

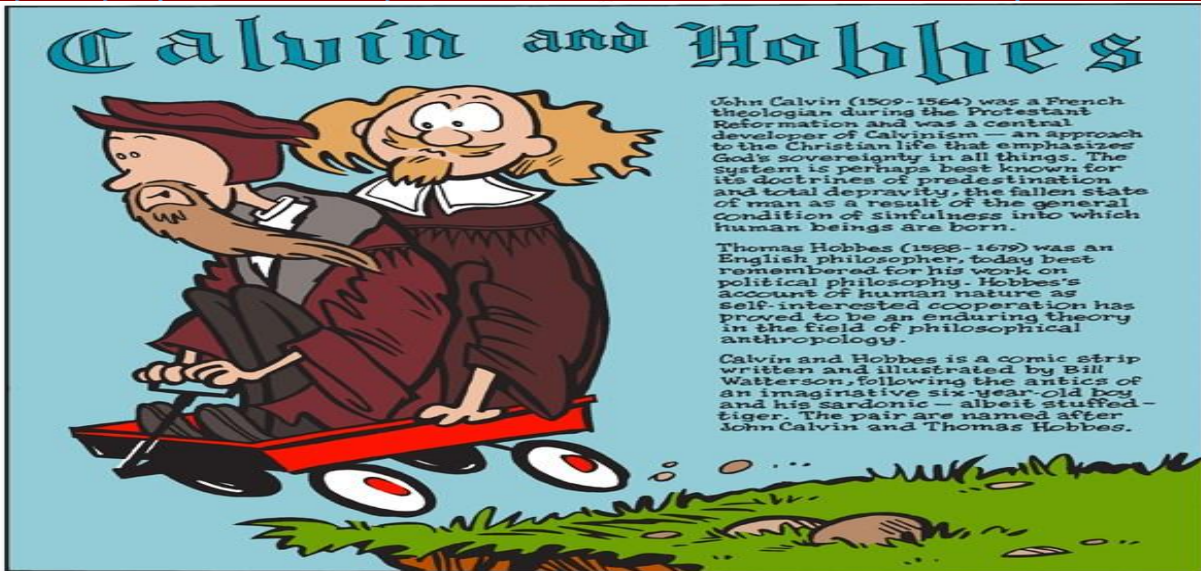
AN ADVANCED* STUDY OF CALVINISM:

Double Predestination & Ordering of Election

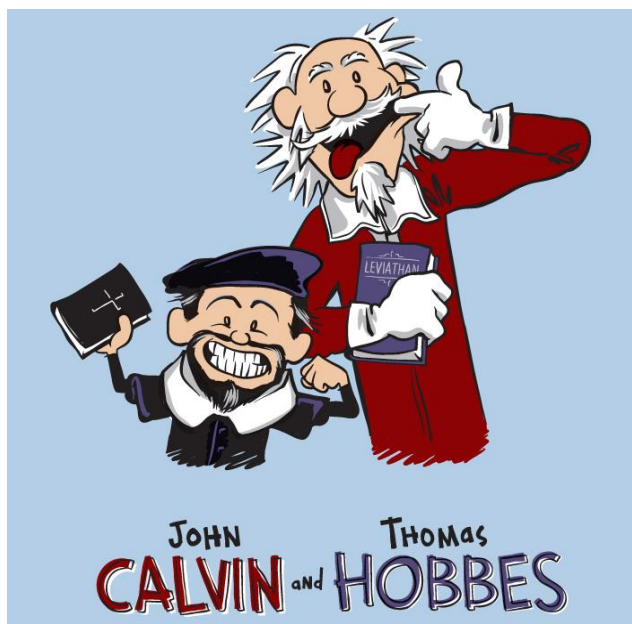
S POINTS - PARADOX & PROVIDENCE - S VIEWS - LAPSARIAN SYSTEMS - REGENERATION - VESSELS FATED & FREE

by David L. Burris

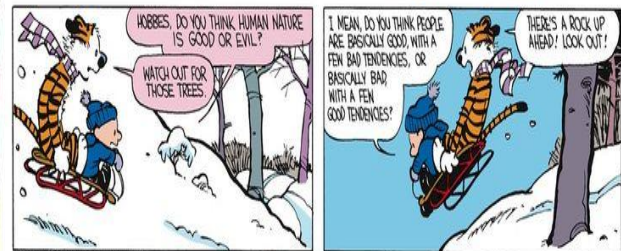
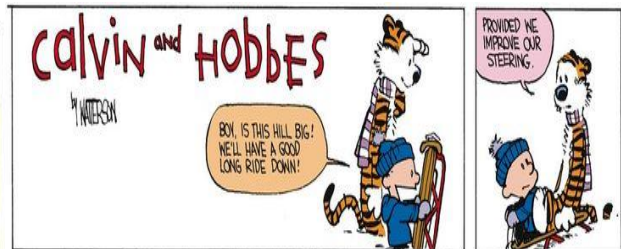
By Way of Humor Everyone Has Been Exposed to Concepts of Calvinism



Text excerpted from the Wikipedia articles *John Calvin*, *Calvinism*, *Total depravity*, *Original sin*, *Thomas Hobbes* and *Calvin and Hobbes*. 30 April 2007

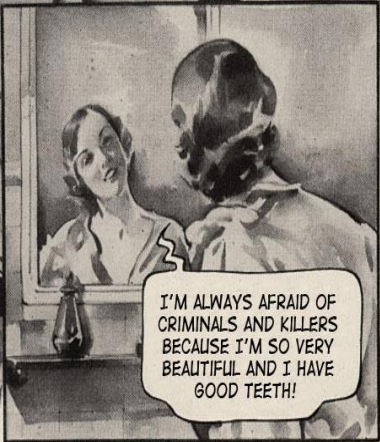


* [ARTICLE APPENDIX](#) CONTAINS TEACHER/STUDENT MATERIALS FROM MEMORIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST CLASS SESSIONS ON CALVINISM BASICS



Calvinist Cartoons by EDDIE EDDINGS

THE SATURDAY EVENING POSTMILLENNIALIST presents True Stories Embellished Beyond Recognition



Why do Calvinists make great telemarketers? Because they love to tell people they have been pre-qualified.

How many Calvinists does it take to change a light bulb? None. It was defective from the beginning and predestined to go out.

Why should you choose a Calvinist Realtor? Because they do not believe in a “Great Commission”.

Why do Calvinists do so poorly on College tests? They can’t handle multiple choice questions.

How many Calvinists does it take to screw in a light bulb? It depends on how many are needed to get all the unbelievers out of the room, for only the Elect are given the Light.

What is the difference between a Calvinist and a Terrorist? You can reason with a terrorist.

Calvinist Dictionary

All: The elect. Everyone: The elect.

Kosmos: Greek word that means “The elect”.

Whosoever: The elect. World: The elect.

Why do Calvinists love Facebook so much? Because you can’t get access unless you’re chosen.

What do you call a Christian whose business takes off and makes him wealthy.

A Calvinist and one of the Elect.

What do you call a bankrupt Christian? A former Calvinist.

Why do presidential campaigns make Calvinists so nervous? They like the idea of an election but just can’t get past the voting part.

KEYED: CHURCH OF CHRIST SOURCES PURPLE HIGHLIGHTED

The Christian History Timeline—Calvin’s Life

During his lifetime, Calvin was already recognized as a major figure in Europe. Below is a chronology of significant dates and events in Calvin’s life.

- | | |
|---------|--|
| 1509 | Calvin was born in Noyon, France on July 10. |
| 1523 | Fourteen year-old Calvin goes to Paris to study. |
| 1528–29 | Calvin goes to Orleans and then Bourges to study law. |
| 1531 | Calvin’s Father dies. |
| 1532 | He publishes his first work—a commentary on Seneca’s <i>De Clementia</i> . |
| 1533 | Calvin and Nicolas Cop flee Paris. At about this time Calvin undergoes a “sudden conversion.” |
| 1534 | Calvin visits Lefevre D’Etaples and resigns his two benefices. |
| 1536 | In March, first edition of his <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> is published. |
| 1536 | In August, Calvin is persuaded by Farel to remain in Geneva. |
| 1538 | Calvin and Farel are banished from Geneva. Calvin goes to Strasbourg as pastor to the French-speaking congregation. |
| 1539 | Cardinal Sadeleto writes letter to Geneva. Calvin is asked to respond on behalf of Geneva. |
| 1540 | Calvin’s <i>Commentary on Romans</i> is published. In August, Calvin marries the widow of an Anabaptist, Idelette de Bure. |
| 1541 | Calvin is welcomed back to Geneva September 13. |
| 1542 | Calvin writes a treatise on free will against the Roman Catholic theologian Albert Pighius. |
| 1549 | Calvin’s wife, Idelette, dies. <i>Consensus Tigurinus</i> is signed with Zurich. |
| 1552 | Jerome Bolsec banished from Geneva. |
| 1553 | Servetus is burned at the stake for heresy. |
| 1559 | Calvin is made a citizen of Geneva. Final edition of <i>Institutes</i> is published. Academy is established. |
| 1564 | Calvin dies on May 27 ¹ |

¹ [The Christian History Timeline—Calvin’s Life](#). (1986). *Christian History Magazine-Issue 12: John Calvin: Reformer, Pastor, Theologian*.

Unity or Diversity? A Question for Systematic/Doctrinal Theology

Unity, Emphasizing Continuity	Unity, Emphasizing Both Continuity and Discontinuity	Classic and Revised Dispensationalism : Unity, Emphasizing Discontinuity	Progressive Dispensationalism : Unity, with Continuity and Discontinuity	Diversity and Plurality
John Calvin	Martin Luther	Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord	John Craig Blaising, Darrel Bock	Rudolf Bultmann
<p>Reformer John Calvin devoted significant space in <i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i> to the similarities—and to the differences—between the Testaments. He focused on the similarities of the Testaments in terms of their ultimate objective, which is to serve as God’s special revelation, through which people come to saving knowledge of God in Christ. In book 2, chapter 8 of <i>Institutes</i>, he shows that “the law was Given, not</p>	<p>Martin Luther, explaining justification by faith alone, writes that the Scriptures are divided in two parts: “commandments and promises.” The commandments, Luther asserts, “show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it; they are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability.”¹⁵ Luther saw the Old Testament’s teaching of law as</p>	<p>Classic dispensational theology is typically very concerned with the question of the relationship between the Testaments. Dispensationalists see the Bible as an essential, theological unity that expresses within it a diversity of ways in which God has worked in redemptive history. The name <i>dispensational</i> signifies a characteristic emphasis on marked distinctions between the various and</p>	<p>Progressive dispensationalists have also taken the Bible to be an essential unity, but have discerned, like classic and revised dispensationalists, strong elements of diversity and discontinuity between the Testaments. Progressive dispensationalists distinguished themselves by an explicit attempt to focus more on the <i>literary</i> dimensions of the biblical text than have classic and revised dispensationalists. Craig Blaising writes, “It should be noted that</p>	<p>For Rudolf Bultmann, the Bible’s diversity and plurality cannot and should not be overcome by a dogmatic or theological appeal to divine revelation, with its usual emphasis on Scripture’s uniformity and essential unity. Bultmann does not see the theological content of revelation as being straightforwardly contained in the biblical witness of the Old and New Testaments, waiting simply to be extricated by the interpreter through “objective”</p>

to restrain the folk of the Old Covenant under itself, but to foster hope of salvation in Christ until his coming." In book 2, chapter 9, he further explains that "Christ, although he was known to the Jews under the law, was at length clearly revealed only in the gospel." Calvin sees a clear progression in the history of redemption in which humanity is given something (hope in Christ) that enables them to enter into covenant with God. The nature of this hope is not fully understood, however, until Christ comes to earth. Calvin writes: "For when he appeared in this, his image, he, as it were, made himself visible; whereas his appearance had before been indistinct and shadowed." In speaking of the relationship

having the function of bringing people to faith in the gospel out of a personal realization of inability to be righteous. A command such as "you shall not covet," he says, has, in effect, the function of causing a person to despair: "Therefore, in order not to covet, and to fulfill the command, a man is compelled to despair of himself, and to seek elsewhere and from some one else the help which he does not find in himself.... And as we fare with this one command, so we fare with all; for it is equally impossible for us to keep any one of them." Luther says that to fulfill the commands given in the Old Testament, one must come to the Christ of the New Testament: "Thus the promises of God give what the

successive stages of redemptive history as they unfold in Scripture. Charles Ryrie defines dispensationalism as "a distinguishable economy in the outworking of God's program." According to dispensationalism, God works out His redemptive plan according to various "economies," much like the management of a household;²⁶ man is responsible to respond in each dispensation according to the level of revelation God provides. The introduction to the revised 1967 edition of the *Scofield Reference Bible* explains that the dispensations "are distinguished, exhibiting the progressive order of God's dealings with humanity, the increasing purpose which runs through and links together time-periods during

progressive dispensationalism is not an abandonment of 'literal' interpretation for spiritual interpretation. Progressive dispensationalism is a development of 'literal' interpretation into a more consistent historical-literary interpretation." Progressive dispensationalists see the relation between the Testaments and the plan of God that unfolds within its canonical story line as a "progression." The New Testament does not take meaning away from the Old Testament, but complements the Old Testament's meaning, providing new insights and new aspects of God's revelation as it unfolds in history. As Darrel Bock writes, "A complementary emphasis does not remove meaning; it makes new,

methodological approaches. Bultmann was an influential "form critic" of the New Testament. Form criticism was the interpretative process in which segments of text were examined by a historical and literary eye to determine their "genre" (literary form). The form of the literature then helps the reader to determine the historical, social, and cultural situation of the authors of the text. This will help the reader determine the meaning of the text. Bultmann interpreted the New Testament with reference to two spheres of history: the history of the actual events described by the written documents (e.g., the life of the Jesus as described by the evangelists) and the history of the composition of the texts themselves

can clearly see from what has already been said that all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us." Calvin is arguing against the claims of "Servetus and certain madmen of the Anabaptist sect," who, according to Calvin wrote disparagingly of the Israelites, their place in the history of redemption, and the place of the law as a means of dispensing grace. They saw only a negative purpose for the law, as being dramatically distinct from the grace of the new covenant. For Calvin, the covenant made with the Old Testament saints and the covenant made with New Testament saints

Lord, now as then, and forever."¹⁹ If there is continuity in regard to the ground and source of salvation, what then is the nature of the discontinuity between the Testaments? For Luther, it lies largely in the nature and role of the law as compared to that of the gospel: "But the subsequent giving of the law to the Jews is not on a par with this promise. The law was given in order that by its light they might the better come to know their cursed state and the more fervently and heartily desire the promised Seed; wherein they had an advantage over all the heathen world. But they turned this advantage into a disadvantage; they undertook to keep the law by their own strength, and failed to learn from it their needy

more. Dispensationalists also distinguish between various covenants in the biblical revelation (Adamic—pre and post-fall, Noahic, Abrahamic, Davidic). Craig Blaising and Darrel Bock have delineated differences between three versions of dispensationalism: classical, revised, and progressive. Classical dispensationalism (e.g., C. I. Scofield) features a distinction between God's salvific purposes as having both an earthly purpose and a heavenly purpose. In His earthly purpose, God will re-create the physical world and preserve an earthly people who will dwell on it for eternity—even eternity beyond the millennium (the literal thousand years of peace). But God is also redeeming a

interpretation, "When progressives speak of a complementary relationship between Old and New Testament texts, they are claiming that a normal, contextually determined reading often brings concepts from the Holy Scriptures together in the New Testament in a way that completes and expounds what was already present in the older portion of God's Word. As revelation proceeds, the texts themselves, New and Old Testament, are brought together in a way that links concepts together, so that both old and fresh associations are made (Matt. 13:52)." This way of interpreting the Bible canonically and integratively, Bock contends, still

through the event of a disclosure. Revelation is "that opening up of what is hidden which is absolutely necessary and decisive for man if he is to achieve 'salvation' or 'authenticity; i.e., revelation here is the disclosure of God to man—whether this disclosure is thought to take place through the communication of knowledge, through a mediating doctrine about God, or whether it is an occurrence that puts man in a new situation." For Bultmann, then, the form and content of Scripture, when the *kerygma* is extracted from it, provide a possibility for the reader to encounter God in the act of existential faith. It makes sense, then, that the diversity and plurality exhibited by the Scriptures stand

differs only in terms of “the mode of dispensation,”⁷ that is, the manner and degree to which God revealed the substance of their faith to the faithful ones. For Calvin, the Old Testament saints “had Christ as pledge of their covenant” and “put in him all trust of future blessedness.” This means that, in the theologies of old and new, the orientation is toward the knowledge of God in Christ and to the promise of spiritual and eternal life.

In a subsequent chapter on the “differences between the two testaments,” Calvin discusses them under four main headings: (1) In the Old Testament, the stress is on earthly benefits, “which, however, were to lead to heavenly concerns.” (2) The Old Testament

and cursed state.” The law was given, Luther explains, to cause those who attempted to follow it to turn in despair to God, “to know their accursed nature and learn to call upon Christ.”²¹ Lest one think that Luther holds to a negative view of the Old Testament and of the law it contains, i.e., *merely* as a way to drive men to despair to turn to the positive solution in the Gospel, Luther offers, in his *Introduction to the Old Testament*, this commendation of the merits of the Old Testament as the Word of God to be interpreted literally and with great benefit. He writes, against those who have a “little opinion” of the Old Testament, that because the New Testament is based on the Old Testament, and the preaching of Christ fulfills the

heavenly, spiritual people (all the redeemed of all the ages *before* that generation to which Christ appears on the earth. This latter group will comprise the earthly, eternal people, those who are converted to Christ at His appearing, and these will exist forever on the earth). Both classical and revised dispensationalists uphold some kind of distinction between Israel and the church, being two very different entities with two different purposes in God’s redemptive plan. The future for Israel is, in some way, different from the future of the church, as it is grounded in a physical and political reality rather than primarily in the spiritual realm. Dispensationalists find differences

enables a “stable meaning” of the text, because the meaning “emerges from within a normal reading of the text.” The only difference, Bock maintains, between traditional and progressive readings, then, “is that progressives are asking dispensationalists to work more integratively with the biblical text.” Progressive dispensationalists, according to Blaising and Bock, “understand the dispensations not simply as *different* arrangements between God and humankind, but as *successive* arrangements in the *progressive* revelation and accomplishment of redemption.” The plan of redemption, they say, “has different aspects to it ... but all these dispensations point to a future culmination in which God will

out over any formal or material unity that could be discerned. The “kerygma” is presented through Scripture in a plurality of ways through a plurality of events. Bultmann explicitly rejects Oscar Cullman’s salvation-historical approach of “carrying up the statements of the various New Testament writings to the same level” as leading to an “illicit harmonization.” For Bultmann, the history of salvation is not an idea with which the New Testament authors are greatly concerned: “In any case, it is a gross overstatement to say that the entire New Testament presupposes a unified conception of the history of salvation, and the oldest formulations of faith do not seem to me to provide proof of this.”

presents spiritual and ultimate truth by typologies (“images and ceremonies typifying Christ”).¹⁰ (3) In the Old Testament, God’s Word is given in the letter (thus, “literal”) whereas in the New Testament it is given on the heart (thus, “spiritual”). (4) The Old Testament is “bondage,” because it produces “fear in men’s minds,” whereas the New Testament is “freedom,” because “it lifts them to trust and assurance.”

Thus, Calvin presents both the similarities and differences as he viewed them between the Old and the New Testaments. As he stated, “I freely admit the differences in Scripture, to which attention is called, but in such a way as not to detract from its established unity.”

“sayings of the Old Testament,” it is “not to be despised, but diligently read.” Nonetheless, the Old Testament is “a book of laws, which teaches what men are to do and not to do,” while “the New Testament is a Gospel or book of grace, and teaches where one is to get the power to fulfill the law.” While these basic distinctions hold, Luther sees the New Testament also contains “laws and commandments for the ruling of the flesh,” and the Old Testament provides “certain promises and offers of grace, by which the holy fathers and prophets, under the law, were kept, like us, under the faith of Christ.”²⁴

biblical Testaments, because they see distinctions throughout the unfolding of God’s progressive revelation. However, as Ryrie notes, “The concept of progressive revelation does not negate the unity of the Bible but recognizes the diversity of God’s unfolding revelation as essential to the unity of his completed revelation.” Thus to focus only on the distinctions in the dispensational hermeneutic can be misleading, because in some areas of theological discourse, dispensationalists will find more elements of similarity than will a nondispensational theologian. For example, dispensationalists often claim that

both politically administer Israel and Gentile nations *and* indwell all of them equally (without ethnic distinctions) by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the dispensations *progress* by revealing different aspects of the final unified redemption.” Contrary to classic and revised dispensationalists who viewed the church as being in a separate category in God’s redemptive plan (what some called a “parenthesis, or others an “intercalation”), the church, for progressive dispensationalists, is a “new manifestation of grace, a new dispensation in the history of redemption.”³⁶ Progressive dispensationalists view the covenants (not just the new covenant, but the Abrahamic and Davidic) as having been, and

If there exists no essential unity, but rather a remarkable diversity and plurality of theological and historical expression in the New Testament, how much more would he see the diversity and plurality between the New Testament and the Old Testament. For Bultmann the Old Testament is beneficial for the Christian theologian when interpreted in existential categories, but is not to be seen as an essential supplement to the New Testament kerygma. Most higher critics of the Bible, whether their specialty was New Testament or Old Testament, tended to read the Bible less as a unity than as composite fragments of literature and history. While Bultmann shows this influence in his

Both unity and diversity, similarities and distinctions, should be affirmed. One must interpret it theologically, in light of the realization of the progression of redemption in human history and the progressive unfolding of divine revelation, from the first until now.

For Calvin, the reality of the progress of redemption, accompanied by a progress in revelation, meant that the New Testament was accorded a kind of priority over the Old Testament. Calvin's emphasis on the similarities between the Testaments in this respect finds its legacy in much of Reformed, or covenantal, interpretation of Scripture.

they are better able to hold to a consistency, or *continuity*, of meaning and usage between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word Israel, they would claim, means the same thing (or things) in the Old Testament as in the New when it refers to the earthly, national people of God; thus the prophecies of the Old regarding the glorious, eternal future for national Israel must be awaiting their earthly (national-political) fulfillment in a future dispensation.

being progressively—though only partially—fulfilled in the present age, looking “forward to complete fulfillment at the return of Christ.” Finally, regarding the important notion of the “kingdom of God,” progressive dispensationalists see one promised eschataological kingdom which has both spiritual and political dimensions.... The progressive revelation of one or another aspect of the eschatological kingdom (whether spiritual or political) prior to the eternal reign of Christ, follows the history of Jesus Christ and is dependent on Him as He acts according to the will of the Father.”³⁸

sensitivity to the diversity of the New Testament presentation, he at least tried to provide a theological unity to Scripture through the emphasis on a *kerygma* that can be presently and existentially appropriated.

James Barr is a contemporary example of a biblical scholar who emphasizes the diversity present in the biblical text. He holds that the Bible's theology is most accurately represented when its diversity is adequately recognized. He warns against the tendency to subsume Scripture's diversity under a theologically motivated emphasis on canonical unity.²

² House, H. W., & Roberts, K. (2006). [Charts on Systematic Theology: Prolegomena](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 112–116). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional.

How Knowledge of God Is Acquired

Natural Theology Tells Us *That God Is*, Revealed Theology Tells Us *Who God Is*

God Is Revealed Generally, but Truly Known Only Specially

All Theology Is Revealed Theology

Revealed Theology Finds Its “Point of Contact” in Natural Theology

Thomas Aquinas

John Calvin

Karl Barth

Emil Brunner

Undoubtedly the church’s greatest theologian (and certainly the most prolific since Augustine, Thomas Aquinas (c. 1224–1274), in his *Summa Theologica*, worked often with the relationship between revelation and reason, or between natural theology and revealed theology. This is seen most explicitly in his Part 1, Question 12: “How God Is Known By Us.”

How much, ponders Thomas, can the *created intellect* of humanity know about God? Can it know the divine essence? Must the divine essence be seen through a “likeness of Him”?

In order to see the likeness of God, Aquinas asserts, humanity must receive a disposition in their being (especially in their intellect) that would enable him to see and know God in His essence.

Calvin began his *Institutes* with a discussion of “the Knowledge of God the Creator,” giving place at the start to a kind of general revelation. He notes that this revelation of God has been given in two ways: (1) The knowledge of God has been “naturally implanted in the minds of men” (i.e., “by natural instinct,” an “awareness of divinity,” and “a certain understanding of his divine majesty”), and (2) The knowledge of God “shines forth in the fashioning of the Universe and the continuing governance of it.”

Nonetheless, though God has stamped His imprint on man’s consciousness and on creation itself, it “does not profit us,” because the radical sinfulness of man’s nature turns him away from God, rendering him wholly

According to the view that all theology is revealed theology, not only is salvation inaccessible to humanity apart from special revelation, but so is *any* knowledge of God. This view holds that human reason, with everything else, was utterly corrupted by the fall, rendering it incapable of acquiring by its own resources *any* accurate knowledge of God and of divine things.

This view was most prominently (and vigorously) propounded by Karl Barth, who reacted against the then-common tendency to theologize on the basis of Enlightenment principles of rationality, rather than on the sole, ultimate authority of Scripture and the revelation of God in Christ.

In his “Angry Introduction” to a

In a famous theological dialogue, Emil Brunner countered Karl Barth’s insistence that the knowledge of God *only* occurs by special revelation in the person and work of Christ. In “Nature and Grace,” he posited the primacy of special revelation in Christ, while also finding room to say that general revelation provides a limited knowledge of God. For Brunner, the “creation of the world” is a “self-communication of God”; this he saw as a “fundamentally Christian” interpretation of the Scriptures. Taking his departure from Romans 2, Brunner said that the “consciousness of responsibility” brings about the possibility of sin. Thus, without creation and without conscience, humanity is

He must therefore receive “the light of glory strengthening the intellect to see God.”

To the question, “whether any created intellect by its natural powers can see the divine essence,” Thomas replies with a qualified no. By natural powers alone, the intellect cannot see God in His essence. However, because the intellect remained intact after the Fall, it is possible to see and know God when God’s grace adds to and strengthens it. When “God by His grace unites Himself to the created intellect,” then the creature can see God as an “object made intelligible to it.” A “supernatural disposition” increases the powers of the created intellect so that God can be known by it.⁵⁹ Humans cannot see God, except by what He does, just as an ultimate cause cannot be seen except in its effects. However, as the divine light illuminates the human intellect, those effects can lead to a clear knowledge of God’s essence.

Can God be known by natural reason? Creatures know things naturally by their senses, he explained, and thus God can only be known by effects (which includes humans

unable, in his natural state, to know God through general revelation. As he states, “The manifestation of God in nature speaks to us in vain ...” “Although they bathe us wholly in their radiance, yet they can of themselves in no way lead us into the right path.”

What, then, is this general revelation good for if it does not provide actual, true knowledge of God to those who encounter it? One reason is to render humanity without excuse: “Although we lack the natural ability to mount up into the pure and clear knowledge of God, all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us.”

Thus special revelation, as Scripture, is needed as “Guide and Teacher” in order to know God, even as the Creator. So Calvin: “God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures.”

Thus in the Scriptures we find two kinds of the knowledge of God: God as Creator and God as Redeemer: “First in order came that kind of knowledge by which one is permitted to grasp who that God is who founded and governs the universe. Then that other inner knowledge was added, which alone quickens

polemical piece against Emil Brunner’s *Nature and Grace*, Barth states his view of the task of theology, in opposition to how he viewed Brunner’s view of that task: “We must learn again to understand revelation as grace and grace as revelation and therefore turn away from ... *theologia naturalis* (natural theology) by ever making new decisions and being ever controverted anew.” In this piece, Barth found inappropriate Brunner’s “point of contact” as a description of God’s revelation of Himself to humanity as created in the image of God.

For Barth, natural theology is “every (positive or negative) formulation of a system which claims to be theological, i.e., to interpret divine revelation, whose subject, however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose method therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture.”

Barth also objects to Brunner’s claim that there is in humanity a “capacity for revelation” and a “capacity (or receptivity) for words,” apart from the reality of revelation. Barth means by this, of course,

also without responsibility before God.

General revelation is not sufficient, however, to bring people to a saving knowledge of God. Apart from a “subjective” revelation in Christ, people will only pervert the knowledge of God in creation, such that it is limited to a pagan knowledge of “gods”—not of the true God. Only the superior revelation in Christ can open the eyes of lost humanity.

Thus, Brunner spoke of the necessity of a “double-revelation,” of which the first, general revelation (such as in creation or conscience), can be truly seen and understood only by the one who has been enlightened by the second, the special revelation in Christ.

For Brunner, the possibility of revelation is the possibility of “address,” from God to humanity. Humans (sinful though they be, are able to receive God’s special revelation, His “address,” because they are created in the image of God, an image they have not completely lost because humanity possesses a “capacity for words and responsibility.” Thus humans have the possibility to hear the Word of God, in a *formal*

themselves) that can be seen in nature and in rational thought. Nonetheless, "Because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God *whether He exists*, and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him."

Through natural reason, humans can develop a limited natural theology. But this theology gives evidence of the existence of God, not necessarily *what* God is or who He is in Himself. In fact, Thomas developed his five proofs for the existence of God on the basis of natural theology. However, what is revealed by nature is of lesser perfection than that which is revealed by grace, received by faith, which itself is a kind of knowledge.

dead souls." This latter knowledge is whereby a person comes to know God as Redeemer. The inner witness of the Spirit is necessary, given by grace through faith, to enable a person even to come to a true (and salvific) knowledge of God in the Scriptures.

"Nevertheless, all things will tend to this end, that God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to us in Scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there."⁶⁶

what is usually called *special* revelation. He asks, "What is the meaning of 'receptivity for words' if man can do nothing of himself for his salvation, if it is the Holy Spirit that gives him living knowledge of the word of the Cross?"

Barth wished to maintain the freedom and sovereignty of God, along with the absolute fallenness and sinfulness of man in his understanding of the revelation of God in Christ and the corresponding possibility of man to know the Creator. He wanted to bind "nature," the things of creation, including humanity and his various possibilities, inextricably with "grace," suggesting that only in grace can humanity know anything *truly* and, of course, salvifically, about God. Thus, it made no sense for Barth to speak of a general revelation in theological language. All revelation is special, all revelation is summed up in and derived from the incarnation, cross, and resurrection of Christ.

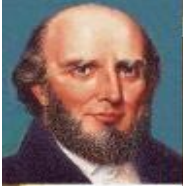
sense (i.e., they have ears, minds, and linguistic abilities), but they do not have the possibility to *believe* the Word of God apart from faith.

It is necessary to hold tightly, although paradoxically, to the dialectic of the knowledge of one's sin and the knowledge of God. Which comes first, Brunner asks? One cannot really say, for without the knowledge of one's sin, there can be no knowledge of God (and thus grace). But without the knowledge of God, there can be no knowledge of sin. This dichotomy, Brunner asserts, "is itself the essence of the state of sin."³

³ House, H. W., & Roberts, K. (2006). [Charts on Systematic Theology: Prolegomena](#) (Vol. 1, pp. 60–62). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional.

Calvin's Special Knowledge

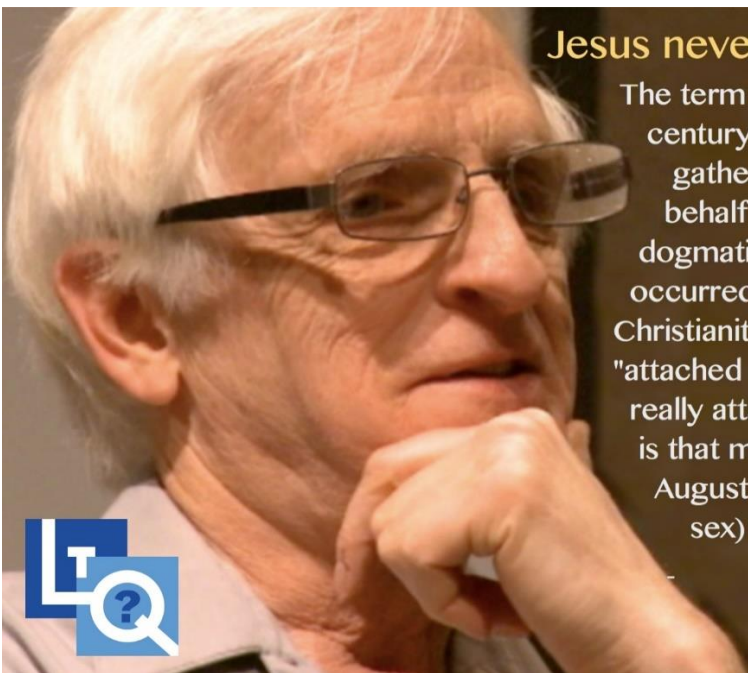
GENERAL ORIENTATION: ORIGINAL SIN



"I object to the doctrine of constitutional sinfulness [Original Sin], that it makes all sin original and actual, and not a crime... If the nature is sinful, in such a sense that action must necessarily be sinful... then sin in action must be a calamity, and can be no crime. It is the necessary effect of a sinful nature. This cannot be a crime, since the will has nothing to do with it." {Finney, Systematic Theology, lecture 16}

In short, if we are born sinful then we can't be accused of committing a crime [sin] against God since we didn't have any choice in the matter

It would be like condemning people for simply living



Jesus never heard of "Original Sin."

The term wasn't even used until the 4th century, so it's "strange to run a church, a gathering, an ekklesia — supposedly on behalf of Jesus — when one of its main dogmatic tenets, Original Sin, never occurred to Jesus." Sadly, Western Christianity is dependent on and chronically "attached to Original Sin — but what they're really attached to is St. Augustine. The fact is that most Westerners believe more in Augustine (and his preoccupation with sex) than they do in Jesus."

- Matthew Fox in
"Living the Questions 2.0"
www.livingthequestions.com



Augustinian–Pelagian Controversy

AUGUSTINE - and/or - PELAGIUS

An Abbreviated Augustine:

Augustine argued that by Adam's first sin, by which the entire human race participated, sin came into the world, corrupting every person both physically and morally. Everyone, being of Adam, is born into the world with a nature that is so corrupted that they can do nothing but sin – the exercise of the will is limited to only evil options (freedom being defined as the capacity to make choices in conformity with one's desires). Therefore, for Augustine, the need for grace was central. We are heirs of a disfigured condition that has clouded the capacity of our wills as to even an awareness of Christ – much less – a desire for Him. The effect of the unmerited favor of God is twofold: 1st – God reveals the wonder of His Son's redeeming mercies; 2nd He strengthens the will so that humankind can freely embrace Christ as the sinner's only hope of forgiveness. This grace is irresistible. Because we cannot be saved against our will – the wills of men are made compliant.

Three Basic Postulates:

1. Monk Pelagius taught that there was no connection between what Adam did & the state wherein we are born; Ours' also is a voluntary condition - the same as that of Adam before his fall. He and his followers opposed the doctrines of Adamic Unity & guilt by birth inheritance.
2. The doctrine of inherited inability discarded, the corollary was embraced – the freedom of humanity's will. Although the human will is inhibited by negative example we retain the ability to choose between good & evil. The will is defined as a determining power, not a selecting agent of the presented available options.
3. Grace is an assisting gift that is availed from God by way of human choice. This "illuminating grace" influences humankind toward voluntary cooperation with God; it is a resistible grace.

Ideological Development: Christian Religion

Julian Defended Origen Against Augustine:

- “[God] it is, you say who judges in this way; he is the persecutor of newborn children; he it is who sends tiny babies to eternal flames. It would be right and proper to treat you as beneath argument: you have come so far from religious feeling, from civilized feeling, so far indeed from mere common sense, in that you think that your Lord is capable of committing a crime against justice such as is hardly conceivable even among the barbarians.”

Posterity's Uncritical Acceptance of Augustine's Platonism

“Their understanding of conception, shaped by a patriarchal culture, would have been some variation of the dominant Aristotelian theory. On this view, the male semen provides the formative principle for life. The female menstrual blood supplies the matter for the fetus, and the womb the medium for the semen's nurture. The man's seed transmits his logos (rational cause) and pneuma (vital heat/animating spirit), for which the woman's body is the receptacle. In this way the male functions as the active, efficient cause of reproduction, and the female functions as the provider of the matter to which the male seed gives definition. In short, the bodily substance necessary for a human fetus comes from the mother, while the life force originates with the father.

Platonists believed that all physical objects are simply copies of eternal, immaterial templates or Forms. This means that two objects of the same kind have a sort of connection because they both depend on the same Form. So the terrible taint of Adam can spread to those who share his Form, the Form of humanity. This inheritance concept of fatalistic disposition and consequence can similarly be linked to classic theories of genetics. It was believed that everything children inherit is received from the father alone. The mother contributed nothing material to fetal development and served simply as an incubator. It was considered a matter of simple common sense that embryo existed entire in seed form within the male before implantation. The father once existed in seed form in his father too, and so on - and so on - all the way back to the Garden of Eden - similar to a set of Russian Dolls.”

– Jonathan Hill Book

Traducianism

The theory of *Traducianism* maintains that both the soul and body of the individual man are propagated. It refers the creative act mentioned in Gen. 1:27 to the human *nature*, or *race*, and not to a single individual merely. It considers the work of creating mankind *de nihilo*, as entirely completed upon the sixth day; and that since that sixth day the Creator has, in this world, exerted no strictly creative energy. He rested from the work of creation upon the seventh day, and still rests. By this single act, all mankind were created, as to both their spiritual and their sensuous substance, in and with the first human pair, and from them have been individually procreated and born, each in his day and generation. According to Traducianism, creation is totally distinct and different from birth. Creation relates to the origination *de nihilo* of the total substance or nature of mankind, considered as a new and hitherto non-existent species of being. Birth is subsequent to creation, and refers only to the modifications which this substance undergoes,—its individualization in the series of generations. Hence man can be created holy, and be born sinful. By creation he may be endowed with the moral image and righteousness of his Maker; while by birth, or rather *at* birth, he may be possessed of a moral guilt and corruption that was originated after creation, and before birth.

This view of the origin of the soul was first stated with distinctness by Tertullian, and from his time onward gained ground and authority in the Western Church; while the Eastern Church, as has been remarked, preferred the theory of Creationism. The Biblical support for Traducianism was derived from Paul's statement of the Adamic connection and the origin of sin, in Romans 5:12–19, corroborated by 1 Cor. 15:22: "In Adam all die," Eph. 2:3: "And were by nature children of wrath, Heb. 7:10: "For Levi was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedec met him," Ps. 51:5: "Behold I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me," and Gen. 5:3: "And Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image."

Tertullian was the first to state this theory in express terms, and defend it upon speculative grounds. He does it in a somewhat crude and materializing manner, because he attempts to explain and illustrate the manner in which the individual life is deduced from the generic. In this respect, he falls into the same error into which Justin Martyr, and the first theoretic Trinitarians, generally, fell, in the speculative construction of the doctrine of the Trinity. In his tract *De Anima* (c. 19), Tertullian remarks that "the soul of man, like the shoot of a tree, is drawn out (*deducta*) into a physical progeny from Adam the parent stock." In another place (c. 27), in this same tract, he asserts that "both substances (body and soul) are conceived, finished, and perfected together;" and holds to both a corporeal and a psychical generation, each proceeding from its own appropriate base, though each is inseparable from the other, and both are simultaneous.

The Traducian theory continued to gain ground in the North-African, and in the Western European Church, by reason of its affinity with that particular mode of stating the doctrine of sin which prevailed in these churches. Jerome remarks that in his day it was adopted by "*maxima pars occidentalium*." Leo the Great († 461) asserts that the "catholic faith teaches that every man, with reference to the substance of his soul as well as of his body, is formed in the womb." Among the Orientals, this theory obtained little currency. Gregory Nyssa,³ and Anastasius Sinaita, alone, were inclined to adopt it.

But the theologian who contributed most to the currency and establishment of Traducianism was Augustine. And yet this thinker, usually so explicit and decided, even upon speculative points, nowhere in his works formally adopts the theory itself. In his *Opus imperfectum* (IV. 104) he replies to Julian: "You may blame, if you will, my hesitation because I do not venture to

affirm or deny that of which I am ignorant; you may say what you please concerning the profound obscurity of this subject; nevertheless let this doctrine be fixed and unshaken that the guilt of that one man is the death of all, and that in him all died." Yet Augustine's entire speculation upon the origin and nature of sin is indirectly, and by implication, an earnest defence of the Traducian theory. His anthropology, as we shall see when it comes up for examination, is both illogical and inconceivable without it. The transmission of *sin*, to which Augustine held, logically involves, as Tertullian had perceived before him, the transmission of the sinning soul; and this implies the Adamic existence and unity.

The attitude and tendency of Augustine's mind, in respect to the two systems of Creationism and Traducianism (for the theory of Pre-existence he expressly rejects and argues against), may be seen from an analysis of the first book of his treatise *De Anima*. Renatus had sent Augustine the work of Vincentius Victor, in which the doctrine of Creationism was defended. Augustine in his critical reply takes the ground that Victor cannot *demonstrate* from Scripture, the position that souls are created and in-breathed in every instance of birth, and asserts that we are in ignorance upon the whole matter. He examines one by one those texts which Victor has quoted, and contends that they are insufficient to prove Creationism. In summing up, he remarks, that if any one prefers to hold that souls are created in each individual instance, he must take care not to hold the four following errors: 1. That the souls thus immediately created are made sinful at the instant of creation, by the Creator, through an original sin, or sinful disposition, that is infused into them, and which is not truly their own sin; 2. That those who die in infancy are destitute of original sin, and do not need that baptism which puts them in possession of the merits of Christ; 3. That souls sinned in some other sphere before their connection with flesh, and that for this reason they were brought down into sinful flesh; 4. That the newly-created souls of those who die in infancy are not punishable for existing sin, but only for sins which it is foreknown they would have committed had they been permitted to arrive at a suitable age.

The difficulties that beset the subject of the origin of the individual soul, whether the theory of creation or of traduction be adopted, are very clearly stated by Augustine in his epistle *Ad Optatum*, his treatise *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, his tract *De anima*, and his exegetical work *De Genesi ad literam*. We will briefly give the line of remark in these treatises, which we take from the learned and discriminating work of Gangauf upon the Metaphysical Psychology of Augustine.

So far as the question of the divine agency in creation is concerned, says Augustine, we may accept either Creationism or Traducianism. By either theory, God is recognized as the creator; for even in case the theory of traduction or generation be adopted, God is still the absolute origin and author, inasmuch as in the primal act of creating the human soul he so created it that it possesses the power of reproducing and perpetuating itself in individual souls, just as in the sphere of nature and matter the first seed is indued with the power to reproduce individuals after its own kind. This *endowment* of reproductive power, says Augustine, as much requires creative energy to account for its existence, as does the existence of the first seed, or the first soul; "for who can make a seed to produce individuals invariably after its kind, except that Being who made the seed itself from nothing?" Nevertheless, continues Augustine, both theories have their difficulties. In reference to Traducianism, the question arises, how it is possible to hold to such a propagation of the soul without falling into materialism, and regarding the soul as a corporeal entity, after Tertullian's example, whose fancies in this respect need not awaken our wonder, since he represents God the creator himself as corporeal. On the other hand, he who adopts Traducianism finds little difficulty with the doctrine of original sin, while the advocate of

Creationism finds a great difficulty here. For the soul as newly created (and it is newly-created in every individual instance according to the Creationist) cannot be anything but a pure and perfect soul. It cannot be tainted with evil of any kind; but on the contrary, as coming immediately from the creator's hand, must possess his holy image and likeness. If, now, it be thus pure and perfect, the question arises: Why does it deserve to be associated at very birth with a diseased and dying body, and to be stained and polluted with a corrupted sensuous nature?² The fact that its connection with such a body does not depend at all upon the soul, but rests entirely upon the will of the creator, would seem to imply that God himself is the cause of the soul's deteriorated state and condition. But if so, its restoration would be no act of grace. It would, rather, be a matter of obligation, since the creator would be merely healing a wound which he himself had made. Furthermore, in the case of infants who die without baptism,—a thing that occurs in thousands of instances, and with the Divine foreknowledge,—how is the justice of God to be vindicated, if such infantile souls, without any agency and fault of their own, are visited with disease, sickness, pain, and death temporal and eternal? Can we believe that the creator *makes* these newly-created spirits guilty at the time of creating them, and then inflicts these evils upon them as a punishment? How, upon the theory of Creationism, shall we find an interval of time between the act that creates the soul and the act that unites it with a diseased and mortal body, of sufficient length for Satan to present his temptation, and the newly-created spirit to yield and fall? Neither is it any relief to say that God punishes the souls of unbaptized infants upon the ground of those sins which they *would* have committed had they lived, and which he foreknew they would commit. For this would conflict with the nature of retribution and the idea of justice. Punishment supposes some *actual* offence in the past. It is always retrospective. Hence penalty cannot be anticipated. No being can be justly punished in advance. If he can be, then there is nothing to prevent a child who dies at the age of three years, from being punished for all the sins which he would have committed had he lived upon earth to the age of forty, or sixty, or sixty thousand years. With respect to such questions as the following, which were urged against the theory of Creationism: Why does God create souls for children who die at birth, or immediately after? and why does he create souls in the instance of adulterine offspring? Augustine remarks, that he thinks he could give an answer from the position of Creationism. But to the question: Why does God *punish* an infant soul? he can give no answer from this position.

Augustine finally remarks, that if one goes to the Scriptures for a *decisive* settlement of the question at issue between Creationism and Traducianism, he does not obtain it. In respect to the doctrine of original sin, the preponderance of Scripture proof is upon the side of Traducianism. But passages may be quoted in favor of the soul's new creation in each individual instance; still, no one of them is so decisive that it might not be interpreted in favor of its traduction. All such passages prove, indeed, that God is the giver, the creator, the former of the human soul. But *how* he is, whether by in-breathing them newly-created, or by the traduction (*trahendo*) of them from the parent, the Scriptures nowhere say. "As yet," says Augustine (Ep. CXC, Ad Optatum), "I have found nothing certain and decisive in the canonical Scriptures, respecting the origin of the soul."

It is evident from these trains of remark, which are drawn from a very wide surface in Augustine's writings, that his mind felt the full force of the mysteries that overhang the origin of the individual soul, and its inborn sinfulness. That his mind inclined to Traducianism, the course of reasoning which has been delineated plainly shows. That he was not averse to Creationism, provided the problem of sin could be solved in a way to accord with what he believed to be the teaching of Scripture and the Christian experience, is evident from the following remark which he makes respecting this theory in his letter to Jerome: "Ecce volo ut illa sententia mea sit, sed

nondum esse confirmo.” Again, in this same letter he says to Jerome: “Teach me now, I beg of you, what I shall teach; teach me what I shall hold; and tell me if souls are every day, one by one, called into being from nonentity, in those who are daily being born.”⁴



⁴ Shedd, W. G. T. (1999). [A history of Christian doctrine](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 13–23). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

PELAGIANISM AND SEMI-PELAGIANISM

§ 1. *Pelagianism*

PELAGIUS, a British monk, directly by his own teachings, and indirectly by the controversy to which he gave occasion, and the adherents who developed his views, constructed an anthropology totally antagonistic to the Augustinian.

The fundamental points in his theory are the following. The soul of man by creation is neither holy nor sinful. His body by creation is mortal. The fall of Adam introduced no change of any kind into either the souls or the bodies of his posterity. Every man, therefore, when born into the world is what Adam was when created. At birth, each man's physical nature is liable to disease and death, as was Adam's at creation;² and, at birth, each man's voluntary faculty, like Adam's at creation, is undetermined either to sin or holiness. Being thus characterless, with a will undecided either for good or evil, and not in the least affected by Adam's apostasy, each individual man, after birth, commences his own voluntariness, originates his own character, and decides his own destiny, by the choice of either right or wrong. Temporal death is no part of the punishment of sin, because it befalls man by creation. His body is mortal per se, and irrespective of sin. Eternal death is therefore the whole of the punishment of man's sin.

The general, but not strictly universal prevalence of sin in the world is accounted for, by the power of temptation, and the influence of example and of habit. It is possible for any man to be entirely sinless, and there have been some such, even among the heathen. The grace of the Holy Spirit is not absolutely, but only relatively necessary, in order to holiness; it renders its attainment easier to man. Regeneration does not consist in the renewal of the will by an internal operation of Divine efficiency, but in the illumination of the intellect by the truth, the stimulation of the will by the threatenings of the law and the promise of future rewards, and by the remission of sin through the Divine indulgence. God's grace² is designed for all, but man must make himself worthy of it by an honest striving after virtue. The Son of God became man, in order, by his perfect teaching and example, to afford the strongest motives for self-improvement, and thereby redeems us. As we are imitators of Adam in sin, so we are to become imitators of Christ in virtue.

Pelagius held that infant baptism is necessary in order to the remission of *future* sins; but children who died without baptism he thought would be saved, although they would experience a less degree of felicity than the redeemed enjoy.² Respecting the doctrines of the trinity and the deity of Christ, of revelation, of prophecy, and of miracles, Pelagius adopted the supernaturalism of the Church, although his anthropology logically developed would have brought him to the rationalistic view upon these subjects.

Pelagius advanced his views first at Rome, from 409 to 411, principally through a commentary upon the Pauline Epistles. His system was brought to the notice of the North-African Church, in 411, by his pupil Coelestius, who was judged heretical by a council at Carthage in 412, and was excommunicated upon his refusal to retract his opinions. Pelagius in 411 went to Palestine. The Eastern Church were suspicious of his views, and he was accused of heresy before the synods of *Jerusalem* and *Diospolis*. But he succeeded in satisfying his judges, by qualifying his assertions respecting the possibility and the actual fact of human sinlessness. The North-African Church, however, under the leadership of Augustine, were not satisfied with Pelagius's explanations, and followed up the discussion. Pelagianism was condemned as a heresy by the synods of *Mileve* and *Carthage*, in 416, and this decision was ultimately endorsed by the

vacillating Roman bishop Zosimus, in 418, and thus by the Latin Church. The Eastern Church, as represented at the *Council of Ephesus*, in 431, also condemned Pelagianism.

But though the Eastern Church came into this decision, its opposition to Pelagianism was not so earnest and intelligent as that of the Western, and particularly as that of the North-African Church. There were two reasons for this. In the first place, the Greek anthropology was adopted by the Oriental bishops. This, we have seen, maintained the position that original sin is not voluntariness but physical corruption, together with the synergistic view of regeneration. The Greek anthropology would therefore come in conflict with the theory of Augustine upon these points. In the second place, the doctrine of unconditional election and predestination, which flowed so naturally from the Augustinian view of the entire helplessness of human nature, was extremely offensive to the Eastern mind. Hence we find that when the controversy between Augustinianism and Pelagianism was transferred from the West to the East, and the examination was conducted in the Eastern synods, there were bishops who either asserted that the matters in dispute were unessential, or else sided with Pelagius, if the choice must be made between Pelagius and Augustine. The *Antiochian School*, as represented by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Isidore of Pelusium, stood midway between the parties, and the condemnation of Pelagianism which was finally passed by the Council of Ephesus seems to have been owing more to a supposed connection of the views of Pelagius with those of Nestorius, than to a clear and conscientious conviction that his system was contrary to Scripture, and the Christian experience.

Such a settlement, consequently, of the strife could not be permanent. Moreover, the views of Augustine respecting predestination were misstated by some of his followers, and misrepresented by some of his opponents, in such a manner as to imply the tenet of necessitated sin,—evil being represented as the product of an efficient decree, instead, as Augustine taught, of a permissive one. The doctrine of election was construed into a motive for indifference, instead of fear and supplication for mercy. The same abuse was made of the doctrine of sovereign grace in the salvation of the human soul that was anticipated and warned against by the Apostle Paul. These causes, and this condition of things, led to the revival, by a party in the West, of the synergistic theory of regeneration, as the only thing which, it was supposed, could relieve the honest-minded of their difficulties respecting predestination and election, and make conversion an intelligible and practical matter. This party were the so-called *Semi-Pelagians*.

§ 2. *Semi-Pelagianism*

The Semi-Pelagian controversy arose in the following manner. The monks of the cloister of Adrumetum, in North-Africa, were most of them advocates of the Augustinian theory, but had fallen into dispute respecting its meaning. Some of them, by the doctrine of absolute predestination, had been thrown into great mental doubt and despair. Others were making this doctrine the occasion of entire indifference, and even of licentiousness. A third class were supposing that some virtuous efficiency, even though it be very slight, must be ascribed to the human will, in regeneration. The abbot of the cloister referred the case to Augustine, in 427, who endeavored in his two treatises, *De gratia et libero arbitrio*, and *De correptione et gratia*, to relieve the difficulties of the monks, and appears to have been successful.

But, contemporaneously with this occurrence, a far more extensive opposition to Augustine's theory arose in Southern Gaul. A theological school was formed among these enterprising and active French churches which, in fact, reproduced with modifications the Greek anthropology of the preceding centuries. A Scythian monk, *John Cassian*, a pupil and friend of Chrysostom, and

the founder and president of the cloister at Marseilles, stood at the head of it. It became a vigorous party, of which the most distinguished members and leaders were *Vincent of Lerins*, *Faustus of Rhegium*, *Gennadius*, and *Arnobius the Younger*.

Augustine, also, had his disciples and adherents in these same churches of Southern Gaul. Among them were two influential theologians, viz.: *Hilary* and *Prosper*. These informed Augustine of the controversy that was going on in the French churches, and he endeavored, as in the instance of the monks of Adrumetum, to settle the dispute by explanatory treatises. He addressed to the Massiliensians the two tracts: *De praedestinatione sanctorum*, and *De dono perseverantiae*. He meets the objection that the doctrine of predestination ministers to moral indifference and licentiousness, by teaching that the decree of election is not a decree to bestow eternal happiness upon men full of sin, but that only he can be sure of his election who runs the Christian race, and endures to the end. The divine decree includes the means as well as the end, and therefore produces holiness in order to secure happiness. Handled in this manner, the doctrine, Augustine claims, is not a dangerous one for the common mind; but on the contrary affords the only strong ground of confidence to a helpless and despairing spirit. Augustine, however, did not succeed in convincing his opponents, and the controversy was afterwards carried on with some bitterness between Prosper and Vincent of Lerins.

The ablest advocate of the Semi-Pelagian theory was *Faustus of Rhegium*. His treatise *De gratia et libero arbitrio* greatly influenced the decisions of the council of *Arles*, in 475, and of *Lyons*, in the same year,—both of which councils sanctioned Semi-Pelagianism. The fortunes of this system, however, declined in Southern Gaul, from two causes. In the first place, the later defenders of Augustinianism, particularly *Fulgentius*, while holding the doctrine of predestination with entire strictness in its relation to holiness, were more reserved respecting its relations to sin,—thus affording less opportunity for the charge of necessitated evil. Secondly, the personal influence of some highly respected and excellent bishops, such as *Avitus of Vienne*, and *Caesarius of Arles*, was thrown in favor of the views of the North-African Father. By these means, a change was effected in the churches of Southern Gaul, to such an extent, that in the year 529, a little more than fifty years after the councils of Arles and Lyons, they declared for the Augustinian anthropology, in the two councils of *Orange* and *Valence*. The following are some of the decisions of the council of Orange, and indicate in their condemnatory clauses the Semi-Pelagian positions, particularly respecting grace and free-will. “If any one assert that by reason of man’s prayer the grace of God is conferred, but that it is not grace itself which causes that God is prayed to, he contradicts the prophet Isaiah (61:1), and the apostle Paul (Rom. 10:20) saying the same thing: ‘I was found of them that sought me not, and have been made manifest to them that asked not after me.’ If any one maintains that God waits for a willingness in us to be purged from sin, and does not allow that the very willingness to be cleansed from sin is wrought in us by the infusion and operation of the Holy Spirit, he resists the Holy Ghost saying by Solomon (Prov. 8:35, Septuagint ver.), ‘The will is prepared by the Lord;’ and by the apostle (Philip. 2:13), ‘It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.’ If any man say, that we believe, will, desire, endeavor, labor, watch, study, ask, seek, and knock, without and previous to grace, and that grace is conferred by God upon this ground, and does not confess that it is wrought in us by the infusion and operation of the Holy Ghost, that we believe, will, desire, endeavor, and do all the above-mentioned things as we ought, and thus makes the aid of grace to follow after man’s humility or obedience, and does not allow that it is the gift of grace itself, that we are obedient and humble: he resists the apostle (1 Cor. 4:7; 15:10) saying: ‘What hast thou, that thou hast not received,’ and: ‘By the grace of God I am what I am.’ It is God’s gift both

when we think aright, and when we hold our feet from falsehood and unrighteousness. For as often as we do good things, God worketh in us, and with us, that we may work. There are many good things done *in* man which are not done *by* man (*multa in homine bona fiunt, quae non facit homo*). But man doth no good things which God does not cause man to do (*quae non Deus praestet, ut faciat homo*). In every good work, we do not begin, and are helped afterwards by the grace of God, but he first of all, no good merits of ours going before, inspires into us both faith and love of himself, that we may both believingly seek the sacrament of baptism, and after baptism, by his help, may fulfil the things that are pleasing to him.”

Respecting the Semi-Pelagian theory itself: It was intended by its advocates to be a middle-position between Augustinianism and Pelagianism. The essence of the theory consists in a *mixture* of grace and free-will. There are two efficient agencies concerned in the renovation of the human will: viz., the will itself and the Holy Spirit. Hence, the product can not be referred either to one or the other, as the sole originating cause. Upon this co-existence of two co-efficients and their co-operation, Cassian lays great stress, as the distinguishing and essential position which would retain the element of truth that, in his judgment, was in Augustinianism and in Pelagianism, and would exclude the errors into which, he believed, both fell. Hence, in answer to the test question: Which agency begins the work of regeneration? Cassian affirms that sometimes it is the divine, and sometimes it is the human. Sometimes he ascribes the commencement of good in man, to man, and its completion to God; and sometimes he derives the first desire after grace itself from God. Sometimes he even ascribes to the human spirit a compulsion to good. “Sometimes,” he remarks, “we are drawn to salvation against our will (*inviti*).” In another place,² he asks: “What was that which stood in the way of Paul, because he seems to have been attracted to the way of life, as it were unwillingly; though afterwards consummating and perfecting this initial compulsion (*necessities*), by a voluntary devotedness.”

Semi-Pelagianism was the revival in the Western Church of the Greek anthropology, though made somewhat more guarded by the discussions and statements of the Pelagian controversy. The following recapitulation, taken from Wiggers’ representation, embraces the principal points in the system. In his primitive state, man was possessed of certain physical, intellectual, and moral advantages which he does not now possess. His body was immortal; he lay under no earthly ills or burdens, such as the curse of labor, and in the instance of woman the pains of child-bearing; he possessed remarkable knowledge of nature and the moral law; and was entirely sinless. The sin of the first pair, to which they were tempted by the devil, resulted, not only for them but also for their posterity, in both physical and moral disadvantages. The body became mortal, and a moral corruption entered which was propagated to the posterity, and gradually becomes greater and greater. Freedom of will, in the sense of power to good, is not wholly lost, but it is very much weakened. Man in his present condition is morally diseased. The imputation of original sin is removed in baptism, and without baptism no one attains salvation. Owing to his morally diseased and weakened condition, man needs the assistance of divine grace, in order to the practice of holiness, and the attainment of salvation. The moral freedom of man, or his power to good, works in connection with divine grace. The two things are not to be separated from each other. There is no unconditional decree of God, but predestination to salvation or to perdition depends upon the use which man makes of the remainder of his freedom to good. The decree of election is therefore a conditional one; God determines to bestow forgiveness and assisting influences upon those who he foresees will make a beginning. And yet the merit of his salvation man must not ascribe to himself, but to the grace of God, because without this grace man’s endeavors would be unsuccessful.

Wiggers compares the three systems with each other as follows:
Augustinianism asserts that man is morally *dead*;
Semi-Pelagianism maintains that he is morally *sick*;
Pelagianism holds that he is morally *well*.⁵

COUNTERING THE COUNTERFACTUAL TEST

❖ **Bible Says You Are In Charge Of Your Own Heart**

- ❖ *Jeremiah 4: 4 – “Remove the foreskin of your hearts”*
- ❖ *Jeremiah 9: 13 – “Stubbornly followed their hearts”*
- ❖ *Jeremiah 18: 11 – “Act according to his evil heart”*

❖ ***Ezekiel 18:31 – “Make Yourselves A New Heart & A New Spirit!”***

⁵ Shedd, W. G. T. (1999). [*A history of Christian doctrine*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 93–110). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

THE PAPAL ANTHROPOLOGY

§ 1. *Tridentine Theory of Original Sin*

As there had been two tendencies within the Roman Catholic Church,—a stricter one inclining to the Augustinian anthropology, and a laxer one inclining to the Semi-Pelagian,—the Council of Trent adopted an ambiguous method of treating the vexed subject of original sin. The *phraseology* of their canons favors the Augustinian theory, but the exposition of the canons in the negative anathematizing clauses, and by their leading theologians, supports the Semi-Pelagian doctrine. Chemnitz, after a brief specification of the Pelagianizing sentiments of many of the schoolmen, remarks, “I, for my part, should judge that these profane opinions were condemned in the *language* of the decrees [of Trent]. But Andradius, the expositor of the council, says that ‘the decrees were composed with such ingenuity, that neither these nor similar opinions of Papal theologians respecting original sin were condemned, but were left free to be received or rejected.’ ” A glance at the *Canones*, and then an examination of the explanations of them, particularly by *Bellarmin*, will corroborate the remark of the learned Lutheran divine.

The Tridentine theologians give their general statement of the doctrine of Original Sin in the following terms. “If any one shall not confess that the first man Adam, when he had transgressed the command of God in paradise, lost immediately the holiness and righteousness in which he had been created, and incurred through the offence of this disobedience the wrath and indignation of God, and thus the death which God had previously threatened, and with death captivity to the power of him who has the kingdom of death, that is the devil, and that the entire Adam, both soul and body, through this transgression was changed for the worse (in deterius): let him be accursed. If any one assert that the transgression of Adam injured himself alone, and not his posterity, and that he lost the holiness and righteousness which he had received from God, for himself alone and not for us, or, that having been polluted by the sin of disobedience he transmitted death and the punishment of the body only to the whole human race, but not sin itself, which is the death of the soul, let him be accursed, because he contradicts the apostle who says: ‘By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, in whom all sinned’ (in quo omnes peccaverunt). If any one assert that this sin of Adam, which is one in origin, and, being transmitted by propagation not imitation, is inherent in all and belongs to each, is removable by the power of man’s nature, or by any other remedy than the merits of the only Mediator our Lord Jesus Christ . . . let him be accursed.” This assertion of apostasy and need of redemption taken by itself, and with the construction which the phraseology naturally suggests, could have been accepted by the Reformers themselves.² But the doctrine of Original Sin as actually formed by the leading Roman Catholic divines evinces plainly, that this construction was not intended to be put upon it.

1. The first peculiarity in the Papal anthropology consists in the tenet, that *original righteousness is not a natural, but a supernatural endowment*. The germ of this view appears in one of the statements of the *Roman Catechism*,—a work which followed the Tridentine Canons, and is of equal authority with them in the Papal Church. “Lastly,” says the Catechism, “God formed man out of the clay of the earth, so made and constituted as to his material body, that he was immortal and impassible, not indeed by the force of nature itself, but by a Divine favor. But as to his soul, he formed him after his own image and likeness, endowed him with free-will, and so tempered within him all the emotions of his mind and his appetites, that they would never disobey the rule of reason. Then he *added* the admirable gift of original righteousness, and

decreed that he should have the pre-eminency over other animals.” Bellarmin² explains very clearly what he understands by original righteousness as a supernatural endowment; and his explanation is as authoritative as any individual opinion can be within the Papal Church. “In the first place it is to be observed that man naturally consists of flesh and spirit. . . . But from these diverse or contrary propensities, there arises in one and the same man a certain conflict, and from this conflict great difficulty of acting rightly. . . . In the second place, it is to be observed that Divine Providence, in the beginning of creation (*initio creationis*), in order to provide a remedy for this disease or languor of human nature, which arises from the nature of a material organization (*ex conditione materiae*), *added* to man a certain remarkable gift, to wit, original righteousness, by which as by a sort of golden rein the inferior part might be easily kept in subjection to the superior, and the superior to God; but the flesh was thus subjected to the spirit, so that it could not be moved so long as the spirit was unwilling, nor could it become a rebel to the spirit unless the spirit itself should become a rebel to God, while yet it was wholly in the power of the spirit to become or not to become a rebel to God. . . . We think that this rectitude of the inferior part was a *supernatural* gift, and that, too, intrinsically, and not accidentally, so that it neither flowed nor could flow from the principles of nature (*ex naturae principiis*).”

Upon examining this statement, it will be found to conflict with the Latin anthropology. Man as created is a synthesis of body and soul; but the two *are in antagonism at creation*. Creation is thus imperfect. The addition of the original righteousness, which is not a part of the *creative* act, is requisite in order that the higher shall obtain the victory over the lower nature, and the creature be made perfect. It is true that this supernatural endowment is bestowed “*initio creationis*,”—still the work of creation proper does not include it, but this is super-added, in the phrase of Bellarmin, “to provide a remedy for the *disease* or *languor* of human nature.” The Papal idea of creation, therefore, differs from the Augustinian, in that it involves imperfection. We have seen that the Latin anthropology regards man as created with a will that is holy, and which thereby possesses entire domination over the lower physical and bodily nature. It also teaches that the physical nature by creation has in it nothing corrupt or imperfect. Original righteousness, according to Augustine’s theory, enters into the very idea of man as coming from the hands of the Creator. It is a part of his created endowment, and does not require to be superadded. The work of the Creator is perfect, and needs no improvement. There is no “disease” or “languor” in it. But in the Papal anthropology, man as he comes from God, is imperfect. He is not created sinful indeed, but neither is he created holy. To use the Papal phrase, he is created *in puris naturalibus*; without positive righteousness, and without positive unrighteousness. The body is full of natural carnal propensities, and tends downward. The soul as rational and immortal tends upward. But there is no harmony between the two *by creation*. An act subsequent to that of creation, and additional to it, is necessary to bring this harmony about; and this is that act by which the gift of original righteousness is *superadded* to the gifts of creation. In and by this act, the higher part is strengthened to acquire and maintain dominion over the lower, and a positive perfection is imparted to human nature that was previously lacking in it. Original righteousness is thus, in reference to the created and natural characteristics of man, a *supernatural* gift.

2. The second peculiarity in the Papal anthropology consists in the tenet, that *apostasy involves the loss of a supernatural, but not of a natural gift*. By the act of transgression, human nature lapses back into that condition of conflict between the flesh and the spirit in which it was created. In losing its original righteousness, therefore, it loses nothing with which it was endowed by the *creative* act, but only that superadded gift which was bestowed subsequently to this. The supremacy of the higher over the lower part is lost by the Adamic transgression, and the

two parts of man, the flesh and the spirit, fall into their *primitive* and *natural* antagonism again. Original righteousness being a supernatural gift, original sin is the loss of it, and in reality the restoration of man to the state in which he was created. Original sin brings man back again to a negative condition, in which he is neither sinful nor holy. It is a state of conflict, indeed, between the flesh and the spirit; but the flesh has nothing in it which was not created in it, and nothing that does not naturally and necessarily belong to the flesh as such. And the spirit, in like manner, contains only its own intrinsic characteristics. So that the conflict is one that arises from the nature of things, or by creation itself, and not from any act of apostasy on the part of man. Here appears another marked point of difference between the Papal and the Latin anthropology. The latter does not concede that *by creation and the nature of things* the flesh must be in conflict with the spirit. It regards this as a relic of the Gnostic idea of matter and of a fleshly organism. On the contrary, the Augustinian anthropology maintains that the “flesh” as it comes from the creative hand contains nothing corrupt or disordered in it. It is a just tempering and mixture, which is in perfect harmony with the higher laws of mind and of God. If, therefore, there is ever found to be a conflict between the flesh and the spirit, this is proof positive that some change, some disorder, has been introduced into the flesh by the action of the spirit itself. Corruption begins in the spirit or will itself, and descends into the sensuous and bodily parts. The Augustinian anthropology regards the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, as a consequence and evidence of an apostasy. The Papal anthropology, on the contrary, considers it as the primitive and natural condition in which man was created, and which required to be remedied by the addition of a supernatural gift.

3. A third characteristic, consequently, of the Papal anthropology is that it *does not regard original sin as truly and properly sin*. This follows necessarily from the position that human nature is not created with holiness, but that holiness is a supernatural endowment specially bestowed after the act of creation proper is complete. For the loss of this endowment simply puts man back to the negative and characterless position upon which he stands by creation. But this cannot be a position of guilt and sin properly so called. If so, then God creates man in a sinful state. Original sin, according to the Tridentine theologians, is, indeed, a conflict between the flesh and the spirit, between the body and the mind. It is a state of corruption, and of inordinate physical desires. But this is not a state of sin and guilt. This conflict is necessary from the nature of the case. For by *creation*, the flesh is inordinate, and the spirit is weak. It is not until something subsequent to creation is bestowed,—viz.: the supernatural gift that subdues the lower to the higher part,—that righteousness or positive moral character exists. That act, therefore, whereby this righteousness is lost, the act of original transgression, is not one that plunges man into guilt proper, but only into corruption or an inordinate and ungoverned condition of the lower nature,—which inordinate condition belongs to the flesh by creation, just as the properties of matter belong to matter by creation. Hence, Bellarmin remarks that “the state of man after the fall of Adam differs no more from the state of man as created *in puris naturalibus* [i.e. previous to the bestowment of the supernatural gift of original righteousness], than a man originally naked differs from one who was once clothed, but has been stripped of his clothing; neither is human nature any worse, if we except the guilt of the act of transgression in eating the forbidden fruit, than it was made by God, nor does it labor under any more ignorance or infirmity than it labored under as created *in puris naturalibus*. Hence, the corruption of nature results, not from the subtraction of any gift belonging to nature by *creation*, nor from the addition to it of any evil quality, but solely from the loss of a supernatural gift which was over and above the gifts of nature.” In conformity with this, the Council of Trent decide that indwelling sin in the regenerate

is not properly sin. After stating that concupiscence (*concupiscentia vel fomes*) remains in the baptized, they add that “this concupiscence, which the apostle sometimes denominates sin (Rom. 6:12, 7:8), the holy synod declares the catholic church never understood to be called sin because it is really and truly sin in the regenerate, but because it is from sin, and inclines to sin.”

§ 2. *The Tridentine Theory of Regeneration*

Holding such views of the nature of original sin, it was logical that the Tridentine theologians should combat the doctrine of human impotence, and the helpless dependence of the apostate will upon the Divine efficiency in order to its renewal. They adopt the theory of synergism in regeneration, and defend it with great earnestness. “If any one,” say the Tridentine Canons, “shall affirm that the free will of man was lost, and became extinct, after the sin of Adam... let him be accursed. If any one shall affirm that the free will of man, moved and excited by God, co-operates nothing by assenting to God thus exciting and calling, so that it *disposes and prepares itself* for obtaining the grace of justification, but like some inanimate object does nothing at all, but is merely passive, let him be accursed. If any one shall affirm that all works that are performed before justification, from whatever reason they are done, are really and truly sins, and merit the displeasure of God, or that the more a man endeavors to dispose himself for grace, the more does he sin, let him be accursed. If any one shall affirm that the sinner is justified by faith alone, in the sense that nothing else is requisite which may co-operate to the attainment of the grace of justification, and that the sinner does not need to be prepared and disposed by the motion of his own will, let him be accursed.”

There was no part of the anthropology of the Reformers which the divines of Trent opposed with more vehemence, than the monergistic theory of regeneration. The theory that man cannot co-operate efficiently in the regenerating act was, and is to this day, represented by the Papal theologians as fatalism. This is the charge made by Bellarmin, and by Möhler.⁶

⁶ Shedd, W. G. T. (1999). [*A history of Christian doctrine*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 140–151). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE REFORMERS

§ 1. *Lutheran-Calvinistic Theory of Original Sin*

THE Reformers constructed the doctrines of Sin and Regeneration after the same general manner with Augustine and Anselm; so that the somewhat minute account which we have given of the Augustinian and Anselmic anthropologies renders a detailed representation of the Protestant anthropology unnecessary. The principal Lutheran and Calvinistic symbols agree in their definitions of sin and grace, and from them we shall derive our account.

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation reëffirmed, in opposition to the Papal anthropology, the Augustinian doctrine that original sin is truly and properly sin, and also that it was committed in Adam. The *Augsburg Confession* is explicit respecting the guilt of original sin, in the following terms. "The churches teach that after the fall of Adam, all men propagated according to ordinary generation, are born with sin, that is without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence (*επιθυμία*), and that this disease (morbus) or original depravity (*vitium originis*) is truly sin, damning, and bringing eternal death upon those who are not regenerated by baptism and the Holy Spirit. They also condemn the Pelagians and others, who deny this original depravity to be sin." The explanatory defence of the Augsburg Confession, which goes under the name of the *Apologia*, explains what the authors of this Confession meant by their assertion that original sin is "concupiscence." "Some persons assert that original sin is not a depravity (*vitium*) or corruption in the nature of man, but only a *condition* of servitude or mortality which the descendants of Adam come into without any proper and personal guilt. Furthermore, they assert that no one is under condemnation to eternal death on account of original sin. It is as when slaves are born of a slave woman, and come into this servile condition without any fault of their nature, but through the misfortune of their mother. In opposition to this view, we have made mention of concupiscence, and have called it desire, to indicate that the *nature* of man is born corrupt and vitiated."

The Papal opponents of the Reformers had converted the doctrine of original sin into the doctrine of original evil, and had defined original sin as *fomes*,—not sin itself, but the fuel of sin; not the depravation of the will, but the corruption of the sensuous nature only. Taking this merely physical theory of the Adamic sin, they had gone so far as to raise the questions: "What is the particular quality of the body in which this *fomes* consists; was it contracted from eating the apple (*contagio pomi*), or from the breath of the serpent; and can it be cured by medicines?" Alluding to these notions, Melancthon, the author of the *Apology*, remarks that the "scholastic doctors" bury up the real matter in discussion. "When they speak of original sin, they do not specify the greater and graver faults of human nature,—namely, ignorance of God, contempt of God, destitution of the fear of God and of trust in Him, hatred of the government of God, terror at the justice of God, anger against God, despair of God's favor, reliance upon things visible." It is this class of sins which the Symbol has in view, when it speaks of original sin, and which it sums up under that term and name.

The same view of original sin is taught with yet greater decision and particularity, in the *Formula Concordiae*. This symbol carries out the doctrines of the Augsburg Confession to their logical results, and is the best expression of scientific Lutheranism. After distinctly rejecting the view of Flacius, which made original sin to be the substance of the human soul, and after asserting that sin in all its forms is the soul's agency and not the soul's essence, the *Formula Concordiae* affirms, that "Christians ought not only to acknowledge and define actual faults and

transgressions of the commands of God to be sins, but they ought also to regard that hereditary disease (*morbis*) by which the whole nature of man is corrupted, as a specially dreadful sin, and, indeed, as the first principle and source of all other sins, from which all other transgressions spring as from their root.” The first position in the statement of the doctrine of original sin, according to the *Formula Concordiae*, is that “this hereditary evil is guilt (*culpa*) or crime (*reatus*); whence it results that all men, on account of the disobedience of Adam and Eve, are odious in the sight of God, and are by nature the children of wrath, as the apostle testifies.”

The same view of original sin was adopted by the Calvinistic division of the Protestants. *Calvin* defines original sin to be “an hereditary pravity and corruption of our nature, diffused through all the parts of the soul, *rendering us obnoxious to the Divine wrath*, and producing in us those works which the Scripture calls ‘works of the flesh.’ And this is, indeed, what Paul frequently denominates ‘*sin*;’ while the works which proceed thence, such as adulteries, fornications, thefts, hatreds, murders, revellings, he calls the ‘fruits of sin,’—though they are also called ‘sins’ in many passages of Scripture, and even by himself. This thing, therefore, should be distinctly observed: namely, that our nature being so totally vitiated and depraved, we are, on account of this very corruption, considered as convicted, and justly condemned in the sight of God, to whom nothing is acceptable but righteousness, innocence, and purity. And this liability to punishment arises not from the delinquency of another; for when it is said that the sin of *Adam* renders us obnoxious to the Divine judgment, *it is not to be understood as if we, being innocent, were undeservedly loaded with the guilt of his sin*; but, because we are all subject to a curse, in consequence of his transgression, he is therefore said to have involved us in guilt. Nevertheless, we derive from him, *not the punishment only, but also the pollution to which the punishment is justly due*. Wherefore *Augustine*, though he frequently calls it the sin of another, the more clearly to indicate its transmission to us by propagation, yet at the same time also asserts it properly to belong to every individual. And the apostle himself expressly declares, that ‘death has therefore passed upon all men, for that all have sinned,’—that is, *have been involved in original sin*. And therefore infants themselves, as they bring their condemnation into the world with them, are rendered obnoxious to punishment by *their own* sinfulness, not by the sinfulness of another. For though they have not yet produced the fruits of their iniquity, yet they have the seed of it within them.... Whence it follows that this native depravity is properly accounted sin in the sight of God, *because there could be no guilt without crime*.”

Calvin does not examine the metaphysical grounds for the imputation of the Adamic sin, so fully as do *Augustine* and *Anselm*. But the extract cited above involves the doctrine of the unity of the race in the primitive apostasy. It teaches that original sin is not a mere individual sin, but is common or generic; otherwise, the individual “being innocent” would be “undeservedly loaded with the guilt of a sin not his own,” and foreign to him. We derive from Adam, “not the *punishment* only, but also the *pollution* to which the punishment is justly due.”

The clearest and most explicit statement of the doctrine of original sin in its relations to the Adamic connection, that was made in any of the Calvinistic symbols of the 16th and 17th centuries, is found in the *Formula Consensus Helvetici*. This creed sustains the same relation to the Calvinistic system that the *Formula Concordiae* does to the Lutheran. It is confined to the doctrines of original sin and grace, and upon these subjects makes statements that are more exhaustive and scientific than are found in any of the other creeds drawn up by the Reformed or Calvinistic theologians. It was composed by the distinguished Swiss divines *Heidegger*, *Turretine*, and *Gereler*, primarily to oppose a particular theory of original sin and election which was obtaining some currency, and which these theologians regarded as a deviation from genuine

Calvinism. In order to a proper understanding of the positions of the Formula, it is necessary to give a brief account of this theory.

In the year 1640, *Joshua Placaeus*, a distinguished theologian of Saumur, in the west of France, published the theory, that God cannot justly, and therefore does not actually, impute Adam's sin itself to his posterity, but only the consequences of that sin. And inasmuch as punishment follows imputation, God cannot justly and does not actually punish Adam's sin itself in the posterity, but only the consequences of that sin,—viz.: the corruption of nature resulting from it, and transmitted by propagation. The apostatizing *act* itself was the act of the individual Adam simply and solely. The posterity, therefore, did not participate in it, and therefore it could not be *immediately* imputed to them as guilt. But the *consequences* of that individual apostatizing act of Adam,—viz.: the corruption of the whole nature, issuing from it and transmitted to the posterity,—are imputed to them. This imputation of the effects of Adam's act of apostasy, Placaeus denominated "mediate;" while the imputation of the apostatizing act itself, or of the cause of these effects, he called "immediate." "If," says Placaeus, "by the first sin of Adam, his first actual sin be meant, and not his habitual sin which followed it, then imputation must be distinguished into *immediate* or *antecedent*, and *mediate* or *consequent*. The first imputation occurs immediately, that is without the medium of any corruption. The last imputation occurs mediately, that is through the medium of hereditary and inward corruption. The former precedes inward and hereditary corruption, in the order of nature; the latter follows it. The former is the cause of inward and habitual corruption; the latter is the effect." Placaeus rejects the former, and admits the latter.

In opposition to this theory of "mediate" imputation, the Formula Consensus makes the following statements. "As God entered into a covenant of works with Adam, not only for himself *but also with the whole human race in him as the head and root*, so that the posterity who were to be born of him would inherit the same integrity with which he was created, provided he should continue in it; so Adam by his sad fall sinned not for himself only, *but for the whole human race* who were to be born 'of blood and the will of the flesh,' and lost the blessings promised in the covenant. We are of opinion, therefore, that the sin of Adam is imputed to all his posterity by the secret and *just* judgment of God. For the apostle testifies that 'In Adam all have sinned. By the disobedience of one man many were made sinners;' and, 'In Adam all die' (Rom. 5:12, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21, 22). *But it does not appear how hereditary corruption, as spiritual death, could fall upon the entire human race by the just judgment of God, unless some fault (delictum) of this same human race (ejusdem generis humani), bringing in the penalty of that death, had preceded. For the most just God, the judge of all the earth, punishes none but the guilty.* Wherefore man, previous to the commission of any single or 'actual' transgression, is exposed to the divine wrath and curse from his very birth (*ab ortu suo*), and this in a twofold manner; first, on account of *the transgression (παράπτωμα) and disobedience which he committed in the loins of Adam*; and secondly, on account of the hereditary corruption inherent in his conception, which is the consequence of this primitive transgression, and by which his whole nature is depraved and spiritually dead. Thus it appears that original sin, by a strict discrimination, is twofold, and consists of the imputed guilt of Adam's transgression and the inherent hereditary corruption consequent upon this. For this reason, we are unable to assent to the view of those who deny that Adam represented his posterity by the ordinance of God, and, consequently, deny that his sin is *immediately* imputed to them, and who, under the notion of a 'mediate' and consequent imputation, not only do away with the imputation of the first sin, but also expose the doctrine of innate and hereditary corruption itself to grave peril."

According to this statement of Turretine and Heidegger, mediate imputation must rest upon immediate; and *both* imputations must be asserted. They did not consider it conformable to justice, to impute an effect without imputing the cause. The posterity could not properly be regarded as guilty for their inward corruption of heart and will, unless they were guilty for that primal Adamic act of apostasy which produced this corruption. It does not appear reasonable, they say, that a corrupt nature should be transmitted and imputed to the universal race of mankind, “*unless some fault*” (delictum), some voluntary and culpable act, “of this same human *race* had preceded.” The attempt, therefore, of Placaeus, to sever the inherited depravity from the Adamic act of apostasy, to impute the effect but not the cause of the effect, appeared to them in the highest degree illogical. More than this, it brought the doctrine of innate depravity itself into “grave peril.” For, according to the theory of “mediate imputation,” moral corruption together with temporal and eternal death come upon the posterity, while yet the posterity have no part in that primitive act of apostasy which is the originating cause, and sole justifying reason of this very corruption and death. The justice of the Divine procedure, according to Turretine and Heidegger, is imperilled by a method that permits the misery and corruption that issue from an act of sin to fall upon a posterity who do not participate in that act, and are innocent of it. The Adamic sin itself must, therefore, be imputable to the posterity, in order to legitimate the imputation of its consequences. And, furthermore, this act, they imply, must be imputed upon *real* and not nominal grounds. The imputation of Adam’s sin must not be a “gratuitous” imputation, for this would yield only a “gratuitous” condemnation. Righteousness may be imputed when there is no righteousness; but sin cannot be imputed when there is no sin. “David describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God *imputeth righteousness* without works: saying, Blessed are they whose *iniquities are forgiven*, and whose *sins are covered*. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord *will not impute sin*” (Rom. 4:6–8). The imputation of righteousness when there is no inherent and real righteousness, according to this explanation of St. Paul, is simply the forgiveness of iniquity, or the non-imputation of sin. It is a gratuitous imputation, and a gratuitous justification. But when Placaeus proposed to carry the doctrine of a gratuitous imputation, such as holds true of Christ’s righteousness, over to Adam’s sin, and proposed to impute the Adamic guilt without any real and inherent demerit upon the part of the posterity, in the same manner that the righteousness of Christ is imputed without any real and inherent merit upon the part of the elect, Turretine and Heidegger opposed him. The doctrine of a gratuitous justification is intelligible and rational; but the doctrine of a gratuitous damnation is unintelligible and absurd. Hence the Formula Consensus taught that “man previous to the commission of any single or ‘actual’ transgression, is exposed to the divine wrath and curse from his very birth, . . . first, on account of the transgression and disobedience *which he committed in the loins of Adam*.” The posterity must be really, and not fictitiously, in the person of the progenitor, in order that they may be “immediately” and justly charged with a common guilt.

§ 2. *Lutheran-Calvinistic Theory of Regeneration*

The leading Protestant symbols adopt the Augustinian view of regeneration, and particularly of the impotence to good of the apostate will. One of the most striking characteristics of the anthropology of the first Protestant theologians is the marked difference which they find between the unfallen and the fallen Adam, or between man by creation and man by apostasy. Man as created has plenary power to be perfectly holy. Man as apostate is destitute of this power. According to Luther and Calvin, the loss of power to good is one of the inevitable effects of sin,

so that sin might be defined to be an inability to holiness. Hence they refuse to attribute to fallen man those gifts and energies of unfallen humanity which they held to have been lost in and by the voluntary act of apostasy. After this act of self-will, which is subsequent to the creative act, they concede to man no power to become spiritually perfect and holy. The utmost to which he is competent, without renewing grace, is acts of external morality. “The churches,” says the *Augsburg Confession*, “teach that the human will has a certain liberty sufficient for attaining morality (civilem justitiam), and choosing things that appear reasonable. But it has not the power, without the Spirit of God, to attain holiness or spiritual righteousness, because the carnal man cannot (οὐ δύναται) know spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14). Augustine says this in the same words (Hypognosticon, lib. iii.), ‘We acknowledge that free will is in all men; that it has indeed a rational judgment by means of which it is able to begin and finish, without God’s grace, not those things which pertain to God, but those works that relate to this present life,—the good as well as the bad. The good, I say; meaning those which are in their place right and proper: e.g.: to choose to work in the field, to choose to eat and drink, to choose to have a friend, to choose to have clothes, to choose to build a house, to marry a wife, to learn an art, or whatever allowable and proper thing it may be that pertains to the present life.’ The churches also condemn the Pelagians and others who teach that without the Holy Spirit, by natural powers (naturae viribus) alone, we are able to love God supremely.” Consonant with these statements of the Augsburg Confession, is the following from the *Apology*. “The human will is able, after a certain sort (aliquo modo), to attain civil righteousness, or the righteousness of works: It is able to converse about God, to render to God an external worship, to obey magistrates and parents in externals, to keep the hands from murder, adultery, and theft.... We concede, therefore, to the will of man the power to perform the external works of the law, but not the inward and spiritual works,—as, for example, to truly revere God, to truly trust in God, to truly know and feel that God regards us with pity, hears our prayers, and pardons our sins, &c. These are the genuine works of the first table of the law, which no human heart is able to perform without the Holy Spirit, as Paul says (2 Cor. 2:14): ‘The natural man, that is man using only his natural powers, perceiveth not the things of God.’ ” The *Formula Concordiae*, the symbol of High Lutheranism, teaches that “before man is illuminated, converted, regenerated, and drawn by the Holy Spirit, he can no more operate, cooperate, or even make a beginning towards his conversion or regeneration, with his own natural powers, than can a stone, a tree, or a piece of clay.” *Luther’s* expressions respecting the impotence of the sinful will are marked by his usual decision and boldness. At the Leipsic Disputation, he compared man to a saw in the hand of the workman; and in his commentary upon Genesis 19 he says: “In spiritualibus et divinis rebus, quae ad animae salutem spectant, homo est instar statuae salis, in quam uxor patriarchae Loth est conversa; imo est similis trunco et lapidi, statuae vita carenti, quae neque oculorum, oris, aut ullorum sensuum cordis usum habet.” In his work *De servo arbitrio*, written against Erasmus, he compares the divine exhortations to obedience addressed to men, to the irony of a parent who says ‘Come now,’ to a little child, although he knows that he cannot come.

The Reformed or Calvinistic division of the Protestants were equally positive and clear, in their assertion of the bondage of the apostate will, and of the monergistic theory of regeneration.

The *First Helvetic Confession*, an important Calvinistic symbol drawn up under the influence of Bullinger, makes the following statement. “We attribute free will to man in this sense, viz.: that when in the use of our faculties of understanding and will we attempt to perform good and evil actions, we are able to perform the evil of our own accord and by our own power, but to embrace and follow out the good, we are not able, unless illuminated by the grace of Christ, and

impelled by his Spirit. For it is God who works in us to will and to do, according to his good pleasure; and from God is salvation, from ourselves perdition.” The *Second Helvetic Confession*, drawn up entirely by Bullinger, is yet more explicit and detailed upon the subject of regeneration, and the relations of the human will to it. It considers the state of man in three respects: first, his state before his fall; second, his state after his fall; third, the nature of his agency in regeneration. Its language is as follows: “Man before the fall was upright (*rectus*) and free; he was able to remain holy, or to decline into evil. He declined to evil, and involved in sin and death both himself and the whole race of men. Next, we must consider the condition of man after the fall. The intellect of man was not taken away by the fall, neither was he robbed of his will and changed into a stock or stone; but his intellect and will were so changed and enfeebled (*imminuta*), that they cannot any longer perform what they could before the fall. The intellect is darkened, and the will has been converted from a free into an enslaved faculty. For it is the servant of sin; not unwillingly, but willingly. For it is still a will, and not a nill (*voluntas, non noluntas dicitur*). Hence, in respect to sin, man is not coerced either by God or by Satan, but does evil of his own voluntariness (*sua sponte*); and in this respect exercises the freest possible choice. But in respect to holiness, the intellect of man does not of itself rightly judge concerning divine things. The scripture requires regeneration in order to salvation. Hence our first birth from Adam contributes nothing to our salvation. Paul says, ‘The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.’ The same apostle asserts, that ‘we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any good thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.’ But it is evident that the mind or intellect is the guide and leader of the will; if therefore the guide is blind, it is easy to see how far the will also is affected. Wherefore, there is no free will to good in an unrenewed man; no strength for acting holily. Our Lord, in the Gospel says: ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.’ And the apostle Paul asserts that ‘the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.’ In the third place, we are to consider whether the regenerate have free will, and how far (*an regenerati sint liberi arbitrii, et quatenus*). In regeneration, the intellect is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that it apprehends the mysteries and will of God. And the will itself is not only changed (*mutatur*) by the Spirit, but is strengthened in its energies (*instruitur facultatibus*), so that it spontaneously wills and performs the good. Unless we concede this we deny Christian liberty, and bring in legal servitude. The prophet (*Jer. 31; Ezek. 36*) represents God as saying: ‘I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.’ Our Lord (*John 7*) also says: ‘If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.’ Paul, also, says to the Philippians (*Phil. 1:29*): ‘Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;’ and again (*Phil. 1:6*): ‘I am confident that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perfect (*ἐπιτελέσει*) it until the day of Jesus Christ;’ and again (*Phil. 2:13*): ‘It is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do.’ ”

Respecting man’s agency in regeneration, the Second Helvetic Confession teaches that the human activity is the effect of the Divine activity. “The regenerate,” says this creed, “in the choice and working of that which is good, not only act passively, but actively also (*regeneratos in boni electione et operatione, non tantum agere passive, sed active*). For they are acted upon by God, that they themselves may act what they do act (*aguntur enim a Deo, ut agant ipsi, quod agant*). Rightly does Augustine adduce the fact that God is styled our helper (*adjutor*). But no one can be helped, except as there is activity in him (*nequit autem adjuvari, nisi is, qui aliquid agit*). The Manichaeans despoil man of all activity, and make him as a stock or stone.”

By the above phrase “acting passively,” the formers of this creed appear to mean, that the sinful will, in relation to the strictly *renewing* agency of the Holy Spirit, is recipient, or is acted upon, while yet it is a *will* and not a stone; and by “acting actively,” they mean that as a consequence of this passivity it becomes spontaneously active in holiness. The regenerating energy does not find or leave the human will inert and lifeless, like a stock or stone, but makes it willing and energetic to good, with the same energy and intensity with which it had been willing and energetic to evil.

§ 3. *Melanchthon's Synergism*

Melanchthon took a leading part in the construction of the Augsburg Confession and the Apology; both of which asserted the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, and the monergistic theory of regeneration. But when the difficult points involved in the doctrine of grace and regeneration came to be discussed among the Protestants, and the Calvinistic division, in particular, asserted the helplessness of the human will with great energy, and emphasized the tenet of election and predestination, Melanchthon receded somewhat from his earlier opinions, and adopted a species of synergism. He expressed his views in a revised form of the Augsburg Confession, which goes under the name of the *Variata*, and in his important theological manual, entitled *Loci Communes*. Instead of explaining regeneration as Luther and Calvin did, and as he himself did when the Augsburg Confession was drawn up, as the effect of the Divine efficiency simply and solely, he asserts that “concurrunt *tres causae* bonae actionis, verbum Dei, Spiritus Sanctus, et humana voluntas assentiens nec repugnans verbo Dei.” The human soul, according to Melanchthon, though apostate, yet retains an appetency faint and ineffectual, yet real and inalienable, towards the spiritual and the holy. Into this seeking, or faint striving (*clinamen*) in the right direction, the grace of God enters, and brings it to a result. This form of synergism, though the nearest to monergism of any, because it reduces down the human factor to a minimum is, yet, not the monergism of Luther and Calvin. Hase, who is certainly not biased in favor of monergism, remarks that “the synergism emanating from Melanchthon may be regarded as a remote tendency to Pelagianism; first, in that the co-operation of man toward his own change of character (*Bessrung*) appears to be founded upon natural endeavors, and not upon the inward operation of the Holy Spirit; and secondly, in that the non-resistance of the sinner at the commencement of the change of heart is represented as a positive active concurrence of will.”

§ 4. *Zuingle's Doctrine of Original Sin*

The only one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation who did not accept the Augustinian doctrine of original sin was *Zuingle*. This active and energetic mind seems to have inclined to that theory, prevalent in the second and third centuries, which we have designated by the general name of the Greek anthropology, and which reappeared in Semi-Pelagianism. But the opinions of *Zuingle* upon original sin were confined to the circle of his own personal influence, and did not spread like those of Luther and Calvin through the Protestant churches. They were not adopted into any symbol, and did not constitute the foundation of any ecclesiastical body.

Zuingle sent a statement of his theological sentiments to the diet at Augsburg in 1530, where so many religious parties were represented. It is entitled *Zuingle's Fidei Ratio*, and from it we extract the following representation of his views of original sin. “I think this in regard to original sin. That is properly sin which is transgression of the law; for where no law is there is no

transgression; and where there is no transgression there is no sin properly so called,—that is to say, so far as by sin is meant wickedness, crime, villainy, or guilt. I acknowledge, therefore, that our first father sinned a sin that is truly sin,—that is, wickedness, crime, and turpitude. But those who are generated from that person did not sin in this manner,—for what one of us bit with his teeth the forbidden apple in Paradise? Hence, whether we will or no, we are compelled to admit that original sin, as it is in the posterity of Adam, *is not truly sin*, in the sense already spoken of; for it is not a crime committed against law. Consequently, it is properly speaking a disease and condition. A *disease*, because as Adam fell from love of himself, so also do we fall. A *condition*, because as he became a slave, and obnoxious to death, so also we are born slaves and children of wrath, and obnoxious to death ... Adam died, on account of sin, and being thus dead, that is sentenced to death, in this condition [status] he generated us. Therefore we also die,—so far as he is concerned, by his fault and culpability; but so far as we are concerned, by our condition and disease, or, if you prefer, ‘sin,’—but sin improperly so called. Let us illustrate by an example. A man is taken captive in war. Upon the ground of his own personal hostility to his captors, and treachery towards them, he deserves to be made a slave, and is so held. Now they who are born of him in this condition are slaves,—not by virtue of their own fault, guilt, or crime, but by virtue of their condition [status], which condition is the consequence of the guilt of their father, who had deserved to come into it by his individual fault. The children in this instance are not laden with crime itself, but with the punishment, fine, loss, or damage of crime,—that is, with a wretched condition of servitude.”

The difference between this view, and that of the Lutheran and Calvinistic symbols from which we have quoted, is plain. So far as the *will* is concerned, Zuingli does not hold the doctrine of the Adamic unity, and hence he cannot concede from his position the doctrine of a common apostasy and guilt. The Adamic transgression, according to the Zuinglian theory, was only nominally and by a mental fiction the transgression of the posterity, and hence the sinfulness of it when attributed to the posterity, is only nominal. At the same time, he left unanswered that question which drove Augustine towards the theory of Traducianism, viz.: Why are the posterity of Adam, who by the supposition are entirely innocent of Adam’s act of apostasy, visited with all the dreadful temporal and eternal consequences of that act? For Zuingli expressly says that the posterity, though guiltless of the primitive act of apostasy, are “born slaves, and *children of wrath*, and obnoxious to death.”⁷

⁷ Shedd, W. G. T. (1999). [A history of Christian doctrine](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 152–177). Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Controversies: Human Nature, Total Depravity & the Image of God

The psalmist asks one of the most important questions ever to be raised by a human being in Psalm 8:4: “What is man, that You art mindful of him?” The answer to this question is not simply an exercise in mental curiosity by those seated at the intellectual round table. Our whole being cries out for an answer.

Proper identification is important. Even a machine requires proper identification. A motor requires proper identification in order that the right fuel may be used, the proper function may be understood, the right adjustments may be made, the right parts may be ordered for replacement, etc. Improper identification can have serious results. The same can be said of plants. What may be fatal to one plant may not be harmful at all to another. The same can be said of animals. Improper identification can be dangerous and even fatal because it can result in an improper prescription.

It seems absurd, in a way, even to talk about improper identification of human beings since we are all human. We observe others and are observed by them. The problem rests in the danger of an improper description of man. Two conflicting views of human beings demand our attention. One view describes man as a being related to the animal world. He has an animal history. He has the needs of an animal of his type. The other view describes man as created by God in God’s image. He is accountable to God.

It is obvious that the prescriptions written for man’s needs will differ greatly according to which of these views a person embraces. If the wrong prescription can cause malfunction and even disastrous results for a machine, it should be more obvious that the wrong prescription for a human being can have *the most serious consequences*. We need a proper prescription for our lives. Proper prescriptions can come only after we have proper identification. It is only when we have a prescription based on our design that we can know true happiness.

Special divine revelation takes the guesswork out of identification. Identification comes to us as a “given” from the Creator. The real nature of man’s personality and what it takes to meet human needs will never be discovered by observation and experience. It must come to us as a “given.”

I am not suggesting that the whole picture of man comes so fully amplified that there is no room for study. I am saying, however, that revelation does give us the basics and that all amplification of details must involve reflection upon the data of revelation. Also, we must be constantly subjecting whatever may be known through research and observation to the authority of revelation.

One of the important things to observe about a system is that nothing in a system can be fully identified without reference to its other parts. Every part of a system is tied into the system by relationships to other parts. These relationships must be touched on in identifying a part. The matter of relationship in identification is clearly revealed in the statement: “Man is created in the image of God.” To identify man without identifying God, and then to elaborate the meaning of “the image of God,” is disastrous.

THE MEANING OF BEING CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

It is a mistake to begin our identification of human beings by saying, “Man is a sinner.” That is true, but there is something more fundamental in explaining what a human being is. Human beings are created in the image of God.

If the man at a body shop is going to work to restore a wrecked automobile, he will need to know what it was like before it was wrecked. So it is with human beings. While it is necessary for us to recognize that “all have sinned,” we need to know what human beings were like before they sinned. Saying that a human being is a sinner tells us about a serious problem he has, but it does not tell us what a human being is. It is important in identifying man to say that God created him, but that still does not tell you what a human being is. God also created plants and animals. We have not told what a human being is until we say that he or she is created in the image of God.

Once we know what it means to be created by God in His image, then we can begin to address the fact that man is a sinner, the problems that presents, and the hope and meaning of redemption. What human personality is and how human personality functions are understood by knowing the meaning of being created in the image of God. The basic needs of human beings are determined by knowing the design of human beings as they came from the hand of the Creator.

That man is created in the image of God is declared in Genesis 1:26–27. The meaning is that man is patterned after God. In what sense is man patterned after God? That it was not a physical likeness is too obvious to require proof.

A RATIONAL LIKENESS

We get clues from Colossians 3:10 and Ephesians 4:24 regarding what is involved in being created in God’s image. In Colossians 3:10 we read: “And have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.” The image of the Creator in man is linked to rationality. Therefore, we conclude that being created in the image of God involves human rationality. We do not make people rational by educating them. We can educate people because by the design of creation they are rational.

Human beings are created as rational beings, and this makes it possible for us to think, reason, and learn. It is astounding what human minds have been able to accomplish. All of this has been possible because God created human beings with intelligence. As created, rational beings, not only are we able to think and reason, but we also have rational needs. We *need* knowledge and understanding. People need answers to the *inescapable questions of life*: Is there a God? If so, what is He like? How can I know Him? How do we account for the origin of the universe and man? What is a human being? How do I know what is right and what is wrong? Is there life after death? If there is, how do I get ready for it? Human beings are in desperate need of answers to these questions. Human beings need a worldview. When a person starts answering these questions, he or she is developing a worldview.

A MORAL LIKENESS

In Ephesians 4:24 Paul wrote: “And that you put on the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.” We conclude from this text that the image of God in man makes man a moral creature. In thinking of morals at this point, we should think

in the broadest sense of the word to include the whole scope of what is involved in holiness, love, wisdom, and ideals. We do not make people moral by teaching them morals. We can teach them morals because by the design of creation they are moral. Paul tells us that every human being has the law of God written on his or her heart (Rom. 2:14–15).

The need to live according to God’s moral standard and to appreciate beauty and excellence is designed in every human being. We cannot decide whether we need to live according to God’s moral standard. *God decided that* when He created us. We can decide whether we want to live according to God’s moral teachings, but we cannot decide whether we need to. God has already decided that. A human being cannot go contrary to God’s moral law without suffering consequences.

Since we all have to deal with our own sinfulness, it helps us when we can see moral issues addressed in the Bible. Yet general revelation does a good job of informing us on basic morality. At the judgment, no person will honestly be able to say to God, “I didn’t know it was wrong to lie. I didn’t know it was wrong to steal. I didn’t know it was wrong to murder. I didn’t know it was wrong to have sex outside marriage.” The suppression of the Truth will no longer work.

Until Jesus Christ returns, we will always have to contend with sin. No sin will be exterminated from the human race prior to His return. But there is a decided difference between the presence of sinful behavior and the idealizing of such behavior. It was this problem that Paul addressed in Romans 1:32, “They not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (NASB). The word that is translated “give hearty approval to” is *suneudokeō*. The literal meaning is “to think well with.” When wrong behavior is approved and idealized, we have reached a new low.

LIKENESS SUMMED UP IN THE WORD *PERSON*

The word *person* sums up the idea of rationality and morality. God is personal. Man is personal. The basic thrust of the idea of being created in the image of God is that man is a personal being. A person is one who thinks, feels, and acts.

THE MEANING OF *MIND*

We think with our minds. The mind is referred to in Matthew 22:37; Romans 14:5; and Hebrews 8:10. The words *think*, *reason*, and *understanding* are used too often in Scripture to require a list of proof texts. We think with our minds. We grasp ideas. We reason. We make judgments. We draw conclusions. We size up situations.

THE MEANING OF *HEART*

The heart is referred to in Matthew 22:37; Romans 10:1, 9; Hebrews 8:10; and many other passages. We feel with our hearts. The heart is the seat of the emotions. With the heart we feel the reality of the truth that we know with our mind. The heart registers the value we place on things. It is with the heart that we feel sorrow and sadness. Sorrow and sadness reflect feelings of negative value or disvalue. Feelings of positive value are joy, happiness, satisfaction, peace, and contentment. Heart involvement represents the involvement of our deepest inner self. The human heart cries out for more than a mere objective grasp of knowledge.

THE MEANING OF *WILL*

The New Testament does not use the noun form of will to refer to the faculty of choice in man. However, the verb form (*thelō*) is used (Mt. 16:24; 21:29; 23:37; Mk. 8:34; Jn. 7:17; Rev. 22:17; and others). By will, we mean power of choice. Every command, every prohibition, every exhortation, and every entreaty in the Bible made to people presupposes they are capable of making choices.

Whether we want to think of the act of willing as the function of a faculty of the person or simply the person making a choice, the fact remains that the ability to choose is part of being a person. That ability of choice is what we call *will*. In his totality, man is a thinking, feeling, acting being. He thinks with his mind, feels with his heart, and acts with his will.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AND FUNCTIONAL LIKENESS OF GOD IN MAN

What has been said about man as a personal, rational, moral creature is frequently referred to as the formal likeness of God in man. I prefer to speak of it as the constitutional likeness of God in man. The image of God in man at creation included more than constitutional likeness; it also included functional likeness (also referred to as material content⁴). The functional likeness means that man as created thought, felt, and acted in a way that was pleasing to God.

The distinction between constitutional and functional likeness is made clearer if we divide the scope of person into *personhood* and *personality*. Personhood would embrace the constitutional likeness of God—that is, all the elements that go together to constitute a person. Personality refers to the way in which a person thinks, feels, and acts. At times *person* and *personality* are used synonymously, but there is usually a difference. In this study, personality will be used as defined above. Man as created was in the likeness of God with respect to both his personhood and his personality.

THE TWO LEVELS OF PERSONALITY

The functioning of personality occurs on two levels: the conscious level and the subconscious level. Man as created and as he developed after creation, up to the time of the fall, functioned both on the conscious and subconscious level in the likeness of God.

The subconscious mind is programmed with ideas, attitudes, and responses. *Mind*, as it is referred to here, is used in the broad sense to include mind, heart, and will. It is this use of the word *mind* that we employ when we say, “I have made up my mind to do so and so.” *Mind* in this instance involves more than the reasoning, thinking mind. It involves our total personality: our mind, heart, and will.

Through study, thought, observation, and meditation, we store knowledge or ideas into our subconscious mind. Only a very limited part of our knowledge is at any given moment in our conscious mind. It is stored for recall in our subconscious mind. The storage of ideas is much like the programming of a computer. Our mind is programmed with a vast store of ideas that can be brought to the surface with differing degrees of speed.

In the process of meditation, ideas to which we are committed take on the appropriate attitudes in the heart. We are programmed to think and feel a certain way under certain

circumstances. The programming of the subconscious mind of Adam and Eve was constituted with ideas and attitudes that were in the likeness of God before the fall. In their innermost being they were like God. I agree with Berkhof when he says, “The image of God in which man was created certainly includes what is generally called ‘original righteousness,’ or more specifically, true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.... Man’s creation in this moral image implies that the original condition of man was one of positive holiness, and not a state of innocence or moral neutrality.”

In theological writings, references are frequently made to “original righteousness” and “original sin.” I have been unable to find anyone who comments on the meaning of the word *original* when discussing the meaning of original righteousness and original sin. Most commonly, we think of original as meaning “first” as distinguished from some other place in the order of numerical sequence. Sometimes, we take the meaning to be the original as distinguished from a copy. Neither of these meanings properly modifies righteousness or sin in the terms “original righteousness” or “original sin.”

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the meanings of original is “innate.” That seems to fit the meaning of original righteousness and original sin. When we speak of man, as created, as possessing original righteousness, we mean he was innately righteous. Righteous thoughts, feelings, and actions flowed from the very design of his nature. By original sin, we mean that since the fall of Adam and Eve human beings are born with an innately depraved nature. There is an innate proneness to sin.

DESIGNED FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Inherent in the constitutional likeness of God in man and demonstrated in the functional likeness is the fact that man is designed for relationships. A human being cannot be adequately described apart from these relationships. In fact, people will die, suffer malfunction, or be less than human according to what relationship or relationships are involved and depending upon the extent to which they are deprived, or deprive themselves, of these relationships. These relationships are (1) man’s relationship to God; (2) his relationship to other people; (3) his relationship to the created order; and (4) his relationship to himself.

DESIGNED FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Human beings are designed for a relationship with God. Man’s relationship to God is seen in his fellowship with and his responsibility to God. After we are told of the creation of man by God, we read, “Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth’ ” (Gen. 1:28). We read also of man’s moral responsibility when God said, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). From the reference to God walking in the garden immediately after the fall, we would infer that He had done so before and that Adam and Eve had enjoyed fellowship with God. Before the fall Adam and Eve functioned properly and in a way that was becoming to God in their relationship with Him. We do not make people religious by teaching them about God. We can teach them about God because they are religious by the design of creation. Human beings are in desperate need of a meaningful

relationship with God. As Augustine said, “Thou madest us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee.”

DESIGNED FOR INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Human beings are designed for social relationships. In Genesis 2:18, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” The direct reference here is to making a wife for Adam. However, considering that a human being is a member of a race, it is obvious that social relationships are a part of the design of God. A person’s need for reciprocal social relationships is no less real than his need for air, water, and food. God created this need for social relationships in our basic design, and it cannot be ignored without serious consequences. We can infer from Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for man to be a loner.

DESIGNED FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CREATED ORDER

Human beings are designed for a relationship to the created order (Gen. 1:26, 28–30; Ps. 8:6–8). God designed man for the responsibility of exercising dominion over the earth, plants, and animals. This meant that man had a management responsibility over the created order. That responsibility was to be used to meet his needs and to serve his purposes. It is often referred to as the “Cultural Mandate.”

Our relationship with the material universe is more than a means of survival. God designed it for our pleasure and enjoyment. It presents us with a challenge. It is an opportunity for us to put our creative minds to work. The Cultural Mandate sanctifies and elevates to the level of divine service the work of farmers, housekeepers, skilled workers, helpers, scientists, engineers, artists, etc. The list could go on. When done for the glory of God, all that we do is a divine service. The challenge is great. Work was a part of the original plan of God for man. It did not involve the undesirable aspects that it does now, but work has always been a part of the divine plan.

This managerial responsibility must also involve a concern for ecology. We must be concerned about the condition of things as we pass them on to future generations.

In the Cultural Mandate, God is saying to every human being: I have made you in My image. I have given you a mind. Your mind is capable of taking what I have given you in the physical universe and achieving much that will be for your enjoyment, comfort, deep satisfaction, and My glory. The possibilities of creative achievement are limitless. I have given you a moral nature. My laws are written in your heart. As you carry out this Mandate, your mind is to do its work under the supervision of your moral nature. See what you can do with the challenge that is before you. One day, I will have you report to Me to see how good a steward you have been of the opportunities you have had.

The fall of man complicated matters in the fulfillment of this Mandate. But the Mandate still remains in force. Stephen M. Ashby reminds us that “it is our responsibility as stewards of this divine command to educate people to think Christianly with an integrated and unified field of knowledge in regards to their faith with their learning.”

DESIGNED FOR AN INTRAPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP

Man was designed for a relationship with himself. Anytime there is responsibility and challenge, there is also a place for self-examination. How did I do? How can I face the challenge that is before me? Genesis 2 presents two clear illustrations of responsibility: the responsibility (1) to refrain from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17) and (2) to exercise dominion over the earth and its inhabitants.

To eat of the forbidden fruit was to reap the consequences of death. It would also make man guilty. Guilt when recognized by a person becomes self-judgment on the negative side. To refrain from eating would have produced self-acceptance on the positive side. The responsibility to exercise dominion over the earth has the same basic results so far as self-judgment and self-acceptance are concerned. The moral tone may not be as strong, but the same basic principles are involved.

In connection with the responsibility placed upon man and the challenge given to him, we see that man is goal-oriented. Achievement with its rewards, as well as failure with its losses, are inescapable parts of human beings that were designed in them by their Creator.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FACT THAT MAN WAS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD CONTRIBUTES TO A PROPER SENSE OF WORTH

The image of God in man gives dignity and places a sense of worth on him. Psalm 8:5–8 reads:

*For You have made him a little lower than the angels,
And You have crowned him with glory and honor.
You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet, All sheep and oxen—
Even the beasts of the field,
The birds of the air,
And the fish of the sea
That pass through the paths of the seas.*

As a result of the fall, there is a dark side to human nature, but even in fallen man there are still signs of nobility. Jesus was talking about fallen man when He said, “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Mt. 6:26). Jesus appealed to the greater worth of man than animals when He defended His healing of the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day: “Then He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.’ ” (Mt. 12:11–12).

INFLUENCE AND RESPONSE, NOT CAUSE AND EFFECT

In some sense, an individual’s actions are both his own and under his control. If this were not the case, he or she would be less than a person. Yet the fact that human beings are relational creatures means that their actions cannot be explained as independent in the absolute sense. *Influence* is brought to bear on their actions. *Influence* in personal decisions can never be equated

with *cause* as in mechanical cause and effect relationships. *Influence* and *response* are more appropriate terms, where persons make decisions, than the terms *cause* and *effect*.

In many of our decisions, we are both active and acted upon. To have to make a choice between active and passive is to equate personal relationships with mechanical cause and effect relationships. These principles relate to our relationships to both God and other human beings.

It is only when we distinguish between influence and response and cause and effect that we can begin to understand how God works with us as human beings.

THE FACTOR OF HUMAN DESIGN

When we see the full meaning of the fact that (1) we are designed to be personal, rational, moral beings and (2) we are designed for the four basic relationships, then we can determine our needs according to our design. The design of human beings represents not only possibilities, but also needs. It is possible for us not only to be rational and moral and to have functioning relationships, but we also need to function rationally and morally and properly in the framework of the four basic relationships. Failure in any of these areas means loss. All rational, moral, and spiritual functions are functions of the personality. A Christian psychology, sociology, and system of ethics must have as a part of its foundation an acquaintance with what it means to be made in the image of God. It is utterly impossible for human beings through observation and experience alone (empiricism) ever to arrive at an adequate understanding of human needs and human behavior. Only when we let special divine revelation inform us about human design and its implications can we develop an adequate understanding of human need and how to minister effectively to those needs. Then and only then can we help our fellow human beings be what they are designed to be and become what they can by redemption.

We pay very close attention to design and how it determines need in machines. We are very careful when we buy fuel for our automobiles. We get diesel fuel if that is what our car was designed for. We get gasoline if our car was designed for gasoline. Shall we be less careful in finding out what we are designed for? Will we ignore the question of human design and recommend that people create their own meaning and purpose or simply go along with what society is saying? We know better than to pour water in the fuel tank of our car. It is even more important that we live according to the design that the Designer designed into our being when He made us in His own image.

THE ORIGIN OF THE IMMATERIAL PART OF MAN

By origin of the immaterial part of man, I am not referring to the original creation by God, but to the origin of the immaterial part as it relates to those who have descended from Adam and Eve. In one sense, this discussion may not belong under the discussion of man as created, but in another sense it does. The design of providing the immaterial part of man is not related to the fall, but was already a part of the divine plan before the fall. The same plan would have been followed if there had been no fall of man into sin.

There are three approaches: (1) The pre-existence theory teaches that the immaterial part of man existed prior to the creation of the body. Since orthodox Christians have never accepted this view, I do not deem it necessary to deal with it. There are no reasons for anyone even to be confused about whether the Bible supports such a view. (2) The creationist theory teaches that

God creates the immaterial part of each person and places it in the body sometime between conception and birth. (3) The traducian theory teaches that the immaterial part of man is transmitted through propagation just as the body is.

THE CREATIONIST VIEW

One of the main reasons people have advocated the creationist view is that it is felt this was the only way for Christ to be born without depravity. It is felt that traducianism would result in a depraved nature for Christ. I would suggest that the same divine act of conception that could provide Jesus with a body that did not bear the marks of depravity could also sanctify the immaterial part of man.

The most serious objection to the creationists' view is how the immaterial part becomes corrupt. One thought, which is sometimes associated with the federal headship view of Adam's sin and the race, suggests that God created the immaterial part of man corrupt because Adam violated the covenant God made with him when he sinned. I cannot conceive of God creating anything corrupt. Another view states that God creates the immaterial part sinless, but that it becomes corrupt upon contact with the body. There is a close relationship between the spirit and the body, but to blame the total process of perpetuating the depravity of the race on the body is more than can be justified. The depravity of the spirit is far more basic in our depravity than that of the body.

THE TRADUCIAN VIEW

The traducian theory most easily accounts for the perpetuation of depravity in the human race and its effect on the total person. Some are of the opinion that the Bible does not give a clear-cut case for either creationism or traducianism. I do not think this is the case. In Genesis 5:3 we read, "And Adam . . . begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth." If the creation of man in God's image included the personhood and personality of Adam, certainly the begetting of Seth in Adam's image included Seth's personhood and personality. Personhood and personality cannot be based on body alone but must embrace the spirit also. Traducianism offers the only adequate explanation of Adam's begetting Seth in his own image.

THE EFFECT OF THE FALL ON THE IMAGE OF GOD IN MAN

Concerning the effect of the fall on the image of God, Carl F. H. Henry explains: "The fall of man is not destructive of the formal image (man's personality) although it involves the distortion (though not demolition) of the material content of the image." Louis Berkhof comments: "As created in the image of God man has a rational and a moral nature, which he did not lose by sin and which he could not lose without ceasing to be man. This part of the image of God has indeed been vitiated by sin, but still remains in man even after his fall into sin."⁹ Gordon H. Clark says, "Sin has interfered with but does not prohibit thought. It does not eradicate the image but causes it to malfunction."

As was stated previously when discussing the meaning of being made in the image of God, I prefer "constitutional likeness" to "formal image" and "functional likeness" to "material

content,” but the meaning is the same whichever way it may be stated. I made a further distinction between personhood and personality. This distinction will be particularly helpful in explaining the effect of the fall on the image of God in man.

THE EFFECT ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL LIKENESS

The fall did not change the fact of the constitutional likeness. The personhood of man remains intact. He is still a thinking, feeling, acting being. He is still morally constituted. All of the constituent parts of personhood remain intact after the fall. The parts have suffered damage, but they all remain. The damage reflects itself in the personality.

THE EFFECT ON THE FUNCTIONAL LIKENESS

The effect of the fall is seen in the functional likeness. A basic and drastic change occurred in man’s personality. Before the fall, man thought, felt, and acted both on the conscious and subconscious levels in absolute conformity to the likeness of God. After the fall, this was no longer true. Man no longer thinks, feels, and acts in a way that is pleasing to God. This is true both on the conscious and subconscious levels. However, it is not as simple as saying that man is the precise opposite of what he was before the fall. We must avoid oversimplified explanations of how the fall affected the image of God.

THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF FALLEN MAN’S ATTAINING A RIGHT STANDING BEFORE GOD BY HIS OWN EFFORTS

It is possible and sometimes happens that unbelievers reach a measure of decency and uprightness in society. They may perform humanitarian deeds, but all of these fall far short of meeting divine approval (Rom. 3:23). The presence of sin in their lives still renders them unrighteous before a holy God. The power of sin in their lives makes them stand in need of the new birth.

THE QUESTION OF THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Probably the most enduring controversy over depravity centers on the will. Does fallen man have a free will? If descendants of Adam do not in some sense have freedom of will, they have lost their personhood. One of the factors involved in being a person is to have power of choice or the ability to will. The will can choose and act only to the extent that it is free. To deprive the will of freedom is to deprive it of being a will. I think the debate between Calvinism and Arminianism should be framed over whether fallen man is a functioning, personal being. Does he have a functioning mind, heart, and will?

THE MEANING OF FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Before proceeding to discuss the effect of depravity on the will, let us make a few things clear about what is and is not meant by freedom of will. The freedom of the will does not mean

that forces or influences cannot be brought to bear on the will. In fact, the very nature of freedom of the will means that forces or influences will be brought to bear on the will. It does not mean that these forces cannot be a contributing factor in the exercise of the will. It does mean that these influences or forces *cannot guarantee or determine* the action of the will. We are dealing with influence and response, not cause and effect.

THE FRAMEWORK OF POSSIBILITIES AND THE MEANING OF FREEDOM OF THE WILL

Freedom of will is a freedom within a *framework of possibilities*. It is not absolute freedom. Man cannot be God. He cannot be an angel. The freedom of a human being is in the framework of the possibilities provided by human nature. Also, the influences brought to bear on the will have a bearing on the framework of possibilities.

I think “dead in trespasses and sins,” or spiritual death, means that man is separated from God, dead in relationship to God. There is no communion and no fellowship with God. The principle is similar to that spoken of by Paul when he said, “By whom the world is crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). Both Paul and the world were alive in the sense that they were not lifeless. They were not alive so far as a functioning relationship between them was concerned.

Spiritual death, if this is the correct interpretation, refers to the fact that the sinner is cut off from communion and fellowship with God. This is true both because a holy God demands that it be so until sin is taken care of, and also because the bias of the sinner’s heart is against God. The fact that sinners are not in communion with God does not mean that they are totally deaf to God’s communication. If that were the case, sinners could not even distort the message of God. You cannot distort that to which you are totally deaf. That a person is a sinner does mean he does not hear well. He tends to resist and oppose the Truth and to distort the Truth. The gospel has to go forth against great opposition.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF ADAM’S SIN FOR THE RACE

The questions to be answered regarding the consequences of Adam’s sin for the human race are as follows: First, is Adam’s sin imputed to the race? Second, if it is imputed, how and why?

Romans 5:12–19

The key passage in deciding the consequences upon the race of Adam’s sin is Romans 5:12–19. How do we interpret the phrase “death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” in verse 12 (KJV)? “Death passed upon all men” is the effect. “All have sinned” is the cause. Concerning the Greek word translated “have sinned” in the KJV, there are two possibilities insofar as Greek grammar is concerned. “Have sinned” is a translation of *hēmarton*, which is the aorist. If we understand the aorist as a simple aorist, we would translate “all sinned.” It would mean that all sinned at some time in the past. This would mean that death passed upon the race because the race sinned at some time in the past.

If we understand the aorist as being a gnomic aorist, we would translate it “all sin.” If we understand it to be a culminative aorist, we would translate it “all have sinned.” Whether we understood the Greek to be a gnomic aorist or a culminative aorist, the interpretation would be the same. It would mean that death passes upon all men because all people sin.

If we understand that death passed upon all men because all men sinned at some time in the past, death would pass upon all because all sinned in Adam. If we understand that death passes upon all men because all sin, death would pass upon each person because of his own sins, not the sin of Adam. The context must decide which of these interpretations is correct. The chart below will help us see how the context decides the question.

CAUSE	EFFECT
5:12 “All have sinned” or “All sinned”?	“Death passed upon all men”
5:15 “The offence of one”	“Many be dead”
5:16 “By one [person]”	“Condemnation”
5:17 “One man’s offence”	“Death reigned”
5:18 “The offence of one” (The Greek means “one offence.”)	“Judgment came upon all men to condemnation”

On the “effect” side of the chart, it is obvious that the effect in 5:15–18 is the same as the effect in 5:12. If it is clear what the cause of the effect is in 5:15–18, that should help clarify what the cause is in 5:12. The cause in 5:15–18 is “one person,” “one man’s offence,” and “one offence.” Putting that together, it is clear that the cause is the one offense committed by Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit.

If 5:12, 15–18 all give the same effect, it is to be expected that 5:12, 15–18 will all give the same cause. The cause is clear in 5:15–19. This interprets the cause in 5:12. While Greek grammar may allow the statement in 5:12 to refer to each individual’s sin, the context decides against it and in favor of the other grammatical possibility. It is clear in the total context that 5:12 is to be interpreted, “all sinned in Adam.”

Romans 5:12–19 definitely settles the fact that the sin of Adam is imputed or placed on the account of the whole race. The question to be decided now is how and why was this done?

THE APPROACHES USED TO EXPLAIN IMPUTATION OF ADAM’S SIN TO THE RACE

One view would say that the answer is found in Adam’s natural headship of the race. The other would declare that while Adam is the natural head of the race, the natural headship did not furnish the grounds for imputing the sin of Adam to the race. Adam was appointed federal head of the race and the grounds of imputation are found in the federal headship of Adam.

According to the view that grounds imputation in the natural headship of Adam, sin is imputed to the race because the race, by being in Adam, was a part of Adam when he sinned, thus identified with him in his sin and the guilt of that sin. This view accepts the traducian view of the origin of the human spirit. The process of propagation transmits depravity.

According to the federal headship view, Adam became the representative of the race by divine appointment. The reason for Adam’s being chosen was his natural headship, but natural headship did not of itself involve the race in Adam’s sin. God entered into a covenant with Adam

promising to bestow eternal life on him and his posterity should he obey God. Corruption and death would pass on to his posterity should he disobey God. It is the covenant relationship of the race with Adam, by virtue of his being appointed as the representative of the race, that involves the race in the consequences of his sin. Instead of saying that the race sinned in Adam, this view would say, "All are accounted as sinners."

COMPARISON OF NATURAL AND FEDERAL HEADSHIP THEORIES

NATURAL HEADSHIP VIEW	FEDERAL HEADSHIP VIEW
1. Traducianist	1. Creationists as a rule, but could be traducianist
2. Adam representative of the race because the race was in him	2. Adam representative of the race because of divine appointment
3. Sin imputed because of identification by being in Adam	3. Sin imputed to the race because Adam, as appointed representative of the race, violated the covenant
4. All sinned	4. All are accounted as sinners
5. Immaterial part transmitted with a depraved nature	5. Immaterial part created by God with corrupt and depraved nature, or created without corruption and corrupted by contact with a corrupt body. (A few would go along with the traducian view, but this is not the usual view.)

THE FEDERAL HEADSHIP VIEW

While a person may be a traducianist and hold to the federal headship view, a creationist must hold to the federal headship view if he believes in the imputation of the sin of Adam to the race. Being in Adam from only a physical viewpoint would not furnish an adequate basis for imputing the sin of Adam to the race as it relates to the total personality.

The federal headship view works on the assumption that the federal headship principle of imputation explains the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to the redeemed. It then seeks to build a parallel view of the imputation of Adam's sin to the race.

While there may be some people who accept the federal headship view of Adam who do not accept unconditional election, the federal headship principle fits logically in the Calvinistic system. The covenant made with Adam, because of Adam's disobedience, brought condemnation to all who were in the covenant. In this case, it was the whole race. The covenant made with

Christ, because of His obedience in death and righteousness, brought eternal life to all who were in the covenant. In this case, according to Calvinism, only those who were unconditionally elected to be parties of the covenant were in the covenant.

By an act of His own will and based on His own reasons, God chose to include the whole race as the recipient of the guilt and consequences of Adam's sin. He could have chosen to do it otherwise. There was nothing in the nature of things that made it necessary for it to be that way. By an act of His own will and based on His own reasons, God did not choose to elect the whole human race and make them participants in the benefits of Christ's obedience. There was nothing in the nature of the case that required Him to limit the number of the elect.

THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE IMPUTATION OF ADAM'S SIN AND THE IMPUTATION OF CHRIST'S DEATH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The principle involved in imputation of something from one to another is *identification by being in or in union with the person*. This is true whether it is sin or whether it is righteousness. The Scripture knows of no other way that the action of one person can be imputed to another. This is the principle involved in the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to the believer.

The Bible knows of no imputation from one to another except in a manner that makes it so that the action can in some sense be said to be *the action of the person himself*. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "I am [or I have been] crucified with Christ." By being in union with Christ, Paul became so identified with Christ that it could be said he was crucified with Christ. Paul was not actually crucified with Christ in the sense of experiencing the sufferings of Christ. By identification with Christ, the death of Christ became his so that he could get credit for its benefits.

OTHER VIEWS ON THE IMPUTATION OF ADAM'S SIN TO THE RACE

There are two more views that should be mentioned. The theory of mediate imputation denies that the guilt of Adam is imputed to the race. We receive depravity from him, and depravity forms the basis of guilt and condemnation. The sin of Adam is the indirect cause, not the direct cause, of the race being charged with guilt. This imputation of guilt precedes personal acts of sin. This view does not accord with Scripture, as we have seen from our discussion above.

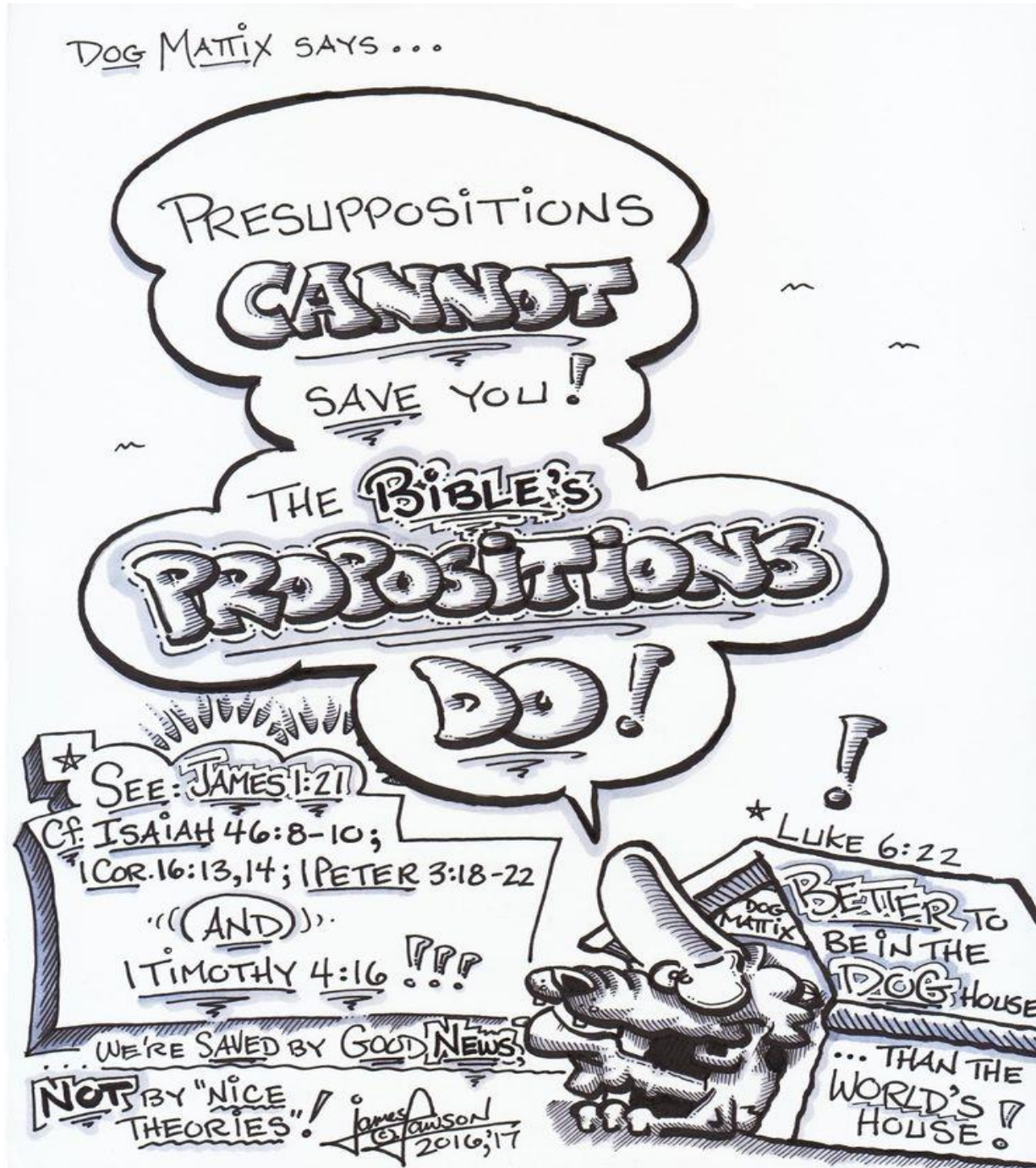
Another view that is frequently referred to as the Arminian view does not teach that the race is charged with the guilt of Adam's sin. Depravity is inherited from Adam and causes people to sin. They are not condemned before God until they commit individual sin upon becoming responsible persons. The discussion above shows the inadequacy of this view. One of the chief concerns of Arminians has been to deny that infants go to hell.⁸

⁸ Forlines, F. L. (2011). [*Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*](#). (J. M. Pinson, Ed.) (pp. 1–33). Nashville, TN: Randall House.

**“Man is conceived
in sin and born in
corruption and he
passeth from the
stink of the didie
to the stench of
the shroud.”**

– Robert P. Warren

PRIMARY PRESUPPOSITION: HUMAN WILL



"Come and hear, all you who fear God,
And I will DECLARE what He has done for my soul." Psalm 66:16 NKJV

Presumption of Synergism or Monergism

"Grant what thou commandest, and command what thou dost desire."

With those words, Augustine touched off the historical debate of monergism vs. synergism. Augustine was saying, in essence, that humanity, on its own, cannot obey God nor do what God requires. A British monk named Pelagius took issue with Augustine's statement & argued that humankind can respond to God without any involvement on the Creator's part. Since that point in time, the debate has continued and has taken various interesting twists and turns.

Are Non-Calvinists Really

Trying to Manipulate God

Are Non-Calvinists Really

Trying to Manipulate God

Or to Put Him In Their

Debt? NO!!

Augustinianism, Pelagianism, and Semi-Pelagianism

Definitions

Theopedia defines [Monergism](#) as "the belief that the Holy Spirit is the only agent who effects the regeneration of Christians "; and defines [Synergism](#) as "essentially the view that God and humanity work together, each contributing their part to accomplish salvation in and for the individual."

Monergism, which comes from a compound word in Greek that means "to work alone," is the view that God alone effects our salvation. Synergism, which also comes from a compound Greek word meaning "to work together," is the view that God works together with us in effecting salvation.

John Hendryx (in his article titled [Monergism vs. Synergism](#)) writes: "Synergism is the doctrine that the act of being born again is achieved through a combination of human will and divine grace... Synergists believe that faith itself, a principle standing independent and autonomous of God's action of grace, is something the natural man must add or contribute toward the price of his salvation."

In contrast, he shows that Monergism teaches:

Salvation is entirely a work of God... man can contribute nothing toward the price of his salvation and that one is saved wholly and unconditionally by grace through faith.

The conflict between these two views is not new. It has existed for close to 1600 years of church history. Let us take a journey to the 5th century and look at the contention between Augustinianism, Pelagianism, and Semi-Pelagianism. Each of these views approached man's participation in salvation differently.

1. Augustinianism - Salvation determined by God alone
2. Pelagianism - Salvation determined by the individual.
3. Semi-Pelagianism - Salvation accomplished by God and man working together

The divergent views are sourced in their presuppositions regarding the effect of the sin of Adam on man's spiritual nature and the condition of his heart. In my understanding it has helped to define the views in their approach to the spiritual deadness of man.

1. Augustinianism - the completely-dead view
2. Pelagianism - the not-dead view
3. Semi-Pelagianism - the mostly-dead view

Augustinianism

The Augustinian view declares that Adam's sin has brought spiritual incapacitation to mankind. Man not only cannot but will not do anything that is pleasing to God. In presenting the completely-dead view, Theopedia shows [Augustinianism](#) affirming:

Due to the corruption of human nature in the Fall, one's will is not free, but rather a slave to sin. As such, every person is born sinful and justly under the condemnation of God. In order for a person to be delivered from this dreadful state (i.e. saved), God must intervene.

In his [Outlines of Theology](#), A.A. Hodge, with regard to original sin, notes: "every man brings into the world with him a nature already so corrupt, that it can do nothing but sin."

Philip Schaff, who devotes a fair number of pages in his [History of the Christian Church](#)³ to a discussion of the divergent views, writes:

To understand Augustine's doctrine of the fall of man, we must remember, first of all, that he starts with the idea of the organic unity of the human race, and with the profound parallel of Paul between the first and the second Adam; that he views the first man not merely as an individual, but at the same time as the progenitor and representative of the whole race, standing to natural mankind in the same relation as that of Christ to redeemed and regenerate mankind. [824]

Pelagianism

In contrast to Augustinianism, the Pelagian view affirms that Adam's disobedience only affected him, and that individuals are born with the innocence with which Adam was created. Man therefore has the capability to choose whether or not to follow in Adam's disobedience.

In presenting the not-dead view, Theopedia shows [Pelagianism](#) teaching:

That man has an unimpaired moral ability to choose that which is spiritually good and possesses the free will, ability, and capacity to do that which is spiritually good. Man could choose to follow the precepts of God and then follow those precepts because he had the power within himself to do so.

[Warfield](#) notes:

The Pelagian scheme therefore embraces the following points. God has endowed man with an inalienable freedom of will, by virtue of which he is fully able to do all that can be required of him. To this great gift God has added the gifts of the law and the gospel to illuminate the way of righteousness and to persuade man to walk in it; and even the gift of Christ to supply an expiation for past sins for all who will do righteousness, and especially to set a good example. Those who, under these inducements and in the power of their ineradicable freedom, turn from their sins and do righteousness, will be accepted by the righteous God and rewarded according to their deeds.

Schaff contrasts Pelagianism with Augustinianism and notes:

The soul of the Pelagian system is human freedom; the soul of the Augustinian is divine grace. Pelagius starts from the natural man, and works up, by his own exertions, to righteousness and holiness. Augustine despairs of the moral sufficiency of man, and derives the new life and all power for good from the creative grace of God. The one system proceeds from the liberty of choice to piety; the other from the bondage of sin to liberty. [787]

R.C. Sproul (in an article titled, [Augustine and Pelagius](#)) writes:

Pelagius recoiled in horror at the idea that a divine gift (grace) is necessary to perform what God commands. For Pelagius and his followers responsibility always implies ability. If man has the moral responsibility to obey the law of God, he must also have the moral ability to do it.

Michael S. Horton (in his article titled [Pelagianism: The Religion of Natural Man](#)) points out that "Pelagianism was condemned by more church councils than any other (labelled) heresy in history."

Semi-Pelagianism

In an attempt at maintaining the natural ability of man to choose, while at the same time denying his innocence, Semi-Pelagianism insists that spiritual deadness does not incapacitate.

In presenting the mostly-dead view, Theopedia shows [Semi-Pelagianism](#) "aimed at a compromise between Pelagianism and Augustinianism." The article notes, with regard to man, that his "nature is neither good nor bad, but injured." Man therefore is in need of God's grace, but retains the ability "to decide whether he wants God's grace."

Got Question Ministries (in an article titled [What are Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism?](#)) notes:

Semi-Pelagianism essentially teaches that humanity is tainted by sin, but not to the extent that we cannot cooperate with God's grace on our own. Semi-Pelagianism is, in essence, partial depravity as opposed to total depravity.

Schaff observes that Semi-Pelagianism, while attempting to reconcile the above views,

Rejects the Pelagian doctrine of the moral roundness of man, but rejects also the Augustinian doctrine of the entire corruption and bondage of the natural man, and substitutes the idea of a diseased or crippled state of the voluntary power. [858]

In introducing his readers to John Cassian, whom Schaff describes as the "head of the Semi-Pelagian party," Schaff notes that Cassian taught:

That the divine image and human freedom were not annihilated, but only weakened, by the fall; in other words, that man is sick, but not dead, that he cannot indeed help himself, but that he can desire the help of a physician, and either accept or refuse it when offered, and that he must cooperate with the grace of God in his salvation. [861]

Shelton Smith, President of [Sword Of The Lord Publishers](#) and Editor of their newspaper, in an article titled *The Case Against Calvinism*⁴, affirms the Semi-Pelagian view when he writes:

Calvin's total-depravity teaching did not properly represent the condition of unsaved men. When the Bible describes the sinful condition of man, there is no question that he is depraved and totally so. Man is not inherently good; he is by nature a sinner.

But man's total depravity must not be defined as total inability. The fact is that God has made arrangements for our salvation, and He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (II Pet. 3:9).

So a man is totally depraved (a sinner), but he can come to Christ if he will do so. He has the ability to come to Christ - he can if he will.

Schaff, in summarizing the 3 views, uses the terms Monergism and Synergism to define each.

The Greek church adhered to her undeveloped synergism, which coordinates the human will and divine grace as factors in the work of conversion; the Latin church, under the influence of Augustine, advanced to the system of a divine monergism, which gives God all the glory, and makes freedom itself a result of grace; while Pelagianism, on the contrary, represented the principle of a human monergism, which ascribes the chief merit of conversion to man, and reduces grace to a mere external auxiliary. [786]

¹ Warfield, B.B. *The Plan of Salvation*. (General Books LLC, 2009).

² John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust).

³ Schaff, Philip. *History of the Christian Church*. (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers), 1996. Vol. 3 of 8.

⁴ *Sword of the Lord*. 27 September 2010

Catholic vs. Protestant: Synergism vs. Monergism Debate

Erasmus' Thesis

The Purpose of His Thesis

Erasmus begins his thesis admitting that among the many difficulties in theology, none is a more "tangled labyrinth" than that of free choice. Not only does he set forth his own views in his work, but he admits also that there have been varying ideas on the issue since the early days of the Christian church.

The reason why he tries his hand at untying the knots in this old issue is because it had recently resurfaced in the writings of John Eck and Luther. He hopes that he might want once and for all make the issue more plain. He writes,

It seems good to my friends that I should try my hand and see whether, as a result of our little set-to, the truth might be made more plain.¹

This undoubtedly is a kind of arrogance. By taking Luther to task, he inevitable also takes the whole Augustinian theology to task on the issue of the freedom of the will. While he repeatedly appeals to antiquity, yet he seems to reject the greatest voice in the ancient period.

The Heart of the Issue

The scholar of Rotterdam shows himself to be worthy of the title. He does not shy away from issues, even when dealing with a controversial subject like this. He does not excuse himself but boldly faces the issue that confronts him.

The heart of the controversy is the doctrine of free will. He shows that this is indeed the precise controversy by titling his thesis *The Freedom of the Will*. To this doctrine of the will, he aims to speak.

He admitted that in this issue he had not personally decided on a conclusive position. He writes,

I admit that many different views about free choice have been handed down from the ancients about which I have, as yet, no fixed conviction, except that I think there to be a certain power of free choice.² The subsequent development of the book shows

that to be false. He doesn't only have a slight idea about free choice, but he decidedly chose to reject Luther's and Augustine's doctrine of the will.

Erasmus tells us that having considered Dr. Luther's position, he is not persuaded by it. If he rejects the Reformation doctrine of man, what then are his ideas about man? Before we examine his ideas, we need to go back to our previous statement about the doctrine of man. It must be understood that both Luther and Erasmus were not merely debating the subject of the will in the abstract. They were not debating the loci in dogmatics we call anthropology. What is at stake is the question whether or not man in his fallen state is free and able to do good. To be more precise, they were debating about anthropology as it is related to soteriology. The question was not merely a moral one; it is a spiritual one. The question, in other words, is not just whether man is good or bad; but the question is how is man saved. Is his salvation a work of his own efforts, or is it a cooperation between his weakened will, or a work of the sovereign God apart from any contributions of man? So the question is eventually soteriological.

Erasmus saw this. He was not a blind renaissance scholar. This becomes more apparent in the later part of his work where he raises the question of the relationship between free will and grace. So the question is between particular grace and synergism, Augustinianism and Pelagianism, Dordt and Arminianism. This can also be seen in his definition of the issue. He writes:

By free choice in this place we mean a power of the human will by which a man can apply himself to the things which lead to eternal salvation, or turn away from them.³

Here Erasmus rightly connects the two issues of anthropology and soteriology. The issue has to do with whether man is able to choose to receive salvation or to reject it.

His Approach

Erasmus is very careful with his words in his work. He knows that it is first of all a historical question. History shows that men have taken opposite sides. Erasmus, being a good humanist, does not want to offend any side. When he says that he approaches the subject as a debater and an inquirer rather than a dogmatist, he wants to avoid the impression that he is taking sides in the debate. He wants to present himself as a mediator between what he deems two swinging extremes, pure free-willism and sovereign grace. But he knows also that the issue is scriptural. As such, besides reproducing some ancient opinions, he wants also to reason from Scriptures why his view must be considered as viable, and as the only alternative to Luther's doctrine.

His Doctrine of the Will

Erasmus does not claim to be on the side of Pelagius, the fourth century heretic, in this matter of the human will. He knows well enough that if his doctrine is Pelagian he could not stand against the German Reformer, for then he himself would be charged with the ancient heresy. Up to the time of the Reformation, one can almost say that there were two views of anthropology and soteriology. One either believes in salvation by works or salvation by grace. In other words one is either a Pelagian (whether pure or semi) or an Augustinian. Salvation is either by sovereign grace or by human merits.

But Erasmus does not want to be as blatant as Pelagius in his heresy. Concerning Pelagius' doctrine of man, he writes,

Pelagius, while he feared for the justice of God, ascribed too much to free choice, and those are not so far distant from him who ascribe such power to the human will that by their own natural strength they can merit, through good works, that supreme grace by which we are justified.⁴

Erasmus, in rejecting Pelagianism, nevertheless also rejected Augustine's doctrine of man's will. He believes that Augustine, who once embraced the freedom of the will, was forced by the controversy to take the opposite extreme. This, he says, is exactly the case with Luther as well. Luther, like Augustine, was driven to extreme. Erasmus writes,

After his battle with Pelagius, Augustine became less just toward free choice than he had before. Luther, on the other hand, who had previously allowed something to free choice, is now carried so far in the heat of his defense as to destroy it entirely.⁵

In between these two "extremes" he finds a medium. The medium that he has created is the doctrine of synergism. Synergism is that doctrine of soteriology that ascribes salvation both to God and man. In salvation, God & man make an equal contribution. Salvation is both by merit and grace. Really Erasmus sees salvation as a cooperation. God cooperates with man, and man with God. It is a joint venture, a partnership. The result is that while God receives the glory, man also receives the reward for his merits. His view is best summed by the statement made popular by John Wesley in the eighteenth century: "God helps those who help themselves."

Erasmus expresses his doctrine very clearly in his conclusion to the passages he set forth to defend free will. He writes,

And so these passages, which seem to be in conflict with one another, are easily brought into harmony if we join the striving of our will with the assistance of divine grace.⁶

But Erasmus would not deny grace. He cannot because the doctrine of grace is so clear in the Scriptures. But yet neither does he want to deny the priority of free will. So he finds himself in a dilemma, a dilemma which he refuses to admit, but which is clear in his writings. For example, he writes,

We should not arrogate anything to ourselves but attribute all things we have received to the divine grace, which called us when we were turned away, which purified us by faith, which gave us this gift, that our will might be *synergos* (a 'fellow-worker') with grace, although grace is itself sufficient for all things and has no need of the assistance of human will.⁷ In speaking about [Philippians 2:13](#), that "a good will cooperates with the action of grace."

One might immediately ask: Is this not inconsistent?

Erasmus has a way of getting around this apparent inconsistency. He speaks of a remote cause and a secondary cause. He writes,

In each individual action two causes come together, the grace of God and the will of man: in such a way, however, that grace is the principal cause and the will secondary, which can do nothing apart from the principal cause, since the principal cause is sufficient in itself. Just as fire burns by its native force, and yet the principal cause is God who acts through the fire, and this cause would of itself be sufficient, without which the fire could do nothing if he withdrew from it.⁸

Erasmus' view might be close to what Wesleyan Arminianism teaches today. He speaks of a prevailing grace, a grace that precedes man's salvation but that is not efficacious. It is a grace that God gives to all fallen sinners. That grace prepares him for salvation and gives him the ability to appropriate the salvation saving grace offers to him in the gospel. Implied here also is that saving grace is not efficacious and sovereign. It may be resisted and rejected by the sinner's free choice. The idea here is that when he accepts Christ as offered in the gospel, he receives salvation by his own decision. Christ could not have entered his life if he had not chosen Him. The sinner must initiate the act and cooperate with the saving grace freely offered to him. But Erasmus adds also that it is God's work, for it is God who offers the "apple" to him.

Without Christ, there is no salvation. One might say that the solution is in Christ, but the decision is in man.

Wesleyan Arminianism, like Erasmus, insists on a prevailing grace. Grace must first work in the sinner's heart before the sinner can be enabled to get a grip on saving grace. But like Erasmus, Wesleyan theology insists also that man after the fall is able to desire the good and choose salvation.

It is not hard to see that Erasmus' doctrine is the basis for modern decisionism in mass evangelism. Both center in the autonomy of man. Both highlight the fact that man must do something in order to be saved. Both view salvation as a cooperation between God and man. Both see in Christ's death only a possibility of salvation, not a vicarious and efficacious accomplishment of salvation.

His Refutation of Luther's Doctrine

Luther, according to Erasmus, is arrogant. On page 95 he considers Luther's doctrine as a hyperbole, an exaggerated position. Erasmus remarks that he prefers moderation.

In Part III of his book, he titles the division "Examination of Luther's Arguments." He begins with an explanation of the words "flesh" and "spirit" in [Galatians 6:3](#) and [Isaiah 40:6-8](#). He does this because these are the texts that Luther used to set forth the doctrine of man's total depravity. Following Jerome's lead, Erasmus takes the word "flesh" to mean not a sinful flesh, but merely a weakened flesh. By this he meant not a flesh that is earthy and possesses obvious limitations because of its confinement to space and time. He takes it to mean something quite different. The idea, as suggested by Jerome, is that man's flesh is his morally weakened condition. He finds Luther's idea that man is totally depraved as intolerable.

It is to be noted, as we have earlier pointed out, that in refuting Luther's doctrine of man's depravity, Erasmus appeals to both history and Scripture.

When Erasmus appeals to Jerome and cites the authority of the fathers, he is showing that the church of all ages has never held to Luther's extreme. When he appeals to Scripture, he is saying to Luther that the Word of God militates against him. But is this the case?

His Defense of Free Will, Scriptural Arguments

Let us begin first with Erasmus' scriptural arguments, although this is not how he himself commences his apology. He commences the debate with reference to the early fathers, and probably did so because the authority of canonized saints seems always to have carried abundant weight among the people in those days.

The scriptural passages cited by Erasmus to set forth his case are the following: [Genesis 4:6, 7](#); (Apocrapha) Ecclesiasticus 15:14-17; [Isaiah 1:19-20](#); [Isaiah 45:20, 27](#); [Ezekiel 18:31](#); Ezekiel 33:11.

Firstly, he sees that Scripture makes a clear distinction between man before and after the Fall. He contends that man before the Fall is in no need of grace. He writes,

In man the will was so upright and free that, apart from new grace, he could continue in innocence.¹³

After the Fall, he sees man's will as only weakened, and not totally depraved and corrupted. He writes that the will is, after the Fall, "obscured by sin, but not altogether extinguished."

In other words, he speaks about a partial depravity after the Fall. This is clear from the language that he uses immediately following this statement. He says,

Thus, as the sin of our progenitors has passed into their descendants, so the tendency to sin has passed to all.¹⁴

This, he says, is owing to the fact that after our first parents fell, God immediately acted to forgive their sins, and by his grace has restored man to a morally able condition. By this grace man is enabled to continue to do the right, yet not without the tendency to sin. He underlines the latter and says that sin is not totally rooted out owing to the vestiges of original sin in us.

On the one hand he seems to say that the image of God in man is not totally extinguished, because man is still a reasonable creature. But, as he goes on, it is clear that buried inside these reasonable and moral faculties is the ability to do some good. Although it is not a saving good, nevertheless it is a good that enables him to merit salvation. He writes,

And in these things it is probable that there was a will in some way ready for the good but useless for eternal salvation without the addition of grace by faith.¹⁵

Thus, he sees not only the ability to do good in man, but also that the good he does is able to bring him a step nearer to salvation. The goodness that man does is then a stepping stone to saving faith. This is akin to the idea of a common grace that some Reformed people speak about.

Indeed Erasmus mentions common grace. More than this, to rescue him from his own dilemma, he speaks about three or even four kinds of grace. By grace he means merely a benefit freely given. As such there can be manifold ideas of grace.

Firstly, there is common grace, by which he means the common benefits God gives to all men alike.

Secondly, there is peculiar grace. This is the grace by which,

God in his mercy arouses the sinner wholly without merit to repent, yet without infusing that supreme grace which abolishes sin and makes him pleasing to God.¹⁶

This grace only assists the sinner, but never saves him. It makes him displeased with himself, and leads him to do a good that makes him a candidate for the highest grace. One may call this a preparing grace, but Erasmus calls it an operative grace, or stimulating grace.

This second grace is given to all men alike. This second grace will enable one to cooperate with the third kind of grace, which he calls cooperative grace, that will make man's salvation effective. This third grace, like all the other graces, can be refused and resisted. But when man, having been enlightened and enabled by the preparatory grace, and by his awakened will cooperates with this third grace, then his salvation is completed. Thus he writes,

The first arouses, the second promotes, the third completes.¹⁷

Free Will and God's Foreknowledge

Lastly, let us examine his solution to the problem of man's free will and God's foreknowledge.

Here again, Erasmus displays his ignorance of the issue. Really, he has no answer to this relationship because he is not clear as to the precise connotation of these terms. He at first defines foreknowledge as the same as God's willing. This is good, but this purpose or willing of God is conditional upon man's free choice. Does he mean that God's purpose is then mutable? He at first seems to deny it, but since he prefers to exalt the free will in man, he eventually concedes that God's purpose is indeed

dependent upon man's free will. God acts according to man's plan. He writes, concerning the case of Judas,

Thus if you look at the infallible foreknowledge of God, and his immutable will, Judas was necessarily going to turn traitor to his Lord, and yet Judas could change his intention, and certainly he had it in his powers to refuse to undertake his treacherous design.¹⁸

All that he says about God's will being immutable and infallible is just an orthodox coating for his blatant conditional theology. God's decree must turn according to man's decision.¹⁹

Erasmus hates the doctrine of reprobation. He explains away the doctrine by stating that it is a conditional decree. He even speaks about God's hatred against Esau merely as a "temporal misfortune," and adds that, in [Romans 9](#), where Paul speaks about the Potter and the clay, he was merely using a rhetorical device to repress the wicked Jews' murmuring against God.

The Conflict between Luther and Erasmus

“Their debate, seemingly narrow and obscure, actually involved the most fundamental discussion of nature and destiny.”

*Steven Ozment,
The Age of Reform, 290*

Luther's Thesis

Luther's Reason For His Book

Luther in his Introduction explains why he has not responded sooner to Erasmus. He remarks that it is not because of cowardice nor any such like thing; but rather he has already dealt with the issue of free will in other writings so that he sees it unnecessary to repeat what he has taught in those other places. But, it appears that the disturbances caused by Erasmus' doctrine necessitated a reply from Luther, and so Luther replied, in the most eloquent manner.

In Luther's judgment, the book of Erasmus is worthless, low in quality; and it is the disgusting and distasteful contents that prevented him from an earlier reply. But its evasive method and dangerous doctrine has worried some of Luther's faithful friends, and, fearing what it might do to the Reformation, they urged Luther to write a reply. Luther's chief reason for writing is, as he tells us, that Christian truth is in danger in many hearts.

As such, his reason is chiefly polemical. In his book, Luther takes Erasmus to task, and systematically refutes the humanist's theology bit by bit. He begins by taking to task Erasmus' theology in his own words, showing the inconsistencies of his own language and theology. In the process Luther confesses that, in contending with Erasmus, he has become more sure about his own position. He says,

I owe you no small thanks, for you have made me far more sure of my own position by letting me see the case for free choice put forward with all the energy of so distinguished and powerful a mind.²⁰

After Luther tears down Erasmus' arguments, he positively sets forth the Reformation doctrine of free will. As such, his purpose is also instructional, hoping also that in this way Erasmus himself might be brought to a correct understanding of the truth. In concluding his Introduction, Luther writes,

Therefore we must pray to God that he may open my mouth and your heart, and the hearts of all men, and that he may himself be present in our midst as the master who informs both our speaking and hearing.²¹

Luther's Approach

Luther begins his reply to Erasmus by calling attention to the importance of doctrine. Erasmus has made the statement that doctrinal assertions are not important. Erasmus' preference is a position of no position; that is, doctrinal neutrality and uncertainty.

However, in the world of theology, there is no such thing as neutrality & uncertainty. Either one admits that truth is absolute and stands for it or he is against it. Luther correctly points out that Erasmus, in rejecting the doctrinal assertions in the Scriptures, is really taking sides with the Sophists.

The Holy Spirit is no Skeptic, and the things He has written in our hearts are not doubts or opinions, but assertions - surer and more certain than sense and life itself.

This of course boils down to the fact that Erasmus does not subscribe to the doctrine of the sufficiency and perspicuity of Scripture. Erasmus stands in the Roman Catholic tradition of holding both Scripture and traditions as authoritative. But still, both are not enough for him. As a humanist scholar, he is compelled by his own system to include also human reason and philosophies. This precisely is Erasmus' problem. It is strange that the man who gives us the Greek New Testament should turn his mind against it. In writing in defense of free will, Erasmus refused to submit himself to Scripture. And it is this that Luther first takes issue with. He writes,

Is it not enough to have submitted your judgment to Scripture? Do you submit it to the Church as well? - why, what can the Church settle that Scripture did not settle first?

Hence, Luther, when he takes the humanist to task, begins with a positive setting forth of the doctrine of Scripture. The reason why Luther does this should be obvious to all students of the Reformation. One of the Reformation's mottos is *Sola Scriptura*, that is, Scripture alone. Luther had learned this in his debate with Eck at Leipzig and in his defense before the Roman court. Scripture must be our sole authority in matters of doctrine and life.

Secondly, Luther's approach is exegetical. He says several times that the issue is an issue in hermeneutics. He accuses Erasmus of twisting Scripture, and wresting the Word to his own destruction.

This however is not Erasmus' method. Erasmus is man-centered both in his theology and in his method. When appealing to the authority of the fathers, Erasmus shows that he is more interested in man's commentaries than in scriptural authority. Erasmus' man-centeredness can also be seen in his purpose in his work. For in his work he aims to arrive at moderation. He wants to please man, and this has led him to develop a theology that is utterly man-centered.

Erasmus even remarked that Scripture has not dealt at length with the issue of free choice and seems to have left the issue open. He admits that Scripture is obscure

about the matter. Erasmus in fact makes a strange classification of matters between that which may be known and that which may not be known.

The first are those things that are reserved to be known only in heaven.

The second are those things which God has willed that we should be completely ignorant of. An example of this is the hour of Judgment.

The third are those things which God has willed that we should contemplate, such as the distinctions between the two natures of Christ.

The fourth are those things which God has willed to be plainly evident. Examples are the precepts for the good life.

The fifth are those things that even when made known are not suitable to be made known to men.

His purpose in such a classification is so that he may excuse himself from taking a stand in doctrinal issues. Since Scripture is obscure about the issue, therefore we should not be so dogmatic about it. He himself confesses that he detests doctrinal assertions, and admits that he prefers the opinions of the Skeptics and church councils to those who assert a strong opinion in doctrines.²² It seems that Erasmus wants to make those who make strong doctrinal assertions to appear to be ultra-fundamentalists who go around beating others with a theological club.

Luther rejects Erasmus' moderation. He insists on definite doctrinal assertions. This doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture is denied by Erasmus. Erasmus with his five classifications of scriptural knowledge really is making the Scriptures an unclear book. Luther is annoyed with this, and immediately counteracts it by giving a list of helps how one may elicit the true sense of Scripture. The first rule he lays down is the most fundamental principle in hermeneutics, that is, Scripture interprets Scripture. Secondly, he insists that the way to know the Scriptures is to have our minds opened by Christ. Along with this, too, he asserts that the Spirit is required for the right understanding of the Scriptures. Not only is the truth of the Word made clear in our hearts by the Spirit, but Luther also says that truths are made known in the preaching. The former he calls internal clarity, the latter he calls external clarity.²³ Luther's main critique of Erasmus' method is that Erasmus omits both of these principles in interpretation. He fails to interpret Scripture from Scripture; he lacks a spiritual mind; and therefore both his approach and theology are really Christless. Luther's critique of Erasmus' message is this:

Christianity as you describe it includes this among other things: that we should strive with all our might.... These words of yours, devoid of Christ, devoid of the Spirit, are colder than ice, so that they ever tarnish the beauty of your eloquence.²⁴

With regard to the issue of free choice, Luther insists (p. 169) that the Scriptures are clear on the issue. Since this is the case, then the doctrine of man's total depravity ought to be preached and taught. He writes,

Consequently, if the dogma of free choice is obscure or ambiguous, it does not belong to Christians or the Scriptures, and it should be abandoned and reckoned among those fables which Paul condemns Christians for wrangling about. If, however, it does belong to Christians and the Scriptures, it ought to be clear, open, and evident, exactly like all the other clear and evident articles of faith.²⁵

How Luther Sees the Issue

Not only does he deal with the issue in connection with soteriology, but also he deals with it in relation to theology. He sees here that the glory and the honor of God are at stake. What Luther really wants to do is to set forth the sovereignty of God over against the autonomy of man. As such it is Luther who really deals with the issue. Erasmus, owing to his humanism, evades altogether, perhaps only with some passing and slight remark, the sovereignty of God. He is not able to deal with such a high doctrine for he has no doctrine of Scripture and no idea of theology. So at the heart of the issue is more than just our salvation, but especially the honor of God. Luther's contention is that we must let God be God!

Of the doctrine of sovereignty, there must be no compromise. In response to Erasmus' accommodating view, Luther says,

*What I am after is to me something serious, necessary, and indeed eternal, something of such a kind and such importance that it ought to be asserted and defended to the death, even if the whole world had not only to be thrown into strife and confusion, but actually to return to total chaos and be reduced to nothingness. If you do not understand this or are not concerned about it, then mind your own affairs and let those understand and be concerned about it on whom God has laid the charge.*²⁶

Refutation of Erasmus' Doctrine

Erasmus' Idea of Free Will Refuted

Luther begins his refutation of Erasmus' arguments in support of free choice in part III of the book.²⁷

He commences with a critique of the definition of free choice given by Erasmus. Luther calls his definition a "bare definition," a definition that is narrow and that does not truly set forth the idea that is represented by the term. Thus Luther contends that at the outset there is a problem with the term that is used, for, as he says,

There is a conflict between the definition of the name and the definition of the object, because the term signifies one thing and the object is understood as another.²⁸

In Luther's opinion no man has real free choice. For by free choice is meant, That which can do and does, in relation to God, whatever it pleases, uninhibited by any law or any sovereign authority.²⁹

As such, free choice properly belongs to no one but God alone, for God alone is free to do what He desires to be done. Luther argues that because man is under subjection to God, he cannot be said to act freely on his own, just as a slave cannot be free because he is under the sovereign authority of his master. Luther suggests to Erasmus that perhaps he can consider the terms "**veritable choice,**" or "**mutable choice,**" **but not "free choice,"** for this is a misrepresentation of what man truly is. *As such, Luther insists that the term free choice ought to be dropped altogether in the study of man, since such a thing as free choice does not exist in him.*

By free choice, Luther understands Erasmus to refer to man's ability to do that which is good toward salvation. Luther elaborates on Erasmus' phrase "power of human will by which man is able," and adds that what he means is, A capacity or faculty or ability or aptitude for willing, unwilling, selecting, neglecting, approving, rejecting, and whatever other actions of the will there are.³⁰

When Erasmus adds that this free choice of man is able to "apply itself" to things which are eternal, Luther sees in this an added emphasis by his foe to underline the fact that the will itself produces the willing and the unwilling, and itself acts as an independent power free from external forces. This necessarily means that, for Erasmus, the preaching of the gospel is a mere presentation which itself does nothing to the hearer. It is up to the hearer himself to act independently of grace to accept or reject the gospel.

Luther astutely observes that when Erasmus defines free choice as an independent faculty that is able to apply itself to salvation, he inevitably says that when a hearer wills salvation, then he is able to perform it. This is logically the case, as Luther shows,

For if you can will or unwill anything, you must to some extent be able to perform something by that will, even if someone else prevents you from completing it.³¹

If Erasmus affirms this, which he must if he is to hold his position consistently, then he inevitably denies grace and the Holy Spirit, and even the cross. But since Erasmus does not entirely attribute the whole of salvation to free will but also to grace, then he really is espousing a half-baked free-will theology. Luther himself, I am sure, finds this confusing, and ridicules such an idea of free will and says that in a way Erasmus is more confusing than Pelagius and even outdoes him, for he does not want to assert that salvation is wholly of man.

Erasmus' definition is therefore unacceptable. For couched in those words that free choice is able to apply itself to salvation is a doctrine of salvation apart from grace. Luther points out to his foe that,

You, however, make free choice equally potent in both directions, in that it is able by its own power, without grace, both to apply itself to the good and to turn away from the good. You do not realize how much you attribute to it by this pronoun "itself" - its very own self! - when you say it can "apply itself"; for this means that you completely exclude the Holy Spirit with all his power, as superfluous and unnecessary. Your definition is to be condemned....³²

Erasmus' Texts Examined

It is therefore at this point, "If thou wilt," that the question of free choice arises.³⁴

It is such expressions containing "ifs" that Erasmus rashly and madly holds to in defense of his position. As we have already noted, Erasmus imagines that a command necessitates the ability to perform the duty, for God cannot command man to do something which he is not able to do.

But Luther contends that there is nothing in such conditional expressions that implies free choice. Luther argues from grammar first of all. He says that verbs in the subjunctive mood assert nothing.³⁵ If the writer of Ecclesiastes would want to assert free will, he would have written otherwise, and say probably something to this effect, "Man can keep the commandment of God," or "Man has the power to keep the

commandment." In other words, he would have used the indicative mood rather than the subjunctive mood.

Secondly, Luther shows that such commandments are given not to show our ability, but rather to show precisely the opposite, that man is not able to keep the law. He explains with an illustration,

How often do parents have a game with their children by telling them to come to them, or to do this or that, simply for the sake of showing them how unable they are, and compelling them to call for the help of the parent's hands!³⁶

The reason for God giving the law, he says, is that human nature is so blind that it does not know its own powers, or rather diseases, and so proud as to imagine that it knows and can do everything; and for this pride and blindness God has no readier remedy than the propounding of his law....³⁷

Luther insists that man without grace and without the Spirit is not able to keep the law.³⁸ Such expressions in the imperative are really designed to show precisely this truth of total depravity,³⁹ and that outside of grace man is really helpless.

Following his clarification of this text in Ecclesiastes, Luther goes on to explain other Old Testament passages that contain the imperative mood. One such text also appealed to by Erasmus is [Deuteronomy 30:15, 19](#), "I have set before your face the way of life and of death. Choose what is good." Luther's explanation to this and to all such texts is that such precepts only set forth what man ought to do and not what he is able to do. He writes,

The words quoted are imperatives, and only say what ought to be done; for Moses does not say, "Thou hast the strength or power to choose," but, "Choose, keep, do!" He issues commandments about doing, but does not describe man's ability to do.⁴⁰

From these texts, Luther, thirdly, points out the basic fault in Erasmus' interpretation. In all such texts, Erasmus takes what is the imperative to be the indicative. He says to the Rotterdam scholar,

...as soon as you get hold of an imperative verb you take it as implying the indicative, as if once a thing is commanded it must forthwith necessarily be done or be possible to do.⁴¹

Luther grieves at such an error, and complains that even "grammarians and street urchins" know the difference in what is expressed by these two moods. He says,

Even grammarians and street urchins know, that by verbs of the imperative mood nothing else is signified but what ought to be done. What is done, or can be done, must be expressed by indicative verbs.⁴²

Fourthly, Luther points out that Erasmus fails to distinguish between Law and Gospel. Taking the words from Jeremiah and Zechariah that say, "If you return, I will restore you," and "Return to me, and I will return to you," Luther shows the distinction between what is legal and what is evangelical. The word "return" in its legal use is an expression of a command in which God exacts from us our duty to repent and to return to him. But the word "return" may also have an evangelical usage, and in this sense is an expression not of a command, but of an expression of a divine comfort and promise, "by which nothing is demanded from us, but the grace of God is offered us."⁴³ Like the first, it does not imply what man is able to do, but shows rather that God Himself promises to do something to a returning sinner. Belonging to this second use is also the text in [Ezekiel 18:23,32](#), "I desire not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn and live." He comments about the text:

The word of grace does not come except to those who feel their sin and are troubled and tempted to despair.... Here for instance, "I desire not the death of a sinner" explicitly names death and the sinner, that is, the evil that is felt as well as the person who feels it.⁴⁴

Far from being the case that this text in Ezekiel sets forth free choice, it shows rather that man who lies outside of God's grace, lies only in death, and that "free choice by itself can only go from bad to worse and fall down into hell."⁴⁵ In order that man may enjoy the favor of God, he must return by the way of legal repentance. Only those who see their sins and feel the burden of death see the need for mercy. This means that we must walk according to what the law tells us we must do. For it is only through the law that we recognize our transgressions, that is, our inability to perform our duty, so that we despair of ourselves and flee to God for grace. This then means that free will is hoax. The law tells us what we cannot do, not what we can do!

From the Old Testament, Luther moves on to the New Testament. In responding to Erasmus' use of [Matthew 19:17, 21](#), [Luke 9:23](#), [John 14:15](#), and like verses that have the conditional particle "if" in them, he highlights another fundamental flaw in Erasmus' hermeneutics, that is, he fails to distinguish what belongs to the Old Testament and what belongs to the New Testament. Luther remarks that to the old dispensation belongs threats and punishments; but to the new dispensation belongs promises and exhortations. The point he is making is that the New Testament texts on conditions and exhortations are designed to...

... stir up those who are already justified and have obtained mercy, so that they may be active in the fruits of the freely given righteousness of the Spirit, and may exercise love by good works and bravely bear the cross and all other tribulations of the world.⁴⁶

An example is that Erasmus, on the basis of [Matthew 5:12](#) ("rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven"), sets forth the doctrine of free choice, ignoring the fact that the admonition was given to the early apostles, who were men who already were recipients of grace and were justified.

The problem, as Luther sees it, is that Erasmus has no doctrine of renewal and regeneration. In the words of Luther, he "discusses free choice precisely as it is without grace."

Since there are no such things as rewards of merit, because there is none worthy of any rewards, therefore when the Bible speaks about rewards in connection with a condition, it speaks of them as rewards of consequence. This is clear from such passages as [II Chronicles 15:7](#), [Romans 2:6, 7](#). Hell and judgment, life and favor are all rewards of consequence depending whether one is in grace or outside of grace. And this, Luther adds, depends on election. Citing [Matthew 25:34](#), Luther says

How can they merit that which is already theirs and is prepared for them before they are born?⁴⁷ Luther powerfully brings his argument to a logical conclusion, saying that "It is settled then that merit is not proved from reward, at any rate in the Scriptures; and also that free choice is not proved from merit".⁴⁸

The idea of God's sovereignty in these texts leads Luther to discuss the question of God's sovereignty and evil. Luther's answer to the apparent problem is very simple. He says that God uses wicked men as they already are. Evil things are done, but God can not be said to do evilly although he does evil through evil men, because one who is himself good cannot act evilly, yet he uses evil instruments that cannot escape the sway and motion of his omnipotence. It is the fault, therefore, of the instruments, which God does not allow to be idle, that evil is done, with God himself setting them in motion.⁵⁰

In Pharaoh's case, when God comes to him with His command to let His people go, Luther says that God is confronting him with an object that he naturally hates, so that Pharaoh in accordance with the wickedness of his own will hates and opposes what is commanded of him. Thus, the command only fans the fire of hatred which already resides in him. Pharaoh, thus, instead of letting God's people go becomes more hardened in his heart. Luther then takes the word "I will harden Pharaoh's heart" to

mean "I will act so that Pharaoh's heart may be hardened."⁵¹ That God uses the evil in man's heart to accomplish His will shows that free choice can do nothing but evil.

Turning to the case of Jacob and Esau, Luther says that the sense in the text is very plain. Paul, in quoting the words from Malachi, aims to set forth the truth that the rewards of the two brothers are decreed before they are born. Erasmus tries to get around this clear and certain text by saying that, in Malachi, the hatred that is spoken of against Esau is a mere temporal misfortune, and that the hatred is only directed at some people. Luther, having answered these objections, eventually begs his opponent not to evade the question at hand, but to face the issue, that is, "by what merit or what work they attain to their faith by which they are grafted in or to unbelief by which they are cut off?" Luther's answer to the question is,

Paul teaches that it comes about by no work of ours, but solely by the love and hate of God.⁵²

The same thing is true in the illustration of the Potter and the clay. Clearly set forth in this picture is the absolute sovereignty of God. The vessels do not prepare and make themselves, but the master makes them, some to honor and some to dishonor. He admits that such a doctrine is unpleasant, and is often regarded as even cruel. But because Scripture teaches it, it is true. It is reason that insists otherwise.

Luther rebuts Erasmus' concept of "flesh" in the Bible. Erasmus had earlier tried to disprove Luther's anti-free choice doctrine when he expounded the idea of "flesh" in [Genesis 6:3](#) as corrupted flesh. Erasmus responded by saying that flesh in the text means only weakness and not total corruption. Again Luther puts up a strong case for his position. He shows from several texts that flesh must mean depraved mankind. Luther's exegetical capabilities shine again when he shows that wherever flesh in the Bible is treated as in opposition to spirit, one can be sure that flesh in that context means everything that is contrary to the Spirit.⁵³

Erasmus tries to get around the problem by saying that man is a trichotomy, composed of a spirit, a soul, and a body. By body, Erasmus means flesh, and says that this bodily part of man is carnal and fleshy, that is sensual. But he contends that the soul and the spirit, the immaterial part of man, is good and sound and is capable of striving after good virtues. Luther, on the other hand, shows that all of these components make up the flesh of man. This flesh is carnal and thus hostile and opposed to God, thus ungodly. The problem with Erasmus' view here is that it of necessity means that Christ came only to die for that part of man which is bad and corrupted, and it makes Christ a partial Savior!

Luther criticizes Erasmus for appealing to ancient fathers like Jerome and Origen. He considers this appeal to ancient authorities as of no weight at all. Luther remarked that they were incompetent exegetes because of their allegorizing hermeneutics.

Where is that promise by which we bound ourselves to conduct our debate on the basis of the Scriptures themselves, not of men's commentaries?⁵⁵

Luther's Doctrine Set Forth

Luther's Statement Concerning Fallen Man

Man, in Luther's view, has a very miserable life. This is not only because he is corrupted by sin and depraved in nature, but also because his will is in bondage, and is therefore unable to do anything which is spiritually good. In addition, Luther points out that his corruption has so blinded him that he is even unaware of his own corruption. In refuting Erasmus, he writes,

Scripture, however, lays it down that man is corrupt and captive, and what is more, that he portrays a proud contempt of ignorance of his corruption and captivity.⁵⁶

Luther makes a big point about man's ignorance of his own depravity. In a remarkable insight into man's psychology and his spirituality, Luther remarks that unregenerate fallen man likes to imagine himself to be a free creature. This, of course, he adds, is what the devil has done to him. The devil has so blinded him that he is made to think that he is well and alive without God. For when man becomes aware of his misery, the devil knows that his plan will be defeated; for then man at once will begin to seek for deliverance and refuge in God.

Scripture, however, represents man as one who is not only bound, wretched, captive, sick and dead, but in addition to his other miseries is afflicted, through the agency of Satan his prince, with this misery of blindness, so that he believes himself to be free, happy, unfettered, able, well and alive.⁵⁷

Sin and Man's Free Will

Luther's doctrine of the will can be found especially near the end of the book where he launches a final attack against Erasmus. In his final section, Luther again does some serious exegesis, and shows from the writings of the apostle Paul and the apostle John that Erasmus' doctrine of free will is a fallacy.

Most of Luther's argument from the apostle Paul's epistles are taken from the book of Romans. This is interesting because it shows how important a place the epistle plays in the work of the sixteenth century Reformation.

From the epistle of Romans, Luther declares first the doctrine of man's depravity. Quoting from Paul, he declares together with the apostle that the wrath of God is directed against all men. According to Luther, all men without exception are sinners. Taking his cue from [Romans 1:18](#), Luther explains that for man to be a sinner means that he is ungodly & unrighteous. And because of his hostility and wickedness, God shows his wrath against all mankind. There are three important truths regarding man and free will that Luther brings out from this text. The first is that all are without exception sinners. Secondly, he defines sin as basically ungodliness and wickedness. Thirdly, he points out that man's wickedness brings out the wrath of God. Fourthly, he adds that the best of men are "ungodly, wicked and deserving of the wrath of God."⁵⁸ Lastly, he points out that because everyone is given to such wickedness, there is no possibility that man is able freely to will and do that which is good. He concludes his exegesis of this text with these remarks,

Therefore, Paul in this passage lumps all men together in a single mass, and concludes that, so far from being able to will or do anything good, they are all ungodly, wicked, and ignorant of righteousness and faith.⁵⁹

He argues that this fact of man's deplorable condition is plain before all, so that there is none one who can deny this universal truth. But since his opponent is so blind, Luther sprinkles several other passages from Romans. He quotes from [Romans 2:9ff.](#), 3:19, but especially 3:10ff. Concerning the last text, he challenges Erasmus,

For Luther, total depravity must necessarily mean total inability. Again, commenting on [Romans 3:10](#), which speaks the truth that depravity is in every man, he concludes,

So you see that free choice is completely abolished by this passage, and nothing good or virtuous is left in man, since he is flatly stated to be unrighteous, ignorant of God, a despiser of God, turned aside from sin, and worthless in the sight of God.⁶¹

Luther, unlike Erasmus, was not afraid to face the question of God's wrath. In fact, as he shows, the doctrine of God's wrath is crucial to the understanding of man's free will. For he explains that, since all men are without exception under the wrath of God, all men are totally depraved.

Man's Will and Justification

Luther sees that Erasmus' view is an attack on the Reformation truth that man is justified by faith alone apart from works. Speaking again from Romans, he shows f [rom 3:20](#) that by the works of the law no man is justified before God. He rejects Jerome's interpretation that the law here in this text refers merely to the ceremonial laws. Referring to [Galatians 3:10](#), Luther asserts that the law referred to is the valid and authoritative moral law. He points out that one of the functions of this law is to show the sinner his sins and misery, that is, to show us our inability. And since this is the case, the law can only show us our sins and cannot deliver us out of them. It is hence ridiculous for Erasmus to assert that man may by his free will obey the law and thus cooperate with God to obtain salvation. Luther insists that [Romans 3:21-25](#) is clear, the "righteousness of God is apart from the law."

Justification is out of God's free grace. Grace, Luther says, is the opposite of works. Commenting on Paul's doctrine of justification by grace through faith, he says that there is no such thing as merit, but all who are justified are justified freely. Erasmus boasted in the meritorious nature of good works and remarked that there is a reward according to works. But Luther says,

For when he (Paul) asserts that justification is freely bestowed on all who are justified, he leaves no one to work, to earn or prepare himself; and he leaves no work that can be called congruous or condign; and thus by a single stroke of this thunderbolt he shatters both the Pelagians with their total merit, and the Sophists with their little scrap of merit. Free justification allows of no workers, because there is an obvious contradiction between "freely given" and "earned by some sort of work."⁶²

Given all that he has said about free will, Luther's concluding word should not come as a surprise to us. Hence, free choice is nothing but a slave of sin, death, and Satan, not doing and not capable of doing or attempting to do anything but evil.⁶³

As such, denying the gospel of grace is really denying the gospel. Erasmus' gospel is powerless and Christless. Luther writes,

Choose then which you please. If you grant that the Scriptures speak antithetically, you will be able to say nothing about free choice but what is contrary to Christ, namely that error, death, Satan, and all evils reign in it. If you do not grant that they speak antithetically, then you enervate the Scriptures, so that they lose their point and fail to prove that Christ is necessary. Hence, inasmuch as you maintain free choice, you cancel out Christ and ruin the entire Scripture. Moreover, although verbally you may make a show of confessing Christ, yet in reality and in your heart you deny him.

Or if the power of free choice is not wholly in error or damnable, but sees and wills what is virtuous and good and what pertains to salvation, then it is in sound health and has no need of Christ the physician ([Matt. 9:12](#)), nor has Christ redeemed that part of man; for what need of light and life is there where there is light and life?⁶⁴

If there is one credit that we can give to Erasmus, it is to his credit that he alone hits the core issue in the Reformation. Luther writes,

Moreover, I praise and commend you highly for this also, that unlike all the rest you alone have attacked the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and have not wearied me with irrelevancies about the papacy, purgatory, indulgences, and such like trifles (for trifles they are rather than basic issues), with which almost everyone hitherto has gone hunting for me without success.⁶⁵

Finally, Luther's teaching on the subject can be found in a concise but yet precise form in his Smalcald Articles.

In the Section on Sin, Luther writes,

What the scholastic theologians taught concerning this article (sin) is therefore nothing but error and stupidity, namely,

1. That after the fall of Adam the natural powers of man have remained whole and uncorrupted, and that man by nature possesses a right understanding and a good will, as the philosophers teach.
2. Again, that man has a free will, either to do good and refrain from evil or refrain from good and do evil.
3. Again, that man is able by his natural powers to observe and keep all the commandments of God.
4. Again, that man is able by his natural powers to love God above all things and his neighbor as himself.
5. Again, if man does what he can, God is certain to grant him his grace.
6. Again, when man goes to the sacraments there is no need of a good intention to do what he ought, but it is enough that he does not have an evil intention to commit sin, for such is the goodness of man's nature and such is the power of the sacraments.
7. That it cannot be proved from the Scriptures that the Holy Spirit and his gifts are necessary for the performance of a good work.⁶⁶

Luther, Martin, The Smalcald Articles, from *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, edited by Timothy Lull. (Fortress Press, 1989), p. 516-517.

**DOES DUAL SYNERGISM
DILUTE THE DOCTRINE
OF DIVINE INITIATIVES?**

THE HISTORICAL CALVIN WASN'T FUNNY!



<https://youtu.be/gD0AHBQI4WI>

John Calvin Is Deeper Studied in Contrast to Jacob Arminius

The familiar caricature of Calvin's theology is symbolized by the mnemonic device TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. These so called "five points of Calvinism" arose in the seventeenth century, amid great political and theological turmoil in the Netherlands.

In the early seventeenth century, Jacob Arminius, professor of theology at the University of Leiden, came under suspicion by the more orthodox Dutch Calvinists. Arminius was viewed to have seriously deviated from the orthodox doctrines of justification and election. Charges of Pelagianism were made, and the matter quickly escalated.

Jacob Arminius

In retrospect, Arminius' views were not, strictly speaking, Pelagian. He did, however, differ from Calvinist orthodoxy on a number of issues. He denied the doctrine of perseverance and questioned whether grace was necessary for one to come to faith. He also challenged the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The desire of Arminius was to uphold the goodness and mercy of God. He was concerned that Calvinist doctrines made God the author of sin and wanted to stress the importance of faith and holiness in the Christian life.

His untimely death provided only a temporary reprieve. The fires were soon rekindled by his followers. Under the leadership of John Uytenbogaert, the Arminians met in 1610 to draw up what was called a remonstrance. It was simply a petition for toleration and a summation of their views in five points. They modified the doctrine of unconditional election, asserting that God did not elect individuals. They argued that God's election was more general and had reference to that group of men who exercised faith. Like Arminius, they also denied perseverance of the saints, saying God's gift of faith could be resisted by man. Finally, the Arminians affirmed that Christ died for the sins of every man.

The orthodox Calvinists responded with a seven-point statement called the counter-remonstrance. The government tried to settle the controversy with a series of ecclesiastical conferences. But matters only grew worse. Riots actually broke out in some areas of the Netherlands. Finally, amid a battle between political rivals, Prince Maurice and Oldenbarnveldt, a national synod was called to settle the controversy.

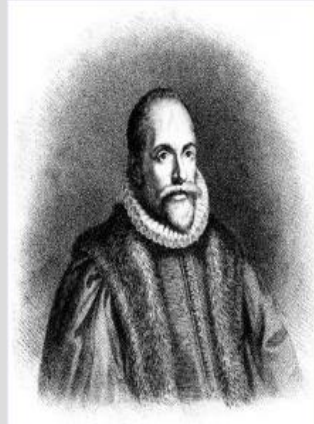
The synod convened in 1618 in the Dutch city of Dordrecht [Dort]. To insure fairness, the Dutch Calvinists invited delegations from Reformed churches throughout Europe. Simon Episcopius represented the Arminian position at Dort. The rejection of Arminian theology was unanimous. Five theological points were formulated to answer the Remonstrants. The Canons of Dort declared that fallen man was totally unable to save himself [*Total Depravity*]; God's electing purpose was not conditioned by anything in man [*Unconditional Election*]; Christ's atoning death was sufficient to save all men, but efficient only for the elect [*Limited Atonement*]; the gift of faith, sovereignly given by God's Holy Spirit, cannot be resisted by the elect [*Irresistible Grace*]; and that those who are regenerated and justified will persevere in the faith [*Perseverance of the Saints*].

These doctrines have been called the five points of Calvinism and are often symbolized by the well-known "TULIP." However, they are not a full exposition of Calvin's theology. To be sure, these doctrines do reflect Calvin's viewpoint in the area of soteriology. For example, the synod of Dort does not address Calvin's devout commitment to Scripture, nor does it say anything about the Trinity or Christ. The doctrines of Dort are more properly viewed in their historical context as a theological response to the challenges of seventeenth-century Arminianism.⁹

⁹ [T.U.L.I.P.](#) (1986). *Christian History Magazine-Issue 12: John Calvin: Reformer, Pastor, Theologian*.

James ARMINIUS (Jacob) Dutch Scholar (1560 –1609)

- On The Source Of Authority & Truth:
The Holy Scriptures rest on the character of God, its author. Therefore, since God is true, His claims must be true.
- On The Work Of Christ & The Cross:
Christ died as a sacrifice for sin, an offering of Himself to the Father – that the Father might show how much He hates sin and hereafter effectually deter us from it.
- On The Gift Of Grace, Sin & Salvation:
1st - The inheritance from Adam includes neither guilt nor sinful inclination of the will. Humankind is punishable only for sins each has committed, having received no inherited corruption from Adam but merely disordered sensibilities.
2nd – Humanity can resist God's distribution of saving grace as well as lose the grace cooperatively received.



1601

- Dutch Reformed theologian
Jacobus Arminius sets forth doctrines emphasizing man's ability to choose Christ and Christ's death for all people (Arminianism)



Arminius' studies of Paul's Epistle to the Romans led him to disagree with Calvin's doctrine of predestination, which claimed that God's will determines ahead of time what the destiny of groups and individuals will be.

Five points of Arminianism

1. Free will or human ability

- ✘ Free will consists of our ability to choose good over evil
- ✘ We have the power to cooperate with God's grace or resist it.

Five points of Arminianism

2. Conditional election

- ✘ God's choice (election) determined by knowledge of what man would do (foreseen faith).
- ✘ Our choice of God, not God's choice of us, is cause of salvation.

Five points of Arminianism

3. Universal redemption or general atonement

- ✘ Jesus' death and resurrection made it possible for all to be saved, but is effective only for those who choose to accept it.

Five points of Arminianism

4. Resistible grace

- ✦ Our free will limits the Holy Spirit's ability to draw us toward salvation; God's grace can be resisted.

5. Falling from grace

- ✦ Salvation can be lost, as it requires our cooperation.

1618

⊙ Dutch Reformed the Netherlands Synod of Dordt, denounces Arminianism

⊙ The Synod responds to Arminius' five criticisms of Calvinism with five points of Calvinism



The Synod of Dordt

Five points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)

1. Total depravity (inability)

- ✘ Sin affects every part of human nature, resulting in our inability to choose good over evil.
- ✘ We must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit in order to believe.

Five points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)

2. Unconditional election

- ✘ God's choice (election) determined not by our foreseen response (faith); rather, faith and repentance are also gifts given by God.
- ✘ God's choice of us, not our choice of God, is the cause of salvation.

Five points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)

3. Limited atonement

- ✘ Jesus' death and resurrection actually saved the elect.
- ✘ It guarantees everything necessary for salvation, including the gift of faith.

Five points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)

4. Irresistible grace

- ✘ The Holy Spirit's call is irresistible.
- ✘ God's grace never fails to result in salvation for those to whom it is extended.

Five points of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.)

5. Perseverance of the saints

- ✘ Salvation cannot be lost, as it is completely powered by God.
- ✘ Thus the elect will persevere (be preserved) to the end.

Calvinism vs. Arminianism Explained



Calvinism

is named for John Calvin, a French theologian who lived from 1509-1564. It is derived from Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published in 1536, and generally expressed in five points. It is the basis for the doctrine of many Baptist, Presbyterian and Reformed churches.



Arminianism

is named for Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian who lived from 1560-1609. Arminius started out as a strict Calvinist, but changed his views, which were published in a document called *The Remonstrance* in 1610. The Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, Pentecostal, and many charismatic churches are based on Arminianism.

SALVATION

Calvinism generally holds that God's sovereignty (or control) is unconditional and absolute, and that all things are predetermined due to His own planning.

God, not man, determines who will receive salvation.

God intentionally limited His control, so that man has freedom to respond. God provides salvation for everyone, but it is effective only for those who choose to accept His grace.

Man, not God, determines who will receive salvation.

FIVE POINTS

Total Depravity

Because of the Fall, the will of humans is in bondage to their evil nature. They cannot choose good over evil, therefore God must initiate salvation.

Unconditional Election

God elected individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world based solely on His sovereign will. His choice was not conditioned on the foreseen faith of the individual, rather God gives faith to those he selected.

Limited Atonement

Jesus died only for the elect.

Irresistible Grace

When God calls a person to salvation, the call cannot be resisted.

Perseverance of the Saints

Those who are elected by God cannot lose their salvation. They will persevere in faith, because He will see to it that none will be lost.

Total Depravity

Human nature was affected by the fall, but humans are not helpless. Each sinner has free will and can choose to repent and believe, and God does not control the decision.

Conditional Election

God elected individuals to salvation before the foundation of the world, based upon foreseeing that they would respond to his call. Therefore salvation is conditioned upon man's choice to believe and respond to the gospel.

Unlimited Atonement

Jesus died for all.

Irresistible Grace

God calls all to salvation, but many people resist and reject this call.

Falling From Grace

Believers may lose their salvation by failing to keep their faith. (Note: Some Arminians hold that believers are eternally secure in Christ.)

KEY VERSES

Ephesians 1:11

"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will..."

Ephesians 2:1-2

"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."

1 Peter 1:2

"...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ..."

John 6:37

"All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Matt 23:37

"...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

1 Tim 2:4

"...who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

2 Pet 3:9

"...he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

Hebrews 6:4-6

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace."

Arminianism	Calvinism	
Semi-Pelagian	Augustinian	
<p align="center">Synergistic</p> <p>Salvation is accomplished as man and God cooperate. Divine Grace and the human will work together for salvation to happen.</p>	<p align="center">Monergistic</p> <p>Salvation is wholly the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Mankind possesses no inclination toward the Gospel in his natural state and needs Divine Grace to be enabled to believe.</p>	
<p align="center"><i>Free Will or Human Ability</i></p> <p>Although human nature was seriously affected by the fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man's freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man's freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature.</p>	<p>T</p> <p>Total Depravity</p>	<p align="center"><i>Total Inability or Total Depravity</i></p> <p>Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not--indeed he cannot--choose good over evil in the spiritual realm.</p>
<p align="center"><i>Conditional Election</i></p> <p>God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man's will.</p>	<p>U</p> <p>Unconditional Election</p>	<p align="center"><i>Unconditional Election</i></p> <p>God's choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will. His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom He selected. These acts are the result, not the cause of God's choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man.</p>
<p align="center"><i>Universal Redemption or General Atonement</i></p> <p>Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins.</p>	<p>L</p> <p>Limited Atonement</p>	<p align="center"><i>Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption</i></p> <p>Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners.</p>
<p align="center"><i>The Holy Spirit Can be Effectually Resisted</i></p> <p>The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) precedes and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work.</p>	<p>I</p> <p>Irresistible Grace</p>	<p align="center"><i>Irresistible Grace or Effectual Calling</i></p> <p>In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. The external call (which is made to all without distinction) can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call (which is made only to the elect) cannot be rejected; it always results in conversion. By means of this special call the Spirit irresistibly draws sinners to Christ.</p>
<p align="center"><i>Falling from Grace</i></p> <p>Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ--that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.</p>	<p>P</p> <p>Perseverance of the Saints</p>	<p align="center"><i>Perseverance of the Saints</i></p> <p>All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end.</p>

Five Points Calvinism VERSUS REMONSTRANTS Five Points Arminian

- T - otal Inherent Depravity
- U - nconditional Election
- L - imited Atonement
- I - rresistible Grace
- P - erseverance Of The Saints

- Free Will
- Conditional Election
- Universal Atonement
- Obstructable Grace
- Falling From Grace

TULIPS OF DEATH OR LIFE

Wilted Wreath – Garden Flower

- T - otal Inherent Depravity
- U - nconditional Election
- L - imited Atonement
- I - rresistible Grace
- P - erseverance Of The Saints

- T - remendous Value
- U - nfathomable Love
- L - imitless Opportunity
- I - rrefutable Goodness
- P - romises To The Saints

T.U.L.I.P. - Five-Points Interdependent

The Sovereignty of God

The secularism and materialism of our present age is likely to cause us to forget such basic doctrines as the sovereignty of God. Every source of teaching, other than those which base their teaching on God's word, seems to depreciate the idea of a God who rules the universe. Our weather forecasters, geologists, scientists, and philosophers state emphatically that our world is run by certain basic operations of nature without any intervention of any supernatural forces. Many plainly deny that supernatural forces even exist.

Despite the beliefs of modern infidels, the Bible still reveals the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. A "sovereign" is "one who exercises supreme power; a supreme ruler; the person having the highest authority." The doctrine of the sovereignty of God simply states that God is the supreme ruler of all creation. He is above all principalities and powers, being the Supreme Lord of the world.

Calvinists have exaggerated this doctrine to teach their decree of predestination whereby God is supposed to have foreordained every event which has, is, or will come to pass. Nothing is left to chance or accident; nothing is left to the free-will of man. Everything is said to have been foreordained and predetermined by God, including that man would sin, that some were created for the express purpose of burning in Hell (to the praise of God's glory, of course), and that man's salvation or damnation was based on God's decree rather than upon faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ. I consider this concept of God's sovereignty to be absolutely contrary to God's revelation, His moral attributes, the Bible doctrine of man, and any number of other doctrines.

Nevertheless, the Bible does reveal that the God of the Bible is a sovereign God; He is subject to no one. He rules as He sees fit without giving answer to anyone. Regarding this sovereignty, let us notice: 1. That is based on creation. God's right to be Ruler of the world is based on His creation of the world. The Psalmist said, "O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand" (95:6). "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he bath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods" (Psa. 24:1-2).

Worthy to be praised is Jehovah, the King of all of the earth. "For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth For God is the King of all the earth: sing ye praises with understanding" (Psa. 47:2, 7). As the Creator of the universe, Jehovah God is the Sovereign over it.

2. That Jehovah controls the kingdoms of men. The sovereignty of God includes His control over the kingdoms of men. Our world is not left to the mere caprice of men for what occurs in it. Kingdoms do not rise and fall because of men alone. God is the Sovereign in control of the nations. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1).

The book of Daniel demonstrates that God is the one controlling the kingdoms of men. In chapter four of that book, King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which Daniel interpreted for him. The dream foretold the period in Nebuchadnezzar's life when he would act like the beasts of the field until he knew "that

the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of man, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men" (4:17). The dream was fulfilled; Nebuchadnezzar went insane and ate grass with the cattle of the field. Later he regained his senses and continued his rule over Babylon. This chapter was written to demonstrate "that the heavens do rule" (4:25-26). Regarding Jehovah, Nebuchadnezzar said, "I thought it good to shew the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are his signs! and how mighty are his wonders! his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Dan. 4:2-3).

The New Testament reveals the same truth regarding the control which God has of the nations. When Jesus stood before Pilate, the Roman procurator said, "Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" (Jn. 19:10). Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above . . ." (Jn. 19:11). The Most high still rules over the kingdoms of men.

"The Lord is King for ever and ever: the heathen are perished out of his land" (Psa. 10:16). "Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations" (Psa. 145:13).

This is a very comforting doctrine for me, to know that Jehovah is the one controlling the nations. Though I do not know what the future holds, I know that He is the one controlling it. The government of this world will not be determined by some hair-brained nut! God is the one who determines what the course of the future will be.

The Meaning of Sovereignty

What does the doctrine of the sovereignty of God mean? To demonstrate that God is sovereign demonstrates that He will accomplish His will and purposes. The God who governs the world has the ability to accomplish what He sets out to do. We see this demonstrated any number of times on the pages of God's revelation.

1. In Israel. When God chose Abraham, He promised to give him seed as numberless as the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore (Gen. 15:5); indeed, He promised to make a great nation from Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:2). He also promised to give the land to Canaan to Abraham's descendants (Gen. 12:7; 15:13-17). God was able to fulfill both of His promises.

The childless Sarah bore a son in her old age, even though she had ceased being "after the manner of women" (Gen. 18:11). Through Abraham's son Isaac, the descendants of Abraham multiplied. Isaac's son Jacob had twelve boys who became the heads of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Even when powerful Egypt attempted to stop the numerical increase of Israel, she was unable (Ex. 1) because she was fighting, not only against the Israelite slaves, but also against the Almighty God of heaven who rules the world and who promised to make a great nation out of Abraham's descendants. The will of God was accomplished.

Bible students will remember how the God of heaven fulfilled His promise to give the land of Canaan, that land which was occupied by giants (Num. 13:31-33), to Israel. Beginning with the miraculous conquest of Jericho, Israel invaded Canaan. Her wars were fought with the God of heaven assisting Israel. To fulfill His promise to Abraham, Jehovah sent hail stones (Josh. 10:11) and caused the sun to stand still (Josh. 10:12-14). The God of heaven is the Sovereign of the entire universe; He has the ability to accomplish His purpose.

2. In Redemption. The sovereignty of God is also seen in God's accomplishment of His will to redeem mankind from sin. Jehovah promised to bless the world through the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15), the descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:3), the descendant of David (2 Sam. 7:11-14). On several occasions, Satan used everything within his power to destroy the seed of David. Satan tried to destroy the descendants of David when Athaliah usurped the throne of Judah (2 Kgs. 11:1-3) but God preserved Jehoash through the priest Jehoiada. Herod the Great tried to destroy the son of David when he slew the Bethlehem infants, but God preserved His Son alive (Matt. 2:11-23).

The Psalmist foresaw the conflict between Satan and God's purpose to make His Son king over His kingdom. He wrote,

Why do the heathen rase,
And the heathen imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying,
Let us break their bands asunder, And cast away their cords from us.
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:
The Lord shall have them in derision.
Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath,
And vex them in his sore displeasure.
Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (Psa. 2:1-6).

The Sovereign Lord's plan to redeem mankind through the death of His Son; despite every attempt which the Devil used to prevent its accomplishment, God accomplished His will.

How foolish it is for man to try to prevent the Almighty God of heaven from accomplishing His will. Every effort used by man to prevent God from accomplishing His purpose is destined to failure from the beginning. The great God laughs at man's futile and foolish attempts to thwart His purposes.

3. In Judgment. I might add that the Sovereign of this world will also accomplish His purposes in bringing this world to its grand climax. His plans call for the resurrection of the dead, the destruction of this world, the judgment, and the final separation of the righteous and the wicked. As the sovereign ruler of this universe, He will accomplish His purposes. Nothing which Satan does or man might plan to do can prevent God from accomplishing what He intends to do.

That is the essence of Sovereignty. When a person has the supreme authority over everything and the supreme ability to accomplish his will, he is sovereign. Jehovah has exactly that relationship to this universe. He has supreme authority over it; He rules the world as He sees fit.

Worthy Of Praise

Surely such a Sovereign is worthy of man's highest praise. "For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods" (Psa. 95:3). "Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised: he is to be feared above all gods" (Psa. 96:3-4). "Give unto the Lord the glory due his name . . . O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psa. 96:8-9).

As the Judge of the earth, He is worthy of our praise. "And he shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness" (Psa. 9:8). As the King of Glory, He is worthy of our praise. "Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle . . .

Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory" (Psa. 24:8, 10). "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter" (Psa. 45:6).

The book of Revelation describes the scene around the throne of God as the twenty-four elders and the several beasts offered praise to God saying, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure thy are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). Ultimately all men shall bow in subjection before the King of glory, the Sovereign Lord of the universe. Let us praise Him while breath is yet in our body.

Conclusion

Frankly, I am comforted by the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. There are times when I watch the Evening News "with Walter Cronkite," that I despair at all of the problems facing men on this earth. Discussions regarding the nuclear threat, the ability of man to totally destroy life from this earth, make me a little apprehensive. I fear that some insane person might trigger a button which will ignite a nuclear war.

Then I remember that God is still Sovereign over this world and my spirit is quieted. The same God who sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross for my sins is still at the helm of the ship. He has not surrendered the government of this world to anyone. What happens in the future will be controlled by His will. He has revealed to us that, even if His saints must endure persecution and suffer hardship, the ultimate victory belongs to them. So I pillow my head in His bosom and sleep soundly. – Mike Willis

Calvin's Interpretation Of The Divine Sovereignty

- ✦ “The confession of the sovereignty of God has become the hallmark of authentic Calvinism.” *Evangelical Dictionary*
- ✦ **From The Westminster Confession:** “God from eternity, did unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”

In Their Own Words

Kevin Fralick

- ✦ “The population of heaven after the end of the world will not be determined by those who have accepted the Lord Jesus Christ, but by those whom the Lord Jesus accepted before the beginning.”

In Their Own Words

Edward Palmer

- ✦ “It is even Biblical to say that God has foreordained sin. If sin was outside the plan of God, then not a single affair of life would be ruled by God.”

In Their Own Words

Arthur Pink

- ✘ “Not only did God know Adam would eat of the forbidden fruit, He decreed it.”

In Their Own Words

Homer Hoeksema

- ✘ “A Christ for all is really a Christ for none.”

In Their Own Words

Franciscus Gomarus

- ✘ “God moves the Tongues of men to blaspheme.”

Protestant Spectrum: The Tenets of T.U.L.I.P.

MERE CALVINISM: THE TULIP SYSTEM

Too many people (especially in the young, restless, Reformed movement of the new Calvinism) simply equate Calvinism with Reformed theology as if they were synonymous. It is important to distinguish the two as many people who legitimately consider themselves Reformed do not adhere to what is usually considered Calvinism in all its features. Calvinism is a part of the history of the Reformed tradition, but it is not all of it and, for many Reformed people anyway, it can be dispensed with.

Here I want to explicate the essential features of historical Calvinism as a belief system. While “Reformed” designates a branch of the Reformation and a broad and diverse family of Protestants, “Calvinism” designates a set of beliefs about God’s sovereignty especially in relation to the doctrines of providence and predestination. It is far from monolithic, but it is more unified than Reformed. There are essential features of Calvinism without which it would not be recognizable as such, but within that commonality exists a diversity that often gives rise to debates even among Calvinists.

Before getting into those areas of diversity, however, I want to allow leading Calvinists to explain what I call “garden variety Calvinism” or “mere Calvinism.” Surprisingly it is *not* tied precisely or exactly to whatever Calvin happened to teach, although it is historically and theologically indebted to Calvin. What we usually call “Calvinism” today includes some elements Calvin himself did not emphasize if he believed them at all. One example is “limited atonement.” Some historical theologians believe Calvin would be displeased with the overly systematic and scholastic nature of the Calvinism developed by his followers. I will explain these matters more fully in this chapter.

A leading Calvinist theologian and reliable guide to this general Calvinist outlook on God’s sovereignty is Loraine Boettner. Although he is not well-known, a half century after the peak of his productivity as an author, his influence on contemporary Calvinists is profound. He is widely considered by Calvinist theologians in America a great “father figure” who packaged and handed down the Calvinist faith to them. He is certainly not regarded as infallible, and some Calvinists will disagree with some of his teachings, but few Calvinist theologians of the twentieth century can stand shoulder-to-shoulder with him in terms of influence and respect.

According to Boettner, Calvinism begins with a vision of God derived from Scripture that is also consistent with philosophical theism: “The very essence of consistent theism is that God would have an exact plan for the world, would foreknow the actions of all the creatures He proposed to create and through His all-inclusive providence would control the whole system.” Boettner nails it down further by asserting that God “very obviously predetermined every event which would happen” so that “even the sinful acts of men are included in this plan.”² For Boettner (and many other Calvinists) this belief in meticulous divine providence (which I will call “divine determinism” and explain why in chapter 4) is grounded in God’s infinity (philosophical theism) and Scriptures such as Amos 3:6, “When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?”

Virtually all Calvinists (as distinct from some in the Reformed tradition and especially what I have called “revisionist Reformed” theologians) affirm a strong or high view of God’s sovereignty such as Boettner’s. Did Calvin himself affirm such? In Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Geneva’s chief pastor wrote about God’s providence: “We ought undoubtedly to hold that whatever changes are discerned in the world are produced from the secret stirring of God’s hand ... what God has determined must necessarily so take place.” The surrounding context, including a vivid illustration about a merchant robbed and killed by thieves, makes absolutely clear that Calvin believed nothing at all can happen that is not foreordained and rendered certain by God. He says that a Christian will realize that nothing is truly an accident, as everything is planned by God.

This, then, is the first point of mere Calvinism: the total, absolute, meticulous sovereignty of God in providence by which God governs the entire course of human history down to the minutest details and renders everything certain so that no event is fortuitous or accidental but fits into God’s overall plan and purpose. Boettner expresses it well: “There is nothing casual nor contingent in the world” because “the world as a whole and in all its parts and movements and changes was brought into a unity by the governing, all-pervading, all-harmonizing activity of the divine will, and its purpose was to manifest the divine glory.”⁵ Few, if any, real Calvinists would quibble with any of this. (I say “real Calvinists” because it is not difficult to find people who claim to be Calvinists who are not. For example, many Southern Baptists think they are Calvinists just because they believe in the eternal security of the believer—the fifth point of the TULIP system. But that by itself hardly makes one a Calvinist!)

I will expound and critique this Calvinist view of God’s sovereignty in the next chapter. It is not what all Christians believe. All Christians have always believed that nothing at all can happen without God’s permission, and almost all Christians have always believed God foreknows whatever will happen. But Calvinists typically go further and claim that whatever happens is planned and rendered certain by God. Calvin explicitly denied mere foreknowledge or permission by God—even of evil.

Some readers might wonder if I have simply chosen an extreme Calvinist—Boettner—to represent garden variety or mere Calvinism. Not at all. All of these ideas about God’s sovereignty in history and salvation can be found in contemporary Calvinists such as Sproul and Piper. I will quote them when I turn to my critique in the next chapter. Here I am simply using Boettner as a model to expound mainstream, “garden variety,” mere Calvinism.

According to Boettner (and most Calvinists) God is not only supreme and absolutely in control (and controlling) in history; he is also absolutely controlling regarding who will and who will not be saved. This is where we turn to the famous (or infamous) acrostic TULIP to describe the Calvinist system of soteriology. Readers should know the origin of TULIP. It is an acrostic developed in the nineteenth century to help students remember the so-called “five points of Calvinism” as they were stated in the Canons of the Synod of Dort in 1618/1619.

Dort was a gathering of Calvinist “divines” (theologians, scholars, pastors) in the Dutch city of Dordrecht to respond to the beliefs of the Remonstrants—followers of Jacob Arminius. The Remonstrants presented the leaders of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands a “Remonstrance” or protest against certain common Calvinist ideas. Some historians (especially Calvinists) have misrepresented this document as if it rejected all five of the beliefs represented by TULIP (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints). In fact, it only rejected the middle three, leaving total depravity and perseverance of the saints open to further discussion. (There were various versions of the “Remonstrance” written and published

throughout the decade after Arminius's death and the Synod of Dort, and some left perseverance open while others seemed to close it off as wrong. But all affirmed total depravity.)

The Synod of Dort rejected the Remonstrants' "Remonstrance" and affirmed the so-called five points of Calvinism that later came to be summed up using the heuristic device TULIP. The Canons (decrees) of Dort included much more than TULIP, but those five beliefs were the ones thought to be denied by the Remonstrants so they are usually treated as the essence of the pronouncements of the Synod of Dort.

Ever since Dort Calvinism has been summarized by Calvinists themselves using the five points, and Boettner follows them rather closely in his exposition of the Calvinist faith. So do numerous other Calvinist authors whose book titles reveal the centrality of TULIP: *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Christian Reformed pastor-theologian Edwin H. Palmer and *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended and Documented* by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas. Other books do not have the five points in their titles but nevertheless organize their expositions of Calvinism according to TULIP. One example is Sproul's *What Is Reformed Theology?* (One notable exception is H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, which barely mentions TULIP. This book seems to be more of an exposition of Reformed theology and social thought in general than Calvinist soteriology in particular.)

Many, if not all, Calvinists agree with Boettner about the five points as a system. They are, he wrote, a "simple, harmonious, self-consistent system," and "prove any one of them false and the whole system must be abandoned." One question that will arise later is whether this system can be found in Calvin. I will argue it cannot be and that at least the "L" is created and inserted into the system after him. But that doesn't bother most Calvinists as they do not think their Calvinism must adhere slavishly to whatever Calvin believed or wrote.

"T" FOR TOTAL DEPRAVITY

The first point of the Calvinist system is "T" for total depravity. This is a widely misunderstood concept; it does not mean that human beings are as evil as they can possibly be. The "total" is what misleads people to think that. Rather, typically, it means that every part of every human person (except Jesus Christ, of course) is infected and so affected by sin that he or she is utterly helpless to please God before being regenerated (born again) by the Spirit of God. According to Boettner, the natural person, before and apart from the regenerating grace of God, always freely sins and delights in it because "he is an alien by birth, and a sinner by choice."¹² The "natural virtues" of people do not count as good because they are done with wrong motives; depravity lies in the condition of the heart inherited from Adam. Human beings are born with a corrupt nature but are nevertheless fully responsible for the sins they cannot avoid because of this condition.¹⁴ Boettner claims that "only Calvinists seem to take this doctrine of the fall [original sin] very seriously."

Again, is this strongly pessimistic view of humanity consistent with Calvin's own teachings? Without any doubt it is. Calvin wrote that because of the fall of Adam "the whole [of every] man is overwhelmed—as by a deluge—from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin. As Paul says, all turnings of the thoughts ... are enmities against God ... and therefore death."

Is this also consistent with contemporary Calvinist teaching after Boettner? Indeed it is. Sproul expresses it succinctly: "In our corrupt humanity we never do a single good thing." Like Boettner and Calvin before him Sproul attributes this hopeless and helpless condition of the natural person apart from God's regenerating grace to the fall of Adam. For all of them—at least for most, if not

all Calvinists—all humans except Jesus Christ inherit Adam’s corrupted nature and are accounted guilty for Adam’s sin. Boettner writes: “Adam’s sin is imputed to his descendents.”¹⁸ Sproul sums up the dour Calvinist view of humanity because of the fall this way: “Man is incapable of elevating himself to the good without the work of God’s grace within. We can no more return ourselves to God than an empty vessel can refill itself with water.”

Many Calvinists explain the human condition after the fall and before regeneration by the Holy Spirit as literally spiritually dead, basing that on Ephesians 2. In other words, for typical Calvinism, the natural, fallen human person is utterly incapable of even desiring God or the things of God. There is no moral ability (as opposed to a hypothetical natural ability that does not exist in spiritual matters) to reach out to God or to accept God’s offer of salvation. Everything that flows from the dead person is putrid and filthy even if it seems to be virtuous. The reason is that true virtue is defined by the motive, and the sinner’s heart, blackened by sin, has a constant disposition toward self rather than toward God or neighbor. This account of the human condition is important to keep in mind because it is *why* Calvinists argue that no one can be saved without unconditional election and irresistible grace.

Like Calvin, Calvinists typically acknowledge the existence of “civic virtues” in fallen, natural people who are spiritually dead. Calvin waxed eloquent about the “natural gifts” of fallen people, who are able by the help of God’s Spirit through common grace to achieve great things in the arts and sciences. Of course, none of these abilities or achievements has anything to do with salvation. Sproul comments on the reality of “civil virtue” by which people outwardly conform to the law of God and perform acts of charity, but he denies that these are any signs of spiritual life because they are all done out of self-interest.²¹ The natural, fallen person may achieve great things, but he or she cannot please God because the heart is still corrupt and self-centered. Sin lies in the motives, and they are entirely wrong until the Holy Spirit regenerates the person.

“U” FOR UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

The second point of TULIP is unconditional election. “Election” is another biblical word for predestination to salvation (or service); they are synonymous. All Christians believe in election; Calvinists believe in it in a particular way. Boettner expresses it clearly: “The Reformed Faith has held to the existence of an eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any difference or desert in men themselves, separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death [hell].”²² This is, of course, what is commonly known as “double predestination.”

Some Calvinists will deny this teaching in favor of a “single predestination,” often called “mild” or “moderate Calvinism.” (These terms are also sometimes used for other permutations of Calvinism.) Single predestination is belief that God chooses some fallen persons to save while simply “passing over” others and “leaving them” to their deserved damnation. In other words, according to this idea there is no decree of God by which he foreordains anyone to hell. That is, there is no “decree of reprobation” but only one of election to salvation.

Boettner and other Calvinists scoff at the idea of single predestination. He pointed out, rightly I judge, that for God to predestine some to salvation *is* to predestine some to damnation. He wrote of reprobation that “this, too, is of God.” He explained it this way: “We [Calvinists] believe that from all eternity God has intended to leave some of Adam’s posterity in their sins, and that the decisive factor in the life of each is to be found only in God’s will.”²⁴ This may be putting the matter a little more strongly than many Calvinists wish to put it, but it courageously clings

consistently to belief in the absolute sovereignty of God in all things. Note what Boettner is saying here: the “decisive factor” in some people’s going to hell is God’s will. Boettner was impatient, to say the least, with Calvinists who argue for single predestination: “‘Mild Calvinism’ is synonymous with sickly Calvinism, and sickness, if not cured, is the beginning of the end.”

What did Calvin say? Did he believe in this double predestination, including God’s sovereign reprobation of certain human persons to hell? He wrote: “God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.” Lest anyone misunderstand him, Calvin drove his point home by ridiculing those who accept election but reject reprobation, calling that an “absurd” notion: “Therefore, those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children.”²⁷ Calvin notoriously recognized and affirmed the highly objectionable character of this double predestination and especially the reprobation side of it, calling it “the horrible decree.”

What about other Calvinists? Sproul unequivocally affirms unconditional election of some to salvation and predestination of others to damnation:

It [the Calvinist view of predestination] teaches that from all eternity God has chosen to intervene in the lives of some people and bring them to saving faith and has chosen not to do that for other people. From all eternity, without any prior view of our human behavior, God has chosen some unto election and others unto reprobation.... The basis for God’s choice does not rest in man but solely in the good pleasure of the divine will.

To those who say that God elects some to salvation but does not predestine anyone to damnation Sproul responds: “If there is such a thing as predestination at all, and if that predestination does not include all people, then we must not shrink from the necessary inference that there are two sides to predestination. It is not enough to talk about Jacob; we must also consider Esau [referring to Romans 9].”

Sproul carefully explains that these two decrees of God—election and reprobation—are not equal. He rejects what he calls “hyper-Calvinism,” which believes in “equal ultimacy” of the decrees of election and reprobation. (Here is one area of diversity among Calvinists, although Sproul declares what he calls “hyper-Calvinism” as being “anti-Calvinist!”) As he explains it, the decree of election is positive while the decree of reprobation is negative. In other words, God positively puts faith in the hearts of the elect while purposefully neglecting to do so with the reprobate. The only difference is that God does not create unbelief in the hearts of the reprobate; he simply leaves them alone in their condemnation while he creates belief in the hearts of the elect.³²

One can only wonder how big a difference this really is. How does this make the two decrees not equally ultimate? Both are unconditional in the sense that God’s choice is not based on anything God sees in the persons chosen or passed over. As I will explain in chapter 5, calling one decree “positive” and the other “negative” does not seem to lessen the awfulness of reprobation. Sproul accuses hyper-Calvinism of doing “radical violence to the integrity of God’s character.” A critic of Sproul’s high Calvinist view would say the same about his view.

Some readers who have come to embrace Calvinism (or are considering that) by hearing or reading John Piper may be asking whether *he* embraces this “dreadful decree” of reprobation. That is, does Piper believe predestination is unconditional and double? Without doubt he does. In *The Pleasures of God* he discusses “The Pleasure of God in Election” and leaves no doubt that he agrees with Calvin, Boettner, and Sproul. Election, he says, is unconditional because “it is not

based on what someone does after birth. It is free and unconditional.” He does not dwell long on the nonelect but affirms that God chooses some not to save even though he has compassion on them.³⁵ I will deal with this claim in the next chapter; it seems contradictory to me and to most, if not all, non-Calvinists.

The main point of the “U” of TULIP, for Calvinists, is the *unconditional* nature of election to salvation (which would also be true of reprobation). God’s predestination of the eternal destinies of individual human beings *has nothing whatever to do with their foreseen character or choices*. Every Calvinist author emphatically drives this point home. Boettner declares that God’s choice is not based on anything God sees in a person, including his foreknowledge of their faith or repentance. Even faith and repentance are gifts of God to the elect and cannot be the basis of their election. For Calvinists this is a doctrine of mercy and grace—that God sovereignly chooses to save some undeserving sinners and does all the saving himself without any cooperation from them. Critics believe they choose to overlook the dark side of this doctrine, which is that God *could* save everyone—since election to salvation is unconditional—but does not. Boettner attempts to explain why:

The condemnation of the non-elect is designed primarily to furnish an eternal exhibition, before men and angels, of God’s hatred for sin, or, in other words, it is to be an eternal manifestation of the justice of God.... This decree displays one of the divine attributes which apart from it could never have been adequately appreciated.

Many Calvinists prefer to appeal to mystery at this point and not offer any suggestion as to why God doesn’t save everyone. Perhaps this is one isolated element in some Calvinists’ theology that could rightly be called extreme or radical. Boettner’s belief (and other Calvinists’ similar answers) raises this question: Was not the cross of Jesus Christ a sufficient manifestation of God’s justice and hatred toward sin? (Not that Jesus was a sinner but the sin of the world was laid on him partly to display how seriously God takes sin.) Boettner’s and other Calvinists’ speculative reason for reprobation would seem to lessen the glory of the cross.

“L” FOR LIMITED ATONEMENT

The third element of TULIP is “limited atonement”—also and preferably called by many Calvinists “particular redemption.” This is the one point of TULIP contested by many self-identified Calvinists and *perhaps* totally missing from Calvin’s own thought. (This will be discussed in detail in chapter 6.) Many Calvinists say they are “four pointers” or “four-point Calvinists.” They mean they believe in I and U and I and P but not in L. However, the L—limited atonement, particular redemption—is part of the historical Calvinist system of soteriology, and many high Calvinists argue it cannot be dropped without doing violence to the whole Calvinist scheme of salvation.

Before expounding this point of TULIP, I should note that all Calvinists accept the “penal substitution theory” of the atonement. That is, they believe with Calvin and the Puritans and most evangelical Christians that God punished Jesus for the sins of the people God wanted to save—either the whole world including all people (the typical Arminian view) or the elect (the typical Calvinist view). In other words, Jesus Christ satisfied the justice of God by bearing the deserved punishment of every person God wanted to save. That’s what makes them “savable.” Many non-Calvinists affirm this doctrine of the atonement as well, but Calvinists typically argue that the

belief that Christ bore the punishment for every person's sins leads inevitably to universalism—belief in the salvation of all.

Boettner strongly endorses limited atonement, arguing that it is logically connected with unconditional election. With most Calvinists he emphatically asserts that the *value* of Christ's death was *sufficient* for the salvation of all people, but that it was *efficient* to save only the elect. Another way of putting that is that the benefits of Christ's death on the cross, though sufficient for the salvation of all people, were *intended by God* only for the elect. The limited nature of the atonement, then, was in its *scope* and not in its *value*. This is why many Calvinists prefer the term “particular redemption” or “definite atonement.” It was particularly intended by God for particular people (as opposed to everyone indiscriminately), and it definitely secured or accomplished the salvation of those for whom it was intended—the elect.

In true Calvinist fashion, Boettner starkly states the doctrine of particular redemption as it applies to the nonelect: “It [the cross] was not, then, a general and indiscriminate love of which all men are equally objects, but a peculiar, mysterious, infinite love for the elect, which caused God to send His Son into the world to suffer and die.”

What about other Calvinists? Do they affirm this limited atonement doctrine as Boettner did (and perhaps Calvin did not)? John Piper definitely affirms it: “He [Christ] did not die for all men in the same sense. The intention of the death of Christ for the children of God [the elect] was that it purchased far more than the rising of the sun and the opportunity to be saved. The death of Christ actually saves from ALL evil those for whom Christ died ‘especially.’ ” Sproul definitely affirms it. He prefers to call this doctrine “purposeful atonement”: “The atonement's ultimate purpose is found in the ultimate purpose or will of God. This purpose or design does not include the entire human race. If it did, the entire human race would surely be redeemed.”⁴³

Answers to these Calvinists' charges against belief in universal atonement (e.g., that it logically requires belief in universal salvation) will be answered in chapter 6. In my opinion, they are simply wrong. There is no logical connection between universal atonement and universal salvation anymore than there is a logical connection between the president of the United States declaring an unconditional amnesty for Vietnam War protesters who fled to Canada to escape the draft and every one of them automatically availing himself of that amnesty and coming back to the U.S. (This actually happened under President Jimmy Carter, and many who could have come home because all was forgiven did not return.) This is only a brief overview of TULIP. I'll address complex issues in more depth in subsequent chapters. Here it is simply important to note, for readers' understanding of Calvinism, that most Calvinists deny that God intended the cross for all people, which means, of course, that he does not love everyone in the same way.

Boettner and Piper do affirm that the cross benefits everyone in some way. Thus, it is true to say (at least for them) that Christ died for all. Boettner wrote that “certain benefits” of the cross extended to all humanity in general. These are “temporal blessings” only and have nothing to do with salvation. Piper teaches that Christ did die “for all” but not in the same way. Attempting to take seriously the “all” passages of Scripture (which will be dealt with in more detail later) he says:

We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense. 1 Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is “the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way. All of God's mercy toward unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross.

Of course, as I will point out and discuss in more detail in chapter 6, one might legitimately wonder how beneficial the cross really is for those to whom God denies its saving power. How

does the cross accomplish anything for the nonelect? How is the rising of the sun accomplished by the cross of Christ, and of what benefit is the preaching of the gospel to the nonelect? How does it accomplish the former and of what benefit is the latter to the nonelect? One can only suspect that both Piper and Boettner (and other Calvinists who claim that Christ died for the non-elect “in some sense”) simply want to turn aside accusations that their view of limited atonement clashes with Scriptures that say Christ died for all.

Furthermore, especially Piper (and no doubt other Calvinists) wishes to say that God has genuine compassion on the nonelect for whom Christ did not die as an atoning sacrifice. “There is a general love of God that he bestows on all his creatures,” but this is *not* the love God has for his elect. And, according to Piper, God has sincere compassion even for the nonelect so that he desires their salvation, even though he declines to provide for it on the cross. To paraphrase John Wesley, this seems to be such a love and compassion as makes the blood run cold. What love refuses to save those who could be saved because election to salvation is unconditional? What compassion refuses to provide for their salvation when it could be provided for?

The point is that garden-variety, mere Calvinism typically, but not always, restricts the saving intention of God in the cross of Christ to the elect; it is not intended by God for the salvation of the reprobate, the nonelect. They are excluded from the atonement *except* in some attenuated sense of receiving some kind of temporal blessings from it that are left mostly unexplained. Thus, some Calvinists will refuse to say to a crowd of people or to strangers, “Christ died so that you can be saved” or “Christ died for your sins.” That would be presumptuous; there is no way to know that. However, cleverly, Piper and some other Calvinists who believe in limited atonement can say to anyone and everyone, “Christ died for you,” without meaning “Christ died for your sins” or “Because Christ died for you, you can be saved.” Some might consider this a subterfuge, disingenuous.

On the basis of what Scriptures do Calvinists affirm limited atonement? Many critics, including some Calvinists who call themselves “four pointers,” argue that this doctrine has no scriptural basis. However, Boettner, Sproul, Piper, and others point to passages such as John 10:15; 11:51–52; and 17:6, 9, 19, in which Jesus says things such as “I lay down my life for the sheep.” A main point of chapter 6, devoted to limited atonement, will be that the verse here that talks about Christ’s dying for his people, his sheep, or the ones given to him by his Father does not necessarily exclude him from dying for others. In fact, 1 John 2:2 clearly states that he, Jesus, is the atonement for the sins of the whole world. Piper and others claim this refers to the children of God scattered throughout the world and not everyone.

“I” FOR IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

The fourth point of TULIP is variously called irresistible grace, effectual grace (Sproul’s favored term for it), or efficacious grace (Boettner’s favored term for it). A closely related term is monergism—belief that God is the sole active agent in salvation. Monergism is the opposite of synergism—the belief that salvation includes cooperation by the person being saved. Irresistible grace does not mean that all grace is always irresistible or efficacious. Rather, only saving grace given to the elect to regenerate them and to give them new birth is irresistible and effectual. A person chosen by God for salvation will not, because he or she cannot, resist the “inward call” of God because God “bends their will.” It is not a matter of coercion; the Holy Spirit does not overwhelm and force the person to repent and believe; rather, the Holy Spirit transforms the person’s heart so that he or she wants to repent and believe.

Boettner and other Calvinists link this aspect of their soteriology closely to total depravity:

As Calvinists we hold that the condition of men since the fall is such that if left to themselves they would continue in their state of rebellion and refuse all offers of salvation. Christ would then have died in vain. But since it was promised ... the work of God in redemption has been rendered effective through the mission of the Holy Spirit who so operates on the chosen people that they are brought to repentance and faith, and thus made heirs of eternal life.

They base this on their doctrine of total depravity as absolute spiritual deadness such that not even an elect person has the ability to respond to God, let alone reach out to God, until and unless God breathes new life into them in regeneration and Scripture. The main Scripture passage they typically point to is John 6:44, where Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Calvinists argue that the Greek word translated "draw" *always* means "compels" (but not "coerces"). To counter any idea that it means "coerce" (either in John 6 or in Calvinist theology) Sproul writes: "The whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness."

Boettner agrees: "This change [regeneration by means of irresistible grace through inward calling] is not accomplished through any external compulsion but through a new principle of life which has been created within the soul and which seeks after the food which alone can satisfy it." This reliable Calvinist guide also states unequivocally that the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating grace, although irresistible, never violates the person's free agency: "The elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice."⁵¹ This seems peculiarly paradoxical, but that doesn't bother Boettner or other Calvinists.

With regard to Calvinists' appeal to John 6:44, in chapter 7 I will discuss whether the Greek word translated "draw" really means "compel" or "drag" or "draw irresistibly" as Sproul and other Calvinists argue. As with so many other proof texts used by Calvinists for their distinctive doctrines, this one is open to other and even better interpretations. For example, if the Greek word for "draw" in John 6:44 can only mean "drag" or "compel" rather than "woo" or "call," then John 12:32 must be interpreted as teaching universal salvation. There Jesus says "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." The Greek word translated "draw" there is the same one used in John 6:44. Thus, if the word has to be interpreted "compel" or "drag," then Jesus would be saying in John 12:32 that he will compel or drag all men to himself. That's not how the verse is understood even by Calvinists!

Did Calvin believe and teach irresistible grace? Although he doesn't use the term, Calvin clearly did teach the concept at the end of a lengthy discussion of how God works in the elect to bring them to himself: "To sum up: by free adoption God makes those whom he wills to be his sons; the intrinsic cause of this is in himself, for he is content with his own good pleasure."

Sproul expresses this doctrine strongly: "God unilaterally and monergistically does for us what we cannot do for ourselves." In true Calvinist fashion he places regeneration by the Holy Spirit (being born again) *before* conversion (in logical order of the events of salvation). That is, before a person is even able to receive the gifts of faith and repentance, he or she must be made a new creature in Christ Jesus through the "effectual inward call" of God, which is comparable with a creation out of nothing. In other words, God does not take some existing potential and build on it or draw it out to work salvation in a person's life. Rather, God takes a person dead in trespasses and sins and brings him or her to life spiritually.

Sproul, like all Calvinists, distinguishes between the "outward call," which is the gospel preached to everyone, and the "inward call," by which the Holy Spirit regenerates a person. Only the elect receive the latter, and it always results in their salvation and cannot do otherwise.

Regeneration, then, must precede conversion (repentance and faith) because no one would ever respond to God with repentance and faith unless he or she is first born again. The saved person usually is not aware of the priority of regeneration; he or she may sense that being born again *follows* upon faith and repentance, but theologically the Calvinist knows that cannot be the case.

This is a distinctive of the Calvinist scheme and, so far as I know, all Calvinists subscribe to it. Others might subscribe to it as well, but only if they believe that infant baptism regenerates a child (baptismal regeneration), as in Episcopal and Lutheran theology. However, many Protestants such as Baptists and Pentecostals believe that faith precedes regeneration in the logical order of salvation. The ordinary message of the gospel for most evangelical Christians is “believe and be saved,” based on Scripture passages such as John 3:1–21, in which Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again and that belief in him will accomplish that (v. 14). There is really no way to reconcile this passage with belief that regeneration precedes faith.

“P” FOR PERSEVERANCE

The fifth aspect of TULIP Calvinism is perseverance of the saints. This is perhaps the least controversial aspect of Calvinism because many non-Calvinists believe in it as well, based on Scripture passages such as Romans 8:35–39. Even Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), the great opponent of Calvinism, declared that he was unable to decide about this doctrine and left it for further study. He died before finally making up his mind. The first Remonstrant statement of faith of 1610 did not include a denial or affirmation of it. Later, especially Wesley and his followers (Methodists, Wesleyans) rejected it on the basis of Scriptures such as Hebrews 6. Still, this does not seem to be a particularly objectionable doctrine for many non-Calvinists because it does not touch on the central issue of disagreement: the character of God.

Nevertheless, it is worth briefly expounding this fifth point of TULIP as Calvinists believe it. Sproul rightly notes that the term “perseverance of the saints” is better expressed as “preservation of the saints” because the eternal security of the true believer is God’s work entirely and not theirs.⁵⁷ All Calvinists believe that a truly elect person cannot ever be finally or fully lost because God will keep him or her from falling. Another term for this doctrine is “inamissable grace.” It follows logically from the other points of TULIP. (Lutherans, however, who generally agree with monergism, reject this doctrine.)

Some non-Calvinists will argue vehemently against this belief; for the most part they are strong Arminians who are in reaction against Calvinism. For example, many Baptist churches are called “Free Will Baptists” precisely because they reject this doctrine held strongly by some even non-Calvinist Baptist churches. In fact, it would probably be safe to say that most Baptists, especially in the South, are not Calvinists but adhere fervently to inamissable grace under the phrase “eternal security.” Free Will Baptists oppose not only Calvinism but also this doctrine as it is widely held by other Baptists.

We have just been on a “tour,” as it were, of garden-variety or mere Calvinism. But it is not the whole story of Calvinism. In the next section I want to explore diversity among Calvinists more fully by examining some varieties of “mere Calvinism.”

VARIETIES OF TULIP

It should be clear by now that I consider “Reformed” a more flexible category with much greater diversity than “Calvinism.” Clearly, by contemporary worldwide standards such as the

WCRC, the two categories are not inextricably linked *except* in the sense that all Reformed people claim a religious family tree that reaches back to the Swiss Reformation of the sixteenth century, including the work of John Calvin. But they do not all agree with TULIP or even much that Calvin said about God's sovereignty. Calvinism is not so much a family or heritage as it is a system of theological beliefs. It is firmly embedded in the Reformed tradition, but it is not identical with it.

Many in the Reformed tradition are uncomfortable with Calvinism (as were some Swiss reformers during Calvin's lifetime!), and Calvinism extends outside the worldwide Reformed community of churches into, for example, Baptist life. It can even be found here and there among the so-called Free Churches (e.g., Evangelical Free Church of America, which has in recent years been leaning more and more toward Calvinism) and occasionally even among Pentecostals. I recently met a Calvinist pastor of a large Assembly of God church; this was unheard of in the past and still would probably shake up the hierarchy of the AG denomination! This pastor's associate pastor is clearly a member of the young, restless, Reformed movement even though for an AG person, that is something of a misnomer and definitely an anomaly. To call someone both "Reformed" and Pentecostal seems more than odd.

I will here write about diversity among Calvinists *about* Calvinism rather than diversity *of* Calvinism. Why? Diversity is always of people; Calvinism is not a group of people but a theological construct that gets interpreted and lived out in various ways by various people—some within the Reformed family and some outside of it. The sketch of garden-variety or mere Calvinism given above focused on an ideal type of Calvinism shared by many Calvinists, but not all. All real Calvinists look to TULIP as a relatively accurate description of their soteriology, but some reject one point (always "L"), and some who accept all five points apply them to practices such as evangelism in different ways. And then there is the old argument between "supralapsarian" and "infralapsarian" Calvinists, which I will discuss shortly.

I have already mentioned the fact that many Calvinists reject the "L" in TULIP in favor of a combination of universal atonement and particular election and effectual grace. These "four point" Calvinists step out from the rest and argue that in spite of electing only some persons to salvation and only drawing some persons irresistibly to faith, God sent Christ to die for the sins of the whole world and not only for the sins of the elect. Criticism of limited atonement will come later here; for now I will restrict myself simply to pointing out that many Calvinists agree with Arminians and Lutherans (and perhaps others) that Christ's substitutionary death on the cross was actually intended by God for all people. In other words, he bore the punishment for the sins of the whole world without exception.

One notable Calvinist theologian of the Baptist tradition who accepted all points of TULIP except "L" was August Hopkins Strong (1836–1921), longtime professor of theology at Rochester Theological Seminary and author of numerous books, including the widely used and influential textbook *Systematic Theology*. On the basis of Scripture passages such as 1 John 2:2 Strong argued that "the atonement of Christ has made objective provision for the salvation of all, by removing from the divine mind every obstacle to the pardon and restoration of sinners, except their willful opposition to God and refusal to turn to him."

Following Strong in true Baptist style, later Calvinist Baptist theologian Millard Erickson (b. 1932) argued similarly: "We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement." Numerous others, especially Baptist and Free Church Calvinists, agree with Strong and Erickson. It was probably the majority Calvinism among non-Reformed evangelicals

throughout much of the twentieth century—until the rise of the young, restless, Reformed movement under the influence of John Piper and others who argue strongly for limited atonement.

But what about theologians *within* the traditionally Reformed communities, such as conservative Presbyterian and Christian Reformed? Do they all affirm the “L” in TULIP? Hardly. One notable example is theologian James Daane, mentioned above, a member of the Christian Reformed Church. In *The Freedom of God* this Fuller Seminary professor blasted the Synod of Dort for citing “no Scripture passages to prove ‘limited atonement’ ” and for virtually eliminating mystery from Reformed theology through scholastic modes of thought that focus on *number* rather than *community*. Of much traditional Calvinism he wrote:

All ... attempts to employ number—the idea of limitation—to understand the nature of election, the election of the church, the nature of divine grace, and of Christ’s atonement are really attempts to reduce the mystery of Christian truths to boundaries that we can rationally manage. Down this road all mystery disappears—the mystery of unbelief and no less the mystery of Christ and of the church.

Critics may dismiss Daane as influenced by Swiss revisionist Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), but his main influence was Dutch Reformed theologian Berkouwer, who is generally considered much more traditional than Barth. In any case, Daane represents someone *not Baptist* and fully within the Reformed family and an evangelical (not liberal or neoorthodox) who rejected limited atonement.

Perhaps the oldest and deepest division among Calvinists is over the order of the divine decrees. The debate goes back at least to Calvin’s successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza. This is a somewhat subtle area of theology that puts off many novices, so I will take time and space here carefully to explain what it is all about and why Calvinists divide over this.

Soon after Calvin’s death some of his followers adopted a style of theological work foreign to Calvin himself. It has generally been labeled “scholastic,” referring back to the medieval theologians’ tendency to use philosophy and logic to speculate about matters left unmentioned by Scripture. (The common example, though somewhat extreme, is, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?”) One manifestation of this scholastic approach to Calvinism was an attempt to discern the logical (not temporal or chronological) order of God’s decrees expressing his sovereignty over creation and redemption. The background question was: “Did God decree the election and reprobation of persons *before* or *after* the decree to permit the fall?” Here is another, and perhaps better, way of putting it: “Did God decree the election and reprobation of persons *in light of the fall* or *prior to and not in light of it*?”

If this seems like a wholly speculative endeavor, even many Calvinists would agree. However, once some Calvinists later called “supralapsarians”—who argued that God’s first and foremost decree was to save some persons yet to be created and damn others—appeared with their version of Calvinism, everyone had to weigh in. The “infralapsarians” were and are those who argue that God decreed to create and allow the fall (which all agree he actually foreordained!) first and only then decreed to elect some fallen persons to salvation and predestine others to damnation.

When the Synod of Dort met in 1618/1619, this was debated and the assembly of Reformed divines ultimately decided to allow both views without marginalizing either one as heresy. There were some present, however, who considered the supralapsarian view heresy because it seemed to make God the author of sin and evil. Boettner sides with supralapsarianism, calling it “high Calvinism.” (It should be noted, however, that this in no way makes his overall account of Calvinist theology in general, that is TULIP, different from infralapsarianism.) Sproul, by contrast, condemns supralapsarianism calling it “hyper-Calvinism” and “anti-Calvinism.” This view, he

says, makes God the author of sin by “involving God in coercing sin” and thus does “radical violence to the ... character of God.”

A supralapsarian could easily argue that Sproul is guilty of living in a glass house while throwing rocks. How does supralapsarianism any more make God the author of sin than infralapsarianism? The difference would seem to lie elsewhere. The supralapsarian simply wishes to exalt God’s supremacy by not making anything about him, including his decrees, dependent on something that happens in the world. The supralapsarian thinks the infralapsarian has done just that by subordinating the decree of election and reprobation to the decree to permit the fall. If only in light of the fall does God work out his plan of redemption, then, the supralapsarian says, redemption is a kind of “Plan B” in God’s mind. This comes too close for comfort to Arminianism, so says the supralapsarian, because it makes God indirectly dependent on the world.

However, as I will show, making God dependent on the world might just be part and parcel of Calvinism—especially what I will call radical or extreme Calvinism, whether supra- or infralapsarian. That is because *some* in *both* camps emphasize that the entire program of creation and redemption (including reprobation and hell) is said to be “for God’s glory.” Does God need the world to glorify himself? Or is creation rather the result of the overflowing trinitarian love of God?

One more area of diversity among Calvinists has to do with whether God only “permits” sin and evil or actually in some sense brings it about. All Calvinists agree that God foreordains sin and evil because everything is foreordained by God. (Admittedly some untutored people who think they are Calvinists may not believe this, but every Calvinist theologian going back to Calvin himself affirms it.) Sproul represents those Calvinists who adamantly deny that God is in any sense the author of sin or evil. Calamities, yes; moral evil, never.

The problematic situation is set up by Sproul’s (and other Calvinists’) assertion of absolute divine sovereignty (meticulous providence and what I will call divine determinism even though he does not like that terminology): “If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God’s sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled.... Maybe that one molecule will be the thing that prevents Christ from returning.” So the question inevitably arises: “Is God, then, the author of evil and of sin?” Sproul says no: “One thing is absolutely unthinkable, that God could be the author or doer of sin.” He affirms that God *allowed* the entrance of sin and evil into his good creation but *did not coerce it*.

Another well-known Calvinist who says that God allows or permits sin and evil without causing it or being its author is Paul Helm, a British evangelical philosopher and theologian who teaches at Canada’s Regent College. In his book *The Providence of God*, this Calvinist, like Sproul, expresses a high view of God’s sovereignty: “Not only is every atom and molecule, every thought and desire, kept in being by God, but every twist and turn of each of these is under the direct control of God.”

But, of course, this raises to an intense pitch the question of God’s relationship to sin and evil. Is God the author of them? Helm says no. Because of God’s “impeccable nature” he cannot be the author of sin, but because he is sovereign he must *allow* sin and evil if they are to exist. But Helm argues this permission of sin and evil is “specific permission” (similar or identical to what Boettner calls “willing permission”). That is, God never takes the spectator posture when he allows things, including sin and evil. Without causing them he specifically wills them in such a way as to assure they will happen without actually causing them:

God ordains all those circumstances which are necessary for the performance by a person of a particular morally evil action (say, an action of cruelty at a particular time and place). God does not

himself perform that action, nor could he, for the reasons already given [viz., his impeccable nature]. Nevertheless, he *permits* that action to take place. He does not prevent it to stop it. So in circumstances ordained by God someone does an evil action; the circumstances are ordained, but the evil is permitted.

Many Calvinists would say “amen” to this account of God’s relationship with sin and evil. No more than anyone else do they want to say that God is the cause or author of sin and evil.

Boettner includes a lengthy chapter on this issue in *The Reformed Doctrine of Providence* and, like Helm, argues (but even more vehemently) that although God ordains everything, he is not the cause or author of sin or evil. I will probe this further in chapter 4, so I will put aside for now any lengthy discussion of the inherent problems in this view. Let it be known for now that I agree with the second view held by some Calvinists that their doctrine of God’s sovereignty necessarily implies or teaches that God *is* the author of sin and evil *or at least* actively assures it in some causal sense so that language of “permission” is not sufficient.

It is not at all difficult to find Calvinists on the Internet (e.g., bloggers) who boldly state that Calvinism requires confession that God *is* the author of sin and evil. One such person is Vincent Cheung, who writes about Calvinism *as a Calvinist* at his website www.vincentcheung.com. (I know little about this person except that he is a prolific commentator on subjects related to theology from a Calvinist perspective.) Like many others one can easily find on the web, Cheung ridicules fellow Calvinists who say God is not the author of sin. He then says that “when someone alleges that my view of divine sovereignty makes God the author of sin, my first reaction tends to be ‘So what?’ ... there is no biblical or rational problem with him being the author of sin.”⁶⁹ Cheung goes on to argue that the typical Calvinist account of God’s absolute sovereignty necessarily leads to God as being the author of sin in any ordinary sense of “author.”

Another Calvinist who affirms that God more than merely permits sin and evil, but without actually calling God the “author of sin,” is John Frame (b. 1939). Frame taught for many years at Westminster Theological Seminary and now holds a chair in theology at Reformed Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous books, many of them on Reformed theology (from a strongly Calvinist perspective). In an interview with Andy Naselli published on the internet in 2009 Frame answered a question about God’s not causing but only permitting evil. Although he demurs from saying God causes or authors evil, Frame says the language of permission is not strong enough and prefers to say that God “actually brings evil about.”

Another Calvinist who does not think the language of God’s merely permitting sin and evil is strong enough to do justice to God’s sovereignty is John Piper. While he does not reject the language of permission, he often goes beyond it in explaining God’s role in disasters, evil, and even sin. In a sermon published at his website soon after the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, Piper rejected mere permission explanations of God’s role and affirmed that, in some sense, God “designed,” “ordained,” and “governed” those events. During a sermon preached to a youth conference in 2005 he emphasized God’s absolute sovereignty over all things and said, “Even a ‘dirty bomb’ that levels Minneapolis would be from God.”

Many Calvinists wince at such statements as Cheung’s, Frame’s, and Piper’s, but others regard them as the hard truth that necessarily follows from Scripture’s own teaching. For example, Joseph told his brothers that they intended their act of selling him into slavery in Egypt for evil, but God intended it for good (Gen. 50:20). Then there is the event of the cross of Christ, which was foreordained by God “from before the foundation of the world.” Both events involved sins. Was God not the author of these sins? No matter how you try to get around it, some Calvinists will say,

there is no escaping the fact that God foreordained and rendered these events certain, so he is their author if not their direct cause. While disagreeing that these stories require belief that God rendered sin or evil certain, I agree with the Calvinists who say the typical Calvinist view of sovereignty requires confession of God as author of sin and evil.

There is one final realm of diversity in Calvinism to be mentioned. That is the debate over true “hyper-Calvinism”—correctly used (according to most Reformed theologians) of Herman Hoeksema’s (1886–1965) version of Calvinism that rejected the practice of indiscriminately offering the gospel invitation to salvation to all people. Hoeksema was born in the Netherlands but emigrated to the United States as a child and settled in Grand Rapids, where he eventually pastored a large Christian Reformed church. Among other works he wrote *Reformed Dogmatics*. Hoeksema sparked a controversy within the Reformed churches by arguing that indiscriminate evangelism, such as open invitations to salvation, violates the doctrine of God’s sovereignty in salvation.

The controversy has been described as one over the “well-meant gospel offer” by leading Calvinist theologian and Calvin Theological Seminary professor Anthony Hoekema (1913–1988) (notice the different spelling from Hoeksema; they were not related). According to Hoekema, Hoeksema taught that “the gospel call is never an offer” of salvation. It is rather a proclamation of what God has done; God alone will decide what to do with it, and he always decides to use it to draw the elect to himself. But it is *not* a well-meant offer of salvation to everyone because “God does not desire the salvation of all to whom the gospel comes; he desires the salvation only of the elect.”

The Christian Reformed Church expelled Hoeksema over this, maintaining that “the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation, not just on the part of the preacher, but on God’s part as well, to all who hear it, and that God seriously and earnestly desires the salvation of all to whom the gospel call comes.”

Reformed theologian Daane attributes Hoeksema’s extreme Calvinism not to an aberrant interpretation of high Calvinism but to that theology itself—a theology he calls “decretal theology,” which includes reprobation as a decree of God. One does have to wonder what logic prevents a person who believes in TULIP from moving to Hoeksema’s position. Why would God earnestly desire the salvation of everyone and how can the gospel call be a well-meant offer of salvation to all indiscriminately, including the nonelect, if God has decreed that only some will be saved?

RADICAL REFORMED THEOLOGY

Given the manifest diversity of the Reformed community and among Calvinists, when I say I am “against Calvinism” and want to rescue God’s reputation from “radical Reformed theology,” whose Calvinism and which Reformed theology am I talking about? There are so many kinds! Indeed. Well, here I want to explain what kind I am against; the rest of the book will explain why in detail.

By “Calvinism” as that which I am against I am referring to the “high Calvinism” of TULIP, whether infralapsarian or supralapsarian. It really does not matter much which type one examines closely: both will be found to make God morally ambiguous at best and a moral monster at worst (in spite of Calvinists’ claims to the contrary). Once again I wish to emphasize *it is not free will about which I am concerned*, except as free will is necessary to protect God’s character from being impugned. What concerns me, as I will make abundantly clear, is the biblical teaching that “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

Please don't dismiss this as too facile; I am going to unpack my claim that high Calvinism, the Calvinism that affirms most or all of TULIP, directly contradicts that God *is* love. I am well aware of Calvinist objections that God's love is different from our kind of love. I've heard that many times. While there is some truth to that, it is overstated by most Calvinists. If God's love is absolutely different from the highest and best notions of love as we derive them from Scripture itself (especially from Jesus Christ), then the term is simply meaningless when attached to God. One might as well say "God is creech-creech"—a meaningless assertion.

As I hope to demonstrate, some Calvinists agree with me about the analogy between God's goodness and love and our highest and best ideas of goodness and love. Paul Helm, for example, rejects any idea that God's goodness and love is totally qualitatively different from ours (as ours is derived from Scripture, of course). Yet, I will argue, even those who agree with me cannot adequately explain how their account of God's sovereignty, especially in relation to sin, evil, and reprobation, is consistent with goodness or love.

Again, what am I against? By "against Calvinism" I mean that I am opposed to *any and every belief system that includes the "U," the "L," and/or the "I" in TULIP*. The "U" and the "I" *always* appear together even when the "L" is rejected. I object most strenuously to the "L," but I think it is necessarily implied by the "U" and the "I," so I agree with those Calvinists who argue that it is inconsistent to leave it out. The "flower," so to speak, is damaged beyond recognition or recovery by pulling off that petal!

Also, I believe, affirmation of unconditional election necessarily implies affirmation of reprobation in spite of some Calvinists' denials. Reprobation is the "good and necessary consequence" of unconditional election *unless one affirms universal salvation*. (An example of this is the great Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth, who, I believe, did affirm universalism.) As I cannot affirm universal salvation, I judge unconditional election with its necessary correlate reprobation unacceptable because it impugns the character of God as unconditionally good.

Irresistible grace does the same thing. It impugns the goodness of God. If God calls and draws sinners irresistibly to himself so that they escape hell simply because he overwhelms them and regenerates them without any act of free will on their part, then a good God would do that for everyone! I am not content to leave the "why" question in the realm of mystery here. I acknowledge mystery in revelation, but not one that requires belief in a hidden or secret will of God that makes him a moral monster. Only a moral monster would refuse to save persons when salvation is absolutely unconditional and solely an act of God that does not depend on free will.

When I say I am against Calvinism, then, I mean the core beliefs of garden variety, mere Calvinism *insofar* as they are taken to their logical conclusion. I realize that not all Calvinists take them to their logical conclusion; at various stages in the reasoning out process individual Calvinists stop and appeal to mystery and refuse to be logically consistent by affirming the good and necessary consequences of their beliefs. *I am not against them or their highly modified and attenuated Calvinism!* (And this is probably the case with the majority of people I meet who consider themselves Calvinists.)

However, within the young, restless, Reformed movement of the new Calvinism and among their mentors (the people they read and listen to and look up to as their heroes), *most* in my experience are taking Calvinism to its logical conclusions—or at least far in that direction. There is a boldness and even aggressiveness among them that I do not find among most Calvinists of the older generation. I am against any Calvinism (and any theology) that impugns the goodness of God in favor of absolute sovereignty, leading to the conclusion that evil, sin, and every horror of human history are planned and rendered certain by God.

What about “radical Reformed theology?” What do I mean by that and why does God’s reputation need to be rescued from it? By radical Reformed theology I mean the same as consistent Calvinism described above. I mean that extreme Calvinism so evident in some Calvinist speakers and writers and their eager followers that ineluctably ends up making God the author of sin and evil, whether that language (i.e., “author”) is used or not. That John Piper prefers to say that God “designs” and “governs” evil makes no difference when the context necessarily implies that God wants it to happen and renders it certain—especially when it is said that this is necessary for his full glorification.

To be perfectly blunt and to “cut right to the chase,” as the saying goes, my problem is primarily and especially with divine determinism that leads to God’s unconditional reprobation of certain people to eternal suffering in hell for his glory. I am opposed to any idea that, as the old Calvinist saying goes, “those who find themselves suffering in hell can at least take comfort in the fact that they are there for the greater glory of God.” I recognize and freely acknowledge that few Calvinists would say this. But my argument is they should find the courage to say this because it is necessarily implied by what they do say. I will explain and defend that claim throughout this book.

Radical Reformed theology, then, is any theology that makes assertions about God that necessarily, logically imply that God is less than perfectly good in the highest sense of goodness found in the New Testament and especially in Jesus Christ, the fullest revelation of God for us. It is consistent infralapsarianism or supralapsarianism, whether hyper-Calvinist or ordinary, mere Calvinist.

So what Reformed theology am I *not* against? I guess I would have to say the only Reformed theology I am *not* against is revisionist Reformed theology—the kind I find in Sell and Berkhof and Daane and König (although I may not agree with everything any of them taught). It is Reformed theology that explicitly rejects a divine decree of reprobation and backs up from there to reject boldly other Calvinist claims that necessarily require divine reprobation. It is Reformed theology that explicitly rejects divine determinism of every single event without exception, leaving no room for free will, and backs up from there to affirm a loving, divine self-limitation such that God is in no way responsible for the suffering of innocents in the Holocaust or similar horrors of history.

I believe it is possible to find nonradical Reformed theology commonly among Reformed people and even among some who consider themselves Calvinists. They appeal to mystery rather than divine decrees that govern every event, including the fall. They affirm God’s sovereignty without extending that to sin and evil except insofar as God permits them (without that positive, willing permission spoken of by consistent Calvinists and the radical Reformed theologian who talks about God rendering them certain). They affirm election as God’s gracious and unconditional choice of a people for service without unconditional determination of individuals’ eternal destinies, including some to hell. They are Reformed people who agree with Adrio König, himself of Reformed pedigree, who wrote:

Anyone who levels things out in vague generalizations by attempting to explain everything and all possible circumstances as the will of God always ends up in the impossible situation that there are more exceptions than rules, more things that are inexplicable and that clash with the picture of God that is given to us in his word, than there are comforting confirmations that he is directing everything.... Anyone who tries to use the omnipotence and providence of God to propose a meticulously prepared divine plan which is unfolding in world history (L. Boettner) will always be left with the problem that other believers might not be able to discern the God of *love* in the actual course of world events.... It must be emphatically stated that ... the Scriptures do not present the future as something which materializes [sic] according to a “plan” but according to the covenant....

There are distressingly many things that happen on earth that are not the will of God (Luke 7:30 and every other sin mentioned in the Bible), that are against his will, and that stem from the incomprehensible and senseless sin in which we are born, in which the greater part of mankind lives, and in which Israel persisted, and against which even the “holiest men” ... struggled all their days.... To try to interpret all these things by means of the concept of a plan of God, creates intolerable difficulties and gives rise to more exceptions than regularities. But the most important objection is that the idea of a plan is against the message of the Bible since God himself becomes incredible if that against which he has fought with power, and for which he sacrificed his only Son, was nevertheless somehow part and parcel of his eternal counsel.

ALTERNATIVES TO RADICAL REFORMED THEOLOGY

One reason many young people (and perhaps others) embrace the new Calvinism (which is by-and-large radical Reformed theology as just described) is because they are convinced it is the only biblically and intellectually serious theology available. It is all too true, as some Calvinists have argued, that many American evangelical churches are almost totally devoid of theology. I have been a theology professor of thousands of students in three Christian universities over almost thirty years. During that time I have noticed a downward trend in terms of Christian students’ biblical and theological awareness.

I have also noticed that trend in the churches I have attended. Whereas thirty years ago and more most evangelical churches taught Bible stories and performed some kind of catechesis with young people, most have moved to the most vapid “study” of ethical and moral issues—often substituting discussion of the possible spiritual interpretation of movies for biblical teaching and the study of doctrines.

Many churches and Christian youth organizations have simply abdicated their responsibility to teach basic Christian beliefs so that Christianity seems to many Christian young people a shallow religion of self-fulfillment with God’s help. This is what Calvinist intellectual Michael Horton calls “Christless Christianity,” and I agree with him. It is simply pervasive in American church life. So, when intellectually curious young people who are convinced there must be something more to their faith than the folk religion they have been given encounter Calvinism for the first time (usually under the name Reformed theology), they are often impressed and sometimes swept away with it. In my experience this is partly under the influence of extremely passionate sermons delivered by scholarly popularizers of Calvinism who preach at enormous youth conferences (the sermons being podcast for relistening), as if their theology is the only one that truly honors God.

I have found that many of the new Calvinists simply are not aware there are any viable alternatives to their newfound doctrinal faith. Through reading books by their favorite pastors and teachers, many of them are convinced that all alternatives—and especially the dreaded “Arminianism”—are man-centered, biblically unsupported, and intellectually weak. Almost all alternatives to Calvinism are lumped together as Arminianism or semi-Pelagianism or both (many Calvinists such as Sproul equate the two). In his sermon on “For Whom Did Christ Die?” Piper attacks Arminianism as a theology of self-salvation. He says: “In order to say that Christ died for all men in the same way, the Arminian must limit the atonement to a powerless opportunity for men to save themselves from their terrible plight of depravity.”

This is, of course, a caricature of Arminianism, as I have demonstrated in *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. One has to wonder what Piper was thinking when he misrepresented Arminianism in this way. Arminian theology *does not* say that people can save themselves or that

the atonement is powerless. Traditional Arminian theology says that in and through the cross of Christ the sin of Adam inherited by all was forgiven (Romans 5) so that people are only condemnable for their own sins. The cross completely removes every obstacle to every human being's salvation except their own resistance to God's freely offered grace, which is given to all in some measure but especially through the preaching of the Word. I believe Piper knows this because we have communicated about it and he told me he used to be an Arminian!

What Piper and almost all Calvinist critics of Arminianism (and other alternative theologies of God's sovereignty and salvation) often leave out that are crucial to mention are two things: (1) any limitation of God's sovereignty is said to be a voluntary self-limitation because God is sovereign over his sovereignty, and (2) if anyone comes to Christ with repentance and faith, it is only because they are enabled by God's "prevenient grace" to do so. I rarely encounter Calvinists who fairly describe the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace even though it is central and crucial to Arminian theology.

So what is Arminianism or Arminian theology? It is the much vilified but innocent main evangelical alternative to Calvinism. For support for the portrait of it I will paint here I point readers to *Arminian Theology*, which contains hundreds of supporting quotations from leading Arminian theologians, going back to Jacob Arminius himself, who ascribed all of salvation to the grace of God and fervently denied that he attributed any part of the work of salvation to "man" (the human person who repents and believes unto salvation). Contrary to the misrepresentations of many Calvinist critics, Arminianism does not "limit God's sovereignty" or attribute merit to "man" in salvation.

Classical Arminian theology, such as that of John Wesley (1703–1791), affirms the total depravity of human beings and their utter helplessness even to exercise a good will toward God apart from God's supernatural, assisting grace. It attributes the sinner's ability to respond to the gospel with repentance and faith to prevenient grace—the illuminating, convicting, calling, and enabling power of the Holy Spirit working on the sinner's soul and making them free to choose saving grace (or reject it). This is the Arminian interpretation of the "drawings" of God mentioned by Jesus in the gospel of John. God does not draw irresistibly but persuasively, leaving human persons able to say no.

Arminian theology does affirm divine election, but it interprets it as corporate rather than individual. Romans 9, the bedrock Scripture passage of high Calvinism, is interpreted as the early church fathers did—as referring to the service of Israel and Gentile believers in God's plan, not to the eternal destinies of individuals. Arminians affirm predestination, interpreting it with Romans 8 as God's foreknowledge of faith. They reject reprobation except insofar as it is freely chosen by people who live against the will of God revealed in nature and the law written on their hearts (Romans 1–2).

Above all Arminians insist that God is a good and loving God, who truly desires the salvation of all people. Note 1 Timothy 2:3–4: "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"; and 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." Arminians regard these and similar passages of Scripture as clearly and unequivocally pointing to God's universal desire for salvation of every person. The Greek of 1 Timothy 2:4 *cannot* be interpreted any other way than as referring to every person without limit. Some Calvinists interpret 2 Peter 2:4 as referring only to the elect, but in light of 1 Timothy 2:4, that hardly works.

Arminians believe that any limitation of God's intention for everyone's salvation, including "limited atonement," necessarily and inexorably impugns the character of God even where Calvinists insist otherwise. Arminians do not claim that Calvinists *say* God is not good or loving; they say Calvinism *implies* that necessarily, so that Calvinists *should say it* in order to be logically consistent with themselves.

The main alternative to Calvinism is classical Arminianism (which is different from what sometimes goes under that label!) as described briefly above. Again, I urge readers who are interested in exploring it further to read *Arminian Theology* and other books by Arminians about Arminianism—just as I and many Arminians have read Calvin's *Institutes* and many books about Calvinism by Calvinists. You should not believe what Calvinists say about Arminianism without checking it out for yourself in the primary sources.

Is Arminian theology biblically and intellectually respectable? Is it a serious competitor with Calvinism? Of course, only someone who looks into it fairly deeply in the primary sources can know for sure. But my argument is that the only reason this is seriously called into question is the vicious calumnies raised against it by Calvinists over the years; most of what Calvinists say about it is simply untrue or at least only partially true. One of the worst offenders is Sproul, who equates Arminianism with the heresy of semi-Pelagianism, condemned at the Second Council or Synod of Orange in AD 529 (which also condemned any belief that God predestined sin). Virtually every book by a Calvinist expounding Calvinist theology that I have read (and I have read dozens) eventually gets around to slamming Arminianism as a shallow message of self salvation if not actual heresy.

I urge young, restless, Reformed new Calvinists to think for themselves about Calvinism's alternatives, including especially Arminianism. But I also recommend investigation into non-Calvinist Reformed theologians such as H. Berkhof, König, and Daane, but perhaps above all the great Dutch Reformed theologian G. C. Berkouwer, who published many volumes of systematic theology in the 1950s and 1960s. Some may consider him a Calvinist, but he definitely was not one in the full TULIP, "high Calvinism" sense, especially in that he rejected any notion of divine reprobation as included in God's sovereignty.⁸⁵ Other Protestant alternatives are Lutheranism, which rejects limited atonement and unconditional perseverance, and Anabaptist theology, which focuses mainly on discipleship rather than on systematic theology but clearly includes belief in God-granted freedom of the will and rejects TULIP almost in its entirety. (Some Anabaptists accept total depravity.)

Ultimately, I hope that alternatives to Calvinism warrant serious consideration because of the serious conundrums presented by the logical extension of classical Calvinism, to which this book now turns.¹⁰

¹⁰ Olson, R. E. (2011). [Against Calvinism](#) (pp. 37–69). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

The Trouble With Tulips: Reformed Theology



By - Benjamin Witherington

- ❑ “Scholars who look to Calvin and Luther and their legacy pride themselves on being biblical and giving meticulous attention to the biblical text. This is not a surprise since both Calvin and Luther were formidable exegetes and theologians, and they set examples that many sought to follow ever since. Reformed exegetes have a hard time coming to grips with the paradox of a God who is both sovereign and free, and yet somehow so exercises that sovereignty and limits his own freedom that he has made it possible for human beings to have and exercise a measure of freedom as well, including in matters of salvation.”

The Trouble With Tulips: Reformed Theology



By - Benjamin Witherington

- ❑ “They have a hard time understanding that holy love doesn’t involve determinism, however subtle. Indeed love, if it is real love, must be freely given and freely received, for God has chosen to relate to us as persons, not automata. They have a hard time dealing with the idea that God programmed into the system a certain amount of indeterminacy, risk, and freedom. And maybe, just maybe the good old Evangelical lust for certainty leads us all to quickly to fill in gaps & silences of Scripture, driving us to bad exegesis.”

The Trouble With Tulips: Reformed Theology



By - Benjamin Witherington

- “There are in fact profound exegetical problems with the T.U.L.I.P. theology of Calvinism and to a lesser extent Lutheranism. These theological ideas are linked, and, with the exception of the ‘T’ and the ‘L,’ are necessary corollaries of each other. For example, if one believes that God has predetermined people to be saved from before the foundation of the world, then, in turn, election is unconditional, grace is irresistible, and perseverance is inevitable. These three linked ideas do not necessarily require the notion of total depravity or limited atonement.”

The Trouble With Tulips: Reformed Theology



By - Benjamin Witherington

- “There is then a logical consistency to this cluster of linked ideas, and it is the logic and coherency that seem to make it compelling, rather than its real exegetical ability. And of course the danger of any such necessary linking of ideas is that if one link in the chain is dropped then the chain ceases to hold. For example, if it can be demonstrated that apostasy from the true faith is not merely possible but is an idea that Christians are regularly warned against in the New Testament, then there is something wrong not only with the notion of perseverance but also with the ideas of irresistible grace and predetermination.”

Wesleyan Arminians & Calvinist Reformers Continue to Disagree:

YES TO GRACE; NO TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM

Even though I had proven to him that my theology, classical Arminianism, does *not* say persons save themselves through their good works or contribute anything meritorious to their salvation, my Calvinist interlocutor wasn't convinced. "Your theology," he accused, "is still semi-Pelagian if not fully Pelagian."

Somewhat offended because I regard these as heresies, I asked him to explain more fully. I thought he had come to realize Arminians *do not* believe in works righteousness and *do* believe salvation is all of grace and has nothing to do with meritorious works. But he responded: "Because you make the decisive factor in salvation your own free will decision."

At that time, years ago, I had never heard that accusation, but I knew for sure that no Arminian says that. When pressed, my Calvinist friend said: "You see, if salvation isn't all God's work and has nothing whatever to do with anything we do, it isn't by grace and it isn't a gift. By making it dependent on the person's free acceptance of God's grace, you make salvation a good work and therefore not a gift; and that contradicts Ephesians 2:8–9." I've encountered this accusation against Arminianism (and all non-Calvinist theologies) many times since. Somehow this notion that non-Calvinists make their free will decision the "decisive factor in salvation" has become a mantra for many Calvinists.

While I do think this specific charge has a suitable answer (which I will explain below), the underlying issue in this conversation was really about grace as either resistible or irresistible. Close examination suggests this is exactly the issue underlying the charge that Arminianism amounts to "works-righteousness." How does the saving grace of God bring the benefit of Christ's atoning death, forgiveness, reconciliation with God, and justification into a person's life? Is it a gift imposed or a gift freely received?

The Calvinist view is called *monergism*—from two Greek words that mean "one" and "energy" or "action." Monergism is the belief that salvation is all God's doing from beginning to end without any cooperation from the person being saved other than what God instills in that person. The alternative is "synergism"—the belief that salvation is all of grace but requires free cooperation for it to be activated in a person's life.

THE CALVINIST DOCTRINE OF IRRESISTIBLE OR EFFECTUAL GRACE/MONERGISM

There's a reason why the "I" follows the T, the U, and the L in TULIP, and it's not just because that's how the flower is spelled. For Calvinists, irresistible grace, which many prefer to call "effectual grace," is both biblical and logically necessary because of total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. For biblical support they usually point to John 6:44: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them." They interpret "draws" as "compels" but

without the connotation of external force against the person's will. In other words, God bends the elect person's will so that he or she *wants* to come to Jesus with repentance and faith.

As for logic, the argument is that because people are totally depraved and dead in trespasses and sins, unless God elects him or her, the person will never respond to the internal calling of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit has to change the person inwardly in an effectual manner, which is regeneration. Then the born again person desires to come to Christ, in which case he or she is given repentance and faith (conversion) and justification (forgiveness and imputation of Christ's righteousness). This process is called "monergistic grace" or just "monergism."

Reformed theologian Henry Meeter, in *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, defines monergism this way:

One might say, *God planned salvation, and he earned it in Christ*. Now the choice of acceptance or rejection is mine alone. In a sense it is so. But who causes a Christian to accept Christ? "For we are all gone astray. There is none that seeketh after God." So Christ sends the Holy Spirit into our stubborn hearts, regenerates us, and puts faith and love to God there, as well as new ambitions and desires. This he does with irresistible power—not, as the Arminians say, if we let him; we would never spontaneously let him. We only work out our own salvation because it is God that worketh in us.... Thus, the entire work of redemption in its essentials is the work of God. God the Father planned it. God the Son earned it. And God the Holy Spirit applies it, regenerating heart and life.

Whether Meeter has Arminianism right is debatable, and I have challenged similar descriptions in my *Arminian Theology*. Nevertheless, his is a clear and concise expression of the monergism universally held and taught among Calvinists.

The point is that, for the Calvinist, any contribution that the human person makes to his or her salvation is really, however unnoticed, a work of God in him or her. Meeter partially quotes Philippians 2:12, which says: "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Verse 13, which Meeter omits (possibly by mistake), says, "for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." For him and all Calvinists whom I have encountered, what Paul meant is this: "If you are working out your salvation with fear and trembling, remember it is God doing it all in and through you." Only in this way can all glory for salvation be given to God alone.

Did Calvin believe in monergistic grace? That he did is revealed in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* where he referred to the "inner call." He declared: "The manner of the call itself clearly indicates that it depends on grace alone." He continues:

Even the very nature and dispensation of the call clearly demonstrates [that] it consists not only in the preaching of the Word but also in the illumination of the Spirit... When he first shines with the light of His word upon the undeserving, he thereby shows a sufficiently clear proof of his free goodness. Here, then, God's boundless goodness is already manifesting itself but not to the salvation of all; for a heavier judgment remains upon the wicked because they reject the testimony of God's love. [Of course, Calvin has previously made clear that this is because they were predestined to do so!] And God also, to show forth his glory, withdraws the effectual working of his Spirit from them. This inner call, then, is a pledge of salvation that cannot deceive us... But lest the flesh boast that it did at least answer him when he called and freely offered himself, he declares that it has no ears to hear, no eyes to see, unless he makes them. Furthermore, he makes them not according to each person's gratefulness but according to his election.

Here Calvin clearly expresses monergism or irresistible grace. God “makes” the elected sinner’s ears to hear and eyes to see the gospel, and he “withdraws” that “effectual working” (irresistible grace) from the non-elect, the reprobate.

As I will explain later, most Calvinists claim that synergists want to be able to boast, even if just a little, that they contributed something to their salvation and/or are so in love with free will that they cannot bring themselves to accept that God does everything in salvation and they contribute nothing. That does not reflect the real statements made by synergists, however. The fact is, most synergists object to monergism because of the necessary implication stated plainly by Calvin that it requires God to withhold or withdraw monergistic grace from many of the very people he created in his own image and likeness to their eternal damnation and suffering “for his glory.” This Calvin states clearly about the reprobate: “They are raised up to the end that through them God’s glory may be revealed.” Lest anyone misunderstand the source of their reprobation: “For when it says that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will.”⁴ The *sole reason* non-Calvinist evangelical Christians object to monergism is because it makes God the ultimate, even if indirect, cause of the reprobates’ unbelief and damnation. It does serious harm to God’s reputation.

Lorraine Boettner follows Calvin closely by attributing everything in salvation to God to the exclusion of any free human cooperation with grace. He bases this on the doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election. “If man is dead in sin, then nothing short of . . . supernatural life-giving power of the Holy Spirit will ever cause him to do that which is spiritually good.” So, regeneration must precede conversion: “Regeneration is a sovereign gift of God, graciously bestowed on those whom He has chosen.”⁶ It involves a fundamental change of character so that the person regenerated wants to repent and believe and serve God. Boettner avers that this doctrine of irresistible grace is *the only* evangelical theology because only it ascribes all the work of salvation to God, thus giving God alone the glory. Arminianism is not evangelical, he claims, because it makes man and not God “ultimately the deciding factor” in salvation.⁸ This is why he and other Calvinists attack Arminian theology as “man-centered” rather than “God-centered.”

One has to wonder, however, who is the God at the center of this theology. Boettner admits that God could save everyone, because election to salvation is unconditional and regeneration and faith are solely gifts of God given only to the elect: “But for reasons which have been only partially revealed, He leaves many impenitent.” While non-Calvinists are willing to admit that high Calvinism is God-centered, they have good reason to wonder how exactly to distinguish between the God it centers itself on and Satan—except that Satan wants all people damned to hell and God wants only a certain number damned to hell. That may sound harsh, but it is the reason most Christians are not Calvinists. And it is no less harsh than Calvinists’ frequent accusation that Arminians (and other non-Calvinists) place man, not God, at the center of their theology because they want to boast and rob God of his rightful glory.

Ironically and confusingly, Boettner goes on to claim that monergism involves no violation of the sinner’s free agency. “This change [viz., regeneration] is not accomplished through any external compulsion but through a new principle of life which has been created within the soul and which seeks after the food which alone can satisfy it [viz., God’s word].” Then he compounds the confusion by saying that “the elect are so influenced by divine power that their coming is an act of voluntary choice.”¹¹ One can only wonder what “voluntary choice” means in this context; I assume Boettner is referring to the compatibilist freedom of Edwards and other Calvinists—freedom compatible with determinism.

Steele and Thomas weigh in on this doctrine that they call “the efficacious call of the Spirit”: “Simply stated, this doctrine asserts that the Holy Spirit never fails to bring to salvation those sinners whom He personally calls to Christ. He inevitably applies salvation to every sinner whom He intends to save, and it is His intention to save all the elect.” Like Calvin, Boettner, and most Calvinists, they distinguish between a “general, outer call” of the gospel, which is a universal invitation to all people to be saved, and a “special, inward call” that goes out only to the elect and effects their regeneration before they respond with repentance and faith. This special call is irresistible: “The grace which the Holy Spirit extends to the elect cannot be thwarted or refused, it never fails to bring them to true faith in Christ.” For biblical support Steele and Thomas turn to Romans 8:30: “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” The omission of 8:29 appears convenient to their purpose of showing God utterly and solely responsible for regeneration. That verse says: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” There election is based on God’s foreknowledge—something Calvinists reject as an error. Also, verse 30 says nothing at all about grace being irresistible. Moreover, Paul skips over regeneration to justification. This verse, in its context and not treated eisegetically (reading meanings into a text that are not there), does not support irresistible grace.

Calvinist Palmer agrees entirely with Calvin, Boettner, and Steele and Thomas about irresistible grace, and for the same reasons; but he emphasizes more the active response to grace that is necessary on the elect person’s part if he or she is to be saved. As we have already seen, like some Calvinists, Palmer revels in paradox. Here is another case:

Although it is true that none would be saved were it not for the irresistible grace of God, no one may ever fall into the rationalistic trap of saying that he has nothing to do. He may not reason that since all depends on the Holy Spirit, he does not need to believe; or that he must simply wait for the Spirit to move him, and there is nothing that he can do to be saved.

This warning sounds Calvinist and Arminian at the same time; Palmer apparently wants to have his cake and eat it too. Note especially the final words of his statement where he warns against believing there is nothing a person can do to be saved. Afterwards he writes: “If you do [believe], thank God for causing you to do so.” So, on the one hand, God “causes” the elect person to believe, and we are forbidden to suggest that is in any way an act of free will.¹⁶ On the other hand, we are forbidden to suggest there is nothing a person can do to be saved. These ideas are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

R. C. Sproul also champions irresistible grace: “God unilaterally and monergistically does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.” He prefers to call it “effectual grace” lest anyone misunderstand by thinking that in this belief God forces someone to be saved against his or her will. Rather, God graciously imparts the gift of faith so that the person wants to believe: “The faith by which we [the elect] are saved is a gift. When the apostle says [in Eph. 2:8–9] it is not of ourselves, he does not mean it is not our faith. Again, God does not do the believing for us. It is our own faith but it does not originate with us. It is given to us. The gift is not earned or deserved. It is a gift of sheer grace.” Also, “the whole point of irresistible grace is that rebirth quickens someone to spiritual life in such a way that Jesus is now seen in his irresistible sweetness.”¹⁹

For Sproul, then, God “monergistically and unilaterally” saves the elect person by giving him or her the gift of faith, which then is the person’s own faith *and* God regenerates the person so that they, for the first time, see Jesus “in his irresistible sweetness.” All this without violating the

person's will. Like Boettner, Sproul regards irresistible grace or effectual calling as an even more basic and fundamental issue of Protestant (and therefore evangelical) theology than justification by faith alone. After all, he argues, if a person contributes anything to salvation, including a bare permission to allow God to work, then justification is not solely by grace alone. The issue of the graciousness of salvation is more important because it is more basic than the issue of salvation by faith alone. "Here we reach the ultimate point of separation between semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism, between Arminianism and Calvinism, between Rome and the Reformation."

Notice how Sproul is putting Arminianism, by which he means any Protestant view other than high Calvinism, on the side of "Rome"—meaning Roman Catholicism—over against the Reformation. What he is saying here is that Arminianism (i.e., any view other than his) is not really Protestant and therefore not really evangelical either. I live in Texas and around here we might say, "Them's fightin' words!" Seriously, one has to wonder why Sproul would be so blatantly offensive to fellow Protestant Christians, including everyone in the Wesleyan tradition, all Pentecostals, many if not most Baptists, and many other evangelical Christians who, for very good reasons, do not accept his point of view.

Sproul continues:

In the Reformation view, the work of regeneration is performed by God and by him alone. The sinner is completely passive in receiving this action. Regeneration is an example of operative grace. Any cooperation we display toward God occurs only *after* the work of regeneration has been completed.

The only support Sproul gives for his claim that this is "the Reformation view" is Luther's vicious response to Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) entitled *On the Bondage of the Will*. There, admittedly, Luther expressed this view. Does that make it "the Reformation view"? Hardly. Luther's right-hand man, Philip Melancthon (1497–1560), was more of a synergist, agreeing with Erasmus that salvation involves some cooperation with God's grace by the human person even though he adamantly insisted there is no merit in this cooperation. Reformation Anabaptists such as Balthasar Hubmaier (1480–1528) and Menno Simons (1496–1561) emphasized free will over against monergistic grace. For Sproul to pit his monergistic view of salvation as the only Protestant one over against all others as Roman Catholic is misleading at best and disingenuous at worst.

John Piper can be counted on to agree with Calvin, Boettner, Steele and Thomas, Palmer, and Sproul. Diving into paradox with them, he writes: "God will see to it that his elect hear the invitation and respond the way they should.... But he does not do this in a way that lessens our accountability to hear and believe." He also argues that irresistible grace, together with unconditional election, forms the only reasonable motive for intercessory prayer and spiritual warfare. That is because, he argues, there is no point in praying for the salvation of the lost or the defeat of Satan, who he admits is "the god of this world," unless God intervenes powerfully to make these things happen. If people have free will, Piper argues, there is no point in praying for their salvation or that they not support Satan in his "devastation" of the world. "Either you give up praying for God to convert sinners or you give up ultimate human self-determination."²⁴

Of course, anyone can see the profound irony in such claims. Elsewhere Piper has stated unequivocally that God ordains, governs, and even causes everything that happens. Whatever is the case, God has foreordained it. If he responds to a prayer—for example, for the salvation of a lost loved one—it is because he has foreordained it. The prayer does not actually change anything; it is simply a foreordained means to a foreordained end. Piper is a divine determinist, whether he likes that label or not. So what role does prayer or spiritual warfare really play in his theology?

Certainly not that they can actually bring it about that God acts in any other way than he already planned to act and necessarily will act.

MORE INJURY TO GOD'S REPUTATION

In the next section of this chapter, “Alternatives to Irresistible Grace/Monergism,” I will show that many of the accusations by Calvinists such as Sproul against non-Calvinist and especially Arminian views miss their targets entirely. In this section, I want once again to expose the fallacies of the Calvinist arguments for monergism and demonstrate that monergism actually injures God's reputation by necessarily undermining God's goodness and love.

I begin with refutations of typical Calvinist interpretations of Scriptures that supposedly require monergism. The most important such verses are John 6:44 and 65, where Jesus says that no one comes to him unless the Father “draws” him. Sproul and other Calvinists argue that the Greek verb here translated “draws” always and only means “compels.” In a brilliant but unpublished 2003 paper entitled “The ‘Drawings’ of God,” pastor-theologian Steve Witzki conclusively proves that Sproul is wrong. He cites numerous Greek lexicons saying that the Greek word does not always mean “compels” but often means “draw, attract.”

Sproul cites a reference work many consider definitive in matters of interpreting the Greek New Testament—Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*—to support his definition of the term throughout the New Testament, including John 6:44 and cognate passages. However, Witzki quotes Kittel as allowing a broader range of possible meanings. With reference to John 6:44 and 12:32 the author of Kittel's article (Albrecht Oepke) writes:

There is no thought here of force or magic. The term figuratively expresses the supernatural power of the love of God or Christ which goes out to all ... but without which no one can come.... The apparent contradiction shows that both the election and the universality of grace must be taken seriously; the compulsion is not automatic.

The most devastating argument against Sproul's case that the term always means “compels” is John 12:32. There Jesus says that if he is lifted up from the earth, he will “draw all people” to himself. The Greek verb translated “draw” there is the same as in John 6:44 and 65. If Sproul is right and the verb must always mean “compel,” then this verse teaches universalism. In fact, however, the word *can mean* simply draw or attract rather than compel or drag. The Arminian interpretation of these verses in John 6 and 12 is reasonable: that nobody can come to Jesus Christ unless he or she is drawn by God's prevenient grace that calls and enables but does not compel.

Are there Scriptures that contradict irresistible grace? Steve Lemke marshals many passages that disprove it. For example, Matthew 23 and Luke 13 describe Jesus' lament over Jerusalem:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:37–39)

Lemke rightly notes that if Calvinism is correct, “Jesus' lament would have been over God's hardness of heart.” There are so many passages like this throughout the Bible, where God or Jesus or a prophet decries the people's hardness of heart sorrowfully as if it could be otherwise. If irresistible grace were true, of course, Jesus could have simply drawn the people of Jerusalem

effectually to himself. Why didn't he if he was so sorrowful about their rejection? And why would he be sorrowful about their rejection if it, like everything else, was foreordained by God?

The usual Calvinist response to these passages is that God is sorrowful over people's hardness of heart and rejection of him. That he doesn't do anything about it can only be because he chooses not to, and that he chooses not to can only be because his strongest motive (Edwards' definition of free will) is not to. In brief, he doesn't want to but wishes he could. The only hint Calvinists give us as to why God doesn't do what he wishes is "for his glory." What kind of God is glorified by people rejecting him when he chooses not to overcome that rejection when he could?

Moreover, why would God be sad or sorrowful about what glorifies him? What possible analogy could there be to this in human experience? Suppose a father has a love potion that would cause all of his children to love him and never rebel against him. He gives it to some of his children but not others and then weeps because some of his children reject him and don't love him. Who would take him seriously? Or, if they took him seriously, who wouldn't think him insincere or a bit mad? Lemke concludes from the story of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem:

If Jesus believed in irresistible grace, with both the outward and inward calls, His apparent lament over Jerusalem would have been just a disingenuous act, a cynical show because He knew that God had not and would not give these lost persons the necessary conditions for their salvation.

Another interesting biblical passage mentioned by Lemke is Matthew 19:24, where Jesus says to his disciples: "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." What sense does this verse make in light of irresistible grace? Is Jesus saying it is harder *for God* to save a rich man than a poor one? How could that be? If everyone, without exception, only gets into the kingdom of God by God's work alone without any required cooperation on his or her part, then Jesus' saying makes no sense at all. Again, Lemke's comment is spot on:

Of course, if Jesus were a Calvinist, He never would have suggested that it was harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their wills would be changed immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call. It would be no harder for a rich person to be saved by God's monergistic and irresistible calling than it would be for any other sinner. But the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to His calling.

Lemke also points to the numerous all-inclusive invitations for people to come to God and to Christ in Scripture, especially to the already discussed "all" passages that express God's desire for everyone to be saved and none to perish (Matt. 18:14; 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2). As I have already shown, these cannot be interpreted as referring only to some people.

Most devastatingly of all, Lemke rightly points out that "the Calvinists essentially blame God for those who do not come [to salvation]." After all, while they would say that those who reject the gospel merely receive their just deserts when they are condemned, "there is really more to it than that. Calvinists say that God elected some to glory for His own reasons from before the world began, and He gave them irresistible grace through His Spirit so they inevitably would be saved." This is the main point against this doctrine of Calvinism (as it is the main point against all of them!). It portrays God as a respecter of persons because he chooses some to save irresistibly and others not to receive that crucial gift, with the result that they are damned forever. That they deserve condemnation is not the issue. The issue is that *everyone* deserves it, but God is selective about saving some irresistibly and leaving others to die an eternal separation from him in hell. Calvinists offer no reason for this other than "God's good pleasure" and/or "God's glory."

Yet, all Calvinists claim that God is good and loving. What goodness and love is this? In fact, to put it bluntly, Calvinism necessarily implies, whether any Calvinist would say so or not, that God requires a better quality of love from us than he himself exercises! In Luke 6:35 and parallel passages Jesus commands us to love our enemies; there is no hint of any exception. But according to Calvinism, God doesn't do that. Of course, some Calvinists insist that God *does* love even his reprobate enemies. But there is no analogy to *that* kind of love in human experience. It would be a love in which a person could rescue some from terrible deaths but chooses not to in order to show how great he is. Is there any analogy to this "goodness" and "love" in human experience? If not, then I suggest, with Paul Helm, it is meaningless.

Walls and Dongell offer an analogy to test whether any human being would be considered loving or good if he or she acted as Calvinism says God acts in giving irresistible grace only to some of his fallen human creatures. (Remember, he created all in his own image and likeness.) In their illustration, a doctor discovers a cure for a deadly disease killing a group of camp children and gives it to the camp's director. The director administers it to some sick children so that they are cured and withholds it from others so that they die terribly. He has no shortage of the cure; nothing at all hinders him from curing all the children. Even though some of the children resisted the cure, the director had the ability to persuade all of them to take it; he only persuaded some. When the parents confront the director, he passionately contends that he loved all the children—even the ones who died. He cared for them while they were sick and made them as comfortable as possible. Walls and Dongell rightly conclude:

The director's claim to love all the children rings hollow at best, deceptive at worst. If love will not employ all available means to rescue someone from ultimate loss, it is hard to hear it as love at all. In our judgment, it becomes meaningless to claim that God wishes to save all while also insisting that God refrains from making the salvation of all possible. What are we to make of a God whose walk does not match his talk?

The plain fact of the matter is that the doctrine of irresistible grace, *without universal salvation which most Calvinists reject*, leads to the "good and necessary consequence" that God is not good and not loving. Now, of course, no Calvinist would admit that! But their teaching should lead a thinking person to that conclusion. And what they say is inconsistent and therefore highly problematic, if not downright incoherent. When I hear or read a high Calvinist saying that God loves everyone and is a good God, I really have no idea what that means.

Another problem with irresistible grace is that personal relationships require mutuality. Dutch philosopher-theologian Vincent Brümmer has demonstrated this conclusively in his *Speaking of a Personal God*, where he presents a step-by-step logical argument that mutuality, in the sense of free response that is resistible, is part of any personal relationship. Without freedom of will, which includes ability to resist, a person's acts are not really "acts" at all but "events." By definition, realization of a personal relationship requires free acts of both parties toward the other:

For the realization of a *personal relationship* the initiative of *both* partners in the relationship is necessary. Given that both partners in such a relationship are persons, both have by definition the freedom of will, by which it must be *factually possible* for both of them to say "no" to the other and so to prevent the relationship from coming into existence. It is only by means of the "yes" of one partner that the other receives the freedom of ability to realize the relationship. In this respect personal relationships are symmetrical and differ from purely causal relationships which are asymmetrical, because only one partner (the cause) can be the initiator. The other partner in a purely causal relationship is an object of causal manipulation and therefore lacks the freedom of will to be able to say "no" with respect to what happens to him or her.

Brümmer argues further that in our relationship with God, God can be the initiator and must be because of our lack of “freedom of ability” due to our sinfulness. However, “a personal relationship with God assumes that the human partner also remains a person in the relationship and that his or her free choice is equally a necessary condition for the relationship to be brought about.” Finally, Brümmer negates the idea of irresistible grace by saying that even

God cannot bring about our choice without it ceasing to be ours. By definition, a *personal* relationship with God cannot be factually unavoidable for the human partner. For this reason the doctrine of factual irresistibility excludes a personal relationship between God and human persons.

It doesn't take a philosopher to establish these facts; they are common sense. But it helps for a philosopher to support them. And it won't do for Calvinists to complain about critics appealing to philosophy; they are good at using philosophy when it helps their arguments. Common sense alone dictates that a truly personal relationship always involves free will; insofar as one party controls the other such that the other has no real choice whether to be in the relationship or not, it is not a real relationship. It makes no difference that both parties *want* to be in the relationship. Imagine a friendship where one person has manipulated the other one into being his friend. Perhaps he has plied him with money or even given him a drug that makes him friendly. Any objective observer of such a “friendship” would say it is really not a legitimate friendship—at least not a healthy one. Mutual, informed consent is a prerequisite to any good relationship. But Brümmer doesn't leave the matter there. He aims his critique straight at high Calvinism's notion of salvation itself. Referring to high Calvinism with the metonymy of “Dordt” (referring to the 1618/1619 Synod of Dort) he says:

It strikes me that the difficulties here have their source in the fact that the Dordt theologians did not view human salvation in terms of a personal *relationship* with God but in terms of a reborn *condition* in us. The only question then concerns the *cause* of this condition: is it God or us, grace or human will?

But when salvation is regarded not as a mere causal condition but also, and even more, as a personal relationship, as most evangelicals do regard it, the idea that it can be founded on *both* grace *and* human will (with grace having priority) is compelling.

I will round out this description and critique of Calvinism's doctrine of irresistible grace, monergism, with an appropriate quote from Vernon Grounds, an evangelical theologian who agrees completely with Brümmer: “God deals personally with personal beings.... Grace that left no option whatever would not be grace, it would be something else. We should have to say, ‘By force were ye saved, and not of yourselves.’ ”

ALTERNATIVES TO IRRESISTIBLE GRACE/MONERGISM

Now I will tackle some of the objections to “evangelical synergism” raised by Calvinists. By “evangelical synergism” I mean roughly Arminian theology, although many who hold this view of salvation do *not* wish to be called Arminians. I respect that while also respectfully asking them to consider whether the label may be more appropriate than they think.

Over the centuries Calvinist theologians, by sheer repetition and misrepresentation, have brought about a situation where the term “Arminian” is widely thought of as designating a heresy. I have demonstrated conclusively in my *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* that it is *not* what they say. For example, contrary to Sproul and other misinformed or disingenuous Calvinist critics,

it is not semi-Pelagian. Semi-Pelagianism is the heresy that says the initiative in salvation is ours, the human person's, and not God's. Arminianism has always insisted that the initiative in salvation is God's; it is called "prevenient grace," and it is enabling but resistible. It would come as a shock to many Calvinists to know how much of salvation and the whole Christian life both Arminius and Wesley attributed to grace—*all of it*.

But Arminian theology assumes, because the Bible everywhere assumes, that God limits himself out of love so that his initiating, enabling grace is resistible. It is powerful and persuasive but not compelling in the determinative sense. It leaves the sinner a person, not an object. Baptist theologian Robert E. Picirilli says:

What Arminius meant by "prevenient grace" was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration. He was quick to observe that this "assistance of the Holy Spirit" is of such sufficiency "as to keep at the greatest possible distance from Pelagianism."

Another Baptist theologian, Stanley J. Grenz, was an Arminian without labeling himself such. In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, he describes prevenient grace in three ways: as illuminating, as convicting, and as calling and enabling. He makes clear it is always resistible because it comes to persons and not machines through the hearing of God's Word. The point here is simply this: Arminian theology (and many non-Calvinist theologies that are not so labeled)⁴⁶ places the initiative in salvation and all the work of salvation squarely on the divine side of the equation. God's grace is the effectual cause of salvation, but the human person's faith as response to prevenient grace is the instrumental cause of salvation. What is that faith? Simply trusting God; it is not a "good work" or anything meritorious of which the saved sinner could boast. But what about the Calvinist attacks on Arminian theology as a form of self-salvation and works righteousness akin to (they would say) Roman Catholic theology? Knowledgeable Calvinists do not say that Arminians believe they have to work for their salvation; they say that Arminians and other non-Calvinists make the human decision of faith the "decisive factor" in salvation and therefore bring it back, however unintentionally, to salvation by good works.

To Arminians, however, this accusation is ridiculous. Imagine a student who is starving and about to be evicted from his room due to lack of money. A kindly professor *gives* him a check for \$1,000—enough to pay his rent and stock his kitchen with food. Imagine further that the rescued student takes the check to his bank, endorses it, and deposits it in his account (which brings his balance up to \$1,000). Imagine also that the student then goes around campus boasting that he *earned* \$1,000. What would everyone's response be who knew the truth of the situation? They would accuse the student of being an ungrateful wretch. But suppose the student said, "But my endorsing the check and depositing it was the decisive factor in my having the money, so I did a good work that earned at least part of the money, didn't I?" He would be ridiculed and possibly even ostracized for such nonsense.

In what situation in human experience is merely *accepting* a gift "the decisive factor" in having it? It is *a* factor, yes—but hardly the decisive one. Merely accepting a gift does not give one the right to boast. Oh, but the Calvinist will say, the student in the above illustration *could* boast *if* the professor offered a similar gift of money to *other* starving students and they rejected it. He could boast that in some way he is better than they are. I doubt it. He might try, but who would believe him? People would say to him: "Stop trying to take some credit for being rescued! That others didn't accept the money and were evicted and are begging for food on the street says nothing at all

about you. Give all the credit where it belongs—to the kindly professor.” Who can really argue with that?

Why do Arminians and other non-Calvinists reject irresistible grace? Because they love free will and don't want to give all the glory to God, as some Calvinists suggest? Not at all. That's a calumny unworthy of anyone who has bothered to study the matter. Every Arminian from Arminius to the present has always made clear the real motive behind rejecting the doctrine of irresistible grace: preserving the good and loving character of God. Of course, *if* a person could be a universalist, there would be no necessary obstacle to irresistible grace except possibly the one raised above about the nature of personal relationships. However, *if* the only possible way in which people could be saved was for God to overwhelm them and compel them to accept his mercy, I would have no fundamental objection to believing in it *so long as God did it for everyone*. Fortunately, there is another way: prevenient grace. And since I cannot believe in universal salvation, that is the only alternative to monergism that preserves God's character of perfect love, revealed in Jesus Christ.

Another common Calvinist objection to evangelical synergism/Arminianism is that it does not take human depravity seriously enough. After all, Calvinists aver, fallen human persons are literally dead in trespasses and sins. Their only hope is for God to resuscitate them. Indeed, but God's resuscitation does not include leaving them no option whether to accept him or not. Actually, Arminians and other synergists *do* believe that prevenient grace restores life to the person dead in trespasses and sins. However, it does not compel them to accept God's mercy unto salvation, which requires free repentance and faith (conversion).

So, in Arminian theology, a partial regeneration does precede conversion, but it is not a complete regeneration. It is an awakening and enabling, but not an irresistible force. This is how evangelical synergists interpret the “drawings” of John's gospel, including Jesus' words about drawing all people to himself if he be lifted up. In fact, *only* this interpretation of these drawings keeps them together meaning the same thing—God's powerful attracting and persuading power that actually imparts free will to be saved or not. Being saved is not a matter of doing a work; it is only a matter of *not resisting*. When a person decides to allow God's grace to save, he or she repents and trusts only and completely in Christ. That is a passive act; it could be compared to a drowning person who decides to relax and let his rescuer save him from drowning.

This is how Arminians/evangelical synergists understand Philippians 2:12–13 quoted earlier. The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells his Christian readers to remember to “work out” their salvation “with fear and trembling.” Critics think Arminians and evangelical synergists generally stop there and ignore the next verse. But they don't. They realize and teach that *if* people are working out their salvation, from beginning to end, it is only because “God is at work” in them. That's prevenient, assisting grace: prevenient leading up to conversion and assisting throughout the entire Christian life. But it would be pointless for Paul to urge his readers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling if God were doing everything and they did not even have to cooperate by allowing God's grace to work in them.

I ask the reader's indulgence as I close this chapter by providing two rather homely illustrations of evangelical synergism that I believe do more justice to the biblical text and Christian experience *and the character of God* than Calvinist images and analogies. First, imagine a deep pit with steep, slippery sides. Several people are lying broken and wounded, utterly helpless, at the bottom of the pit.

- *Semi-Pelagianism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down to the bottom of the pit and waits for a person to start pulling on it. Once he does, God responds by yelling,

“Grab it tight and wrap it around yourself. Together we’ll get you out.” The problem is, the person is too hurt to do that, the rope is too weak, and God is too good to wait for the person to initiate the process.

- *Monergism* says God comes along, throws a rope down into the pit, and climbs down it, wrapping it around *some* of the people and then goes back out of the pit and pulls them to safety without any cooperation. The problem is that the God of Jesus Christ is too good and loving to rescue only some of the helpless people.
- *Evangelical synergism* says that God comes along and throws a rope down and yells, “Grab onto it and pull and together we’ll get you out!” Nobody moves. They are too wounded. In fact, for all practical purposes they are “dead” because they are utterly helpless. So God pours water into the pit and yells, “Relax and let the water lift you out!” In other words, “Float!” All a person in the pit has to do to be rescued is let the water lift him or her out of the pit. It takes a decision, but not an effort. The water, of course, is prevenient grace.

Second, here is an illustration of grace and “working out your salvation” throughout the Christian life. During the hot summers I have to water my plants often. So I go to the outdoor faucet where the hose is attached, turn it on all the way, and then walk to the end of the hose and drag it around the side of the house to water a bush. Invariably when I get to the bush and press the handle of the attachment at the end of the hose, nothing comes out. I go back to the faucet and discover everything’s fine there. The water pressure is strong; the water is flowing into the hose full force. Ah, I realize, there’s a kink in the hose. So I go and find the kink that is keeping the water inside the hose from flowing and work it out.

In this illustration, the water represents God’s assisting grace; it is always “full force” in a Christian’s life. There are no “grace boosters.” Grace is full and free from conversion and regeneration on into the life of sanctification. But if I am not experiencing the flow of God’s grace in confidence and power for service, it isn’t due to any lack of grace; it is due to kinks in the hose of my life. What are the kinks? Attitudes, besetting sins, lack of prayer. All I have to do is decide to remove those kinks and the grace that is already there is allowed to flow.

This is an imperfect illustration of Philippians 2:12–13 from an evangelical synergist perspective. The one alteration needed to make the illustration really “work” is that even my ability to remove those “kinks” is a gift of God. But I do have to do something—not a good, meritorious work of which I can boast but merely admitting my helplessness and utter dependence on God’s grace and asking God to give me the ability and desire to remove the kinks.

The best exposition of this evangelical synergistic/Arminian soteriology in modern language is *The Transforming Power of Grace* by Thomas Oden. By all accounts an orthodox, biblically serious, and evangelical theologian, Oden winsomely and biblically articulates the theology briefly outlined above that I call evangelical synergism. Of grace Oden says: “God prepares the will and co-works with the prepared will. Insofar as grace precedes and prepares free will it is called prevenient. Insofar as grace accompanies and enables human willing to work with divine willing, it is called cooperating grace.”⁴⁹ “Only when sinners are assisted by prevenient grace can they begin to yield their hearts to cooperation with subsequent forms of grace.” “The need for grace to prevene is great, for it was precisely when ‘you were dead in your transgressions and sins’ (Eph. 2:1) that ‘by grace you have been saved’ (Eph. 2:8).”¹¹

¹¹ Olson, R. E. (2011). [Against Calvinism](#) (pp. 155–174). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

YES TO ATONEMENT; NO TO LIMITED ATONEMENT/PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

During one of my class sessions with Calvinist speakers, a leader of the local Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) asked my students, “How many of you believe Christ died for everyone?” I knew he meant “for everyone in the same way—to suffer the punishment for their sins.” Every student’s hand shot up. “Then you have to believe everyone is saved; you have to be a universalist. How many of you are universalists?” All hands went down except one or two. “You see,” the speaker said, “If Christ already suffered everyone’s punishment for sins, including the sin of unbelief, then nobody can go to hell because it would be unjust for God to punish the same sin twice.”

The speaker was bringing out one of high Calvinism’s favorite “hooks” to get young people to consider including in their soteriology the “L” of TULIP—limited atonement. And if anyone does accept “L,” Calvinists argue, they have to accept the rest of the system. After all, if all people are not going to be saved, then Christ died only for some—those he came to save. Who would they be? The unconditionally elected by God. Why would they be unconditionally elected by God? Because they are totally depraved and have no other hope than God’s election of them and Christ’s death for them. And how will God bring those for whom Christ died to benefit from his death on their behalf? By irresistibly drawing them to himself. How could anyone elected and drawn by God, whose sins are already paid for, ever be lost? It’s impossible.

Clever. But does it work? Is limited atonement, which most Calvinists prefer to call “particular redemption,” biblical? Is it consistent with the love of God shown in Jesus Christ and expressed in the New Testament many times in many ways (e.g., John 3:16)? Did Calvin believe in it? Did anyone in Christian history believe in it before Calvin’s scholastic followers? Is it perhaps more a deduction from the T, the U, the I, and the P than a truth of revelation? Do high Calvinists actually embrace it because it is scriptural, or do they embrace it because logic requires it and they think Scripture allows it? Does rejection of limited atonement require universalism as a “good and necessary consequence,” as the speaker claimed? These and other questions will be considered here in some detail.

My conclusion will be that limited atonement is another one of high Calvinism’s Achilles’ heels. It cannot be supported by Scripture or the Great Tradition of Christian belief (outside of scholastic Calvinism after Calvin). It contradicts the love of God, making God not only partial but hateful (toward the nonelect). Its rejection does not logically require universalism, and those who hold it do believe it because (they think) logic requires it and Scripture allows it, not because any clear portion of Scripture teaches it.

Another conclusion here will be that the T, U, I, and P of TULIP *do* require the L and that Calvinists who claim to be “four pointers” and reject the L are being inconsistent. Ironically, there I stand in agreement with all high Calvinists of the TULIP variety! I will also argue that belief in limited atonement, particular redemption, makes it impossible reasonably to make a well-meant offer of the gospel of salvation to everyone indiscriminately. Ironically, there too I stand in agreement with hyper-Calvinists!

Finally, the Calvinist speaker to my class aimed his last typical Calvinist argument at me and those students who agree that the atonement cannot be limited. “You may not know it, but you also limit the atonement. In fact, you limit it more than Calvinists do. It is actually you Arminians [and he meant to include all who say Christ died for everyone] who believe in limited atonement.”

That got the students' attention! I had heard it before and already knew where he was going with this. "You limit the atonement by robbing it of power to actually save anyone; for you, Christ's death on the cross only provided an opportunity for people to save themselves. We Calvinists believe the atonement actually secured salvation for the elect."

Here, as then, I will object to this attempt to turn the tables. I do not agree that non-Calvinists limit the atonement. This frequently heard complaint simply doesn't hold water because even Calvin did not believe the atonement saved anyone until certain conditions are met—namely, repentance and faith. Even if these are gifts of God to the elect, that means the atonement no more "saved" people than Arminians (and other non-Calvinists) believe.

CALVINISM'S DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

So far as I have been able to ascertain, all true Calvinists (as opposed to some revisionist Reformed theologians) embrace the so-called "penal substitution theory" of the atonement. Of course, they do not think it is "just a theory." With many non-Calvinists (such as Wesley) they regard it as the teaching of the Bible about Christ's saving death on the cross. According to this doctrine, Jesus' death was primarily a substitutionary sacrifice offered to God by Jesus (i.e., to the Father by the Son) as the "propitiation" for sins. "Propitiation" means appeasement. In this view, the cross event is seen as Christ's appeasement of God's wrath. He suffered the punishment for the sins of those whom God intended to save from their deserved condemnation to hell. Calvin puts it in a nutshell:

This is our acquittal: the guilt that held us liable for punishment has been transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isaiah 53:12). We must, above all, remember this substitution, lest we tremble and remain anxious throughout life—as if God's righteous vengeance, which the Son of God has taken upon himself, still hung over us.

Calvin, and most Calvinists, believed that Christ's death accomplished more (e.g., the "transmutation" or transformation of our sinful nature and fulfillment of God's law in our place),³ but the crucial achievement of Christ on the cross was the suffering of our punishment.

Other theories of the atonement have arisen in Christian history, and some of them find echoes in Calvin's theology. For example, the so-called "Christus Victor" view of Christ's saving death is popular especially since the publication of Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén's classic book on the atonement, *Christus Victor*. Calvin nods toward this image of the atoning death of Christ, that it conquered Satan and liberated sinners from bondage,⁵ but his main focus is on Christ's satisfaction of God's justice by suffering the punishment deserved by sinners so that God can righteously forgive them. Contrary to many critics of this penal substitution theory, it does not rest on a view of God as bloodthirsty or as a child abuser! Calvin rightly underscores love as God's motive in sending his Son to die for sinners.

Almost without exception high Calvinists since Calvin have held firmly to this view of the atonement and its achievement on behalf of God and sinners. They do not reject other dimensions of the atonement, but this one is central and crucial to the whole Calvinist soteriology. Many non-Calvinists agree. But the issue at stake here is whether Christ died in this way *for all people* or only for some—the elect. No Calvinist denies the *sufficiency* of Christ's death in terms of *value* to save the whole human race. What some have come to deny is that Christ actually suffered the deserved punishment for all people—something clearly taught by the Greek church fathers and most medieval theologians and even Luther. Classical, high Calvinism has come to believe and

teach that God only *intended* the cross to be the propitiation for some people and not for others; Christ did not suffer for everyone (at least not in the same way, Piper would like to add) but only for those whom God has chosen to save.

This is the doctrine of “limited atonement,” or what some Calvinists prefer to call “definite” or “particular” or “efficient” atonement. Boettner states the doctrine well: “While the value of the atonement was *sufficient* to save all mankind, it was *efficient* to save only the elect.” Lest anyone misunderstand and think this means God intended it for everyone, but it only effectuates the salvation of those who receive it with faith (the view of most non-Calvinist evangelicals), Boettner says the nonelect were excluded from its work by God: “It was not, then, a general and indiscriminate love of which all men are equally the objects [that sent Jesus to the cross], but a peculiar, mysterious, infinite love for the elect, which caused God to send His Son into the world to suffer and die,” and he died only for them.⁸ Like many Calvinists, Boettner claims that “certain benefits” of the cross extend to all people in general, but these are merely “temporal blessings” and not anything salvific.

Non-Calvinists look at statements such as these and tremble. This would be, indeed, a “peculiar love” that excludes some of the very creatures God made in his own image and likeness from any hope of salvation. Moreover, these “temporal blessings,” alleged to flow to the nonelect from the cross, are hardly worth mentioning. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, they amount to a little bit of heaven to go to hell in!

Steele and Thomas, authors of *The Five Points of Calvinism*, define and describe limited atonement, which they prefer to call particular redemption, this way:

Historical or mainline Calvinism has consistently maintained that Christ’s redeeming work was definite in *design* and *accomplishment*—that it was intended to render complete satisfaction for certain specified sinners and that it actually secured salvation for these individuals and for no one else. The salvation which Christ earned for His people includes everything involved in bringing them into a right relationship with God, including the gifts of faith and repentance.

Like Boettner, these theologians aver that Christ’s atonement was not limited in *value* but only in *design*. And they claim that Arminians (and other non-Calvinists) also limit the atonement in the manner mentioned above.

Steele and Thomas claim support for limited atonement in biblical passages such as John 10:11, 14–18 and Romans 5:12, 17–19. However, even a cursory glance at these passages reveals they *do not* limit the atonement but only say it is for and applied to God’s people. They do not deny that it is for others as well.

What about the “all” and “world” passages such as 1 John 2:2: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”? Steele and Thomas explain these thus:

One reason for the use of these expressions was to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jews alone.... These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without *distinction* (i.e., He died for Jews and Gentiles alike) but they are not intended to indicate that Christ died for all men without *exception* (i.e., He did not die for the purpose of saving each and every last sinner).

One crucial question that arises in response to these claims is the distinction between the *value* of Christ’s atoning death and its *design* and *purpose*. Apparently, Boettner and Steele and Thomas (and other Calvinists I will quote) believe that Christ’s death on the cross was a *sufficient* sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. What, then, do they mean by saying that Christ did not die for all

people? If it was a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, including everyone, and had value enough for everyone, how is it *not* a contradiction to then say that Christ did not die for everyone?

Apparently, what at least *some* Calvinists mean is that Christ's death was great enough in scope and value for God to forgive everyone because of it, but God did not *intend* it for anyone but the elect. But why would God cause Jesus to suffer a punishment sufficient in scope for sins God intended not to forgive? And if his death was a sufficient punishment for all, then doesn't that imply he bore everyone's punishment? And if that's so, then even if God intended it only for the elect, the charge that universal atonement would require that everyone be saved (because sins cannot be punished twice) comes back to haunt Calvinists themselves. There is something terribly confused at the heart of the typical Calvinist claims about this doctrine.

This confusion becomes especially intense when Calvinist pastor-theologian Edwin Palmer ridicules the universal atonement view: "To them [he means specifically Arminians but this could apply to other non-Calvinists] the atonement is like a universal grab-bag: there is a package for everyone, but only some will grab a package.... some of His [Christ's] blood was wasted: it was spilled." But wouldn't this be true of *any* doctrine of the atonement that says it was a "sufficient sacrifice" for the whole world and that says its *value* is infinite? It would seem that advocates of limited atonement should say that Christ's death was *not sufficient* for the whole world and *did not* have infinite value *if* they are going to accuse believers in universal atonement of believing some of Christ's blood was wasted (because not everyone benefits from it). Doesn't their claim about its sufficiency and value amount to the same thing *even if* they go on to say God designed and intended it only for the elect? It seems so.

Palmer takes the same approach as Steele and Thomas with regard to the universal passages, including John 3:16–17: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." According to Palmer, "In this passage 'world' does not mean every single person ... but ... people from every tribe and nation." About the passages that say Christ died for "all" he says, "All is not all."¹⁵

Palmer calls the fact that Christ died only for the elect and yet God "freely and sincerely offers salvation to everyone" a "fundamental mystery." As I will show, however, critics of the Calvinist view argue this is not a mystery but a contradiction—a distinction R. C. Sproul delineates (and he rejects contradictions in theology). How can a Calvinist preacher of the gospel, let alone God, say to any congregation or other assembly, "God loves you and Jesus died for you so that you may be saved if you repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," without adding the caveat, "if you are one of God's elect"? He or she can't do it with a clear conscience.

Sproul, a Calvinist particularly strong on limited atonement, calls the doctrine "Christ's purposeful atonement." This is, of course, a bit disingenuous insofar as it is intended to express what is distinct in the Calvinist view, because, of course, all Christians believe Christ's atonement was "purposeful." Right up front, at the beginning of his exposition of this doctrine, Sproul misrepresents and even caricatures non-Calvinist views. In order to support his belief in limited atonement, Sproul quotes Calvinist evangelical theologian J. I. Packer, who wrote: "The difference between them [Calvinist and Arminian views of the atonement] is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself."¹⁸

This is perhaps the most vicious calumny against non-Calvinists. No Arminian or other informed evangelical Christian believes in self salvation. Sproul explains Packer's accusation by

saying that for the Calvinist, Christ is a “real Savior,” whereas for the Arminian, Christ is only a “potential Savior.” I have demonstrated the falseness of this interpretation of Arminian theology in my *Arminian Theology*. I will explain below why it is wrong.

Sproul continues by throwing another tired accusation against Arminian theology *and any theology of universal atonement* (e.g., Lutheran). “If Christ really, objectively satisfied the demands of God’s justice for everyone, then everyone will be saved.” Here Sproul is relying heavily on the theology of Puritan theologian John Owen (1616–1683), who was one of the early defenders of the theological novelty of limited atonement. According to Owen and Sproul, universal atonement, the belief that Christ bore the punishment for every person, necessarily leads to the universalism of salvation. After all, Owen argued, and Sproul echoes him, how can the same sin, including unbelief, be punished twice by a just God?

One has to wonder whether Sproul has never heard the obvious answer to this or if he is simply choosing to ignore it (see my answer later in this chapter). Suffice it for now to say simply that this argument is so easily turned aside that it makes one wonder why anyone takes it seriously. Then there is the problem I mentioned earlier: If Christ’s death was a *sufficient satisfaction* for the whole world’s sins, how is that different from Christ actually suffering the punishment for everyone? There really is no difference; the former *includes* the latter!

Sproul takes on the classical text of universal atonement (2 Peter 3:9) but ignores the equally important universal passages, 1 Timothy 2:5–6 and 1 John 2:2. According to him and many others who adhere to limited atonement, 2 Peter 3:9 should be interpreted as referring to “will of disposition,” which is different from his “decretive will.” In other words, this verse does not express what God *decrees* to be the case but what God *wishes* could be the case. Whereas that might be a possible interpretation of 2 Peter 3:9 (though I doubt it), one cannot interpret 1 Timothy 2:5–6 in this manner, nor many other universal passages where Christ is said to give his life for “all” or “the world” or “everyone.” Sproul also suggests that in 2 Peter 3:9, “any” refers to God’s elect. Again, as forced as this interpretation is, it might conceivably be possible. However, it is not possible as an interpretation for the other “all” texts, including 1 Timothy 2:5–6.

Evangelical statesman Vernon Grounds (1914–2010), longtime president of Denver Seminary and author of many books of theology, mentions the following universal passages about Christ’s atonement: John 1:29; Roman 5:17–21; 11:32; 1 Timothy 2:6; Hebrews 2:9; and 1 John 2:2 (in addition, of course, to 2 Peter 3:9). Then he says of the view espoused by Sproul and other five-point Calvinists: “It takes an exegetical ingenuity which is something other than a learned virtuosity to evacuate these texts of their obvious meaning: it takes an exegetical ingenuity verging on sophistry to deny their explicit universality.” This observation is perhaps why Calvinists such as John Piper have so emphasized the idea that Christ died for all but not in the same way. I doubt that would satisfy Grounds or any other critic of limited atonement. It only raises more questions about God’s love, sincerity, and goodness as well as about the value of “temporal blessings” provided by the atonement for the nonelect when they would be better off never born.

John Piper strongly defends limited atonement while at the same time arguing that there is a certain universality in it as well. This is his way, so it seems, of resolving the dilemma posed by the “all” passages in the face of belief in particular redemption and of solving the problem of how the believer in it can preach that Christ died for everyone in his or her audience. Piper’s doctrine of the purpose of the atonement is interesting because it goes beyond the usual penal substitution theory into something like the governmental theory. The governmental theory is usually thought to be the typical Arminian doctrine of the atonement, although neither Arminius nor Wesley taught it.

According to the governmental view, Christ did not suffer the exact punishment deserved by every human being but an equivalent punishment to that. This was formulated by early Arminian thinker Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) to resolve the problem of how the atonement could be universal and yet not everyone be saved. (Like many Arminians, I think there’s an easier answer to that problem than developing a new theory of how Christ’s death satisfied the wrath of God.) According to Grotius and others who hold this view, the main purpose of the atonement was to uphold God’s moral government of the universe in the face of two realities: (1) our sinfulness, and (2) God’s forgiveness of our sinfulness. How can God be the righteous, moral governor of the universe and wink at sin by forgiving sinners? He can’t be. So God resolves that inner dilemma by sending Christ to suffer a punishment exactly like the one sinners deserve—but not *their* punishment (which Grotius believed would be unjust and would result in all of them being saved). This upholds God’s righteousness when he forgives sinners.

Piper does not reject the penal substitution view in favor of the moral government theory, but he does underscore the moral government motif. He asks: “Why did God bruise [i.e., kill] his Son and bring him to grief?” and then answers: “to save sinners, and at the same time to magnify the worth of his glory.” By laying “our sin on Jesus and abandoning him to the shame and slaughter of the cross,” “God averted his own wrath.”²⁴ Piper also makes clear that the cross is primarily a vindication of the righteousness of God for forgiving sinners. Many, if not most, Arminians and other non-Calvinist evangelical Christians can give a hearty amen to that. The only problems are (1) when Piper goes on to say, as he occasionally does in sermons, that Jesus died “for God,” and (2) that the saving benefit of his death was intended only for the elect. Romans 5:8 clearly and unequivocally states Christ died “for sinners,” and many verses already cited, including especially 1 John 2:2, say his death was an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Piper preaches that Christ died such a death only for some—the elect. For them and them only it actually secured justification by God. It did not just make it possible; it actually accomplished it. That is why, he argues, if Christ died for everyone, all would be justified and there could be no hell. So how does he explain verses such as 1 John 2:2? “The ‘whole world’ refers to the children of God scattered throughout the whole world.” But he also claims that “we do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense”²⁶ and that Christ died for every person but not in the same way. “There are many Scriptures which say that the death of Christ was designed for the salvation of God’s people, not for every individual.” Then he cites John 10:15; 17:6, 9, 19; 11:51–52; and Revelation 5:9.

True, these verses mention Christ’s death for “his sheep” and “for those whom the Father draws to the Son.” Yet, not a single verse explicitly limits his death to these people. That Christ died for them [viz., Christians] by no means requires that he died *only* for them. Critic David Allen rightly points out that “the fact that many verses speak of Christ dying for His ‘sheep,’ His ‘church’ or ‘His friends’ does not prove that He did not die for others not subsumed in those categories.” To say he died for others in a different way, not suffering the punishment for them but only providing some vague temporal blessings, is hardly satisfying. What good would those be unless Christ also opened up the possibility of their salvation?

Overall, the high Calvinistic doctrine of limited atonement is confusing at best and blatantly self-contradictory and unscriptural at worst.

PROBLEMS WITH LIMITED ATONEMENT/PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

Before delving into the numerous forceful objections to limited atonement, it is at least interesting to note that John Calvin himself did not believe in this doctrine. In 1979 researcher R. T. Kendall (b. 1935) published a powerful argument that Calvin did not believe in limited atonement: *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. Kevin Kennedy uses most of his arguments, along with others, in an article entitled “Was Calvin a ‘Calvinist’? John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement.” Following Kendall, Kennedy admits that Calvin nowhere explicitly addresses the issue; he apparently did not even think of it as an issue or he would have boldly lined up on one side or the other (which Calvin was known to do!). But one cannot find in Calvin’s writings a statement such as “Christ bore the punishment for every single person,” a fact Calvinists who contend he believed in particular redemption use to their benefit.

However, as Kennedy keenly points out, Calvin *does* say things nobody *would say* who believed in limited atonement:

For instance, if Calvin did profess limited atonement, one would not expect to find him intentionally universalizing scriptural passages that theologians from the later Reformed tradition claim are, from a simple reading of the text, clearly teaching that Christ died only for the elect. Furthermore, if Calvin truly believed that Christ died only for the elect, then one would not expect to find Calvin claiming that unbelievers who reject the gospel are rejecting an actual provision that Christ made for them on the cross. Nor would one expect Calvin, were he a proponent of limited atonement, to fail to refute bold claims that Christ died for all of humanity when he was engaged in polemical arguments with Roman Catholics and others. However, the truth is, Calvin does all this and more.

But Kennedy does not have to infer Calvin’s belief in universal atonement from what he does *not* say; he provides many quotes from Calvin, especially from his commentaries, that are unqualified universal statements regarding the atonement. Two must suffice here. In his commentary on Galatians Calvin wrote with regard to 1:14: “[Paul] says that this redemption was procured by *the blood of Christ*, for by the sacrifice of his death all the sins of the world have been expiated.” In his commentary on Isaiah Calvin wrote of Christ that “on him was laid the guilt of the whole world.”³² Again, Calvin wrote in a sermon on the deity of Christ:

He [Christ] must be the redeemer of the world. *He must be condemned, indeed, not for having preached the Gospel, but for us he must be oppressed*, as it were, to the lowest depths and sustain our cause, since he was there, as it were, in the person of all cursed ones and of all transgressors, and of those who had deserved eternal death. Since, then, Jesus Christ has this office, and he bears the burdens of all those who had offended God mortally, that is why he keeps silent.

After quoting numerous passages from Calvin’s writings, Kennedy concludes: “These passages provide just a sampling of the many places where Calvin uses universal language to describe the atonement.”

Kennedy goes on to examine the one Calvin passage supporters of limited atonement tend to point to that seems to prove his belief in the doctrine: his remarks on the universalizing passage 1 John 2:2 in his commentary on this letter. Kennedy argues that there, Calvin was simply trying to avoid any interpretation of the verse as teaching universal salvation. Besides, he rightly points out that one passage out of many that deal with the extent of the atonement should hardly be taken to contradict the rest.

Does it really matter whether Calvin believed in universal atonement or limited atonement? Not particularly. Nobody doubts that Calvin was solidly in favor of the other four points of TULIP.

Had he lived longer, would he have found his way to “L?” Perhaps. Certainly some of his immediate successors did. However, the fact that Calvin apparently *didn't* see it explicitly taught in Scripture undermines the claims of those high Calvinists who say it is clearly taught there.

More important than whether Calvin believed in limited atonement is whether Paul did. Is there a verse in Paul's letters that clearly and unequivocally contradicts the doctrine of particular redemption? I believe there is. In all my reading of Calvinist and anti-Calvinist literature I have not run across any mention of 1 Corinthians 8:11, even though this single verse seems to contradict it. There Paul writes to the Christian who insists on flaunting his freedom to eat meat in a pagan temple, even in sight of Christians who have weaker consciences and might thereby “stumble”: “So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.” Clearly, Paul is issuing a dire warning to those of “strong faith” to avoid offending the consciences of their weaker brothers and sisters. His warning is that by exercising Christian liberty from legalism too publicly, a “strong Christian” might actually cause a person loved by God, for whom Christ died, to be “destroyed.”

Now, if limited atonement is true, Paul's warning is an empty threat because it cannot happen. A person for whom Christ died cannot be destroyed. Christ died only for the elect, and the elect are drawn irresistibly to God (the subject of the next chapter) and will be kept by God (the “P” in TULIP) regardless of whatever happens.

Believers in limited atonement raise two objections. First, what does “destroyed” mean; might it only mean “damaged” or “hurt”? The Greek word translated “destroyed” is *apollytai*, which means to “destroy, perish, die.” It is unlikely, if not impossible, that the word could mean anything else especially in this context. Second, I have heard some Calvinists insist it only means “harm” or “hurt.” But why would Paul's warning be so dire in that case? “For whom Christ died”—it sounds as if Paul is saying this offense is serious business. The conjunction of “for whom Christ died” with “harm” just doesn't carry much weight.

The plain sense of the text is that Paul is warning Christians of stronger conscience to beware of causing the utter ruin and destruction, spiritually, of a weaker Christian or at least someone for whom Christ died. If that is so, and I am firmly convinced no other exegesis is reasonable, this one verse destroys the doctrine of limited atonement by demonstrating that Paul did not believe in it.

Before proceeding to other objections to limited atonement, I want to dispense with the argument that universal atonement necessarily implies universalism. It does not! First, even Calvin knew that there is a difference between Christ's atoning death on someone's behalf and the benefits of that atonement being applied to the person's life for forgiveness. Forgiveness is clearly conditional for Calvin; it requires faith and repentance. That is, the elect person is *not* saved the moment Christ died for him or her; that personal salvation is a work of the Holy Spirit through the Word when God gives the gifts of faith and repentance for forgiveness. Even regeneration happens simultaneously with repentance and not, of course, when Christ died for the person. Virtually every Calvinist I know believes that “salvation” is a person's experience only when the benefits of Christ's death are applied to his or her life; they are not saved already the moment Christ died for them.

Thus, the argument that universal atonement necessarily implies universal salvation fails to take into account the gap, as it were, between Christ's death for someone and the application of its benefit to the person's life. All for whom Christ died were not already saved when he died. Even in five-point Calvinism, Christ's death does not “accomplish” people's salvation but “secures” it, as Piper and others say. But even Piper and other proponents of limited atonement agree that the

people for whom Christ died, in the sense of suffering their punishment, must have faith to be saved by Christ's death.

I believe, as do all Arminians and other non-Calvinist Protestants, that Christ died for every single human person in such a way as to secure their salvation without requiring it or making it certain. Subjective appropriation is a condition of said secured salvation being one's possession. Does that mean some of Christ's blood was wasted? Perhaps. And that is what makes spiritual death and hell so tragic—they are so absolutely unnecessary. But God, in his love, preferred to waste some of Christ's blood, as it were, rather than be selfish with it.

An analogy will illustrate my point here. Just one day after his inauguration, President Jimmy Carter followed through on his campaign promise and guaranteed a full pardon for all who resisted the draft during the Vietnam War by fleeing from the U.S. into Canada or other countries. The moment he signed that executive order, every single draft exile was free to come home with the legal guarantee that he would not be prosecuted. "All is forgiven; come home" was the message to every single one of them.

This cost President Carter dearly; some believe it was so controversial, especially among veterans, that it contributed to his loss to Ronald Reagan in the next election. Even though there was a blanket amnesty and pardon, however, many draft exiles chose to stay in Canada or other countries to which they fled. Some died without ever availing themselves of the opportunity to be home with family and friends again. The costly pardon did them no good because *it had to be subjectively appropriated in order to be objectively enjoyed*. Put another way, although the pardon was objectively theirs, in order to benefit from it they had to subjectively accept it. Many did not.

The claim that objective atonement necessarily includes or entails subjective, personal salvation is faulty. The argument, so frequently made at least since John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, that Christ either died for all and therefore all are saved, or he died for some and therefore some are saved, is logically absurd. It simply ignores the real possibility that Christ suffered the punishment for many people who never enjoy that liberation from punishment. Why would Christ suffer punishment for people who never enjoy its benefits? Because of God's love for all.

There is still the matter of Owen's (and most high Calvinists') argument that the same sin cannot be punished twice. Again, that's simply false. Imagine a person who is fined by a court \$1,000 for a misdemeanor and someone else steps in and pays the fine. What if the fined person declines to accept that payment and insists on paying the fine himself or herself? Will the court automatically refund the first \$1,000? Probably not. It's the risk the first person takes in paying his friend's fine. In such a case, the same punishment would be paid twice. It is not that God exacts the same punishment twice; it is that the sinner who refused the free offer of salvation by default subjects himself or herself to the punishment that has already been suffered for him or her. As noted above, that's what makes hell so terribly tragic.

So, there is a difference between the *provision* of forgiveness of sins and the *application* of forgiveness of sins. Calvin knew this. I suspect most Calvinists know it, but such knowledge takes a back seat to their desire to wield their argument that universal atonement would require universal salvation. Arminian theologian Robert Picirilli (b. 1932) is right when he says in relation to 1 Timothy 4:10: "That He [Jesus] is savior of all men speaks of provision; that He is savior especially of believers speaks of application."

Many Calvinists have argued that belief in universal atonement leads to universalism. They point to certain Arminians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who formed the basis of the Universalist movement (which later united with the Unitarian Church). However, it is my view

that *Calvinism*, with its doctrine of *atonement as securing salvation* in a necessary way so that all for whom Christ died *must* be saved, leads to universalism. The reason is that for someone who takes utterly seriously the clear biblical testimony to the universal love of God for all people *and* believes atonement necessarily secures salvation, universalism is just a step away. The only way to hold back from it is by denying either the love of God in its fullest and truest sense *or* that atonement necessarily secures salvation for the person atoned for.

A case study in this trajectory from Calvinism to universalism is Karl Barth, who, I am convinced, did come to believe in the doctrine of *apokatastasis*—that everyone is or will be saved. He did that without sacrificing the T, the U, the I, and the P of TULIP. But he did retain the mistaken Calvinist notion that penal substitution necessarily secures personal, subjective salvation.⁴¹ Once he came to believe that Christ died for everyone without exception, because God is “He who loves in freedom,” universalism followed logically.

It seems to me, and to many other non-Calvinists, that any person who has a profound grasp of the biblical witness to God as revealed especially in Jesus Christ, but also in verses such as John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8, will have to give up particular redemption and, in order to avoid universalism, any necessary connection between redemption accomplished and applied. Four-point Calvinists, who try to deny “L” but hold onto the rest of TULIP, have to explain why Christ would suffer the punishment for the reprobate—sinners God intentionally rejects from possible salvation.

Most high Calvinists, including Boettner, Steele and Thomas, Sproul, and Piper, believe passionately in universal evangelism; they reject hyper-Calvinism that says a well-meant offer of salvation cannot be made to everyone either by God or by preachers. As already intimated, however, there is tension and even conflict between particular atonement and indiscriminate evangelism. Among other critics of limited atonement, Gary Schultz has argued convincingly that there is no sincerity in an indiscriminate preaching of the gospel and invitation to repent, believe, and be saved if limited atonement is true. “The crux of the issue,” he rightly points out,

is how the gospel can be genuinely offered to the non-elect if God made no payment for their sins.... If Christ did not pay for the sins of the non-elect, then it is impossible to genuinely offer salvation to the non-elect, since there is no salvation available to offer them. In a sense, when offered the gospel, the non-elect would be offered something that was never there for them to receive in the first place.

Then Schultz also rightly drives the point home: “If the atonement was only for the elect, to preach this message to the non-elect would at best be giving them a false hope and at worst would be untrue.”

Some Calvinists may respond that a preacher never knows for sure who in his audience are the elect and who are not the elect, so he or she should offer salvation to everyone while thinking in his own mind that only the elect will respond. But two things block that objection. First, most, if not all, non-hyper-Calvinists believe that not only the preacher but also *God himself* offers salvation to all as a “well-meant offer” (as mentioned earlier as a declaration by the Christian Reformed Church against hyper-Calvinism). Surely *God* knows who the elect and nonelect are. Why would *God*, having that knowledge, offer salvation to those he intends to exclude and for whom Christ did not die? Second, if that is what the Calvinist preacher believes, why not offer the gospel of salvation to all indiscriminately, even if the preacher *does* know who is elect and who is not?

What’s the practical application here? It is simply this: *if* you believe that there may be some in your audience who cannot be saved because Christ made no provision for their salvation, you *cannot in all honesty* preach that all may come to Christ through repentance and faith because

Christ died for them. You have to tailor your offer and invitation to your theology and say something like this: “*If* you are one of God’s elect and *if* Christ died for you, you can be saved by responding with repentance and faith.” You cannot say to everyone, “Christ died for you so you can be saved; repent and believe so that God can forgive your sins and accept you as his child.” But it *seems* non-hyper-Calvinism is saying *God* would give the second offer and invitation, so the preacher can also. But that would be insincere for God and the preacher. The point is, *insofar* as the preacher believes in limited atonement he or she should join the hyper-Calvinists and *not* offer the gospel of salvation to everyone indiscriminately. Also, the point is, how can belief in limited atonement *not* hinder evangelism?

THE ALTERNATIVE TO LIMITED ATONEMENT/PARTICULAR REDEMPTION

Fortunately, limited/particular atonement is *not* the only option for Christians considering what Christ accomplished on the cross. A person can affirm penal substitution, including belief that Christ fulfilled the law for everyone and suffered everyone’s punishment, and still believe that persons must subjectively appropriate those benefits by faith in order to be saved. This was, for example, Wesley’s doctrine. It is also the doctrine of many Baptists and others who sometimes accept certain points of Calvinism but not limited atonement (however inconsistent that may be).

The vast majority of Christians down through the centuries, including *all the church fathers* of the first four centuries (i.e., before Augustine), believed in universal atonement. The great church father Athanasius, highly regarded by all Christians including Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant, adamantly insisted that by his death Christ brought salvation to everyone without exception:

The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father’s Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, *might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all*, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection. It was by surrendering to death of the body which He had taken, as an offering and sacrifice free from every stain, that He forthwith abolished death for His human brethren by the offering of the equivalent. For naturally, since the Word of God was above all, when *He offered His own temple and bodily instrument as a substitute for the life of all*, He fulfilled in death all that was required. Naturally also, through this union of the immortal Son of God with our human nature, all men were clothed with incorruption in the promise of the resurrection. For the solidarity of mankind is such that, by virtue of the Word’s indwelling in a single human body, the corruption which goes with death has lost its power over all. You know how it is when some great king enters a large city and dwells in one of its houses; because of his dwelling in that single house, the whole city is honoured, and enemies and robbers cease to molest it. Even so is it with the King of all; He has come into our country and dwelt in one body amidst the many, and in consequence the designs of the enemy against mankind have been foiled, and the corruption of death, which formerly held them in its power, has simply ceased to be. For the human race would have perished utterly had not the Lord and Saviour of all, the Son of God, come among us to put an end to death. (Italics added for emphasis.)

Clearly, Athanasius (together with all the Greek church fathers, Martin Luther, John Wesley, and numerous other great orthodox men and women in Christian history) believed that Christ died for all without exception, including suffering the penalty for everyone’s sins. Clearly also, Athanasius *did not* believe (as a few Greek church fathers did) in universalism. He clearly stated,

so that it cannot be misunderstood, that full salvation in the sense of eternal life comes finally only to those who repent and believe and that many souls will be lost forever because they reject Christ.

What the Greek fathers and nearly every Christian of renown believed about the scope and extent of the atonement (until Calvin's scholastic followers) was that Christ was the substitute for everyone without exception, such that every obstacle to God's forgiveness for every person was removed by his death. They also believed that the benefits of that sacrifice would only be applied to persons who believe—whether they are elect (Luther and Calvin) or freely choose to accept God's grace (Athanasius, Aquinas, the Anabaptists, Wesley).

This is orthodox church teaching; limited/particular atonement is aberrant church teaching. Just because it has been around among Calvinists for a long time (but only *after* Calvin!) does not make it any less aberrant. Even some of the Reformed divines gathered at the Synod of Dort rejected this point of TULIP, siding with the Remonstrants about this matter. Then, fifty years later, many Puritans at the Westminster Assembly that wrote the Westminster Confession of Faith opposed this doctrine.⁴⁵ What happened? Evidently, the louder and most insistent voices won the day in spite of not having truth on their side. To this day many Reformed people and many Calvinists cannot stomach this element of the TULIP system, extract it out, and reject it even if that brings them into conflict with the rest of what they believe and with their fellow Reformed and Calvinist believers.¹²

The Atonement in Calvinism and Arminianism

	CALVINISM	ARMINIANISM
The Meaning	Christ died for the sin of sinners. <i>A substitute for a penalty.</i>	Christ died for the sin principle. <i>A substitute for a penalty.</i>
The Purpose	To secure the foundation of forgiveness and righteousness.	To secure a disposition of possibility.
The Focus	To secure God's forgiveness and righteousness.	To allow God to make a plan to secure salvation.
The Result	Salvation	Salvability, the possibility for God to grant salvation upon certain conditions.

Chart 19

¹² Olson, R. E. (2011). [Against Calvinism](#) (pp. 136–154). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

YES TO GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY; NO TO DIVINE DETERMINISM

I went to hear a famous government official, who was also a well-known evangelical Christian, speak in our college's chapel. I expected to hear him talk about the dangers of smoking because that was what he was especially known for; he was a crusader against tobacco. But that's not what he addressed in his chapel talk. Instead, for about an hour, he held forth on the subject "God killed my son." I was not totally surprised because I knew him to be a member of a large, influential Reformed church. Yet, I had never heard any Calvinist put a similar matter so bluntly. The doctor spoke eloquently and movingly about his young adult son's tragic death in a mountain climbing accident and several times stopped, looked intently at the young audience, and stated, "God killed my son."

The speaker made crystal clear what he meant. He did *not* mean God permitted his son's death or merely allowed it to happen. Rather, he meant that God planned it and rendered it certain. He stopped short of saying God caused it, but his often-repeated title certainly implied that: "God killed my son." He also made crystal clear that he did not mean this was an unusual occurrence of God's intervention; what he meant was that every such death, like every event, is planned and governed by God in such a way as to make it inevitable. (I'm certain he would say, if asked, that God uses secondary causes such as weather and moisture and faulty equipment, but to him this was not pertinent. All that he cared about was that God killed his son.) In other words, this Christian statesman was publicly declaiming that God is absolutely sovereign down to the details and that God plans every event, including tragedies, and renders them certain.

What was especially significant about this presentation of the Calvinist view of divine sovereignty in providence (God's governing of history and lives) was the speaker's *reason* for believing it so passionately. Of course, he believed it because he thought it was biblical. But he also made clear that he believed it because it was the only thing that brought him comfort and hope in the face of such a shattering tragedy. If his son's death was merely an accident and not part of God's plan, he said, he could not live with the utter randomness and meaninglessness of it. He could only find comfort in his son's death *if* it was God's doing and not at all an accident.

As I listened, I wondered what this great evangelical statesman would say if his son's death was not, as he reported, immediate and painless but rather a long, lingering, agonizing, painful death from, say, cancer. Such deaths commonly occur and sometimes to children and young people! I remember visiting my daughter's teenage friend in the hospital one day and hearing a child screaming in agony without pause for the entire thirty minutes I was there. It was bone-shattering shrieks of absolute torment echoing through the halls of the hospital. I had never heard anything like it, and it left me shaken. What if those parents asked the speaker if he believed *their* child was being killed *in that particular way* by God? What would he say? If he was consistent with himself *and his theology*, he would have to say yes.

I was working in my office one day when the phone rang. It was a pastor who had read in the student newspaper about my rejection of Calvinism. He demanded to know: "How can you not believe in God's sovereignty?"

I asked him what he meant by God's sovereignty, and he replied: "I mean the fact that God controls everything that happens."

I responded by asking him: "Does that include sin and evil?" He paused: "No."

Then, I asked, "Do *you* really believe in God's sovereignty?" He apologized and hung up.

What I wanted to tell the pastor was that I *do* believe in God's sovereignty—with all my heart, soul, and mind. I believe, as the Bible teaches and all Christians should believe, that nothing at all

can happen without God's permission. That is what some would call a "weak view" of God's sovereignty (although it has nothing to do with any "weakness" of God), whereas Calvinism typically affirms a "strong view" of God's sovereignty. Let's look into Calvinism's doctrine of divine providence—the doctrine of God's sovereignty over nature and history.

CALVINISM'S DOCTRINE OF GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin

Many scholars consider the real founder of the Reformed tradition to be Ulrich Zwingli, who wrote a lengthy essay entitled *On Providence*. This essay came to be influential on Calvin and, through him, on the whole Reformed tradition (although many Reformed people, especially the ones I have labeled "revisionists," have come to reject much of it). Zwingli defined providence as God's "rule over and direction of all things in the universe. For if anything were guided by its own power or insight, just so far would the wisdom and power of our Deity be deficient." Zwingli continued his exposition by denying that anything in the world is "contingent, fortuitous or accidental" because God alone is the "sole cause" over everything, such that all other so-called causes are merely "instruments of the divine working."²

Zwingli based much of this strong doctrine of sovereignty on philosophy; he began with a presupposed idea of God as necessarily the all-determining reality and drew from it the conclusion that everything must be a manifestation of the power of God or else God would not be God. Of course, Zwingli also appealed to Scripture, as have all defenders of the strong doctrine of God's sovereignty. It will be helpful to look at some allegedly supporting passages before plunging on to look at Calvin's doctrine and later Calvinists' interpretations of providence.

In chapter 3, we saw that Calvinists appeal to the stories of Joseph and Jesus' crucifixion to support a vision of God's providential sovereignty as detailed and meticulous, including evil. Of course, not all biblical scholars or interpreters deduce that doctrine from these stories and events. For example, isn't it possible that God "meant them for good" *in the sense that* he could have stopped the events but chose to allow them instead? Most Calvinists will claim there is little if any difference between that and their view, but I will argue the difference is great.

Calvinists appeal to statements in the Old Testament prophets, such as the already referred to Amos 3:6. But there are other passages, such as Proverbs 16:33; Isaiah 14:27; 43:13; 45:7; and Daniel 4:35. All of these indicate God's overseeing authority and rule down to the details. For example, Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord," while Isaiah 45:7: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things." There is hardly any need to quote further; these passages alone seem to provide proof of the strong view of God's providence. Later in this chapter, of course, I will argue that there are alternative interpretations that better express God's sovereignty and that do not make God the author of evil.

Calvin picked up where Zwingli left off with his doctrine of God's sovereignty over history, God's meticulous providence, although he did not defend it from philosophy but primarily from Scripture (which is not to say he was not influenced by philosophy!). In a vivid illustration Calvin wrote:

Let us imagine, for example, a merchant who, entering a wood with a company of faithful men, unwisely wanders away from his companions and in his wandering comes upon a robber's den, falls among thieves, and is slain. His death was not only foreseen by God's eye, but also determined

by his decree. For it is not said that he foresaw how long the life of each man would extend, but that he determined and fixed the bounds which men cannot pass.... Yet, as far as the capacity of our mind is concerned, all things therein seem fortuitous [accidental]. What will a Christian think at this point? Just this: whatever happened in a death of this sort he will regard as fortuitous by nature, as it is; yet he will not doubt that God's providence exercised authority over fortune in directing its end.

Calvin sums up his whole doctrine of God's providence thus: "No wind ever arises or increases except by God's express command." In other places, he argues that God's providential governing of history cannot be expressed by means of permission; God does not merely permit anything but ordains it and brings it about most certainly. For Calvin, this is seen most clearly in the fall of Adam, which was foreordained by God. Just in case there would be any quibbling about how strong Calvin's doctrine of providence was, I will quote this passage from his *Institutes*:

To sum up, since God's will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made his providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works, not only in order to display its force in the elect, who are ruled by the Holy Spirit, but also to compel the reprobate to obedience.

How could Calvin put it any more bluntly and forcefully than that? God compels the reprobate, the wicked, to obey his will. In other words, even the evil done by wicked people is foreordained and rendered certain by God. Later Calvinists such as Sproul will claim that Calvinism *does not* say that God coerces the wicked to do evil acts. Calvin seemed to think it is so, even though he argues God remains unstained by the evil of their deeds because his motives are good while theirs are evil. (Of course, this just raises the question of the origin of evil motives!)

Jonathan Edwards

Later Calvinists' views of God's providence are largely consistent with Zwingli's and Calvin's. In other words, in general, high Calvinism from Zwingli to Calvin to Edwards to Boettner to Sproul to Piper amounts to *divine determinism* in spite of some Calvinists' strong objections to that terminology. We begin with Jonathan Edwards.

Edwards taught the strongest doctrine of God's rule possible. For him God is not only the all-determining reality; he creates the whole world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) at every moment and does not work through secondary causes. Everything without exception is directly and immediately caused by God, including evil. Edwards insisted that all things, including sin and evil, follow from "an infallible previous fixedness of the futurity of the event [meaning all events]," such that everything happens according to a "universal, determining providence" that imposes "some kind of necessity of all events."⁷ Edwards nails it down:

God does decisively, in his providence, order all the volitions of moral agents, either by positive influence or permission: and it being allowed on all hands, that what God does in the affair of man's virtuous volitions, whether it be more or less, is by some positive influence, and not by mere permission, as in the affair of a sinful volition.

Readers should not be thrown off by Edwards' use of the language of permission because this must be understood in the context of his earlier quoted statements about "determining providence" and the "necessity of all events." Clearly, by "permission" Edwards only means that, in the case of evil, God does not force or coerce people to sin, but he does render it certain. One has to wonder

why Edwards (and other Calvinists) fell back into using “permission” language when his (and their) overall explanation of God’s providence requires something more direct and active?

Not only did Edwards affirm God’s absolute, determining sovereignty over all events in the world; he also affirmed the necessity of God’s own decisions. This nails down his belief in what I am calling divine determinism. For him, everything that happens, even in God’s own mind and volition, is necessary. For those who doubt this, consider that Edwards affirmed “the necessity of the acts of God’s will.” Of course, Edwards did not mean that some force outside of God or even within God coerces God to decide and act as he does. Rather, “the *necessary* determination of God’s will in all things, [is] by what he sees to be *fittest* and *best*.” In other words, “God’s will is determined by his own infinite, all-sufficient wisdom in everything.”¹¹ The inexorable upshot of this must be that God’s creation of the world is necessary and not contingent. That is to say, it is not free.

Some defenders of Edwards may object that the Puritan theologian claimed God’s actions are free. Indeed he did. So how did he reconcile these things? Edwards argued that free will only means doing what is in accordance with one’s strongest motive or disposition. For him, as for most Calvinists who wish to embrace some sense of free will in both God and creatures, free will is *not* being able to do otherwise than one does (power of contrary choice), which is the libertarian sense of free will, but only doing what one *wants to do even if he or she could not do otherwise*. According to Edwards, even one’s wants are always determined by something. The heart, the seat of dispositions, determines the acts of the human will just as surely as God’s wisdom determines his decisions and actions.

This has come to be called by philosophers “compatibilism”—belief that free will is compatible with determinism. It is probably not what most people think free will means. Most people probably mean by free will ability to do otherwise than one does. But according to compatibilism, the only time one is *not free* is when one is being forced to do something he or she does not want to do. In this sense, then, God’s creation of the world is “free” because it is what God wanted to do. But that does not mean God could have done otherwise.

One has to question the orthodoxy of Edwards’ view. The whole point of Christian orthodoxy traditionally affirming the freedom of creation is to assure that it is within the realm of grace and not necessity. Whatever is necessary cannot be gracious. Also, if God’s creation of the world was necessary, then the world is *in some sense* part of God—an aspect of God’s own existence. This is known as pantheism: the belief that God and the world are interdependent realities. Most orthodox Christians have always considered that heresy.

I am not actually accusing Edwards of heresy; rather, I am accusing him of inconsistency because he clearly *did not* intend to make God in any way dependent on the world. The point is that his speculative musings about God’s sovereignty led him to conclusions with which he probably was not comfortable and probably did not hold in the same way all the time. Nevertheless, in spite of Edwards’ intentions, his strong doctrine of sovereignty—divine determinism—is a slippery slope that leads logically down into pantheism.

Another issue Edwards had to deal with was the problem of God’s relationship to sin and evil. Doesn’t his strong doctrine of providence lead inevitably to God being the author of sin and evil? Edwards was clearly uncomfortable with that, but at the same time he admitted it *in some sense*. First, his explanation of how God rendered the fall of Adam certain is that God withheld from Adam “those influences, without which nature will be corrupt,” but this does not make God the author of sin. To make the point clearer, Edwards stated that “the first arising or existing of that evil disposition in the heart of Adam, was by God’s *permission*; who could have prevented it, if

he had pleased, by giving such influences of his Spirit, as would have been absolutely effectual to hinder it; which, it is plain fact, he did withhold.” Even though God rendered certain the first evil disposition that gave rise to all others, Edwards argues, God is not guilty. Only Adam was guilty because his intentions were evil. God’s intentions in rendering sin and evil certain were good. “In willing evil God does not do evil.”¹⁵

Does this actually get God off the hook, so to speak, of being the author of sin and evil? Edwards finally concluded:

If by “author of sin,” is meant the permitter, or not hinderer of sin; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted or not hindered, will most certainly and infallibly follow: I say, if this be all that is meant, by being the author of sin, I don’t deny that God is the author of sin.

I suggest that most people would consider that being the author of sin. But many Calvinists, realizing that for most people “author of sin” means that God coerced Adam to sin against his will, reject that language while agreeing with Edwards. Neither Edwards nor any Calvinist believes that God forced Adam to sin against his will, but ordinary language dictates that one is the “author” of something simply by rendering it certain. Thus, I argue, Calvinism does make God the author of sin *in the sense that*, according to its account of God’s sovereignty, God rendered Adam’s sin certain.

My point here is simply this: When Calvinists deny that their doctrine makes God the “author of sin,” what they usually mean is that God did not force Adam (or anyone) to sin against his will. However, they should admit, with Edwards, that their doctrine *does* make God the author of sin in the sense that God rendered it certain that Adam (and all his posterity) would sin.

R. C. Sproul

Similarly to Edwards, Sproul rejects the label “determinism” for this strong view of divine sovereignty *because* he understands “determinism” to mean “external coercion.” He admits, with Edwards and all other high Calvinists, that God determines all things, but he prefers to call this divine “determination,” *not* “determinism.” One can only wonder what difference it really makes. I will continue to call this view divine determinism following the ordinary definition of “determinism” (as given in various dictionaries and encyclopedias), that “every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions.”¹⁹ Certainly that is the case with Edwards’ and Sproul’s and most other Calvinists’ beliefs about God’s sovereignty.

Let’s turn now to Sproul’s account of God’s providential sovereignty. Sproul is well-known for making rather emphatic and extreme statements about Calvinist doctrine. For example, in *Chosen by God* he writes that anyone who does not agree with his belief (as expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith) about predestination should be a “convinced atheist.” For Sproul (and many other Calvinists) predestination is more than a concept about God’s sovereignty in deciding who will be saved and who will not be saved; it is also a concept about God’s “total sovereignty” in all things. In chapter 3 I quoted Sproul’s remark that there can be no single molecule in the universe not totally under the control of God. He is famous for asking audiences whether they believe in God’s total sovereignty in the sense that I am here calling divine determinism. Then he asks how many are atheists. Those who did not raise their hands in response to the first question, he says, should raise their hands to the second question. His reason, of course, is that “if God is not sovereign, then he is not God. It belongs to God as God to be sovereign.”

What's odd about this is that in *Chosen by God*, Sproul states that "good and learned men" can disagree about this doctrine, but then he says anyone who does not agree with him should be a convinced atheist. He shouldn't be surprised if some "good and learned men" take offense at that suggestion! Many Christians agree with him that God's sovereignty is an essential part of God's nature *without* agreeing with his *interpretation* of that sovereignty.

So what exactly is Sproul's doctrine of predestination/providence? We get a strong clue in his definition of predestination: "It includes whatever comes to pass in time and space." In other words, predestination, in its broadest sense, is simply another word for God's determination of all events: meticulous providence. He affirms that everything that happens is God's will.²⁴ To nail it down he writes:

The movement of every molecule, the actions of every plant, the falling of every star, the choices of every volitional creature [creatures who choose], all of these are subject to his sovereign will. No maverick molecules run loose in the universe, beyond the control of the Creator. If one such molecule existed, it could be the critical fly in the eternal ointment.

In other words, "one maverick molecule could destroy every promise God has ever made about the outcome of history."

Sproul goes on to make a distinction between two senses of God's will: God's *decretive will* and God's *permissive will*. This might relieve some anxiety about God's role in evil, but then he takes back with one hand what he gave with the other: "What God permits, he *decrees* to permit." In other words, God's permission is *willing and even determining permission*; it merely reflects and enacts God's eternal decrees. Thus, even sin lies *both* within God's decretive will *and* God's permissive will. The latter does not in any way determine the former or else God would not be sovereign. What God permits, he decreed to permit—including sin. The way Sproul explains the relationship between God's decretive will and God's permissive will tends to collapse them together. The specter of a God who wills sin and evil still hangs over it.

In order to obtain a more complete understanding of Sproul's doctrine of God's providential sovereignty, it is helpful to look at his view of free will. On the one hand, unlike some Calvinists, Sproul affirms that Adam and Eve fell by their own free will: "Calvinism sees Adam sinning by his own free will, not by divine coercion." Furthermore, he says of the fall, "Adam jumped into the pit [of depravity and spiritual death]. In Adam we all jumped into the pit. God did not throw us into the pit."³⁰ Some of Sproul's readers take false comfort in this—as if it alleviates the problem of God's sovereign choice that Adam would sin. But that's not clear at all.

It's important to look more closely at what Sproul means by "free will." There he turns to Edwards' compatibilism, in which "free will" is simply doing what you want to do even if you couldn't do otherwise. Like Edwards (in many ways Sproul's mentor), Sproul argues that "we [always] choose according to our strongest inclination at the moment." That would have been true for Adam, too, because both Edwards and Sproul are simply explaining what "free will" *always means*. Sproul explains further: "There is a reason for every choice we make. In a narrow sense every choice we make is *determined*." Determined by what? By our inner motives and inclinations.

All one has to do to see that this really does not solve the problem of God and evil is think backward from Adam's first sin to the motive that controlled it and actually caused it. In other words, what Sproul is saying is that Adam's sin was predetermined by an inner disposition to sin. Adam could not have done otherwise than he did. Sproul says this is not determinism because he defines determinism as "coercion by external forces," which actually has nothing to do with it, as

already noted. He seems to be inventing that definition arbitrarily simply to avoid calling his view of history, including the fall, determinism.

The question for Sproul and all Calvinists who take this approach is this: from where did Adam's evil inclination come? For them, it couldn't come from free will because free will is simply choosing to act on one's inclinations. I am going to explore this dilemma of Calvinism more fully later in this chapter. Here I simply raise it as a problem for Sproul's and other Calvinists' typical explanations of the fall of humanity into sin and evil and God's involvement in that. To hint at what is to come: it seems logically necessary by this account of free will and God's sovereignty to trace the first inclination to evil back to God as its source, which, of course, no Calvinist wants to do!

Lorraine Boettner

I turn now from Sproul to Boettner. What did Boettner say about God's sovereign providence? I have already quoted his strong statements about God's sovereignty. Here I simply add to that earlier explanation. According to Boettner, the Reformed view of God's providence is that God "very obviously predetermined every event which would happen.... Even the sinful acts of men are included in this plan." But, like Sproul, Boettner wants to say that God only *permits* the sinful acts of people; he does not cause them. Yet, also like Sproul, he takes back with one hand what he gives with the other by saying about this:

Even the sinful actions of men [including Adam's first sin] can occur only by his [God's] permission. And since he permits not unwillingly but willingly, all that comes to pass—including the actions and ultimate destiny of men—must be, in some sense, in accordance with what he desired and purposed.

In other words, even the first sinful act (and therefore the first inclination to sin) was willingly planned and purposed by God because he desired it. Boettner insists, however, that God never sins himself or even causes people to sin. Nevertheless, in order to bring about his purpose and plan he rendered even the first sin certain. How?

All we need to know is that God does govern His creatures, that His control over them is such that no violence is done to their natures and that His control is consistent with His own purity and excellence. God so presents the outside inducements that man acts in accordance with his own nature, yet does just exactly what God plans for him to do.

Later in this chapter I will explore this further and ask if it really gets God off the hook for being the author of sin and evil. Does it really differ from saying that God determines sin and evil and actively renders them certain? Is language of mere permission really appropriate for this account of God's role in sin and evil? If God presents people with "outside inducements" guaranteed to result in their sinning, doesn't that make God the author of their sin? If so, how are they responsible and God is not?

Paul Helm

I will now draw on Paul Helm, another Calvinist witness to the strong doctrine of providence that I believe gets Calvinism in hot water by inexorably leading to the "good and necessary consequence" that God *is* the author of sin, evil, and even all innocent suffering. Helm's *The Providence of God* is widely considered a contemporary classic of Calvinist thought. Here is how

he expresses the sovereignty of God in providence: “Not only is every atom and molecule, every thought and desire, kept in being by God, but every twist and turn of each of these is under the direct control of God.” Then, “the providence of God is ‘fine-grained’; it extends to the occurrence of individual actions and to each aspect of each action.”³⁷ Of course, Helm recognizes that for many of his readers this strong view of God’s sovereignty will raise to an intense pitch the problem of evil. Is God, then, the author of sin and evil? What of God’s goodness?

This problem of evil and God’s role in it becomes even more problematic when Helm turns to describing how God rules the evil in the world:

For, according to the “no-risk” view [Helm’s view of God’s providence in which God takes no risks], God controls all events and yet issues moral commands which are disobeyed in some of the very events which he controls. For example, he commands men and women to love their neighbors while at the same time ordaining actions which are malicious or hateful.

According to Helm, God has two wills: “what happens” (what he decrees and renders certain) and “what ought to happen” (what he commands that often goes against what he decrees). Some Calvinists refer to these as God’s “decretive will” and God’s “preceptive will.” In other words, according to this view of God’s providence, God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (preceptive will) while at the same time (or from all eternity) decreeing that they would eat of it. The crucial question this raises is how God is good and not in conflict with himself. God assures that his moral commands will be disobeyed. How can God do that without coercing people to sin? And how does he do it without being responsible for sin?

At this juncture Helm, like many Calvinists, turns to God’s withholding of divine influence so that people naturally sin without God’s causing them to sin: “What determines the action [e.g., the fall] in so far as it is an *evil* is divine *withholding*. God withholds his goodness or grace, and forthwith the agent forms a morally deficient motive or reason and acts accordingly.”

In other words, God renders evil certain without doing evil himself. The evil, after all, is in the motive with which the foreordained action is carried out by the creature. The sinner’s motive is a bad one whereas God’s motive in foreordaining and rendering it certain is good. The sinner is sinning because, from an evil motive (e.g., of selfishness) he or she disobeys God’s preceptive will even though he or she could not do otherwise because God withholds the provision needed not to sin.

This raises many questions about God’s goodness, human responsibility, and the source of the first evil motive. Helm affirms that, in spite of God’s involvement in rendering evil certain, he is a perfectly good God such that “the goodness of God must bear some positive relation to the sorts of human actions we regard as good. Otherwise, why ascribe *goodness* to God?” I will deal with the problems inherent in this account of God’s providence later in this chapter. Suffice it to say here that it seems incoherent at best.

John Piper

What about the influential John Piper—probably *the* most important mentor of the new Calvinism among the young, restless, Reformed generation? What does he say about God’s sovereignty and providence, including evil? He follows Edwards and parallels Helm closely. As explained earlier, Piper believes that everything without exception comes to pass according to God’s foreordained plan and purpose and that God renders everything certain without participating in evil himself: “In some way (that we may not be able to fully comprehend) God is able without blameworthy ‘tempting’ to see to it that a person does what God ordains for him to do even if it

involves evil.” With Helm Piper affirms two wills in God: “God decrees one state of affairs [including evil] while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass.”⁴² Piper denies, in his account of providence, that God is the author of sin or evil even though he does “see to it” that things that are contrary to God’s commands come to pass.

Each of the authors quoted so far in this section somewhere says that whatever God foreordains and renders certain, including sin and evil, glorifies God. Boettner says it most succinctly: “God has a definite purpose in the permission [!] of every individual sin, having ordained it [!] ‘for His own glory.’ ” Even the works of Satan are foreordained and controlled by God for his glory!⁴⁴

Let us sum up the typical high Calvinist view of God’s sovereignty. While there may be nuances of difference in each account, it’s safe to say there are some overarching commonalities so that a general description can be offered. In high Calvinism, God’s sovereignty in his providence means that everything down to the minutest details of history and individual lives, including persons’ thoughts and actions, are foreordained and rendered certain by God. Even evil thoughts and actions are planned and brought about such that God “sees to it” that they happen to carry out his will. Nothing at all, whatever, falls outside God’s predestining plan and activity.

Yet, God is not stained by the evil that creatures do even though he renders it certain because his motives are always good, even in bringing about the evil that he forbids. And God’s ultimate plan is good such that evil serves its purpose. “God wills righteously those things which men do wickedly.” Yet creatures are solely responsible for the evil they commit.⁴⁶ God renders sin and evil certain not by coercing or forcing people to do them but by withdrawing or withholding that divine influence that they would need not to sin and do evil. Everything that happens, including sin, is ordained by God for his own glory.

THE PROBLEM OF GOD’S REPUTATION

Sproul states that “any distortion of the character of God poisons the rest of our theology.” Indeed, non-Calvinist Christians agree completely, but they regard the typical high Calvinist account of God’s sovereignty as inexorably, logically leading to a distortion of God’s character. Of course, no Calvinist admits this, but that’s not the point. Calvinists frequently accuse Arminians and other non-Calvinists of stopping short of drawing out the “good and necessary consequences” of their admitted beliefs, so it is fair for Arminians to do the same with Calvinists. Generally speaking, with few exceptions, Calvinists affirm God’s perfect goodness and love, but their belief in meticulous providence and absolute, all-determining sovereignty (determinism) undermines what they say. They seem to want to have their cake and eat it too.

Before plunging into my critique of Calvinism’s account of God’s sovereignty, I want to state clearly and unequivocally that all orthodox Christians, including non-Calvinists such as Arminians, also affirm God’s sovereignty. Sometimes Calvinists smuggle their own definition of sovereignty into the meaning of the word itself so that anyone who does not agree with their divine determinism does not believe in divine sovereignty. I have already demonstrated that Arminians believe in God’s sovereignty, and once again, I point readers to *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. Non-Calvinists take God’s *permissive will* more seriously than Calvinists and explain biblical stories such as Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 50) and the crucifixion of Jesus in that way—God foresaw and permitted sinful people to do things because he saw the good that he would bring out of them. But God by no means foreordained or rendered them certain.

Someone might ask how God could be sure they would happen. God knows the hearts of people and can foresee that, given certain foreseen circumstances, they will do sinful things. God does

not have to manipulate them; he can simply predict them infallibly. Calvinists will scoff at this, but their own account of God's involvement raises greater problems that they may wrestle with but leave unsolved.

In short, the Calvinist account of God's sovereignty given earlier in this chapter inevitably makes God the author of sin, evil, and innocent suffering (such as the children of the Holocaust) and thereby impugns the integrity of God's character as good and loving. The God of *this* Calvinism (as opposed to, say, revisionist Reformed theology) is at best morally ambiguous and at worst a moral monster hardly distinguishable from the devil. Remember, according to this account of God's sovereignty and providence, *even the devil is only doing the works given him to do by God*. They, too, like everything else, have been foreordained, planned, willed by God, and rendered certain by God *for his glory*. I can only agree wholeheartedly with evangelical philosopher Jerry Walls who says, "The Calvinist must sacrifice a clear notion of God's goodness for the sake of maintaining his view of God's sovereign decrees." About the Calvinist claim that even evil is willed and rendered certain by God Walls rightly says, "At this point the idea of goodness, as we know it, has simply lost its shape."⁵¹

Let me be perfectly clear that whatever objections Sproul and others may raise, the Calvinist account of God's sovereignty *is* divine determinism. No amount of caviling can get around it. To affirm that everything that happens, down to the minutest details including even God's own thoughts and actions, are determined *is by definition* to affirm determinism. Even if Sproul does not follow Edwards in arguing that God's own thoughts and actions are determined (which, given his agreement with Edwards' compatibilist idea of free will, he would seem to have to), he *does* affirm that everything in the world is determined by God.

All of the Calvinists cited above *sometimes* fall back on permission language when talking about God's sovereignty over sin and evil, but a close examination of what they mean reveals that their idea of God's permission is different than ordinary permission. It is willing and even determining permission. Remember that God permits the fall of Adam but also renders it certain, because it is in his will and purpose, by withholding or withdrawing the moral power Adam would have needed not to sin.

This is an odd kind of permission indeed. Who would believe that a teacher who withholds the information students need to pass a course merely permitted them to fail? What if that teacher, when called on the carpet by parents and school officials, said, "I didn't cause them to fail. They did it on their own"? Would anyone accept that explanation or would they accuse the teacher of not merely permitting the students to fail but also of actually *causing* them to fail? And what if the teacher argued that he or she actually planned and rendered the students' failure certain for a good reason—to uphold academic standards and show what a great teacher he or she is by demonstrating how necessary his or her information is for students to pass? Would not these admissions only deepen everyone's conviction that the teacher is morally and professionally wrong?

Many, perhaps most, critics of Calvinism register extreme dismay at its divine determinism. There are many reasons, but the first and foremost one is that it renders God morally impure if not repugnant.

One day, at the end of a class session on Calvinism's doctrine of God's sovereignty, a student asked me a question I had put off considering. He asked: "*If* it was revealed to you in a way you couldn't question or deny that the true God *actually is* as Calvinism says and *rules* as Calvinism affirms, would you still worship him?" I knew the only possible answer without a moment's thought, even though I knew it would shock many people. I said no, that I would not because I could not. Such a God would be a moral monster. Of course, I realize Calvinists do not *think* their

view of God's sovereignty makes him a moral monster, but I can only conclude they have not thought it through to its logical conclusion or even taken sufficiently seriously the things they say about God and evil and innocent suffering in the world.

Perhaps no one has taken a stronger stance against Calvinism's doctrine of God's providence than theologian David Bentley Hart, who examined the role of God in innocent suffering in *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* There he calls the view espoused by high Calvinists "theological fatalism" and says that people who hold that view "defame the love and goodness of God out of a servile and unhealthy fascination with his 'dread sovereignty.'" ⁵³ Then he says:

If indeed there were a God whose true nature—whose justice or sovereignty—were revealed in the death of a child or the dereliction of a soul or a predestined hell, then it would be no great transgression to think of him as a kind of malevolent or contemptible demiurge, and to hate him, and to deny him worship, and to seek a better God than he.

I find it helpful to quote Hart at some length as he expresses my own and most non-Calvinists feelings about Calvinism's divine determinism, including sin and evil and innocent suffering, so clearly and courageously:

One should consider the price at which that comfort [viz., that of the Calvinist speaker who preached "God killed my son"] is purchased: it requires us to believe in and love a God whose good ends will be realized not only in spite of—but entirely by way of—every cruelty, every fortuitous misery, every catastrophe, every betrayal, every sin the world has ever known; it requires us to believe in the eternal spiritual necessity of a child dying an agonizing death from diphtheria, of a young mother ravaged by cancer, of tens of thousands of Asians swallowed in an instant by the sea, of millions murdered in death camps and gulags and forced famines (and so on). It is a strange thing indeed to seek peace in a universe rendered morally intelligible at the cost of a God rendered morally loathsome.

With great reluctance, because I know it may deeply offend Calvinists, I can only say amen!

Without doubt some Calvinists will object and say God only permits sin and evil and innocent suffering; he does not actually cause them. And he permits them blamelessly without participating in the sin or evil themselves. The answer to this objection to Hart's devastating critique should be obvious from the Calvinist quotations provided above. Evangelical thinkers Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell rightly point out in *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* that the often-used language of *permission* "does not sit well with serious Calvinism," even though Calvinists such as Sproul and Helm fall back on it in order to avoid any implication that God is the cause of sin, evil, or innocent suffering.

Walls and Dongell rightly also point out that Calvin himself rejected this language of God's permission as inappropriate for God's sovereignty. True, some Calvinists use it, but "if God only permits certain things without specifically causing them, it is hard to see how this would square with the Calvinist claim of all-embracing determinism."⁵⁸ (Philosopher Walls defines determinism as "the view that every event must happen exactly as it did because of prior conditions.")

According to Walls and Dongell and many other careful critics of Calvinism, a deep incoherence lies at the heart of Calvinists' assertion of exhaustive divine sovereignty, divine determinism, and mere permission of evil: "For a determinist—and this is the crucial point—no event can be seen in isolation from the events that cause it. When this is kept in mind, it's hard to see how Calvinists can speak of any events or choices as being *permitted*." They take on Sproul's claim that evil springs from evil character made up of evil dispositions. This is Sproul's (and other Calvinists') attempt to avoid making God the author of evil because God is said to foreordain and

render certain actions while the evil of them flows from the finite actors' sinful desires. God's motive in foreordaining and rendering certain the sin is morally pure, *and* he does not coerce anyone to sin. Thus, God is said merely to permit the sin or evil action while at the same time rendering it certain.

Walls and Dongell rightly question the coherence of this account of God's role in evil because the question inevitably arises: From where did the creature's evil disposition and evil desires come? Here's one of the Achilles' heels of Calvinism using Pharaoh as case study (because Sproul blames Pharaoh's evil actions on his evil character and not on God who foreordained them). Walls and Dongell point out that "Pharaoh did not become the person he was in a vacuum. Rather, his character was formed by a long series of events and choices, all of which were determined by God (according to Calvinism)." In other words, to be consistent, Calvinism *must say* that even Pharaoh's evil character ultimately comes from God. (Imagine a universe in which only God and the very first creature exist. Where could the first evil impulse come from if not from the creature's free will, which Calvinism denies except in the compatibilist sense, or God?)

Walls and Dongell ask, then, "What sense, then, does it make to say that God permitted Pharaoh's actions, given this picture" of God's role in rendering everything certain without exception? They point out that "the notion of permission loses all significant meaning in a Calvinist framework. Therefore, it is not surprising that Calvin himself was suspicious of the idea and warned against using it."⁶³ Finally, Walls and Dongell sum up the entire problem concisely and forcefully: "Calvinism is hard-pressed to account for sin and evil in a way that is morally plausible. For if God determines everything that happens, then it is hard to see why there is so much sin and evil in the world and why God is not responsible for it."

Appeal, then, to God's permission of sin and evil does not square with high Calvinism's strong doctrine of divine sovereignty. Admittedly, many Calvinists *do* fall back on it, but that does not ameliorate what else they say about God's all-determining plan and action in rendering everything without exception certain.

Some Calvinists defend God's goodness based on what is called the "greater good" theodicy. (Theodicy is any philosophical or theological attempt to justify God's actions in the face of evil.) In fact, so far as I can tell, *all* Calvinists incorporate some version of the greater good defense of God's goodness in the face of sin and evil into their doctrines of providence. Walls and Dongell refer specifically to Paul Helm. The problem, they point out (and I would say another Achilles' heel of Calvinism), is belief in the divine decision to reprobate many people to hell by sovereignly "passing over them" when choosing some to save. In what sense can hell be said to serve a greater good? What good? I will say more on this issue in chapter 5, on unconditional election.

I would like to pause here and make something clear. *If* high Calvinism is saying anything distinctive in its doctrine of providence, it is that God purposefully plans and renders certain and controls everything without exception. Talk of God as merely permitting sin and evil and innocent suffering stands in stark contrast with this strong doctrine of providence. *If* it is logical for Calvinists to say God permits or allows evil, they can only mean that in a highly attenuated and unusual sense of "permits" and "allows"—one that falls outside the ordinary language of most people. Put bluntly but clearly, according to high Calvinism, God wants sin, evil, and innocent suffering to happen even if, as some Calvinists such as John Piper say, it hurts God. And he wants them to happen in a causal way; he renders them certain.

Let's examine a case study most Calvinists are reluctant to deal with. I find most of their case studies of God's sovereignty are about God's merciful allowing of suffering in Christians' lives to make them stronger. See, for example, Piper's *The Hidden Smile of God*, in which he explains how

intense affliction helped strengthen the spiritual lives of Christian heroes John Bunyan, William Cowper, and David Brainerd. But what happens if we turn from that kind of disciplinary affliction that Paul, in the New Testament, clearly says God *does* bring into Christians' lives for their own good and for his glory to two other kinds of affliction: the intense suffering of a child dying of cancer and the kidnap, rape, and murder of a child.

If high Calvinism is right, we have no choice but to attribute these horrible afflictions to God just as much as we must attribute Bunyan's, Cowper's, and Brainerd's afflictions to God. There is simply no way around it, given what Calvinists say about the "fine grained" sovereignty of God that controls every twist and turn of every atom and thought. The sufferings of children are not exempted by Calvinists even though they rarely bring them up.

So, return with me to the previously mentioned incident in the hospital where I visited my daughter's friend. Down the hall, not far away, I could hear a small child, perhaps two or three years old, screaming in agony between horrible, retching coughs. The poor child was being held by someone who talked soothingly to her as she coughed uncontrollably and then screamed some more. It was by no means a normal or usual childhood tantrum or cry of discomfort. I have never heard anything like it before or since or even on television. My constant thought was: "Why doesn't someone do something to alleviate that child's suffering?" I wanted to rush down the hall and see if I could help, but I could tell there were plenty of people around her in that room. What I heard haunts me to this day. It seemed that the child was possibly dying an agonizing death.

If Calvinism is true, God not only planned and ordained but also rendered certain that horrible suffering of that small child. He not only planned and ordained and rendered certain the child's illness but also the resulting agony. It won't do to reply that God suffers with her, as Piper says. In *The Pleasures of God* Piper offers his own case study of God's sovereignty in tragedy. He tells in some detail about his mother's death in a horrible car accident. (He makes a point of the fact that she suffered little, but what if she had suffered like that child I heard in the hospital?) Piper uses his mother's death to illustrate how whatever happens pleases God even if it also grieves him. God, he avers, planned and saw to it that his mother's car accident and death would happen for his glory. But how does it render God any less monstrous to say that God plans, ordains, and renders certain the agony of a dying child but grieves over it? Piper says that everything in creation, including sin, evil, and suffering, is an expression of God's glory.⁶⁷ He says that God "loves a worldwide reputation" and does everything to make his mighty power known.⁶⁹

In *The Doors of the Sea* theologian Hart tells of a large Sri Lankan man of enormous physical strength whose five children were killed by the Asian tsunami of 2004. The man was featured in an article in the *New York Times*. He was unable to prevent his children from perishing and, as he recounted his futile attempts, he was "utterly overwhelmed by his own weeping." Then Hart writes: "Only a moral cretin . . . would have attempted to soothe his anguish by assuring him that his children had died as a result of God's eternal, inscrutable, and righteous counsels, and that in fact their deaths had mysteriously served God's purposes in history."⁷¹ Of course, most Calvinists would advise their followers not to say such things in such moments to such people. However, Hart reflects that "if we would think it shamefully foolish and cruel to say such things in the moment when another's sorrow is most real and irresistibly painful, then we ought never to say them."

Turn with me now to the second imaginary (but too often real) case study of innocent suffering. This one involves moral evil. Imagine a little girl being kidnapped by a vile sex maniac who places her in his car and drives from her neighborhood to an isolated forest alongside a river. In spite of her crying and protesting, he takes her down to the river bank where he rapes her, strangles her,

and throws her body in the river. (This is not merely imaginary; it is based on a true story I saw on a television show called *Cold Case Files*.)

Calvin offers us the case of a merchant who foolishly wanders away from his companions and comes upon a thieves' den and is robbed and murdered. As earlier quoted, he says this event, like all events, was not only foreseen and allowed by God but actually caused and governed by God's secret plan. Nowhere does he suggest or allow that this is an exception to God's sovereignty; rather, he makes clear it is an illustration of how God works all things that are always being "directed by God's ever-present hand."

We read about the foolish merchant or a similar event today and shake our heads and say, "Yup; I can see God foreordaining that. What a stupid man. And God could easily have a good reason for causing that to happen." But if Calvin is right (and if high Calvinists such as those we have quoted are right), it is not only the foolish merchant whose death is rendered certain by God; it is also the kidnap, rape, and murder of the little girl that was "directed by God's ever-present hand." Notice that this event was not a freak disaster of nature or the result of someone's stupidity. It was pure evil. But whether we take Calvin's illustration of the murdered merchant or the very real illustration of the little girl, according to Calvinism's view of God's sovereignty *both* are identical in that God planned, ordained, governed, and rendered them certain. Hart is right that this inexorably makes God "the secret architect of evil."

But even worse, according to Piper, this makes God the "smiling face" hiding behind a "frowning providence." In *The Hidden Smile of God*, he quotes eighteenth-century Calvinist hymn writer William Cowper's song "God Moves in a Mysterious Way" approvingly: "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace; behind a frowning providence he hides a smiling face." That's all well and good when he is talking about the afflictions God brings into the lives of his heroes to make them stronger Christians. But what about when it applies equally, as it must if Piper is right about God's providence, to the scene of a sex maniac raping a little girl, then strangling her and throwing her into a river? It won't do to escape the difficulty by saying in such cases God merely allows the sin and evil and innocent suffering. If Calvinism is right, God also approves of it and renders it certain even if he also grieves over it. What kind of God is that?

Piper and other Calvinists talk much of God's great reputation and renown. What many of their listeners and followers fail to realize is their account of God's sovereignty makes God's reputation dubious at best—unless, of course, all one means by God's reputation is his power. But is that really what we mean by God's reputation? Isn't it more a matter of his character as good? As earlier noted, Helm says God's goodness cannot be so different from our highest and best ideas of goodness that it loses all meaning. But isn't that what has happened here—with Piper's and similar Calvinists' ideas of God's role in evil and innocent suffering? I think so.

I want to register the fact that some within the Reformed community agree with this assessment of high Calvinism's doctrine of God's sovereignty. James Daane, among others, blasts what he calls "decretal theology" (which is what I am calling divine determinism) for failing to take evil seriously. Drawing out the good and necessary consequences of this theology's explanation of God's role in sin and evil, Daane says, "With his eye of faith the decretal theologian can look out on a broken, bleeding humanity, on a world at war with itself, and see only a thing of beauty and peace."

THE FREEDOM OF GOD AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY

At least two other problems arise directly out of high Calvinism's account of God's sovereignty. Not only is God's reputation as good impugned, but also God's freedom in relation to creation and human responsibility for evil are cast into doubt.

I have already touched on the problem of God's freedom. It will come up again throughout this book because it is an issue at the heart of the debate over Calvinism. Even some Reformed theologians believe classical, high Calvinism effectively, if inadvertently, undermines the freedom of God—which is highly ironic because *all* Calvinists claim that their view of God is designed to protect God's transcendence, including his freedom.

Many Calvinists argue that only Calvinism protects God from being made dependent on creatures. Boettner, for example, argues that Calvinism is all about God's absolute freedom from being conditioned by anyone or anything outside of himself. In fact, for Boettner, the whole scheme of Calvinism, although supported by Scripture, can be derived from the idea of God's infinity. Thus, when God created the world he did so with "perfect freedom." Helm also leans on the idea of God's transcendence or wholly otherness to say that creatures cannot affect the divine will. God is wholly free from human or any other conditioning: "No human decision can change the divine will in any respect."⁷⁸ Sproul writes about God's self-sufficiency as absolutely crucial to God's deity and makes clear by that he means God is free from any dependence on anything outside himself for anything he is or does.

These ideas of God are not unique to Calvinism; for the most part they are common stock in what is called "classical Christian theism"—a picture of God developed throughout the centuries but especially in the early church and medieval universities. In classical Christian theism God is said to be incapable of any kind of change or dependence on anything or anyone outside himself for anything. God is *actus purus*, to use the term of Thomas Aquinas, the great medieval scholastic philosopher and theologian. That means there is no potentiality in God, only actuality.

The question is, however, whether at least some versions of Calvinism inadvertently make God dependent on the world for something that he needs—his own self-glorification through the manifestation of all his attributes equally. This is a theme running throughout most high Calvinism—that everything God does in creation and redemption is for his glory. This idea of the purpose of God is traceable at least to Edwards, but Boettner expresses it best with his answer to why God has allowed sin into the world:

Sin ... is permitted in order that the mercy of God may be shown in its forgiveness, and that His justice may be shown in its punishment. Its entrance is the result of a settled design which God formed in eternity, and through which He purposed to reveal Himself to His rational creatures as complete and full-orbed in all conceivable perfections.

Piper, also like Edwards, claims that God's purpose in everything that happens is the display of his glory. Edwards clearly explained, as Piper agrees, that God's purpose in everything including evil is the full manifestation of all his attributes including justice and wrath.

In an ironic twist, this explanation of God's purpose in creation and redemption, including sin and evil, comes back to haunt Edwards and most Calvinists after him. (Hints of it can also be found in Calvin.) Apparently, God *needs* the world to be as it is, including sin, evil, innocent suffering, redemption, and reprobation (hell), in order to manifest his attributes and thereby glorify himself. Could God have refrained from it? Not according to Edwards, who affirmed the "necessary determination of God's will in all things by what he sees to be *fittest* and *best*."

Edwards' and other Calvinists' denials of libertarian freedom as incoherent and embrace of compatibilism even in God (i.e., God's free will is controlled by his strongest motives) lead straight into the idea that God's creation of the world as the "theater of his glory" (Calvin) was necessary and not truly free in the sense that it might have been otherwise. This logical conclusion from this strong view of sovereignty is contrary to the strong emphasis on God's transcendence and freedom from conditioning. It is also contrary to traditional Christian orthodoxy! And it undermines the whole idea of creation and redemption being *solely by grace* because what is necessary cannot be by grace.

Evangelical philosopher Bruce A. Little correctly criticizes Piper and others who think like him. According to Piper, he rightly notes, God ordains evil (as everything else) to glorify himself. He notes that "Piper carefully uses his words to say that in all the evil on this earth, God has a purpose: to make the glory of Christ shine more brightly.... [A child's] torturous death is part of this will. This position not only makes evil necessary to the purpose of God, it makes God the one morally responsible for the evil."⁸⁴ Little and other critics come close to exposing the radical extent of this view of God's sovereignty including evil. It is that God *must create, allow sin and evil, redeem, and reject in order to fulfill the potential of his own self-glorification.*

Without the world, then, God would not be God in the same way; his glory would be less than it is with it. Evil, then, is necessary to God. God is dependent on the world, including evil. Evangelical philosopher Jeremy Evans rightly concludes: "If God needs creation to exemplify these properties [justice, wrath], then humans can rightly question whether God was free in His act of creation."

Of course, few Calvinists will put it that way, but it is a "good and necessary consequence" of what some of them say about God's purpose in creation and the necessity of God's actions arising out of his character. The upshot is that God is not truly free in relation to creation in the sense of being able to do otherwise than create, permit (render certain) evil, redeem, and damn for his glory.

The second of the two problems following from Calvinism's doctrine of God's providence is the inevitable shift of responsibility for sin and evil from creatures to God. Again, all Calvinists say that God is not responsible for sin and evil even though he foreordains and renders them certain, and that creatures are responsible even though they could not do otherwise than they do.

In his *Institutes* Calvin claims that "God's providence does not exculpate our wickedness." To those who claim that God's providence does make God and not the sinner responsible for evil he says: "Away ... with this doglike impudence, which can indeed bark at God's justice afar off but cannot touch it."⁸⁷ His explanation is that although people would not do evil things "unless he [God] willed it," they do them motivated by an "evil inclination." Therefore, even though they could not do otherwise than they do, and even though "their misdeeds are committed solely by God's dispensation," God is not guilty and they are.

Clearly, what Calvin means is that "evil" lies in the intentions of the heart and not in the actions themselves. Since God foreordains and renders certain the actions with a good motive (no doubt for his glory!), he cannot be held responsible for the evil of them. Rather, the person who does the evil thing he or she cannot avoid doing (because compelled by an evil motive and ultimately by God) is the only guilty party.

What did Edwards say about this? We have already seen that Edwards believed and argued that God "renders sin certain infallibly" by "withholding his action and energy." He wrote of sinners that "God leaves 'em [sic] *to themselves* [so that they] necessarily sin." But, Edwards claimed, God does not do evil by willing evil.⁹² This is because *guilt* lies entirely in the evil disposition of the heart that arose in Adam and in us by God's permission making it necessary.

Here is Edwards' clearest statement on this matter: "For God ... to have the disposal [control] of this affair [the fall], as to withhold those influences, without which nature will be corrupt, is not to be the *author of sin*."

Notice a couple of things here. First, Edwards believed and taught that human nature (and perhaps creaturely nature in general, including angels) would necessarily become corrupt and sin without supernatural divine influence. All Calvinists who follow Edwards' line here (and most do) must be making the same assumption. The necessary correlate of that is that human nature was not created good. This equates finitude with "not good." Of course, nobody has ever thought that finite nature is metaphysically perfect as God is perfect. It is capable of corruption. But to say it will necessarily become corrupt without God's supernatural influence is to call into question the goodness of God's creation.

Second, Edwards is saying that God withheld that necessary influence, and *he must mean withdrew it* because otherwise the fall would have happened immediately. Either way, God could have preserved Adam from sinning; he chose not to, knowing infallibly that Adam would fall if he withdrew his supernatural, preserving power.

Third, the fall of Adam and all its consequences (including the kidnapping, rape and murder of the little girl) were willed by God and rendered certain by God.

Fourth, Edwards nowhere explains the origin of Adam's evil disposition that made him and not God guilty. But his doctrine of divine providence, which is exhaustive sovereignty down to the minutest details, would seem to require that everything in creation, including all motives and dispositions, is under God's control and rendered certain by God. However, in this argument Edwards seems to be saying that Adam's evil disposition simply popped into existence out of nowhere. That is forbidden by Edwards' strong doctrine of God's sovereignty and by his denial of libertarian free will. Everything comes from somewhere! If the evil inclination that caused Adam to sin came from within himself autonomously, that would be a huge concession to Arminianism!

Edwards scholar John E. Smith, editor of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, comments that "it must be, then, that God in his wisdom counts a necessary evil nature subject to moral blame." And, in light of Edwards' statement elsewhere that "nothing can come to pass but what is the will and pleasure of God should come to pass ... this extraordinarily strong language would seem to put Edwards in the position of making God the efficient cause of all evil and sin."⁹⁵ Smith criticizes Edwards for failing to account adequately for Adam's sin or God's blamelessness and says of Edwards' defense of God, "Edwards ended lamely."

Let's move on to Boettner. What did he say about God's responsibility for sin and evil? True to his doctrine of meticulous providence, he did not hesitate to affirm "the absolute sway of God over the thoughts and intents of the heart [of man]." However, he argued, people are enslaved to sin by their own fault. How did this enslavement to sin begin? Boettner repeats the arguments of Edwards. Even the fall of Adam and Eve was "ordained in the secret counsels of God,"⁹⁸ and God used his sway over their thoughts and intents to render the fall certain. "Yet," Boettner claimed, "God in no way compelled man to fall. He simply withheld that undeserved constraining grace with which Adam would infallibly not have fallen, which grace He was under no obligation to bestow." According to Boettner, like Edwards before him, this is the reason God is not responsible for sin and evil and human beings are. All since Adam have inherited his corrupted nature and also act out of it sinfully because of it.

So, according to Boettner, the only way God could have been responsible for Adam's first sin is if he compelled him to sin. Simply rendering his sin certain by withholding the "constraining grace" in no way makes God responsible for it. Two questions automatically arise. First, who

believes that a person who renders it certain that another person will commit a crime, such that the other person who actually commits the crime could not have done otherwise, is not complicit in it? Anyone who watches the television series *Law & Order* knows that a person or company that seduces a person to commit a crime even indirectly is just as guilty as the person who commits it. And the person who commits it is guilty only to the extent he or she was able to avoid doing it. I ask, if you were on a jury and you became convinced by the evidence that the defendant could not have done otherwise than commit the offense, would you vote guilty or for acquittal? I venture that common sense dictates that jurors vote for acquittal in such cases.

Second, Boettner believes that God in no way owed Adam that constraining grace needed not to sin. I regard that as debatable. But the issue is not whether God *owed* it to him but whether the God who is *love*, revealed most fully in Jesus Christ, would have removed it, thereby rendering it certain that Adam would fall with all the consequences of that. Boettner's argument that God in no way owed constraining grace to Adam certainly makes God seem callous, especially when God then blames Adam for sinning when God created him with a nature so weak that sinning was inevitable. It seems that, on this account, God set Adam up to fall. It reminds of the old limerick about the supralapsarian Dutch theologian Franciscus Gomarus, who harassed Arminius for not accepting this high account of God's sovereignty and all that comes with it:

Franciscus Gomarus was a supralapsarius;
He actually gave Adam an excuse.
God had decreed,
Foreordained Adam's deed.
God pre-cooked Adam's goose.

What about other Calvinists? What do they have to say about God's responsibility and humanity's responsibility for the fall and all of its consequences? Helm repeats the arguments of Edwards and Boettner about God's ordaining evil and rendering it certain. God does not cause evil actions but "determines them" by "divine *withholding*." He claims only the immediate cause of an evil act can be considered guilty of it.¹⁰¹ I believe this is spurious because it flies in the face of common sense and natural law. Jeremy Evans is right: "Ultimate responsibility ... resides where the ultimate cause is."

John Piper avoids the tortuous explanations of other Calvinists and simply says he does not know how it is that God foreordains and renders certain sin and evil and yet sinners are responsible and God is not. He says this is ultimately a mystery that cannot be relieved by human reasoning. The Bible simply says both: God foreordains evil and humans are responsible anyway.

Many critics of high Calvinism, including this writer, believe a serious contradiction lies at the heart of this strong view of God's sovereignty that includes God's foreordination and rendering certain of evil—especially when it is explained by the mechanism of God's "withholding" or "withdrawing" of necessary grace such that Adam fell (and all his posterity with him) infallibly by God's design. I take seriously that Calvinists rarely attribute the guilt of sin to God; they almost always say that God is morally pure and stainless and that all guilt for sin lies with sinful creatures. But the problem is that this contradicts their strong view of God's sovereignty that includes God's determination to evil.

Who can blame those who fear that this inevitably leads to the good and necessary consequence that God is the author of sin and evil and thus bears primary responsibility for it? Other than a sheer act of will power to embrace what is unintelligible, what stops someone who believes this from continuing on to say that creatures are not guilty and God is?

What one has to face is the question as to which side of this double-sided doctrine of God's absolute, determining sovereignty and humans' sole responsibility of evil to embrace. One cannot really embrace both without falling into contradiction. Appeal to mystery is not appropriate; contradiction is not mystery, as even Sproul emphatically argues in *Chosen by God*. I agree with him when he writes that "for a Christian to embrace both poles of a blatant contradiction is to commit intellectual suicide." I will deal with this problem of unintelligibility more in the conclusion.

ALTERNATIVES TO DIVINE DETERMINISM

Does Scripture require acceptance of the high Calvinist doctrine of divine determinism? It does not. What about all those biblical passages that Calvinists use to argue their case for exhaustive foreordination and determination of all events, including sin and evil? Some of those have been mentioned earlier. Every single passage that supposedly teaches divine determination of evil, innocent suffering, and sin can be interpreted as referring to God's permission. Virtually all Christians agree that nothing whatever can happen without God's permission. The question is whether Calvinism is really permitted to fall back on permission language when it already says that God wills whatever happens, including sin and evil, and that God's permission is "willing permission" that actively renders them certain. The main alternative to this strong doctrine of God's sovereignty is *divine self-limitation*.

First, let it be clearly understood that those who appeal to divine self-limitation and passive permission as the explanation for sin and evil in the omnipotent, creator God's world *do not* say God *never* manipulates historical circumstances to bring about his will. What God *never does* is *cause evil*. God may and no doubt sometimes does bring about some event by placing people in circumstances where he knows what they will freely do because he needs them to do that for his plan to be fulfilled. Such seemed to be the case with Jesus' crucifixion. Even then, however, it was not that God tempted or manipulated individuals to sin. Rather, he knew what events, such as the triumphal entry, would result in the crucifixion.

But what we must not say is that the fall of Adam, which set off the whole history of sin and evil, was willed, planned, and rendered certain by God. God neither foreordained it nor rendered it certain, and it was not a part of his will except to reluctantly allow it. How do we know this? We know it because we know God's character through Jesus Christ. The doctrine of the incarnation proves that God's character is fully revealed in Jesus such that "no *interpretation* of any passage [in the Bible] that undercuts the revelations of the divine mind inculcated by Jesus can be accepted as valid. What he says and does is what God says and does. He had no hidden decrees to conceal, no dark side of his Father to protect from disclosure, no reason to be defensive about the [ways of] God."

The high Calvinist doctrine of God's sovereignty including evil as part of God's plan, purpose, and determining power blatantly contradicts Scripture passages that reveal "God is love" (1 John 4:8), takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:32), wants everyone to be saved (Ezek. 18:32; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), and never tempts anyone (James 1:13). To be sure, Calvinists have clever but unconvincing explanations of these and numerous other passages of Scripture. For example, John Piper argues that God has "complex feelings and motives," such that he genuinely regrets that sin and evil have to be part of his world, genuinely wishes that all people could be saved, and is grieved when those he predestined to die and even suffer in hell for eternity for his

glory experience that fate. But these are not convincing explanations of these important passages that reveal the heart of God. They make God double-minded.

So how might one deal with the reality of sin and evil in God's world without placing undue limits on God's power and sovereignty? The only way is to posit what Scripture everywhere assumes—a divine self-limitation in relation to the world of moral freedom, including especially libertarian freedom. That freedom is a wonderful and terrible gift of God to human persons created in his image and likeness. In other words, God allows his perfect will to be thwarted by his human creatures whom he loves and respects enough not to control them.

Thus, God does have two wills, but they are not ones posited by Calvinism. As a result of Adam's free choice to fall into sin (with free choice here meaning he could have done otherwise), God has a *perfect will*—also known as his *antecedent will*. (“Perfect” here means “what God truly wishes would happen.”) God's perfect will is that none perish; this is God's antecedent will (antecedent to the fall and to its resulting corruption in the world). God also has a *consequent will*—consequent to creaturely rebellion. It is that he allows some freely to choose to perish. But his allowing is genuinely reluctant and not manipulative.

Evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz (1950–2005) offered a helpful distinction in God's providence that corresponds to the two wills—perfect/antecedent and consequent—mentioned above. It is the distinction between “sovereignty *de facto*” and “sovereignty *de jure*.” According to Grenz, with whom I agree, due to God's voluntary self-limitation he is now sovereign *de jure* (by right) but not yet sovereign *de facto* (in actuality). His sovereignty *de facto* is future. This reflects the biblical narrative in which Satan is the “god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4) (where “world” clearly means “this present evil age”), and God will defeat him in the coming age to become “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). The entirety of 1 Corinthians 15 can be interpreted in no other way; it assumes the distinction between God's sovereign rule *de jure* now and *de facto* in the future. This is *not* to say, of course, that God is *not* actually sovereign now at all; it only says that God is *allowing* his sovereignty to be challenged and his will to be partially thwarted until then.

Doesn't this limit God's power and sovereignty? No, because God remains omnipotent; he *could* control everything and everyone if he chose to. For the sake of having real, personal creatures who can freely choose to love him or not, God limits his control. Still, God is sovereign in the sense that nothing at all can ever happen that God does not allow. Nothing falls totally outside of God's supervening oversight and governance. But not everything that happens is what God wants to happen or determines to happen. There is no exhaustive divine determinism.

Of course, Jesus, being God, could have healed everyone in Nazareth when he visited there (Mark 6:5), but he “couldn't” do miracles there because of their lack of faith. As God, he had the sheer power to do miracles. But he had limited his power ordinarily to do miracles in the presence of faith. He did not want to go around unilaterally healing people without some measure of cooperating or receptive faith on their part. So it is with God's sovereignty. He could exercise deterministic control, but he has chosen not to do so. As theologian E. Frank Tupper says, God is not a “do anything, anytime, anywhere kind of God” because he has chosen not to be that kind of God. He has chosen to make himself partially dependent on his human covenant partners while remaining the “superior covenant power of holy love.”¹⁰⁹

This is a book intended to point out the weaknesses and even fatal flaws of high Calvinism, that is, radical Reformed theology. It is not intended to be a defense of Arminianism or any alternative to Calvinism. That would make it a much longer book and therefore one many may decline to read. What is missing on bookstores' and libraries' shelves is not a book about Arminianism or even one about God's self-limiting sovereignty over against Calvinism. What is

missing is a book demonstrating why high Calvinism is not biblically, theologically, or logically tenable. That's all this volume intends to be. Occasionally I will mention alternatives to high Calvinism, such as (about God's sovereignty) E. Frank Tupper, *A Scandalous Providence*; Gregory Boyd, *Is God to Blame?* Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Ruler*; and especially David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* Here I will offer a taste of that last little volume, which well expresses my and many other Christians' alternative (to Calvinism) vision of God's providence. Hart explains:

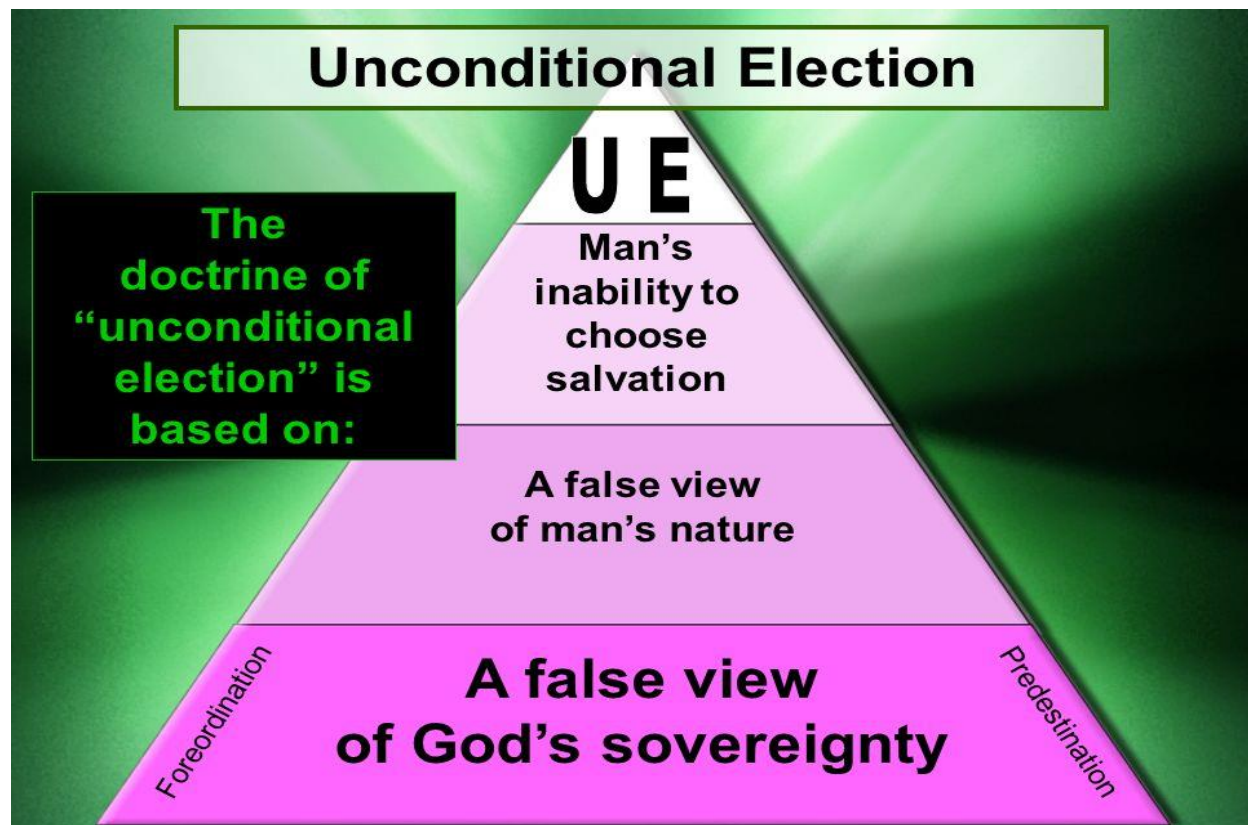
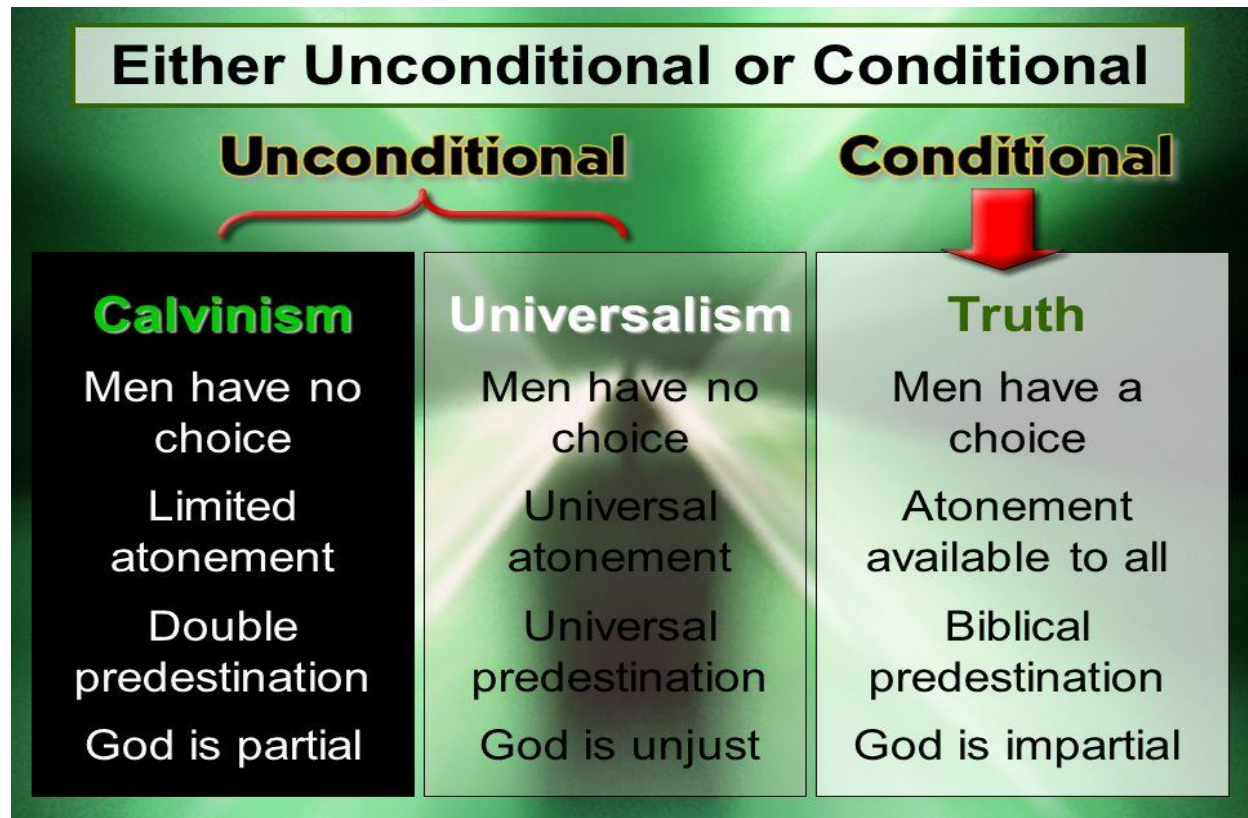
How radically the gospel is pervaded by a sense that the brokenness of the fallen world is the work of rebellious rational free will, which God permits to reign, and pervaded also by a sense that Christ comes genuinely to *save* creation, to conquer, to rescue, to defeat the power of evil in all things. This great narrative of fall and redemption is not a charade, not simply a dramaturgical lesson regarding God's absolute prerogatives prepared for us from eternity, but a real consequence of the mystery of created freedom and the fullness of grace.¹³

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Calvinists:	A Mystery (both are true because God said so!) Redeeming grace limited in scope, not sufficiency. Divine security through assured perseverance.
Lutherans:	Grace universal, effectual only for the elect. Redeeming grace unlimited in scope and sufficiency. Redeeming grace can be lost.
Arminians:	Stress on responsibility, neglect of sovereignty. Redeeming grace unlimited in scope and sufficiency. Redeeming grace can be lost.

Chart 18

¹³ Olson, R. E. (2011). [Against Calvinism](#) (pp. 70–101). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



YES TO ELECTION; NO TO DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

I never discovered who did it, but I must say it was clever and intriguing if somewhat bizarre. My wife and I returned to my office to retrieve our coats after an evening Christmas program and banquet on campus. Pinned on my office door was a folded-over note. That's not unusual; I often get them from students, colleagues, or visitors. So I took the note down, opened my door, and turned on the light. Then I read the note: "Professor Olson, I talked to God; you're damned. Thought you'd like to know." It was unsigned. Of course, I took it as a joke; I had been involved in a light-hearted campus debate about "predestination versus free will," so I assumed the note was someone's attempt at humor. On the other hand, I have met Calvinists who think it is possible to know for sure who is predestined to heaven and who is predestined to hell.

That may not be as bizarre as some Calvinists think. They should study their own history. In the previous chapter I mentioned John Piper's book that includes a chapter on the Calvinist hymn writer William Cowper (pronounced "Cooper") (1731–1800), author of "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood" and "God Moves in a Mysterious Way," as well as hundreds of other hymns. Cowper was a convinced Calvinist who strongly believed in "double predestination"—that God has from eternity chosen some people to save and others to damn. For much of his adult life he suffered bouts of extreme depression and even spent time in an asylum. During some of those times he was convinced that somehow he knew he was predestined to hell. Whether his conviction of damnation led to his depression or vice versa is, of course, unknown.

I spoke to an adult Sunday school class about Christian doctrine and Spent one session on the doctrine of election, explaining how Calvinists view it as unconditional and Arminians (and others) view it as conditional (when referring to individuals and their eternal destiny). We talked about the strengths and weaknesses of this doctrine and especially the problem of God's goodness in light of his supposed decree to "pass over" or even positively select some to eternal perdition. The class debated among themselves whether this is consistent with the love of God shown in Jesus Christ. Afterward, a middle-aged gentleman with a PhD in psychology who was also the author of some well-known books on marriage came to me for a "one-on-one." He explained that he did not consider God's selection of some for damnation a problem because he had come to believe the reprobate are not really persons at all but automata (machines, robots). I had never heard such an explanation before and would have suspected it of being the imaginings of a somewhat unsophisticated mind, had this man not been who he was.

Without any doubt the doctrine of unconditional election, the "U" in TULIP, has been the subject of much debate and controversy among conservative and evangelical Christians. But it is crucial to all true Calvinists; it is the heart of their system of soteriology. To them, it is a sweet, comforting doctrine because it tells them their salvation is not dependent on anything they are or do but only on God's grace. To Calvinists it is inextricably linked to the foundational Reformation doctrine of justification by grace through faith alone. They believe that any view except theirs leads inexorably to a weakening of that Reformation doctrine. To others, however (such as Calvinists like Cowper), it is a doctrine of terror because of its unavoidable flip side—that God has chosen some, whom he could save, to suffer eternally in hell (even if only by passing over them when selecting others to salvation).

Whereas defenders of unconditional election see it as an expression of God's great goodness and mercy, opponents (such as John Wesley) see it as an expression of a dark and hidden God (Luther's term for the side of God that predestines some to hell) who cares more about his own glory than about the well-being of all people. Opponents say it cannot be reconciled with Scriptures

such as “God is love” and “God [does not want] anyone to perish” (1 John 4:8, 16; 2 Peter 3:9). Most of all, it cannot be reconciled with the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ, who wept over Jerusalem when its inhabitants did not accept him as their Messiah (Luke 19:41–44).

Few people who know about the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election (usually expressed by nontheologians as simply “predestination”) are indifferent; most are either set against it (such as John Wesley) or adamantly for it (such as Jonathan Edwards). (I mention Wesley and Edwards here because they were born in the same year [1703], their lives significantly overlapped during the Great Awakening in Great Britain and North America, and they are usually considered the two great-grandfathers of the evangelical movement.) As I will explain more fully in this chapter, I am for unconditional election *as that applies to God’s people but not specific individuals*, and I am for *conditional election of individuals*. But I am firmly and unalterably opposed to unconditional individual election’s inevitable correlate—reprobation. I believe this so-called double predestination of individuals by God is inconsistent with his love, and the teaching makes it difficult to tell the difference between God and the devil.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION /S DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

Some Calvinists say that they believe in “single predestination.” What they mean is that they do *not* believe God chooses to damn anyone; he only selects some of fallen humanity (St. Augustine’s “mass of damnation”) to save, and he leaves the rest to their deserved and freely chosen fate in hell. But does this make sense?

I begin as usual with Calvin, who wrote in the *Institutes* that “God is said to have ordained from eternity those whom he wills to embrace in love and those upon whom he wills to vent his wrath.” The surrounding context makes clear that he agrees with what is said. It would be difficult to argue that Calvin held anything other than double predestination. Passages from the *Institutes* quoted in chapter 3 make this clear; he talks about the reprobate being compelled to obedience by God. (Again, the context makes clear he does not mean compelled to obedience to God’s *preceptive will*, that is, God’s moral commands, but compelled to obedience to God’s *decretive will*, that is, God’s decrees of what shall be, including their sinfulness.) Calvin, I believe, would be shocked to hear of people calling themselves Calvinists but arguing that predestination is only single, that it applies only to election and not to reprobation—as if the two could be separated or as if God could be sovereign in that case.

Boettner also affirmed divine reprobation of some persons and even that God’s will is the “decisive factor” in their damnation. First, he wrote of reprobation that “this, too,” like election to salvation, “is of God.” Furthermore, “we believe that from all eternity God has intended to leave some of Adam’s posterity in their sins and that the decisive factor in the life of each is to be found in God’s will.”³ It is important to remember that for Boettner, as apparently for other Calvinist authors I have quoted, “the Scripture writers did not hesitate to affirm the absolute sway of God over the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Also, “God so governs the inward feelings, external environment, habits, desires, motives, etc., of men that they freely do what He purposes.”⁵ God, he confessed, “in a real sense” determines people’s choices, and there is no such thing as “self-determination.” Thus, the reason is clear for Boettner’s claim that reprobation is necessarily part of God’s sovereign plan and purpose and is not ultimately conditioned by anything outside of God himself. God’s will [obviously his “decretive will”] is the “decisive factor” in the life of the reprobate and their reprobation.

At the same time, however, like all Calvinists I am aware of, Boettner claims that the reprobate *deserve* their punishment (eternal suffering in hell) because they “voluntarily chose sin.” Ultimately, he leaves this apparent contradiction in the realm of mystery: “Predestination [including reprobation] and free agency are the twin pillars of a great temple, and they meet above the clouds where the human gaze cannot penetrate.”⁸ It seems to me, however, that this mystery is a blatant contradiction, something even Sproul rules out of bounds for Christian discourse. We must point out here the difference between mystery and contradiction; the former is something that cannot be fully explained to or comprehended by the human mind whereas the latter is sheer nonsense—two concepts that cancel each other out and together make an absurdity. Christian theology should never rest comfortably with the latter whereas the former is always going to be present in human talk of God.

Boettner has harsh words for those Calvinists who opt for single predestination: “‘Mild Calvinism’ [i.e., the attempt to believe in single predestination] is synonymous with sickly Calvinism, and sickness, if not cured, is the beginning of the end.” While admitting that reprobation is “admittedly an unpleasant doctrine,”¹⁰ Boettner attempts to prove its necessity. For him, without it God’s justice will not be fully displayed and thus God will not be fully glorified in the world and before angels.

Another witness that unconditional election necessarily includes reprobation as its “other side of the coin” is Calvinist pastor and theologian Edwin Palmer, author of *The Five Points of Calvinism*, in which he lays out and defends “Twelve Theses on Reprobation.” First, he defines reprobation as “God’s eternal, sovereign, unconditional, immutable, wise, holy, and mysterious decree whereby, in electing some to eternal life, He passes others by, and then justly condemns them for their own sin—all to His own glory.” Like Boettner and others, he admits this is a difficult doctrine but says that “our infinite God presents us with some astounding truths—truths that our sinful and finite minds rebel against.”¹² He argues that sin comes about by the “efficacious permission of God”—something we have already noted in other Calvinist theologians who are reluctant to say sin is caused by God. It would seem that “efficacious permission” must mean, as God’s permission of sin and evil means in Edwards, Boettner, and others, that God renders it certain without forcing people to sin. Palmer says: “All things, including sin, are brought to pass by God—without God violating His holiness.”

Palmer argues that the predestination of some necessarily implies reprobation of others: “If God chooses some, then He necessarily passes by others. Up implies down; back implies front; wet implies dry; later implies earlier; choosing implies leaving others unchosen.” (Notice that Palmer is using logic here and I agree with him!) He then goes on to argue that God does not “effectuate” sin and unbelief in the same way he effectuates faith.¹⁵ “God wills sin and unbelief unwillingly; he takes no delight in them.” One can only wonder why this would be so *if* it is true that God does everything “for his glory.” How can God not take delight in what glorifies him? Palmer forges on boldly and states that God’s reprobation is both conditional and unconditional:

Reprobation as condemnation is conditional in the sense that once someone is passed by, then he is condemned by God for his sins and unbelief. Although all things—unbelief and sin included—proceed from God’s eternal decree, man is still to blame for his sins. He is guilty; it is his fault and not God’s.

This is enough to make anyone’s head spin. And Palmer agrees and revels in it. “He [the Calvinist] realizes that what he advocates is ridiculous.... The Calvinist freely admits that his position is illogical, ridiculous, nonsensical, and foolish.” However, “this secret matter belongs to

the Lord our God, and we should leave it there. We ought not to probe into that secret counsel of God.” Apparently Palmer agrees with Martin Luther who, when pushed to the wall by Erasmus in their debate about free will, urged his readers to “adore the mysteries” and not try to use logic. Palmer also echoes early church theologian Tertullian who said, “I believe it because it is absurd!” Perhaps many Calvinists will not agree with Palmer, but they should if they want to hold onto this teaching that God reprobates people unconditionally (because he himself foreordained sin and rendered it certain) *and yet* the reprobate are solely responsible and deserve their eternal punishment because their reprobation is “conditional.”

What drives Palmer and other high Calvinists to such a sacrifice of the intellect? He makes no secret of it: Romans 9—the bedrock passage of Scripture for Calvinist belief in unconditional election and reprobation: “When God speaks—as he has clearly done in Romans 9—then we are simply to follow and believe, even if we cannot understand, and even if it seems contradictory to our puny minds.” Romans 9 says that God chose Jacob over Esau and loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born or had done anything good or bad “in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls” (Rom. 9:11–12). Then Paul quotes Exodus where God said to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (9:15). Then we read: “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (9:18).

Of course, Romans 9 says much more and I urge readers to read and study the entire book of Romans and interpret chapter 9 in the context of the whole book. Like all Calvinists, Palmer interprets these statements literally as applying to individual salvation and reprobation. As I will show later in this chapter, however, there are other valid interpretations that do not end up requiring the sacrifice of the intellect or regarding God as arbitrary or monstrous.

Sproul is another Calvinist who argues that there can be no unconditional election to salvation without reprobation so that “single predestination” is an impossible concept. He boldly promotes double predestination while registering some important caveats. “If there is such a thing as predestination at all, and if that predestination does not include all people, then we must not shrink from the necessary inference that there are two sides to predestination. It is not enough to talk about Jacob; we must also consider Esau.” In order to soften the blow (to God’s goodness) Sproul argues that these two decrees of God—to save some and damn others—must not be taken as “equally ultimate” or both positive. He criticizes what he calls hyper-Calvinism for making election and reprobation equally ultimate—placing them on the same plane in the plan of God and the outworking of that plan by God. Against hyper-Calvinism Sproul expresses what he believes is the true Reformed doctrine:

The Reformed view teaches that God positively or actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to insure their salvation. The rest of mankind God leaves to themselves. He does not create unbelief in their hearts. That unbelief is already there.... In the Calvinist view the decree of election is positive; the decree of reprobation is negative.

One can only wonder how big a difference that is. Does saying that election and reprobation are not equally ultimate and that one is positive and the other negative really accomplish anything in terms of rescuing the integrity of God’s character (which is clearly Sproul’s concern)?

It is important for Sproul that double predestination be understood his way—as the unequal, ultimate *and* nonultimate decisions of God to save some fallen humans and let others suffer eternal punishment. First, he says, those whom God allows to suffer eternal punishment, those he passes over, deserve eternal punishment anyway. God is under no obligation to save them. His passing

over them does not implicate him in their demise in any way that would imply moral imperfection in God.

A closer look at *how* Sproul says the reprobate are evil and deserving of eternal punishment reveals the flaw in his reasoning about the character of God in light of double predestination. He uses God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart to illustrate God's general way of rendering it certain that some portion of humanity, the nonelect or reprobate, deserve eternal punishment. "All that God has to do to harden people's hearts is to remove restraints. He gives them a longer leash.... In a sense he gives them enough rope to hang themselves." He is affirming the normal Calvinist explanation that God renders the fall and all its consequent corruption, including sin and guilt, certain by withdrawing or withholding sufficient grace. God chooses certain people to harden their hearts so they won't repent and believe. Then he says:

This is how we must understand double predestination. God gives mercy to the elect by working faith in their hearts. He gives justice to the reprobate by leaving them in their own sins. There is no symmetry here. One group receives mercy. The other group receives justice. No one is a victim of injustice. None can complain that there is unrighteousness in God.

Does this make any sense? Not really. First, how is this not symmetry in light of the fact that sinners' sinfulness is foreordained and rendered certain by God such that they cannot do otherwise? How is God's decree of reprobation to pass over certain individuals merely negative and passive if God hardens their hearts? How does Sproul's account really differ from what he calls hyper-Calvinism?

Reformed theologian James Daane, an archenemy of double predestination, calls this kind of talk "verbalism"—"a theatrical game in which words really carry no ascertainable sense." For Daane, as I will bring out later in this chapter, this applies to many words used by double predestinarians, whom he calls "decretal theologians." It seems to apply well to Sproul's talk of God's decrees not being equally ultimate because one is positive and the other negative and to his notions of justice and fairness.

All of the Calvinist theologians who argue *for* double predestination and *against* "single predestination" embrace and affirm the idea that God sovereignly predestines some of his own human creatures, created in his own image and likeness, to hell, and that this is consistent with God's goodness, justice, and love. I agree with them wholeheartedly that there can be no such thing as single predestination insofar as predestination is unconditional election of *some certain* people, a certain *number* out of all, to heaven. The automatic, unavoidable correlate to that is predestination to hell. It's double or nothing.

Where I disagree with them is that double predestination can be defended as good or that a God who does this can be considered good, loving, and just in any sense analogous to those virtues as they are revealed to us in Jesus Christ and in Scripture. If God does this the way they describe, then God's "goodness," God's "love," God's "justice" are mere words with no ascertainable meaning. Daane is right; it would be mere verbalism to continue to speak of God having those attributes as aspects of his eternal divine nature and character—something almost all Calvinists do.

Moreover, even if God merely passes over some whom he could save, why would he do that if he is good, loving, and just? What meaning could those attributes have, even when applied to God, if God does what Calvinists claim? In other words, it isn't just a matter of reprobation, although I do believe reprobation is necessarily implied in the Calvinist doctrine of election. Even if it were possible to hold on to the idea that God does not positively reprobate anyone but only

mercifully chooses to save some and leave others to their “deserved damnation,” what meanings would “goodness,” “love,” and “justice” have when attributed to a God who could save everyone because salvation is absolutely unconditional (i.e., not dependent on anything God sees in or about the persons being saved)?

Here is another Achilles’ heel of high Calvinism. In spite of their best efforts to avoid it, the “good and necessary consequence” of their soteriology—TULIP—is that God is morally ambiguous if not a moral monster. There is no human analogy for this “goodness.” Any human being who had the ability to rescue a large number of people from a terrible calamity but rescues only some would never be considered good or loving or just. Some will say that these terms mean something different in God than in our world. Calvinist Paul Helm is right to reject that argument: “The goodness of God must bear some positive relation to the sorts of human actions we regard as good. Otherwise, why ascribe *goodness* to God?”

A PROBLEM FOR GOD’S CHARACTER AND REPUTATION

Regardless of the above *prima facie* contradictions of double predestination, Calvinists do defend this theology in various ways. I think I have understood them correctly, but I still do not think these defenses hold up.

Some Calvinists simply turn aside objections to double predestination by saying: “It is not within the creature’s jurisdiction to call [God] into question.” This is, of course, hardly a defense, but it is a response. Strangely, nearly all Calvinists do nevertheless attempt to defend God’s goodness, so one wonders how seriously to take this response to criticism. Furthermore, it is not God whom critics of Calvinism are calling into question. It is Calvinists’ *beliefs* about God that we are questioning! There is a difference. The frequency with which one encounters this rejection of criticism leads to the conclusion that at least some Calvinists have trouble distinguishing between their own *doctrine* of God and God himself. Like everyone else, Calvinists should be willing to at least consider the possibility that there are serious deficiencies and flaws in their doctrinal beliefs.

Many Calvinist theologians go beyond attempts to turn aside criticisms with statements about “not questioning God.” Many do offer strategies for defending God’s good character, God’s reputation, in the face of critical questions from non-Calvinists. The main issue they address is simply this: How can God be said to *be good, loving, and just in the face of these doctrines of high Calvinism?* How is God good, loving, and just toward the reprobate? How is God not arbitrary in his choosing some to save unconditionally while leaving others to damnation? And a related critical question is: How can the gospel call be given out as a well-meant offer to all if some have already been chosen by God for damnation and thus have no chance at all, whatsoever, of being accepted by God? (This last question rises to an especially intense pitch in relation to the next point of TULIP—limited atonement.)

Another way of asking the same set of questions is to pose passages of Scripture to Calvinists and ask how they reconcile their belief in reprobation-predestination with them? For example, John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Note also the verses quoted earlier: 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; and 1 John 4:8. How is God love if he foreordains many people to hell for eternity when he could save them because election to salvation is always completely unconditional and has nothing to do with character or choices? How is it that God wants all people to be saved if he determines some specific individuals to be damned? How is it that God has no pleasure in the

death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:32) if he foreordains everything, including their reprobation and eternal punishment, for his good pleasure? How is God good if he purposefully withheld from Adam the grace he needed not to fall—knowing that Adam’s fall would result in the horrors of sin and evil and innocent suffering of history?

First, some answers from John Calvin. Calvin had little interest in defending God’s character; for him, whatever God does is right, and it is wrong to question God regardless of how unjust his actions seem to be. He frequently chided those who peer into God’s mysteries too deeply (e.g., by seeking a cause or reason beyond simply *that* God willed something) or who accuse God of acting unjustly (by which he seems also to mean those who accuse his doctrine of God of ruining God’s reputation).

However, Calvin did attempt to explain some Scriptures that might seem to conflict with his arguments about God’s double predestination. With regard to God’s reprobation of some in light of the “all” passages of Scripture he wrote:

God is said to have ordained from eternity those whom he wills to embrace in love, and those upon whom he wills to vent his wrath. Yet he announces salvation to all men indiscriminately. I maintain that these statements agree perfectly with each other. For by so promising he merely means that his mercy is extended to all, provided they seek after it and implore it. But only those whom he has illumined do this. And he illumines those whom he has predestined to salvation. These latter possess the sure and unbroken truth of the promises, so that one cannot speak of any disagreement between God’s eternal election and the testimony of his grace that he offers to believers.

This only seems to deepen the mystery. If this is intended to answer the question of how these statements agree perfectly with each other, I don’t see how it accomplishes that. As great a thinker and communicator as Calvin was, I sometimes find his explanations obscure if not evasive.

Calvin says more about this problem. First, he argues that “none undeservedly perish.” That is why God is just in punishing the reprobate; they deserve it. Why do they deserve it? Because of their “malice and perverseness.”³³ How does it come about that they continue in their malice and perverseness rather than repent and believe like the elect? “That they may come to their end, he [God] sometimes deprives them of the capacity to hear his word; at other times he, rather, blinds and stuns them by the preaching of it.” Why does God do this to the reprobate? “He who here seeks a deeper cause than God’s secret and inscrutable plan will torment himself to no purpose.”³⁵ Is Calvin getting anywhere toward resolving the problem? I don’t see how that is the case; he seems merely to be deepening the dilemma of God’s goodness.

How does Calvin interpret 1 Timothy 2:3–4, the clearest revelation that God desires the salvation of all men? “By this Paul surely means only that God has not closed the way unto salvation to any order of men; rather, he has so poured out his mercy that he would have none without it.” In other words, all 1 Timothy 2:3–4 (and no doubt 2 Peter 3:9) means is that God wants some people of every tribe and nation to be saved but not every individual person. That hardly fits the language of 1 Timothy 2:4, however, which specifically says “all men,” meaning “all people”—not all kinds of people.

So why does God reprobate some and not elect all to salvation? In some places Calvin leaves this in the realm of mystery, but in at least one instance he speculates: “The reprobate are raised up to the end [purpose] that through them God’s glory may be revealed.” Those who accuse God of being unjust (or just accuse this doctrine of making God unjust!) are dismissed by Calvin as “foolish men [who] contend with God.”³⁷ He impatiently declares that whatever God does is right and just simply because God does it, and there is no explanation for what God does other than

“because he has willed it.” Nowhere does he even attempt to justify God or reconcile his doctrine with God’s love. The only love of God he mentions is God’s love for the elect.

Fortunately, many Calvinists have not been satisfied to leave the matter there. As one progresses forward toward the modern age and into the postmodern world of the early twenty-first century, one finds many Calvinists increasingly interested in justifying the ways of God.

Jonathan Edwards wrote an entire essay on “The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners.” In it he stuck rather close to Calvin’s approach, although somewhat more emphatically and defensively (perhaps because of the rising Enlightenment tendency to question God’s justice). Again, as with Calvin, Edwards’ emphasis falls on God’s justice rather than his love, which he hardly mentions. Here is what Edwards says to those who question God’s justice in damning for eternity to hell those he foreordained and even rendered certain to fall into sin and remain there:

When men are fallen, and become sinful, God by his sovereignty has a right to determine about their redemption as he pleases. He has a right to determine whether he will redeem any or not. He might, if he had pleased, have left all to perish, or might have redeemed all. Or, he may redeem some, and leave others; and if he doth so, he may take whom he pleases, and leave whom he pleases.

This hardly solves the problem of God’s justice, however, as the “men” who are fallen, whom God has a right to dispose of as he wills, fell by God’s foreordination and predestining power. Again, the question that naturally arises and that Edwards doesn’t answer is this: What meaning do “goodness,” “justice,” and “love” have in such a context? Like Calvin, Edwards seems most interested in turning aside any and all questions about God’s justice in reprobating and punishing people. The only answer he offers is that whatever God does is right and above fault. He simply assumes that his interpretation of what God does is the only reasonable one in light of Scriptures such as Romans 9.

What did Boettner say about God’s goodness in light of his reprobation of people? He first makes clear beyond any doubt that God’s sole purpose in reprobation is his glory; without it God’s justice could not be sufficiently displayed—and that is one of the purposes of creation and redemption. Of course, this raises the question of why it is just for God to punish the reprobate, and Boettner simply avers that they sinned “voluntarily.”⁴¹ In light of his explanations, cited and discussed in the previous chapter, it seems an odd use of “voluntarily” since God has determined it. For him, obviously, “voluntarily” does not mean they could do otherwise than they do. Is that a natural meaning of “voluntary,” and does it answer or just raise more questions about God’s justice? Boettner doesn’t seem to recognize this problem, or he prefers to overlook it. And he doesn’t really deal with the love of God *except to say* (oddly) that “God in his love saves as many of the guilty race of men as He can get the consent of His whole nature to save.” One can only respond with an astonished, “What?”

At least Boettner, in contrast to Calvin and Edwards and some other Calvinists, takes a shot at answering the question. But doesn’t it raise more questions? Is God limited in some way? Why can’t he get the consent of his “whole nature” to save everyone? The obvious implication, given everything else Boettner says, is that God *must* damn some in order to display his attribute of justice and thereby glorify himself. So God’s need to glorify himself (and “need” is the right word, given Boettner’s language of divine limitation in relation to the extent of salvation) overrides and controls his love.

This is exactly what non-Calvinists worry about with regard to Calvinism: that its deep, inner logic leads inexorably to exalting God’s glory over and even against his love. Apparently, God can (or must) limit his love, but he can’t limit his self-glorification. I would put it the other way

around and say that in light of Christ's self-emptying (Phil. 2), God can limit his glory (power, majesty, sovereignty) but not his love (because God *is* love; see 1 John 4!).

Boettner argues that God is not arbitrary in his judgments, meaning that his choice of whom to save is not a matter of tossing the dice. He says that God "has his reasons" even if we cannot even guess what they are. Herein lies another problem. Like all Calvinists, Boettner states that God's choice of people to elect is absolutely unconditional; it has nothing to do with anything God sees in the ones he elects.⁴⁵ Just as reprobation is the necessary flip side of election, so choosing to pass over some in choosing to elect others must necessarily have nothing to do with anything especially bad God sees in them. All are equally worthy of eternal punishment. Once choosing on the basis of something particular about the ones chosen, either for election or reprobation, is ruled out, what is left? I argue all that is left, and this is a matter of sheer logic, is arbitrary choice—"eenie, meenie, miney, mo." There is no conceivable third alternative.

Imagine that you confront your child because you find his or her name written in crayon on the bedroom wall. He or she denies doing it. You ask, "Then who did it?" and the child says, "Someone else." Then you respond, "But wait, this is your room and your name is written on the wall and nobody but you has been here since I last saw the wall and then your name wasn't written on it." Your child says, "Okay, I didn't do it, but neither did someone else." What will your response be? Might you believe that explanation? Why not? Couldn't there be a third possibility? Unless you believe the house to be haunted or something, you probably won't seriously consider your child's explanation. The graffiti writer has to be either the child or someone else; there is no conceivable third possibility. So it is with Boettner's "explanation" (the same one used by most Calvinists) that God doesn't choose arbitrarily but also doesn't choose based on anything special about the persons he chooses. There is no third alternative. It has to be arbitrary if it is absolutely unconditional.

Unlike Boettner and other Calvinists, Edwards seems to have accepted, at least once, that God's choice between the elect and nonelect is arbitrary. This may come as a shock to many later Calvinists who object vehemently to this accusation about the Calvinist God. In his famous (or infamous) sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," Edwards appealed to "God's arbitrary will" to explain God's treatment of the nonelect. This is at least honest, bold, and consistent, but it raises serious issues for the character and ways of God.

How does Boettner deal with the "all" passages of Scripture? With regard to John 3:16 and similar verses, he says that "world" does not mean every individual person. It means all kinds of people. Since so many Calvinists give this explanation, I'll save most of my critique of it for later in this chapter when I summarize problems with Calvinist explanations of God's reprobation. For now, suffice it to say this interpretation of "world" hardly works as it would require that numerous references to the whole world as fallen would mean only that people of all kinds are fallen.

For example, John 1:10 says that the "world" (same Greek word as John 3:16) did not recognize the Word when he came. If "world" in John 3:16 means "all kinds of people," then John 1:11 possibly means that only some persons—of all kinds of people but not everyone—did not recognize Jesus as the Son of God. No Calvinist interprets John 1:11 that way! Boettner's interpretation of John 3:16 seems forced. Although he does not come right out and say, "God hates the nonelect and that is why he reprobates them," he more than implies it. So, I judge it fair and safe to say that Boettner, like many Calvinists, does *not* think God *is* love as 1 John 4:8 says, *or* at least he falls into inconsistency in his handling of the matter. If God's very nature is love, then he loves everyone and not just some people "of every kind." (Of course, that assumes once again that

“love” in God is analogous to and not totally different from the best of love as we know it. With Helm I assume that; otherwise the word means nothing.)

What about 1 Timothy 2:4 that says God wants “all people” to be saved? Boettner explains: “Verses such as 1 Timothy 2:4, it seems, are best understood not to refer to men individually but as teaching the general truth that God is benevolent and that He does not delight in the sufferings and death of His creatures.” One can only ask how that is a possible interpretation of that verse? Also, how can God not delight in what he has himself foreordained and rendered certain for his glory? Doesn’t he delight in being glorified? This is a Calvinist conundrum, to be sure. But Boettner adds this: “It is true that some verses taken in themselves do seem to imply the Arminian position [i.e., that God really desires the salvation of everyone and makes it possible]. This, however, would reduce the Bible to a mass of contradictions.”⁴⁹ One could just as easily turn that around and substitute “the Calvinist position” for “the Arminian position” and it would be truer.

Sproul wrestles admirably but ultimately unsuccessfully with the problem of God’s goodness, love, and justice in the face of his reprobation of many human persons whom he could save. First, he admits that God foreordained sin, and I’m sure I have quoted him enough times to make clear that he also believes God rendered it certain. Yet, he argues, God is not responsible for sin; we are.⁵¹ God is just to condemn the reprobate because they hate him and are wicked: “Is there any reason that a righteous God ought to be loving toward a creature who hates him and rebels constantly against his divine authority and holiness?” One can only respond ... yes. Because it is his *nature to love!* (1 John 4:8). Also, Romans 5:8–10 says that God loved sinners while they were still sinners and gave up Christ for them! Sproul verges on depicting God as not having a loving nature; he more than implies that God loves some and hates others when *all* have hated him and rebelled against his authority and holiness. That brings us back to the issue of arbitrariness.

Sproul faces the issue of God’s seeming arbitrariness and lack of fairness (and I would add apparent lovelessness) in double predestination: “The nasty problem for the Calvinist [is] ... if God can and does choose to insure the salvation of some, why then does he not insure the salvation of all?” Indeed, why not? Here is Sproul’s answer:

The only answer I can give to this question is that I don’t know. I have no idea why God saves some but not all. I don’t doubt for a moment that God has the power to save all, but I know that he does not choose to save all. I don’t know why.... one thing I do know. If it pleases God to save some and not all, there is nothing wrong with that. God is not under obligation to save anybody. If he chooses to save some, that in no way obligates him to save the rest.

Sproul then objects to non-Calvinists raising this as an issue of fairness and says God does not have to answer to our standards of fairness. Fair enough. But fairness isn’t the main issue. The main issue, which Sproul skirts, is *love*. If God could save everybody because election to salvation is unconditional and if God is by nature love, why doesn’t he? The only answers Sproul can offer are (1) he doesn’t love everybody, and (2) God can do whatever he wants to do because he isn’t obligated to do anything for anyone. These answers demean God and impugn his goodness and do damage to his reputation, which is based on his morally perfect character.

What does Sproul say about 1 Timothy 2:4? Nothing. I have not been able to find any explanation of that important passage in Sproul’s writings, but he has written so much I may not have found it. However, in *Chosen by God* he does ask about 2 Peter 3:9, which says much the same but perhaps not as forcefully. Insofar as God does not want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance,” Sproul says “anyone” means “the elect.” That doesn’t work in light of 1 Timothy 2:4, however, which clearly refers to every person without exception. (Is that why Sproul passes over that passage without comment?)

Sproul takes another route as well. He suggests that the Bible speaks “more than one way” about God’s will. First, he says, there is God’s “sovereign, efficacious will.” This is what other Calvinists have called God’s “decretive will.” Then there is God’s “preceptive will” (his commands). Finally, there is “God’s disposition—what is pleasing to him.”⁵⁹ So, according to this interpretation of 2 Peter 3:9 (and by extension 1 Tim. 2:4), it is saying that God *wishes* all could be saved even though he doesn’t intend to save everyone.

Sproul says it makes God sad to punish the wicked. He uses an analogy of a judge who must sentence his beloved son to prison. He has to do it, but it hurts him. The analogy, of course, breaks down entirely. The judge in the illustration did not foreordain and render certain his son’s crime. If he had, he would be wrong to sentence him to prison! Also, the judge in the analogy *is* obligated to sentence his son to prison; according to Sproul, God is *not* obligated to save anyone and could save everyone. Finally, what if Sproul’s judge sentenced his own son to prison but freed another young man who committed the same crime? Wouldn’t everyone question the judge’s love for his son?

Let’s change the analogy a bit. Suppose a judge sat on his bench and wept as he sentenced his son to prison for armed robbery. Then it came to light that he used behavioral conditioning to make his son believe armed robbery is good and right *and* drove him to the bank to rob it. Then it also came to light that the judge granted clemency to another young man who also robbed a bank in exactly the same manner as his son. Who would think that judge was good? And yet that is a better analogy to Sproul’s double predestination than his!

What about the problem of God’s seeming arbitrariness in election and reprobation? Sproul says, “God doesn’t do anything without a reason. He is not capricious or whimsical.” But *what* reason might he have for choosing John for salvation and Bob for damnation? He makes abundantly clear that election and reprobation are absolutely unconditional. So, his final word on the issue is that God chooses “according to the good will of his pleasure.... God predestines us according to what pleases him.... What pleases God is goodness.... Though the reason for choosing us does not lie in us but in the sovereign divine pleasure, we may rest assured that the sovereign divine pleasure is a good pleasure.” Once again, I can only respond with a stunned or bemused, “Huh?”

Back to the analogy I offered above in response to Boettner’s claim that God’s choice is not arbitrary but also not based on anything about the people he chooses. Sproul’s appeal to God’s “good pleasure” says nothing about *how* God chooses. After ruling out anything God sees in or about the people he chooses (e.g., a free response to the gospel enabled by his grace) and also ruling out arbitrary choice, what’s left? Nothing conceivable. To say “God’s good pleasure” *is*, then, to say (as Edwards did at least once) “arbitrary choice.”

John Piper tackles the problem of God’s love in relation to his choice of some to suffer in the flames of hell for eternity for his glory with great vigor and imagination. First, how does he deal with the “all” passages of the New Testament and Ezekiel 18:23—which he calls “the Arminian pillar texts?” He appeals to two wills of God: “God decrees one state of affairs while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass.”⁶⁴ In other words, God wills that some perish and at the same time wills that none perish. “As a hearty believer in unconditional, individual election I rejoice to affirm that God does not delight in the perishing of the impenitent, and that he has compassion on all people. My aim is to show that this is not double talk.”

So how does he show that it is not double talk? Piper writes about God’s “complex feelings and motives.” On the one hand, God loves his glory above all else: “God elects, predestines, and secures for one great ultimate purpose—that the glory of his grace might be praised forever and

with white-hot affection.”⁶⁷ But in spite of the fact that God gets glory from election and reprobation (he agrees with those who argue they are inseparable as two sides of a coin), he also loves the nonelect and has genuine compassion on them. He claims that God has “universal love for all creatures” that is *not* the love he has for the elect. So this is his explanation of John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8. “There is a general love of God that he bestows on all his creatures.” But in spite of loving all people in some way, God only loves some people in the best way. His love for the nonelect appears in the temporal blessings he gives them. (I cannot resist saying again that Piper’s view here amounts to saying that God provides the nonelect with a little bit of heaven to go to hell in!)

What about God’s love and compassion for the nonelect? Piper avers that God has “a true compassion, which is yet restrained, in the case of the nonelect, by consistent and holy reasons, from taking the form of a volition to regenerate.” Moreover, “I affirm that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires their salvation; yet I also affirm that he has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin. Election is the good news that salvation is not only a sincere offer made to all, but a sure effect in the life of the elect.”⁷⁰

To illustrate and defend his idea of these two wills in God Piper tells the story of George Washington and a certain Major Andre who had committed some treasonous acts during the Revolutionary War. As the story goes, Washington sentenced Major Andre to death even though he had the power to pardon him. The future president and commander-in chief of the Continental Army had great compassion on Major Andre as he signed his death warrant, which was judged necessary to uphold duty and policy. Piper compares this with God’s complex feelings and emotions as he condemns the reprobate.

But does this analogy work any better than Sproul’s analogy of the judge sentencing his son? The answer is no, it does not. First, if Piper is right, if Washington were truly comparable to God, he would have designed and governed Major Andre’s crime and seen to it that he committed it. Who would consider Washington good for sentencing Major Andre to death if that were the case—no matter how “necessary” it was to uphold duty and policy?

Second, if Major Andre were truly comparable to the reprobate in Piper’s theology, he would not have been able to do otherwise than commit his crime. Piper denies libertarian free will. Who would consider Major Andre deserving of death if he were controlled by someone else? (Remember that, even though Piper believes people always act according to their strongest motives—Edwards’ view of “free will”—his God is also the all-determining reality and thus *must* be the ultimate cause of creatures’ controlling motives.)

Third, the analogy implies a limitation of God—something surely Piper does not want to admit given his powerful elevation of God’s supremacy in all things. Washington was obligated to sentence Major Andre to death; he felt duty bound to do it and he was accountable to others, such as the Continental Congress, his fellow officers and soldiers, and the citizens of the colonies. To whom is God accountable? If he feels such great compassion for the reprobate, why doesn’t he just pardon them? He could, unless he is limited and controlled by something over which he has no power. After all, remember, in Calvinism God’s election to salvation is absolutely unconditional. Back to the problem of Edwards’ implicit dependency of God on the world!

Finally, the analogy breaks down because to be a valid analogy, Washington would have to have already pardoned at least one other person who committed exactly the same crime as Major Andre. After all, according to Piper, that’s what God does—pardons (elects to salvation unconditionally) a lot of people who are no better than the ones he reprobates. Who would consider

Washington “compassionate” in that case? Wouldn’t he be considered arbitrary and capricious and suspected of just wanting to show his severity?

What about the problem of the gospel call and invitation if God has already chosen some to be damned? Many of the Calvinist authors surveyed here do not directly address the problem: How can the gospel call be given out as a well-meant offer to all (which most Calvinists affirm) if some have already been chosen by God for damnation and have no chance at all of being accepted by God? Piper answers the question briefly in “Are There Two Wills in God?” He says, “Unconditional election [and by extension, of course, reprobation] ... does not nullify sincere offers of salvation to everyone who is lost among all the peoples of the world.” Of course, this is just an assertion; it falls short of an explanation.

This is a huge problem for anyone who believes it is appropriate for a preacher of the gospel to make an offer of salvation to everyone within his hearing. Yet, most evangelical Calvinists *do* believe that is legitimate *even though* the preacher knows there are probably many present who *cannot* respond and for whom the invitation is *impossible to accept* because God has closed the door on the possibility of their coming to faith and Christ did not die for them! (This is the subject of the next chapter.)

WITNESSES AGAINST DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

Although I have already made known my own qualms (to say the least!) about double predestination and especially the reprobation side of it, now I want to call on some other witnesses to give testimony to why it is unbiblical and unworthy of the character of God as revealed in Scripture and especially in Jesus Christ, and also why it is simply illogical in terms of its unwanted (by Calvinists themselves) “good and necessary consequences.”

My first witness is theologian G. C. Berkouwer—that twentieth-century influential Reformed thinker. In his book *Divine Election*, Berkouwer expresses great discomfort with any form of divine determinism and especially any foreordination of individuals to eternal damnation. He argues that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination must be interpreted non-deterministically: “On the one hand, we want to maintain the freedom of God in election, and on the other hand, we want to avoid any conclusion which would make God the cause of sin and unbelief.” He expresses frustration with Calvin’s approach, which says, on the one hand, that human beings are the sole cause of their rejection but also says, on the other hand, that God is the ultimate source of their “ruin and condemnation.”⁷⁵

Berkouwer rejects any divine causality of sin, evil, or reprobation and argues for a single predestination without calling it that. For him, reprobation is not a decree of God but “the shadow side” of “the light of election.” Of his own view, which he claims is consistent with the Reformed confessions, he says: “This doctrine opposes the so-called ‘predestinationalists’ who teach a double predestination in the sense that God from eternity has foreordained one group to salvation and another as decidedly to preterition [condemnation], and that Christ did not die for the reprobates.”⁷⁷

Most important for our purposes is that Berkouwer rejected the traditional Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9—the bedrock text of double predestination. Of Romans 9–11 he wrote: “It is being accepted more and more that this passage is not concerned primarily with establishing a *locus de praedestinatione* as an analysis of individual election or rejection, but rather with certain problems which arise in the history of salvation.” According to him, Paul’s “vessels of wrath” are

not individuals predestined to hell but Israel, which God temporarily abandoned in order to graft Gentiles into his people.⁷⁹

Berkouwer is not as clear or forthcoming about his views on predestination as I would like. But one thing is clear, he rejects divine determinism especially with regard to evil and damnation. He opts for a dialectical or paradoxical approach that attempts to steer a course between the Scylla of indeterminism and the Charybdis of determinism. Both are rocks on which theology will crash if it is not careful. Ultimately, he claims about God's will and man's will that "every form of competition is made impossible. There are relations here which have no human analogies." Sproul's trenchant critique of single predestination might apply to Berkouwer's explanation (if it can be called an explanation!), but the point here is simply that one of the twentieth century's most influential Reformed theologians argued vehemently against divine reprobation as inconceivable, given the character of God revealed in Jesus and throughout Scripture.

One of the main reasons Berkouwer rejects double predestination or any kind of divine determinism is that it undermines the preaching of the gospel. Here I will move on and come back to this important point in more detail when considering the objections of Berkouwer's main American disciple, James Daane, who wrote an entire book about the conflict between divine determinism and preaching the gospel.

Berkouwer takes the "all" passages of the Bible with ultimate seriousness and affirms God's love for the whole world without exception. He rejects the dualistic notion of two wills in God. He says that the universalistic texts must be taken seriously without affirming "objective universalism"—the view that ultimately there are no damned. In the final analysis, Berkouwer's approach is only helpful in criticizing double predestination but not in offering a viable alternative because, although he says he takes the "all" texts seriously, he holds onto the idea of single predestination, which is finally untenable. I do not believe it is possible to take the "all" texts seriously while embracing any form of unconditional election—even Berkouwer's inconsistent single predestination view (unless one opts for universalism).

A Reformed theologian who moves further away from unconditional election than Berkouwer, but for the same reasons, is James Daane. In *The Freedom of God* he blasts the entire high Calvinist system of thinking of unconditional election in terms of God's choice of individuals and especially in terms of numbers. He calls high Calvinism "decretal theology" and "theology of the single decree" and "Reformed scholasticism"—all of which mean what I have called "divine determinism." This theology, he says, will not preach, and that is why there is so little preaching of election in Reformed churches. (He wrote this well before the renaissance of Calvinism in the new Calvinism of the young, restless, Reformed movement.) For him (as for me), unconditional election of individuals is not really good news because it necessarily implies reprobation of individuals: "Once one commits himself to the decree of decretal theology, it is theologically impossible for him to allow, justify, or explain preaching the gospel to all men."

Daane argues that Calvin's followers increasingly defined election apart from grace by incorporating reprobation into their theologies. For him, "Scripture speaks of predestination to life but not to death" And he recognizes that predestination to death is automatically the flip side of unconditional election of individuals to salvation. Daane rejects the whole approach of traditional Calvinism as it inevitably makes God the author of sin and damnation and has to appeal to two or three wills in God, including a secret will (to damn some in spite of revealing his will to save all).⁸⁴ It also contradicts itself by blaming humans for their depravity and condemnation when God decreed all of it from the beginning.

Daane's analysis of high Calvinism penetrates right into its basic foundation: the doctrine of God. "The basic weakness of decretal theology appears to be precisely its understanding of God's relationship to the world." This scholastic theology, he rightly argues, makes God and God's relationship to the world ahistorical, whereas the Bible portrays God as entering into history freely. "The possibility of taking history seriously, as real and not merely apparent, is foreclosed by the scholastic definition of the single decree."⁸⁷ For scholastic decretal theology, he says, nothing in the world can really affect God; everything including sin and evil and damnation are determined by God. The result, he says, is that "decretal theology is a profound rationalization of whatever is." Also, in this theology, God's love is really his love for himself and Christ died for God rather than for the world.⁸⁹ Worst of all, according to Daane, this theology ends up depriving God of his freedom; whatever is, is what must be—even for God.

For Daane, Reformed theology needs to back up and take the biblical narrative more seriously than it has in its scholasticism. The God of the Bible *does* decree something; he decrees to "go historical by moving out of himself creatively toward and into both creation and redemption." Daane says that "in creating the world, God conditioned himself, but with this condition—that he remains God."⁹¹ This is God's freedom: to involve himself in the world, its time and history, its suffering and pain, in order to take it on himself and thus redeem it. Sin, then, is not foreordained by God as high Calvinism says. Daane rejects that notion: "Decretal theology is very vulnerable in its inability to maintain the gravity of sin." He means that it makes sin, like everything else, a matter of course; it is decreed and foreordained by God necessarily and therefore is not really something opposed to God.

Daane seems to be moving toward a theology of God as taking risks, although he stops short of either Arminianism or open theism (the view that God does not foreknow the future absolutely). Why does he move in that direction? Because he takes history seriously—the biblical history of redemption that includes God in it as very involved rather than hovering over it as its author. Moreover, he takes the love of God in Jesus Christ very seriously; he takes God's freedom seriously as not his freedom *from* being affected by the world but as his freedom *to be* affected by the world.

What about election? If Daane is "Reformed," he *must* account for election. He does. And he calls it unconditional election. But it is God's unconditional election of Jesus Christ and his people, Israel and the church. It is not God's unconditional acceptance of some individual human persons to salvation and corresponding rejection of others to damnation. "The Bible knows nothing of an *isolated, individualistic* doctrine of election." And it has nothing to do with historical determinism.

For Daane, election has nothing to do with numbers; to make it about numbers is inevitably to fall back into making reprobation a part of election, which makes election unpreachable. "Election in biblical thought is never a selection, a taking of this and a rejection of that out of multiple realities." Rather, "election is a call to service, a summons to be a co-laborer with God in the actualization of God's elective purpose and goal." That elective purpose and goal revolves around Jesus Christ as God's mission in the world to save it.⁹⁵

What about Romans 9–11 and Ephesians 1? These two New Testament passages are said to be the proofs of the high Calvinist doctrine of double predestination. Daane rightly says that "Romans 9–11 does not form a biblical commentary on the truth of individual election. Rather, it is a commentary on the fact of the inviolability of God's election of Israel as a nation." Election to what? To service in blessing the nations with producing Jesus Christ—the real subject and object of God's electing grace. Ephesians 1, which speaks much about election, is not about individuals

and their eternal destinies but about the people of God. The “you” repeated throughout the chapter as God’s chosen is plural: God’s new people, the church.

Daane’s revisionist Reformed approach is much preferable to high Calvinism’s divine determinism and double predestination, including reprobation. And it goes considerably beyond Berkouwer in overturning Calvinist scholasticism. It is right to focus on the inability to preach that theology as good news because it inevitably includes sin, evil, innocent suffering, *and* hell as God’s will—whatever its advocates may say. Furthermore, its “good and necessary consequence” is making God less than loving, less than free, and less than good. It also makes history unreal because nothing really happens; all is just the outworking of God’s eternal, foreordained plan on a stage that is said to glorify the author and director of the play but, in fact, makes him monstrous.

Perhaps nobody in church history since the Reformation has attacked high Calvinism and especially double predestination as ferociously as John Wesley, author of two treatises on the subject: “Free Grace” and “Predestination Calmly Considered.” I suggest that anyone who wants to read a relatively brief criticism of high Calvinism that simply blasts it out of the water look at one of these two writings. Unfortunately, at times Wesley’s ferocity against this theology gets almost personal; his language against it contributed to the breakup of his friendship with revivalist George Whitefield (1714–1770), a five-point Calvinist.

Wesley rightly declares, with even Sproul and many Calvinists, that “single predestination” is impossible. His argument is worth quoting at length for those who still think it may be possible to believe in election without reprobation:

You still believe that in consequence of an unchangeable, irresistible decree of God the greater part of mankind abide in death, without any possibility of redemption: inasmuch as none *can* save them but God; and he *will not* save them. You believe *he hath absolutely decreed not to save them*; and what is this but decreeing to damn them? It is, in effect, neither more nor less; it comes to the same thing. For if you are dead, and altogether unable to make yourself alive; then if God hath absolutely decreed your everlasting death—you are absolutely consigned to damnation. So then, though you use softer words than some [viz., single predestination], you mean the selfsame thing.

Then he proceeds to destroy this doctrine: “You suppose him [God] to send them [the reprobate] into eternal fire, for not escaping from sin! That is, in plain terms, for not having that grace which God had decreed they should never have! O strange justice! What a picture do you draw of the Judge of all the earth!”

In light of the “all” passages referred to several times in this chapter, Wesley says that unconditional election, which necessarily includes reprobation, calls God’s sincerity into question. Referring to the universal call to repentance and salvation and God’s expressed desire that all respond to it so as to be saved, Wesley poses an image to illustrate the problem: a jailor calling on prisoners to leave their cells without opening the doors. “Alas! My brethren, what kind of sincerity is this, which you ascribe to God our Savior?”¹⁰¹

Then he takes on the issue of God’s goodness and love clearly revealed in Jesus Christ and passages such as John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8. “How is God good or loving to a reprobate, or one that is not elected?” To those who argue that God does love the reprobate in some way and is good to them, Wesley asks how God could be good to him in this world (i.e., in temporal gifts) “when it were better for him never to have been born?”¹⁰³ As for God’s love for them: “Is not this such love as makes your blood run cold?... If, for the sake of election, you will swallow reprobation, well. But if you cannot digest this, you must necessarily give up unconditional election.”

Wesley goes on in his sermon “Predestination Calmly Considered” (which ought perhaps better be titled “Predestination *Not* So Calmly Considered”!) to argue that God is *not* exalted by

unconditional election but rather “dishonored, and that in the highest degree, by supposing him to despise the work of his own hands.” But again, to those high Calvinists who say that God does love the nonelect and is good to them he scornfully asks:

What would the universal voice of mankind pronounce of the man who should act thus? That being able to deliver millions of men from death with a single breath of his mouth, should refuse to save any more than one in a hundred, and say “I will not, because I will not!” How then do you exalt the mercy of God, when you ascribe such a proceeding to him? What a strange comment is this on his own word, that “his mercy is over all his works”!

At the conclusion of his tirade Wesley calls double predestination (which is necessarily the flip side of unconditional election) “an error so pernicious to the souls of men.”

What about Romans 9? How does Wesley deal with that all-important (to Calvinists) passage? He interprets it the way virtually all non-Calvinists have:

It is undeniably plain, that both these scriptures [verses 12 and 13] relate, not to the persons of Jacob and Esau, but to their descendents; the Israelites sprung from Jacob, and the Edomites sprung from Esau. In this sense only did “the elder” (Esau) “serve the younger”; not in his person (for Esau never served Jacob) but in his posterity. This posterity of the elder brother served the posterity of the younger.

In other words, “Jacob” and “Esau” are ciphers for Israel and Edom, and for Paul in Romans 9 they are referring to Israel and the Gentiles, which is the whole burden of Paul in this section of Romans! Wesley concludes: “So neither here is there any instance of any man being finally condemned by the mere sovereign will of God.”

To Wesley, the doctrine of double predestination is “a doctrine full of blasphemy,” “such as [should] make the ears of a Christian tingle.”¹¹¹ It destroys all of God’s attributes (love, justice, compassion, etc.) and represents the most holy God as “worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel and more unjust.” That is why Wesley finally concludes about Romans 9 and similar passages claimed by Calvinists as proof for their doctrine: “Whatever that Scripture proves, it can never prove this. Whatever its true meaning be, this cannot be its true meaning.... No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that his mercy is not over all his works. That is, whatever it prove beside, no Scripture can prove predestination.”

ALTERNATIVES TO UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION/REPROBATION

Fortunately, Wesley did not leave the matter there; he offered an alternative to the doctrine he called “blasphemy.” His alternative is classical Arminianism, which is *not* what most Calvinists think. Too often the situation is represented as a definite either/or: *either* salvation by works righteousness *or* salvation by unconditional election. Like all true, classical Arminians Wesley affirmed as the beginning his first principle: “Whatsoever good is in man, or is done by man, God is the author and doer of it.” Contrary to what many think, Wesley, as a classical Arminian, affirmed that salvation is *all of grace and has nothing to do with man’s merit*:

[Salvation] is free in all to whom it is given. It does not depend on any power or merit in man; no, not in any degree, neither in whole, nor in part. It does not in any wise depend either on the good works or righteousness of the receiver; not on anything he has done, or anything he is. It does not depend on his endeavors. It does not depend on his good tempers, or good desires, or good purposes and intentions; for all these flow from the free grace of God.

However, Wesley did not believe this “free grace” position on salvation required unconditional election. For him, salvation is given by God to the person who freely responds to the gospel with repentance and faith, which are not gifts of God *or* “good works” but human responses to God’s gift of *prevenient grace*. He affirmed original sin, including total depravity in the sense of spiritual helplessness. But he also affirmed God’s universal gift of *prevenient* or enabling grace that restores freedom of the will: “The very power to ‘work together with Him’ was from God.” This power to work together with God for salvation (which is all God’s doing) is simply the calling, enlightening, enabling grace that God implants in a human heart because of his love and because of the work of Christ.¹¹⁷ But this grace is resistible, not irresistible. It is given in some measure to everyone. Election is simply God’s foreknowledge of who will freely receive this grace unto salvation (Rom. 8:29). Reprobation is simply man’s rejection of this grace and God’s foreknowledge of that.

Wesley asks Calvinists and those tempted to join their ranks because they seem to make God most glorious: “How is it more for the glory of God to save man irresistibly, than to save him as a free agent, by such grace as he may either concur with or resist?” For Wesley, the latter makes God more glorious because it does not require that God hate anyone or treat anyone unjustly. For Wesley, God’s glory lies in his morally perfect character more than in his omnicausality—something he rejects as improper to God given the evil in the world.

Someone who has worked on the problem of Romans 9 and other passages about election without concluding they require belief in unconditional, individual predestination is Arminian biblical scholar William Klein, author of *The New Chosen People*. There he conducts a detailed study of the original languages of biblical passages that are claimed to support individual predestination to either heaven or hell and concludes that “the New Testament writers address salvific election in primarily, if not exclusively, corporate terms.” His systematic theological conclusion is that “God has chosen the church as a body rather than the specific individuals who populate that body.” Klein finds support for this view throughout Scripture but especially mentions 2 John 1 and 13.

Even more basic than corporate election, however, according to Klein, is God’s election of Jesus Christ: “Christ is God’s Chosen One, and the church is chosen in him.” The two are inextricably linked. He points to Romans 5, where Paul talks about “Adam” and “Christ” as representatives and, in a sense, corporate personalities. Romans 9, then, presupposes this idea of corporate solidarity, which Klein says is everywhere presupposed in the biblical thought world. Just as the “first Adam” represents fallen humanity in Romans 5 and there “Christ, the New Adam,” represents the new humanity, so in Romans 9 “Jacob” represents God’s people and “Esau” represents not God’s people. According to Klein, then, how does one become one of God’s elect persons? “As Israel became God’s chosen people when God chose Abraham and Abraham responded with faith, so the church finds her election in solidarity with Christ and his election.” Through faith, a person enters into Christ, that is, into his church and thereby becomes “elect.” “To exercise faith in Christ is to enter into his body and become one of the ‘chosen ones.’”¹²⁶

Here it will be helpful, almost necessary, to quote extensively from Klein because several paragraphs in his book nicely summarize *the main alternative* to high Calvinism’s view of election and salvation. It is a brief statement of classical Arminian theology:

When it comes to the provision of salvation and the determination of its benefits and blessings, the language of the New Testament writers is commanding. God decreed in his sovereign will to provide for salvation, and then he set Jesus on a course to secure it through his human life, death, and resurrection (Heb. 10:9–10). He purposed to extend mercy to his people and to harden and punish unbelievers. He predestined or predetermined what believers will enjoy by virtue of their

position in Christ. We may trace salvation and all that it entails solely to the pleasurable will of God.

God's will does not determine the specific individuals who will receive that salvation. The language of “willing” embraces all, not a select number. God’s will is not restrictive; he wills all to be saved. Yet, people can procure salvation only on God’s terms. Though Jesus desires to reveal God to all, only those who come to him in faith find God and the salvation he offers. That some fail to find salvation can be attributed only to their unwillingness to believe—to their preference for their own way rather than God’s. If God desires salvation for all, he wills (in the stronger sense) to give life to those who believe. These are not incompatible. They place the initiative with God for providing salvation and the obligation with people to receive it on God’s terms—faith in Christ. God has done more than merely provide salvation; he “draws” people (Jn 6:44) so they come to Christ. In fact, people come to Christ because God enables them (Jn 6:65). However, these actions of drawing and enablement are neither selective (only some are chosen for it), nor are they irresistible. Jesus’ crucifixion was God’s means of drawing all people to Christ (Jn 12:32). It was God’s provision for their salvation. All may respond to God’s overture, but they must do so by placing their trust in Christ. Since God draws all via the Cross, and he desires that all repent of their sins and find salvation, it is not God’s will that determines precisely which individuals will find salvation. Though God surely has always known who they will be, and though he chose them as a body in Christ, individuals must repent and believe for God’s will to be done.

Someone might say “Well, that’s all well and good *except*—it makes God less glorious!” The right response is “How so?” The critic might say: “It limits God.” The response is: “Isn’t God sovereign over his sovereignty? Can’t God limit himself to give free will to human persons? If God’s making salvation dependent on human persons’ decisions is entirely based on God’s own voluntary choice, how is that less glorious? Was the cross less glorious because it was not a display of power and might or majesty but suffering servanthood? Is it perhaps the case that the high Calvinist view of God’s glory is based on a human notion of glory?”

A theologian who puts the idea of God’s self-limitation to use to talk about God’s greatness and goodness including *conditional* election of individuals is Jack Cottrell, author of many books of Arminian theology. Like other critics of high Calvinism, he argues that it inevitably leads to determinism and thus away from free will and a God of love and compassion. The God of Calvinism, he avers, is one whose sovereignty is marked by *omnicausality* and *unconditionality*. In light of the sin and evil and innocent suffering of history and especially in light of the reality of hell, these are inconsistent with God’s goodness. An omnicausally and unconditionally sovereign God would be the author of all that. The only way to avoid it, Cottrell rightly argues, is to believe in *divine self-limitation* and that of a kind beyond what Calvinists will normally allow. According to Cottrell,

God limits himself not only by creating a world as such, but also and even further by the *kind* of world he chose to create. That is, he chose to make a world that is *relatively independent* of him.... This means that God has created human beings as persons with an innate power to initiate actions. That is, man is free to act without his acts having been predetermined by God and without the simultaneous and efficacious coactions of God. Ordinarily, man is allowed to exercise his power of free choice without interference, coercion or foreordination. By not intervening in their decisions *unless* his special purposes require it, God respects both the integrity of the freedom he gave to human beings and the integrity of his own sovereign choice to make free creatures in the first place.

Of course, Cottrell is not the first theologian to think of this. One can find it, for example, in Swiss Reformed theologian Emil Brunner (and Cottrell quotes Brunner as a source). However, Cottrell explains the idea of divine self-limitation clearly and concisely and defends it well as

necessary in order to understand how God is sovereign and yet not deterministically in control of everything, which would lead right into double predestination and thereby undermine, if not destroy, God's goodness.

By creating this particular world with its God-given human freedom to rebel and sin, God bound himself to react only in certain ways and not in other ways. This by no means detracts from his sovereignty because it is *an expression of his sovereignty!* According to Cottrell, and I agree with him, while this may not be explicitly taught in Scripture, it is everywhere assumed. For example, in the biblical narrative God grieves and relents and promises and reacts, and all those are expressions of conditionality, which implies voluntary limitation. God has obviously granted to human beings a degree of freedom even to hurt him and thwart his will (only up to a point, of course). God remains omnipotent and omniscient, and he is therefore omniresourceful and able to respond to whatever free people do in the wisest way to preserve his plan and bring about the ends he has decided upon.

One area where I disagree slightly with Cottrell is that he asserts that this self-limiting God retains "sovereign control." While rejecting determinism, he says that "God remains *completely in control of everything*" because "unless God is in *total* control, he is not sovereign." That seems to me an a priori (entirely presupposed) statement and not really warranted by his own suggestion of divine self-limitation. A God who does not exercise deterministic power is not totally in control. I prefer to say God is "in charge, but not in control." It seems to me "completely in control of everything" implies something neither I nor Cottrell believe in—divine determinism.

After all, the context of Cottrell's statements about divine self-limitation is the doctrine of election (at least in the source I am citing here). If one says God is "completely in control of everything" and that includes who will be saved and who will not be saved, that teaching is not what Cottrell or any non-Calvinist believes. If we are going to exploit the idea of divine self-limitation to avoid double predestination, we might as well jettison the concept of total control, or else we are taking back with one hand what is given with the other.

At this point some Calvinist (or other) reader may be pulling his or her hair and yelling (figuratively speaking): "What about this free will business? What *is* free will? Hasn't Edwards proven that free will doesn't even exist except as doing what is in accord with one's strongest motive?" Cottrell and other critics of high Calvinism appeal to free will even to the point of saying it limits God (or, better stated, God allows it to limit his actions). For Edwards and most Calvinists, of course, it doesn't limit God because God controls even the free will decisions and actions of human beings.

But that leads right back into divine determinism—something many Calvinists deny but to no avail. After all, how can God control or even govern human decisions and actions unless he imparts motives? They are, after all, what controls decisions and actions. That makes God the source of sin and evil because those arise from and lie within motives (or what Edwards called dispositions).

I will take up the issue of free will in its Calvinist form (compatibilism) and its non-Calvinist form (non-compatibilism) in chapter 7 (on irresistible grace). Suffice it to say for now that I admit libertarian free will (the will not entirely governed by motives and able to act otherwise than it does) is somewhat mysterious, but I do not think it is impossible or illogical. Nor do many philosophers. And I do think, with Cottrell and Wesley and other non-Calvinists quoted here, that without libertarian freedom, which presupposes divine self-limiting sovereignty, we are right back in divine determinism with all its deleterious good and necessary consequences.

So which mystery is better? With which one can a person live? The mystery of how God is good in spite of his foreordination and determination of sin, evil, and innocent suffering as well as

the eternal suffering of the reprobate (who are reprobate by God's design and control), or the mystery of where libertarian free choices come from? I care more about preserving and defending the reputation of God as unconditionally good than solving the problem of free will.

I want to end this chapter about unconditional election (and its necessary correlate of reprobation) by appealing to certain specific texts of Scripture. Let's look again at John 3:16. Everybody knows it by heart. It says God loves the "world." Calvinists either do not believe that refers to everybody without exception, or they say (with John Piper) that God loves even the nonelect in some ways. Both explanations of John 3:16 fail to make sense. The best critical exegetes of John 3:16 affirm it does mean "the whole human race." Even some Calvinists cannot agree with their fellow Calvinists that in that passage "world" refers only to the elect. They recognize all too well what the interpretation that limits "world" to only some people from every tribe and nation would do to other verses that mention "world" in John's gospel.

As for those Calvinists who think God loves "the whole world" but not in the same way, that is a strange kind of love and hardly fits the context of John 3:16: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (3:17). If "world" in verse 16 means all people, then verse 17 clearly says Jesus came to save everyone (or give everyone that possibility). That conflicts with Piper's and others' claim that God loves the nonelect (included in "world" in verse 16) because he surely wouldn't send Jesus into the world to save the nonelect! Both Calvinist interpretations of John 3:16 fall down as impossible. It stands as a monument against unconditional election with its necessary dark side of reprobation.

Finally, what about 1 Timothy 2:4, which says God wants "all people" to be saved and where the Greek cannot be interpreted any other way than every single person without exception? After all, the same Greek word for "all" is used in 2 Timothy 3:16 of inspired Scripture. If it doesn't mean literally "all" in 1 Timothy 2:4, then it doesn't mean "all" in 2 Timothy 3:16, but all Calvinists think it *does* mean literally "all" in 2 Timothy 3:16 ("all Scripture is God-breathed"). First Timothy 2:4 (which is not alone in universalizing God's will for salvation but is least open to any other interpretation) stands alongside John 3:16 as a proof text against unconditional election, which, except in the case of universalism, necessarily includes reprobation.¹⁴

¹⁴ Olson, R. E. (2011). [*Against Calvinism*](#) (pp. 102–135). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Special Knowledge: Predestination Paradox

Does the Bible Contain Paradox?

According to Kenneth S. Kantzer, editor of *Christianity Today*, there are two sorts of paradoxes: rhetorical and logical. The former is "a figure used to shed light on a topic by challenging the reason of another and thus startling him" (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, edited by Walter A. Elwell, 826, 827; Robert L. Reymond, *Preach The Word!* 31, 32). The Bible dearly contains rhetorical paradox (compare *Matthew 10:29*; *John 11:25,26*; *2 Corinthians 6:9,10*).

Logical paradoxes, however, are altogether different. Here we have a situation where an assertion (or two or three) is self-contradictory, or at least seems to be so. One way or the other the assertion cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason. The hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the one person of Jesus Christ, unconditional election and the free offer of the Gospel, and God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, are examples set forth by the advocates of biblical (logical) paradox.

For example, Edwin H. Palmer in *The Five Points of Calvinism* refers to the doctrine of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility as a "paradox" which the Calvinist affirms, "in the face of all logic" (85). Does God speak to us in such language? Is He the author of logical paradox? No, says the apostle Paul, "God is not the author of confusion" (*1 Corinthians 14:33*). And yet, far too frequently such comments are heard within the camp of orthodox. J. I. Packer makes the statement that the Bible is full of such paradoxes (he refers to them as antinomies). Packer writes that these antinomies are "seemingly in compatible positions" that we must learn to live with. We are to "Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real" (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 18-21). Cornelius Van Til nods at this point as well. He goes so far as to say, "Now since God is not fully comprehensible to us we are bound to come into what seems to be contradictions in all our knowledge. Our knowledge is analogical [i.e.,

there is no univocal point at which God's knowledge is the same as man's knowledge] and therefore must be paradoxical" (*The Defense of the Faith*, 44). Further, says Van Til, "All the truths of the Christian religion have of necessity the appearance of being contradictory" (*Grace and Gospel*).

These are incredible statements coming from such eminent orthodox scholars as Drs. Palmer, Packer, and Van Til; and yet, sadly, they are not all that unusual. How should we view logical paradox, as (supposedly) found in Scripture? According to Gordon Clark, the issue of biblical paradox is totally subjective. What may be paradoxical to one may not be to another (*The Atonement*, 32). For example, Dr. Palmer's paradox, noted above, regarding God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, is no paradox at all to John Gerstner, who writes, "We do not see why it is impossible for God to predestinate an act to come to pass by means of the deliberate choice [i.e., human responsibility] of specific individuals" (*A Predestination Primer*, 26). Neither was it a paradox to the Westminster divines, who maintained that "God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes [i.e., man's responsibility] taken away, but rather established" (*WCF*, III, 1). This doctrine may be a "high mystery" (i.e., difficult to fully grasp), but it is in no way paradoxical (i.e., impossible to reconcile), says *Westminster* (III, 8). In fact, the doctrine is "to be handled with special prudence and care" by men as they seek "the will of God [as] revealed in His Word" (III, 8). This, of course, wouldn't be possible with any doctrine that can't be reconciled by the mind of man.

The present author agrees with Dr. Clark when he says that a Biblical paradox is nothing more than "a charley-horse between the ears that can be eliminated by rational massage." To insist on the existence of logical paradox in the Bible is to hold, at least implicitly, to a very low view of God's infallible Word. For, as Gordon Clark elsewhere says, "dependence on...paradox...destroys both revelation and theology and leaves us in complete ignorance (*The Philosophy of Gordon Clark*, edited by Ronald Nash, 78). Interestingly, the affirmation of biblical paradox is a major tenet of neo-orthodoxy, a theology which so revels in the existence of such paradox that it is called "The Theology of Paradox" (Kantzer, *loc. cit.*). Karl Barth & Emil Brunner, for example, both aver the existence of contradictions within the Bible (in neo-orthodoxy the Bible is not "the Word of God"; rather, it contains the Word of God). Barth claims that the Bible is at every instance nothing more than the vulnerable words of men, who were fallible and erring in their writings (*Church Dogmatics*, I: 2:507ff.). According to Barth, it is beneath the transcendent God to reveal Himself, in Christ, thru lowly propositional

statements. Thus, in the Bible we will encounter numerous paradoxical, contradictory statements. Emil Brunner, another champion of neo-orthodoxy, concurs. Following Kierkegaard, Brunner acknowledges that the Christian faith, the Bible, God's revelation to man, and so forth, must all be viewed as paradoxical. Such being the case, the Bible is never to be considered infallible Word of God. It contains numerous contradictions, i.e., paradoxes (Robert L. Reymond, *Brunner's Dialectical Encounter*, 88ff; Stewart Custer, *Does Inspiration Demand Inerrancy?* 76ff.). At this point, Brunner goes so far as to say that contradiction is the hallmark of religious truth (cited in John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology*, 24). What kind of nonsense is this? Very scholarly nonsense.

Neo-orthodox theology, following on the heels of Immanuel Kant and the immanentistic theologians Friedrich Schleiermacher and Albrecht Ritschl, sought to erect a wall between a transcendent Deity and man (Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 17ff.) True knowledge of God is not possible; He is the "wholly other" (Barth). Moreover, maintains neo-orthodoxy, because propositional revelation is not possible, theological agnosticism results.

Understandably these teachings in the theological milieu led to divorce between Christian truth (and faith) and reason. What we not all too frequently encounter is the result of what Nash calls "religious revolt against logic" (*ibid.*, 918.). While Augustine claimed that logic was divinely ordained (even an attribute of God), and thus to be trusted and used by man as God's image bearer, neo-orthodoxy and much modern day evangelicalism deny that logic can be trusted.

Evangelical Donald Bloesch, for one, openly denies that there is a univocal point at which man's logic & knowledge are the same as God's. Due to this lack of a point of contact, paradox must exist in Scripture. Herman Dooyeweerd, and the majority of the Amsterdam Philosophy school, for another, have erected a "Boundary" between God, as Lawgiver, and man, as recipient. The laws of logic exist only on man's side of the Boundary. If this Dooyeweerdian Boundary truly existed, God could never reveal anything at all to His creatures, and man could never know anything about God, including the notion of the Boundary.

The truth of the matter is, however, that logic is an attribute of God himself. He is the God of truth (*Psalms* 31:5); Christ is truth (Wisdom, logic, reason, etc.) Incarnate (*John* 14:6; *1 Corinthians* 1:24; *Colossians* 2:3). God is not the author of confusion (*1 Corinthians* 14:33); thus, He cannot speak to us in illogical, paradoxical statements. Because logic is one of God's attributes, the laws of logic are eternal principles. And because man is an image bearer of God, these laws are a part of man. There must be, then, a point of contact between God's logic & knowledge and man's. Carl Henry writes, "The insistence on a logical gulf between

human conceptions and God as the object of religious knowledge is erosive of knowledge & cannot escape a reduction to skepticism. Concepts that by definition are inadequate to the truth of God cannot be made to compensate for logical deficiency by appealing to God's omnipotence or to His grace. Nor will it do to call for a restructuring of logic in the interest of knowledge of God. Whoever calls for a higher logic must preserve the existing laws of logic to escape pleading the cause of illogical nonsense" (*God, Revelation and Authority*, III, 229). According to Henry, the question being raised in orthodox circles about the Bible containing logical paradox about the great divorce between God's logic and mere human logic, and so forth, is-the result of the dialectical epistemology of neo-orthodoxy(*op. cit.*, 214ff.). Ronald Nash confirms what has already been noted above, "If there is absolutely no point of contact between the divine logic and so-called human logic, then what passes as human 'preaching' can never be valid." In other words, without this point of contact, man could never truly know anything at all (*op. cit.*, 96).

The laws of logic are essential for man to have knowledge. Apart from the law of contradiction, not both A and non-A, for example, *Genesis 1:1* would be a meaningless proposition. "In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth" cannot at one and the same time mean, "In the beginning God did not create the Heavens and the Earth." Eliminate the law of contradiction as axiomatic, and one has eliminated the meaning of all Scripture.

Appeals to biblical passages such as *Isaiah 55:3, 9*, God's thoughts and ways are above those of mankind, in order to contradict the position taken in this article, are specious. No orthodox Christian questions the quantitative difference in God's knowledge, thoughts, ways, etc., and man's. What is questioned is the qualitative difference. That is, the difference between God's thoughts and man's thoughts is one of degree, not of kind. Any exegesis of this passage that concludes God's thoughts are wholly other than man's thoughts stumbles on the command for the wicked to forsake his thoughts and think as God does.

Writing on this subject, Gordon Clark says, "Of course, the Scripture says God's thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. But is it good exegesis to say that this means His logic, His arithmetic, His truth are not ours? If this were so, what would the consequences be? It would mean not only that our additions and subtractions are all wrong, but also that all our thoughts, in history as well as in arithmetic, are all wrong." Not so, says Clark, "we must insist that truth is the same for God and man" (*The Philosophy of Gordon Clark*, 76). What, then, are we to conclude about the alleged inclusion of logical paradox in the Bible? Enough has been said to show the serious problems raised with such a concept. But more needs to be said. Robert Reymond poses three

insuperable obstacles that those averring such an errant view must deal with (*Preach the Word*, 30-31):

- (1) As noted above, the issue of what is and what is not a paradox is totally subjective. To universally claim that such and such a teaching is a paradox would thus require omniscience. How could anyone know that this teaching had not been reconciled before the bar of human reason?
- 2) Even when one claims that the seeming contradiction is merely "apparent," there are serious problems. "[If] non-contradictory truths can appear as contradictories and if no amount of study or reflection can remove the contradiction, there is no available means to distinguish between this 'apparent' contradiction and a real contradiction" (*ibid.*). How would man know whether he is embracing an actual contradiction (which if found in the Bible [an impossibility; *1 Corinthians* 14:33], would reduce the Scriptures to the same level as the contradictory Koran of Islam) or a seeming contradiction?
- 3) Once one asserts (with Barth & Brunner) that truth may come in the form of irreconcilable contradictions, then, "he has given up possibility of ever detecting a real falsehood. Every time he rejects a proposition as false because it 'contradicts' the teaching of Scripture or because it is in some other way illogical, the proposition's sponsor only needs to contend that it only *appears* to contradict Scripture or to be illogical, and that his proposition is one of the terms...of one more of those paradoxes which we have acknowledged have a legitimate place in our 'little systems'" (*ibid.*). This being the case, Christianity's uniqueness as the only true revealed religion will die the death of a thousand qualifications.

What is our conclusion? Simply this: The Bible does not contain logical paradox. Clark is correct; any so-called logical paradoxes found in Holy Scripture are little more than charley-horses between the ears that can be removed by rational massage; they are the result of faulty exegesis, not God's Word. Any stumbling in this area will lead to (at least) a fall into neo-orthodox nonsense. *W. Gary Crampton/The Trinity Review*

The nature of evil

Chaos in the Moral Order;
Evil as Part of Our Nature

Calvin's Solution to Perceived Paradox

CHAPTER XXI

OF THE ETERNAL ELECTION, BY WHICH GOD HAS PREDESTINATED SOME TO SALVATION,
AND OTHERS TO DESTRUCTION

The divisions of this chapter are,—I. The necessity and utility of the doctrine of eternal Election explained. Excessive curiosity restrained, sec. 1, 2. II. Explanation to those who through false modesty shun the doctrine of Predestination, sec. 3, 4. III. The orthodox doctrine expounded.

Sections

1. The doctrine of Election and Predestination. It is useful, necessary, and most sweet. Ignorance of it impairs the glory of God, plucks up humility by the roots, begets and fosters pride. The doctrine establishes the certainty of salvation, peace of conscience, and the true origin of the Church.
Answer to two classes of men: 1. The curious.
2. A sentiment of Augustine confirmed by an admonition of our Saviour and a passage of Solomon.
3. An answer to a second class, viz., those who are unwilling that the doctrine should be adverted to. An objection founded on a passage of Solomon, solved by the words of Moses.
4. A second objection, viz., That this doctrine is a stumbling-block to the profane. Answer 1. The same may be said of many other heads of doctrine. 2. The truth of God will always defend itself. Third objection, viz., That this doctrine is dangerous even to believers. Answer 1. The same objection made to Augustine. 2. We must not despise anything that God has revealed. Arrogance and blasphemy of such objections.
5. Certain cavils against the doctrine. 1. Prescience regarded as the cause of predestination. Prescience and predestination explained. Not prescience, but the good pleasure of God the cause of predestination. This apparent from the gratuitous election of the posterity of Abraham and the rejection of all others.
6. Even of the posterity of Abraham some elected and others rejected by special grace.
7. The Apostle shows that the same thing has been done in regard to individuals under the Christian dispensation.

1. THE covenant of life is not preached equally to all, and among those to whom it is preached, does not always meet with the same reception. This diversity displays the unsearchable depth of the divine judgment, and is without doubt subordinate to God's purpose of eternal election. But if it is plainly owing to the mere pleasure of God that salvation is spontaneously offered to some, while others have no access to it, great and difficult questions immediately arise, questions which are inexplicable, when just views are not entertained concerning election and predestination. To many this seems a perplexing subject, because they deem it most incongruous that of the great body of mankind some should be predestinated to salvation, and others to destruction. How causelessly they entangle themselves will appear as we proceed. We may add, that in the very obscurity which deters them, we may see not only the utility of this doctrine, but also its most pleasant fruits. We shall never feel persuaded as we ought that our salvation flows from the free mercy of God as its fountain, until we are made acquainted with his eternal election, the grace of God being illustrated by the contrast, viz., that he does not adopt all promiscuously to the hope of salvation, but gives to some what he denies to others. It is plain how greatly ignorance of this principle detracts from the glory of God, and impairs true humility.

But though thus necessary to be known, Paul declares that it cannot be known unless God, throwing works entirely out of view, elect those whom he has predestined. His words are, “Even so then at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work,” (Rom. 11:6.) If to make it appear that our salvation flows entirely from the good mercy of God, we must be carried back to the origin of election, then those who would extinguish it, wickedly do as much as in them lies to obscure what they ought most loudly to extol, and pluck up humility by the very roots. Paul clearly declares that it is only when the salvation of a remnant is ascribed to gratuitous election, we arrive at the knowledge that God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure, and does not pay a debt, a debt which never can be due. Those who preclude access, and would not have any one to obtain a taste of this doctrine, are equally unjust to God and men, there being no other means of humbling us as we ought, or making us feel how much we are bound to him. Nor, indeed, have we elsewhere any sure ground of confidence. This we say on the authority of Christ, who, to deliver us from all fear, and render us invincible amid our many dangers, snares, and mortal conflicts, promises safety to all that the Father hath taken under his protection, (John 10:26.) From this we infer, that all who know not that they are the peculiar people of God, must be wretched from perpetual trepidation, and that those, therefore, who, by overlooking the three advantages which we have noted, would destroy the very foundation of our safety, consult ill for themselves and for all the faithful. What? Do we not here find the very origin of the Church, which, as Bernard rightly teaches, (Serm. in Cantic.) could not be found or recognised among the creatures, because it lies hid (in both cases wondrously) within the lap of blessed predestination, and the mass of wretched condemnation?

But before I enter on the subject, I have some remarks to address to two classes of men. The subject of predestination, which in itself is attended with considerable difficulty, is rendered very perplexed, and hence perilous by human curiosity, which cannot be restrained from wandering into forbidden paths, and climbing to the clouds, determined if it can that none of the secret things of God shall remain unexplored. When we see many, some of them in other respects not bad men, every where rushing into this audacity and wickedness, it is necessary to remind them of the course of duty in this matter. First, then, when they inquire into predestination, let them remember that they are penetrating into the recesses of the divine wisdom, where he who rushes forward securely and confidently, instead of satisfying his curiosity will enter an inextricable labyrinth. For it is not right that man should with impunity pry into things which the Lord has been pleased to conceal within himself, and scan that sublime eternal wisdom which it is his pleasure that we should not apprehend but adore, that therein also his perfections may appear. Those secrets of his will, which he has seen it meet to manifest, are revealed in his word—revealed in so far as he knew to be conducive to our interest and welfare.

2. “We have come into the way of faith,” says Augustine: “let us constantly adhere to it. It leads to the chambers of the king, in which are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. For our Lord Jesus Christ did not speak invidiously to his great and most select disciples when he said, ‘I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now,’ (John 16:12.) We must walk, advance, increase, that our hearts may be able to comprehend those things which they cannot now comprehend. But if the last day shall find us making progress, we shall there learn what here we could not,” (August. Hom. in Joann.) If we give due weight to the consideration, that the word of the Lord is the only way which can conduct us to the investigation of whatever it is lawful for us to hold with regard to him—is the only light which

can enable us to discern what we ought to see with regard to him, it will curb and restrain all presumption. For it will show us that the moment we go beyond the bounds of the word we are out of the course, in darkness, and must every now and then stumble, go astray, and fall. Let it, therefore, be our first principle that to desire any other knowledge of predestination than that which is expounded by the word of God, is no less infatuated than to walk where there is no path, or to seek light in darkness. Let us not be ashamed to be ignorant in a matter in which ignorance is learning. Rather let us willingly abstain from the search after knowledge, to which it is both foolish as well as perilous, and even fatal to aspire. If an unrestrained imagination urges us, our proper course is to oppose it with these words, "It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory," (Prov. 25:27.) There is good reason to dread a presumption which can only plunge us headlong into ruin.

3. There are others who, when they would cure this disease, recommend that the subject of predestination should scarcely if ever be mentioned, and tell us to shun every question concerning it as we would a rock. Although their moderation is justly commendable in thinking that such mysteries should be treated with moderation, yet because they keep too far within the proper measure, they have little influence over the human mind, which does not readily allow itself to be curbed. Therefore, in order to keep the legitimate course in this matter, we must return to the word of God, in which we are furnished with the right rule of understanding. For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which as nothing useful and necessary to be known has been omitted, so nothing is taught but what it is of importance to know. Every thing, therefore, delivered in Scripture on the subject of predestination, we must beware of keeping from the faithful, lest we seem either maliciously to deprive them of the blessing of God, or to accuse and scoff at the Spirit, as having divulged what ought on any account to be suppressed. Let us, I say, allow the Christian to unlock his mind and ears to all the words of God which are addressed to him, provided he do it with this moderation, viz., that whenever the Lord shuts his sacred mouth, he also desists from inquiry. The best rule of sobriety is, not only in learning to follow where-ever God leads, but also when he makes an end of teaching, to cease also from wishing to be wise. The danger which they dread is not so great that we ought on account of it to turn away our minds from the oracles of God. There is a celebrated saying of Solomon, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing," (Prov. 25:2.) But since both piety and common sense dictate that this is not to be understood of everything, we must look for a distinction, lest under the pretence of modesty and sobriety we be satisfied with a brutish ignorance. This is clearly expressed by Moses in a few words, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children forever," (Deut. 29:29.) We see how he exhorts the people to study the doctrine of the law in accordance with a heavenly decree, because God has been pleased to promulgate it, while he at the same time confines them within these boundaries, for the simple reason that it is not lawful for men to pry into the secret things of God.

4. I admit that profane men lay hold of the subject of predestination to carp, or cavil, or snarl, or scoff. But if their petulance frightens us, it will be necessary to conceal all the principal articles of faith, because they and their fellows leave scarcely one of them unassailed with blasphemy. A rebellious spirit will display itself no less insolently when it hears that there are three persons in the divine essence, than when it hears that God when he created man foresaw every thing that was to happen to him. Nor will they abstain from their jeers when told that little more than five thousand years have elapsed since the creation of the world. For they will ask, Why did the power of God slumber so long in idleness? In short, nothing can be stated that they

will not assail with derision. To quell their blasphemies, must we say nothing concerning the divinity of the Son and Spirit? Must the creation of the world be passed over in silence? No! The truth of God is too powerful, both here and everywhere, to dread the slanders of the ungodly, as Augustine powerfully maintains in his treatise, *De Bono Perseverantiæ*, (cap. xiv.–xx.) For we see that the false apostles were unable, by defaming and accusing the true doctrine of Paul, to make him ashamed of it. There is nothing in the allegation that the whole subject is fraught with danger to pious minds, as tending to destroy exhortation, shake faith, disturb and dispirit the heart. Augustine disguises not that on these grounds he was often charged with preaching the doctrine of predestination too freely, but, as it was easy for him to do, he abundantly refutes the charge. As a great variety of absurd objections are here stated, we have thought it best to dispose of each of them in its proper place, (see chap. 23.) Only I wish it to be received as a general rule, that the secret things of God are not to be scrutinized, and that those which he has revealed are not to be overlooked, lest we may, on the one hand, be chargeable with curiosity, and, on the other, with ingratitude. For it has been shrewdly observed by Augustine, (*de Genesi ad Literam*, Lib. v.) that we can safely follow Scripture, which walks softly, as with a mother's step, in accommodation to our weakness. Those, however, who are so cautious and timid, that they would bury all mention of predestination in order that it may not trouble weak minds, with what colour, pray, will they cloak their arrogance, when they indirectly charge God with a want of due consideration, in not having foreseen a danger for which they imagine that they prudently provide? Whoever, therefore, throws obloquy on the doctrine of predestination, openly brings a charge against God, as having inconsiderately allowed something to escape from him which is injurious to the Church.

5. The predestination by which God adopts some to the hope of life, and adjudges others to eternal death, no man who would be thought pious ventures simply to deny; but it is greatly cavilled at, especially by those who make prescience its cause. We, indeed, ascribe both prescience and predestination to God; but we say, that it is absurd to make the latter subordinate to the former, (see chap. 22. sec. 1.) When we attribute prescience to God, we mean that all things always were, and ever continue, under his eye; that to his knowledge there is no past or future, but all things are present, and indeed so present, that it is not merely the idea of them that is before him, (as those objects are which we retain in our memory,) but that he truly sees and contemplates them as actually under his immediate inspection. This prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures. By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death. This God has testified, not only in the case of single individuals; he has also given a specimen of it in the whole posterity of Abraham, to make it plain that the future condition of each nation was entirely at his disposal: "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance," (Deut. 32:8, 9.) The separation is before the eyes of all; in the person of Abraham, as in a withered stock, one people is specially chosen, while the others are rejected; but the cause does not appear, except that Moses, to deprive posterity of any handle for glorying, tells them that their superiority was owing entirely to the free love of God. The cause which he assigns for their deliverance is, "Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them," (Deut. 4:37;) or more explicitly in another chapter, "The Lord did

not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people: for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you,” (Deut. 7:7, 8.) He repeatedly makes the same intimation, “Behold, the heaven, and the heaven of heavens, is the Lord’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is. Only the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them,” (Deut. 10:14, 15.) Again, in another passage, holiness is enjoined upon them, because they have been chosen to be a peculiar people; while in another, love is declared to be the cause of their protection, (Deut. 23:5.) This, too, believers with one voice proclaim, “He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob, whom he loved,” (Ps. 47:4.) The endowments with which God had adorned them, they all ascribe to gratuitous love, not only because they knew that they had not obtained them by any merit, but that not even was the holy patriarch endued with a virtue that could procure such distinguished honour for himself and his posterity. And the more completely to crush all pride, he upbraids them with having merited nothing of the kind, seeing they were a rebellious and stiff-necked people, (Deut. 9:6.) Often, also, do the prophets remind the Jews of this election by way of disparagement and opprobrium, because they had shamefully revolted from it. Be this as it may, let those who would ascribe the election of God to human worth or merit come forward. When they see that one nation is preferred to all others, when they hear that it was no feeling of respect that induced God to show more favour to a small and ignoble body, nay, even to the wicked and rebellious, will they plead against him for having chosen to give such a manifestation of mercy? But neither will their obstreperous words hinder his work, nor will their invectives, like stones thrown against heaven, strike or hurt his righteousness; nay, rather they will fall back on their own heads. To this principle of a free covenant, moreover, the Israelites are recalled whenever thanks are to be returned to God, or their hopes of the future to be animated. “The Lord he is God,” says the Psalmist; “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture,” (Ps. 100:3; 95:7.) The negation which is added, “not we ourselves,” is not superfluous, to teach us that God is not only the author of all the good qualities in which men excel, but that they originate in himself, there being nothing in them worthy of so much honour. In the following words also they are enjoined to rest satisfied with the mere good pleasure of God: “O ye seed of Abraham, his servant; ye children of Jacob, his chosen,” (Ps. 105:6.) And after an enumeration of the continual mercies of God as fruits of election, the conclusion is, that he acted thus kindly because he remembered his covenant. With this doctrine accords the song of the whole Church, “They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them,” (Ps. 44:3.) It is to be observed, that when the land is mentioned, it is a visible symbol of the secret election in which adoption is comprehended. To like gratitude David elsewhere exhorts the people, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance,” (Ps. 33:12.) Samuel thus animates their hopes, “The Lord will not forsake his people for his great name’s sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people,” (1 Sam. 12:22.) And when David’s faith is assailed, how does he arm himself for the battle? “Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts,” (Ps. 65:4.) But as the hidden election of God was confirmed both by a first and second election, and by other intermediate mercies, Isaiah thus applies the term, “The Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel,” (Isa. 14:1.) Referring to a future period, the gathering together of the dispersion, who seemed to have been abandoned, he says, that it will be a sign of a firm and stable election, notwithstanding of the apparent abandonment. When it is elsewhere said, “I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away,”

(Isa. 41:9,) the continual course of his great liberality is ascribed to paternal kindness. This is stated more explicitly in Zechariah by the angel, the Lord “shall choose Jerusalem again,” as if the severity of his chastisements had amounted to reprobation, or the captivity had been an interruption of election, which, however, remains inviolable, though the signs of it do not always appear.

6. We must add a second step of a more limited nature, or one in which the grace of God was displayed in a more special form, when of the same family of Abraham God rejected some, and by keeping others within his Church showed that he retained them among his sons. At first Ishmael had obtained the same rank with his brother Isaac, because the spiritual covenant was equally sealed in him by the symbol of circumcision. He is first cut off, then Esau, at last an innumerable multitude, almost the whole of Israel. In Isaac was the seed called. The same calling held good in the case of Jacob. God gave a similar example in the rejection of Saul. This is also celebrated in the psalm, “Moreover, he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: but chose the tribe of Judah,” (Ps. 78:67, 68.) This the sacred history sometimes repeats, that the secret grace of God may be more admirably displayed in that change. I admit that it was by their own fault Ishmael, Esau, and others, fell from their adoption; for the condition annexed was, that they should faithfully keep the covenant of God, whereas they perfidiously violated it. The singular kindness of God consisted in this, that he had been pleased to prefer them to other nations; as it is said in the psalm, “He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them,” (Ps. 147:20.) But I had good reason for saying that two steps are here to be observed; for in the election of the whole nation, God had already shown that in the exercise of his mere liberality he was under no law but was free, so that he was by no means to be restricted to an equal division of grace, its very inequality proving it to be gratuitous. Accordingly, Malachi enlarges on the ingratitude of Israel, in that being not only selected from the whole human race, but set peculiarly apart from a sacred household, they perfidiously and impiously spurn God their beneficent parent. “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau,” (Mal. 1:2, 3.) For God takes it for granted, that as both were the sons of a holy father, and successors of the covenant, in short, branches from a sacred root, the sons of Jacob were under no ordinary obligation for having been admitted to that dignity; but when by the rejection of Esau the first born, their progenitor though inferior in birth was made heir, he charges them with double ingratitude, in not being restrained by a double tie.

7. Although it is now sufficiently plain that God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others, his gratuitous election has only been partially explained until we come to the case of single individuals, to whom God not only offers salvation, but so assigns it, that the certainty of the result remains not dubious or suspended. These are considered as belonging to that one seed of which Paul makes mention, (Rom. 9:8; Gal. 3:16, &c.) For although adoption was deposited in the hand of Abraham, yet as many of his posterity were cut off as rotten members, in order that election may stand and be effectual, it is necessary to ascend to the head in whom the heavenly Father hath connected his elect with each other, and bound them to himself by an indissoluble tie. Thus, in the adoption of the family of Abraham, God gave them a liberal display of favour which he has denied to others; but in the members of Christ there is a far more excellent display of grace, because those ingrafted into him as their head never fail to obtain salvation. Hence Paul skillfully argues from the passage of Malachi which I quoted, (Rom. 9:13; Mal. 1:2,) that when God, after making a covenant of eternal life, invites any people to himself, a special mode of election is in part understood, so that he does not with promiscuous

grace effectually elect all of them. The words, “Jacob have I loved,” refer to the whole progeny of the patriarch, which the prophet there opposes to the posterity of Esau. But there is nothing in this repugnant to the fact, that in the person of one man is set before us a specimen of election, which cannot fail of accomplishing its object. It is not without cause Paul observes, that these are called *a remnant*, (Rom. 9:27; 11:5;) because experience shows that of the general body many fall away and are lost, so that often a small portion only remains. The reason why the general election of the people is not always firmly ratified, readily presents itself, viz., that on those with whom God makes the covenant, he does not immediately bestow the Spirit of regeneration, by whose power they persevere in the covenant even to the end. The external invitation, without the internal efficacy of grace which would have the effect of retaining them, holds a kind of middle place between the rejection of the human race and the election of a small number of believers. The whole people of Israel are called the Lord’s inheritance, and yet there were many foreigners among them. Still, because the covenant which God had made to be their Father and Redeemer was not altogether null, he has respect to that free favour rather than to the perfidious defection of many; even by them his truth was not abolished, since by preserving some residue to himself, it appeared that his calling was without repentance. When God ever and anon gathered his Church from among the sons of Abraham rather than from profane nations, he had respect to his covenant, which, when violated by the great body, he restricted to a few, that it might not entirely fail. In short, that common adoption of the seed of Abraham was a kind of visible image of a greater benefit which God deigned to bestow on some out of many. This is the reason why Paul so carefully distinguishes between the sons of Abraham according to the flesh and the spiritual sons, who are called after the example of Isaac. Not that simply to be a son of Abraham was a vain or useless privilege, (this could not be said without insult to the covenant,) but that the immutable counsel of God, by which he predestinated to himself whomsoever he would, was alone effectual for their salvation. But until the proper view is made clear by the production of passages of Scripture, I advise my readers not to prejudge the question. We say, then, that Scripture clearly proves this much, that God by his eternal and immutable counsel determined once for all those whom it was his pleasure one day to admit to salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, it was his pleasure to doom to destruction. We maintain that this counsel, as regards the elect, is founded on his free mercy, without any respect to human worth, while those whom he dooms to destruction are excluded from access to life by a just and blameless, but at the same time incomprehensible judgment. In regard to the elect, we regard calling as the evidence of election, and justification as another symbol of its manifestation, until it is fully accomplished by the attainment of glory. But as the Lord seals his elect by calling and justification, so by excluding the reprobate either from the knowledge of his name or the sanctification of his Spirit, he by these marks in a manner discloses the judgment which awaits them. I will here omit many of the fictions which foolish men have devised to overthrow predestination. There is no need of refuting objections which the moment they are produced abundantly betray their hollowness. I will dwell only on those points which either form the subject of dispute among the learned, or may occasion any difficulty to the simple, or may be employed by impiety as specious pretexts for assailing the justice of God.¹⁵

¹⁵ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (1845). [Institutes of the Christian religion](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 528–540). Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society.

As Calvinists Explain It...

General Features of Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination

CALVIN'S DOCTRINE of predestination has been the occasion for concern and worry for many people. Many have found that this doctrine led them to fret and struggle, worried that they could never be certain of their salvation. "If God decided long ago whether I would be saved or damned," they say, "what can I do now that will make any difference? How can I know for sure that I am among the elect?" Others consider this doctrine unacceptable for its apparent contradiction of human freedom. Yet, ironically, Calvin himself saw this doctrine as possessing great practical benefit. He insisted that it bears "sweet fruits" for the believer; indeed, only by accepting this Biblical doctrine of predestination can the believer find genuine assurance and comfort in his salvation.

Misunderstanding of Calvin's teaching continues to challenge much of modern Calvin scholarship. "Calvin formerly stirred debate because people agreed or disagreed with his teaching. Recently men have been in disagreement with regard to what his teaching was." This judgment of John T. McNeill accurately reflects the state of Calvin studies² since Karl Barth's theology sparked a renewed interest in the Reformer's writings. T. H. L. Parker claimed that Barth "showed in a most decisive fashion that the message of the Reformers was valid, *in a new form*, for our own day." This "revolution in Calvin studies,"⁴ say some scholars, may yet demonstrate that Calvin was not a Calvinist in the traditional sense at all, that many have actually misunderstood his teaching.

The problem of correctly understanding the voluminous writings of Calvin is not really new, however. One need think only of the question of whether there is a "central doctrine" in Calvin's theology. The variety of answers given and of doctrines proposed illustrates the difficulty. But no matter what doctrine the researcher finally settles on, the doctrine of predestination usually demands attention. Recently the idea of a central doctrine in Calvin's thought has rightly been rejected, and increasing attention has been given to Scripture as the source of Calvin's teachings.

Although there is an abundance of literature on Calvin's thought, it is regrettable that no full-length study of his doctrine of predestination has recently appeared in English. In the light of renewed interest in Calvin, it is not out of place to attempt a brief presentation of Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Although the question of the centrality of predestination in Calvin's theology continues to draw attention, interest today centers more on such questions as the christocentric character of predestination, the decretive character of reprobation, and the so-called equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. Underlying all of this, there remains of course the vital question of what Calvin's own teaching actually was. Because this survey is concerned primarily with setting forth Calvin's thought on predestination, references to secondary sources and contemporary writers are limited to the footnotes. This is simply an attempt to present Calvin's doctrine of predestination as explained in the *Institutes* and as elaborated and illustrated in his tracts and commentaries. Certain general features of Calvin's doctrine must first be noted; then attention will be directed to election and reprobation, respectively.

The Place of Predestination in the Institutes

Calvin did not invent the doctrine of predestination, nor was he the first to teach it clearly. Calvin's name has become inseparably linked to this doctrine, however, probably because he, more than anyone else, was called upon to defend predestination against all sorts of opposition. But the claim that predestination was the central doctrine in Calvin's theology, an a priori principle from which he drew out his whole theological system by logical deduction, is without warrant. He did not engage in speculative, frigid, theoretical reasoning in discussing predestination.

Predestination was certainly not the topic with which Calvin began the *Institutes*. In the final edition of 1559 he did not discuss this subject fully until the end of book 3—about three-fourths of the way into the work. Although he did not arrange his material in the same order in every edition of the *Institutes*, and did not follow the same pattern of arrangement in his various writings on the subject,¹¹ Calvin never placed predestination at the head of his theology. Unwarranted conclusions are sometimes drawn, however, from the systematic arrangement of the *Institutes*. It is nevertheless worth observing that when later Reformed theologians have discussed predestination along with the decree of God and before discussing creation, they have not followed Calvin's final arrangement of materials.

We find Calvin's treatment of predestination near the end of book 3 in the midst of his discussion of soteriology. A long chapter on prayer precedes the three chapters on predestination, and a chapter on the final resurrection follows it. This contextual factor alone deserves more attention from those who would make predestination the logical core of Calvin's theology. One must also avoid the more common danger today, however, of allowing the systematic place that is given the doctrine to becloud the very things Calvin says clearly in this section, and the fundamental importance that the doctrine has within the whole of his thought.¹⁴ While predestination is not Calvin's central doctrine, it is nonetheless of crucial importance for his entire, Biblically derived theology.

This systematic or methodological placement of the doctrine of predestination in the *Institutes*, then, makes the immediate context of Calvin's discussion important. Soteriology concerns the Holy Spirit's work in applying to sinners the completed atoning work of Christ. In this work the Holy Spirit employs men as His agents in the preaching of the gospel. The gospel is not preached to all, however, and where it is preached, it meets with different responses. How is this to be explained? This question provides the context of Calvin's discussion of predestination, as is clear from his opening words:

In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgment is made known. For there is no doubt that this variety also serves the decision of God's eternal election. If it is plain that it comes to pass by God's bidding that salvation is freely offered to some while others are barred from access to it, at once great and difficult questions spring up, explicable only when reverent minds regard as settled what they may suitably hold concerning election and predestination.

Such was also the context of Paul's significant discussion of predestination in Romans 9, a chapter especially decisive in Calvin's various discussions of the doctrine. There can be no doubt

that Calvin's careful study of the Epistle to the Romans, his commentary on which was published in 1539, was the source of the doctrine of predestination and also the major influence on his rearrangement of the materials in the second edition of the *Institutes* in 1539.

We shall return to this matter of the soteriological context of Calvin's discussion of predestination when we deal specifically with election and reprobation. But it is important to observe this context at the outset of this study.

The Practical Significance of Predestination

Within a soteriological context one would hardly expect to find a frigid, speculative discussion of the eternal predestination of God. One of the ironies of history is that the man who wrote that "no one can be more averse to paradox than I am, and in subtleties I find no delight at all," should repeatedly be accused of being and doing just that.²⁰ A sympathetic reading of the *Institutes* should quickly dispel the myth.

The opening words of the 1559 *Institutes* indicate that its author had made a clear break with the scholastics. Calvin spoke not of *scientia* but of *sapientia*, "wisdom." His definition of the knowledge of God shows his practical religious concern: "Now, the knowledge of God, as I understand it, is that by which we not only conceive that there is a God but also grasp what befits us and is proper to his glory, in fine, what is to our advantage to know of him. Indeed, we shall not say that, properly speaking, God is known where there is no religion or piety."²² When Calvin considered the providence of God, he said that it is "expedient here to discuss briefly to what end Scripture teaches that all things are divinely ordained." By means of "pious and holy meditation on providence, which the rule of piety dictates to us," Calvin wished to receive "the best and sweetest fruit." Throughout the *Institutes* this practical concern pervades Calvin's discussion of election and reprobation. The preacher-pastor-theologian always demonstrated a warm, practical interest in the doctrines that he learned from Scripture.

Calvin acknowledged that the consideration of this doctrine immediately presents very difficult questions. He considered these questions inexplicable if the Biblical view of predestination is not maintained. But Calvin did not begin with these problems. He first called attention to the "usefulness of this doctrine" and to "its very sweet fruit." He mentioned three of these fruits: this doctrine teaches us to put our trust in the free mercy of God; it exalts the glory of God; and it fosters sincere humility.

Contemplation of divine predestination teaches us to look at the mercy of God. In Calvin's judgment "we shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God's free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God's grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others." Salvation does not come from our works; election makes clear "that our salvation comes about solely from God's mere generosity."²⁶ Those who "shut the gates" to this doctrine "wrong men no less than God"; nothing will "suffice to make us humble as we ought to be nor shall we otherwise sincerely feel how much we are obliged to God" unless we contemplate His election. Hence "ignorance of this principle detracts from God's glory" and "takes away from true humility."

Those who are blind to the three benefits of this doctrine—God's free mercy, God's glory, our sincere humility—"would wish the foundation of our salvation to be removed from our midst" and would "very badly serve the interests of themselves and of all other believers." In this doctrine one discovers the very origin of Christ's church. The comfort of God's predestination is

not for individuals alone; it is for the church and the communion of believers. We hear Calvin preach: “Let us resort to the election of God, whenever we become dismayed or cast down: if we see men fall away, if the whole church should seem to come to nought, we must remember that God hath his foundation; that is, the church is not grounded upon the will of man, for they did not make themselves, neither can they reform themselves: but this proceedeth from the pure goodness and mercy of God.”²⁹

This useful doctrine with its pleasant fruits “ought to be preached openly and fully.” “They that think to abolish the doctrine of God’s election destroy as much as possible the salvation of the world.”³¹ In fact “the devil hath no fitter instrument than those who fight against predestination; and cannot in their rage suffer it to be spoken of, or preached as it ought to be.” “The devil can find no better means to destroy our faith, than to hide this article from our view.”³³

This non-speculative, deeply religious and practical interest is evident also in what is regarded as one of Calvin’s most polemic tracts, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (1552). In his response to the charges of Albert Pighius, archdeacon of Utrecht, Calvin stated that he really had nothing more to say than he had stated in the *Institutes*, but then he provided this remarkable summary of his practical concern:

The *Institutes* testify fully and abundantly to what I think, even should I add nothing besides. First of all, I beg my readers to recall the admonition made there. This matter is not a subtle and obscure speculation, as they falsely think, which wears the mind without profit. It is rather a solid argument excellently fitted to the use of the godly. For it builds up faith soundly, trains us to humility, elevates us to admiration of the immense goodness of God towards us, and excites us to praise this goodness. There is no consideration more apt for the building up of faith than that we should listen to this election which the Spirit of God testifies in our hearts to stand in the eternal and inflexible goodwill of God, invulnerable to all storms of the world, all assaults of Satan and all vacillation of the flesh. For then indeed our salvation is assured to us, since we find its cause in the breast of God. For thus we lay hold of life in Christ made manifest to faith, so that, led by the same faith, we can penetrate farther to see from what source this life proceeds. Confidence of salvation is founded upon Christ and rests on the promises of the gospel. Nor is it a negligible support when, believing in Christ, we hear that this is divinely given to us, that before the beginning of the world we were both ordained to faith and also elected to the inheritance of heavenly life. Hence arises an impregnable security.

The Biblical Source of Predestination

The theologian’s task, according to Calvin, “is not to divert the ears with chatter, but to strengthen consciences by teaching things true, sure, and profitable.” Nor is the theologian himself to determine what is true, sure, and profitable; that is given by Scripture alone. “For our wisdom ought to be nothing else than to embrace with humble teachableness, and at least without finding fault, whatever is taught in Sacred Scripture.” “We ought to seek from Scripture a sure rule for both thinking and speaking to which both the thoughts of our minds and the words of our mouths should be conformed.”³⁷ For Calvin, Scripture is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. As the revealed will of the living God, Scripture is the single source of Calvin’s theology.

Why is Calvin so concerned to explain and defend the doctrine of predestination? He stated: “I can declare with all truth that I should never have spoken on this subject, unless the Word of God had led the way, as indeed all godly readers of my earlier writings, and especially of my

Institutes, will readily gather.” After defining predestination in the light of his Scriptural study, he advised his readers “not to take a prejudiced position on either side until, when the passages of Scripture have been adduced, it shall be clear what opinion ought to be held.”⁴⁰ He drew the doctrine from Scripture; that is also the standard by which he wanted his exposition judged. It is not speculatively produced with isolated proof texts attached. Many passages are quoted, but the basic structure of the doctrine is dependent on Scripture, especially on Romans and Ephesians. Calvin’s first commentary was on Romans, and his study of that book greatly influenced his elaboration of the doctrine of predestination in the *Institutes*. Calvin was convinced that “if we understand this Epistle, we have a passage opened to us to the understanding of the whole of Scripture.”

An axiom for Calvin is that the theologian must be obedient to the teaching of God’s Word: “We ought to have such respect for the Word of God that any difference of interpretation on our part should alter it as little as possible.... It is therefore presumptuous and almost blasphemous to turn the meaning of Scripture around without due care, as though it were some game that we were playing.” When accused by his opponents of originating the doctrine that relates the hardening of men to the eternal counsel of God, Calvin emphatically replied: “We are certainly not the author of this opinion.... Paul taught this before us.... For in the present matter we contend for nothing which is not taught by him.”⁴⁴ To those who stumble at Paul’s distinction between election and reprobation in Romans 9, Calvin responded, “But what audacity to check the Holy Spirit and Paul!”

While insisting that Scripture must be the exclusive source of this doctrine, Calvin recognized especially two dangers that arise in dealing with Scripture. It is possible, on the one hand, to engage in excessive curiosity that leads to speculation beyond what Scripture teaches. On the other hand, it is possible to fall prey to an excessive timidity that dares not speak where the Scriptures do speak. With respect to the first, he wrote: “Human curiosity renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. No restraints can hold it back from wandering in forbidden bypaths and thrusting upward to the heights. If allowed, it will leave no secret to God that it will not search out and unravel.” Those who are tempted by this danger of speculation must remember that when they inquire into predestination, “they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. For it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself, and to unfold from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom, which he would have us revere but not understand that through this also he should fill us with wonder.”⁴⁸ What God reveals in Scripture of the secrets of His will, “these he decided to reveal in so far as he foresaw that they would concern us and benefit us.” But “the moment we exceed the bounds of the Word, our course is outside the pathway and in darkness, and ... there we must repeatedly wander, slip, and stumble.”⁵⁰ Against this danger Calvin warned: “Let this, therefore, first of all be before our eyes: to seek any other knowledge of predestination than what the Word of God discloses is not less insane than if one should purpose to walk in a pathless waste [cf. Job 12:24], or to see in darkness. And let us not be ashamed to be ignorant of something in this matter, wherein there is a certain learned ignorance.”

Calvin also issued warnings against the opposite danger of those “who are so cautious or fearful that they desire to bury predestination in order not to disturb weak souls.” The Christian

must “open his mind and ears to every utterance of God directed to him,” but “when the Lord closes his holy lips, he also shall at once close the way to inquiry.”⁵³ This is Calvin’s concern:

For Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know. Therefore, we must guard against depriving believers of anything disclosed about predestination in Scripture, lest we seem either wickedly to defraud them of the blessing of their God or to accuse and scoff at the Holy Spirit for having published what it is in any way profitable to suppress.... The best limit of sobriety for us will be not only to follow God’s lead always in learning but, when he sets an end to teaching, to stop trying to be wise.

Profane men carp, rail, bark, or scoff at predestination, but if opposition to Scriptural doctrine were to deter the Christian, he would be required to keep secret also the doctrines of the Trinity and creation, in fact, all “the chief doctrines of the faith.”

The Biblical source of all doctrine and the dangers to be avoided are expressed in this general rule: “I desire only to have them generally admit that we should not investigate what the Lord has left hidden in secret, that we should not neglect what he has brought into the open, so that we may not be convicted of excessive curiosity on the one hand, or of excessive ingratitude on the other.” Calvin’s desire was that there might flourish in the church of God “sufficient greatness of soul” to “prevent its godly teachers from being ashamed of the simple profession of true doctrine, however hated it may be,” and “to refute whatever reproaches the ungodly may pour forth.”⁵⁷

The Definition of Predestination

Calvin taught the doctrine of predestination because he was convinced that this is what Scripture demands. He attempted to avoid speculation and theorizing so that the pleasant fruits of the Scriptural doctrine may be tasted, and he did this in a soteriological context that reflects the powerful influence of the Epistle to the Romans. Before proceeding to sketch Calvin’s view of election and reprobation, respectively, it will be useful to survey the entire doctrine before us. His definitions provide good summaries of the whole.

In the two comprehensive definitions that follow, Calvin summarized his doctrine of double predestination:

We call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death.

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation. Now among the elect we regard the call as a testimony of election. Then we hold justification another sign of its manifestation, until they come into the glory in which the fulfillment of that election lies. But as the Lord seals his elect by call and justification, so, by shutting off the reprobate from knowledge of his name or from the sanctification of his Spirit, he, as it were, reveals by these marks what sort of judgment awaits them.

Almost everything that Calvin taught regarding predestination is included in these two summaries.

In other writings Calvin presented similar summaries. In the preface to his commentary on the Psalms, he spoke of “eternal predestination by which God distinguished the reprobate from the elect.” In refuting the arguments of Pighius, the first of three considerations cited by Calvin is this: “. . . the eternal predestination of God, by which before the fall of Adam He decreed what should take place concerning the whole human race and every individual, was fixed and determined.”⁶¹ Finally, we note Calvin’s early summary in *Instruction in Faith* (1537). The focus is similar to that of Romans 9 and of the final edition of the *Institutes*:

Beyond this contrast of attitudes of believers and unbelievers, the great secret of God’s counsel must necessarily be considered. For, the seed of the word of God takes root and brings forth fruit only in those whom the Lord, by his eternal election, has predestined to be children and heirs of the heavenly kingdom. To all the others (who by the same counsel of God are rejected before the foundation of the world) the clear and evident preaching of truth can be nothing but an odor of death unto death. . . . We acknowledge, therefore, the elect to be recipients of his mercy (as truly they are) and the rejected to be recipients of his wrath, a wrath, however, which is nothing but just.

These summaries make clear that Calvin held to double predestination, that is, to both election and reprobation. These summaries and the whole of his teaching indicate that Calvin considered both election and reprobation sovereign works of God rooted in the eternal and immutable decree or eternal counsel of the Triune God. Thus Calvin emphasized both sovereign election and sovereign reprobation. We shall see, however, that Calvin used other adjectives that cannot be applied to election and reprobation equally. He followed Paul in speaking of both election and reprobation: “. . . in the case of the elect he would have us contemplate the mercy of God, but in the case of the reprobate acknowledge His righteous judgment.”

Election is gratuitous election that displays the free mercy and goodness of God. The elect are elect in Christ; Christ is the mirror of election. Reprobation, on the other hand, displays the righteous judgment of God, His justice. That is not to imply that justice does not also characterize God’s election; it certainly does, for “there can be no injustice at all either to the elect or the reprobate.” In all His works God is perfectly just. Gratuitous mercy, however, does not characterize God’s sovereign reprobation. Hence, we reflect Calvin’s emphasis when we speak of sovereign and gratuitous election on the one hand, and of sovereign and just (righteous) reprobation on the other. Other attributes of God also appear in predestination, of course. The incomprehensibility of God is called to our attention again and again, but the three attributes mentioned—sovereignty, grace, and justice—are the chief ones mentioned in Calvin’s discussion. From this survey of the general features of Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, we now turn to a more detailed examination first of sovereign and gratuitous election, and then of sovereign and just reprobation.

Sovereign and Gratuitous Election

IN SETTING FORTH the Biblical basis for the doctrine of election, Calvin begins in his *Institutes* with Ephesians and then goes to Romans. In that great trinitarian doxology of Ephesians 1, Paul addressed “the saints in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus” (NIV). He referred to God’s “pleasure and will” as the source of all the grace they had received: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” (Eph. 1:3–6 NIV)

When one pays attention to the separate clauses of this passage and ties them all together, there is no reason to doubt the doctrine of election. Calvin’s comments on this passage give us a summary of the main features of the doctrine of sovereign and gratuitous election:

Since he calls them “elect,” it cannot be doubted that he is speaking to believers, as he also soon declares.... By saying that they were “elect before the creation of the world” [Eph. 1:4], he takes away all regard for worth. For what basis for distinction is there among those who did not yet exist, and who were subsequently to be equals in Adam? Now if they are elect in Christ, it follows that not only is each man elected without respect to his own person but also certain ones are separated from others, since we see that not all are members of Christ. Besides, the fact that they were elected “to be holy” [Eph. 1:4b] plainly refutes the error that derives election from foreknowledge, since Paul declares all virtue appearing in man is the result of election. Now if a higher cause be sought, Paul answers that God has predestined it so, and that this is “according to the good pleasure of his will” [Eph. 1:5b]. By these words he does away with all means of their election that men imagine in themselves. For all benefits that God bestows for the spiritual life, as Paul teaches, flow from this one source: namely, that God has chosen whom he has willed, and before their birth has laid up for them individually the grace that he willed to grant them.

In his commentary on Ephesians Calvin summarized the doctrine of election by referring to four causes of our salvation: “The efficient cause is the good pleasure of the will of God; the material cause is Christ; and the final cause is the praise of His grace.... The formal cause [is] the preaching of the Gospel, by which the goodness of God flows out to us.” Although Calvin did not employ these Aristotelian terms in the *Institutes*, he did make the same distinctions throughout his discussion of election. We shall consider the various elements of Calvin’s discussion under the following divisions: the divine decree, its cause and ground, its goal and means.

The Divine Decree of Election

In this section we shall survey Calvin’s emphasis upon three factors: election is *God’s* work; election is God’s *decretive* work; and, finally, election is God’s decretive work relating to *individuals*.

Election is God’s work. According to Calvin, election is from beginning to end the sovereign work of our gracious God. Election as God’s work concerns the eternal counsel made before the foundation of the world. As God’s work, election concerns the salvation of men and women that

is wrought entirely by our sovereign God. The final end of election is not attained until God, having worked the salvation of His elect and having brought them to glory, is thereby fully glorified Himself.

Although this divine decree is in some sense the work of all three persons of the Trinity, Calvin understood it as primarily the work of the first two persons. That the Father is the author of the decree is most clear. It is in the light of the Father's eternal decree that Christ's words must be understood: "All that the Father gives me will come to me.... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me...." Thus "the Father's gift is the beginning of our reception into the surety and protection of Christ."⁴

But Calvin also considered Christ Himself author of the decree of election: "Meanwhile, although Christ interposes himself as mediator, he claims for himself, in common with the Father, the right to choose." This is the meaning of Jesus' words in John 13:18: "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen" (NIV). Thus when Christ declared "that he knows whom he has chosen, he denotes in the human genus a particular species, distinguished not by the quality of its virtues but by heavenly decree.... Christ makes himself the Author of election." Shortly we shall also see that Calvin regarded the elect as "elect in Christ" and that he viewed Christ as "the mirror of our election." But it is important here to see that Christ is Himself author of the decree.

We have noticed that Calvin regarded the divine decree as the work of all three persons of the Trinity, but that he emphasized the roles of the Father and the Son. He did not explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit as author of the decree as he did the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is involved in the doctrine of election, of course: He is the teacher of this doctrine, having inspired the Scriptures,⁸ and even more significantly, His soteriological work carries out the eternal decree of God.

Election is God's decretive work. God's works are many and varied. The decretive work of God is here in focus. To understand Calvin, one must recognize that election, as well as reprobation, refers to the sovereign, eternal counsel of God. "We call predestination *God's eternal decree*, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man." "Scripture ... clearly shows ... that God once established *by his eternal and unchangeable plan* those whom he long before determined once for all to receive unto salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction." Calvin spoke of the eternal decree, or the eternal counsel or plan: it precedes the existence of the person elected (e.g., Jacob); it precedes the fall of Adam;¹² indeed, it precedes the creation of the world. That is why Calvin said that "all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."¹⁴ Calvin was not speculating about the order of the decrees. Rather, with complete Biblical warrant he was speaking of the eternal counsel of God that precedes all His activities in history, an eternal counsel that is, however, carried out in history.

Calvin's reference to the eternal counsel and decree of God indicates the intimate relationship between predestination and providence in his thought. In the editions of the *Institutes* published from 1539 to 1554, Calvin discussed these subjects together in the same chapter. Not until the final edition of 1559 did he move his discussion of predestination to book 3. This systematic rearrangement did not, however, involve a change in content nor a basic change in Calvin's thought. When he discussed providence, he found it necessary to refer to predestination—to election and reprobation. And when he here discussed predestination, the whole is related to the counsel of God that is executed through His providential direction and government of all things.

In the light of contemporary discussion, this point deserves further attention. Reference to God's decree of election at once recalls Calvin's assertions in connection with God's providence: "But we make God the ruler and governor of all things, who in accordance with his wisdom has from the farthest limit of eternity decreed what he was going to do, and now by his might carries out what he has decreed." He called us to "remember that there is no erratic power, or action, or motion in creatures, but that they are governed by God's secret plan in such a way that nothing happens except what is knowingly and willingly decreed by him." In this summary of the whole doctrine of providence, he made direct mention of election and reprobation: "To sum up, since God's will is said to be the cause of all things, I have made his providence the determinative principle for all human plans and works, not only in order to display its force in the elect, who are ruled by the Holy Spirit, but also to compel the reprobate to obedience."¹⁸

Election is particular. According to Calvin the decretive work of God is specific and particular; it concerns specific individuals. The decree of election does not concern only some general intention of God, nor is it a decree only to save those who believe. Rather, the decree concerns individuals (not yet existing, of course) whom God destines for eternal salvation; this decree provides the means for accomplishing that purpose for each elect individual. Calvin's view of individual election did not, however, lead him to individualism.

Calvin did not refer exclusively to individual election, and it is important to notice this in order to understand the sections on predestination properly. He speaks of a national election of Israel and of an election to office in distinction from individual election to salvation. These other "species" or "degrees" of election display the generosity as well as the sovereignty of God's election; they do not necessarily involve salvation, however. Esau, for example, was a member of the elect nation, but he broke the covenant and showed that he was not elect to salvation. The same was true of Ishmael. Judas is one who was both a member of the elect nation and was elected to office, but who was not elected to salvation. "Although it is now sufficiently clear that God by his secret plan freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others," Calvin continued, "still his free election has been only half explained until we come to *individual persons*, to whom God not only offers salvation but so assigns it that the certainty of its effect is not in suspense or doubt." Not the whole nation of Israel but only those individually elected unto salvation are "engrafted to their Head," Jesus Christ, so "they are never cut off from salvation."²¹ These elect persons are, however, bound together into a communion. In Christ their Head "the Heavenly Father has gathered his elect together, and has joined them to himself by an indissoluble bond." This constitutes the significant basis for Calvin's doctrine of the church.

Particular election—the election of individual persons to salvation—was so clearly taught by Calvin that it became the occasion for the common objection that God was then a respecter of persons. After some preliminary reflection on the real issue involved in this objection, Calvin presented his answer. The answer is a simple assertion of the Creator's sovereign right over His entire creation. There is nothing in human persons that accounts for their election or reprobation as such. The elect to whom God shows mercy are as guilty as the reprobate. Although the reprobate are eventually condemned for their sins, the sovereign action of God in passing them by (preterition) was not occasioned by their sin.

Calvin's answer echoes Augustine: "Because God metes out merited penalty to those whom he condemns but distributes unmerited grace to those whom he calls, he is freed of all accusation—like a lender, who has the power of remitting payment to one, of exacting it from another." And with Augustine, Calvin said: "The Lord can therefore also give grace ... to whom he will ... because he is merciful, and not give to all because he is a just judge. For by giving to

some what they do not deserve, ... he can show his free grace.... By not giving to all, he can manifest what all deserve.”²⁴

Abraham’s heirs were not more worthy than other people when the nation of Israel was elected; likewise individuals elected unto salvation are no more worthy of election than are those rejected. It is due simply to God’s sovereignty: “God chooses some, and passes over others according to his own decision....” “God has always been free to bestow his grace on whom he wills”; if anyone seeks a further cause than God’s free sovereignty, “let them answer why they are men rather than oxen or asses. Although it was in God’s power to make them dogs, he formed them in his own image.”²⁶ Calvin’s only response to such questions is the response of Paul: “But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” ’ ” (Rom. 9:20 NIV).

From the above it ought to be clear what Calvin meant when he defined predestination as “God’s eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of *each man*.” The decree of election makes a distinction between individuals where there is none by nature: in Jacob and Esau “all things are equal, yet God’s judgment of each is different. For he receives one and rejects the other.... Disowning Ishmael, he sets his heart on Isaac [Gen. 21:12]. Setting Manasseh aside, he honors Ephraim more [Gen. 48:20].” The decree is not known to men, however, except in rare instances when God chooses to reveal it. In the unique case of Jacob and Esau, the parents were told of God’s eternal decree concerning their twins prior to their birth; Rebecca was divinely informed of the election of her son Jacob.²⁹ But even in this unique instance, this divine revelation did not become the basis for divergent action on the part of the parents. The means of grace were not to be withheld from Esau and given only to the elect Jacob. The sovereign election of individuals to receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ emphasizes, however, the free mercy of God in giving to one what He withholds from another—and giving generously where no merit is present in the recipient.

The Cause and Ground of Election

The preceding section demonstrated that Calvin saw the salvation of believers rooted in the eternal and immutable decree of God. Now the question must be considered, Does that divine decree have some reason or cause as its basis? Why did God elect some persons and not others? Was it because of their good works? Or was it because He foreknew or foresaw their good works? These were not live options for Calvin. But others have presented such answers, and Calvin was forced to consider them. He emphatically denied good works or foreknowledge of them as reason or cause for God’s decree of election. The first cause, the principal cause, the highest reason, the foundation of our election, according to Calvin, is God Himself—His sovereign will, His good pleasure. Thus, the sovereignty of God stands out again in considering the cause and ground of election. Since works are not the basis for election, the gratuitous mercy of God also emerges prominently in the discussion. God chooses His elect in Christ: He, Jesus Christ, is the ground of their election. These features of Calvin’s discussion must now be considered in some detail.

The cause is not good works. Calvin enumerated three reasons for rejecting the position that good works are the cause of the decree of election. God made His decrees before the foundation of the world, so the persons elected did not yet exist to perform any works; all men are lost in Adam and hence incapable of performing any good works; finally, election is itself unto good

works—“For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.”³²

The time of our election, therefore, proved for Calvin that it is purely gratuitous. “By saying that they were ‘elect before the creation of the world’ [Eph. 1:4], he takes away all regard for worth. For what basis for distinction is there among those who did not yet exist, and who were subsequently to be equals in Adam?” Paul stated this specifically in another passage when he drew out the antithesis implied in Ephesians: God “has saved us and called us to a holy life—*not because of anything we have done* but because of his own purpose and grace.” But it is in Romans 9 “where Paul both reiterates this argument more profoundly and pursues it more at length.” There Paul said that the sovereign election of God made the distinction between Jacob and Esau and between believing and unbelieving Israel. “If their own piety established some in the hope of salvation, and their own desertion disinherited others, it would be quite absurd for Paul to lift his readers to secret election.”³⁶

The cause is not foreknowledge of works. What about God’s foreknowledge of works? Is that not the cause and ground of election? Calvin’s response was negative: “But though they had not yet acted, a certain sophist of the Sorbonne might reply, ‘God foresaw what they could do.’ This objection has no force in the nature of corrupt men, in whom nothing can be seen but materials for destruction.” “We are all lost in Adam; and therefore, had not God rescued us from perishing by His own election, there was nothing to be foreseen.”³⁸ Again Romans 9 rendered the decisive word for Calvin: “If foreknowledge had any bearing upon the distinction between the brothers, the mention of time would surely have been inopportune.” Calvin considered the various theories of Ambrose, Origen, Jerome, and Thomas,⁴⁰ but he rejected all on similar Scriptural grounds. If works were in any sense the basis for election, Paul could easily have overcome the charge that there was unrighteousness in God’s discrimination by referring to them: “Paul could have settled this in one word, by proposing a regard for works. Why, then, does he not do this but rather continues a discourse that is fraught with the same difficulty? Why but because he ought not? For the Holy Spirit, speaking through his mouth, did not suffer from the fault of forgetfulness. Therefore he answers without circumlocutions: God shows favor to his elect because he so wills; he has mercy upon them because he so wills.” Therefore, “those who assign God’s election to merits are wiser than they ought to be,” as an ancient “ecclesiastical writer truly wrote.”⁴² Augustine’s words also remain true: “God’s grace does not find but makes those fit to be chosen.” “Finally,” said Calvin, “from the words *election* and *purpose* it is certain that all causes that men commonly devise apart from God’s secret plan are remote from this cause.”

The cause is God’s sovereign will. The cause and ground of election cannot be human good works nor even God’s foreknowledge of them. What then is election’s ground? Calvin said that the only cause that can be named is simply the sovereign will of God. Jacob and Esau constitute Scripture’s clearest example. “Esau and Jacob are brothers, born of the same parents, as yet enclosed in the same womb, not yet come forth into the light. In them all things are equal, yet God’s judgment of each is different. For he receives one and rejects the other.” “Hence it ought not to be doubted that Jacob was, with the angels, engrafted into the body of Christ that he might share the same life. Jacob, therefore, is chosen and distinguished from the rejected Esau by God’s predestination, while not differing from him in merits.”⁴⁶ Or when Paul said in Ephesians 1:5, 9, that “God purposed in himself,” this means “that he considered nothing outside himself with which to be concerned in making his decree.... Surely the grace of God deserves alone to be proclaimed in our election only if it is freely given. Now it will not be freely given if God, in

choosing his own, considers what the works of each shall be.” If you ask for a reason for the distinction between Jacob and Esau, no other answer is permissible than God’s own word to Moses: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”⁴⁸

What is then the cause or reason for the decree of election? Paul gave the answer in Ephesians 1:5—“his pleasure and will” (NIV). If one attempts to push beyond the good pleasure of God’s will, Calvin warned: “... it is very wicked merely to investigate the causes of God’s will. For his will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are.” “The everlasting decree of God ... hath no causes whatsoever.... For God will have us use such soberness, that his bare will (*sa simple volonté*) may suffice us for all reasons.... It is wisdom in us to do whatever God appointed and never ask why.” Calvin himself followed that injunction in his 1562 *Confession of Faith*, which was sent to the Diet at Frankfurt in the name of the French Reformed Churches: “We hold that the goodness which he displays towards us proceeds from his having elected us before the creation of the world, not seeking the cause of so doing out of himself and his good pleasure.” This emphasis upon God’s sovereign will is not identical with the late-Middle Age concept of God as absolute power.⁵² For Calvin the will of God is characterized by all of God’s attributes; His will is just and holy and righteous. We shall consider this further when discussing God’s will in connection with reprobation.

The ground is Christ. Calvin emphasized that sovereign election unto salvation is “election in Christ.” Election stems from God’s sovereign will, but there is a just basis or ground for this election. “When Paul teaches that we were chosen in Christ ‘before the creation of the world’ [Eph. 1:4a], he takes away all consideration of the real worth on our part, for it is just as if he said: since among all the offspring of Adam, the Heavenly Father found nothing worthy of his election, he turned his eyes upon his Anointed, to choose from that body as members those whom he was to take into the fellowship of life.”

Again in a later section Calvin said: “Accordingly, those whom God has adopted as his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ [Eph. 1:4]; for unless he could love them in him, he could not honor them with the inheritance of his Kingdom if they had not previously become partakers of him.”

Election in Christ in no way minimized or altered the decretive character of divine election for Calvin. On the contrary, election in Christ sets forth the ground of this eternal divine decree, or its “material cause,” as he called it in the Ephesian commentary. Election in Christ does not minimize the sovereignty of the decree, but it does magnify the gratuitousness, the free mercy, of election. Election in Christ is a second proof of the freedom of election: “When he adds, *In Christ*, it is the second confirmation of the freedom of election. For if we are chosen in Christ, it is outside ourselves. It is not from the sight of our deserving, but because our heavenly Father has engrafted us, through the blessing of adoption, into the Body of Christ. In short, the name of Christ excludes all merit, and everything which men have of themselves; for when he says that we are chosen in Christ, it follows that in ourselves we are unworthy.”

In opposing the “puerile fiction” of Pighius, Calvin provided a good summary of the significance of our election in Christ. He quoted John 6:37: “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (NIV). According to Calvin we have here “three things briefly but clearly expressed”: “... first, all that come to Christ were given to Him by the Father before; second, all who were given are transmitted from the Father’s hand to His, so that they may be truly His; and lastly, He is a faithful custodian of all whom the Father entrusted to His good faith and protection, so that none is allowed to perish. Now if the

question of the beginning of faith be raised, Christ replies: Those who believe believe because they were given to Him by the Father.”

The Goal and Means of Election

The goal is God’s glory and our sanctification. The goal of God’s eternal election is twofold. One goal Calvin called the final cause or ultimate design of election, namely, the glory of God. The other he called its proximate end, which is our sanctification. Commenting on the words of Ephesians 1:4, “to be holy and blameless in his sight” (NIV), Calvin said: “He indicates the immediate, but not the chief design. For there is no absurdity in supposing that one thing may have two objects. The design of building is that there should be a house. This is the immediate aim. But the convenience of dwelling in it is the ultimate aim. It was necessary to mention this in passing; for Paul at once mentions another aim, the glory of God. But there is no contradiction here. The glory of God is the highest end, to which our sanctification is subordinate.” In Ephesians 1:6 the phrase “to the praise of his glorious grace” (NIV) refers to the final cause of God’s election. That appears again in verse 12, “for the praise of his glory” (NIV): “He repeats the purpose. For only then does God’s glory shine in us, if we are nothing but vessels of His mercy. The word *glory* denotes, κατ’ ἐξοχήν, peculiarly that which shines in the goodness of God; for there is nothing more His own, in which He desires to be glorified, than His goodness.”

The glory of God was the unique emphasis of Calvin, both for his teaching and his own personal life. “*Soli Deo gloria!*” was his well-known motto. His comments on Ephesians are clear on this feature of election, but he did elaborate on it in his discussion of election in the *Institutes*. It is, however, as we have seen above, one of the pleasant fruits that comes from a right understanding of this doctrine. This perspective underlies his entire discussion of the sovereign and gratuitous mercy of God displayed in divine election.

In the *Institutes* Calvin gave much more attention to the immediate goal of election—our sanctification—and to questions relating to this goal. The immediate goal of election is the sanctification of the elect—to make them “holy and blameless in his sight” (Eph. 1:4 NIV)—and that sanctification leads the believer to glorify his sovereign, gracious Lord. Sovereign election provides all the means to attain the total goal of God’s sovereign purpose. Romans 8:29–30 provides the basic structure for these means by which God effectuates His eternal election, namely, calling, justification, glorification. There is a reciprocal action; the means direct attention to God’s source and goal: “Now among the elect we regard the call as a testimony of election. Then we hold justification another sign of its manifestation, until they come into the glory in which the fulfillment of that election lies.” This also indicates the crucial significance of the doctrine of election for the whole of Calvin’s theology. Election envelops the whole redemptive process from the eternal decree to its final accomplishment in glory. Between these poles election is relevant to the doctrine of faith, the knowledge of God, the whole of soteriology, and the church and sacraments, and to eschatology as well.⁶² Thus Calvin finally found the right place for his discussion of predestination—book 3, which deals largely with soteriology. Soteriology culminates in eschatology; for “the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him” (Ps. 103:17 RSV). Calvin quoted Bernard with approval on this perspective: “From everlasting because of predestination, to everlasting because of beatification—the one knowing no beginning, the other no end.”

The means is preaching. God makes use of means to bring His decreed goal to realization. And these very means are also included in God’s decree and are under His sovereign control. By

divine command the gospel must be preached to all people; yet not all hear, and among those who do, responses differ. God's predestination is involved. "Even though the preaching of the gospel streams forth from the wellspring of election, because such preaching is shared also with the wicked, it cannot of itself be a full proof of election."⁶⁵ The calling that is proof of election, the calling referred to in Romans 8:30, "consists not only in the preaching of the Word but also in the illumination of the Spirit." This effective calling is one of the means of election:

"Although in choosing his own the Lord already has adopted them as his children, we see that they do not come into possession of so great a good except when they are called; conversely, that when they are called, they already enjoy some share of their election."

Does the universal call of the gospel then conflict with particular election? If not, what is its real significance? Calvin faced these questions boldly, carefully, and Scripturally. He frankly stated that the universality of the promise does not destroy the distinction of special grace. We may *not* say that the gospel is "effectually profitable to all." If God "willed all to be saved, he would set his Son over them, and would engraft all into his body with the sacred bond of faith. Now it is certain that faith is a singular pledge of the Father's love, reserved for the sons whom he has adopted."⁷⁰

These considerations do not mean that the preaching of the gospel to all is meaningless.

It is easy to explain why the general election of a people is not always firm and effectual: to those with whom God makes a covenant, he does not at once give the spirit of regeneration that would enable them to persevere in the covenant to the very end. Rather, the outward change without the working of inner grace, which might have availed to keep them, is *intermediate* between the rejection of mankind and the election of a meager number of the godly.

Relying upon Augustine, Calvin explained how the gospel should be preached:

If anyone addresses the people in this way: "If you do not believe, the reason is that you have already been divinely destined for destruction," he not only fosters sloth but also gives place to evil intention. If anyone extends to the future also the statement that they who hear will not believe because they have been condemned, this will be cursing rather than teaching.... "For as we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved." So shall it come about that we try to make every one we meet a sharer in our peace.... It belongs to God, however, to make that rebuke useful to those whom he ... has foreknown and predestined.

At the same time Calvin held that the preaching of the gospel, even for the reprobate, involves a display of God's "great benefit," or common grace. A heavier judgment therefore awaits the reprobate who have heard the gospel and rejected it than those who lived before the coming of Christ and never heard the gospel.⁷⁴

The preaching of the gospel is primarily a means for effectuating the decree of election. That is why Calvin referred to gospel preaching as streaming "forth from the wellspring of election." He explained: "The elect are gathered into Christ's flock by a call not immediately at birth, and not all at the same time, but according as it pleases God to dispense his grace to them. But before they are gathered unto that supreme Shepherd, they wander scattered in the wilderness common to all; and they do not differ at all from others except that they are protected by God's especial mercy from rushing headlong into the final ruin of death."⁷⁶ This inner call stems from the "free goodness" of God and results from "the effectual working of his Spirit"; hence, "this inner call ... is a pledge of salvation that cannot deceive us."

Calvin suggested that especially two errors need to be avoided in understanding the relation of election and faith. First is the error of some who “make man God’s co-worker, to ratify election by his consent,” for this makes “man’s will superior to God’s plan.” Scripture does not say that we are “merely given the ability to believe”; it states that we are given “faith itself.”⁷⁹ The second error is that of regarding election as dependent upon faith, “as if it were doubtful and also ineffectual until confirmed by faith.” According to Calvin “it is false to say that election takes effect only after we have embraced the gospel, and takes its validity from this.”⁸¹ He did admit of course that election is “confirmed, with respect to us,” for “the secret plan of God, which lay hidden, is brought to light, provided you understand by this language merely that what was unknown is now verified—sealed, as it were, with a seal.” The presence of true faith is also a ground for our assurance of God’s election. While the inner, effectual call confirms election, we must not confuse cause and effect. The pipe through which the water flows to us must not be confused with the fountain from which that water springs.⁸³ Thus Calvin said that “faith is fitly joined to election, provided it takes second place.” Election is the parent of faith. God employs calling, faith, justification, and sanctification as the means for accomplishing the glorification decreed from eternity. “The Lord seals his elect by call and justification”; therefore, Calvin said: “Now among the elect we regard the call as a testimony of election. Then we hold justification another sign of its manifestation, until they come into the glory in which the fulfillment of that election lies.”⁸⁵

In this light we understand Calvin’s refutation of the objection that his doctrine of predestination removes all incentive for responsible ethical activity. Calvin admitted that some people had polluted the doctrine of predestination with such foul blasphemy, but he recalled the words of Paul, that we have been elected in Christ “to be holy and blameless in his sight.”⁸⁷ “If election has as its goal holiness of life, it ought rather to arouse and goad us eagerly to set our mind upon it than to serve as a pretext for doing nothing.” Sadoletto was one who charged that Calvin’s doctrine of predestination led to indolence; Calvin’s reply is indicative of the way he treated this objection:

Since therefore, according to us, Christ regenerates to a blessed life those whom he justifies, and after rescuing them from the dominion of sin, hands them over to the dominion of righteousness, transforms them into the image of God, and so trains them by his Spirit into obedience to his will, there is no ground to complain that by our doctrine, lust is left with loosened reins.... Nay rather, as the end of gratuitous election, so also of gratuitous justification is, that we may lead pure and unpolluted lives before God. For the saying of Paul is true (1 Thess. 4:7), we have not been called to impurity but to holiness.

Knowledge of our election is based on Christ. But how does one know he is elect? Calvin asked that question too: “Now, what revelation do you have of your election?” That question arises in almost everyone who reflects upon election as the source of salvation. Satan deviously tries to unsettle us. Calvin contended that “Satan has no more grievous or dangerous temptation to dishearten believers than when he unsettles them with doubt about their election, while at the same time he arouses them with a wicked desire to seek it outside the way.”⁹¹ The desire for security is not itself the temptation; the temptation is to seek security in an improper way. Calvin said: “I call it ‘seeking outside the way’ when mere man attempts to break into the inner recesses of divine wisdom, and tries to penetrate even to the highest eternity, in order to find out what decision has been made concerning himself at God’s judgment seat.” If a man attempts to do that, “he casts himself into the depths of a bottomless whirlpool to be swallowed up; then he tangles himself in innumerable and inextricable snares; then he buries himself in an abyss of

sightless darkness.”⁹³ To suffer shipwreck on that rock means the loss of “peace and tranquillity toward God.”

It is in connection with the quest for certainty regarding one’s election that Calvin referred to Jesus Christ as the mirror of election. First, we should recall Calvin’s emphasis upon our election in Christ, for this is closely related to Christ as the mirror of election:

Accordingly, those whom God has adopted as his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ [Eph. 1:4]; for unless he could love them in him, he could not honor them with the inheritance of his Kingdom if they had not previously become partakers of him. But if we have been chosen in him, we shall not find assurance of our election in ourselves; and not even in God the Father, if we conceive him as severed from his Son. Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election. For since it is into his body the Father has destined those to be engrafted whom he has willed from eternity to be his own, that he may hold as sons all whom he acknowledges to be among his members, we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life [cf. Rev. 21:27] if we are in communion with Christ.

We should turn our eyes to Christ for security. For “what is the purpose of election but that we, adopted as sons by our Heavenly Father, may obtain salvation and immortality by his favor?” Assurance of election does not come from some special revelation; nor does it come from curious attempts to pry into the eternal decree of God. Christ is the mirror, and “if we desire anything more than to be reckoned among God’s sons and heirs, we have to rise above Christ. If this is our ultimate goal, how insane are we to seek outside him what we have already obtained in him, and can find in him alone?”⁹⁸ “Therefore, if we desire to know whether God cares for our salvation, let us inquire whether he has entrusted us to Christ, whom he has established as the sole Savior of all his people.” This is what Calvin meant when he said that “the firmness of our election is joined to our calling”,¹⁰⁰ hence to acquire “the inestimable fruit of comfort” and assurance, the Word requires that we “begin with God’s call, and ... end with it.”

Looking to Christ as the mirror of our election may give assurance for the present, but what about the future? Some people seem to have true faith and appear to be joined to Christ; yet they fall away later. Calvin also faced this problem. For the future also Christ is the mirror of election and assurance for our perseverance (preservation). “But Christ has freed us from this anxiety, for these promises surely apply to the future: ‘All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who will come to me I will not cast out’ [John 6:37].” Calvin mentioned other passages and concluded with the question: “What did Christ wish to have us learn from this but to trust that we shall ever remain safe because we have been made his once for all?” Since Christ is “the eternal wisdom of the Father, his unchangeable truth, his firm counsel, we ought not to be afraid of what he tells us in his Word varying in the slightest from that will of the Father which we seek. Rather, he faithfully reveals to us that will as it was from the beginning and ever shall be.”¹⁰⁴ Christ must be taken at His word; these promises are so certain that it is not permissible for the believer to pray, “O Lord, if I have been chosen, hear me.” That formulation indicates doubt in the promises of God. Scripture does indicate that some who seem to belong to Christ will later fall away. Calvin explained that “it is also equally plain that such persons never cleaved to Christ with the heartfelt trust in which certainty of election has, I say, been established for us.”¹⁰⁶ He continued: “So then, let not such instances induce us at all to abandon a quiet reliance upon the Lord’s promise, where he declares that all by whom he is received in true faith have been given

to him by the Father, no one of whom, since he is their guardian and shepherd, will perish [cf. John 3:16; 6:39].”

Calvin’s reference to Christ as the mirror of our election is a good example of the Biblical way in which he avoided frigid speculation. It is equally important to observe, contrary to some interpreters, that Calvin did not introduce the so-called *sylogismus practicus*. True, the line between what Calvin did and the practical syllogism is razor thin; but Calvin did not urge people to look at their own good works to find confidence in themselves. His clear emphasis is upon the work of Christ performed in believers. He did say that in seeking the certainty of our election, we should “cling to those latter signs which are sure attestations of it.”¹⁰⁹ But here Calvin was contrasting these “latter signs” with the futile attempt to look into the prior eternal counsel and decree of God. When he elaborated upon these “latter signs,” he never emphasized the believer’s good works. It is Christ’s work and His promises that are evident in these “latter signs.”

One need only review the quotations cited above: “Christ, then, is the mirror wherein we must, and without self-deception may, contemplate our own election.” Again, “If we desire to know whether God cares for our salvation, let us inquire whether he has entrusted us to Christ...”¹¹¹ So too with regard to future assurance, the focus is not in the security that resides in ourselves but in that which is rooted in the promises of Christ. The calling, which according to Calvin should be the beginning and end of our examination of this question, is the calling of God that “consists not only in the preaching of the Word but also in the illumination of the Spirit.” In his tract *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, Calvin pointedly summarized the *Institutes* on this matter: “Confidence of salvation is founded upon Christ and rests on the promises of the gospel.” This is not a *sylogismus practicus*, which draws logical conclusions from the believer’s good works.

Calvin’s insistence that Christ is the mirror of election in no way minimizes the decretive character of eternal election. Rather, the reference to Christ as the mirror is firmly rooted in the eternal decree of God whereby we were elected in Christ. When Calvin warned against futile attempts to penetrate the hidden counsel of God in search of assurance and certainty of one’s election, he in no way wished to leave the impression that there is no eternal decree of election. The question is actually how one can come to *know* about this eternal decree and be assured of his election. Calvin answered that we have no direct access to the decree or counsel of God. We can know it only indirectly, though truly and certainly, from the work of Christ in and for us. For those who wish it “put more bluntly,” Calvin explained that “election is prior to faith, but is learnt by faith.” He said further:

Therefore Christ, when commending the eternal election of His own in the counsel of His Father, at the same time shows where their faith may rest secure. I have manifested, He says (John 17:6), Thy name to the men whom Thou didst give Me. Thine they were, and Thou didst give them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. We see here that God begins with Himself when He sees fit to elect us; but He will have us begin with Christ so that we may know that we are reckoned among His peculiar people.

In one of his sermons Calvin also urged his hearers to recognize that “the grace of Jesus Christ” is joined “with the everlasting counsel of God the Father.” He encouraged his hearers to seek assurance of their election by contemplating the calling and faith rooted in Jesus Christ. At the same time Calvin warned that they must not lose sight of God’s eternal decree: “But we must here remark, that when we have knowledge of our salvation, when God hath called us and enlightened us in the faith of his gospel, it is not to bring to nought the everlasting predestination that went before.”¹¹⁷

In summary, Calvin emphasized God's sovereign, gratuitous election. God's eternal decree is sovereign, and its righteous ground is the grace of Jesus Christ. Our knowledge of the decree is based on Christ as the mirror of election, according to the whole of Scripture. Understood in this Biblical way, the doctrine of election provides peace and security for the true believer, and election issues in the rich fruit of Christian comfort. The following words of Calvin provide a fitting conclusion for this section: "Even though discussion about predestination is likened to a dangerous sea, still, in traversing it, one finds safe and calm—I also add pleasant—sailing unless he willfully desire to endanger himself. For just as those engulf themselves in a deadly abyss who, to make their election more certain, investigate God's eternal plan apart from his Word, so those who rightly and duly examine it as it is contained in his Word reap the inestimable fruit of comfort."

Sovereign and Just Reprobation

PROBABLY NO ONE knew better than Calvin himself that the doctrine of double predestination is not popular. "Now when human understanding hears these things," he wrote, "its insolence is so irrepressible that it breaks forth into random and immoderate tumult as if at the blast of a battle trumpet." Calvin was thinking of those who accepted election but denied reprobation. Some of Calvin's friends and even some fellow Reformers urged him to soft-pedal the doctrine of reprobation.² "Indeed many, as if they wished to avert a reproach from God, accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned," he observed. "But they do this very ignorantly and childishly," he added, "since election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation."

Calvin did not mean that reprobation is a logical deduction from the doctrine of election; he made the assertion above from the full conviction that Scripture requires it. "If we are not ashamed of the gospel, we must confess what is there plainly declared. God, by His eternal goodwill, which has no cause outside itself, destined those whom He pleased to salvation, rejecting the rest; those whom He dignified by gratuitous adoption He illumined by His Spirit, so that they receive the life offered in Christ, while others voluntarily disbelieve, so that they remain in darkness destitute of the light of faith."

Calvin spoke openly of the "incomprehensible plan" of God and admitted that reprobation raises questions that he could not answer. He considered himself compelled to defend the doctrine of reprobation, however, because Scripture requires it. In reference to Romans 9, he said "that hardening is in God's hand and will, just as much as mercy is... And Paul does not, as do those I have spoken of [that is, those who deny reprobation while affirming election], labor anxiously to make false excuses in God's defense; he only warns that it is unlawful for the clay to quarrel with its potter [Rom. 9:20]."

In summarizing Calvin's doctrine of reprobation, we can employ the same divisions used in summarizing his doctrine of election—with one exception. Our discussion of Calvin's doctrine of "sovereign and just reprobation" will deal with the divine decree of reprobation, the cause (but not the ground) of reprobation, and its goal and means. Reprobation is as sovereign as election; however, Calvin emphasized the justice of God's sovereignty in reprobation, in contrast to the free grace of His sovereignty in election.

The Divine Decree of Reprobation

Calvin understood the eternal counsel of God as the expression of His sovereign will and purpose for the entire history of the world. History is the unfolding of this immutable counsel of God. God's foreknowledge, as well as His providence, is rooted in His eternal counsel. The decree of election is part of God's eternal counsel. Now we must follow Calvin's discussion of reprobation. Reprobation, as well as election, concerns the eternal decree or sovereign counsel of God. That is where Calvin's discussion begins.

Reprobation involves God's decretive work. A review of Calvin's definitions of predestination demonstrates that Calvin tied reprobation to God's eternal decree.

We call predestination God's *eternal decree*, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is *foreordained* for some, *eternal damnation* for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as *predestined* to life or *to death*.

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his *eternal and unchangeable plan* those whom he long before *determined* once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote *to destruction*.

Jacob, therefore, is chosen and distinguished from the *rejected Esau* by God's *predestination*, while not differing from him in merits.

These summaries of Calvin's view are clear. Reprobation concerns the *divine* decree. We should observe, however, that Calvin made no specific reference to the distinct persons of the Trinity in connection with reprobation as He did in connection with election. The work of God is of course the work of God Triune, as was observed earlier. Calvin did not specifically repeat this in his discussion of reprobation. While Calvin said that the Son as well as the Father was the author of the decree of election, he made no such reference in connection with reprobation. That the Holy Spirit is the actual teacher of this doctrine of reprobation follows from Calvin's view of the inspiration of Scripture. He did make this specific when referring to those who reject this difficult doctrine: such people were not simply opposing him, but Paul and the Holy Spirit.

Calvin also contended that this doctrine of reprobation had been clearly taught by Christ Himself. Calvin asked: "Now how will those who do not admit that any are condemned by God dispose of Christ's statement: 'Every tree that my ... Father has not planted will be uprooted' [Matt. 15:13, paraphrase]?" And he added that "this plainly means that all those whom the Heavenly Father has not deigned to plant as sacred trees in his field are marked and intended for destruction. If they say this is no sign of reprobation, there is nothing so clear that it can be proved to them." Yet Calvin recognized that an appeal to one clear passage of Scripture would not stop the mouths of his opponents. Hence he again appealed to Romans: "Let readers note that Paul, to cut off occasion for whispering and disparagement, gives the ultimate sovereignty to God's wrath and might, for it is wicked to subject to our determination those deep judgments which swallow up all our powers of mind." Calvin was referring to these words of Paul: "What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory ...?"¹³ To the argument that the variation in the phrases "prepared for destruction" and "prepared in advance for glory" seem to take reprobation out of the eternal decree, Calvin responded: "But though I

should admit to them [who so argue] that Paul, using a different expression, softens the harshness of the former clause, it is utterly inconsistent to transfer the preparation for destruction to anything but God's secret plan. This was also declared in a little earlier context: God aroused Pharaoh [Rom. 9:17]; then, 'he hardens whom he pleases' [Rom. 9:18]. From this it follows that God's secret plan is the cause of hardening." Here Calvin was endorsing the interpretation of Augustine—"Where might is joined to long-suffering, God does not permit but governs by his power."¹⁵ Although Calvin did not regularly use such distinctions as preterition and condemnation, which later Reformed theologians employed in discussing reprobation, we do find these ideas distinguished in his discussion. We shall refer to this later when we consider sin in relation to God's decree.

Reprobation is particular. For Calvin, reprobation, like the decree of election, concerns specific individuals; election and reprobation are specific and particular. The decree of reprobation does not refer to a general intention of God; it is not limited in its reference to a class of people, as the later Arminians contended. The general definitions of predestination quoted above make this clear; so also do the specific references to Esau in distinction from Jacob. Only in the light of individual or particular reprobation could the problem arise that Calvin considered. That problem stems from the alleged inconsistency of the fact that "God is said to have ordained from eternity those whom he wills to embrace in love, and those upon whom he wills to vent his wrath," and the fact that God "announces salvation to all men indiscriminately." Objectors challenge the justice of God precisely because God's decree concerns individuals.¹⁸

Although God's decree of reprobation clearly refers to individuals, Calvin insisted that we do not know who the reprobate are. This is known alone to God; hence we may never deal in history with any individual as if he or she were clearly reprobate. We have the task to preach the gospel to all. We must also desire the salvation of all to whom we preach and need never fear that by so doing we contradict the will of God by which He sovereignly decreed to reprobate some. Even when the church, obedient to the command of its Lord, finds it necessary to excommunicate a member, not even then is that person to be regarded as clearly reprobate, for such a person is "in the hand and judgment of God alone."²⁰ One of the intents of excommunication is to lead the sinner to repentance; for this the church must continue to pray. Here too it is the teaching and example of the apostle Paul that Calvin echoed.

The Cause of Reprobation

We have seen that according to Calvin, reprobation as well as election concerns the eternal, unchangeable, and sovereign decree of God that relates to specific individuals. Now we must face the question of whether this divine decree has some cause outside God's will. Is God's decree to reprobate some individuals based upon their sinful actions? Or since the decree concerns persons who do not yet exist, is the foreknowledge of their sinful actions the cause of God's decree? Why the difference in God's decrees concerning Jacob and Esau? Calvin devoted a good deal of attention to such questions. In that context he also considered various objections that arise concerning foreknowledge, permission, and the relation of God to sin. Calvin's discussion of such problems makes this an appropriate place to deal with the question of the so-called equal ultimacy of election and reprobation.

The cause is not sin. When the question is raised of the cause of God's decree of reprobation, the most common answer is human sin. That appears to be the simplest and most obvious

solution. Reference to human actions seems to be tenable with respect to reprobation, in contrast to the cause of God's decree of election. Election is aimed at producing good works that glorify God; hence human works are excluded from consideration as the cause of God's decree of election. With respect to reprobation, however, the sinful actions of men and women are certainly related to the final condemnation that proceeds from a righteous God. Calvin repeatedly emphasized that no one is finally condemned who does not fully deserve that condemnation. The question now before us, however, is the cause not of a person's final condemnation, but of the divine decree itself. Calvin cannot be accurately understood if this distinction is not kept in mind. What is the cause of the eternal decree of reprobation according to Calvin? That is the question here. Calvin emphatically contended that sinful works are not the cause or basis for God's eternal decree of reprobation. Paul and Romans 9 are crucial again for his argument. "For as Jacob, deserving nothing by good works, is taken into grace, so Esau, as yet undefiled by any crime, is hated [Rom. 9:13]." "If we turn our eyes to works," Calvin immediately added, "we wrong the apostle, as if he did not see what is quite clear to us!"²³ Calvin continued: "Now it is proved that he did not see it, since he specifically emphasizes the point that when as yet they had done nothing good or evil, one was chosen, the other rejected. This is to prove that *the foundation of divine predestination is not in works.*"

The cause is not foreknowledge of sin. Since the works here under consideration could not yet have been performed, the case for foreknowledge of such evil works as the basis for the decree of reprobation appears stronger. Calvin also weighed this possibility but rejected it on Biblical grounds. "But since he foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place, they vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge. when it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding." Calvin saw the solution to this problem in the correct understanding of the relation of foreknowledge, providence, and predestination. Reflecting upon Proverbs 16:4, Calvin wrote: "Behold! Since the disposition of all things is in God's hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, he so ordains by his plan and will that among men some are born destined for certain death from the womb, who glorify his name by their own destruction.... Both life and death are acts of God's will more than of his foreknowledge." Certainly, God foreknew what will take place: he "not only *foreknew* it, but *ordained* it." Hence foreknowledge cannot be considered the cause of the divine decree of reprobation.

The cause is God's sovereign will. If the decree of reprobation does not have its foundation in the sinful works of those reprobated or in the divine foreknowledge of such works, what is its foundation? Calvin's answer came from his analysis of Romans 9. Paul vigorously rejected the suspicion that there is unrighteousness with God. But he did not do so by appealing to Esau's sinful actions. When Paul "raised the objection, whether God is unjust, he does not make use of what would have been the surest and clearest defense of his righteousness: that God recompensed Esau according to his own evil intention." Rather, Paul "contents himself with a different solution, that the reprobate are raised up to the end that through them God's glory may be revealed."²⁹ Paul concluded: "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden." That led Calvin to conclude: "Do you see how Paul attributes both to God's decision alone? If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except that it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will." Calvin also expressed

it this way: "... those whom God passes over (*praeterit*), he condemns (*reprobat*); and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines (*praedestinat*) for his own children." What is the cause of God's decree of reprobation? Calvin's answer is, the sovereign good pleasure of God. No cause other than His sovereign will can be adduced.³³

Calvin's answer to this question occasioned various objections. If God's will alone is the cause of reprobation, why should He then object to the sinful actions of persons whom He reprobates? Does this answer not imply that God is the author of sin? Calvin considered such objections:

Foolish men contend with God in many ways, as though they held him liable to their accusations. They first ask, therefore, by what right the Lord becomes angry at his creatures who have not provoked him by any previous offense; for to devote to destruction whomever he pleases is more like the caprice of a tyrant than the lawful sentence of a judge. It therefore seems to them that men have reason to expostulate with God if they are predestined to eternal death solely by his decision, apart from their own merit.

The first thing Calvin said in response to that objection is a warning to believers: "If thoughts of this sort ever occur to pious men, they will be sufficiently armed to break their force even by the one consideration that it is very wicked merely to investigate the causes of God's will. For his will is, and rightly ought to be, the cause of all things that are." If the will of God has a cause, "something must precede it, to which it is, as it were, bound; this is unlawful to imagine."³⁶ Then in a remarkable section added to the final edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin indicated that his view of God's will is far different from that of some theologians of the late Middle Ages who held to "the fiction of 'absolute might.'" He labeled that view "profane," one the Christian should rightly hate: "We fancy no lawless god who is a law unto himself. For, as Plato says, men who are troubled with lusts are in need of law; but the will of God is not only free of all fault but is the highest rule of perfection, and even the law of all laws." Earlier Calvin had put it this way: "For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous. When, therefore, one asks why God has so done, we must reply: because he has willed it. But if you proceed further to ask why he so willed, you are seeking something greater and higher than God's will, which cannot be found. Let men's rashness, then, restrain itself, and not seek what does not exist, lest perhaps it fail to find what does exist."³⁸ This attitude toward the sovereign will of God Calvin called a "bridle" that "will effectively restrain anyone who wants to ponder in reverence the secrets of his God."

This constitutes Calvin's basic response to those who charge that God is unjust to hold us responsible for what He Himself has decreed. Calvin did, however, go on to indicate that God could "restrain his enemies" by "keeping silence." Yet in His Word God has supplied us with weapons against these objectors. Scripture makes clear that the sovereign God owes nothing to human beings; He owes even less to those who are now all "vitiating by sin" so that we are all "odious to God." Hence Calvin urged the objector to look at himself and recognize his sin; God is just in condemning the sinner even if the sinner cannot fathom the justice of God's eternal decree. To the objector who regards that answer as an evasion, "a subterfuge such as those who lack a just excuse are wont to have," Calvin suggested that we "ponder who God is." He asked: "For how could he who is the Judge of the earth allow any iniquity [cf. Gen. 18:25]?" The apostle Paul was not looking for "loopholes of escape" when he indicated that "divine righteousness is higher than man's standard can measure, or than man's slender wit can comprehend."⁴³

Calvin's answer to the charge that God is unjust emphasizes both the sovereignty and the justice of God's will. With Augustine he said: "... the Lord has created those whom he unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because he has so willed it. But why he so willed it is not for our reason to inquire, for we cannot comprehend it. And it is not fitting that God's will should be dragged down into controversy among us, for whenever mention is made of it, under its name is designated the supreme rule of righteousness." Since God's justice is clearly evident in His final condemnation of the unbelieving sinner, who deserves nothing less than condemnation, "why raise any question of unrighteousness where righteousness clearly appears?"⁴⁵

Calvin's firm insistence upon the sovereignty of God's will in reprobation leads the objector to suggest that God must then have willed man's sin. Opponents suggested that Calvin's doctrine of reprobation frees the sinner from responsibility and actually makes God the author of sin. Calvin also considered this objection. He readily admitted that God had willed Adam's fall, but he denied that God is the author of sin or that God's decree removes the sinner's responsibility.

With respect to God's willing the fall, Calvin stated:

Scripture proclaims that all mortals were bound over to eternal death in the person of one man [cf. Rom. 5:12ff.]. Since this cannot be ascribed to nature, it is perfectly clear that it has come forth from the wonderful plan of God.... The decree is dreadful (*decretum horribile*) indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.... And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also meted it out in accordance with his own decision. For as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and control everything by his hand.

Not only Adam's fall, but also that of all his posterity is included in God's will.

Of course, I admit that in this miserable condition wherein men are now bound, all of Adam's children have fallen by God's will. And this is what I said to begin with, that we must always at last return to the sole decision of God's will, the cause of which is hidden in him.

Calvin acknowledged, then, that God had willed Adam's fall. Yet Calvin did not fully understand or comprehend this: "For the first man fell because the Lord had judged it to be expedient; why he so judged is hidden from us." Calvin did add, "... it is certain that he so judged because he saw that thereby the glory of his name is duly revealed."⁵⁰ Beyond that recognition Calvin did not go. The evident cause of condemnation, he again asserted, is "the corrupt nature of humanity," but the "hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause" lies in God's predestination. Hence Calvin concluded: "And let us not be ashamed to submit our understanding to God's boundless wisdom so far as to yield before its many secrets. For, of those things which it is neither given nor lawful to know, ignorance is learned; the craving to know, a kind of madness."

In connection with Adam's fall and God's decree, some of Calvin's opponents distinguished between God's will and His permission. "By this they would maintain that the wicked perish because God permits it, not because he so wills." Calvin rejected that distinction. (The reference here to *permission* must not be confused with the term *permissive decree* employed by some Reformed theologians. The permissive decree concerns God's decree and His will. Calvin was contemplating a distinction between *will* and *permission*.) He acknowledged of course that when

men sin, “the whole fault rests with themselves.... But to turn all those passages of Scripture (wherein the affection of the mind, in the act, is distinctly described) into a mere permission on the part of God is a frivolous subterfuge, and a vain attempt to escape from the mighty truth!” Some of the church fathers—even Augustine at first—were too eager to avoid giving offense; but by using the term *permission* they “relaxed something of that fixedness of attention which was due to the great truth itself.” Calvin contended that those passages that speak of God’s blinding and hardening the reprobate, as well as the references to Joseph, Job, David, and Paul, show that the term *permission* is inadequate. The sinner is always responsible for his sin, but even these sins are somehow included in the incomprehensible will of God, who does not simply permit but “rules and overrules all the actions of the world with perfect and divine rectitude.” In other words, “man falls according as God’s providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault.”⁵⁷

Calvin’s insistence upon God’s will as the cause of the decree of reprobation and his objection to the term *permission* with respect to human sin led his opponents to charge that this view makes God the author of sin. Calvin considered this “an atrocious charge.” He called upon his opponents to be cautious in the words they used and the charges they made; such unwarranted charges could lead simple and inexperienced Christians to “dash against the awful and abhorrent rock of making God the author of sin.”⁵⁹ Calvin admitted that no words of his can unravel this mystery. But, convinced that Scripture teaches that God’s will is the ultimate cause of all things, he was willing to leave the mystery there.

One senses the disgust with which Calvin heard the critics’ demand for explanation. “As if it were mine to render an exact reason for the secret counsels of God,” he wrote rhetorically, “and to make mortals understand, to a pin’s point that heavenly wisdom, the height and depth of which they are commanded to look upon and adore.” In another place he suggested that those troubled by this problem should take Augustine’s advice: “You, a man, expect an answer from me; I too am a man. Therefore, let both of us hear one who says, ‘O man, who are you?’ [Rom. 9:20]. Ignorance that believes is better than rash knowledge.... Paul rested, for he found wonder. He calls God’s judgments ‘unsearchable,’ and thou settest out to search them? He speaks of his ways as ‘inscrutable’ [Rom. 11:33], and thou dost track them down?” Following that advice himself, Calvin simply added that “it will do us no good to proceed farther....”⁶²

Where Calvin did discuss these questions in greater detail, he only enlarged the same response and introduced certain distinctions. For example, Calvin suggested that if the view that God had decreed Adam’s fall makes God the author of sin, then one is also forced to say that God is the author of that wicked act by which the Jews crucified Jesus Christ. The Jews did “that which Thy hand and Thy counsel beforehand determined to be done”; and remember, said Calvin, that these “are not the words of Calvin, but of the Holy Spirit and of Peter, and of the whole primitive church.”

A distinction Calvin considered helpful here is that between the will of God and the will of Satan: “There is ... a mighty difference, because although God and the devil will the same thing, they do so in an utterly different manner ... man will[s] with an evil will that which God wills with a good will.” Calvin insisted that “God is, and must be, ever utterly remote from sin.”⁶⁵ As Augustine ably expressed it: “By an inexplicable manner of operation, that is not done without the will of God which is, in itself, even contrary to His will, because without His will it could not have been done at all. And yet God willeth not unwillingly, but willingly.” The godly man, according to Calvin, will “indeed confess that the fall of Adam was not without the rule and overrule of the secret providence of God (*arcana Dei providentia*), but they never doubt that the end and object of his secret counsel were righteous and just. But as the reason lies hidden in the

mind of God, they soberly and reverently await the revelation of it, which shall be made in the day in which we shall see that God ‘face to face,’ whom we now ‘behold through a glass darkly’ and unintelligently.”

Another distinction that Calvin thought helpful in considering this question is that between ultimate and proximate causes. In Calvin’s judgment this very simple distinction is of great importance. Calvin was not surprised that his opponent Pighius “should indiscriminately confuse everything in the judgments of God, when he does not distinguish between causes proximate and remote.” Calvin considered it “wicked and calumnious” of Pighius to charge that Calvin made the fall of man “one of the works of God” since Calvin, “removing from God all proximate causation of the act . . . at the same time remove[s] from Him all guilt and leave[s] man alone liable.”⁶⁹ Yet this helpful distinction did not solve the mystery for Calvin: “. . . but how it was ordained by the foreknowledge and decree of God what man’s future was without God being implicated as associate in the fault as the author or approver of transgression, is clearly a secret so much excelling the insight of the human mind, that I am not ashamed to confess ignorance.”

For Calvin, then, God’s sovereign will is the ultimate cause of Adam’s fall and of reprobation, while human sin is the proximate cause. In the latter—in man’s sin—lies all the blame and guilt. In seeking to understand these difficult questions, Calvin therefore urged that we emphasize what is clear and understandable—man’s personal guilt—and not unduly scrutinize what Scripture also teaches clearly—God’s will as the ultimate cause—but which we cannot comprehend. The clear explanation of the unbeliever’s condemnation is his own guilt; that is Calvin’s repeated emphasis. “By his own evil intention, then, man corrupted the pure nature he had received from the Lord; and by his fall he drew all his posterity with him into destruction. Accordingly, we should contemplate the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupt nature of humanity—which is closer to us—rather than seek a hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in God’s predestination.” This is where “ignorance is learned” and “the craving to know, a kind of madness.”⁷² Calvin followed his own advice, as this rare personal confession indicates: “I prescribe nothing to others but what comes out of the experience of my heart. For the Lord is my witness, and my conscience attests it, that I daily so meditate on these mysteries of His judgments that curiosity to know anything more does not attract me; no sinister suspicion concerning His justice steals away my confidence; no desire to complain entices me.”

Reprobation and election are equally ultimate. Calvin’s distinction between ultimate and proximate causes provides a good context in which to examine the question of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. While Calvin’s opponents always objected to the entire doctrine of reprobation, some of his friends today contend that he did not regard election and reprobation as equally ultimate. What does this assertion mean? The discussions have generally failed, unfortunately, to indicate clearly what it does mean.

This question has a clear focus if we refer to Calvin’s distinction between ultimate and proximate causes. If the term “equal ultimacy” refers to the ultimate cause of election and reprobation, the question is not difficult to answer from Calvin’s writings. Is the sovereign will of God, according to Calvin, the ultimate cause of reprobation as it is of election? The various statements of Calvin, cited in the discussion above, provide a clear affirmative answer to this question. Calvin affirmed that the will of God, His eternal decree, is the ultimate cause of reprobation as well as of election. Human sin and guilt enter significantly into Calvin’s discussion of reprobation, of course, but this sin and guilt constitute the proximate cause, not of reprobation as such, but of the judicial element of reprobation, namely, eternal condemnation. Calvin urged his readers to look at this proximate or “evident cause of condemnation” because

they could readily recognize and understand this; God's justice is apparent in His condemnation of the guilty unbeliever. But Calvin never allowed this reference to the proximate cause of reprobation [condemnation] to stand by itself. Compelled by the teaching of Scripture, he acknowledged that the ultimate or remote cause of reprobation, as of election, is the sovereign will of God. However incomprehensible this is, Calvin submitted to the teaching of Scripture.

Although the reader will find sufficient evidence for Calvin's view of equal ultimacy in the summary of his views above, the importance of the subject in recent debates warrants a brief summary of the evidence here. The opening section of Calvin's discussion of predestination is already entitled "Eternal Election, by which God has Predestined Some to Salvation, Others to Destruction."⁷⁷ His basic definition of predestination has the same force:

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation.

He defined predestination as "God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man.... Eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others." One is "predestined to life or to death."⁸⁰ "By his secret plan" God "freely chooses whom he pleases, rejecting others." After discussing the Biblical basis for election and reprobation, Calvin concluded: "Do you see how Paul attributes both to God's decision alone? If, then, we cannot determine a reason why he vouchsafes mercy to his own, except that it so pleases him, neither shall we have any reason for rejecting others, other than his will. For when it is said that God hardens or shows mercy to whom he wills, men are warned by this to seek no cause outside his will."⁸²

As he refuted "the false accusations with which this doctrine has always been unjustly burdened," Calvin again clearly linked reprobation ultimately to the will of God. He stated that "those whom God passes over (*praeterit*), he condemns (*reprobat*); and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children." After citing key references in Romans 9, Calvin urged his readers to "note that Paul, to cut off occasion for whispering and disparagement, gives the ultimate sovereignty to God's wrath and might," and he added that "God's secret plan is the cause of hardening." In considering the relation of Adam's fall to God's decree, Calvin said, "Of course, I admit that in this miserable condition wherein men are now bound, all of Adam's children have fallen by God's will."⁸⁶ He continued, "And this is what I said to begin with, that we must always at last return to the sole decision of God's will, the cause of which is hidden in him." Not only election and salvation but also reprobation and condemnation find their ultimate cause in the sovereign will of God. "Since the disposition of all things is in God's hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, he so ordains by his plan and will..." God's foreknowledge rests on "the fact that he decreed that they take place," and "it is clear that all things take place ... by his determination and bidding."⁸⁹

When Calvin spoke of the means by which God executes His decree, he again referred the ultimate cause of reprobation to the sovereign will of God: "For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others." With Augustine, Calvin said: "The Lord has created those whom he unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because he has so willed it. But why he so willed, it is not

for our reason to inquire, for we cannot comprehend it.”⁹¹ When one asks why the gospel is preached to some nations and not to others, and why some to whom it is preached believe and others do not, “he who here seeks a deeper cause (*causam altiolem*) than God’s secret and inscrutable plan will torment himself to no purpose.” Yet Calvin was always concerned to add that “none undeservedly perish.”⁹³ And when his discussion centered on human responsibility, the addition concerned God’s sovereignty, as this statement illustrates: “The fact that the reprobate do not obey God’s Word when it is made known to them will be justly charged against the malice and depravity of their hearts, provided it is added at the same time that they have been raised up by the just but inscrutable judgment of God to show forth his glory in their condemnation.”

This summary clearly indicates that Calvin regarded the ultimate cause of reprobation, as well as election, as the sovereign will of God. The number of quotations could easily be multiplied from Calvin’s other writings. His contemporary opponents understood him correctly on this score: Calvin clearly regarded the sovereign will of God as the ultimate cause of reprobation as well as of election. If the term “*equal ultimacy*” refers to the ultimate cause of election and reprobation, Calvin clearly taught the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. In answering the false accusations made against the doctrine of predestination, Calvin never retreated from his emphatic insistence that the will of God is the ultimate cause of reprobation.

Reprobation and election are not completely parallel. If election and reprobation are *equally* ultimate in the sense that the sovereign will of God is the ultimate cause of each, this does *not* mean that, for Calvin, election and reprobation are *in all aspects parallel*. Recent discussions of the question have, unfortunately, not distinguished these two facets of the subject. The result has been confusion, distortion, and bypassing of other scholars’ arguments. When ultimacy and parallelism are not clearly defined and distinguished, a simple denial of equal ultimacy usually involves a distortion of Calvin’s insistence upon the sovereignty of the divine will in reprobation. While insisting on Calvin’s defense of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation, however, we must also do justice to the ways in which Calvin indicated they are not parallel.

The nonparallel features of election and reprobation stand out in the chapter titles of this book. While both election and reprobation are described as “sovereign” (indicating the equal ultimacy of the two in Calvin’s theology), election is further described as “gratuitous,” reprobation as “just.”

One of the most striking indications of the lack of parallelism is evident in Calvin’s insistence on distinguishing the ultimate and proximate causes of reprobation. Human sinful action is the proximate cause of the condemnation aspect of reprobation. But Calvin never referred to human action as being even a proximate cause of divine election. In fact, the ground of election is Jesus Christ, and it is precisely our election in Christ that indicates that nothing in human persons is even a proximate cause of election. With regard to reprobation, however, sinful human actions do come into consideration. It is crucial to note at just what point Calvin considered these as the proximate cause of reprobation. We have seen indications of Calvin’s distinction between *preterition* (“passing by”) and *condemnation*. Although later Reformed theologians used these terms technically, the distinction had been made by Calvin as well. Sinful human action was not regarded by Calvin as the proximate cause of God’s sovereign passing by of some while electing others. This decision he credited solely to the freedom of God, to His sovereign will and free decision. It is not because of sinful actions that God decrees to pass some by with His grace. Works, neither performed nor foreseen, play no role at this point in Calvin’s

thought. If sinful works were the proximate cause of the preterition aspect of reprobation, there would be no election.

Sinful actions are the proximate cause only of the condemnation aspect of reprobation. While God sovereignly passes some by in His decretive will, the ground of His final condemnation of them is their sin and guilt. This sin is our sin; it constitutes the proximate cause of reprobation as far as the unbeliever's condemnation is concerned. It is important to observe, however, that sin is not the ground or the proximate cause of God's ultimate discrimination between elect and reprobate. We have heard Calvin deny that often enough. But condemnation, while sovereignly executed, is always the result of human sin—"... none undeservedly perish."⁹⁹ Sin and guilt are the basis for the judicial sentence of condemnation. Calvin's reference to the proximate cause of condemnation in reprobation is one respect in which election and reprobation are not parallel.

Another nonparallel aspect of election and reprobation is closely linked to the preceding one; indeed it is involved in it. We have seen that according to Calvin, Christ is the ground of God's decree of election. The objects of God's eternal election were unworthy of the grace that He chose to give them; God looked upon them in Christ.¹⁰² Christ was the Head in whom the Father united all His elect. In Calvin's doctrine of reprobation, there is no parallel to this key feature of election. The reprobate are obviously not reprobate in Christ. Nor does Calvin see Satan as their head; the reprobate are not reprobate in Satan. In his commentary on Matthew, Calvin did assert that the devil is the head of all the reprobate and the adversary of Christ, but he did not bring this perspective into the discussion of the *decree* of reprobation. Calvin did observe that in many parts of Scripture, the devil is represented as the head of the fallen angels and as the one who gathers all the impious together into one mass of corruption. But Calvin did not refer to this in his discussion of reprobation and the eternal decree. Hence, in explaining Calvin's doctrine of reprobation, we cannot say that he set forth a ground of reprobation in Satan.

It would also be improper to say that the ground of reprobation is man's sin and guilt. Sin and guilt may be said to be the ground of only one element of reprobation, namely, condemnation; sin is the proximate cause of reprobation only in this sense. Even then, however, it is only the proximate cause. As proximate cause, it is clearly understood by us while the ultimate cause is not. On this proximate cause Calvin did place great emphasis, and concentration upon it makes crystal clear that God is just; the blame for sin and final condemnation is ours, not God's.

There are other respects in which election and reprobation are not parallel. Sometimes it is said that Calvin gave less space or attention to reprobation than to election. That contention is difficult to maintain, however, since reprobation is constantly involved in Calvin's discussion of election. Besides, he certainly defended the doctrine of reprobation against all sorts of attack and opposition, from friend as well as foe. Yet it is obviously true that Calvin did not show the same interest and delight in sovereign, just reprobation that he did in sovereign, gratuitous election. He certainly had no interest in reprobation that reflects personal desire or national or schizoid characteristics. He taught the doctrine and defended it vigorously because he was convinced that Scripture teaches it. He was confident that what the Holy Spirit had revealed in Scripture has a purpose that may not be despised or ignored. In his attempted fidelity to the written Word of God, he was confident that he was being submissive to the sovereign God and obedient to Jesus Christ. In all of this, his sole aim was the glory of God.

This Biblical source led Calvin to delight in God's election and to stress it in his preaching in a way that is not possible with respect to reprobation. We have already noted that Calvin considered it a serious error to minimize human responsibility with respect to the Word

preached. An unbiblical view of reprobation would also be irresponsible. When an opponent charged that according to Calvin “God had by his pure and mere will created the greatest part of the world to perdition,” Calvin replied that this was “a perfect fiction” produced in the workshop of the opponent’s brain: “For although God did certainly decree from the beginning everything which should befall the race of man, yet such a manner of speech as the saying that the end or object of God’s work of creation was destruction or perdition, is nowhere to be found in my writings.... God never decrees anything but with the most righteous reason.”¹⁰⁸

Having noted various nonparallel features of election and reprobation, we must finally observe those features that *are* parallel. The most striking one is that God’s sovereign will is the ultimate cause of each. In that respect we have spoken of the equal ultimacy of election and reprobation. There is a parallel also in the fact that the works of human persons are the cause of neither the decree of election nor the decree of reprobation. Election and reprobation are also parallel in that each in its own way contributes to the ultimate glory of God. Another parallel is the fact that God decrees not only the end and goal, but also the means to the attainment of each decreed goal. We must still consider the means of reprobation in the following section; there it will become clear that although there is a parallel, reprobation is effected in the “reverse way” from election.

Although other features could be mentioned as parallel or nonparallel, two issues stand out in Calvin’s discussion. God is sovereign in reprobation as well as in election; they are equally ultimate. But it is God’s justice or righteousness that stands out in reprobation, while the free, gratuitous mercy of God characterizes election. When the reprobate finally receive the eternal punishment that awaits them, they receive precisely what they deserve. But when the elect receive the eternal salvation that awaits them, they receive what they do *not* deserve. The elect receive graciously, though also justly, the continued favor and undeserved mercy of God through Jesus Christ. This is the chief respect in which election and reprobation are not parallel—though they are equally ultimate.

The Goal and Means of Reprobation

The goal is God’s glory. In Calvin’s thought the goal or final cause of election is the praise and glory of God; the goal of reprobation is the glory of God also. Indeed, everything God does manifests His glory: “... the whole world is constituted for the end of being a theatre of His glory.” Romans 9 indicates that even reprobation has the glory of God as its goal, for there Paul said “that the reprobate are raised up to the end that through them God’s glory may be revealed.” Scripture indicates “that the wicked were created for the day of evil simply because God willed to illustrate His own glory in them [Prov. 16:4]; just as elsewhere He declares that Pharaoh was raised up by Him that He might show forth His name among the Gentiles (Exod. 9:16).”

In Calvin’s judgment the glory of God includes His justice. He illustrates this with respect to the fall. Man is responsible for his sin, yet Adam’s fall was predestined by God (although the human mind cannot understand why God willed it). “Yet it is certain that he [God] so judged because he saw that thereby the glory of his name is duly revealed.” Calvin immediately continued: “Where you hear God’s glory mentioned, think of his justice. For whatever deserves praise must be just.”¹¹⁴ Even in the destruction of the wicked, then, the glory of God is manifest. Again in reference to Proverbs 16:4, Calvin wrote: “Behold! Since the disposition of all things is in God’s hand, since the decision of salvation or of death rests in his power, he so ordains by his plan and will that among men some are born destined for certain death from the womb, who glorify his name by their own destruction.”

Three complex factors work together in contributing to God's glory: the eternal decree of God, the wickedness of man, and the final condemnation of the unbeliever by a just God. Calvin intertwined these three factors in this way: "The fact that the reprobate do not obey God's Word when it is made known to them will be justly charged against the malice and depravity of their hearts, provided it be added at the same time that they have been raised up by the just but inscrutable judgment of God to show forth his glory in their condemnation." As one might expect, the complex interrelationship of these three factors led Calvin once again to acknowledge the mystery and incomprehensibility of it all. While Scripture clearly teaches it, godly minds cannot "reconcile the two matters, that man when first made was set in such a position that by voluntarily falling he should be the cause of his own destruction, and yet that it was so ordained by the admirable counsel of God that this voluntary ruin to the human race and all the posterity of Adam should be a cause of humility." Scripture reveals that "the Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble" (Proverbs 16:4 RSV). Whether man can comprehend it or not, he must believe and accept it. Hence Calvin insisted that the eternal decree of reprobation has the glory of God for its final goal.

The means are diverse. Calvin understood the decree of God to include the means for bringing about the decree's goal or purpose. We have seen this in connection with the decree of election: those whom God elected, He also calls, justifies, and glorifies (Rom. 8:29–30). While Calvin taught that the decree of reprobation includes the means for bringing about the decreed goal, he also introduced some important qualifications. God is certainly not the author of sin; the very idea is blasphemous in Calvin's judgment. God hates sin; He never commands anyone to sin. Rather, He commands always, "Thou shalt not . . ." Furthermore, as we have seen repeatedly, Calvin always insisted that human beings are responsible for their sin. Because God's decree always includes the means for its effectuation, there is a parallel here between decree and means with respect to both election and reprobation. Yet the relation of decree and means in reprobation is the "reverse" of what it is in election. That is to say, God withholds from the reprobate what He gives to the elect. He enlightens the hearts of the elect by His Spirit while He abandons the reprobate and withholds His grace from them, blinding them in their sin, hardening their hearts, and handing them over to Satan. "But as the Lord seals his elect by call and justification," Calvin wrote in the *Institutes*, "so, by shutting off the reprobate from knowledge of his name or from the sanctification of his Spirit, he, as it were, reveals by these marks what sort of judgment awaits them."

In another context Calvin expressed even more fully this relation of the decree and the means of achieving the decree's goal:

As God by the effectual working of his call to the elect perfects the salvation to which by his eternal plan he has destined them, so he has his judgments against the reprobate, by which he executes his plan for them. What of those, then, whom he created for dishonor in life and destruction in death, to become the instruments of his wrath and examples of his severity? That they may come to their end, he sometimes deprives them of the capacity to hear his word; at other times he, rather, blinds and stuns them by the preaching of it. . . . The supreme Judge, then, makes way for his predestination when he leaves in blindness those whom he has once condemned and deprived of participation in his light.

As this quotation indicates, Calvin recognized diversity in the means God uses to execute His plan of reprobation. Some people may be deprived of the privilege of hearing the gospel. The clearest example is the period from Babel to Pentecost, when divine revelation was largely

confined to the chosen nation of Israel and withheld from the Gentiles. Why were Gentile nations deprived of hearing the Word of God? “He who here seeks a deeper cause than God’s secret and inscrutable plan will torment himself to no purpose,” is Calvin’s answer.

The means God employs to execute His decree sometimes take a different, more dramatic form. “That the Lord sends his Word to many whose blindness he intends to increase cannot indeed be called in question.” Pharaoh is a striking example, as Paul showed in Romans 9. “For what purpose does he [God] cause so many demands to be made upon Pharaoh? Is it because he hoped to soften his heart by oft-repeated embassies? No, before he began, he both had known and had foretold the outcome.” Illustrations from Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah show that “he directs his voice to them but in order that they may become even more blind; he sets forth doctrine but so that they may grow even more stupid; he employs a remedy but so that they may not be healed.”¹²⁵ Jesus indicated that His parables had a similar purpose (Matt. 13:11); hence Calvin contended that “we cannot gainsay the fact that, to those whom he pleases not to illumine, God transmits his doctrine wrapped in enigmas in order that they may not profit by it except to be cast into greater stupidity.” The apostle John, referring to the prophecy of Isaiah, “states that the Jews could not believe Christ’s teaching [John 12:39], for this curse of God hung over them.”

Man is still responsible. God’s sovereign use of these various means to execute his decree of reprobation does not, however, eliminate or reduce human responsibility. In such contexts Calvin also emphasized human accountability; man is never excused for his unbelief. Jesus told His disciples that He spoke to the people in parables because “the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.... Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not understand” (Matt. 13:11, 13 NIV). “What does the Lord mean,” Calvin asked, “by teaching those by whom he takes care not to be understood?” Here Calvin’s answer emphasizes human unbelief: “Consider whose fault it is, and stop questioning. For however much obscurity there may be in the Word, there is still always enough light to convict the conscience of the wicked.” Here again human responsibility and divine sovereignty are incomprehensibly intertwined. Those who were “ordained to eternal life” hear and obey through the sovereign instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. Calvin also asked, “Why, then, does he bestow grace upon these but pass over others?”¹³⁰ The former, as Luke explained, “were appointed [ordained] for eternal life” (Acts 13:48); the latter, as Paul explained, were “the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction” (Romans 9:22). In that light Calvin suggested that we “not be ashamed to say with Augustine: ‘God could ... turn the will of evil men to good because he is almighty. Obviously, he could. Why, then, does he not? Because he wills otherwise. Why he wills otherwise rests with him.’”¹³²

We have seen that Calvin recognized variety in the means God employs to execute His sovereign decree of reprobation. He withholds His Word from some; to others He sends His Word and through it blinds or hardens them in unbelief. Of course, human irresponsibility is intertwined with the sovereign action of God. Yet Calvin always regarded the preaching of the gospel as evidence of the goodness of God. “When he first shines with the light of his Word upon the undeserving,” Calvin maintained, “he thereby shows a sufficiently clear proof of his free goodness (*gratuitae bonitatis*).” He continued: “Here, then, God’s boundless goodness (*immensa Dei bonitas*) is already manifesting itself but not to the salvation of all; for a heavier judgment remains upon the wicked because they reject the testimony of God’s love (*testimonium amoris Dei*).” Although the Word is evidence of the free and boundless goodness of God, a testimony of His love, the difference in responses also involves the sovereign action of God: “And God also, to show forth his glory, withdraws the effectual working of his Spirit from

them,” that is, from the reprobate. But to His elect He grants the effectual agency of the Spirit so that they come to believe in Jesus Christ.

The preaching of the gospel actually “streams forth from the wellspring of election” and has its primary aim in bringing the elect to faith in Christ. Yet the gospel must be preached to all people indiscriminately, for in this way God works His sovereign will. But why has God commanded that it be preached to all? Here is part of Calvin’s answer: “It is that the consciences of the godly may rest more secure, when they understand there is no difference among sinners provided faith be present. On the other hand, the wicked cannot claim they lack a sanctuary to which they may hie themselves from the bondage of sin, inasmuch as they, out of their own ungratefulness, reject it when offered.”¹³⁷ The question is even more pointed when we ask why the gospel is to be preached to the reprobate as well as the elect. Of course, in history we do not know who are reprobate. But God’s command requires the universal preaching of His gospel, and He knows who are elect and who reprobate. Calvin also addressed this question: “When he [God] addresses the same Word to the reprobate, though not to correct them, he makes it serve another use: today to press them with the witness of conscience, and in the Day of Judgment to render them the more inexcusable.... Paul points out that teaching is not useless among the reprobate, because it is to them ‘a fragrance from death to death’ [2 Cor. 2:16], yet ‘a sweet fragrance to God’ [2 Cor. 2:15].” Thus, Calvin recognized that the Word preached to the reprobate renders him subject to “a heavier judgment.”¹³⁹ It is “the occasion for severer condemnation,” rendering him in the final judgment “the more inexcusable.” Hence the general call of the gospel also functions as a means in effectuating God’s decree of reprobation. Yet Calvin insisted that “even though only his outward call renders inexcusable those who hear it and do not obey, still it is truly considered evidence of God’s grace, by which he reconciles men to himself.”¹⁴²

In these diverse ways Calvin understood that God executes his sovereign decree of reprobation. Although God is the ultimate cause who sovereignly works His own good pleasure, the blame and guilt of sin resides in man, the proximate cause, for man sins willfully and is responsible for rejecting the goodness of God. God’s decree is finally carried out when He condemns the unbeliever for his sin. There the justice of God shines forth clearly, a justice that is included within His glory. Hence “the reprobate are hateful to God, and with very good reason,” Calvin insisted; “for, deprived of his Spirit, they can bring forth nothing but reason for cursing.” Thus Calvin always referred to the proximate cause of condemnation (reprobation)—human sin and guilt; but Scripture did not allow him to negate the ultimate cause of reprobation (preterition)—the sovereign will of God. His understanding of Scripture and his obedience to it as the trustworthy Word of God controlled his theology of predestination. With confident faith he trusted in the full reliability of the Word of God even though he acknowledged the inability of the human mind to grasp it all. So Calvin concluded his discussion of the controversial subject of predestination with these words: “Now when many notions are adduced on both sides, let this be our conclusion: to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: ‘Who are you, O man, to argue with God?’ [Rom. 9:20, paraphrase]. For as Augustine truly contends, they who measure divine justice by the standard of human justice are acting perversely.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Klooster, F., H. (2009). [*Calvin’s doctrine of predestination*](#) (pp. 11–86). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Both “A Horrible Decree” & “Very Sweet Fruit”

Calvin on Predestination

by FRANK A. JAMES III

What was running through John Calvin’s mind as he contemplated the doctrine of predestination? Was he locked in a trance, eyes rolled back, imagining a somber God lurking in the mists of eternity, arbitrarily picking and choosing who would be saved and who would be damned?

No, Calvin’s thoughts about predestination did not originate with morbid and abstract speculations, as some might suppose, but with a pastor’s concern for the people who filled the pews of his church every Sunday. As a pastor, Calvin noticed that people responded differently to the preaching of the gospel. “If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people,” he observed, “twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith, while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it.”

What Calvin saw troubled him. Why did some men fervently embrace Christ, while others firmly rejected him? He searched the Scriptures and there he found the doctrine of predestination.

Historical Context

Calvin was not the first to treat the doctrine of predestination, but it is the name of John Calvin with which this doctrine has become inseparably linked. This is due in part to Calvin’s detailed exposition of predestination and partly because he, more than anyone else since Augustine, was called upon to defend it. Past interpreters of Calvin often fell victim to the misconception that predestination resided at the center of his theology. However, today most acknowledge that he never discussed predestination as his most basic presupposition.

Admittedly, he did accord a growing importance to predestination in succeeding editions of the *Institutes*. In the first edition of 1536, it did not warrant special discussion. But later, when Augustine’s doctrine came under assault, Calvin felt obliged to meet the challenge. “Even a dog barks,” he wrote to a friend, “when his master is attacked: how could I be silent when the honor of my Lord is assailed?”

Attacks on predestination came from two directions. The Roman Catholic Archdeacon of Utrecht, Albert Pighius, mounted the first assault. In his book *On the Freedom of the Will*, he challenged both predestination and Calvin’s concept of free will. Pighius portrayed Calvin’s doctrine as destroying the basis for morality and making God the author of sin.

Calvin first responded to the question of free will with his own book in 1543. He planned to address the matter of predestination in another work. But Pighius died suddenly, and Calvin turned to more pressing matters.

Controversy about predestination broke out again in 1550, after Jerome Bolsec arrived as a refugee in Geneva. A former Carmelite monk, Bolsec had left the Roman church and become a Protestant. He took up the medical profession, but his interest in theological questions remained intact.

Shortly after his arrival in Geneva, Bolsec began to publicly denounce the doctrine of predestination. Such a doctrine, he said, made God a patron of criminals, and worse than Satan. At first he was dealt with rather gently. He was admonished by the Church authorities and told to

cease from such activities. Calvin even met privately with Bolsec in an effort to resolve differences. Bolsec, however, remained unconvinced.

After other reprimands, Bolsec finally let fly his most blatant attack. During a church meeting in October, 1551, he suddenly erupted in a vigorous renunciation of predestination and the Genevan clergy. Just about that time, Calvin happened to enter the church. Verbal sparks flew. Afterwards, Bolsec was arrested and put in prison.

Not all in Geneva shared Calvin's view of predestination. The city government and the ministers of the Genevan church decided to consult with the other Swiss churches about Bolsec. They generally sided with Calvin, but the replies were less than Calvin had hoped. While affirming election, the other Swiss churches were more reticent about reprobation. The result was a milder judgment on Bolsec. He was banished from Geneva and eventually returned to the Roman church.

It was under such convulsive circumstances that Calvin was provoked to defend and clarify his views. Had it not been for Pighius and Bolsec, one wonders if Calvin's name would have been so closely associated with predestination.

Calvin's Perspective on Predestination

To Calvin, predestination was like a tightrope—fearful and wonderful at the same time. He proceeded with caution and prudence, keeping his balance only by holding firmly to the teachings of Scripture. “The moment we exceed the bounds of the Word,” he wrote, “... there we must repeatedly wander, slip, and stumble.”

When one reads Calvin's own writings on predestination, a different picture emerges than most would expect. Rather than an arid scholastic discourse, Calvin speaks of predestination as immensely practical and beneficial to the Christian. He confidently affirms, “... in the very darkness that frightens them not only is the usefulness of this doctrine made known but also its very sweet fruit.”

The God of Predestination

With pastoral experience and Scripture as his guide, Calvin reached this profound conclusion: God “does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.” He defined predestination as “God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others.” Predestination, like a coin, has two sides, election and reprobation. Predestination, for Calvin, especially draws attention to two attributes of God. Election displays God's gracious mercy. Reprobation manifests God's righteous justice.

The Mercy of God

From Calvin's pastoral perspective, predestination is “the Lord's clear declaration that he finds in men themselves no reason to bless them but takes it from his mercy alone.”

Nothing else displays God's mercy like the doctrine of predestination. It is the story of sinful, undeserving men receiving the gift of salvation for no other reason except that God wished to extend his kindness to them. Calvin was less dismayed over God's just reprobation. That he could

understand. But he was completely awe-struck by the realization that God extended mercy to the undeserving.

The best expression of God's mercy is Christ. Great stress is laid on the fact that election is "in Christ." For Calvin, that not only means Christ is the supreme object of the Father's election, but also that Christ is the instrument of election. Calvin even takes the further step of describing Christ as "the Author of election." In Calvin's view, Christ actively participated in the choosing of the elect. At every point across the spectrum of election, from its inception through its execution to its realization, Christ is the focal point of God's mercy.

In the final analysis, to diminish predestination was, for Calvin, to denigrate the role of Christ in accomplishing salvation. Is it any wonder that he was so insistent that predestination "ought to be preached openly and fully?"

The Justice of God

It was the dark side of predestination that aroused so much scorn toward Calvin. But he saw in reprobation more than fire and brimstone. No other doctrine so powerfully reveals the righteousness of God. To acknowledge reprobation is to acknowledge that the God of Christianity hates and punishes sin. Even the sins of the elect are punished in their substitute, Christ.

Opponents accused Calvin of making God the author of sin. He rejected such a notion as insidious, asserting that, by definition, God's inscrutable will is righteous. "For God's will is so much the highest rule of righteousness that whatever he wills, by the very fact that he wills it, must be considered righteous." No one can lay a charge against God.

Just as God is the ultimate cause of election, so also God is the ultimate cause of reprobation. Calvin would not sidestep this conclusion. Indeed, it is the frank acknowledgment of God's reprobation that prompts Calvin's piercing confession: "It is a horrible decree."

Calvin did not pretend to understand why God ordains some to reprobation any more than he understood why God elects some to salvation. He could only declare: "the reason of divine righteousness is higher than man's ... slender wit can comprehend."

Calvin's conception of reprobation is incomplete without an important corollary. Although God is viewed as the ultimate cause of reprobation, still Calvin insists that "none undeservedly perish." Condemnation of the reprobate occurs "because men deserved it on account of impiety, wickedness, and ungratefulness." None suffer punishment apart from a consideration of personal guilt. Calvin does not attempt to explain how these two aspects of reprobation fit: he simply embraces the tension.

Man and Predestination

"They who shut the gates that no one may dare seek a taste of this doctrine," warned Calvin, "wrong men no less than God." The unavoidable result of a clearer view of God is a truer picture of man.

True Humility

The wicked receive precisely what they deserve. The elect receive what they do not deserve. This recognition of the immense goodness of God stirs the pious soul to "true humility." Without a proper understanding of predestination, Calvin cautioned, "humility is torn up by the roots."

Calvin advocated what he called a "learned ignorance," which is to say that the Christian must humbly trust God's righteous judgment even though he does not really comprehend God's ways. This he contrasted with a "brutish ignorance." The "brutish" are those who bury their head in the

sand when faced with something they do not understand, such as predestination. By its very nature, the perspective of predestination obliges the godly man to rely upon God rather than his own limited understanding.

Assurance

As a pastor, Calvin had no doubt seen many parishioners troubled about their salvation. His years of ministry to the saints persuaded him that “Satan has no more grievous or dangerous temptation to dishearten believers than when he unsettles them with doubt about their election.” To counter Satan’s attack, he took courage from the doctrine of predestination. Rightly understood, predestination is a bulwark against doubt, an “impregnable security.” It “brings no shaking of faith, but rather its best confirmation.”

Ask Calvin how he knew that he was numbered among the elect, and he would reply, “Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me.” If Christ is the cause, the instrument, and the object of election, as Calvin fervently believed, then Christ was also the “mirror of election,” in whom the Christian finds the basis for his assurance.

Stimulus to Christian Activity

Francis Hotman, one of Calvin’s devoted friends, wrote in 1556 that Geneva had been imbued with a new and vigorous spirit which had given birth to a race of “martyrs.” Predestination, rightly viewed, is a stimulus to bold Christian activity. Those upon whom God has set his mercy press on against all odds because their assured election has rendered them “invulnerable to all storms of the world, all assaults of Satan and all vacillation of the flesh.” The man chosen by God ought to confidently assert himself in the cause of Christianity.

Calvin vehemently rejected the charge that election leads to idleness. From his perspective, idleness and God’s election are mutually exclusive. When God extends his mercy, it must make a difference in the sinner’s life. God elects men to be holy.

One of the natural results of Calvin’s perspective of predestination was an intensified zeal for evangelism. “For as we do not know who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved. So shall it come about that we try to make everyone we meet a sharer in our peace.”

Historically, the outworking of an aggressive predestinarian theology can be seen in the vitality of the English Puritans and the French Huguenots. It provided the stimulus to George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards in the Great Awakening, provoked William Carey to initiate the modern missions movement, and inspired the dynamic preaching of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Conclusion

The doctrine of predestination was for Calvin a “**horrible decree**” but, even more, it was “very sweet fruit.” He did not pretend to understand it fully, for that would require that he comprehend God. “Let this be our conclusion,” Calvin writes at the close of his discussion of predestination in the *Institutes*, “to tremble with Paul at so deep a mystery; but, if froward tongues clamor, not to be ashamed of this exclamation of his: ‘Who are you, O man, to argue with God?’”¹⁷

¹⁷ James, F. A., III. (1986). [It Was Both “A Horrible Decree” and a “Very Sweet Fruit.”](#) *Christian History Magazine-Issue 12: John Calvin: Reformer, Pastor, Theologian.*

CALVIN'S SPECIAL PEOPLE

Debate: Balance Between General & Special Providence



THE REFORMED CALVINISTIC PERSPECTIVE



DOES GOD *Control* EVERYTHING? By R. C. Sproul

One—WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

Two—GOD MAKES IT ALL HAPPEN

Three—GOD OR CHANCE?

Four—IS GOD RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN WICKEDNESS?

Five—WHAT ABOUT HUMAN FREEDOM?

Chapter One

WHAT IS PROVIDENCE?

One day, while I was watching a news program, an advertisement appeared for a series of books about problems of life in the past. One of the images in the commercial depicted a Confederate soldier from the Civil War lying on a stretcher and receiving care from a nurse and a battle-line physician. The narrator then informed me that reading this book would help me understand what it was like to be sick in the mid-nineteenth century. That caught my attention, because many people of the twenty-first century are so strongly bound to this time that they rarely think about how people lived their daily lives in previous ages and generations.

This is one area where I find myself out of step with my contemporaries. I think about the lives of previous generations quite frequently, because I have a habit of reading books that were written by people who lived, in many cases, long before the twenty-first century. I particularly like to read the authors of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

In the writings of these authors I consistently notice an acute sense of the presence of God. These men had a sense of an overarching providence. We see an indication of that sense that all of life is under the direction and the governance of almighty God in the fact that one of the first cities in what is now the United States of America was Providence, Rhode Island (founded in 1636). Likewise, the personal correspondence from men of earlier centuries, such as Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, is laced with the word *providence*. People talked about a “benevolent Providence” or an “angry Providence,” but often there was a sense that God was directly involved in the daily lives of people.

The situation is vastly different in our own day. My late friend James Montgomery Boice used to tell a humorous story that aptly illustrated the current mindset with regard to God and His involvement in the world. There was a mountain climber who slipped on a ledge and was about to plummet thousands of feet to his death, but as he started to fall, he grabbed a branch of a tiny, scraggly tree that was growing out of a crack in the face of the cliff. As he clung to the branch, the roots of the scraggly tree began to pull loose, and the climber was facing certain death. At that moment, he cried out to the heavens, “Is there anyone up there who can help me?” In reply, he heard a rich, baritone voice from the sky, saying: “Yes. I am here and I will help you. Let go of the branch and trust Me.” The man looked up to heaven and then looked back down into the abyss. Finally, he raised his voice again and said, “Is there anyone else up there who can help me?”

I like that story because I think it typifies the cultural mentality of the present day. First, the climber asks, “Is there anyone up there?” Most eighteenth-century people assumed there *was* Someone up there. There was little doubt in their minds that an almighty Creator governed the affairs of the universe. But we live in a period of unprecedented skepticism about the very existence of God. Yes, polls regularly tell us that between ninety-five and ninety-eight percent of people in the United States believe in some kind of god or a higher power. I suppose that can be explained partly from the impact of tradition; ideas that have been precious to people for generations are hard to give up, and in our culture a certain social stigma is still attached to unbridled atheism. Also, I think we cannot escape the logic of assuming that there has to be some kind of foundational, ultimate cause for this world as we experience it. But usually, when we pin people down and begin to talk to them about their idea of a “higher power” or a “supreme being,”

it turns out to be a concept that is more of an “it” than a “He”—a kind of energy or an undefined force. That’s why the climber asked, “Is there *anyone* up there?” In that moment of crisis, he recognized his need for a personal being who was in charge of the universe.

There is another aspect of that anecdote that I think is significant. When he was about to fall to his death, the climber did not simply ask, “Is there anyone up there?” He specified, “Is there anyone up there *who can help me?*” That is the question of modern man. He wants to know whether there is anyone outside the sphere of daily life who is able to be of assistance to him. But I think the climber was asking an even more fundamental question. He wanted to know not only whether there was someone who *could* help, but whether there was someone who was *willing* to help. This is the question that is foremost in the minds of modern men and women. In other words, they want to know not only whether there is providence, but whether it is cold and unfeeling or kind and compassionate.

So, the question of providence that I want to consider in this booklet is not merely whether there is anyone there, but whether that someone is able and willing to do anything in this world in which we live.

A CLOSED, MECHANISTIC UNIVERSE

Among the ideas that have shaped Western culture, one of the most significant is the idea of a closed, mechanistic universe. This view of the world has persisted for a couple of hundred years and has had tremendous influence in shaping how people understand the way life is lived out. I would argue that in the secular world, the dominant idea is that we live in a universe that is closed to any kind of intrusion from outside, a universe that runs purely by mechanical forces and causes. In a word, the issue for modern man is *causality*.

There seems to be a growing outcry about the negative influence of religion in American culture. Religion is held to be the force that keeps people trapped in the dark ages of superstition, their minds closed to any understanding of the realities of the world that science has unveiled. More and more, religion seems to be regarded as the polar opposite of science and reason. It is as if science is something for the mind, for research, and for intelligence, while religion is something for the emotions and for feelings.

Yet, there is still a tolerance for religion. The idea is often expressed in the news media that everyone has a right to believe what he or she chooses to believe; the main thing is to believe *something*. It does not matter whether you are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Christian.

When I hear comments like that, I want to exclaim, “Does truth matter at all?” The main thing, in my humble opinion, is to believe the truth. I am not satisfied to believe just anything simply for the sake of believing. If what I believe is not true—if it is superstitious or fallacious—I want to be liberated from it. But the mentality of our day seems to be that in matters of religion, truth is insignificant. We learn truth from science. We get good feelings from religion.

Sometimes the highly simplistic idea is set forth that religious superstition reigned supreme in the past, so God was seen as the cause of everything. If someone became sick, the illness was attributed to God. Now, of course, we are told that illnesses are due to microorganisms that invade our bodies, and those tiny organisms operate according to their nature, doing what they have evolved to do. Likewise, whereas in former days people believed an earthquake or a thunderstorm was caused by the hand of God, today we are assured that there are natural reasons for these events. They happen because of forces that are part of the natural order of things.

In the eighteenth century, a book was written that has become the classic of Western economic theory—*The Wealth of Nations*, by Adam Smith. In that book, Smith tried to apply the scientific method to the field of economics in an effort to discover what causes certain economic responses and counter-responses in the marketplace. Smith wanted to cut through speculation and identify basic causes that produced predictable effects. But even while he was applying this scientific inquiry to the complicated network of economic actions and reactions, he spoke of the “invisible hand.” In other words, Smith was saying: “Yes, there are causes and effects going on in this world, but we have to recognize that above all there has to be an ultimate causal power or there would be no lower causal powers. Thus, the whole universe is orchestrated by the invisible hand of God.” In our day, however, we have focused so intently on the immediate activity of cause and effect that for the most part we have ignored or denied the overarching causal power behind all of life. Modern man basically has no concept of providence.

THE GOD WHO SEES

The doctrine of providence is one of the most fascinating, important, and difficult doctrines in the Christian faith. It deals with difficult questions, such as: “How does God’s causal power and authority interact with ours?” “How does God’s sovereign rule relate to our free choices?” “How is God’s government related to the evil and suffering in this world?” and “Does prayer have any influence over God’s providential decisions?” In other words, how are we to live our lives in light of God’s invisible hand?

Let us begin with a simple definition. The word *providence* has a prefix, *pro-*, which means “before” or “in front of.” The root comes from the Latin verb *videre*, which means “to see”; it is from this word that we get our English word *video*. So, the word *providence* literally means “to see beforehand.” The providence of God refers to His seeing something beforehand with respect to time.

Providence is not the same thing as God’s foreknowledge or prescience. Foreknowledge is His ability to look down the corridors of time and know the outcome of an activity before it even begins. Nevertheless, it is appropriate to use the word *providence* with reference to God’s active governance of the universe, because He is indeed a God who sees. He sees everything that takes place in the universe. It is in full view of His eyes.

This can be one of the most terrifying thoughts a human being can have—that there is someone who is, as Jean-Paul Sartre lamented, an ultimate cosmic voyeur who looks through the celestial keyhole and observes every action of every human being. If there is anything about the character of God that repels people from Him more than His holiness, it is His omniscience. Every one of us has a keen desire for a sense of privacy that no one can invade so as to pry into the secret things of our lives.

At the time of the first transgression, when sin entered the world, Adam and Eve immediately experienced a sense of nakedness and shame (Gen. 3:7). They reacted by attempting to hide from God (v. 8). They experienced the gaze of the God of providence. Like the mountain climber in my earlier anecdote, we want God to look at us when we need help. Most of the time, however, we want Him to overlook us, because we want privacy.

On one memorable occasion during the ministry of our Lord, the scribes and Pharisees dragged a woman they had caught in adultery into Jesus’ presence. They reminded Him that the law of God required that she be stoned, but they wanted to know what He would do. But as they spoke, He bent down and wrote something on the ground. This is the only recorded instance of Jesus writing,

and we do not know what He wrote. But we are told that He stood up and said, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). Then He began to write on the ground again. At that, the scribes and Pharisees began to go away, one by one.

I am speculating here, but I wonder whether Jesus wrote out some of the secret sins those men were zealous to keep locked away. Perhaps He wrote “adultery,” and one of the men who was unfaithful to his wife read it and crept away. Perhaps he wrote “tax evasion,” and one of the Pharisees who had failed to render unto Caesar decided to head for home. Jesus, in His divine nature, had the ability to see in a penetrating way behind the masks people wore, into the hiding places where they were most vulnerable. That is part of the concept of divine providence. It means that God knows everything about us.

As I noted above, we often find this divine sight disquieting, but the concept of God’s vision, of God seeing us, should be comforting to us. Jesus said: “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father” (Matt. 10:29). That teaching inspired the popular song “His Eye Is on the Sparrow.” Do you remember the lyrics? “His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.” I believe the writer of that song understood what Jesus was saying—that God knows every time any tiny bird falls to the ground. God does not overlook even the slightest detail in the universe. Rather, He governs the universe in total awareness of everything that is happening within it.

Yes, this kind of intimate knowledge can be frightening. But because we know that God is benevolent and caring, His comprehensive knowledge is a comfort. He knows what we need before we ask Him. And when our needs arise, He is both able and willing to help us. To me, there is nothing more comforting than knowing that there is a God of providence who is aware not only of every one of my transgressions but of every one of my tears, every one of my aches, and every one of my fears.

Chapter Two

GOD MAKES IT ALL HAPPEN

One of the dominant concepts in Western culture for the past two hundred years, as we saw in the previous chapter, is that we live in a closed, mechanistic universe. The theory is that everything operates according to fixed natural laws, and that there is no possibility for intrusion from outside. So, the universe is like a machine that functions by its own inner machinations.

However, even those who introduced this concept as early as the seventeenth century still posited the idea that God built the machine in the first place. Being intelligent thinkers and scientists, they could not get away from the need for a Creator. They recognized that there would be no world for them to observe if there were no ultimate cause for all things. Even though the idea of an involved, providential Governor of the daily affairs of life was questioned and challenged, it still was tacitly assumed that there had to be a Creator above and beyond the created order.

In the classical concept, God's providence was very closely bound up with His role as the Creator of the universe. No one believed that God simply created the universe and then turned His back on it and lost touch with it, or that He sat back on His throne in heaven and merely watched the universe work by its own inner mechanism, refusing to involve Himself in its affairs. Rather, the classical Christian notion was that God is both the primary cause of the universe and also the primary cause of everything that takes place in the universe.

One of the foundational principles of Christian theology is that nothing in this world has intrinsic causal power. Nothing has any power save the power that is vested in it—lent to it, if you will—or worked through it, which ultimately is the power of God. That is why theologians and philosophers historically have made a crucial distinction between primary causality and secondary causality.

God is the source of primary causality; in other words, He is the first cause. He is the Author of all that is, and He continues to be the primary cause of human events and of natural occurrences. However, His primary causality does not exclude secondary causes. Yes, when the rain falls, the grass gets wet, not because God makes the grass wet directly and immediately, but because the rain applies moisture to the grass. But the rain could not fall apart from the causal power of God that stands over and above every secondary causal activity. Modern man, however, is quick to say, "The grass is wet because the rain fell," and he looks no further for a higher, ultimate cause. Twenty-first-century people seem to think we can get along just fine with secondary causes and give no thought to the primary cause.

The basic concept here is that what God creates, He sustains. So, one of the important subdivisions in the doctrine of providence is the concept of divine sustenance. Simply put, this is the classical Christian idea that God is not the great Watchmaker who builds the watch, winds it up, and then steps out of the picture. Instead, what He makes, He preserves and sustains.

We actually see this at the very beginning of the Bible. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word translated as "created" is a form of the verb *bārā*, which means "to create, make." This word carries with it the idea of sustaining. I like to illustrate this idea by referencing the difference in music between a staccato note and a sustained note. A staccato note is short and crisp: "La la la la la." A sustained note is held: "Laaaa." Likewise, the word *bārā* tells us that God did not simply bring the world into existence in a moment. It indicates that He is continuing to make it, as it were. He is holding it, keeping it, and sustaining it.

THE AUTHOR OF BEING

One of the most profoundly important theological concepts is that God is the Author of being. We could not exist apart from a supreme being, because we do not have the power of being in and of ourselves. If any atheist would think seriously and logically about the concept of being for five minutes, it would be the end of his atheism. It is an inescapable fact that no one in this world has the power of being within himself, and yet we are here. So, somewhere there must be One who *does* have the power of being within Himself. If there is not such a One, it would be absolutely scientifically impossible for anything to be. If there is no supreme being, there could be no being of any kind. If there is something, there must be something that has the power of being; otherwise, nothing would be. It's that simple.

When the Apostle Paul spoke to the philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens, he mentioned that he had seen many altars in the city, including one to "the unknown god" (Acts 17:23a). He then used that as an opening to speak biblical truth to them: "What therefore you worship as

unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it ... gives to all mankind life and breath and everything ... for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’ ” (vv. 23b–28a). Paul said that everything God creates is completely dependent on God’s power, not only for its origin but for the continuity of its existence.

Sometimes I am impatient with some of the poetic liberties that hymn writers take. One famous hymn includes this line: “Amazing love! How can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?” Yes, God died on the cross in a manner of speaking. The God-man, the One who was God incarnate, died for His people. But the divine nature did not perish at Calvary. What would happen to the universe if God died? If God ceased to exist, the universe would perish with Him, because God not only has created everything, He sustains everything. We are dependent on Him, not only for our origin, but also for our continuing existence. Since we do not have the power of being in and of ourselves, we could not last for a second without His sustaining power. That is part of God’s providence.

This idea that God sustains the world—the world that He made and observes in intimate detail—brings us to the heart of the concept of providence, which is the teaching that God governs His creation. This teaching has many aspects, but I want to focus on three in the remainder of this chapter—the truths that God’s government of all things is permanent, sovereign, and absolute.

A PERMANENT GOVERNMENT

Every few years, we have a change of government in the United States as a new presidential administration takes over. The Constitution limits the number of years a president may serve as the chief executive of the United States. So, by human standards, governments come and go. Any time a president comes into office, the news media mentions the “honeymoon period,” that time when the new leader is looked upon with favor, warmly received, and so on. But as more and more people become annoyed or disappointed with his policies, his popularity falls. Soon, we hear some pundits opining that we need to throw the “bum” out of office. In other countries, such dissatisfaction has occasionally resulted in armed revolution, resulting in the violent overthrow of presidents or prime ministers. In any case, no earthly ruler retains power forever.

God, however, is seated as the supreme Governor of heaven and earth. He, too, must put up with people who are disenchanted with His rule, who object to His policies, and who resist His authority. But even though God’s very existence can be denied, His authority can be resisted, and His laws disobeyed, His providential government can never be overthrown.

Psalm 2 gives us a vivid picture of God’s secure reign. The psalmist writes: “Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us’ ” (vv. 1–3). The image here is that of a summit meeting of the powerful rulers of this world. They come together to enter into a coalition, a kind of military axis, to plan the overthrow of divine authority. It is as if they are planning to fire their nuclear missiles at the throne of God so as to blast Him out of heaven. Their goal is to be free of divine authority, to throw off the “bonds” and “cords” with which God binds them. But the conspiracy is not just against “the LORD,” it is also against “his anointed.” The Hebrew word here is *māšīah*, from which we get our English word *Messiah*. God the Father has exalted His Son as head over all things, with the right to rule the rulers of this world. Those who are invested with earthly authority are taking counsel together to plan how to rid the universe of the authority of God and His Son.

What is God's reaction to this earthly conspiracy? The psalmist says, "He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision" (v. 4). The kings of the earth set themselves in opposition to God. They agree with solemn pacts and treaties, and they encourage one another not to waver from their resolve to overthrow the King of the universe. But when God looks down at all these assembled powers, He does not tremble in fear. He laughs, but not the laughter of amusement. The psalmist describes the laughter of God as the laughter of derision. It is the laughter that a powerful king expresses when he holds his enemies in contempt.

But God does not merely laugh: "Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 'As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill'" (vv. 5–6). God will rebuke the rebellious nations and affirm the King He has seated in Zion.

I am frequently amazed at the difference between the accent I find in the pages of sacred Scripture and that which I read in the pages of religious magazines and hear preached in the pulpits of our churches. We have an image of God as full of benevolence. We see Him as a celestial bellhop we can call when we need room service or as a cosmic Santa Claus who is ready to shower us with gifts. He is pleased to do whatever we ask Him to do. Meanwhile, He gently pleads with us to change our ways and to come to His Son, Jesus. We do not usually hear about a God who commands obedience, who asserts His authority over the universe and insists we bow down to His anointed Messiah. Yet, in Scripture, we never see God inviting people to come to Jesus. He commands us to repent and convicts us of treason at a cosmic level if we choose not to do so. A refusal to submit to the authority of Christ probably will not land anyone in trouble with the church or the government, but it will certainly create a problem with God.

In the Upper Room Discourse (John 13–17), Jesus told His disciples that He was going away, but He promised to send them another Helper (14:16), the Holy Spirit. He said, "When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (16:8). When Jesus spoke about the Spirit coming to convict the world of sin, He became very specific about the sin He had in mind. It was the sin of unbelief. He said the Spirit would bring conviction "concerning sin, because they do not believe in me" (v. 9). From God's perspective, refusal to submit to the lordship of Christ is not simply due to a lack of conviction or a lack of information. God regards it as unbelief, as a failure to accept the Son of God for who He is.

Paul echoed this idea at the Areopagus when he said, "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). God had been patient, Paul said, but He now commanded everyone to repent and believe in Christ. We rarely hear this idea in print or from the pulpit, the idea that it is our duty to submit to Christ. But while we may not hear it, it is not an option with God.

Simply put, God reigns supreme over His universe, and His reign will never end.

A SOVEREIGN GOVERNMENT

In the United States, we live in a democracy, so it is difficult for us to understand the idea of sovereignty. Our social contract declares that no one can govern here except by the consent of the governed. But God does not need our consent in order to govern us. He made us, so He has an intrinsic right to rule over us.

In the Middle Ages, the monarchs of Europe sought to ground their authority in the so-called “divine right of kings.” They declared that they had a God-given right to rule over their countrymen. In truth, only God has such a right.

In England, the power of the monarch, once very great, is now limited. England is a constitutional monarchy. The queen enjoys all the pomp and circumstance of royalty, but Parliament and the prime minister run the nation, not Buckingham Palace. The queen reigns but she does not rule.

By contrast, the biblical King both reigns and rules. And He carries out His rule not by referendum but by His personal sovereignty.

AN ABSOLUTE GOVERNMENT

God’s government is an absolute monarchy. No external restraints are imposed on Him. He does not have to respect a balance of powers with a Congress and a Supreme Court. God is the President, the Senate, the House, and the Supreme Court all wrapped into one, because He is invested with the authority of an absolute monarch.

The history of the Old Testament is the history of the reign of Yahweh over His people. The central motif of the New Testament is the realization on earth of the kingdom of God in the Messiah, whom God exalts to the right hand of authority and crowns as the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the ultimate Ruler, the One to whom we owe ultimate allegiance and ultimate obedience.

One of the great ironies of history is that when Jesus, who was the cosmic King, was born in Bethlehem, the world was ruled by a man named Caesar Augustus. Properly speaking, however, the word *august* is appropriate for God alone. It means “of supreme dignity or grandeur; majestic; venerable; eminent.” God is the superlative fulfillment of all these terms, for the Lord God omnipotent reigns.

Chapter Three

GOD OR CHANCE?

Following the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt, God commanded His people to build a tabernacle, a large tent that would function as the center of their worship. The innermost section of the tabernacle, which was curtained off, was the Holy of Holies, into which only the high priest could go, and only on one day each year, the Day of Atonement. It was there, in the Holy of Holies, that the ark of the covenant was kept. The ark was not a boat, as in the story of Noah’s ark, but a large,

gold-covered chest. Inside the chest were kept the tablets of the Ten Commandments, Aaron's rod that had budded, and a pot of the manna with which God miraculously fed the people in the wilderness (Heb. 9:4). The lid of the ark, which was adorned with two golden cherubim, was regarded as the throne of God. Simply put, the ark was the most sacred vessel in all of Jewish religious history.

It also had military significance for the Jews. When Moses and Joshua led the Israelites in their journey to the Promised Land and in their conquest of Canaan, when they went into battle against their enemies, the priests carried the ark of the covenant. When the throne of God accompanied the armies of Israel, they were victorious. God was with them in battle and fought for them.

Sadly, the people eventually began to associate victory in battle with the ark itself, not with God. We see this in 1 Samuel 4, which recounts an occasion when the Israelites went into battle with the Philistines (but not accompanied by the ark) and suffered defeat, with the loss of four thousand men. We then read: "When the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, 'Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies'" (v. 3). The people attributed their defeat to God, but they looked to the ark to save them.

So, the ark was brought to the Israelite camp. When the soldiers saw the arrival of the throne of God, they gave a tumultuous, thunderous cheer. Across the valley, the Philistines heard this cheer, and when they discovered the reason for it, they knew they were in deep trouble, for they remembered how God had struck the Egyptians during the exodus (vv. 5–8).

At this time, Israel was led by Eli, a priest and judge. He was a godly man who had served the people for decades, but he had one serious defect. He had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who also were priests, but they did not share Eli's godliness, and they committed all kinds of desecration of their sacred vocation. However, Eli never disciplined them. So, God had spoken to Eli through a prophet, warning him that judgment was going to fall on his house, for Hophni and Phinehas would die on the same day (2:30–34).

This prophecy came to fulfillment when the Israelites, jubilant to have the ark of God with them, went back into battle with the Philistines, and Hophni and Phinehas accompanied the ark. The unthinkable happened—the Israelites did *not* prevail, even though the ark was present. This time, thirty thousand Israelite men fell (4:10). Hophni and Phinehas also died, but worst of all, the pagan Philistines captured the ark of the covenant (v. 11).

After the battle, a messenger ran back to Shiloh with the bad news. Eli was ninety-eight years old, and he was blind and overweight (vv. 15, 18). He was seated by the gate where he issued judgments, for he was waiting anxiously for news of the battle. When the messenger came and told him that Israel was defeated, his sons were dead, and the ark was captured, Eli fell over backward, broke his neck, and died (v. 18).

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and about to give birth. When she heard the news of the defeat and the death of her husband, she went into labor. She gave birth to a son, but she died as a result of her labor. Before she died, however, she named the boy Ichabod, a name that means "the glory has departed" (vv. 19–22). That baby boy was born on the day when Israel's greatest glory, the throne of God, was taken into captivity by the pagan Philistines.

AFFLICTIONS FOR THE PHILISTINES

The Philistines, we are told, took the ark to Ashdod, one of their five city-states. They took it into their most holy temple, which was devoted to Dagon, their principal deity. In the temple, they

placed the ark at the feet of an image of Dagon, the place of humiliation and subordination (5:1–2). The next morning, however, they found the statue of Dagon fallen on its face; it was as if Dagon was prostrate before the throne of Yahweh. The priests propped their deity back up, but the next morning, the statue not only had fallen over on its face, its head and hands were broken off (vv. 3–4).

To make matters worse, a plague of tumors broke out in Ashdod (v. 6), and, apparently, a plague of mice (6:5). The men of Ashdod suspected that these afflictions were coming from the hand of God, so they convened a council to debate what to do. The decision was made to send the ark to another of the Philistine city-states, Gath (5:7–8). However, the same afflictions began in Gath, so the people of Gath decided to send the ark to Ekron. But news of the afflictions had preceded the ark, and the people of Ekron refused to receive it. After seven months of trials, the Philistines finally realized that the ark had to be sent back to Israel (5:9–6:1).

Returning such a sacred object to Israel was no simple task. The Philistines assembled their priests and diviners to advise them as to how to do it. The priests and diviners recommended they send it back with a “guilt offering”—five golden tumors and five golden mice (6:2–6).

Now the story gets interesting. The priests and diviners told the Philistine leaders to prepare a new cart and to put the ark and the golden tumors and mice on it. Then they were to find two milk cows that had never been yoked and hitch them to the cart. Finally, they were to take the cows’ calves away from them. Once all this was done, they were to release the cart but watch where the cows took it. They said, “If it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is [Israel’s God] who has done us this great harm, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by coincidence” (v. 9). In essence, then, this was an elaborate experiment to see whether God had been behind the afflictions or whether they had happened by “chance.”

It is vital that we understand how the Philistines “stacked the deck,” as it were, to determine conclusively whether it was the God of Israel that had caused their afflictions.

They found cows that had just calved. What is the natural inclination for a mother cow that has just given birth? If you take that mother cow away from her calf and then let her go free, she is going to make a beeline to her calf. Likewise, they chose cows that had never been yoked or trained to pull a cart in a yoke. In such a case, a cow is likely to struggle against the yoke and is unlikely to work well with the other cow in the yoke. With these issues built into the experiment, it was very unlikely the cart would go anywhere, least of all toward the land of Israel. If the cows were able to pull the cart at all, they would want to return to their calves. So, if the cart went toward Israel, that would be a sign that God was guiding the cows—and therefore that He had orchestrated the afflictions that had come on the Philistines since their capture of the ark.

AN EXPERIMENT OF ATHEISTS

This experiment sounds primitive. It took place in the prescientific era. These people were not sophisticated. They did not have PhDs in physics. Their naiveté as they tried to discern the cause of their affliction is amusing. But there is something about this story that I find exceedingly contemporary—these people clearly were atheists. You may be surprised by that statement, because the Bible tells us the Philistines had a temple, a priesthood, and a religion, as part of which they engaged in religious activities. Why, then, do I make the assertion that they were atheists?

Years ago, when I was teaching at a seminary, I was responsible to teach a course on the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is a seventeenth-century theological

document that is the confessional foundation for historic Presbyterianism. The first two chapters of the confession deal with the Scriptures and with the triune God, while the third chapter is titled “Of God’s Eternal Decree.” Presbyterians know exactly what that means—predestination. Seminary students enjoy chewing over difficult doctrinal questions, and they especially enjoy debating predestination, so there was excitement about my pending lecture on this doctrine. Most of my students invited friends who did not believe in predestination, so when the class met to consider this difficult doctrine, about twice the usual number of people were assembled.

I started the class by reading the opening lines of chapter three of the Westminster Confession: “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.” Then I paused and said: “The confession says that from all eternity God freely and unchangeably has ordained everything that comes to pass. How many of you believe that?” This was a Presbyterian seminary, so many hands went up; the good Presbyterian students in the class were proud to confess their conviction about the sovereignty of God.

Of course, not everyone raised his hand, so I asked: “How many of you don’t believe this? Nobody’s taking down names. You’re not going to get in any trouble. We’re not going to have a heresy trial here and get out the matches and burn you at the stake. Just be honest.” Finally, a number of fellows raised their hands. When they did, I said: “Let me ask another question: How many of you would candidly describe yourselves as atheists? Again, be honest.” No one raised his hand, so I said: “I don’t understand why those of you who said you do not agree with the confession did not raise your hands when I asked you if you were atheists.”

As you can imagine, there was a hue and cry from the students who did not agree with the confession. They were ready to lynch me. They said: “What are you talking about? Just because we don’t believe that God ordains everything that comes to pass, you’re calling us atheists?” I said: “That’s exactly what I’m calling you. If you don’t believe that God ordains everything that comes to pass, you don’t believe in God.” I then went on to explain to them that the passage I had read from the confession did not say anything uniquely Presbyterian. It was not even uniquely Christian. That statement did not divide Presbyterians from Methodists, Lutherans, or Anglicans, and it did not distinguish between Presbyterians, Muslims, or Jews. It simply offered a distinction between theism and atheism.

What I wanted these young people to see was this: if God is not sovereign, God is not God. If there is even one maverick molecule in the universe—one molecule running loose outside the scope of God’s sovereign ordination—we cannot have the slightest confidence that any promise God has ever made about the future will come to pass.

This, then, is why I say the Philistines were atheists. They allowed for the possibility of an event in this world caused by chance—the possibility that, against all the evidence, the afflictions they had endured had happened by coincidence. They were allowing for a maverick molecule, so they were allowing for the possibility of a God who is not sovereign, and a God who is not sovereign is not God.

The great message of atheism is that “chance” has causal power. Again and again the view is expressed that we do not need to attribute the creation of the universe to God, for we know that it came to be through space plus time plus chance. This is nonsense; there is nothing that chance can do. Chance is a perfectly good word to describe mathematic possibilities, but it is only a word. It is not an entity. Chance is nothing. It has no power because it has no being; therefore, it can exercise no influence over anything. Yet, we have sophisticated scientists today who make sober statements declaring that the whole universe was created by chance. This is to say that nothing

caused something, and there is no statement more anti-scientific than that. Everything has a cause, and the ultimate cause, as we have seen, is God.

When the Philistines let the cows go, they “went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left” (6:12). The cows pulled the cart smoothly, even though they had never been yoked. They walked away from their calves, even though they wished to go to them, as evidenced by their lowing. And they went straight toward Israel. Did all that happen by chance? No, the cows were guided by the invisible hand of the God of providence. Thus, the Philistines knew that that same hand had afflicted them.

Chapter Four

IS GOD RESPONSIBLE FOR HUMAN WICKEDNESS?

On February 12, 1938, two men had a private meeting in a mountain retreat. In the course of their conversation, one of the men said to the other, “I have a historic mission, and this mission I will fulfill, because Providence has destined me to do so.” This man had an understanding that the purpose of his life was under the shaping influence of divine providence. He went on to say to the other gentleman in the course of their conversation that anyone “who is not with me will be crushed.”

The man who made this claim to a providential destiny was Adolf Hitler. Similarly, when Joseph Stalin was elevated to the role of premier of the Soviet Union, the bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church rejoiced in this stroke of providence, as they were convinced that God had raised Stalin up to be a divine instrument for the leadership of the people of Russia. Yet today, when people discuss the diabolical evils that have been perpetrated on the human race, two of the names we hear most frequently associated with human wickedness are those of Hitler and Stalin.

Whenever we study the doctrine of providence and the question of divine government, we inevitably hear that the Scriptures teach us that God lifts nations up and brings nations down (Dan. 2:21; 4:17; Rom. 13:1). This raises a question: How is divine providence related to evil governments, evil individuals, and indeed the whole question of evil? In the previous chapter, I quoted from the third chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which says, “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.” Does that mean, then, that God ordained Hitler and Stalin? Is evil ordained by the providence of God?

It has been said that the existence of evil and the difficulty of explaining it in light of the concept of a sovereign God who is supposed to be good is the “Achilles’ heel” of Christianity. According to Greek mythology, when Achilles was born, his mother dipped him in the River Styx in an attempt to make him immortal. But when she dipped him, she held him by the heel, and that part of his body was not immersed, and therefore was not invincible. Eventually, he was killed when he received an arrow wound in his heel during the Trojan War. Those who argue that the

problem of evil is the Achilles' heel of Christianity mean that it is Christianity's most vulnerable spot. If God ordains everything that comes to pass, it seems that He must ordain evil. And if God ordains evil, the argument goes, He Himself is evil.

The philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) used this argument in his objections to Christianity. He wrote, "Not even on the most distorted and contracted theory of good which ever was framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the government of Nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent. He was saying that because of the undeniable reality of evil, he could not conceive of a God who was both all-powerful and all-righteous.

Of course, some try to resolve this difficulty by denying the reality of evil. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, said evil is an illusion. I once had a debate with a Christian Science teacher about the question of evil. He insisted that evil is an illusion, that it does not really exist, while I insisted that evil is real. At one point in the discussion, I said: "Let me see if we can recapitulate where we stand. You say that evil is an illusion. I say that it's real. Do you think I'm real?" He said yes. I then asked, "Do you understand that I'm saying that evil is real and you're saying it's an illusion?" He said he understood that. I went on: "Do you think it's a good thing that I'm teaching people that evil is real?" He said he did not think so. Finally I asked, "Do you think it's evil for me to teach people that evil is real?" He did not know what to say at that point. He had to conclude that I was an illusion as well.

THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECT

I noted in chapter one that the key issue for modern man is causality, and this question is nowhere more acute than when we talk about the problem of evil. When I was a freshman in college, only a few months after I became a Christian, I was playing Ping-Pong one day in my dorm, and right in the middle of a volley a thought (which was in no way original) came to me: "If God is all-righteous, He's capable only of good; so, how could He possibly have created a world that is marred with evil? If God is the source of all things and He's good, how could there be evil?" That problem troubled me deeply then and it has troubled me even more since, and it troubles many other people, too.

As I began to ponder these things and to study the question of causality, I studied, and later taught, seventeenth-century philosophy. The most prominent philosopher during that time was the French mathematician and scholar René Descartes. He was very concerned about reasoning from causality. He argued for the existence of the world by saying that the universe requires a sufficient cause, a cause that is able to give the result that we now observe. So, he argued from cause to effect to the existence of God, reasoning backward from the universe to God. One of the principles he used in that argument for the existence of God was this: "There can be nothing in the effect that is not first in the cause." To state it another way, "There cannot be more in the effect than inheres in the cause."

That principle, which has been espoused by thinkers for millennia, is a valid one, and it is critical to other arguments for the existence of God. For example, one argument that we use to prove the existence of God is the argument from human personality. We can prove that there has to be a first cause, that this first cause has to be self-existent and eternal, and so on. But after we do that, people will often say, "How do we know that this first cause is personal?" One of the ways I respond to this question is to ask: "Are we persons? Is there such a thing as personality, which involves volition, intelligence, affection—the things that are so integral to what we are as human

beings?” If people agree that human beings are personal, that they have intelligence, intentionality, volition, and so on, I can reply: “Well, we cannot have an impersonal source for personality. There has to be personality in the cause if there is personality in the effect.”

But that particular argument, as valid as it may be, can backfire on the Christian. Critics of Christianity have responded that if there cannot be more in the effect than is inherent in the cause, then God must be evil, because if we have an effect here that is evil, and if there cannot be more in the effect than is inherent in the cause, evil must exist in the cause.

How do we respond to this argument? The simple answer is that there is something in the creature that does not reside in the Creator—sin. That does not mean that the creature has something greater than the Creator; rather, the creature has something far less than the Creator.

A DEFINITION OF EVIL

To explain what I mean, I want to turn to the historic definition of evil. What is evil? To be clear, I am not talking about natural evil or metaphysical evil; rather, I’m talking about moral evil. Human beings have at least this much in common with God—we are moral creatures. We are capable of actions that may be deemed right or wrong. Of course, we live in a time when many people deny that proposition. They say that nothing is objectively good or evil. Instead, there are only preferences, which means that everything is relative. Good and evil are simply societal conventions that we have received through various traditions.

Years ago, I endured a calamity of the highest magnitude—my golf clubs were stolen. That theft was particularly distressing to me because the clubs were in a new golf bag my wife had given to me, so it had sentimental value. Also, I had two specially built clubs that a friend who is on the PGA Tour had given to me. Now, I am a theologian. I am supposed to know something about sin. I think I have seen every kind of human frailty there is under the sun, and I understand the temptations that go with our humanness. But candidly, I have never quite been able to understand the mentality of people who steal, who actually have the audacity to take for themselves someone else’s private property. One man works long hours each week, earning wages by the sweat of his brow so he can purchase a certain commodity that he wants or needs. Another man, seeing something he wants or needs, simply takes it for himself with no investment of time or effort. I cannot understand that mindset. Even though we are masters of self-justification, experts at coming up with excuses for our sins, I cannot conceive of how a thief can look at himself in a mirror and see anything other than a person who is unspeakably selfish and self-centered. In short, I am astonished at how evil people can be. As you can see, I am not in the camp of those who believe theft is not objectively wrong.

We do not need a complex philosophical argument to prove the evil of stealing. It is self-evident. People know instinctively that stealing someone else’s property is wrong. I might say that there is no such thing as evil and argue about it philosophically, but the argument ends when someone helps himself to my wallet. Then I say: “That’s not right. That’s not good. That’s bad.”

But what is evil? The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines sin this way: “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God” (Q&A 14). Here, the confession defines sin or evil in both a negative and a positive way. There are sins of omission and sins of commission. But I want to zero in on the first part of the definition, “any want of conformity unto ... the law of God.” The word “want” here does not mean “desire” but “lack.” So, sin is a lack of conformity to the standard God establishes for righteousness.

The ancient philosophers defined evil in terms of “negation” and “privation.” That is, evil is the negation of the good and a privation (or lack) of goodness. Something that falls short of the plentitude of righteousness is evil. The philosophers were showing that the only way we can describe and define evil is in negative terms. This means that evil, by its very nature, is parasitic. It depends upon its host for its existence. This is what Augustine had in mind when he said that only something good can do that which is evil because the evil requires volition, intelligence, and a moral sense or awareness—all of which are good. So, something happens to a good being that indicates a loss, a lack, or a denial of goodness.

Augustine took the position that it is impossible to conceive of a being that is completely evil. Yes, Satan is radically evil, but he was created as an angel, which means he was part of the creation that God saw as very good. So, even Satan was created good, just as men were created good. Thus, at the point of creation, the eternal God, who is altogether good, acted as a moral agent to create other moral agents that were good. But the great difference between the Creator and the creature is that God is eternally, immutably good, whereas the creature was made mutably good. That is, he was made with the possibility of changing in his conformity to the law of God.

We see, then, that we cannot understand disobedience without first having a concept of obedience. Lawlessness is defined by lawfulness. Unrighteousness depends upon a prior definition of righteousness. The antichrist cannot exist apart from his antithetical relationship to Christ. We understand that evil is defined as a negation or a lack of conformity to the standards of the good.

THE ORDINATION OF EVIL

The supreme question is this: “Does God do evil?” The Bible is absolutely clear: God is absolutely incapable of performing evil. Yet, we have affirmed that God ordains everything that comes to pass, and some of the things that come to pass are evil. So, does God ordain evil? There is only one biblical answer to that question: yes. If God did not ordain evil, there would be no evil, because God is sovereign.

We trip and stumble over the word *ordain*. We think that affirming divine ordination of all things must mean that God either does evil or imposes it on righteous creatures, forcing innocent people to do sinful deeds. No. He ordained that His creatures should have the capacity for evil. He did not force them to exercise that capacity, but He knew that they would exercise it. At that point, He had a choice. He could destroy the creation so as not to allow evil to happen. The moment the Serpent came to Adam and Eve and began to suggest disobedience, God could have snuffed out the Serpent or snuffed out Adam and Eve. There would have been no sin. But God, for reasons known only to Himself, made the decision to let it happen. God did not sanction it, but He did not stop it. In choosing not to stop it, He ordained it.

I have to say that I have no idea why God allows evil to besmirch His universe. However, I know that when God ordains anything, His purpose is altogether good. Does this mean I think that in the final analysis evil really is good? No. I am saying it must be good that evil exists, because God sovereignly, providentially ordains only what is good. In terms of His eternal purpose, God has esteemed it good that evil should be allowed to happen in this world.

That does not mean that the sins that I commit, insofar as they contribute to God’s providential plan and government of world history, are actually virtues. Judas’ treachery was part of the divine providence in God’s plan for redeeming the world. Judas could not have delivered Christ to Pilate apart from the providential decree of God. We know that this was the predetermined counsel of God, and yet God did not put evil into the heart of Judas. God did not coerce Judas to do his

diabolical sin. Therefore, Judas cannot stand up on the last day and say, “If it hadn’t been for me, there would have been no cross, no atonement, and no salvation—I’m the one who made it all possible.” What Judas did was utterly evil, but when God ordains all things that come to pass, He ordains not only the ends but also the means to those ends, and He works through all things to bring about His righteous purpose.

One of the most comforting verses of Scripture is Romans 8:28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” Only a God of sovereign providence could make a promise like that. This statement does not mean that all things *are* good, but that all things work together *for* good. They can work together for good only because, over and above all evil, all acts of human wickedness, stands a sovereign God who has appointed a destiny both for the universe and for us as individuals, and that destiny is perfectly consistent with His righteousness.

Chapter Five

WHAT ABOUT HUMAN FREEDOM?

In an earlier chapter, we briefly considered the provocative first line of the Westminster Confession’s chapter “On God’s Eternal Decree,” which says: “God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.” The theologians who were involved in putting together that doctrinal statement were careful to say that even though we believe in a sovereign God who governs all things and ordains whatsoever comes to pass, His sovereign, providential government is not exercised in such a way as to destroy what we call human freedom or human volition. Rather, human choices and human actions are a part of the overall providential scheme of things, and God brings His will to pass by means of the free decisions of moral agents. The fact that our free decisions fit into this overarching plan in no way lessens the reality of that freedom.

Still, the question of how our free decisions correspond to God’s sovereign providence is one of the most excruciatingly difficult questions with which we struggle in theology. Years ago, I engaged in a discussion with a professor from Carnegie Mellon University. At that time, he taught in the physics department, and he was somewhat hostile toward theology, seeing it as more or less a pseudoscience. He said, “At the very heart of your belief system are things that are simply indefinable.” When I asked him to name some examples, he said: “God. What is more basic to theology than God? And yet, anything that you can say about God is ultimately imprecise.” I replied: “Our first doctrine about God is what we call the ‘incomprehensibility of God’—that no concept can exhaustively describe Him. But that doesn’t mean that the statements we make about Him are totally inadequate. Surely you can be sympathetic with our struggle in the science of theology because you have to deal with the same problem in physics.” He denied that physicists

had any such problem and asked me to explain. I said: “What is energy? How basic is energy to modern physics?” He said, “I can answer that question—energy is the ability to do work.” I said: “No, I’m not asking you what energy can do. I’m asking you what it is.” He said, “OK, energy is MC^2 .” I said: “No, I don’t want its mathematical equivalency. I want its ontological structure.” He finally sighed and said, “I see what you mean.”

It is a human tendency to think we can solve a metaphysical mystery by putting a name to it or giving it a definition. There is no one out there, at least no one of whom I am aware, who understands gravity. Likewise, I do not know any scientist who has yet answered the oldest, most perplexing philosophical and scientific question: “What is motion?” Putting a label on something or attaching a technical term to it does not explain everything about it.

THE DOCTRINE OF CONCURRENCE

I have gone into this lengthy point because we have a word for the relationship between divine sovereign providence and human freedom, but while I think it is a useful word, it is merely descriptive; it does not explain how human actions and divine providence square. The word is *concurrence*. Concurrence refers to the actions of two or more parties taking place at the same time. One string of actions occurs with another string, and they happen to dovetail or converge in history. So, the Christian doctrine of the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human volitional actions is called the doctrine of concurrence. As you can see, the word *concurrence* simply designates this process, but it does not explain it.

I think one of the finest illustrations of concurrence is found in the Old Testament book of Job. This book is presented somewhat in the form of a drama, and the opening scene took place in heaven. Satan entered the scene after going to and fro across the earth, canvassing the performance of men who were supposed to be devoted to God. God asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?” (1:8). Of course, Satan was cynical. He said to God: “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land” (vv. 9b–10). Satan’s questions implied that Job was faithful and loyal to his Creator only because of what he got from God. So, Satan challenged God: “But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (v. 11). Therefore, God gave Satan permission to attack all Job’s possessions and, later, Job’s health.

How did Satan carry out his attack on Job? We are told that, among other events, the Chaldeans took his camels (v. 17). So, in this theft, three agents were involved—the Chaldeans, Satan, and God. Let us consider each of these agents one by one.

Some scholars, focusing on Satan’s malicious intent, conclude that the Chaldeans were upright men who respected Job, but demonic forces under the control of Satan drove them to steal Job’s camels. They had no thought of stealing from Job until Satan put the idea into their minds. But Scripture never makes such a claim. The truth is that the Chaldeans were camel-rustlers from the beginning. They had a covetous, envious, jealous rage against Job, and the only thing that had kept the Chaldeans out of Job’s corral for years was the protective hedge God had placed around Job. Given the chance, however, they were more than happy to take Job’s camels.

Satan was not interested in seeing the Chaldeans pick up a few free camels. His goal in this drama was to force Job to curse God. He was acting with malice and malevolence to overthrow the authority and the majesty of God. He hoped that the theft of Job’s camels by the Chaldeans

would be a step toward that goal. So there was an agreement in purpose between the Chaldeans and Satan.

However, there was a total disagreement between the purposes of the Chaldeans and Satan and the purpose of God. Based on what we have learned so far about providence, we can safely conclude that God ordained that Job's camels be stolen. That was God's providential plan. But God's purpose was to vindicate Job from the unrighteous accusations of Satan, as well as to vindicate His own holiness.

Was it a legitimate purpose for God to vindicate Job? Was it a legitimate purpose for Him to vindicate His own holiness? I am not saying that the end justifies the means, but God's purposes and designs have to be considered in our evaluation of this drama. God did not sin against Job. Righteousness did not require that God keep Job from ever losing his camels. Remember, Job was a sinner. He had no eternal claim to those camels. Any camels that Job possessed were gifts of God's grace, and God had every right under heaven to remove or to repeal that grace for His own holy purposes. So, in this drama, God acted rightly, but Satan and the Chaldeans did evil. One event, three agents, three different purposes.

CONCURRENCE IN THE STORY OF JOSEPH

My favorite illustration of concurrence is the story of Joseph, which we find in the latter chapters of Genesis. Joseph was favored by his father, Jacob, who gave Joseph a colorful coat. Joseph's brothers hated him because of this favored treatment (37:3-4). One day, when Joseph fell into his brothers' hands far from their father's watching eyes, they went so far as to discuss killing him, but in the end they simply sold him to some caravan traders going down to Egypt (vv. 18, 28). In Egypt, Joseph was sold to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's guard. He served Potiphar well and became steward of his household (39:1-4). But Potiphar's wife made illicit advances toward Joseph, which Joseph refused. Hell knows no fury like that of a woman scorned, so she accused him of attempted rape, and Joseph was thrown into prison (vv. 7-8, 14-15, 20).

While he was in prison, Joseph met Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker, who had displeased the king (40:1). During their time in prison, Joseph interpreted dreams for the cupbearer and baker, and both dreams came true (vv. 8-23). Sometime later, after the cupbearer had been restored, he told Pharaoh about Joseph's ability, and Pharaoh summoned Joseph to interpret his own dream (41:12-36). Pharaoh was so grateful, he appointed Joseph as the prime minister of Egypt, tasked with preparing for the famine Pharaoh had foreseen in his dream (vv. 37-45).

When the famine came upon the land, it affected Joseph's homeland, too. Jacob's family was starving, so Jacob sent some of his sons down to Egypt to buy some of the surplus food the prime minister had been wise enough to store away for the Egyptian people (42:1-2). When the sons went to Egypt, they encountered Joseph, but while they did not recognize him, he recognized them (vv. 6-8). Joseph hid his identity for a while, but finally revealed that he was their long-lost brother (45:3). At Joseph's invitation, Jacob moved his entire family to Egypt (46:5-7).

Years later, after Jacob had died, the brothers became afraid that Joseph would take revenge upon them for selling him into slavery (50:15). So, they concocted a story, saying that Jacob had told them that he wanted Joseph to forgive them (vv. 16-17). They need not have worried; Joseph had long since forgiven them. He said: "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (vv. 19-20).

Joseph did not whitewash the sin of his brothers. He said, “You meant evil against me.” He was saying that they acted with evil intent in selling him to the Midianites. Like the Chaldeans, Joseph’s brothers were guilty of sin, sin that they personally had wanted to do. But God stands above all human choices and works through human freedom to bring about His own providential goals. That is what Joseph was saying: “You chose to do something sinful, but all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. I’m called according to the purpose of God, and God has meant good through this.” What good? First of all, God sent Joseph to Egypt to make preparations for the famine and thereby to save many lives, including those of his own family. Second, God caused Jacob’s entire family to move to Egypt, that they might prosper there and multiply, only to be enslaved and later delivered by the mighty hand of God in one of the key moments of redemptive history. And God brought all this about through the concurrence of His own righteous will and the sinful will of Joseph’s brothers.

GOD MEANT IT ALL FOR GOOD

There is an old, simple story that teaches a profound lesson: “For want of a nail, the shoe was lost. For want of the shoe, the horse was lost. For want of the horse, the rider was lost. For want of the rider, the message was lost. For want of the message, the battle was lost. For want of the battle, the kingdom was lost.” What would have happened in the history of the world if Jacob had not given Joseph a colorful coat? No coat, no jealousy. No jealousy, no treacherous sale of Joseph to Midianite traders. No sale of Joseph to Midianite traders, no descent into Egypt. No descent into Egypt, no meeting with Potiphar. No meeting with Potiphar, no trouble with his wife. No trouble with his wife, no imprisonment. No imprisonment, no interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh. No interpretation of the dreams of Pharaoh, no elevation to the role of prime minister. No elevation to the role of prime minister, no reconciliation with his brothers. No reconciliation with his brothers, no migration of the Jewish people into Egypt. No migration into Egypt, no exodus out of Egypt. No exodus out of Egypt, no Moses, no law, no prophets—and no Christ! Do you think it was an accident in the plan of God that that coat happened? God meant it all for good.

It is difficult to understand the relationship between God’s providence and human freedom because man is truly free in the sense that he has the ability to make choices and to choose what he wants. But God is also truly free. This is why the Westminster Confession can say that God “freely” ordains everything without doing “violence ... to the will of the creatures.” Of course, if I’ve heard it once, I’ve heard it a thousand times: “God’s sovereignty can never limit man’s freedom.” That is an expression of atheism, because if God’s sovereignty is limited one ounce by our freedom, He is not sovereign. What kind of a concept of God do we have that we would say that God is paralyzed by human choices? If His freedom is limited by our freedom, we are sovereign, not God. No, we are free, but God is even more free. This means that our freedom can never limit God’s sovereignty.¹⁸

¹⁸ Sproul, R. C. (2012). [*Does God Control Everything?*](#) (First edition, Vol. 14, pp. iii–65). Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust.

PREDESTINATION AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

AS WE struggle through the doctrine of predestination, we must start with a clear understanding of what the word means. Here we encounter difficulties immediately. Our definition is often colored by our doctrine. We might hope that if we turn to a neutral source for our definition—a source like Webster’s dictionary—we will escape such prejudice. No such luck. (Or should I say, no such providence.) Look at these entries in *Websters New Collegiate Dictionary*.

predestinate: *destined, fated, or determined beforehand; to foreordain to an earthly or eternal lot or destiny by divine decree.*

predestination: *the doctrine that God in consequence of his foreknowledge of all events infallibly guides those who are destined for salvation.*

predestine: *to destine, decree, determine, appoint, or settle beforehand.*

I am not sure how much we can learn from these dictionary definitions other than that Noah Webster must have been a Lutheran. What we can glean, however, is that predestination has something to do with the relationship of our ultimate destination and that something is done about that destination by somebody before we arrive there. The *pre* of predestination refers to time. Webster speaks of “beforehand.” Destiny refers to the place we are going, as we see in the normal use of the word *destination*.

When I call my travel agent to book a flight, the question is soon raised: “What is your destination?” Sometimes the question is put more simply: “Where are you going?” Our destination is the place where we are going. In theology it refers to one of two places; either we are going to heaven or we are going to hell. In either case, we cannot cancel the trip. God gives us but two final options. One or the other is our final destination. Even Roman Catholicism, which has another place beyond the grave, purgatory, views that as an intermediate stop along the way. Their travelers ride the local while Protestants prefer the express route.

What predestination means, in its most elementary form, is that our final destination, heaven or hell, is decided by God not only before we get there, but before we are even born. It teaches that our ultimate destiny is in the hands of God. Another way of saying it is this: From all eternity, before we ever live, God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. God made a choice—he chose some individuals to be saved

unto everlasting blessedness in heaven and others he chose to pass over, to allow them to follow the consequences of their sins into eternal torment in hell.

This is a hard saying, no matter how we approach it. We wonder, “Do our individual lives have any bearing on God’s decision? Even though God makes his choice before we are born, he still knows everything about our lives before we live them. Does he take that prior knowledge of us into account when he makes his decision?” How we answer that last question will determine whether our view of predestination is Reformed or not. Remember, we stated earlier that virtually all churches have *some* doctrine of predestination. Most churches agree that God’s decision is made before we are born. The issue then rests upon the question, “On what basis does God make that decision?”

Before we set out to answer that, we must clarify one other point. Frequently, people think about predestination with respect to everyday questions about traffic accidents and the like. They wonder whether God decreed that the Yankees win the World Series or whether the tree fell on their car by divine edict. Even insurance contracts have clauses that refer to “acts of God.”

Questions such as these are normally treated in theology under the broader heading of Providence. Our study focuses on predestination in the narrow sense, restricting it to the ultimate question of predestined salvation or damnation, what we call *election* and *reprobation*. The other questions are both interesting and important, but they fall beyond the scope of this book.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

In most discussions about predestination, there is great concern about protecting the dignity and freedom of man. But we must also observe the crucial importance of the sovereignty of God. Though God is not a creature, he is personal, with supreme dignity and supreme freedom. We are aware of the ticklish problems surrounding the relationship between God’s sovereignty and human freedom. We must also be aware of the close relationship between God’s sovereignty and God’s freedom. The freedom of a sovereign is always greater than the freedom of his subjects.

When we speak of divine sovereignty we are speaking about God’s authority and about God’s power. As sovereign, God is the supreme authority of heaven and earth. All other authority is lesser authority. Any other authority that exists in the universe is derived from and dependent upon God’s authority. All other forms of authority exist either by God’s command or by God’s permission.

The word *authority* contains within itself the word *author*. God is the author of all things over which he has authority. He created the universe. He owns the universe. His ownership gives him certain rights. He may do with his universe what is pleasing to his holy will.

Likewise, all power in the universe flows from the power of God. All power in this universe is subordinate to him. Even Satan is powerless without God’s sovereign permission to act.

Christianity is not dualism. We do not believe in two ultimate equal powers locked in an eternal struggle for supremacy. If Satan were equal to God, we would have no confidence, no hope of good triumphing over evil. We would be destined to an eternal standoff between two equal and opposing forces.

Satan is a creature. He is evil to be sure, but even his evil is subject to the sovereignty of God, as is our own evil. God’s authority is ultimate; his power is omnipotent. He is sovereign.

One of my duties as a seminary professor is to teach the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Westminster Confession has been the central creedal document for historic Presbyterianism. It sets forth the classical doctrines of the Presbyterian Church.

Once, while teaching this course, I announced to my evening class that the following week we would study the section of the confession dealing with predestination. Since the evening class was open to the public, my students rushed to invite their friends for the juicy discussion. The next week the classroom was packed with students and guests.

I began the class by reading the opening lines from Chapter III of the Westminster Confession:

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.

I stopped reading at that point. I asked, “Is there anyone in this room who does not believe the words that I just read?” A multitude of hands went up. I then asked, “Are there any convinced atheists in the room?” No hands were raised. I then said something outrageous: “Everyone who raised his hand to the first question should also have raised his hand to the second question.”

A chorus of groans and protests met my statement. How could I accuse someone of atheism for not believing that God foreordains whatever comes to pass? Those who protested these words were not denying the existence of God. They were not protesting against Christianity. They were protesting against Calvinism.

I tried to explain to the class that the idea that God foreordains whatever comes to pass is not an idea unique to Calvinism. It isn’t even unique to Christianity. It is simply a tenet of theism—a necessary tenet of theism.

That God in some sense foreordains whatever comes to pass is a necessary result of his sovereignty. In itself it does not plead for Calvinism. It only declares that God is absolutely sovereign over his creation. God can foreordain things in different ways. But everything that happens must at least happen by his permission. If he permits something, then he must decide to allow it. If He decides to allow something, then in a sense he is foreordaining it. Who, among Christians, would argue that God could not stop something in this world from happening? If God so desires, he has the power to stop the whole world.

To say that God foreordains all that comes to pass is simply to say that God is sovereign over his entire creation. If something could come to pass apart from his sovereign permission, then that which came to pass would frustrate his sovereignty. If God refused to permit something to happen and it happened anyway, then whatever caused it to happen would have more authority and power than God himself. If there is any part of creation outside of God’s sovereignty, then God is simply not sovereign. If God is not sovereign, then God is not God.

If there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God’s sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will ever be fulfilled. Perhaps that one maverick molecule will lay waste all the grand and glorious plans that God has made and promised to us. If a grain of sand in the kidney of Oliver Cromwell changed the course of English history, so our maverick molecule could change the course of all redemption history. Maybe that one molecule will be the thing that prevents Christ from returning.

We’ve heard the story: For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of the shoe the horse was lost; for want of the horse the rider was lost; for want of the rider the battle was lost; for want of the battle the war was lost. I remember my distress when I heard that Bill Vukovich, the greatest car driver of his era, was killed in a crash in the Indianapolis 500. The cause was later isolated in the failure of a cotter pin that cost ten cents.

Bill Vukovich had amazing control of race cars. He was a magnificent driver. However, he was not sovereign. A part worth only a dime cost him his life. God doesn't have to worry about ten-cent cotter pins wrecking his plans. There are no maverick molecules running around loose. God is sovereign. God is God.

My students began to see that divine sovereignty is not an issue peculiar to Calvinism, or even to Christianity. Without sovereignty God cannot be God. If we reject divine sovereignty then we must embrace atheism. This is the problem we all face. We must hold tightly to God's sovereignty. Yet we must do it in such a way so as not to violate human freedom.

At this point I should do for you what I did for my students in the evening class—finish the statement from the Westminster Confession. The whole statement reads as follows:

God, from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

Note that, while it affirms God's sovereignty over all things, the Confession also asserts that God does not do evil or violate human freedom. Human freedom and evil are under God's sovereignty.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Surely the most difficult question of all is how evil can coexist with a God who is both altogether holy and altogether sovereign. I am afraid that most Christians do not realize the profound severity of this problem. Skeptics have called this issue the "Achilles' Heel of Christianity."

I vividly remember the first time I felt the pain of this thorny problem. I was a freshman in college and had been a Christian for only a few weeks. I was playing Ping-Pong in the lounge of the men's dormitory when, in the middle of a volley, the thought struck me, *If God is totally righteous, how could he have created a universe where evil is {pg 29} present? If all things come from God, doesn't evil come from him as well?*

Then, as now, I realized that evil was a problem for the sovereignty of God. Did evil come into the world against God's sovereign will? If so, then he is not absolutely sovereign. If not, then we must conclude that in some sense even evil is foreordained by God.

For years I sought the answer to this problem, scouring the works of theologians and philosophers. I found some clever attempts at resolving the problem but, as yet, have never found a deeply satisfying answer.

The most common solution we hear for this dilemma is a simple reference to man's free will. We hear such statements as, "Evil came into the world by man's free will. Man is the author of sin, not God."

Surely that statement squares with the biblical account of the origin of sin. We know that man was created with a free will and that man freely chose to sin. It was not God who committed sin, it was man. The problem still persists, however. From where did man ever gain the slightest inclination to sin? If he was created with a desire for sin, then a shadow is cast on the integrity of the Creator. If he was created with no desire for sin, then we must ask where that desire came from.

The mystery of sin is tied to our understanding of free will, man's state in creation, and God's sovereignty. The question of free will is so vital to our understanding of predestination

that we will devote an entire chapter to the subject. Until then we will restrict our study to the question of man's first sin.

How could Adam and Eve fall? They were created good. We might suggest that their problem was the craftiness of Satan. Satan beguiled them. He tricked them into eating the forbidden fruit. We might suppose that the serpent was so slick that he utterly and completely fooled our original parents.

Such an explanation suffers from several problems. If Adam and Eve did not realize what they were doing, if they were utterly fooled, then the sin would have been all Satan's. But the Bible makes it clear that in spite of his craftiness the serpent spoke directly in challenge to the commandment of God. Adam and Eve had heard God issue his prohibition and warning. They heard Satan contradict God. The decision was squarely before them. They could not appeal to Satan's trickery to excuse them.

Even if Satan not only fooled but forced Adam and Eve to sin, we are still not free of our dilemma. If they could have rightfully said, "The devil made us do it," we would still face the problem of the devil's sin. Where did the devil come from? How did he manage to fall from goodness? Whether we are speaking of the Fall of man or the fall of Satan we still are dealing with the problem of good creatures becoming evil.

Again we hear the "easy" explanation that evil came through the creature's free will. Free will is a good thing. That God gave us free will does not cast blame on him. In creation man was given an ability to sin and an ability not to sin. He chose to sin. The question is, "Why?"

Herein lies the problem. Before a person can commit an act of sin he must first have a desire to perform that act. The Bible tells us that evil actions flow from evil desires. But the presence of an evil desire is already sin. We sin because we are sinners. We were born with a sin nature. We are fallen creatures. But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don't know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know.

In spite of this excruciating problem we still must affirm that God is not the author of sin. The Bible does not reveal the answers to all our questions. It does reveal the nature and character of God. One thing is absolutely unthinkable, that God could be the author or doer of sin.

But this chapter is about God's sovereignty. We are still left with the question that, given the fact of human sin, how does it relate to God's sovereignty? If it is true that in some sense God foreordains everything that comes to pass, then it follows with no doubt that God must have foreordained the entrance of sin into the world. That is not to say that God forced it to happen or that he imposed evil upon his creation. All that means is that God must have decided to allow it to happen. If he did not allow it to happen, then it could not have happened, or else he is not sovereign.

We know that God is sovereign because we know that God is God. Therefore, we must conclude that God foreordained sin. What else can we conclude? We must conclude that God's decision to allow sin to enter the world was a good decision. This is not to say that our sin is really a good thing, but merely that God's allowing us to do sin, which is evil, is a good thing. God's allowing evil is good, but the evil he allows is still evil. God's involvement in all this is perfectly righteous. Our involvement in it is wicked. The fact that God decided to allow us to sin does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin.

A frequent objection we hear is that if God knew in advance that we were going to sin, why did he create us in the first place? One philosopher stated the problem this way: "If God knew we would sin but could not stop it, then he is neither omnipotent nor sovereign. If he could stop it

but chose not to, then he is neither loving nor benevolent.” By this approach God is made to look bad no matter how we answer the question.

We must assume that God knew in advance that man would fall. We also must assume that he could have intervened to stop it. Or he could have chosen not to create us at all. We grant all those hypothetical possibilities. Bottom line, we know that he knew we would fall and that he went ahead and created us anyway. Why does that mean he is unloving? He also knew in advance that he was going to implement a plan of redemption for his fallen creation that would include a perfect manifestation of his justice and a perfect expression of his love and mercy. It was certainly loving of God to predestine the salvation of his people, those the Bible calls his “elect” or chosen ones.

It is the non-elect that are the problem. If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born.

That may indeed be the case. But we must ask the really tough question: Is there any reason that a righteous God ought to be loving toward a creature who hates him and rebels constantly against his divine authority and holiness? The objection raised by the philosopher implies that God owes his love to sinful creatures. That is, the unspoken assumption is that God is obligated to be gracious to sinners. What the philosopher overlooks is that *if grace is obligated it is no longer grace*. The very essence of grace is that it is undeserved. God always reserves the right to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. God may owe people justice, but never mercy.

It is important to point out once again that these problems arise for all Christians who believe in a sovereign God. These questions are not unique to a particular view of predestination.

People argue that God is loving enough to provide a way of salvation for all sinners. Since Calvinism restricts salvation only to the elect, it seems to require a less loving God. On the surface at least, it seems that a non-Calvinist view provides an opportunity for vast numbers of people to be saved who would not be saved in the Calvinist view.

Again, this question touches on matters that must be more fully developed in later chapters. For now let me say simply that, if the final decision for the salvation of fallen sinners were left in the hands of fallen sinners, we would despair of all hope that anyone would be saved.

When we consider the relationship of a sovereign God to a fallen world we are faced with basically four options:

1. *God could decide to provide no opportunity for anyone to be saved.*
2. *God could provide an opportunity for all to be saved.*
3. *God could intervene directly and insure the salvation of all people.*
4. *God could intervene directly and insure the salvation of some people.*

All Christians immediately rule out the first option. Most Christians rule out the third. We face the problem that God saves some and not all. Calvinism answers with the fourth option. The Calvinist view of predestination teaches that God actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to make absolutely sure that they are saved. Of course, the rest are invited to Christ and given an “opportunity” to be saved *if they want to*. But Calvinism assumes that without the intervention of God no one will ever want Christ. Left to themselves, no one will ever choose Christ.

This is precisely the point of dispute. Non-Reformed views of predestination assume that every fallen person is left with the capacity to choose Christ. Man is not viewed as being so fallen that it requires the direct intervention of God to the degree that Calvinism asserts. The non-Reformed views all leave it in man’s power to cast the deciding ballot for man’s ultimate destiny. In these views the best option is the second. God provides opportunities for all to be

saved. But certainly, the opportunities are not equal, since vast multitudes of people die without ever hearing the gospel.

The non-Reformed person objects to the fourth option because it limits salvation to a select group which God chooses. The Reformed person objects to the second option because he sees the universal opportunity for salvation *as not providing enough to save anybody*. The Calvinist sees God doing far more for the fallen human race through option four than through option two. The non-Calvinist sees just the reverse. He thinks that giving a universal opportunity, though it falls short of insuring the salvation of anyone, is more benevolent than insuring the salvation of some and not others.

The nasty problem for the Calvinist is seen in the relationship of options three and four. If God can and does choose to insure the salvation of some, why then does he not insure the salvation of all?

Before I try to answer that question, let me first point out that this is not just a Calvinist problem. Every Christian must feel the weight of this problem. We first face the question, "Does God have the power to insure the salvation of everyone?" Certainly, it is within God's power to change the heart of every impenitent sinner and bring that sinner to himself. If he lacks such power, then he is not sovereign. If he has that power, why doesn't he use it for everyone?

The non-Reformed thinker usually responds by saying that for God to impose his power on unwilling people is to violate man's freedom. To violate man's freedom is sin. Since God cannot sin, he cannot unilaterally impose his saving grace on unwilling sinners. To force the sinner to be willing when the sinner is not willing is to violate the sinner. The idea is that by offering the grace of the gospel God does everything he can to help the sinner get saved. He has the raw power to coerce men but the use of such power would be foreign to God's righteousness.

That does not bring much comfort to the sinner in hell. The sinner in hell must be asking, "God, if you really loved me, why didn't you coerce me to believe? I would rather have had my free will violated than to be here in this eternal place of torment." Still, the pleas of the damned would not determine God's righteousness if in fact it would be wrong of God to impose himself on the will of men. The question the Calvinist asks is, "What is wrong with God creating faith in the heart of the sinner?"

God is not required to seek the sinner's permission for doing with the sinner what he pleases. The sinner didn't ask to be born in the country of his birth, to his parents, or even to be born at all. Nor did the sinner ask to be born with a fallen nature. All these things were determined by God's sovereign decision. If God does all this that affects the sinner's eternal destiny, what could possibly be wrong for him to go one more step to insure his salvation? What did Jeremiah mean when he cried, "O Lord, You have overwhelmed me and I am overwhelmed" (Jer. 20:7)? Jeremiah certainly did not invite God to overwhelm him.

The question remains. Why does God only save some? If we grant that God can save men by violating their wills, why then does he not violate everybody's will and bring them all to salvation? (I am using the word *violate* here not because I really think there is any wrongful violation but because the non-Calvinist insists on the term.)

The only answer I can give to this question is that I don't know. I have no idea why God saves some but not all. I don't doubt for a moment that God has the power to save all, but I know that he does not choose to save all. I don't know why.

One thing I do know. If it pleases God to save some and not all, there is nothing wrong with that. God is not under obligation to save anybody. If he chooses to save some, that in no way

obligates him to save the rest. Again, the Bible insists that it is God's divine prerogative to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy.

The hue and cry the Calvinist usually hears at this point is "That's not fair!" But what is meant by fairness here? If by fair we mean equal, then of course the protest is accurate. God does not treat all men equally. Nothing could be clearer from the Bible than that. God appeared to Moses in a way that he did not appear to Hammurabi. God gave blessings to Israel that he did not give to Persia. Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus in a way he did not manifest himself to Pilate. God simply has not treated every human being in history in exactly the same manner. That much is obvious.

Probably what is meant by "fair" in the protest is "just." It does not seem just for God to choose some to receive his mercy while others do not receive the benefit of it. To deal with this problem we must do some close but very important thinking. Let us assume that all men are guilty of sin in the sight of God. From that mass of guilty humanity, God sovereignly decides to give mercy to some of them. What do the rest get? They get justice. The saved get mercy and the unsaved get justice. Nobody gets injustice.

Mercy is not justice. But neither is it injustice. Look at the following graphic:

There is justice and there is non-justice. Non-justice includes everything outside of the category of justice. In the category of non-justice we find two sub-concepts, injustice and mercy. Mercy is a good form of non-justice while injustice is a bad form of non-justice. In the plan of salvation God does nothing bad. He never commits an injustice. Some people get justice, which is what they deserve, while other people get mercy. Again, the fact that one gets mercy does not demand that the others get it as well. God reserves the right of executive clemency.

As a human being I might *prefer* that God give his mercy to everyone equally, but I may not *demand* it. If God is not pleased to dispense his saving mercy to all men, then I must submit to his holy and righteous decision. God is never, never, never obligated to be merciful to sinners. That is the point we must stress if we are to grasp the full measure of God's grace.

The real question is why God is inclined to be merciful to anyone. His mercy is not required, yet he freely gives it to his elect. He gave it to Jacob in a way he did not give it to Esau. He gave it to Peter in a way he did not give it to Judas. We must learn to praise God both in his mercy and in his justice. When he executes his justice he is doing nothing wrong. He is executing his justice according to his righteousness.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN FREEDOM

Every Christian gladly affirms that God is sovereign. God's sovereignty is a comfort to us. It assures us that he is able to do what he promises to do. But the bare fact of God's sovereignty raises one more big question. How is God's sovereignty related to human freedom?

When we stand before the question of divine sovereignty and human freedom, the "fight or flight" dilemma may confront us. We might try to fight our way into a logical solution of it or take a turn and run as fast as we can from it.

Many of us choose to flee from it. The flight takes different routes. The most common is simply to say that divine sovereignty and human freedom are contradictions that we must have the courage to embrace. We seek analogies that soothe our troubled minds.

As a college student I heard two analogies that gave me temporary relief, like a theological package of Roloids:

Analogy #1—“God’s sovereignty and human freedom are like parallel lines that meet in eternity.”

Analogy #2—“God’s sovereignty and human freedom are like ropes in a well. On the surface they seem to be separate, but in the darkness of the bottom of the well they come together.”

The first time I heard these analogies I was relieved. They sounded simple yet profound. The idea of two parallel lines that meet in eternity satisfied me. It gave me something clever to say in the event that a hard-boiled skeptic asked me about divine sovereignty and human freedom.

My relief was temporary. I soon required a stronger dose of Roloids. The nagging question refused to go away. *How, I wondered, can parallel lines ever meet? In eternity or anywhere else?* If the lines meet, then they are not ultimately parallel. If they are ultimately parallel, then they will never meet. The more I thought about the analogy the more I realized that it did not solve the problem. To say that parallel lines meet in eternity is a nonsense statement; it is a blatant contradiction.

I don’t like contradictions. I find little comfort in them. I never cease to be amazed at the ease with which Christians seem to be comfortable with them. I hear statements like, “God is bigger than logic!” or “Faith is higher than reason!” to defend the use of contradictions in theology.

I certainly agree that God is bigger than logic and that faith is higher than reason. I agree with all my heart and with all my head. What I want to avoid is a God who is smaller than logic and a faith that is lower than reason. A God who is smaller than logic would be and should be destroyed by logic. A faith that is lower than reason is irrational and absurd.

I suppose it is the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom, more than any other issue, that has driven many Christians to claim contradictions as a legitimate element of faith. The idea is that logic cannot reconcile divine sovereignty and human freedom. The two defy logical harmony. Since the Bible teaches both poles of the contradiction we must be willing to affirm them both, in spite of the fact that they are contradictory.

God forbid! For Christians to embrace both poles of a blatant contradiction is to commit intellectual suicide and to slander the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the author of confusion. God does not speak with a forked tongue.

If human freedom and divine sovereignty are real contradictions, then one of them, at least, has to go. If sovereignty excludes freedom and freedom excludes sovereignty, then either God is not sovereign or man is not free.

Happily, there is an alternative. We can keep both sovereignty and freedom if we can show that they are not contradictory.

At a human level we readily see that people can enjoy a real measure of freedom in a land ruled by a sovereign monarch. It is not freedom that is canceled out by sovereignty; it is *autonomy* that cannot coexist with sovereignty.

What is autonomy? The word comes from the prefix *auto* and the root *nomos*. *Auto* means “self.” An automobile is something that moves itself. “Automatic” describes something that is self-acting.

The root *nomos* is the Greek word for “law.” The word *autonomy* means, then, “self-law.” To be autonomous means to be a law unto oneself. An autonomous creature would be answerable to no one. He would have no governor, least of all a sovereign governor. It is logically impossible to have a sovereign God existing at the same time as an autonomous creature. The two concepts are utterly incompatible. To think of their coexistence would be like imagining the meeting of an immovable object and an irresistible force. What would happen? If the object moved, then it

could no longer be considered immovable. If it failed to move, then the irresistible force would no longer be irresistible.

So it is with sovereignty and autonomy. If God is sovereign, man cannot possibly be autonomous. If man is autonomous, God cannot possibly be sovereign. These would be contradictions.

One does not have to be autonomous to be free. Autonomy implies *absolute* freedom. We are free, but there are limits to our freedom. The ultimate limit is the sovereignty of God.

I once read a statement by a Christian who said, "God's sovereignty can never restrict human freedom." Imagine a Christian thinker making such a statement. This is sheer humanism. Does the law of God place restrictions on human freedom? Is God not permitted to impose limits on what I may choose? Not only may God impose moral limits upon my freedom, but he has every right at any moment to strike me dead if it is necessary to restrain me from exercising my evil choices. If God has no right of coercion, then he has no right of governing his creation.

It is better that we reverse the statement: "Human freedom can never restrict the sovereignty of God." That is what sovereignty is all about. If God's sovereignty is restricted by man's freedom, then God is not sovereign; man is sovereign.

God is free. I am free. God is more free than I am. If my freedom runs up against God's freedom, I lose. His freedom restricts mine; my freedom does not restrict his. There is an analogy in the human family. I have free will. My children have free wills. When our wills clash I have the authority to overrule their wills. Their wills are to be subordinate to my will; my will is not subordinate to theirs. Of course, at the human level of the analogy we are not speaking in absolute terms.

Divine sovereignty and human freedom are often thought to be contradictions because on the surface they sound contradictory. There are some important distinctions that must be made and consistently applied to this question if we are to avoid hopeless confusion.

Let us consider three words in our vocabulary that are so closely related that they are often confused:

1. *contradiction*
2. *paradox*
3. *mystery*

1. *Contradiction*. The logical law of contradiction says that a thing cannot be what it is and not be what it is at the same time and in the same relationship. A man can be a father and a son at the same time, but he cannot be a man and not be a man at the same time. A man can be both a father and a son at the same time but not in the same relationship. No man can be his own father. Even when we speak of Jesus as the God/man we are careful to say that, though he is God and man at the same time, he is not God and man in the same relationship. He has a divine nature and a human nature. They are not to be confused. Contradictions can never coexist, not even in the mind of God. If both poles of a genuine contradiction could be true in the mind of God, then nothing God ever revealed to us could possibly have any meaning. If good and evil, justice and injustice, righteousness and unrighteousness, Christ and Antichrist could all mean the same thing to God's mind, then truth of any kind would be utterly impossible.

2. *Paradox*. A paradox is an apparent contradiction that upon closer scrutiny can be resolved. I have heard teachers declare that the Christian notion of the Trinity is a contradiction. It simply is not. It violates no law of logic. It passes the objective test of the law of contradiction. God is one in *essence* and three in *person*. There is nothing contradictory about that. If we said that God

was one in essence and three in essence then we would have a bona fide contradiction that no one could resolve. Then Christianity would be hopelessly irrational and absurd. The Trinity is a paradox, but not a contradiction.

Fogging things up even further is another term, *antinomy*. Its primary meaning is a synonym for contradiction but its secondary meaning is a synonym for paradox. Upon examination, we see that it has the same root as *autonomy*, *nomos*, which means “law.” Here the prefix is *anti*, which means “against” or “instead of.” Thus, the literal meaning of the term *antinomy* is “against law.” What law do you suppose is in view here? The law of contradiction. The original meaning of the term was “that which violates the law of contradiction.” Hence, originally and in normal philosophical discussion, the word *antinomy* is an exact equivalent of the word *contradiction*.

Confusion creeps in when people use the term *antinomy* not to refer to a genuine contradiction but to a paradox or apparent contradiction. We remember that a paradox is a statement that seems like a contradiction but actually isn't. In Great Britain, especially, the word *antinomy* is often used as a synonym for paradox.

I labor these fine distinctions for two reasons. The first is that if we are to avoid confusion we must have a clear idea in our minds of the crucial difference between a real contradiction and a seeming contradiction. It is the difference between rationality and irrationality, between truth and absurdity.

The second reason that it is necessary to state these definitions clearly is that one of the greatest defenders of the doctrine of predestination in our world today uses the term *antinomy*. I am thinking of the outstanding theologian, Dr. J. I. Packer. Packer has helped countless thousands of people come to a deeper understanding of the character of God, especially with regard to God's sovereignty.

I have never discussed this matter of Dr. Packer's use of the term *antinomy* with him. I assume he is using it in the British sense of *paradox*. I cannot imagine that he means to speak of actual contradictions in the Word of God. In fact, in his book *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, he labors the point that there are no ultimate contradictions in the truth of God. Dr. Packer has not only been tireless in his defense of Christian theology, but has been equally tireless in his brilliant defense of the inerrancy of the Bible. If the Bible contained antinomies in the sense of real contradictions, that would be the end of inerrancy.

Some people actually do hold that there are real contradictions in divine truth. They think inerrancy is compatible with them. Inerrancy would then mean that the Bible inerrantly reveals the contradictions in God's truth. Of course, a moment's thought would make clear that if God's truth is contradictory truth it is no truth at all. Indeed, the very word *truth* would be emptied of meaning. If contradictions can be true we would have no possible way of discerning the difference between truth and a lie. This is why I am convinced that Dr. Packer uses antinomy to mean paradox and not contradiction.

3. *Mystery*. The term *mystery* refers to that which is true but which we do not understand. The Trinity, for example, is a mystery. I cannot penetrate the mystery of the Trinity or of the incarnation of Christ with my feeble mind. Such truths are too high for me. I know that Jesus was one person with two natures but I don't understand how that can be. The same kind of thing is found in the natural realm. Who understands the nature of gravity, or even of motion? Who has penetrated the ultimate mystery of life? What philosopher has plumbed the depths of the meaning of the human self? These are mysteries. They are not contradictions.

It is easy to confuse mystery and contradiction. We do not understand either of them. No one understands a contradiction because contradictions are intrinsically unintelligible. Not even God

can understand a contradiction. Contradictions are nonsense. No one can make sense out of them.

Mysteries are capable of being understood. The New Testament reveals to us things that were concealed and not understood in Old Testament times. There are things that once were mysterious to us that are now understood. This does not mean that everything that is presently a mystery to us will one day be made clear, but that many current mysteries will be unraveled for us. Some will be penetrated in this world. We have not yet reached the limits of human discovery. We know also that in heaven things will be revealed to us that are still hidden. But even in heaven we will not grasp fully the meaning of infinity. To understand that fully, one must himself be infinite. God can understand infinity, not because he operates on the basis of some kind of heavenly logic system, but because he himself is infinite. He has an infinite perspective.

Let me state it another way: All contradictions are mysterious. Not all mysteries are contradictions. Christianity has plenty of room for mysteries. It has no room for contradictions. Mysteries may be true. Contradictions can never be true, neither here in our minds, nor there in God's mind.

The big issue remains. The grand debate that stirs the cauldron of controversy centers on the question, "What does predestination do to our free will?"

We will examine that issue in the next chapter.

SUMMARY

1. Definition of predestination.

"Predestination means that our final destination, heaven or hell, is decided by God before we are even born."

2. God's sovereignty.

God is supreme authority of heaven and earth.

3. God is supreme power.

All other authority and power are under God.

4. If God is not sovereign, he is not God.

5. God exercises his sovereignty in such a way that it does no evil and violates no human freedom.

6. Man's first act of sin is a mystery. That God allowed men to sin does not reflect badly upon God.

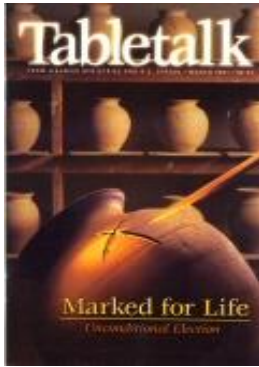
7. All Christians face the difficult question of why God, who theoretically could save everybody, chooses to save some, but not all.

8. God does not owe salvation to anyone.

9. God's mercy is voluntary. He is not obligated to be merciful. He reserves the right to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy.

10. God's sovereignty and man's freedom are not contradictory.¹⁹

¹⁹ Sproul, R. C. (1986). *Chosen by God* (pp. 17–48). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.



Tabletalk Special Issue

PREDESTINATION PROPONENTS

“Marked for Life”

Supernatural Selection:

“God does not force a person to believe against his will, though He may, if it pleases Him, graciously, unconditionally give that person a new will with which to believe. God is indeed partial; He freely and sovereignly choose whom He pleases. But there is no hint of injustice in His choosing. If God chose you and gave you a new heart and working faith, Christ is your substitute.” – Carl Bogue

Divine Discrimination:

“God did not choose you or me because of anything good in us, but because of His love for us, which we do not deserve. That means God discriminates among people, but not on the basis of their character. Some have sought to avoid this unavoidable conclusion by suggesting that God elects groups of people rather than individuals. The trouble with this approach is that it not only does not do justice to the texts, it doesn’t help solve the non-problem it is trying to solve.” – R. C. Sproul

Witness to History:

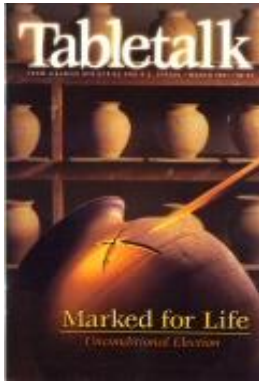
“Conditional Election robs God of His Sovereignty. God created the world so that He might rule over it in love and grace. Man was designed to honor, fear, and serve the Creator. Instead, man rebelled against God and set himself up as master of his own life and creator of his own destiny. But in sovereign, electing love, God provided a salvation and a Savior. *Conditional election means that Almighty God’s sovereignty is not absolute.* If God is not absolutely sovereign in salvation, He is not sovereign anyway.” – Iain Campbell

Electoral College:

“The doctrine of election... is a subset of predestination, which is a subset of God’s sovereignty. Teaching one doctrine requires embracing all the doctrines because of their inter-dependence. Election is not on an *a la carte* theological menu, but is embedded in a Biblical theology.” – Harry Reeder

One by One:

“This is the comfort, not the calamity, of the Biblical doctrine of election. By His sovereign grace, before the foundation of the world, God chose some unto everlasting life in Christ; provided in Christ the redemption necessary to cleanse them from their sins; then sent the Spirit to give them new hearts, thus enabling them to come to Christ by saving faith.” – Dr. Morton Smith



Tabletalk Special Issue

PREDESTINATION PROPONENTS

“Marked for Life”

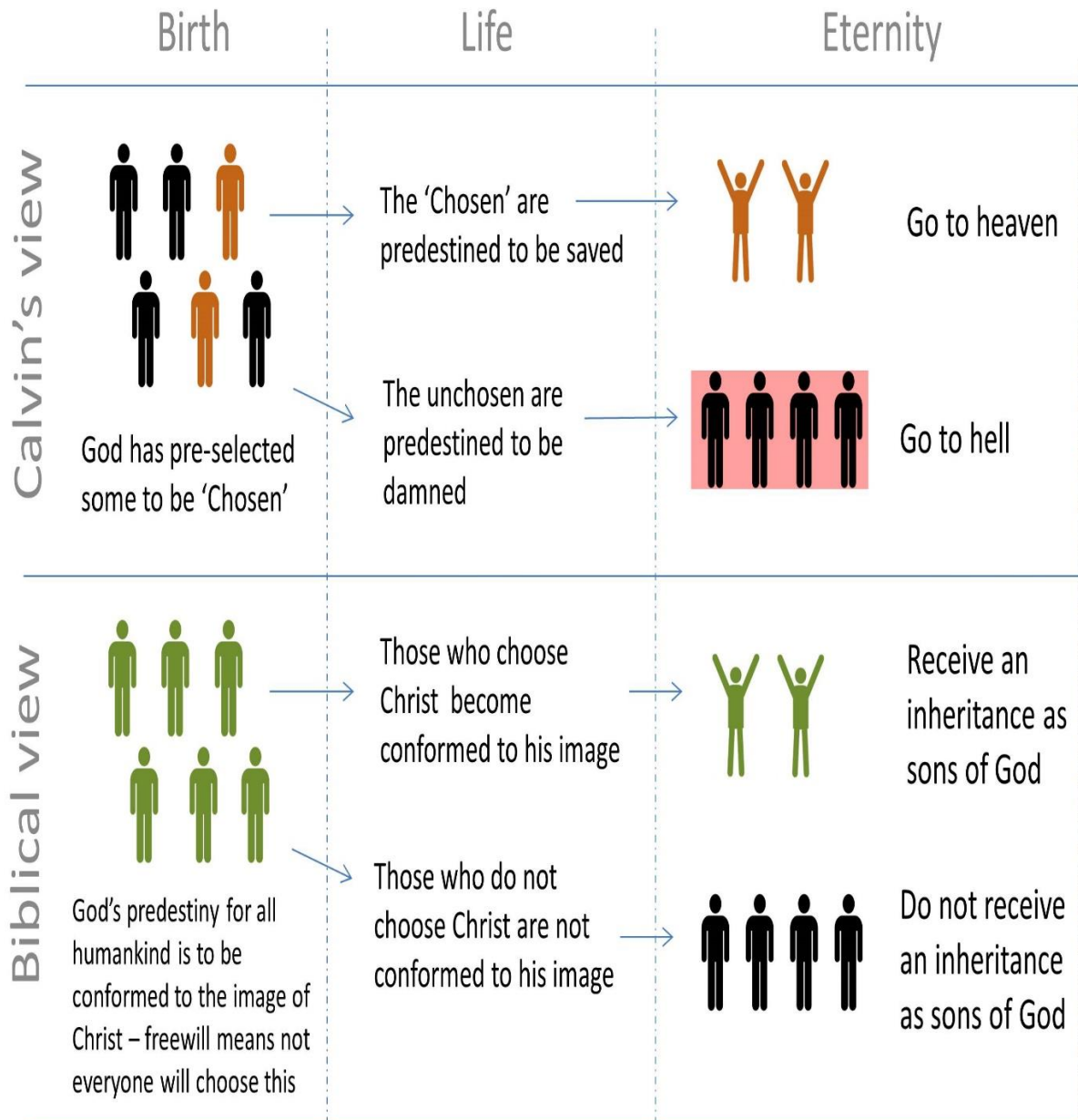
Front Cover – Just’ Cause!

“God still makes the soup. He wrote the recipe and mixes the ingredients. Unconditional election is simply another way of saying that God is the sovereign one, and that He alone is the ultimate cause of whatsoever comes pass. To be sure, He uses secondary causes: the faithful proclamation of the Word, the heartfelt prayers of the saints, the work of apologists and preachers, advertising, even the consciences of the yet-unregenerate elect...” – R. C. Sproul

Back Cover - What Difference Does It Make?

“If the Augustinian view of election is the Biblical view and if the Bible is true, then the doctrine of election is the truth of God and all who are “of the truth” have the duty to embrace it and proclaim it. On the other hand, **if the Augustinian/ Reformed view of election is not Biblical and/or not true, then it distorts the truth of God and should be repudiated and abandoned.**” – R. C. Sproul

Different Views on Predestination





THE RESTORED BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE



Providence in God's Redemptive Plan

Homer Hailey

In my former lecture, the word “providence” was defined as God’s foresight in which His infinite forethought enabled Him to create a universe that He could control through laws which express His will. This control includes both the inanimate and the animate worlds as well as man and the nations, both heathen and His own. And, by this control, He achieves His divine purpose.

It was also pointed out that because man was created a free being, subject to law, he is capable of making his own choices; that is, he can obey or disobey the law under which he is placed and can thereby enjoy or suffer the consequences of his actions. Since man can obey or disobey, God’s foresight and forethought had a plan for him if he should not sin (unrevealed) and a plan for his redemption should he sin (revealed). Therefore, the Bible is the revelation of God’s redemptive plan for sinful man and also of the overcoming and destruction of Satan who enticed man to sin. God’s providence in achieving the object of His plan is the topic of the present lecture.

Purpose

Providence implies purpose, for the exercise of foresight necessitates a plan of some sort in which forethought operates. The noun *prothesis*, from which our word *purpose* is translated, is defined as “a setting forth, plan, purpose, resolve, will”; the verb *protithēmi* is defined as to “plan, purpose to do something” (*Arndt & Gingrich*). The Scriptures clearly declare that, predetermined in His own mind even before the creation of the world and man, God had a plan or purpose (i.e. the setting of something before Him).

One of the clearest and most thorough presentations of predetermined purpose is found in Ephesians 1:3–14; However, time permits consideration of only a few points of this impressive passage. After his saying, “We have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (v. 7), Paul continues by speaking of God’s “making known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth; in him, I say, in whom we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will” (vv. 9–11).

Several points in the passage are pertinent to our theme: that which God purposed was an expression of His will, which remained a mystery—something unknown and unknowable until fulfilled or revealed by Him who so purposed—“unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times.” *Dispensation* is used here to designate God’s arrangement, or administration, of His redemptive plan for man, which was fulfilled and revealed in the “fulness of the times.” Also, the whole of His purpose, which involved heaven and earth, is summed up in Christ. The whole of the divine plan was “foreordained [predetermined] according to the purpose [a setting before one] of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will.” In short, His own will determined the entire plan.

This plan of God has now been revealed and preached in, and through, the gospel. Paul says that unto him was this grace given to preach the mystery to the Gentiles, “And to make all men see what is the dispensation [the arrangement or administration] of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places [supermundane spirit beings in a spiritual realm] might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God.” These had not been taken into the confidence of God in His plan for man’s redemption, but they were learning the full purpose as they beheld its now being fulfilled in Christ and the church “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:8–11). This eternal purpose which included the church and was fulfilled in Christ was God’s purpose or plan for man’s redemption, set before Him before time, somewhere in eternity.

Paul, further, says of God and His plan that He “saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before times eternal, but hath now been manifested by the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:9, 10). Obviously, this statement places the origin of the plan long ages ago before time began.

The fulfilling of the purpose was so certain that Paul could speak of it as though it were already consummated even as it lay a silent plan in the mind of God in eternity. Thus the apostle wrote to the Roman saints, “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). The “all things” are things that pertain to the gospel, and “the called” are the saved according to the redemptive plan of His own will and wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18–25). We must keep in mind that what Paul says in this and the following two verses must be interpreted from the viewpoint of what God saw as fulfilled in the plan which lay before Him. The apostle’s meaning may be illustrated by one who draws a house-plan. In the plan, he sees the house completed and each room with its furniture and furnishings completed as intended. However, when the plan is drawn, there is not a stick of lumber, a block, a brick, or a nail on the lot, and, perhaps, even the lot has not yet been provided. So, according to God’s purpose, Paul could say, “For whom he *foreknew*, he also *foreordained* to be *conformed* to the image of his son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren: and whom he foreordained, them he also *called*: and whom he called, them he also *justified*: and whom he justified, them he also *glorified*” (vv. 29, 30). This is not to say that God selected certain ones and rejected others on an arbitrary basis because Jesus explains and exclaims respectively, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 21:14), and “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye would not!*” (Matt. 23:37). Hence, man’s will determined the selection. Further, God would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4);

Therefore, the gospel was and continues to be preached to all men. The “called” of verse 30 are those who hear and heed the word. In conclusion, Paul is looking at the completed purpose from God’s point of view before the world was and sees it as if completed in eternity.

This position is further verified by Paul when he says, “He chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blemish before him in love: having foreordained us unto adoption as sons through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:4, 5). The conclusion is obvious that since the foreordained of God, whom He would choose and adopt, would be those who would choose to be in Christ, man’s will and choice must conform to God’s choice and will.

It should be noted that He chose us in Christ “before the foundation of the world.” This precise phrase occurs three times in the New Testament and refers to eternity, that period of duration before the cosmos [the orderly world] was brought into being. In His prayer to the Father, Jesus said, “For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24), i.e. in the period which extended back into eternity. And Peter saw Christ as Him “who was foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but was manifested at the end of the times [plural] for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:20). At some point in eternity, God foreknew what He would do in Christ to redeem man in Him and, in that foreknowledge, chose those who of their own will would choose to be His in Christ.

The expression, “from the foundation of the world,” also occurs several times in association with God’s plan or purpose. At the final judgment, Jesus says to those on His right hand, “Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). This eternal kingdom (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21), in which the saints share the glory of Christ (Rom. 8:17), has been in God’s eternal purpose from this point in eternity before time. John writes of the Lamb that has “been slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8, margin ASV) and also of those “whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 17:8). These expressions, “from before the foundation of the world” and “from the foundation of the world,” carry us back to the redemptive plan for man which God had before time and the world were.

This heaven-born plan of God was “a mystery” until fulfilled in Christ and revealed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles (Rom. 1:1, 2; 16:25–27; 1 Pet. 1:10–12), which was announced to the world through them (Eph. 1:9–11; 3:1–13).

When the scheme of redemption was fulfilled in Christ, it became the Holy Spirit’s work to reveal this purpose to all mankind. Jesus promised that the Spirit would bring to the apostles’ remembrance all that He had said unto them (John 14:26), and that He would guide them into all spiritual truth as He would declare the things that were to come (John 16:12, 13). Paul affirms that the mystery was made known unto him by revelation “in the Spirit” (Eph. 3:1–7), “for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God ... combining spiritual things with spiritual words” (1 Cor. 2:9–13). Thus, in God’s purpose, the three persons of the Godhead were involved: God purposed the redemptive plan, Jesus (the Word become flesh) fulfilled it, and the Holy Spirit through the apostles revealed it in its fulness.

God's Providential Control of His Creation

In order to accomplish and bring to consummation His eternal purpose, God must be able to control His universe—inanimate, animate, and moral. Divine foresight was exercised in the whole creation that He might control it through His laws without violating or invading the will of man, the moral creature. Time does not permit an adequate discussion of this great theme; therefore, a brief summary will have to suffice.

In his bewilderment over the evil that had befallen him, Job said some harsh things about God (e.g., Job 9:23, 24); more precisely, he sat in judgment on God and His operation of the world. Jehovah responded to Job's complaint by bringing before him an array of His inanimate and animate world and asking him a series of questions. First, the Lord asked questions involving nine categories of the inanimate world, but Job could answer none of these (Job 38:4–38). Second, He followed with questions concerning nine categories of the animate creation in regard to God's care for, and use of, these. Again, the patriarch completely failed the test (38:39–39:30).

In presenting this array of questions, Jehovah impressed upon Job the majesty of the creation and its Creator and showed him that there is purpose in all causes and effects, or consequences, in the creation. Jehovah so controls the inanimate world that He can provide for the animate creatures of earth. In all the experiences of life, man must recognize that he is a small unit in a vast, complex universe; that is, he may study to learn *what* God does, but he will never be in a position that allows him to judge *why* God does what He does. Man must also recognize that the God who created the universe also controls it, and that, in His providence, He is directing the whole toward the ultimate realization of an infinite and eternal purpose.

Providence in the Moral Realm

Another facet of our subject that must be considered is Jehovah's provision for His control of man, the moral creature, toward accomplishing His divine purpose. God made man of such a nature that He cannot force him to do anything, for free beings can be moved only by the exercise of moral suasion. And yet, throughout history, we see God using men and nations without violating the autonomy of free will. This we accept by faith based on the evidence of fact. Briefly, we point to His use of the Hebrew nation, who were His people, and the heathen nations whom He used and then destroyed.

The development of the Hebrew nation began with the call of Abraham, through whose seed the families and nations of earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3; 22:18). From Abraham's descendents, God selected Isaac and not Ishmael, Jacob and not Esau, and, from the twelve sons of Jacob, He selected Judah, not Reuben the first born. Jehovah used the providential events in the life of Joseph as His means to bring the family of Jacob down into Egypt (for excellent discussion of God's providence concerning Joseph, see J. W. McGarvy, *Sermons*, pp. 215–231.). When the family had become a nation, the Lord raised up Moses to deliver them out of Egypt. The story of the deliverance, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest of Canaan, the apostasies, the raising up of deliverers, the development of the nation into a kingdom, the apostasy of the kingdom, the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, and the return of the remnant are all too familiar to spend time here discussing them. In all of those events, we see the providence of God controlling, directing, and achieving His purpose in spite of the apostasies, rebellions, idolatry, and sins of the people. God never invaded or violated the sanctity of their will, and yet He so controlled His inanimate, animate, and moral creation that He brought the Saviour into the world through the seed of the woman by way of the seed of Abraham.

Besides His own nation, there were (and are) the heathen nations who refused to have God in their knowledge, and who were determined to destroy Israel and eradicate any knowledge of the true God. Jehovah had to control these so as to bring His son into the world through Israel according to this purpose. Jeremiah addresses Jehovah as “O King of the nations” (Jer. 10:7); Daniel says of Him that “He removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan. 2:21), and that “The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men” (4:17).

Jehovah claims that He raised up Assyria and brought them against Israel and Judah as the rod of His judgment, but He adds, “Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few” (Isa. 10:1–12). Therefore, God would use the Assyrian according to what he had made himself. After He had so used him, God would set His hand to destroy Assyria (v. 25). Also, He raised up the Chaldeans to punish Judah for her wickedness (Hab. 1:5–11) and then decreed five woes of judgment upon such a character as the Babylonian king (Hab. 2:4–19). Then, Cyrus of Medo-Persia was Jehovah’s anointed to overthrow Babylon and to allow the Jews to return to their homeland (Isa. 44:28–45:7), and Alexander of Macedonia, in turn, was God’s instrument to destroy Medo-Persia (Dan. 8). Even the Romans played an important role in God’s providential preparation for the preaching of the gospel and the destruction of the Jewish nation; but when the time came, Jesus judged Rome and brought it to an end (Rev. 19:11–21). How God did all this I do not know, but I know only that He did it according to His providential rule over His creation in order ultimately to redeem man.

Satan’s Defeat

In my former lecture, I discussed briefly the origin of Satan and his work in the realm of evil. God’s redemptive plan made provision for his defeat and ultimate destruction. When Jehovah said of the seed of the woman, “He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15), the doom of Satan was sealed. By comparison, the bruising of the seed’s heel in death would result in the crushing of Satan and his power. Though little is said in the Old Testament about Satan, he is set forth in the New Testament as a powerful spirit being, who wields great influence for evil in the world. In Isaiah’s grand description of the sacrifice of Jehovah’s Servant for the redemption of man, Jehovah says of the Servant, “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). This conflict between the Servant and the strong one who held the captives as spoils would result in the Servant’s triumphal gathering in of the wicked one’s spoils.

This conflict began in the wilderness immediately after Jesus’s baptism. Satan lost this first skirmish as Jesus was the complete victor (Matt. 4:1–11). In the exercise of divine power by the seventy whom Jesus sent before Him and to whom the demons were subject, Jesus saw ultimate victory as He said, “I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven,” for He had given them authority even “over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:18, 19). When charged by some that He was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, Jesus spoke a parable which apparently looks back to Isaiah’s statement, “When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from his his whole armor wherein he trusted, and *divideth his spoils*” (Luke 11:21, 22; cf. Matt. 12:29; italics mine, HH). Christ would bind Satan, the strong man, and then divide the spoils which he had held captive.

Just before His death, when Jesus ate the last supper with His disciples, He said to them, “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out” (John 12:31; see, also, 14:30; 16:11). The victory of Christ and the defeat of Satan were determined. In a symbolic picture, John described this great spiritual conflict between the forces of God and those of Satan under the figure of Michael and his angels’ warring against the dragon (Satan) and his angels. This is not a physical military war but a spiritual conflict, which extended from Eden to the cross. In the conflict, Satan and his angels were cast down to the earth (Rev. 12:7–9). The following statement of the great voice in heaven concerning the outcome indicates that this is the correct view of the passage, “Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, *and the authority of his Christ*” (v. 10; italics mine, HH). The authority of God’s Christ was not claimed until after the resurrection (Matt. 28:18), which demonstrated Satan’s defeat.

Through this victory, Christ had accomplished all for which He came. For Hebrews explains, “Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14, 15). And John says, “To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Paul affirmed that this was accomplished in the cross when he said, “Having despoiled the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it [the cross, v. 14]” (Col. 2:15).

Jesus bound Satan that He might divide the spoils with him; He brought him to nought that He might deliver all who through fear of death were subject to bondage. Thus He destroys the works of the devil in redeeming mankind. Saints can now overcome in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11), but the end of Satan occurs when the Lord returns and casts him into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. 20:10). The purpose will have been consummated when the devil is cast into the lake and the saints are ushered into the new heaven and new earth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us say that when God created the universe and man, He had in mind an “eternal purpose,” a plan for man’s redemption should he sin. In order to achieve that purpose, He must, of necessity, have exercised divine foresight and forethought in the creation so that He would be able to control His inanimate and animate creation and man and the nations of men. The history of the achievement of His purpose verifies the claim to His divine providence and rule in all realms.

Satan, the great enemy of God and man, must be overcome, defeated, and destroyed. He has been overcome, defeated, and bound, and it remains only for him to be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. This will come! God’s purpose will be fully achieved!

Providence in the Christian's Life

Homer Hailey

Although "Providence and the Problem of Evil" and "Providence in God's Redemptive Plan," which have been discussed, affect and touch the life of each of us, Providence in the Christian's Life is more personal and intimate. In this particular subject, Christians are prone to extremes: one sees no providence working in his life other than the natural processes of nature; another sees the hand of God in every minute detail of life. Even those of us who believe in God's providence find it difficult to say that this or that event or incident in life was a specific act of providence; yet I must believe that God's hand has been at work in my life, for there have been too many special occurrences for me to think otherwise.

Though we all have questions we would like to have discussed, I shall find it impossible, in the short time allotted, to examine many phases of the subject. Even if we had the time, there are many I could not answer. In considering what seems to me to be the most helpful portions of Scripture that offer a basis for each individual's study, I have selected two from which to point out Biblical teaching on the subject: the wise man who spoke in the book of Ecclesiastes and Jesus in Matthew 6. In my judgment, each of these deals with the providence in the individual's life. All that I know about God's operation in His world I have learned through what He has said; therefore, I will devote most of my time reading from what He has said on the subject.

Ecclesiastes

Some students of Ecclesiastes arrive at opposite views of the book. One finds it a book of pessimism; that is, nothing seems to be right in the world. Another finds it a book of optimism; that is, all is under the control of God, and He is encouraging His people. To me the book presents a strong, optimistic view of life. However, from a worldly viewpoint, it is quite pessimistic, for, of that which is earthly, he insists that "all is vanity and a striving after wind." But, in spite of this, optimism prevails, for all is in the hand of God. In other words, God stands out in every event as the One who is in control.

The word "God" occurs forty times in the Hebrew text, and once it is supplied even by the translators. This strongly indicates that God is the emphatic power in the writer's mind; for example, He is in the world of the individual and controls events and destinies of man for his good. The book deals with the present earth-life, for the phrase "under the sun" occurs twenty-nine times; "upon the earth," five times; and "under heaven," three times. This earth-life and all that pertains to it are transitory; in fact, "vanity" occurs thirty-two times (thirty-six, TWOT), and "vanities," four times. The word means transitory, fleeting, and, at times, empty.

The Search, chs. 1, 2. Without discussing the question of authorship, I must note that Solomon is definitely the character before the writer's mind in chapters 1 and 2. Early in the book, two questions are raised: "What profit hath a man of all his labor wherein he laboreth under the sun?" (1:3); and "What is it good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life?" (2:3). The first is answered immediately, "And there was no profit under the sun" (2:11); that is, there was nothing of happiness or pleasure that one could lay up for tomorrow, for he must find his enjoyment and fulness of life today. The second is answered in a number of conclusions reached by the wise man as he contemplates various aspects of life. This will be emphasized in the development of our study.

In his search to find out what profit a man has of all his labor under the sun and what it is good for a man to do all his life of vanity, Solomon began by searching out, through wisdom, all that is done under heaven. In the search, he acquired wisdom, only to discover that “in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (1:12–18). From wisdom, he turned to pleasure: building houses and planting gardens, gathering musicians and entertainers of all kinds. In the meantime, he accumulated great riches, silver and gold, and the treasures of kings. He had all the power that one could ask for; therefore, he was able to acquire and build whatever he desired. But, in the end, he had to confess, “Behold, all was vanity and a striving after the wind, and there was no profit under the sun” (2:11).

Time and purpose, and a Controlling Providence. The wise man proceeds by introducing a situation in the realm of creation that demands our recognition of providence, “For every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (3:1). This is followed by fourteen pairs of opposites, each having its own time in the scheme of things (3:2–7). Since a man lives under these times and seasons which man, as an individual or a nation, cannot alter or change, each must accept these and recognize a controlling power behind them. God has given to man the occupation or task (travail) of learning and acknowledging these so that he can live under them in such a world (v. 10); but, in his search, God says, “Yet so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end” (v. 11). All that man can know of either the beginning or the end and of the work that God is doing in the period in between is what God reveals to him.

In this same vein, the wise man continues, “I know that whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever [i.e., final]: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it; and God hath done it that man should fear before him” (v. 14). Since one cannot alter in anyway God’s purpose and plan or change the time of His action in that purpose, man must learn to “fear before him”; that is, reverence and trust Him and His providence.

Another problem in life that we must face is the existence of evil and its effect upon man (discussed briefly in the first lecture). The Preacher says, “And moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there” (3:16). The problem is that wickedness is like the forces of nature because the individual cannot control it, yet he must learn to live under its influence and look to God to remedy the situation. For this reason, the Preacher concludes, “I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work” (v. 17). One must look to God in His providence to deal with that which we cannot. But why does He allow such conditions to exist? “I said in my heart, It is because of the sons of men, that God may prove them, and that they may see that they themselves are but as beasts” (v. 18). The Preacher sees himself in a world which is so made by God that man cannot know His work from beginning to end, and in which God allows wickedness and injustice, although brought on by man, to dominate its people that they may be proved and tested thereby.

In pursuing further the principle of man’s inability to alter or change that which God has predetermined, the wise man says, “Consider the work of God: for who can make straight, which God hath made crooked?” (7:13). For a practical application of the principle, he says, “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yea, God hath made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out any thing that shall be after him” (v. 14). Inasmuch as one cannot change the order of God’s provision, how should he react to the various experiences of providence? The answer is to use them. Both adversity and prosperity usually come into each life at some time, or prosperity comes to one at the same time when adversity comes to another. When prosperity comes, rejoice; when adversity comes, use it as an

occasion to reflect, meditate, and learn. But, in either case, one does not know how God will use it or when change will come; each must look to and trust in the providence of God.

Of this and other things which we must pass over, the writer says, “All this have I proved in wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. That which is, is far off and exceeding deep; who can find it out? (7:23, 24). God intends for us to learn all that we can of His universe and then to use that knowledge of the world in which we have been placed, but man must realize the limitation of his ability to know and fathom the mysteries of God. So long as the scientist stays within the realm of the order as God created it, he can learn much of its secret workings; but when he attempts to invade the realm of the divine mysteries, he finds himself in trouble.

As a final word on the subject of man’s inability to find out all that God is doing behind the scene, the following statement is quite explicit, “When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth . . . then I beheld all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because however much a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea moreover, though a wise man think to know it, yet he shall not be able to find it” (8:16, 17). Giving heed to this, the scientists of today could save the taxpayers billions of dollars in not probing the universe for answers that either cannot be found or can be found simply by reading the Scriptures. One’s acceptance of the principle of God’s providence and providential working in His universe does not demand that he be able to explain it, for he cannot; but one must accept it as a matter of faith by resting on what God has said. The writer continues, “For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the righteous, and the wise, and their works *are in the hand of God*; whether it be love or hatred, man knoweth it not; all is before them” (9:1). The love and hatred demonstrated by man will affect God’s action in the world. Not knowing all the forces involved (prompted either by love or hatred) and not knowing what God is doing in the background, I can be content with the assurance that these are “in the hand of God.” So long as I recognize this, I shall not worry but find peace; for I know that He can, and will, handle the matter.

Conclusions Reached. The Preacher has pointed out that there are times and seasons and a purpose under heaven which man is subject to and cannot control. Neither can man know the beginning or end of matters which God controls, but he must recognize that all is in His hand. What conclusions does he reach in relation to what is “good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their life?” Let us learn from the following.

The preacher looks upon good (enjoyment) as the gift of God, for he asserts, “There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God” (2:24). It is certainly not inconsistent with God’s will that we enjoy the fruits of our labor, for the ability to enjoy these is from the hand of God. God’s providence makes this possible. Further, the writer even traces the sinner’s misery to God, “For to the man that pleaseth him God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that pleaseth God. This also [the business of travail to gather and to heap up] is vanity and a striving after wind” (v. 26). This acknowledges the providence of God in the life of both the one who pleases God and the sinner; He controls the portion of each in life according to the character which the man has developed, without controlling his will. The ability to enjoy life “is the gift of God” (v. 13).

The days of one’s life in which to enjoy the good things of God’s beneficence are also a gift from God. Note the place of *God* in the following passage, “Behold that which I have seen to be good and to be comely is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labor, wherein he laboreth under the sun, all the days of his life which God hath given him: for this is his portion. Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat

thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart” (5:18–20). God gives one his days; God gives him riches and wealth; and God answers one in the joy of his heart so that he does not remember the bad days of life. But there are those to whom God does not give this power to enjoy that which they possess, “but an alien eateth it” (6:1, 2). Providence plays a role in the life of each individual, the good or the evil, whether or not he acknowledges it.

Death closes man’s relationship to this life; he has no more a portion or part in anything that is done “under the sun” (9:4–6); therefore, the writer gives a closing exhortation concerning this life on earth. The exhortation is set forth in four imperatives: (1) “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart”; that is, enjoy the present life with its blessings but within the bounds of divine moral decorum, “for God hath already accepted they works,” the works of the individual through which God has provided the blessings. (2) “Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack oil.” This is a further admonition to enjoy the good things of God’s provision. The white garments are festive robes, and the oil rejoices the heart (Prov. 27:9). This in no way advocates a luxurious sensualism but a joyous life before God. (3) “Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life of vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all thy days of vanity: for that is thy portion in life, and in thy labor wherein thou laborest under the sun.” Life is fleeting and transitory; therefore, find joy in the wife of one’s love, not in putting away and seeking another. Find joy in the benefits of one’s labor, for this is according to God’s will. (4) And, finally, find joy in doing your best in every labor of life, physical and spiritual, for the author encourages, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest” (9:7–10). Fulfill God’s law of work by doing with your might the task at hand, for thereby God provides for a full and complete life here. Let each one put his trust in God and His providence, work with his might, and enjoy to the full the riches of His blessings.

The final conclusion announced by the Preacher is that God will be the final judge of our response to His will and providence, “This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or evil” (12:13, 14).

Jesus and New Testament Teaching

There is probably no passage in the New Testament that gives greater emphasis to the providence of God in the individual life than Matthew 6. The word “Father” occurs twelve times in the chapter; the word “God” occurs twice. This frequent occurrence of these terms for Deity focuses attention on the Father and His concern for His own, and further, His ability to act on their behalf.

In giving to the disciples a model for their praying, the Lord taught them to ask, “Give us this day our daily bread,” i.e. the physical necessities of life, not spiritual. Jesus’ teaching concerning anxiety in verses 25–34 will fully establish this view. Where the KJV translators employ the word “thought”—take thought, give thought, etc., the ASV translates the Greek with the word “anxious.” The noun *merimna* means anxiety, worry, or care. In explaining to His disciples the meaning of the Parable of the Sower, Jesus said of that which was sown among the thorns, “This is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world ... choke [s] out the word” (Matt. 13:22). Mark uses the plural, “the cares [worries] of the world” (4:19); Luke says, “the cares [worries] of this life” (Luke 8:14). Anxieties or worries of the world and of life choke out the word so that the individual fails to develop fully as a Christian.

The verb *merimnaō* means to have anxiety, to be anxious, or to be unduly concerned. This word, occurring six times in verses 19–34, emphasizes Jesus’ concern for His disciples’ worry about matters of everyday life and points them to the Father who makes provision for all their necessities. He begins with the command, “Be not anxious,” then continues by specifying the things about which they are not to worry—food, drink, and clothing, for the essential thing is the life (v. 25). The Lord uses three illustrations to emphasize His point: (1) “The birds of the heaven ... they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not of much more value than they?” (v. 26). Surely, if God feeds these, and Jesus says that He does, will He not provide for His children? (2) “And which of you by being anxious [by worrying] can add one cubit unto the measure of his life?” (v. 27). Jesus does not refer to the heightening of one’s stature but to the extension of one’s life, for an additional foot and a half on some would be ridiculous. Worry tends to shorten rather than to lengthen life. (3) And concerning worry about raiment, He says, “Consider the lillies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (vv. 28, 29). Worry provides none of the essentials of life; and since it is forbidden by the Lord, anxiety about these necessities of life is sin, i.e. a form of unbelief.

The Lord summarizes His discussion on worry by pointing out that the Gentiles (unbelievers) may seek after these things by placing undue emphasis on them, but you are not to do so, “for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (v. 32). Jesus promises the disciples who seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness that “all these things shall be added unto you” (v. 33); the Father just throws these things in as part of the blessings which He bestows. And, finally, do not worry about the morrow; for when tomorrow comes, there will be its needs to be concerned about, and God will take care of them as He does today. Jesus is giving His endorsement and guarantee to the things preached by Koheleth in Ecclesiastes and even is enlarging upon them.

Thus, according to Jesus, the things about which we worry and for which we become anxious and distracted are things that pertain to the physical life—food, drink, raiment, social obligations, and the like. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit said, “In nothing be anxious; but in everything”—those things just mentioned about which we become anxious—“by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Phil. 4:6). This most certainly teaches that one may pray about the material necessities of life as well as about the spiritual; and since the provision of these things depends on work (1 Thess. 4:11, 12; 2 Thess. 3:6–12), one can and should pray about his work, job, or business. And though the kingdom must come first and these second, we should pray about both not neglect either. Peter adds his word to the matter of worry, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:6, 7).

Conclusion

Yes, God’s providence works in the life of each individual! In creating the world and man, He made provision so to control both that He could answer the petitions of His saints and direct the whole to the consummating of an ultimate purpose. Let us believe in that providence and see God’s hand in all the affairs of life—international, national, social, religious, and individual. Such a belief will give meaning to life!²⁰

²⁰ Hailey, H. (1987). [Providence in God’s Redemptive Plan](#). In M. D. Curry (Ed.), *Praise, Prayer and Providence* (pp. 148–165). Temple Terrace, FL: Florida College Bookstore.

PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING DIVINE PROVIDENCE

By Apologetics Press

It is very important that a consideration be given to certain principles that are involved in the operation of divine providence. Remember that any concept of providence one chooses to believe must be consistent with the teaching of the Bible in general.

(1) **God never operates providentially in any way that is in conflict with His nature or His revealed will.** First, since God is holy (Isaiah 6:3) and righteous (Psalm 89:14), His acts of providence always will be consistent with these traits. For instance, God never tempts people to do evil (James 1:13-14), and thus one never could conclude that the Lord has influenced men providentially to do that which is wrong. Such passages as Romans 9:17, where Jehovah “raised up” Pharaoh, must be interpreted in this light. Second, providence is implemented in harmony with Heaven’s will as revealed in the Scriptures. This means, to cite just one example, that since God has revealed the conditions for the remission of alien sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), one never should surmise that providence works in saving him in some other fashion. This is a most crucial point.

(2) **Divine providence does not negate man’s freedom of will.** As an amplification of the foregoing proposition, it must be stressed that providence never will overthrow one’s personal will power. Contrary to the theological determinism of Augustine and Calvin (i.e., the notion that man is so depraved in sin that he has lost his power of choice), the Bible teaches the freedom of the human will (Matthew 23:37; John 5:39-40; Revelation 22:17). By His providence, therefore, God will not coerce a person to do either evil or good, but He can use people to accomplish the divine purpose in either capacity. Note these examples: (a) Because the wicked Assyrian “had it in his heart to destroy,” Jehovah used him as an instrument of wrath upon ancient Israel (cf. Isaiah 10:5-7). (b) The Chaldeans were a “bitter and hasty nation,” marching across the Earth to possess dwelling places not theirs. They were terrible, dreadful, and violent; yet, God used them to punish His rebellious people. The Lord said of His purpose to bring Babylon against Judah, “I am working a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you” (cf. Habakkuk 1:5-11). God said, “I am doing this!” Yet He used those who were disposed to evil to accomplish the task. (c) Again, to use the example of Pharaoh, when that base monarch decided to “harden his heart” and rebel against God (Exodus 8:15; 9:34), the Lord determined to use him and so said, “for this cause have I made thee [Pharaoh] to stand, to show thee my power, and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Exodus 9:16). The decisiveness of that contest has echoed across thirty-five centuries of history! (d) Near the end of Jesus’ ministry, the Jewish rulers gathered to consider the fate of the Lord. On this occasion, Caiaphas, the high priest that year, said to them: “Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” The inspired apostle John commented upon this saying, “Now this he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad” (John 11:49-52). Hendriksen has noted that this cannot mean that Caiaphas was forced to say what he did. He said what he wanted to say, and the responsibility for the wicked meaning which his words conveyed remains entirely his own. Yet, in God’s wonderful providence, the choice of words was so directed that these same words were capable of expressing the gist of God’s glorious plan of salvation.... This passage affords a glimpse into the mystery of the wonderful relationship between the divine counsel and providence, on the one hand, and the exercise of human responsibility, on the other (1954, 2:164). (e) Similarly, as we shall note more precisely presently, the Lord may open doors of opportunity for the voluntary accomplishment of His will, but men must use their volitional faculties and step through (cf. Acts 14:27)!

(3) **The providential must be distinguished from the miraculous.** A miracle is God’s working on a plain that is above that of natural law; providence is His utilization of natural law. In a miracle, the Lord works directly; in providence, He operates indirectly, employing means to accomplish the end. A writer of the past century has

captured the essence of this quite well: Providence [is] the conduct and direction of the several parts of the universe by a superior intelligent Being. The notion of a providence is founded upon this truth, that the Creator has not so fixed and ascertained the laws of nature, not so connected the chain of second causes, as to leave the world to itself, but that he still preserves the reins in his own hands, and occasionally intervenes, alters, restrains, enforces, suspends, etc., those laws by a particular providence (Watson, 1881, p. 863). Let us note several instances of God's operation by the miraculous on the one hand, and by providential means on the other. (a) Before Mary was sexually intimate with Joseph, and so while yet a virgin, she "was found with child of the Holy Spirit" and subsequently gave birth to baby Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1: 30-37). The virgin birth was the fulfillment of Isaiah's "sign" (Isaiah 7:14), and indeed was a miracle (Elkins, 1977, pp. 250ff.). The impregnation of Mary was a supernatural act as a result of God's direct power. By way of contrast, Hannah, of Old Testament fame, whose womb had been "shut up" (1 Samuel 1:6), prayed fervently to Jehovah requesting a son, whom she then promised to give to the Lord all the days of his life. Scripture says that "Jehovah remembered" Hannah and when Elkanah her husband "knew her" [a biblical term for sexual union], she conceived and brought forth a son (1 Samuel 1:19-20). Here, by means of the law of procreation, God intervened and sent a child into the world a child who grew up to become the great prophet, Samuel. And so, two children were sent into the world—the one a prophet by means of providence and the other, God's Son, by means of a miracle! (b) In the reign of king Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came against all the fortified cities of Judah and conquered them (Isaiah 36:1). The pagan monarch's army came right to the northwestern edge of Jerusalem where, according to Sennacherib's Annals, he imprisoned Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage." The king of Judah sought deliverance from the Lord. Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah promised to deal with the heathen invaders. Here is how He did it. In one night's time, "the messenger of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when the men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies" (Isaiah 37:36). God destroyed the Assyrian host via a devastating miracle. On the other hand, and no less remarkably, of Sennacherib Jehovah said: "Behold I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear tidings, and shall return unto his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land" (Isaiah 37:7). The king did return to his homeland where, while he was worshipping in the house of a false god, "his sons smote him with the sword" (37:38). That's providence!* (c) When Jesus and His disciples were caught in a violent storm on the Sea of Galilee, the Lord "rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm" (Matthew 8:26). Here, deity controlled the weather miraculously. In another instance centuries earlier, after Israel had suffered a divinely caused drought for three-and-one-half years, Elijah prayed and Jehovah sent rain. First, there came a little cloud from out over the Mediterranean Sea that appeared to be about the size of a man's hand; then, "the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain" (1 Kings 18:44-45; cf. James 5:16-18). That, of course, is the way rain always comes to Palestine, but in this instance God was directing the elements of the weather providentially. And it might be noted in this connection that this was a wonderful demonstration of Jehovah's great power over Baal, a pagan deity who was worshipped as "the storm god" (Frank, 1975, p. 52). There is, therefore, a difference between miracles and providence.

(4) In providence, God works behind the scenes. A miracle, from the very nature of the case, is designed to be demonstrable. It is an open, exceedingly dramatic event. Even the enemies of Christianity could not deny the powerful signs performed by the apostles of Jesus (cf. Acts 4:14-16). Providence, however, is quite different. I sometimes say that providence is a "provable/non-provable" proposition. On the surface, that sounds like a contradiction, but it is not since I am using the terms "provable" and "nonprovable" in two different senses. Providence is provable. That is, we know that God works in this fashion, because the Bible so plainly teaches it; it is a fundamental Bible truth affirmed from beginning to end. However, providence is non-provable in the sense that no person can point to particular circumstances of his or her life and confidently assert, "I know that this was the providential intervention of God at work!" It very well may have been, but there is no way to document one's subjective feelings about an event. It is like prayer. We are confident that God answers prayer, for the Bible positively declares it; but subjective assertions regarding prayer prove nothing. Deceived people constantly are claiming that they have petitioned the virgin Mary or some "saint" and have been answered, but their claim is

meaningless. * Compare also the death of king Ahab as an example of providence in action (1 Kings 21:19; 22:30-38). So, while it is true that God does work in the lives of men, they frequently are unaware of it. We may suspect it, believe it, hope it to be the case, and even act in such a way as to accommodate it; but, in the final analysis, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Let us note some examples that may prove helpful. (a) Joseph and his brethren certainly were instruments in the providential hand of God “to preserve [the] life” of the Hebrew nation, as Genesis 45:4ff. reveals clearly. Yet, it is certain that those brethren were unaware of this fact, and there is no reason to believe that Joseph understood the matter in his earlier years. (b) Jehovah used Cyrus, the Persian king, to deliver the kingdom of Judah from Babylonian captivity (2 Chronicles 36:22-23). Of that king, God said: “I will gird thee, though thou has not known me” (Isaiah 45:5). (c) There certainly is no doubt in the mind of the serious Bible student that Esther, the queen-wife of Ahasuerus, was a vessel used of God in saving the lives of those Jews threatened by the wicked Haman. However, at the time Mordecai even surmised, “And who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). (d) Onesimus was a slave who had run away from his master, Philemon. Having made his way to Rome, he came into contact with the apostle Paul, who converted him to Christ (Philemon 10). Sometime later, the apostle sent this slave home, urging Philemon to receive him as a beloved brother. In this connection, Paul says: “For perhaps [Greek, *tacha*, “possibly”] he was therefore parted from thee for a season, that thou shouldest have him forever” (Philemon 15). Paul sees the possibility of providence here, but not even he, though inspired, knew for sure. Lenski is right on target: “Paul says ‘perhaps,’ for God’s providential purposes are veiled; even Paul can speak of them only tentatively” (1961, p. 966).

THE SCOPE OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE From the vastness of the entire Universe, to the very hairs of one’s head, the providential interest of the Lord is manifested. Let us illustrate the scope of His majestic concern. (1) The Universe. In a grand exaltation of Christ, the writer of Hebrews declared that the Savior is “upholding all things [i.e., the entire Universe—WJ] by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3). Moreover, “in him all things consist [Greek, *sunistemi* “stand together”]” (Colossians 1:17). “Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature” (Robertson, 1931, 4:479). (2) The forces of nature. God is in control of the forces of nature. He maintains the continuity of the seasons (Genesis 8:22), and He “covers the heavens with clouds...prepares rain for the earth...makes grass to grow upon the mountains” (Psalms 147:8). He controls the Sun and stars (Job 9:7), “by his breath ice is given” (Job 37:10), “he gives snow like wool; he scatters the hoar-frost like ashes. He casts forth his ice like morsel; who can stand before his cold? He sends out his work, and melts them; he causes his wind to blow, and the waters to flow” (Psalm 147:16-18), and “he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons” (Acts 14:17). (3) The animal creatures. Since the life of every living thing is in the hand of God (Job 12:10), one is not surprised to learn that God maintains and uses His animal creation. Though animals neither sow, nor reap, nor gather barns, God feeds them (Matthew 6:26). He “gives to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry” (Psalm 147:9); indeed, “the young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God” (Psalm 104:21). Not even a bird falls to the earth except by the Father’s will (Matthew 10:29). God not only exercises a general providence over the animal kingdom, but can employ His creatures in a special way as well. For example, He provided a “ram caught in the thicket by his horns” for Abraham (Genesis 22:13), and sent quails into the bread brought by ravens (1 Kings 17:6). The Lord sent fiery serpents to bite the Israelites (Numbers 21:6), sent she-bears to punish the lads of Bethel (2 Kings 2:23-24), and used a lion to slay a disobedient young prophet (1 Kings 13:24ff.), yet shut the lions’ mouths to protect Daniel (Daniel 6:22). These cases were not mere poetical references; rather, they were actual historical cases. (4) God and the nations. Since the fall of man, Almighty God has been working a plan designed to effect the redemption of sinful humanity. This “scheme of redemption” operated in view of the first coming of Christ, and will be culminated by the Second Coming of the Lord. To implement His purposes, God has worked providentially among the nations of the world. He is “ruler over the nations” (Psalm 22:28). He rules in the kingdoms of men, setting over them whomever He will (Daniel 4:17), removing kings and setting them up (Daniel 2:21). He can elevate a “Daniel” or a Joseph” providentially to power (Daniel 2:48; Genesis 41:41; 45:9), or drive a Nebuchadnezzar from the throne (Daniel 4:28ff.). (5) *Special providence for the people of God.* Does the person who is devoted to serving the Creator have any promise of

providential advantage in this world? He certainly does! While it is true to say that God sends His rains upon the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), it is not to the alien, but to the saint that inspiration promises: "And my God shall supply every need of yours according to his riches" (Philippians 4:19). It must be pointed out, of course, that this most assuredly does not mean that one's fidelity to the Lord can be measured in terms of material prosperity. The book of Job reveals that even the righteous can suffer deprivation and, by way of contrast, sometimes the tents of robbers do prosper (Job 12:6; cf. Psalm 73).

This, however, does not negate the truth that providence operates in a special way for the children of Jehovah. Both history and clear biblical statements establish this. Space will allow us only a few examples. (a) In the Old Testament era, three times each year male Jews were required to "appear before the Lord in Jerusalem" to celebrate certain feasts. In connection therewith, God promised, "neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou goest up to appear before Jehovah thy God three times in the year" (Exodus 34:23). Thomas Horne observed that "it is a well known fact that the Jews constantly attended these ceremonies without any fear of danger, and that their most vigilant enemies never invaded or injured them during these sacred seasons" (1841, 2:122). Adam Clarke wrote: What a manifest proof was this of the power and particular providence of God! How easy would it have been for the surrounding nations to have taken possession of the whole Israelitish land, with all their fenced cities, when there were none left to protect them but women and children! Was not this a standing proof of the Divine origin of their religion, and a barrier which no deistical mind could possibly surmount! (n.d., 1:477, emp. in orig.).

(b) No study of providence would be complete without a reference to the Old Testament narratives concerning Joseph and Esther. I will not attempt to discuss those cases here since they are masterfully treated in that volume simply called Sermons, by the late, great J.W. McGarvey. In a magnificent way, McGarvey demonstrated how the special providence of the Lord was wrought in the lives of Joseph and Esther.

(c) The law of Moses demanded that every seventh year and every fiftieth year be observed as sabbatical years. In these years, the Israelites were neither to sow nor to reap. How were they to survive in these periods when the land was enjoying its rest (cf. Leviticus 25)? Especially would this seem to be a critical problem when, at the time of Jubilee (the fiftieth year), the land would have to go unattended for both the forty-ninth and fiftieth years! Well, God promised that in such circumstances He would give them a three-year crop in one year (Leviticus 25:20-21). Jehovah thus challenged them to trust His providence! Sadly, however, they did not and so had to suffer for it (2 Chronicles 36:21). Oh, how we rob ourselves when we exercise weak faith!

(d) Of the numerous instances of providence found in the inspiring life of the peerless apostle Paul, one will illustrate our point. While on this third missionary trip, Paul, from Corinth in Greece, penned his epistle to the Romans (Acts 20:2; Romans 16:23; Acts 18:7). In Romans 1:9-10 the apostle mentioned that he continually made request (a present tense participle) that he "may come unto you in joy through the will of God" (Romans 15:30-32). God will answer that prayer in His own providential way! Note the following sequence of events: 1. Paul returns to Jerusalem where he is arrested for allegedly defiling the temple (Acts 21:28); in the night, the Lord tells him that he must bear witness at Rome (23:11). 2. To save his life from the Jewish mob, the Roman leaders have Paul taken to Caesarea by night (23:31ff.). 3. Here he is imprisoned for two years (24:27). Finally, exercising his right as a Roman citizen, he appeals to Caesar (25:11). 4. In the early autumn of A.D. 60, he is put on a ship for Rome (27:1). 5. In route, they are shipwrecked and all hope of being saved from the disaster is lost (27:20). 6. In the night, an angel appears to Paul and promises, "thou must stand before Caesar" (27:24). 7. The following spring, safe and sound, Paul and company arrive in Rome (28:16). Prayers answered! Providence effected! (e) We do not have the space for the study of such rich passages as: "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13), or "And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). These and others thrill our hearts with glimpses of the Lord's wonderful providence.

CONCLUSION - Belief in providence determines many of the basic attitudes of true piety. The knowledge that God watches and works in our lives teaches us to wait on Him in faithfulness, humility, and patience for vindication and deliverance (Psalms 37; 40:13ff.; James 5:7ff.). – APOLOGETICS PRESS

The Theology of Election

While Arminians and Calvinists share much common ground, there are major points of difference. Nothing calls attention to that difference like a study of decrees and election. My plan in this chapter is first to survey Calvinistic and Arminian thought on decrees and election. I will deal with the main concepts that are involved in treating these subjects. I will show what I consider to be problems in Calvinistic thought, and then I will build a case for the Arminian position on these subjects. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will show what I believe to be the proper interpretation of the passages that Calvinists use to support unconditional election. In Chapter 5, I will give the biblical support for conditional election.

THE CALVINISTIC VIEW OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

Unconditional election says that God, in eternity past, chose or elected certain ones from the fallen race of men for salvation. This election was in no way related to God's foreknowledge of faith on the part of the individual. Those who were thus elected will in due time be saved. God has provided the death and righteousness of Christ for their justification. In the course of time, those who have been chosen will be called. This call is an irresistible call (or an effectual call). It cannot fail to result in saving faith. This salvation is an absolute gift. Man did not in any way do anything to merit it or receive it. The elect are in no way responsible for having faith. That faith is theirs as an absolute gift of God.

THE ORDER OF DECREES IN CALVINISM

Millard Erickson explains the wording for the decrees regarding salvation as follows:

SUPRALAPSARIANISM

1. The decree to save (elect) some and reprobate others.
2. The decree to create both the elect and the reprobate.
3. The decree to permit the fall of both the elect and the reprobate.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

INFRALAPSARIANISM

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to elect some and reprobate others.
4. The decree to provide salvation only for the elect.

SUBLAPSARIANISM

1. The decree to create human beings.
2. The decree to permit the fall.
3. The decree to provide salvation sufficient for all.
4. The decree to save some and reprobate others.

Most Classical Calvinists are Infralapsarian. Supralapsarianism, in making the decree to elect some and to reprobate others precede the decree to create, is sometimes referred to as Hyper-Calvinism. While in a minority, Supralapsarians have been accepted among Classical Calvinists. Many theologians do not list Sublapsarianism as a separate category. The particular significance of Sublapsarianism is that, in making the decree to provide atonement to precede the decree to elect, it takes the position of unlimited atonement—thus, four-point Calvinism. All of the above approaches to decrees are in agreement on unconditional election.

CALVINISM, DETERMINISM, AND FREE WILL

I must confess that it is not simple to answer the question, Do Calvinists believe in free will? Some seem to reject the concept of free will. Others claim to believe in free will. Then there is the problem of how they define free will. In order to get a clearer picture of how Calvinists deal with the concept of free will, we must first examine their approach to determinism.

THE QUESTION OF DETERMINISM IN CALVINISM

There are various forms of determinism. Our concern is with theistic determinism. Norman Geisler explains that, according to theistic determinism, every event, including human conduct, is determined or caused by God. Jonathan Edwards exemplified this view, contending that “free will or self-determinism contradicted the sovereignty of God. If God is truly in control of all things, no one could act contrary to his will, which is what self-determinism must hold. Hence, for God to be sovereign he must cause every event, be it human or otherwise.” J. A. Crabtree defines divine determinists as those who believe that “every aspect of everything that occurs in the whole of reality is ultimately caused and determined by God.”⁴ John S. Feinberg points out that “the fundamental tenet of determinism (and the various forms of Calvinism are forms of determinism) is that for everything that happens, in the light of prevailing conditions, the agent could not have done other than he did. For determinists, there are always sufficient conditions that decisively incline the agent’s will to choose one option or another.”

These definitions of determinism bring up the question: “What about the scope of determinism?” Let us look now at how Calvinists deal with this problem.

THE SCOPE OF DETERMINISM

The Whole of Created Reality (Unlimited Determinism)

It is obvious that Jonathan Edwards would take his stand with those who make the scope of determinism coextensive with the whole of reality. Gordon H. Clark makes divine determination cover everything, including the sinful acts of men. In commenting on Proverbs 21:1 and Ezra 7:6, he argues that God determines all policies and decisions of governments: “God controls all governmental policies and decisions. Not only did God cause Pharaoh to hate the Israelites, he caused Cyrus to send the captives back to build Jerusalem. He also caused Hitler to march into Russia and he caused Johnson to escalate a war in Vietnam. God turns the mind of a ruler in whatever direction he wants to.” In commenting on the action of Joseph’s brothers when they sold him into slavery, Clark remarks that, if Joseph’s brothers had murdered him as they had contemplated, “then God would have been mistaken. The sale had to take place. Does this mean

that God foreordained sinful acts? Well, it certainly means that these acts were certain and determined from all eternity. It means that the brothers could not have done otherwise.”⁷

Most Calvinists who make determinism coextensive with the whole of reality are not looking for opportunities to make statements like those that Clark makes. If they had to comment, they would try to soften their remarks. Yet they cannot deny what Clark said.

Soteriology (Limited Determinism)

Richard A. Muller gives a different perspective on determinism than Clark gives. He argues that, contrary to Arminian allegations, Calvin’s and other Reformed theologians’ use of biblical examples of divine determination in their arguments for predestination does not indicate determinism of all actions. This, he argues, confuses philosophy with soteriology—the latter being the true debate between Arminians and Calvinists. Muller contends that the biblical examples Reformed theologians used historically pointed more toward the bondage of the human will to sin, the resultant inability to choose salvation, and the necessity of grace in salvation. This is far from asserting that God determines all events—especially individual sins. The view that God predetermined moral acts, Muller explains, is as far from the Reformed view as saying that God determined the fall of Adam without regard to Adam’s will to sin.

The divine ordination of all things is not only consistent with human freedom; it makes human freedom possible. As J. S. K. Reid has argued of Calvin’s theology, the divine determination so belongs to the ultimate order of being that it cannot be understood as a philosophical determinism in and for the temporal order of being: human responsibility is assumed and God is not the author of sin. This overarching providential determination (which includes the divine ordination of and concurrence in freedom and contingency) is, moreover, distinct from predestination is the specific ordination of some to salvation, granting the inability of human beings to save themselves. Again; this is not a matter of philosophical determinism, but of soteriology.

Muller also argues that, according to Reformed theology, some events are contingent, “having a ‘cause that by its nature could have acted differently.’” Other events result from “divine persuasion,” and others result from “human free agency or deliberation.” According to Muller, traditional Reformed thinkers said simply that “the beginning of the redeemed life is solely the work of God.”

Thus, they posited a distinction between “the general decree of providence that establishes all things, whether necessary, contingent, or free, and the special decree of predestination that establishes salvation by grace alone.” Thus, he contends, the traditional Reformed position avoids “a rigid metaphysical determinism of all human actions, a form of necessitarianism (which was never Reformed doctrine in any case). Predestination regards only salvation, not “a determinism of all human actions.”

Muller further cites the sixteenth-century strict Calvinist, William Perkins: “Human beings move about with a natural freedom, can eat and drink; they can also exercise their humanity freely in the arts, trades... they can practice ‘civil virtue, justice, temperance, liberality, chastity’; and they may freely exercise the ecclesiastical duties of outward worship.”

Muller should not think it strange when Arminians interpret Calvin and other Reformed theologians to mean that “predestination indicates ‘a divine determination of all human actions.’” Well known Calvinists interpret divine determination to be coextensive with the whole of reality. Calvinists as well as Arminians need to be aware that there is not unanimous agreement among Calvinists on this point.

The Question of Free will in Calvinism

It is not a simple matter to find out where Calvinists stand on the subject of free will. It is denied, affirmed, defined, and ignored.

The Denial of Free will

In a chapter entitled “Free Will,” Clark launches an attack on the concept of free will for human beings. One clear statement is found in connection with a comment on Ephesians 1:11. He comments, “This verse states in particular that God works our own willing. It is clear therefore that man’s will is not free, but is directed by the working of God.”

R. K. McGregor Wright leaves no doubt where he stands on the question of free will. He comments, “The Arminian form of the freewill theory is behind every important issue in evangelical apologetics today. However unpopular and threatening this type of probing may be, evangelical freewillism cannot be allowed to remain unquestioned. Too much is at stake.”

The Acceptance of Free will

J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., remarks that to deny free will constitutes “purely arbitrary philosophical dogmatism, entirely contrary to reasonable evidence and to the biblical view.” He argues that there are no biblical, philosophical, or psychological reasons for believing “that a personal being may be free to choose between certain motives, and having chosen, is personally responsible for his choice. If God is angry with sin, then it follows that the sinner is blameworthy, cosmically, ultimately, absolutely.” In support of his position, Buswell points out that “the answer to question thirteen of the Westminster Shorter Catechism tells us, ‘Our first parents, being left to the freedom of their own will, fell from the estate wherein they were created by sinning against God.’ ” The Westminster Standards, he states, “repeatedly and emphatically answer the question of the possibility of free will in the affirmative.”¹⁴

The Acceptance of Freedom, but Unclear About Free will

It is hard to see where Boettner stands on the issue of free will. He comments: “Human nature since the fall retains its constitutional faculties of reason, conscience and free agency, and hence man continues to be a responsible moral agent.” Later in his book where he deals with “Objections Commonly Urged Against the Reformed Doctrine of Predestination” he explains what he means by free agency and foreordination. He points out, “By a free agent we mean an intelligent person who acts with rational self-determination; and by Foreordination we mean that from eternity God has made certain the actual course of events which takes place in the life of every person and in the realm of nature.”¹⁶

He gives further confirmation of his belief in free agency when he says, “Predestination and free agency are the twin pillars of a great temple, and they meet above the clouds where human gaze cannot penetrate.”

Boettner seems willing to use the term *free agent*, but he shies away from using the term *free will* with affirmation. He says that if free will means that “absolute determination” is placed in human hands, then “we might as well spell it with a capital F and a capital W; for then man becomes like God,—a first cause, an original spring of action,—and we have as many semi-Gods as we have free wills.” In other words, the only way to admit this sort of human free will is to surrender divine sovereignty. “It is very noticeable—and in a sense it is reassuring to observe the fact—that the materialistic and metaphysical philosophers deny as completely as do Calvinists this thing that is called free will [emphasis added].”

Boettner leaves us wondering what the difference is between *free agency* and *free will*. What he says about free will is not supported from any source. It is a caricature of free will. The way it is described, no one would claim it. I must confess that I find Boettner's use of "self-determination" surprising when he gives his definition of "free agency" in the quotation given above. I am surprised that he would affirm *any* use of the term "self-determination" in referring to human beings.

Feinberg speaks of a freedom that he thinks is compatible with determinism. He explains that, like other determinists, he believes "there is room for a genuine sense of free human action," despite his belief that the action is "causally determined." Such freedom, he argues, is not "indeterministic." Rather, determinists who believe in free will argue that there are two sorts of causes that "influence and determine actions": constraining causes and nonconstraining causes. Constraining causes force people to act against their wills. While nonconstraining causes are able to cause an action, they do not "force a person to act against his will, desires, or wishes." Thus, Feinberg says that a free act can be causally determined and still be free, "so long as the causes are nonconstraining. This view is often referred to as *soft determinism* or *compatibilism*, for genuine free human action is seen as *compatible* with nonconstraining sufficient conditions which incline the will decisively in one way or another."

Later, in commenting on human responsibility, Feinberg argues that what makes people "morally responsible for their actions" is the fact that those actions are free. "I agree that no one can be held morally accountable for actions that are not free." However, he argues, compatibilism lets people act freely while at the same time their actions are causally determined. "The key is not whether someone's acts are causally determined or not, but rather how they are determined. If the acts are constrained, they are not free and the agent is not morally responsible for them."

Let us take a look at what Feinberg is saying. He says, "Like many other determinists, I claim that there is room for a genuine sense of free human action, even though such action is *causally determined*." Later he comments, "The key is not whether someone's acts are causally determined or not, but rather *how* they are determined. If the acts are constrained, they are not free and the agent is not morally responsible for them."

Feinberg's determinism is coextensive with the whole of reality. The determinism of Muller that is referred to above is restricted to soteriology. Feinberg and Muller would be in essential agreement when it comes to election. However, they differ sharply when it comes to other matters.

It is important to observe that for Feinberg and those who make determinism coextensive with the whole of reality, *God causes all human acts*. When he talks about the agent being responsible, he is particularly talking about sin. This is true since there would be no question about action that is acceptable to God. The *only cause* that he has in mind in his determinism is God. This is true because the determinism under consideration is *divine determinism*. That means that God is the cause not only of faith on the part of those who believe but also for the sins of dishonesty, murder, rape, and so forth. The reason the person is responsible for such action, though it is "causally determined," is that he did what God caused him to do freely, not by constraint. In *unlimited determinism*, God causes people to lie, steal, murder, and to commit rape, but they are not constrained to do so.

Since Muller limits his determinism to soteriology, all acts that are not related to soteriology *are not causally determined*. This would mean that in these areas there would be no essential reason that his view would have to differ from Arminianism.

I will wait until I present my own thinking before I make any critical observations.

Foreknowledge and Free will in Calvinism

Foreordination, for most Calvinists, takes the mystery out of foreknowledge. As Boettner explains, Arminian objections to divine foreordination equally apply to divine foreknowledge. Actions that God foreknows “must, in the very nature of the case, be as fixed and certain as what is ordained.” Thus, he argues that, if foreordination is inconsistent with human freedom, then so is foreknowledge. “Foreordination renders the events as certain, while foreknowledge presupposes they are certain.” Furthermore, he explains, Arminianism’s rejection of divine foreordination constitutes a rejection of “the theistic basis for foreknowledge. Common sense tells us that no event can be foreknown unless by some means, either physical or mental, it has been predetermined.”

Feinberg, in arguing for his position of soft determinism, says, “If indeterminism is correct, I do not see how God can be said to foreknow the future. If God actually knows what will (not just might) occur in the future, the future must be set and some sense of determinism applies.” Crabtree also sees a problem of divine foreknowledge of free human events. He explains, “No one, not even God, can know the outcome of an autonomous decision that has not been made, can he? To assert the possibility of such knowledge is problematic.”²⁴

Buswell does not see a problem with God’s having knowledge of free acts of human beings. He remarks that he does not know how God can know a future free act. Yet neither does he know how he “can have knowledge by analysis, by inference from reason or from causes, or from statistical data reported by intuition, or (if it is insisted upon) by innate ideas.” Thus, Buswell argues, knowledge is a mystery, and divine foreknowledge of future free events is a revealed mystery that we can accept based on what Scripture teaches.

THE STRENGTH OF CALVINISM IN THEOLOGICAL SCHOLARSHIP

The strength of Calvinism in the world of scholarship is evident. For example, about eighty percent of the commentaries on Romans I have surveyed will support the concept of unconditional election. For those who are interested in treatments on unconditional election, I recommend the comments on Romans 8:29–30 and Romans 9 in the following commentaries: Haldane, Harrison, Hendriksen, Hodge, Murray, Olshausen, Plumer, and Shedd. For treatments that support the position of conditional election see the following commentaries on Romans 8:29–30 and Romans 9: Clarke, Godet, Greathouse, Lenski, Meyer, Picirilli, and Sanday and Headlam. It should be pointed out that though Lenski and Meyer in their comments support the concept of conditional election, as Lutherans, they would not use the term “conditional election.”

One may wonder why Calvinists have produced so many more scholarly writings than Arminians. A significant factor is that the emphasis on scholarship among Presbyterians has resulted in the production of scholarly works greater in proportion than their numerical strength.

The tendency among Arminians is to be more inclined to activity than to scholarly pursuits. Arminians are inclined to think that common sense would direct people to take the Arminian approach. The list is short when you look for good works on conditional election. On the popular level, a host of people believe in “once saved, always saved” but believe in conditional election. These people have not come forth with outstanding works on conditional election. For many years a widely used book by the respected theologian Henry C. Thiessen taught conditional election. When Vernon D. Doerksen revised this book, it was changed so that the book now

teaches unconditional election.²⁷ In this move, a book that had been widely used to voice the position of conditional election became a voice for unconditional election.

A DEBT OF GRATITUDE TO CALVINISM

Calvinists work on the assumption that unconditional election is necessary in order to maintain the doctrines of the sovereignty of God, the total depravity of fallen man, and that salvation is absolutely free. The theological world owes a debt of gratitude to Calvinism for its insistence that salvation is the free gift of God. I am sure that Arminians have needed this reminder. However, I am in sharp disagreement with those Calvinists when they make the claim that unconditional election is necessary if salvation is to be free. Calvinists have not hesitated in criticizing Arminians. I am sure they will be understanding if some criticism is returned. My advice to fellow Arminians is that, if we expect to be treated with seriousness, then we must give time and effort to producing some well-thought-out treatments of our doctrine.

AN INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL ARMINIAN THOUGHT ON DECREES AND ELECTION

Three Basic Assumptions or Convictions of Calvinism

I will be giving my answer to Calvinism as I explain and build my case for Classical Arminianism. The unconditional election taught in Calvinism seems to rest on three basic assumptions: first, that the sovereignty of God requires unconditional election and thus precludes conditional election; second, that total depravity precludes the response of faith from a sinner unless he is first regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and third, that the fact that salvation is free precludes conditional election. If these three assumptions are true, Calvinism has made its case. If these three assumptions are not true, Calvinism is in trouble.

An Answer to the First Assumption of Calvinism

The first and probably the most foundational of these assumptions of Calvinism is that the sovereignty of God requires unconditional election and thus precludes conditional election. Calvinistic thought rests on two great pillars in the history of theological thought: Augustine of Hippo and John Calvin. It appears to me that Augustine's doctrine grew out of his thought that depravity was so strong that it could be dealt with only by unconditional election. It appears that Calvin's view grows more out of the idea that unconditional election is the only view of election that is consistent with the sovereignty of God.

In Calvinism, the central truth to be reckoned with is that *everything else must harmonize with the sovereignty of God*. The Calvinistic concept of the sovereignty of God, as I see it, is developed along the lines of *cause* and *effect*. This is why Calvinists have a special difficulty dealing with the origin of sin. It is hard to find good discussions on the origin of sin in Calvinistic writings. Also, this is why some Calvinists are unlimited determinists. This stress on a *cause* and *effect* approach to interpreting the sovereignty of God is also the reason that those who want to restrict determinism to matters relating to salvation when discussing theology on its broader points sound like they are unlimited determinists. In fact, it is hard to find out where many Calvinists stand on whether determinism is unlimited or limited.

The answer to Calvinism's assumption that the sovereignty of God requires unconditional election and thus precludes conditional election will be lengthy. It must deal with the following concerns: (1) *Influence* and *response* versus *cause* and *effect*, (2) the meaning of freedom of will,

(3) the need of a theology of personality, (4) the question of divine determinism, and (5) the question of the foreknowledge of God in relation to the free acts of human beings.

Cause and Effect or Influence and Response? An Arminian Answer

Calvinism has oversimplified the way that God carries out His sovereignty. In so doing it has oversimplified the relationship of God to man in the application of redemption. It is very important to distinguish between *cause* and *effect* relationships and *influence* and *response* relationships. In the relationship of the physical to the physical, or the relationship of the parts of a machine to one another, we are dealing with *cause* and *effect* relationships. The concepts of active and passive apply in their simple meaning. When a hammer hits a nail, the hammer is active and the nail is passive. The hammer *causes* the nail to be driven into the wood. The nail had no choice. A force outside the nail caused the nail to be driven into the wood.

Interpersonal relationships do not submit to such a simple analysis. *Influence* and *response* are more appropriate terms. A person is one who thinks with his mind, feels with his heart, and acts with his will. In the simple sense of the terms *cause* and *effect*, one person cannot *cause* another person to do anything. This does not depend on the lack of ability that one person has to influence another. Rather, the inability of one person to *cause* another person to do something grows out of the nature of what it means to be a *person*. When an appeal is made to a person, it is inherent within the nature of a person to consider the appeal and then make a decision. There is no such thing as a person's doing or not doing something *without having made a decision*. This is true regardless of how strong the influence may be upon him or her.

Calvinism's approach to irresistible grace (or effectual call) sounds more like cause and effect than influence and response. When the appropriate time comes with regard to the elect, God regenerates him or her. As a regenerated person, he or she is caused by God to have faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In such a view, faith is considered a gift. It is problematic for faith to be considered an individual's choice, act, or response. The possibility of a negative response does not exist. It was a guaranteed response. The fact that it was guaranteed makes the terms *cause* and *effect* appropriate. Calvinism considers all of this necessary if salvation is to be a gift.

In explaining the gift of faith in that way, the Calvinist is thinking along the lines of cause and effect. The only problem is that, if being a person means anything beyond being a smoothly operated puppet with conscious awareness, it is impossible to describe the experience of a person in such a manner. We must keep in mind that human beings are personal beings because God has made them that way. This is necessary to the very notion of being made in the image of God. Can anyone really deny that faith is a personal response to the working of God with that individual? At least in some sense, the response of faith is a decision in which the person who believes actively participates. Even Calvinism must admit this.

In my opinion, it has been a mistake over the centuries to focus the conflict between Calvinists and Arminians on whether fallen or redeemed man has a *free will*. The real question is: Is fallen man a personal being, or is he sub-personal? (The same question can also be asked concerning redeemed man.) Does God deal with fallen man as a person? If He does, He deals with him as one who thinks, feels, and acts. To do otherwise undercuts the personhood of man. God will not do this—not because something is being imposed on God to which He must submit, but because God designed the relationship to be a relationship between *personal beings*. Human beings are personal beings by God's design and were made for a *personal relationship* with a personal God. God will not violate His own plan. The nature of the case does not demand that God work in a cause and effect relationship with human beings.

We dare not take the position that God is unable to work with human beings within the framework of influence and response. Are we going to settle for the thinking that the inability of *fallen man* results in the *inability of God*, that is, the inability of God to work with fallen man and redeemed man in an influence and response relationship? I hope not! Are we going to say that the very *nature* of God's *sovereignty* requires Him to work in a cause and effect relationship and prohibits Him from working in an influence and response relationship? I hope not!

I am sure that Calvinists would want to say that they do not believe in "mechanical" cause and effect as it relates to the way God deals with human beings. While they would object to the word "*mechanical*," if they opt for any form of *determinism*, they cannot successfully reject the words *cause* and *effect*. My reading of Calvinistic writings suggests that Classical Calvinists would not object to these terms. If anyone doubts this observation, I would suggest that he reread the quotations above that are taken from Calvinistic writings. I think the description of God's relationship to man that Calvinists would give would be much like my description of influence and response. However, the result is thought to be *guaranteed*. When the result is guaranteed, they would simply have a softened form of cause and effect. Any time the result is guaranteed, we are dealing with cause and effect. When the *guarantee* is gone, Calvinism is gone.

From a Calvinistic viewpoint, it will not do to say that cause and effect describes God's relationship to us, but influence and response describes our relationship to one another. The entirety of that which falls within the scope of determinism falls within the scope of cause and effect. There is no influence and response. Yet, I get the impression when I read Calvinistic writings that they are trying to persuade me. Persuasion is a form of *influence*. I get the impression that they think I could and should agree. I do not think they have any different idea about persuasion than I do. I have a statement that I make sometimes, "Calvinists are Arminian except when they are making Calvinistic statements."

I need to point out that in common speech we frequently tend to use the terms *influence* and *response* and *cause* and *effect* somewhat interchangeably. We may say, "He caused me to do it." To be technical, we should say, "He influenced me to do it, and I chose to do it." Though the terms may be interchangeable (to a certain extent) in common speech, I do not believe any confusion will develop from my using them the way I do in a theological work.

The Meaning of Freedom of the Will

The discussion of cause and effect and influence and response sets the stage for a discussion of the meaning of the freedom of the will. I am going to restate briefly some of what I said about the meaning of free will in Chapter 1.

The New Testament does not use the noun form of *will* to refer to the faculty or organ of choice in man. Instead, the verb form (*thelō*) is used (Mt. 16:24; 21:29; 23:37; Mk. 8:34; Jn. 7:17; Rev. 22:17; and others). By *will* we mean power of choice. Every command, every prohibition, every exhortation, and every entreaty made in the Bible to human beings presupposes that they are capable of making choices.

Whether we want to think of the act of willing as the function of a faculty of the person or simply the person making a choice, the fact remains that the ability of choice is part of being a person. That ability of choice we call will. In his totality, man is a thinking, feeling, acting being. He thinks with his mind, feels with his heart, and acts with his will.

Let us make a few things clear about what is and is not meant by freedom of will. The freedom of the will does not mean that forces or influences cannot be brought to bear upon the will. In fact, the very nature of freedom of the will means that forces or influences will be

brought to bear upon the will. It does not mean that these forces cannot be a *contributing factor* in the exercise of the will. It does mean that these influences or forces cannot *guarantee* or *determine* the action of the will. We are dealing with influence and response, not cause and effect.

The Framework of Possibilities and the Meaning of Freedom of the will

Freedom of will is a freedom within a framework of possibilities. It is not absolute freedom. We cannot be God. We cannot be angels. The freedom of a human being is in the framework of the possibilities provided by human nature. Also, the influences brought to bear on the will have a bearing on the framework of possibilities.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, it was in the framework of possibilities within which they operated to remain in the practice of complete righteousness, or to commit sin. After they sinned, it no longer remained within the framework of possibilities for them to practice uninterrupted righteousness. The same is true for fallen man now (Rom. 8:7–8). If anyone reads the meaning of freedom of will to mean that an unconverted person could practice righteousness and not sin, he misunderstands the meaning of freedom of will for fallen human beings. Romans 8:7–8 makes it clear that Scripture does not teach this.

Jesus makes it clear that it does not fall within the framework of possibilities for a sinner to respond to the gospel unless he or she is drawn by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 6:44). The influence of the Holy Spirit working in the heart of the person who hears the gospel makes possible a framework of possibilities in which a person can say yes or no to the gospel. If he says, “yes,” it is his choice. If he says, “no,” it is his choice. To say less than that is to raise serious questions about the existence of real personhood after the fall. If a human being is not in some sense a *self-directed being*, he or she is not a person. The self-direction may have a high degree of dependence at times, but it is still self-direction. As has already been made clear, I am not suggesting that fallen man can choose Christ without the aid of the Holy Spirit. In fact, I strongly reject such an idea. I am saying, however, that no matter how much or how strong the aid of the Holy Spirit may be, the “yes” decision is still a decision that can rightly be called the person’s decision. Also, he could have said no.

When I say that human beings have a free will, I mean that they can rationally consider a matter and make a choice. In bringing a person to the point of saving faith, the Holy Spirit makes it possible for a person to give the response of faith. At the same time, this work of the Holy Spirit can be resisted. The person can say no. What puts Arminians at odds with Calvinists is that, in Calvinism, when God works with a person to bring him or her to faith, he or she *cannot say no*. Yes is the only answer he or she can give. Calvinists believe that, apart from irresistible grace, nobody could be saved. Irresistible grace is not simply the way God chooses to work in saving people. It is the only option open to God to save lost people. Total depravity, according to Calvinism, makes it impossible for a human being to respond apart from irresistible grace. The sovereignty of God, as viewed by Calvinism, is incompatible with a “no” answer. Thus, resistible grace, according to Calvinism, is ruled out.

TERMS USED IN DEFINING FREE WILL

I have run across the terms *spontaneity*, *indifference*, *libertarian*, and *self-determination*. No Calvinist would deny that human beings have a will. However, as we have seen, some Calvinists

deny outright that human beings have a free will. Others want to use the term *free will* but define it in a way that is consistent with their version of Calvinism. A few others want to maintain real freedom of the will.

Liberty of Spontaneity and Liberty of Indifference

It would appear from what I have read that thoroughgoing Calvinists who affirm a belief in the freedom of the will would concur that there is *liberty of spontaneity*, but not the *liberty of indifference*. Crabtree gives the following explanation of these terms: “One exercises the liberty of spontaneity when what he does is done in accordance with his own will and desires. One exercises the liberty of indifference when what he does is such that he could have done otherwise.”

Ronald H. Nash explains that the liberty of indifference is the capability to do something or not—in other words to do something or refrain from doing it. The liberty of spontaneity, however, is the capability to do whatever one wants to do. “On this second view, the question of the person’s ability to do otherwise is irrelevant. The key question is whether he is able to do what he most wants to do.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* is helpful in this regard. It defines spontaneity as follows:

Spontaneous, or voluntary and unconstrained, action on the part of persons; the fact of possessing this character or quality. 1651 C. CARTWRIGHT *Cert. Relig.* 1.181 Thus we see how Bernard doth agree with Calvin in making the freedom of mans will to consist in a spontaneity and freedom from coaction [constraint, coercion]. 1702 *Le Clerc’s Prim. Fathers* 348. Freedom in his opinion, is only a meer Spontaneity, and doth not imply a Power of not doing what one would. [sic]

The help in the *OED* on the liberty of indifference was found under “indifferency.” One of the meanings for indifferency is “Indetermination of the will; freedom of choice; an equal power to take either of two courses, *Liberty of Indifferency*, freedom from necessity, freedom of will. Obs.”

These references given in the *OED* make it clear that at one time the liberty of spontaneity was used to mean that the will was free in that it was not coerced. It was not speaking of a freedom to make a different decision. Liberty of indifference was freedom to choose a different course of action. Crabtree’s and Nash’s definitions of these terms are consistent with what we learn from the *OED*.

Determinism rules out the liberty of indifference. I would accept the liberty of indifference in the way Crabtree, Nash, and the *OED* define it. However, I am not happy with adding the words “an equal power to take either of two courses,” as seen in the *OED* definition. I think that oversimplifies the matter. Also, there may be more than two options.

If we could maintain this distinction between “spontaneity” and “indifference,” I think they would be very useful in helping us distinguish between an Arminian view of free will and a Calvinistic view of free will. Most Calvinists would accept the liberty of spontaneity and reject the liberty of indifference. Arminians would accept both the liberty of spontaneity and the liberty of indifference as these terms are defined above.

However, there is a problem in using the term *liberty of indifference*. It is loaded with other possible connotations. It could also mean unconcerned or disinterested. Unconcerned or disinterested is not what I mean by freedom of the will. Even Berkhof, usually a careful scholar,

fails to grasp the historic meaning of *liberty of indifference*. In raising the question of whether “the predetermination of things was consistent with the free will of man,” his response was that it was not, if free will is seen as “indifferentia (arbitrariness), but this is an unwarranted conception of the freedom of man. The will of man is not something altogether indeterminate, something hanging in the air that can swing arbitrarily in either direction. I do not know of anyone who would define free will that way. These kinds of comments complicate discussion between Calvinists and Arminians.

Freedom of the will does not mean that a person is free from being influenced or even being pressured. People are pressured frequently in their daily experiences. The whole point of what it means to be a person is that a person is presented with options. Influences are brought to bear upon the person, seeking to influence him or her to choose one of these options. The person rationally considers the options and makes a choice. The problem is that, if he is reasoning from faulty premises, then the conclusions will be invalid. Bias and prejudice can blind a person to the truth. This blindness especially works on the level of premises.

If we will use the terms *liberty of spontaneity* and *liberty of indifference* with their original intended meaning, I think they will be very helpful in establishing meaningful communication between Arminians and Calvinists.

LIBERTARIAN

Libertarian is a term used to describe a person who believes in free will. The dictionary meaning of libertarian is, “An advocate of the doctrine of free will.” But it also means, “A person who upholds the principles of absolute and unrestricted liberty esp. of thought and action.” I would qualify as a libertarian by the first definition. But the term libertarian conjures up too many objectionable ideas in people’s minds for me to want to be identified by the term.

SELF-DETERMINED

Self-determined is sometimes used in discussions of determinism and free will. Norman Geisler advocates the use of this term and the view of free will associated with it. He points out that both Thomas Aquinas and C. S. Lewis hold to this view. Geisler explains that advocates of moral self-determinism sometimes use free will as if it were the “efficient cause of moral actions.” This, he says, provokes the question of what is the cause of free will.

But a more precise description of the process of the free act would avoid this problem. Technically, free will is not the efficient cause of a free act; free will is simply the power through which the agent performs the free act. The efficient cause of the free act is the free *agent*, not the free will. Free will is simply the power by which the free agent acts. We do not say that humans are free will but only that they *have* free will.... So it is not the power of free choice which causes a free act, but the *person* who has the power.

Later in his treatment, Geisler comments that God causes the “fact” of freedom, while human beings cause the “acts” of freedom. “God gives people power (of free choice), but they exercise it without coercion. Thus God is responsible for bestowing freedom, but human beings are responsible for behaving with it.

John Miley, the Methodist theologian whose *Systematic Theology* appeared near the end of the nineteenth century, would be in agreement with Geisler’s statement: “The efficient cause of

the free act is the free *agent*, not the free will. Free will is simply the power by which the free agent acts.” Miley explains that “we find the higher meaning of the term [agent] only in personality. There we reach the power of rational self-energizing with respect to ends. There is no such power in the will itself. It is simply a faculty of the personal agent.” Thus, he argues, freedom of the will “cannot be the true question of freedom. The fact means nothing against the reality of freedom, but points to its true location in our own personal agency, and in the result will make it clearer and surer.”

To place the real freedom in the personal agent is to place it in the person or personality. I think this has much to commend itself. But the term *free will* is so firmly fixed in theology as a theological term to express freedom that we cannot escape using and defining the term.

I think Geisler’s view has much to commend itself. There is a technical turn in what he is saying that most people will not want to work through, but I think he is on the right track. The term *self-determinism* by itself could be subject to gross distortion. It could picture a person as a loose canon out of control. No one who reads what Geisler says will get such an idea. But apart from a context it could suffer such distortion.

Properly understood, my view would be self-determinism, though I prefer to speak of human beings as *self-directed*. Self-determination of human beings must be understood in the context of their relationship with a sovereign God who is bringing influences to bear on them, granting them freedom (permission) of choice, and carrying out His purposes. Anything less will fail to measure up to biblical Christianity.

My problem with Geisler is how he combines his view of self-determinism with “soft determinism.” The problem with determinism whether it is called “hard determinism” or “soft determinism” is that it is still determinism. When Geisler speaks of soft determinism, it is divine determinism.

Geisler explains his approach to the relationship between foreknowledge and determinism by arguing that, given the fact that God does not “pass through temporal successions,” He has forever thought what He thinks. God does not really foreknow; He simply knows in His eternal now what we freely do. Thus, “there is no problem of how an act can be truly free if God has determined in advance what will take place... God is not foreordaining from his vantage point, but simply ordaining what humans are doing freely. God sees what we are freely doing. And what he sees, he knows. And what he knows he determines. So God determinately knows and knowingly determines what we are doing freely.”

The key words in understanding Geisler’s view, as I see it, are: “And what he sees, he knows. And what he knows he determines.” Geisler’s divine determinism is based on *what God knows*. In genuine determinism, knowledge is based on *what is determined*. Bringing up the concept of Eternal Now does not change that. I will deal with this problem later in this chapter under the heading, “The Question of How God Could Have Foreknowledge of Free Human Choices.” It seems to me that Geisler does a better job in building his case for self-determinism (free will) than he does linking self-determinism with divine determinism.

THE CONSISTENCY OF THE INFLUENCE AND RESPONSE MODEL WITH THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE

I think that anyone who does not come with philosophical presuppositions that would prevent agreement would agree that influence and response is the way human beings deal with one another. Those who have not already made up their minds to the contrary would also most likely

accept the idea that God would work with us, as human beings, within the framework of an influence and response relationship. The question for the Christian is, will it stand the test of Scripture?

Philippians 2:12–13

Gordon Clark remarks that this passage so clearly denies free will that he cannot “see how anyone could possibly misunderstand it. In Philippians 2:12–13 the Apostle Paul tells us to ‘work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.’ ” As we have already noted, not all determinists reject free will as Clark does. But any consistent unlimited determinist would interpret these verses within a cause and effect framework. I can see why they would do this. However, these verses present no problem when interpreted in keeping with the influence and response model.

In Romans 5:3 Paul says, “Tribulation produces perseverance.” What Paul is saying is that it is the design of tribulation to produce perseverance. The design does not come to fruition in every case. Some people become very impatient in times of tribulation. There is no reason whatever that the work of God to get us to will and to do of His good pleasure could not be interpreted in terms of *design* and *purpose* in a manner in keeping with influence and response. The meaning would be that God works in us to influence and to enable us to will and to do for His good pleasure.

We are not to think of human beings as operating outside the realm of divine influence. At the same time, we know that they do not always respond properly to this divine influence. This is true of both the saved and the unsaved. We do, of course, insist that there is a compliance that makes a difference between the saved and the unsaved. To say that human beings *always* respond properly to divine influence would say something about God, as the One who does the influencing; that I do not think we want to say. We cannot attribute all that is happening in the world to the influence of God. Nor can we make Him the cause or the determiner of all that is happening. This is the kind of thinking that inclines many to atheism. It is unthinkable that a sovereign, holy, just, fair, and loving God would be the determining cause of everything that is happening in our world. There is something within us that rebels against such a thought.

The influence and response model has room for disobedience. It does not require divine determinism as the basis of all that happens. While there is room for obedience or disobedience, we are not to limit human freedom to mere obedience or disobedience. We are not to think of God as giving a list of minute details requiring yes or no answers for every move we make. Human freedom leaves room for creativity in obedience to the divine commandment—to human beings exercising dominion over the earth and its inhabitants (Gen. 1:26). Christians are given freedom and are encouraged to exercise stewardship over their gifts and callings (1 Pet. 4:10 and Tit. 1:7), the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1–2), and the gospel (1 Cor. 9:17 and Eph. 3:2). Stewardship involves a creative thinking and planning responsibility. It is not possible to harmonize *divine determinism* and *stewardship responsibility* to God.

THE NEED FOR A THEOLOGY OF PERSONALITY

Human freedom is a freedom to function as persons. It is the freedom to think, plan, and act. I would invite you to examine several books on systematic theology. Turn to the index in each set and find the word *personality*. Over and over again you will find references to divine personality, but no reference to human personality. It will be a very rare find when you discover one that makes any reference to “human personality.” One of the rare finds where a theologian

develops the meaning of human personality is found in Arminian theologian John Miley's *Systematic Theology*.

Why is it so hard to find a theology book that defines and expands the treatment of human personality? I think it is because there is not much place for it in deterministic thinking. Calvinists do not have much place for a development of thought on the function of human personality. Calvinists are afraid that if they say very much about the function of human personality they will take something away from God. Calvinists have produced most of the outstanding works on theology. Arminians have tended to follow the Calvinist model; however, they merely give an Arminian interpretation. Since Calvinists do not usually deal with the meaning of human personality in their writings, most Arminians do not either. I think I can safely say that a person will find more references to human personality in this book than in all of the others systematic theology and doctrine books combined. Treatments are given to mind, heart, and will. But it will be rare to find where the term *personality* is used in connection with these treatments. Christian ministry is in great need of an understanding of human personality in reaching lost people and in ministering to the needs of Christians. The foundational thinking of human personality, how it functions, and how personality change is made should be done by *theologians*. While library research is essential, our understanding of human personality needs to be hammered out in the arena of life.

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

Classical Calvinism has problems with the idea that God can have foreknowledge of the actions of those who have free will in the Arminian sense of free will. In unlimited determinism, the fact that God has determined everything that will happen is considered to be the foundation for God's foreknowledge. There is no need of foreknowledge of free acts in unlimited determinism because free acts do not exist. Calvinists who have a place in their thought for free will in the sense of liberty of indifference would have to acknowledge that God has foreknowledge of free acts of human beings. The reader may want to review the material given above under, "The Question of Foreknowledge and Free Will in Calvinistic Thought."

ARMINIANISM ON FOREKNOWLEDGE AND HUMAN FREEDOM

In Classical Calvinism, there is agreement that God has absolute knowledge of the future down to the smallest detail. There is not agreement on how to deal with the question of human freedom or whether human freedom exists. In Arminianism, there is agreement that human beings have freedom of choice. This includes the freedom to place faith in Christ upon hearing the gospel or to refuse to place faith in Christ.

Contemporary Arminians do not agree on the question of foreknowledge as it relates to free acts of human beings. Classical Arminianism agreed with Calvinism that God has absolute knowledge of the future down to the smallest detail. This, of course, would require that God has foreknowledge concerning the free acts of human beings. In recent years, some Arminians have rejected the view that God has foreknowledge of the free acts of human beings.

A DENIAL OF DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN FREE CHOICE

Clark Pinnock is the best known of those who do not believe that God has foreknowledge of the acts of free agents. In an autobiographical account entitled, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” Pinnock describes how he changed from a Calvinist rooted in Augustinian thought to an Arminian. He explains that he had to ask himself if Scripture made it possible to hold God’s complete foreknowledge “of everything that can be known” and at the same time hold that the free choices of human beings are not known by God “because they are not yet settled reality.” He argues that human choices that are not made yet cannot be known by God because they do not exist. “They are potential—yet to be realized but not yet actual. God can predict a great deal of what we will choose to do, but not all of it, because some of it remains hidden in the mystery of human freedom.” Thus, Pinnock relates, “It has become increasingly clear to me that we need a ‘free will’ theism, a doctrine of God that treads the middle path between classical theism, which exaggerates God’s transcendence of the world, and process theism, which presses for immanence.”⁴³

At the heart of what concerns Pinnock is how God’s sovereignty is administered in the light of man’s free will. He explains that, while God as Creator is basically sovereign, He has elected to give human beings significant freedom. He goes on to say:

In keeping with this decision, God rules over the world in a way that sustains and does not negate its structures. Since freedom has been created, reality is open, not closed. God’s relationship to the world is dynamic, not static. Although this will require us to rethink aspects of conventional or classical theism, it will help us relate sovereignty and freedom more coherently in theory and more satisfactorily in practice.

Another advocate of “free-will” theism is Richard Rice. He comments that the interaction of God with a world in which human beings have genuine freedom does not require a denial of God’s foreknowledge, but only a careful redefinition of its scope. Rice argues that God knows much about the future. For example, He knows everything that will ever happen as the direct result of factors that already exist. He knows infallibly the content of his own future actions, to the extent that they are not related to human choices. Since God knows all possibilities, he knows everything that could happen and what he can do in response to each eventuality. And he knows the ultimate outcome to which he is guiding the course of history.

The only thing that God does not know is “the content of future free decisions, and this is because decisions are not there to know until they occur.” In further elaborating on his view, Rice points out “that God is dynamically involved in the creaturely world.”⁴⁶ In commenting on God as a loving parent, Rice explains that God is “genuinely personable and lovable.” Furthermore, Rice argues, God “is vulnerable”; He can “take risks and make sacrifices,” and is “momentarily delighted and disappointed, depending on our response to his love.”

The driving concern of Pinnock and Rice seems to be: (1) that we have a view of God and His foreknowledge that allows for genuinely free acts on the part of human beings, and (2) that our view of God be such that it contributes to a warm personal relationship with God while we experience the real encounters of life.

AFFIRMATION OF ABSOLUTE DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

Arminius makes it unquestionably clear where he stands on the question of God’s foreknowledge. He comments, “I am most fully persuaded that the knowledge of God is eternal,

immutable and infinite, and that it extends to all things, both necessary and contingent, to all things which He does of Himself, either mediately or immediately, and which He permits to be done by others.”

On the contemporary scene, Jack Cottrell speaks out for absolute divine foreknowledge. Acknowledging that non-Calvinists disagree with regard to divine foreknowledge, Cottrell affirms that God has “true knowledge of future free-will choices without himself being the agent that causes them or renders them certain.” God’s foreknowledge “is grounded in—and is thus conditioned by—the choices themselves as foreknown. This is how God maintains sovereign control over the whole of his creation, despite the freedom he has given his creatures.” In another place Cottrell comments: “To say that God has foreknowledge means that he has real knowledge or cognition of something before it actually happens or exists in history. This is the irreducible core of the concept, which must be neither eliminated nor attenuated. Nothing else is consistent with the nature of God.”⁵⁰ To make it emphatically clear, he remarks, “Surely God foreknows everything about the life of every individual. He cannot help but foreknow, just because he is God.”

Robert E. Picirilli makes it very clear where he stands on God’s foreknowledge when he says, “All things that occur are *certainly* foreknown by God. Every happening is certain and known as such from all eternity.”

In summing up an excellent chapter, “God’s Knowledge of the Present, Past, and Future,” William Lane Craig argues that the Old and New testaments portray God as knowing all past, present, and future events. “This foreknowledge would seem to extend to future free acts ... which could not possibly be inferred from present causes and which in any case are not so represented by the biblical authors.” Craig argues that there are countless biblical examples of divine foreknowledge of future free events, “including even the thoughts which individuals shall have. It does not, therefore, seem possible to deny that the biblical conception of God’s omniscience includes foreknowledge of future free acts.”

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF CALVINISTIC APPROACHES TO THE BASIS FOR GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE

Hard Unlimited Determinism

Calvinists who are hard, unlimited determinists solve the problem by eliminating free acts. God determines everything down to the minutest detail. God knows the future because He determines what the future will be. God is the cause of all that happens. The logic of this view is easy to follow. Unconditional election and unconditional reprobation fit logically into unlimited determinism. The problem arises when one tries to harmonize it with the biblical view of God and man.

If God has determined everything that will be, He is the cause of everything. This cannot be harmonized with the biblical view of the holiness of God. A holy God did not and will not determine and cause all of the lying, stealing, hatred, bitterness, depression, mental anguish, pain, suffering, alcoholism, drug addiction, divorce, child sex abuse, rape, abortion, murder, and so on. The law of noncontradiction means nothing if the sin that we are experiencing and seeing can be harmonized with the causal determination of a holy and loving God. No retreat to the inscrutable wisdom of God is acceptable to justify such obvious contradiction.

If God is the cause of everything, why would He cause James Arminius, John Wesley, Adam Clarke, Richard Watson, John Miley, H. Orton Wiley, the Arminians that I have mentioned in

this chapter, and a host of others to be Arminian? Why did He also cause Augustine, John Calvin, Augustus Toplady, John Gill, Charles Spurgeon, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, Benjamin Warfield, those referred to in this chapter, and a host of others to be Calvinists? Would a rational God cause devout believers to arrive at conclusions that are diametrically opposed to one another? He did if unlimited determinism is true.

When it comes to sin, guilt, judgment, and punishment for sin, in deterministic thinking, the problem is not solved by saying that the person did what he wanted to do, that he or she was not coerced. The point is that in determinism the “want to” is determined by God. Yet, if unlimited determinism is true, we see God punishing people for doing what He causally determined that they would do.

Soft Unlimited Determinism

Soft determinists are compatibilists. They believe in both determinism and free will. Their concept of free will would be the liberty of spontaneity as distinguished from the liberty of indifference.

The key to understanding the *liberty of spontaneity* is the kind of influences that can be brought to bear upon a person to influence him or her to make a choice. As mentioned earlier, Feinberg says that, as a compatibilist or soft determinist, he can affirm that an act can be caused without violating human freedom as long as the cause is a non-constraining cause. He argues that non-constraining causes “are sufficient to bring about an action, but they do not force a person to act against his will, desires, or wishes.”

Feinberg speaks of “constraining causes which force an agent to act against his will.” From his standpoint, causes that would force an agent to act against his will can exist only in theory. In the real world there could be no such thing, because God has determined all causes. The causes that are determined by God, according to Feinberg would never force a person to act against his or her will. Since God determines all causes in unlimited determinism, there would be no room for real causes or influences in our world that would coerce a person.

Let me repeat another statement from Feinberg. He points out that the basic affirmation of determinism and Calvinism “is that for everything that happens, in the light of prevailing conditions, the agent could not have done other than he did. For determinists, there are always sufficient conditions that decisively incline the agent’s will to choose one option or another.”

What makes Feinberg’s view determinism is, as can be seen from the last quotation, that no decision that is ever made could be different from what it was. God determines every action. Feinberg makes this clear in other places. He remarks, “God decides what will happen in our world and then sees that his decisions are carried out.” Later on he refers to Calvin’s thought with approbation, “For Calvin, then, God’s sovereignty means he governs all things according to his will. This means God not only overrules in the affairs of men, but also determines what will happen in their lives. This providential determination extends to every area of our lives.”⁵⁷

Soft determinism clearly denies freedom of choice in the sense that a person could have done differently. I agree with Picirilli when he says, “A choice that actually can go but one way is not a choice, and without this ‘freedom’ there is not personality.”

Soft determinism seeks to come across as being milder than hard determinism. Yet as long as it remains “unlimited determinism,” it cannot escape the criticism that I made above against hard determinism. The basis for the criticism that I made was the fact that it is *unlimited* determinism, not that it is *hard* determinism. Changing from “hard” to “soft” determinism brings no relief at all from the criticism that is directed toward determinism *qua* determinism. For example, if a person believes that capital punishment is wrong, changing the method of execution from

electrocution or hanging to lethal injection does not make capital punishment acceptable. It may be that if capital punishment will take place in spite of his best efforts to stop it, that the person who opposes it would prefer lethal injection rather than some other form of execution. But it would not make capital punishment acceptable to the person. It may well be that a person who is opposed to unlimited determinism would prefer that a person promote soft determinism rather than hard determinism. However, he would still have all the objections he had against unlimited determinism *qua* unlimited determinism.

Limited Determinism

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, Richard Muller believes in limited determinism. He limits determinism to soteriology, arguing that “the Reformed exegesis of biblical passages related to predestination, far from indicating a determinism of all human actions, indicates the ultimate determination of God in matters pertaining to salvation.” It appears that Muller restricts determinism to “the beginning of the redeemed life.” He not only states that determinism is limited to soteriology in his own thinking, he insists that it is the Reformed or Calvinistic position. It is obvious that many Calvinists would not agree with him on this limitation of determinism.

Before I evaluate Muller’s position, I will refer again to a statement from him that gets to the heart of his objection to Arminianism. He comments: “The Arminian God is locked into the inconsistency of genuinely willing to save all people while at the same time binding himself to a plan of salvation that he foreknows with certainty cannot effectuate his will.” Yet he says that Calvinism “respects the ultimate mystery of the infinite will of God, affirms the sovereignty and efficacy of God, and teaches the soteriological consistency of the divine intention and will with its effects.”

It would appear that, outside of the beginning of salvation, Muller would believe in the liberty of indifference. What he says certainly points to such a conclusion. If that is the case, he would apparently believe that God has perfect foreknowledge of the free acts of human beings that He has not determined.

Muller’s major criticism of Arminianism is of the Arminian view that God has a genuine desire for the salvation of all human beings while at the same time His foreknowledge tells Him that His desire for the salvation of all will not be fulfilled. That would be a failure. Sovereigns do not fail to accomplish their goals or purposes. In Calvinism, God’s desire to save extends only toward those He has elected. God’s desires will be effectuated.

It appears that, as it relates to the rest of mankind and the decisions of believers other than those related to the beginning of salvation, Muller’s concept of free will would not be essentially different from the view I hold. The questions that I would like to have an answer to are: Does God have any kind of desires regarding the mass of unbelievers who are left out of God’s elective plan? Are all of these desires met? Or, should we say that God has no desires at all for those who are unbelievers? Are they totally beyond God’s concern so that no matter what they do it does not matter to God?

I ask these questions because, if those who hold Muller’s view can admit that there is any incompatibility whatever between what a Sovereign God desires and what actually happens, then the question still remains: “Would that mean that God has forfeited His sovereignty?” If the answer is no, it should help us (and them) to understand that, if God desires the salvation of all and it does not take place, then neither does it mean that God has forfeited His sovereignty. If Muller’s view of free will for the non-elect and many of the decisions of the elect is what it

appears to be, then those who take such a position could make some meaningful contributions to our understanding of the relationship between God's sovereignty and the free will of man.

Another point to be made is that the person who limits determinism to unconditional election must accept the position that God can have foreknowledge of free acts of human beings. That is the only way God can know that those individuals that He would choose to elect would exist. It is impossible for a particular individual to exist apart from having a certain set of parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and so forth, all the way back to Adam and Eve. In that chain of events, there would be numerous free acts that God must have knowledge of before He could know that a particular individual would exist. Once it is admitted that God can have knowledge of free human acts, there is no reason, as far as the exercise of foreknowledge is concerned, that God could not have used the approach of conditional election.

I think it would be very helpful if Calvinist theologians would declare themselves on whether they believe in unlimited determinism or limited determinism. It would help if we knew whether they believe only in the liberty of spontaneity or whether they believe that the liberty of indifference applies to some areas of human experience. If the liberty of indifference applies to some areas, what are these areas? If the liberty of indifference applies to any areas at all, in these areas it would be helpful if Calvinists and Arminians could engage in discussion on: (1) The question of God's foreknowledge of free acts of human beings, (2) How the failure of free agents to obey God does not mean that God has forfeited His sovereignty, and (3) The problem of limiting God's sovereign control to the area of soteriology.

THE QUESTION OF HOW GOD COULD HAVE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FREE HUMAN CHOICES

As we have observed above, many Calvinists work on the assumption that it is impossible for God to have foreknowledge of the free choices and free acts of human beings. These Calvinists also believe that God has foreknowledge of all that will ever take place. Thus, they believe that the only basis that God can have for His foreknowledge is for Him to be causally related, by divine determinism, to all that will ever happen in the future. God knows the future because He determines the future. Since God determines everything that has happened, is happening, or ever will happen, these Calvinists deny free will in the sense of the liberty of indifference. Some Arminians, as we have seen, also deny that God can have foreknowledge of the free choices and free acts of human beings. They thus limit the omniscience of God. Most Arminians, however, believe that the foreknowledge of God includes the free choices of human beings.

We will now turn our attention to some of the attempts theologians have made to explain how God has foreknowledge of free human choices and acts.

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FREE ACTS BASED ON GOD'S BEING TIMELESS

The most common way theologians describe God's eternity is to refer to it as timelessness. It is said that God has no past and no future. Everything with God is one "eternal now." Time is said to be a creation of God and will be terminated by Him. Time is characterized by past, present, and future and has succession of events. Eternity has only the present, thus no succession of events.

This approach to God's timelessness has been used by some to explain how God could know what the free acts of human beings will be before they occur. Again, Geisler, as one who holds to

this view, argues that God does not really foreknow things but knows them as present in His “eternal now.” Thus, “God is not foreordaining from his vantage point, but simply ordaining what humans are freely doing. And what he sees, he knows. And what he knows, he determines. So God *determinately* and *knowingly determines* what we are freely deciding.” Those who hold this view explain that, from a technical viewpoint, God does not have foreknowledge of free acts since all knowledge to God is Now. However, it would be viewed as foreknowledge by us.

This view has problems. It gives God a *direct perception* of all that is happening. This direct perception of what is happening is God’s way of knowing human events whether they are past, present, or future to us. But what about contingencies that never happen? In explaining the inadequacy of this view to explain how God knows the free acts of human beings, Arminius astutely observes:

That reasoning, however, does not exhaust all the difficulties which may arise in the consideration of these matters. For God knows, also, those things which may happen, but never do happen, and consequently do not co-exist with God in the Now of eternity, which would be events unless they should be hindered, as is evident from 1 Sam. 23:12, in reference to the citizens of Keilah, who would have delivered David into the hands of Saul, which event, nevertheless, did not happen.

There is another problem in trying to use the Eternal Now view of God as a basis for His foreknowledge of free human acts. The question is: Is this a valid view of God’s relationship to time? There is one big problem. How can events be eternally now to God when in fact they have not always existed? I do not have any trouble seeing that God can see the past, the present, and the future with equal vividness. But He sees the past as past. It does not have present objective reality to God. He sees the future with equal vividness to the present, but He sees it as future. The future does not have objective reality to God. If these observations are correct, the Eternal Now view is without merit.

GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FREE ACTS BASED ON GOD’S MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

One of the chief proponents of this view, on the current scene, is William Lane Craig. In his promotion of middle knowledge, Craig has a twofold purpose: (1) He desires to show how God does, in fact, have foreknowledge of free acts of human beings, and (2) He wishes to present a view that will be acceptable to both Calvinists and Arminians. In doing so he hopes to bring Calvinists and Arminians closer together.

The founder of this view was the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Molina (1535–1600). Craig says concerning Molina, “By means of this doctrine he proposed to avoid the Protestant error of denying genuine human freedom, yet without thereby sacrificing the sovereignty of God.” Craig calls attention to Molina’s error in soteriology. Yet he thinks that we are shortsighted if we allow Molina’s soteriological errors to keep us from appreciating his approach to divine sovereignty and human free will. Craig argues that Molina affirmed both doctrines, claiming that the doctrine of middle knowledge enabled him to do so. Molina “boldly asserted that had the doctrine of middle knowledge been known to the early church, then neither Pelagianism nor Lutheranism would have arisen. The resolution of the tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom is an admirable objective that ought to interest any Christian.”⁶⁶ In following Molina, Craig asserts that there are three types of divine knowledge. He gives the following table in explaining his view:

The Three Logical Moments in God Knowledge

[logical as distinguished from chronological]

1. **Natural Knowledge:** God's knowledge of all possible worlds. The content of this knowledge is essential to God.
2. **Middle Knowledge:** God's knowledge of what every possible free creature would do under any possible circumstances and, hence knowledge of those possible worlds which God can make actual. The content of this knowledge is not essential to God.

God's Free Decision to Create a World

3. **Free Knowledge:** God's knowledge of the actual world. The content of the knowledge is not essential to God.

God's natural knowledge is innate. God must have natural knowledge or He would not be God. According to Craig, natural knowledge includes the laws of logic. In getting to the point of how this line of thinking helps us to understand how God has foreknowledge of free events, he explains that God's "natural knowledge" entails the knowledge of "all possibilities." Thus, God knows "all possible individuals that he could create, all the possible circumstances he could place them in, all their possible actions and reactions, and all the possible worlds or orders which he could create. God could not lack this knowledge and still be God; the content of natural knowledge is essential to him."

Natural knowledge gives God the knowledge of every person who would make up all possible worlds. Middle knowledge gives God the knowledge of how each person would respond to each hypothetical encounter. As Craig points out, "Middle knowledge is the aspect of divine omniscience that comprises God's knowledge, prior to any determination of the divine will, of which contingent events would occur under any hypothetical set of circumstances."

Both natural knowledge and middle knowledge are logically prior to God's decision to create one of these possible worlds. Craig tells us, "Indeed, God's decision to create a world is based on his middle knowledge and consists in his selecting to become actual one of the possible worlds known to him in the second moment." After (logically after, not temporally after) God's decision to create, God possessed foreknowledge of the world that he would actually create.

In all of the possible worlds that God could create, the individuals were free. This would mean that the individuals in the one that God did choose to create were free. Those who hold this view assert that they have an explanation for believing in human free will and God's foreknowledge of the free acts of human beings. Since God chose to create this world rather than one of the other worlds that He could have created, they conclude that this world and *the individuals and their free acts were predestinated (or predetermined)*—thus preserving the concerns of both Calvinism and Arminianism.

AN EVALUATION OF THE MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE APPROACH

As I see it, there is a fatal flaw in this approach. The problem is found in the explanation of natural knowledge. In a quotation given above, Craig explains that God's natural knowledge "includes knowledge of all possibilities. He knows all possible individuals that he could create, all the possible circumstances he could place them in, all their possible actions and reactions, and all the possible worlds or orders which he could create."

A careful look at this explanation of God's natural knowledge will reveal that it already presupposes God's foreknowledge of free human choices and acts. Let us limit our discussion to the statement "He knows all possible individuals that he could create." The only individuals in the human race that God could have foreknown without having foreknowledge of free human choices and acts, if human beings were to have true free will, would have been Adam and Eve. From that point on free choices were involved in every conception and every birth. For God to know that I would exist would require knowledge of all the free acts from Adam and Eve to me that were involved in every marriage, every conception, and every birth of my endless number of grandparents, and my parents. If He knew that, He already had knowledge of free human choices and acts.

If my observations are correct, this view would not be the grounds of an explanation of how God has foreknowledge of free acts of human beings because it already assumes such foreknowledge in the definition of God's natural knowledge. Also, I contend that the only individuals that have free will are real persons. Fictitious individuals (only theoretically possible individuals) do not have free will. They are moved about, not by a will of their own, but the will of the one who imagines their existence.

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FREE ACTS A MYSTERY

The majority of those who have believed in God's foreknowledge of free human choices have not attempted to give an explanation of how God was able to have this kind of foreknowledge.

Arminius makes the concession, "I do not understand the mode in which He knows future contingencies, and especially those which belong to the free-will of creatures, and which He has decreed to permit, but do not of Himself."

Let me repeat a part of a quotation given earlier in this chapter, where Buswell, a Calvinist, said that he saw no problem in foreknowledge of free acts of human beings. He explains:

To the question then how God can know a free act in the future, I reply I do not know, but neither do I know how I can have knowledge by analysis, by inference from reason or from causes, or from statistical data reported by intuition, or (if it is insisted upon) by innate ideas. Knowledge is a mystery in any event, and God's knowledge of free events in the future is only one more mystery, revealed in Scripture. We have good and sufficient grounds to accept, and no valid ground to reject, what Scripture says on this subject.

I cast my lot with those who do not understand the way God is able to foresee future free acts. The Bible makes it quite clear that God does possess foreknowledge of all future events, including free acts. Berkhof reminded us in a quotation used above, "It is perfectly evident that Scripture teaches divine foreknowledge of contingent events, 1 Sam. 23:10–13; 2 Kings 13:19; Ps. 81:14, 15; Isa. 42:9; 48:18; Jer. 2:2, 3; 38:17–20; Ezek. 3:6; and Matt. 11:21."

As we can see, the Bible makes it clear that God has foreknowledge of free human choices and acts. I believe God's foreknowledge of free acts is also necessarily implied from God's foreknowledge of His own actions. It would have been impossible for God to have had foreknowledge of sending Jesus Christ into the world apart from knowledge of the free acts of human beings, that is, unless a person takes the position of unlimited determinism. For God to have foreknowledge of the exact identity of the human nature of Jesus Christ required that He have foreknowledge of His exact ancestry. For God to have this knowledge required that He have a foreknowledge of free acts of human beings.

I cannot explain how God created the universe *ex nihilo* (from nothing), but I believe it. I do not know how Jesus worked His miracles, but I believe He did. Why should I be concerned if I do not know how He has foreknowledge of free human choices and acts? As Buswell reminds us, there is much about our own ability to gain knowledge that we do not understand. I have sometimes made the statement that our knowledge of God is more adequate for our needs than our understanding of human personality. We cannot reach a consensus about whether human beings have a free will, what free will means, whether human beings are trichotomous or dichotomous or unitary beings, what human personality is, and how human personality is changed.

There are many things about God that we do not understand. I cannot comprehend that God had no beginning. Yet I believe it. I cannot think of God in any other way. Though I cannot understand how God has foreknowledge of free events, I still believe it. I cannot think of God in any other way. I can identify with Jack Cottrell when he says, "Surely God foreknows everything about the life of every individual. He cannot help but foreknow, just because he is God." We must all agree that some things about God are inscrutable!

DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE NOT TO BE EQUATED WITH DIVINE CAUSALITY

It is important for us to realize that causality cannot be ascribed to foreknowledge. Nor can divine cause be required for foreknowledge. These conclusions are necessary if there is to be the possibility of real contingencies in human experience. Picirilli, who acknowledges a debt to James Arminius and Richard Watson, has an excellent treatment on this subject. He explains: "The Arminian insists that there are things that actually can go either of two ways, and yet God knows which way they will go. He knows all future events perfectly. This means that they are all certain, else He would not know what will be."

Picirilli goes on to say:

The Arminian insists that there is no conflict between "certainty" and true "contingency," although explanation of this requires a careful and technical discussion of three important terms: certainty, contingency, and necessity. The distinction between these plays an important role in the issues related to predestination. I would venture that, in this matter alone, there is more room for misunderstanding and more to be gained from clarity than almost any other point in dispute.

In explaining the terms "contingency" and "necessity," Picirilli posits the contingency of "the free acts of morally responsible persons." A contingency, he explains, is "anything that really can take place in more than one way. The freedom to choose does not contradict certainty. Certainty relates to the 'factness' of an event, to *whether* it will be or not; contingency relates to its *nature* as free or necessary. The same event can be both certain and contingent at the same time." Necessary events must "inevitably be the way they are." For necessary events, "there were causes leading to the event that allowed no freedom of choice, causes that necessarily produced the event. Whenever God, for example, 'makes' something happen the way it does without allowing for any other eventuality, that event is a necessity."

Picirilli goes on to argue that "God foreknows everything future as certain." However, necessity is not what makes future events certain. Rather, their "simple factness" is what makes them certain. "They will be the way they will be, and God knows what they will be because He has perfect awareness, in advance, of all facts. But that knowledge *per se*, even though it is

foreknowledge, has no more causal effect on facts than our knowledge of certain past facts has on them.”

Further on he says:

The Calvinist errs, on this subject, in suggesting that God knows the future certainly only because He first unconditionally foreordained (predestinated) it. But that is to confuse knowledge with active cause and so in effect take away contingency. God’s foreknowledge, in the sense of prescience, is part of His omniscience and includes all things as certain, both good and evil, contingent, and necessary. It is not in itself causal.

Picirilli makes a solid case for God’s foreknowledge of future free human choices. God’s foreknowledge of events means that it is certain that they will occur, but it does not make the events necessary. I have already referred to God’s knowledge of hypothetical contingencies. If divine cause had to be the basis for knowledge of that which is neither past nor present, that would rule out knowledge of hypothetical contingencies. That would mean that any reference to hypothetical cases in Scripture by God would be only educated guesses. Such a view of God is unthinkable.

DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF FREE HUMAN CHOICES AND ACTS NOT BASED ON A SPECTATOR ROLE

It is important to keep in mind that in eternity past God did not observe the future as a mere spectator any more than He occupies the position of a mere spectator now. At the present time, God is deeply involved in what is taking place. As a holy, loving, caring, personal, omnipotent, omniscient, wise, and sovereign God, He is deeply concerned about and deeply involved in what is happening in the human race. There is a consistency between all of God’s attributes and of His actions as a divine Sovereign.

God is not an impassible being who cannot be moved by the concerns of human beings. He cares deeply about people. He cares deeply about people because it is His nature to care. He cares deeply about people because He created them for His glory in His image. He wants us to care deeply about people. He feels the pain and suffering of people. He wants us to feel the pain and suffering of people as well.

It is the kind of God that I have just attempted to describe who foresaw the future from all eternity. As He foresaw the future, He saw it as it would progressively unfold from: (1) The result of His creative activity and His divine influence. (2) The result of the devastating influence of sin. (3) The result of the response that human beings would give as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Word of God, and the ministry of the redeemed. (4) The result of all of the influences that would come from all sources outside Himself. (5) The result of all the influence that He would bring on people through His power and His infinite wisdom. He saw then, everything that He sees and is doing now. He is the same God now that He was then. Everything that He is doing now is just as real as it would be if He had not known it in advance.

THE CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD AND THE *INFLUENCE AND RESPONSE* MODEL

Up to this point in this chapter, I think I have been able to raise some serious objections to the *cause* and *effect* model of how God plans and carries out His plan for the human race. The question before us now is: Is the *influence* and *response* model consistent with the sovereignty of God? I believe it is. I may not be able to answer all of the questions that I may be confronted with about this model, but I think it will have considerably fewer problems than the cause and effect model.

A Point of Clarification

Are the following two questions the same? (1) Is free will in the sense of the liberty of indifference consistent with the sovereignty of God? (2) Is free will in the sense of the liberty of indifference consistent with divine determinism? If the only way that a sovereign God can maintain His sovereignty in dealing with human beings is through a cause and effect approach, then these questions are essentially the same, and the answer to both questions is no. However, if a sovereign God can maintain His sovereignty through an influence and response approach, the questions are not the same. The answer to the first question is yes, and the answer to the second question is no.

THE QUESTION OF LIMITING THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

It is usually assumed that, if God is going to grant free will to human beings in the sense of the liberty of indifference that it would impose a limitation on the sovereignty of God. Arminians frequently make this concession. My first question to the suggestion of a limitation is: What kind of limitation? Does the use of the word *limitation* mean to make God weaker? If so, my response is that a God who can grant true freedom of will and still retain His sovereign control is a much greater God than a God who must limit His approach to sovereign control to determinism. I am in agreement with Cottrell when he says that it is wrong to think “that God’s control varies according to the degree that he causes things or the degree of freedom bestowed on his creatures.” God’s sovereignty entails that he have total control. However, “the issue is whether such total control requires a predetermination or causation of all things. I contend that it does not; God’s sovereignty is greater than that!”

My next question with regard to whether free will imposes a limitation on God is: A limitation in comparison to what? Why is it a limitation on God if He should choose to govern human beings through an *influence* and *response model* rather than a cause and effect model?

The two models do have some significant differences. If God had chosen to make man a machine with conscious awareness, he could have carried out His sovereign control with absolute precision. There would have been an absolute correlation between divine cause and effect as human beings would have experienced it. Certainly no one would claim that all we see happening in today’s world is in exact conformity to the desire of a holy and loving God! This is the fatal flaw of unlimited determinism, whether hard or soft.

According to the *influence* and *response model*, it would have been possible for Adam and Eve and the human race to have lived a life of absolute obedience. This would comport with a *liberty of indifference*. But, as we know, it did not actually work out that way. This did not spell the end of God’s sovereignty. It did mean that He had to follow through on the warning that He

gave to Adam and Eve when He said, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

In the *influence and response model*, once sin entered the picture, there would not be an exact correspondence between divine desire and human response. Divine sovereignty took on a new direction. God placed human beings under the sentence of death and cursed the earth. In Genesis 3:15, He made a promise to Adam and Eve that we know in the light of further revelation involved the promise of redemption through Jesus Christ. He is carrying out that plan with the human race. It is being done through the influence and response model.

THE INFLUENCE AND RESPONSE MODEL AND THE FULFILLMENT OF GOD’S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES

One of the most important questions for theologians to answer is: Is the *cause and effect model* the only way that a sovereign God can carry out His purposes? Or, can God work effectively in carrying out His purposes through the *influence and response model*?

There is absolutely no reason that a sovereign God cannot carry out His sovereign purposes while using an *influence and response model*. Once sin entered the picture, there would not be a precise, exact correlation between God’s desires and human action. To say what I am saying is not the same as saying that God will not accomplish what He plans to do. *God’s plan will not be thwarted!*

If God is going to be sovereign—and I cannot imagine God not being sovereign—then He must be able to make plans and carry them out. It cannot be otherwise. However, if God works with human beings through an *influence and response model* in accordance with both the liberty of spontaneity and the liberty of indifference, we would necessarily use different criteria for judging His effectiveness as sovereign than we would if He operated through cause and effect.

The *cause and effect model* would expect an exact correlation between God’s desire and what follows. Determinism is required for the *cause and effect model*. The smallest failure between God’s desire and what follows would mean the collapse of God’s sovereignty.

In influence and response, there is an exact correlation between what God sets out to do and what follows. If God says something will happen, it will happen. But that is not the same as saying that there is an exact correlation between what God desires and what follows. I think we can safely say that God does not desire for lying, hatred, murder, rape, and thievery to occur. At the same time, this does not mean that God will not accomplish the purposes He sets before Himself.

The purposes that God set before Himself, as they relate to human beings, are best explained by the influence and response model. God purposed to create human beings with a free will. He purposed that they would be free to obey Him or disobey Him, to please Him or displease Him. It turned out that Adam and Eve disobeyed God. God obviously did not desire that they disobey Him. Such an attitude would be prohibited by His holiness. Their disobedience did not mean that God had ceased to be sovereign.

God was not caught off guard. He knew what would happen. He set in motion the processes that would bring about the plan of redemption through Jesus Christ. This plan was to be based on the fact that Jesus Christ would pay in full the penalty for the sins of human beings. He would provide absolute righteousness to meet the demand for absolute righteousness. He would offer this free salvation to all who would believe in Jesus Christ. He would have this message preached. He would have the Holy Spirit work to draw people to Christ as the gospel is

preached. All of this would be done in keeping with the influence and response model. The end result of all of this would be “that in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Eph. 1:10). All of this is being done “according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11).

Many seem to think that God would be helpless when it comes to carrying out His sovereign purpose if He did not work through cause and effect. That this is not a necessary conclusion is seen by the way human beings work. The way human beings work with one another is through influence and response. Many things are accomplished this way. Contractors sign contracts and build buildings. For them to accomplish this goal, they have to influence people to work for them.

They have to influence them to do what they ask them to do. They may not always get the ones to work that they ask. But they get others. They succeed with the project.

Human contractors can deal with those who are free in the sense of the liberty of indifference through the influence and response model. If they can, cannot a sovereign and wise God accomplish His purposes with those who are free in the sense of the liberty of indifference through the influence and response model?

In the last several pages, I have made my case for the position that a sovereign and wise God is not required to use the cause and effect model in order to maintain His sovereignty and accomplish His purposes. I believe that God can and does work through the influence and response model. That being true, there is no reason that a sovereign God could not use the approach of conditional election.

We will now turn our attention to the second assumption of Calvinism.

AN ANSWER TO THE SECOND ASSUMPTION OF CALVINISM

The second assumption of Calvinism is that total depravity precludes the response of faith from the sinner unless the Holy Spirit first regenerates him. As I pointed out earlier, the view that the nature of depravity requires that the sinner be regenerated before he or she can respond with faith had its origin with Augustine.

To place regeneration before faith poses some serious problems for Calvinism. This will be dealt with in Chapter 7. For a more thorough treatment please refer to “An Inconsistency in Calvinism.”

Calvinism is faced with two important assumed impossibilities: First, it is impossible for a person to believe unless he or she is first regenerated. Second, it is impossible for sanctification to take place prior to justification. A Classical Calvinist will not argue against either of these statements. In Chapter 7, I give support for these two assertions from Robert Haldane and Louis Berkhof. The Calvinistic credentials of these men are not in question. In Classical Calvinism, the order is regeneration, faith, justification, and sanctification. *In placing regeneration before justification Calvinism has a problem.* By anybody’s definition, regeneration is a life-changing experience. Berkhof tells us that “regeneration is the beginning of sanctification.” If regeneration is the beginning of sanctification, this means that Classical Calvinism has the process of sanctification beginning before justification occurs. This cannot be!

Calvinists have, by and large, adhered to the satisfaction view of atonement and justification. If a person is consistent in developing the implications of the satisfaction view of atonement, it is clear that God cannot perform the act of regeneration (an act of sanctification) in a person before

he or she is justified. God can move in with His sanctifying grace only after the guilt problem is satisfied by justification. To think otherwise is to violate the law of non-contradiction. I realize that when we talk about the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation) we are talking about logical order instead of chronological order. But that logical order is inviolable!

Regeneration is not an act of God that prepares the way for redemption. It is a redemptive act. I commend Calvinists for upholding the satisfaction view of atonement and the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ as the ground of justification. Yet I believe they need to reexamine the question of whether *the redemptive act of regeneration* can be performed on a person before the death and righteousness of Christ is actually imputed to his or her account.

THE NECESSITY OF THE DRAWING POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

It is evident that it is no simple matter for a person who is under the bondage of sin to be brought to an exercise of saving faith. Jesus drove that point home when He said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (Jn. 6:44).

We dare not take the depravity of human beings lightly. Apart from the drawing power of the Holy Spirit, none would come to Christ. If a person cannot exercise faith in Christ unless the Holy Spirit *first* regenerates him or her, those who believe in the satisfaction view of atonement and justification are in trouble as we have seen above. For a person to be regenerated *before* he or she is justified contradicts the logical priority of justification to sanctification. To avoid this contradiction, a way must be found that will place justification before regeneration. I believe that in the influence and response model we can maintain a strong view of depravity and at the same time maintain the *ordo salutis* to be faith, justification, regeneration, and sanctification.

We know that Adam and Eve were created with original righteousness. They had a righteous and sinless nature. By a satanic attack through the serpent, Eve responded in a way that *contradicted* her righteous nature. She disobeyed God and obeyed the serpent. Then Adam, following the example of Eve, responded in a way that contradicted his righteous nature. All of this happened through an influence and response relationship. Satan influenced Adam and Eve and they responded.

It is a matter of historical fact that Adam and Eve by the influence of Satan acted contrary to their nature. Satan did not perform some transforming act on them to give them a depraved nature, making it possible for them to sin. We grant that Adam and Eve, through Satanic influence, an influence which did not first change their nature, were brought to sin. Will we say that God cannot, without first regenerating sinners, influence sinners through the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, so that some of them will contradict their sinful nature and be brought to Christ? How can a person acknowledge the factualness of what happened to Adam and Eve and deny the possibility that a person could exercise saving faith by the aid of the Holy Spirit without first being regenerated?

God made human beings in His image. He made them personal beings. He made them to live in an influence and response relationship with Himself. While depravity puts human beings in a state of being that requires divine aid before they can respond to the gospel, there is no reason to believe that God cannot continue to work with human beings in keeping with the influence and response model. That is the only way consistent with the personhood of human beings.

The image of God still remains in fallen creatures and can be appealed to by the moral teachings of the Bible, the message of sin and guilt, God’s provision of atonement through Jesus Christ, and the offer of salvation through Christ alone through faith alone. When sinners are

confronted with this message, the Holy Spirit can and will work to draw sinners to Christ. They can be brought to that point in which they are enabled to say either yes or no.

To make it clear that I have a very serious view of sin and depravity, let me state again what I said in Chapter 1 under the heading, “The Problem of Giving a Simple Description of Fallen Man”: It is clear that man fell from a state of holiness into a state of sin (Is. 53:6; Rom. 3:23). It is clear that sin has placed man under condemnation before God (Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8). It is clear that fallen man cannot please God and has no fellowship with God (Eph. 2:1–3; Rom. 8:7–8). It is clear that man cannot come to God without the drawing power of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 6:44). It is clear that a work so drastic as to be called a new birth is required for man’s salvation (Jn. 3:3–7). But we also find areas where the state and condition of man are not so clearly understood.

I think I have shown that Calvinists are in deep trouble when they place regeneration, which clearly includes sanctification, ahead of justification in the *ordo salutis*. That problem alone should spell a deathblow to the Classical Calvinist insistence that regeneration must precede faith and justification. I think I have shown that there is no reason to believe that God cannot use the influence and response model in working with sinners to lead them to Christ.

AN ANSWER TO THE THIRD ASSUMPTION OF CALVINISM

The third assumption of Calvinism is that the only way salvation could be free is by unconditional election. My treatment of atonement and justification in Chapter 6 will make it unquestionably clear that I believe justification is a gift. It is by grace. Not one thing that I have ever done or ever will do is placed on my account with God as part of the price of my redemption. The only way God, as Supreme Judge of the universe, can justify a member of the fallen human race is to have Christ’s righteousness and Christ’s death placed on his account. That and that alone is the ground for justification. That is it and nothing else. Justification is by *Christ alone* by (conditioned on) *faith alone*. That is pure and uncorrupted grace!

Is anyone really going to insist that for God to require faith in Christ *as a condition for receiving* the death and righteousness of Christ would mean justification by works? Does not Paul insist in Romans 4 that to be justified by faith (faith as a condition, not ground) is in contradiction to justification by works? Even a Calvinist believes that faith is a condition of salvation.

Earlier in this chapter, I pointed out that the unconditional election taught in Calvinism seems to rest on three assumptions. These assumptions are: First, the sovereignty of God requires unconditional election and thus precludes conditional election. Second, total depravity precludes the response of faith from a sinner unless the Holy Spirit first regenerates him. Third, that salvation is free precludes conditional election. I pointed out that if these three assumptions are true, Calvinism has won its case. I also pointed out that if these three assumptions are not true, Calvinism is in trouble. I believe that I have shown that these assumptions do not rest on solid ground.

Now I want to turn our attention to the question of decrees in Arminian thought.

TYPES OF DECREES CONSISTENT WITH ARMINIAN THEOLOGY

The decrees of God are His eternal purpose or purposes. Decrees could be called God's eternal will or His eternal plan. I will consider three basic types of decrees: efficacious decrees, decrees to influence, and decrees to permit.

Efficacious Decrees

Efficacious decrees are decrees in which God decrees that certain things will come to pass. In these decrees, God Himself will be responsible for their fulfillment. There are two types of efficacious decrees: unconditional efficacious decrees and conditional efficacious decrees.

Unconditional Efficacious Decrees

Unconditional efficacious decrees are not dependent upon any conditions for their fulfillment. The work of creation would be an example of this kind of decree. The provision of hell for the wicked and the provision of atonement through Jesus Christ would also be examples of this kind of decree. Because of God's foreknowledge of sin, by the necessity of His holy nature, He decreed to prepare hell for the wicked. On the occasion of God's foreknowledge of sin, God was moved by His love to decree the provision of atonement.

It is important to note that it can be seen by the use of foreknowledge in these two unconditional efficacious decrees how foreknowledge was used in the "determinate counsel" of God in Acts 2:23. It is not necessary to consider foreknowledge in this case to be causal. It is possible to consider foreknowledge to be instrumental in the decree to predestinate the crucifixion of Christ. In this case, foreknowledge would furnish God with the information necessary for Him to make the plans for the provision of atonement through the death of Christ. By the help of His foreknowledge, God could decree the death of Christ in a way that would not violate the freedom of choice of the persons who would be involved.

Conditional Efficacious Decrees

In conditional efficacious decrees, God efficaciously decreed that certain things would take place when certain conditions were met. These decrees were made because God, on the basis of His foreknowledge, knew that these conditions would be met. An example of this kind of decree would be the justification and regeneration of a person when he believes. It is for this reason that I can say that a believer's justification and regeneration were efficaciously decreed. Justification and regeneration are monergistic. They are solely the work of God.

Decrees to Influence

Decrees to influence refer to the action of God through which He would work with His responsible creatures to bring about desired responses. While there is a desired response on the part of God, that response is not guaranteed by the influence of God. The drawing power of the Holy Spirit upon the unsaved when they read or hear the gospel would be an example of this kind of decree. I have not seen this terminology (or any synonym) used elsewhere. I do not believe that we can successfully understand the workings of God with man apart from this decree or one by another name that says the same thing. It is the lack of tolerance for an idea of this kind that puts Calvinism into an awkward position in trying to explain the origin of sin without making God responsible for sin.

Decrees to Permit

These decrees have reference to the action of God in permitting certain things but not efficaciously bringing them about. All events that God foreknows (which embraces all that ever will happen) are either efficaciously decreed or permitted. All acts of human beings (or free agents) come under this permission *whether evil or good*.

While the *permission* and the *events* that follow, whether evil or good, are decreed, both are not decreed in exactly the same sense. The permission itself is a divine act. The events that follow, which are our present concern, are human acts—some in obedience and some in disobedience. As it relates to those acts that are good, God has the relationship of both influence and permission. As it relates to those acts that are evil, God’s relationship to their occurrence is permission only. As William G. T. Shedd says, “The permissive decree relates only to moral evil. Sin is the sole and solitary object of this species of decrees.”

It is a mistake to limit permission to disobedience. The decrees to influence and the decrees to permit are God’s way of dealing with persons made in His own image. They are permitted to either obey or disobey. They are permitted to be good stewards or bad stewards. In this arrangement, some things happen that please God and some things happen that displease God. It pleased God to make man in His own image and give man a choice in matters. The plan pleased God. But He is not pleased with the sinful deeds of human beings.

AN ORDER OF DECREES CONSISTENT WITH ARMINIANISM

In the first edition of his *Systematic Theology*, Henry C. Thiessen adopted a modified form of Sublapsarianism. He argues that “the decrees are in this order: 1. the decree to create, 2. the decree to permit the fall, 3. the decree to provide salvation for all, and 4. the decree to apply that salvation to some, to those who believe.” Thiessen modified the fourth point of Sublapsarianism to conform to his doctrine of conditional election. This modification of Sublapsarianism would be compatible with Arminianism.²¹

²¹ Forlines, F. L. (2011). [*Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*](#). (J. M. Pinson, Ed.) (pp. 35–90). Nashville, TN: Randall House.



Five Views of Destiny

Election Debate: Personal or Corporate

Election Debate: Foresee or Foreordain

The Classical Arminian View of Election

i.

JACK W. COTTRELL

Arminianism as such, in its broadest sense, is simply non-Augustinianism or non-Calvinism. It has many variations, “from the evangelical views of Arminius himself to left-wing liberalism.” What holds them all together is the rejection of the Augustinian concept of true total depravity (bondage of the will), and a belief in significant free will, at least in relation to the ability to accept or reject the gospel offer of salvation.

It is actually a misnomer to call this view “Arminianism” since it existed long before James Arminius (A.D. 1560–1609). It was the consensus belief in Christendom prior to Augustine (A.D. 354–430), and was affirmed by even Augustine, especially but not exclusively in his earlier years.³ For example, Augustine declared in A.D. 412 that the Creator gave human beings free will as “an intermediate power, which is able either to incline towards faith, or to turn towards unbelief... God no doubt wishes all men to be saved, but yet not so as to take away from them their liberty of will.” Catholic thinking in the Middle Ages was mixed but from the time of the Reformation,⁵ official Roman Catholic teaching has been in line with Arminianism. In the sixteenth century the Anabaptists and most of the Radical Reformation taught a doctrine of (restored) free will, contrary to the main Reformers.⁷

When Arminius himself made the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, he was exposed to strict Calvinist views, especially those of Beza in Geneva; but he personally rejected both the supralapsarian and the sublapsarian forms of Calvinism. Though he acknowledged the Adamic legacy of total depravity and affirmed the necessity of grace to enable faith,⁹ he denied the practical significance of such depravity by declaring that such enabling grace is universal and resistible. Thus as to whether sinners have the ability to accept or reject the gospel, Arminius was certainly an Arminian. Some, such as C. Gordon Olson, Robert Picirilli, and Stephen Ashby, refer to Arminius’s overall view, and that of his early Remonstrant followers, as “Reformed Arminianism.”¹¹ Picirilli and Ashby espouse and expand this view. F. Leroy Forlines calls Arminius’s view “Classical Arminianism” and identifies his own view with it.

Many who have continued in the general freewill tradition, and who are thus Arminian in this broad sense, fall outside the pale of orthodox, conservative Christendom. This includes groups such as Socinians and Unitarians; Quakers;¹⁴ some cults, such as Jehovah’s Witnesses; and what Erickson generally calls “left-wing liberalism.”

The most common form of post-Arminius Arminianism is that formulated by John Wesley and embraced by his followers in the Methodist, holiness, and pentecostal denominations. It is similar to Arminius's own view but includes a more complete and consistent view of the prevenient grace of God that restores to Adam's race the freewill ability to accept or reject the gospel. This view is usually called "Wesleyan Arminianism," or "evangelical Arminianism."

Other modern groups in the general freewill tradition include some Baptists (e.g., the Free Will Baptist Church, represented by Forlines and Picirilli), and the Restoration (Stone-Campbell) Movement fellowships (Christian churches; Churches of Christ), of which I am a part.

With the exception of Catholics and nonorthodox groups such as those named above, the view espoused by most of those mentioned in this brief historical survey can be thought of as "classical Arminianism" in the broadest sense. I know that Forlines uses this title (with a capital "C") in a more specific sense that includes the doctrines of prevenient grace and substitutionary atonement. Nevertheless I am going to apply this title (with a small "c") to all those who believe in man's significant free will to accept or reject the gospel, however the presence of this ability is explained.

How, then, does the classical Arminian doctrine of *predestination* fit into this picture? As I am using the term, it is the view that before the world ever existed God conditionally predestined some specific individuals to eternal life and the rest to eternal condemnation, based on his foreknowledge of their freewill responses to his law and to his grace. For most of those described here as classical Arminians, the key idea is that God predestines according to foreknowledge (prescience) of future human free-will decisions. Jewett calls this the oldest view of predestination, traceable to the early Greek Fathers, and "the most widely held view" today "among lay students of Scripture."

Some may be surprised to hear that Arminians believe in *predestination* at all. This is because many associate the word with Calvinism, and assume that only Calvinists accept such a doctrine. This is not the case, however. As Forlines says, the doctrine of predestination is just as essential for Arminians as it is for Calvinists, and we in the former category need to reclaim the word as well as the concept, along with all the blessings entailed thereby.

I will now present four things: (1) a more complete explanation of the Arminian view of predestination; (2) a brief history of the Arminian view; (3) a statement of the general theological presuppositions of this view; and (4) a brief exposition of Romans 9 as a crucial text relating to this subject.

The Arminian View of Predestination

As just defined, predestination is the view that before the world ever existed God conditionally predestined some specific individuals to eternal life and the rest to eternal condemnation, based on His foreknowledge of their freewill responses to his law and to his grace. In unpacking this definition we shall explore the meaning, the objects, the end, and the manner of predestination.

The Meaning of Predestination

The term *predestination* refers to God's decision to perform a particular future act or fulfill a certain purpose, or his prior determination to cause something to come to pass. God's predetermining activity is not limited to his decisions concerning the final destiny of individuals;

it also includes other aspects of his eternal purposes. For example, as applied to persons God has not only predestined some to *salvation* but has also predestined some to roles of *service* whereby he uses them as instruments to carry out his purposes as related to salvation. Discerning the difference between the two is crucial for a correct understanding of what it means to say God has predestined some to salvation.

Terminology

The Greek verb translated “to predestine” is *proorizo*, which combines *orizo*, “to limit, to fix, to appoint, to determine”; and *pro*, “before, prior to.” *Proorizo* thus literally means “to determine beforehand, to predetermine, to foreordain.” Predestination is thus God’s predetermination or decision to do something, to cause something, to bring about a certain event or state of affairs at a future time. The word occurs six times in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11); the four uses in Romans and Ephesians refer specifically to persons. The English word *predestine* suggests the nuance “to predetermine the final destiny of,” but a reference to final destiny is not inherent in the Greek term. It is an appropriate word nevertheless since the uses in Romans and Ephesians do seem to refer to the predetermination of personal destinies. In these cases the prefix *pro-* (“pre-”) indicates that the determination took place before the world was created (see Eph. 1:4; Rev. 17:8).

In reference to eternal destinies, predestination includes both election and reprobation. Regarding salvation *election* is God’s choice of certain individuals for the specific purpose of giving them eternal life, whereas, *reprobation* is God’s decision to assign the non-elect to eternal damnation. Our main focus here is on the former.

Divine election in general is God’s determination to choose or select one person or group from among others for a specific role or purpose in his plan. The New Testament terms for this are the verb *eklegomai*, “to choose, to select, to elect”; the noun *ekloge*, “choice, election”; and the adjective *eklektos*, “chosen, elect.” These terms appear much more frequently than *proorizo* and have a broader range of application. In 1 Timothy 5:21 Paul refers to elect or chosen angels; in all other cases divine election refers to human beings.

Regarding the latter, it is of supreme importance to note that many of the passages about election have nothing to do with predestination to salvation but refer instead to God’s choosing of certain individuals or groups for *service*, i.e., to fill a certain role in the historical accomplishment of salvation. To be chosen for service is a totally different issue from being chosen for salvation.

Chosen for service. Those predestined for specific roles in the accomplishment of redemption include the Redeemer himself, Jesus of Nazareth. The election of Jesus is the central and primary act of predestination. In Isaiah 42:1 the Lord speaks of Jesus as the elect one: “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights.” Matthew 12:18 quotes this passage and applies it to Jesus. At the transfiguration God announced the election of Jesus in these words: “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” (Luke 9:35 NASB). (See also Luke 23:35; 1 Pet. 2:4, 6.)

The election of Jesus was part of the divine plan even before the worlds were created. Foreknowing both the obedience of the Redeemer and the disobedience of his enemies, God predetermined the accomplishment of redemption through Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20). Jesus was foreordained to die for the sins of the world (Acts 4:28).

At times other individuals were chosen for special roles in order to facilitate God's purposes. To create the nation of Israel God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Neh. 9:7; Acts 13:17; Rom. 9:7–13). He chose Moses (Ps. 106:23) and David (Ps. 78:70; 139:16) among others. He even chose certain Gentile rulers to help carry out His purpose for Israel, e.g., Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17) and Cyrus (Isa. 45:1).

As instruments for establishing the church, another group of individuals was chosen, namely, the apostles. From among His disciples Jesus "chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles" (Luke 6:13). Later He asked them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve?" (John 6:70 NASB). Christ says to the apostles, "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit" (John 15:16 NASB; see 13:18; 15:19; Acts 1:2). Likewise chosen for service as an apostle were Matthias (Acts 1:24) and Paul (Acts 9:15; Gal. 1:15–16).

That such election was for service and not salvation is seen from the fact that even Judas is among the chosen twelve (Luke 6:13; John 6:70), though his predetermined role was that of the betrayer of Jesus (John 6:71). God did not *cause* Judas to fulfill this role but rather *foreknew* what he would do as an apostle (Acts 2:23). In other words, Judas did not betray Jesus because he was chosen to do so; he was chosen because God foreknew that he would betray Jesus.

One of the most important of God's acts of predestination for service applies not to an individual but to a group, namely, the nation of Israel: "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6; see Deut. 14:2; 1 Chron. 16:13; Acts 13:17). This election of Israel was the election of the nation in general, not the election of specific individuals. The nation was chosen specifically to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. The nation could serve its purpose of preparing for the Messiah even if the majority of individual Jews were lost.

Since Israel was chosen specifically to prepare the way for the Messiah's appearance, her purpose was accomplished and her destiny fulfilled in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:32–33; Rom. 9:3–5). Thus the nation of Israel is no longer God's elect people. In the new covenant age God has a new elect body, a new Israel, the church. While not strictly parallel to Old Testament Israel, in this age the church as a body is now God's chosen people (1 Pet. 2:9); and this election is in part an election to service. When Peter describes the church as a "chosen race," he adds this purpose for the choosing: "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9 NASB). Thus in terms of service, whereas Israel was elected for preparation, the church is elected for proclamation.

Chosen for salvation. The language of election does at times refer to predestination to salvation. The verb is used for this purpose infrequently (e.g., Eph. 1:4); most often the adjective *eklektos* is used to describe those whom God has saved, either individually (Rom. 16:13) or collectively. In the collective sense sometimes it refers to "the elect" as the general company of the saved (Luke 18:7; Rom. 8:33; Rev. 17:14), as the church in general (2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2:9), or as specific churches (2 John 1, 13). In 1 Thessalonians 1:4 the noun *ekloge* is used in this last sense. In Romans 11:5, 7 it is used for the saved (the "remnant") within the nation of Israel.

While the terms *predestination* and *election* are not always used interchangeably in Scripture, they are certainly closely related in meaning. Without question those who will be in heaven with God for eternity are both elected and predestined for it. The only shade of difference between the two concepts seems to be this, that election is God's act of choosing or selecting certain

individuals rather than others from a larger group, while predestination is God's act of preappointing those so chosen to their final destiny. The two go hand in hand, and a reference to one implies the other.

The Objects of Predestination

The next question is the objects of predestination. According to Arminians, where matters of eternal destiny are concerned, specifically *who* are the objects of God's predestining activity? Two issues arise here. First, does predestination apply to the lost as well as to the saved? Second, does predestination apply primarily to individuals or to groups?

The lost are predestined, too. Arminians agree that some are predestined to eternal salvation; the elect are chosen for eternal life. As with Calvinism, though, there is no universal agreement as to how predestination applies to the lost. Defining it only in a Calvinistic sense, John Miley absolutely rejects the concept of reprobation. Others, however, understand that reprobation according to foreknowledge works in exactly the same way as election according to foreknowledge, and thus have no difficulty accepting it as a doctrine parallel to election. Pointing out that Arminius accepted both, Picirilli affirms that "reprobation is corollary to election" and that they are "essentially parallel (although as opposites)."²⁸

I accept the latter view, though it is mostly an inference from what we know of the relation between foreknowledge and election. There are few specific biblical references to this doctrine. Careful exegesis of Romans 9:22 shows that the unbelieving Jews *prepared themselves* (middle voice) for destruction through their own unbelief; thus this text is not relevant here. Two texts that may be relevant, though, are 1 Peter 2:8 and Jude 4.

Jude 4 speaks of certain ones who long ago were marked down or branded for condemnation; but it is their *condemnation* that is prerecorded, not their foreseen unbelief. Peter (1 Pet. 2:6–8) refers to those who through unbelief and disobedience stumble over the "stone of stumbling and rock of offense." Then he adds, "unto which indeed they were appointed." If we assume that those appointed are the unbelievers, it is not clear unto what they were appointed. A reasonable explanation is that they were appointed ("destined," NIV) to stumble over the Rock, i.e., be brought down unto eternal ruin and death by the very Stone they rejected, namely, Jesus. They were not appointed or destined to unbelief and rejection of Jesus but to the "stumbling" as the natural and deserved consequence of their unbelief and rejection.

Another possibility in 1 Peter 2:8 is that the ones "appointed" are not the unbelievers but the "precious corner stone" of verse 6 and the "stone of stumbling and rock of offense" themselves. The verb for "appointed" in verse 8 is *tithemi*, which in verse 6 is used for "laying" the stone. That is, this is one of the purposes for which the stones were laid or appointed: to be the source of judgment and downfall for unbelievers. The verb in verse 8 (*etethesan*) is plural because it refers both to the "precious corner stone" in verse 6 and the "stone of stumbling" in verse 8 (both of which refer, of course, to Jesus). If this is the proper interpretation, then 1 Peter 2:8 would not refer to any kind of reprobation.

Predestination refers primarily to individuals. The next question regarding the objects of predestination—whether it applies primarily to individuals or to groups—is not argued among Calvinists, who understand it to be of individuals. But Arminians have some disagreement over this issue. Some emphasize group or corporate election, while others see it as primarily individual.

Those taking the former view assert that God in his precreation counsels predetermined that all who later would fall into a certain category of people would be chosen for eternal salvation. That is, God determined that he would give salvation to anyone who would fulfill certain conditions; “all who meet the specified conditions” are thus predestined to be in heaven. The act of predestination applies not so much to the concrete individuals who would later become a part of this group, as it does to the abstract group or category itself. “God predestines the plan, not the man” is a common contention.

H. Orton Wiley is an example. He has stated, “I hold, of course to *class* predestination.” He finds it objectionable to say “that God has determined beforehand whether some should be saved or not, applied to individuals.” Another example is Robert Shank, who explains election as “primarily corporate and only secondarily particular.” He says, “The election to salvation is corporate and comprehends individual men only in identification and association with the elect body.”³³ This applies even to the passages which connect predestination with foreknowledge: “Whether God has actively foreknown each individual—both the elect and the reprobate—may remain a moot question.”

C. Gordon Olson agrees, declaring that the letter to the Ephesians “militates for corporate, not individual, election.” He says that 1 Peter 2:9 indicates “that the Church’s election, like Israel’s, was corporate.” After presenting several arguments for corporate election, he says, “We can see how Paul could well be referring to the corporate church as that which God chose in eternity past to become His choice people.” Thus “the corporate nature of election is so clear in enough contexts to lead to the probability that all should be taken corporately.”³⁷ Olson does allow for individual election but says that “if we may speak about it at all,” it is “secondary and ancillary.”

In his *Christian Theology* Alister McGrath leaves the impression that all Arminians understand predestination corporately, but this simply is not true. In fact, Arminian defenders of individual election are abundant, beginning in modern times with Arminius himself, who declares that his own sentiment on predestination includes the “decree, by which God decreed to save and damn particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God,” by which from all eternity he knew which individuals would believe and persevere and the ones who would not. In the early nineteenth century Richard Watson, granting the election of individuals to service and of nations and groups to special privileges, affirms that a “third kind of election is personal election; or the election of individuals to be the children of God.”⁴¹ Forlines strongly affirms that the elect “were chosen *individually*. I think Paul makes clear that election is *individual*.” In my judgment this is correct, and I agree with Picirilli that “the Arminian doctrine of election” is “personal and individual.”⁴³ This view is more consistent with the overall theology of classical Arminianism and with biblical teaching itself.

Without question, when the Bible speaks of predestination to salvation, it refers to persons and not to an impersonal plan (e.g., Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Pet. 1:1–2). In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB) Paul says that “God has chosen you,” the Christians at Thessalonica, “for salvation.” In Romans 16:13 Rufus is called an elect person. Revelation 17:8 implies that specific names have been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. What can this be but individual predestination? As we shall see below, a distinctive feature of the Arminian view of predestination is that it is based on literal divine foreknowledge (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1–2). True foreknowledge is foreknowledge of *individuals*. One cannot believe in predestination according to foreknowledge and at the same time deny individual predestination. Thus a consistent Arminian theology affirms the predestination of individuals.

Some biblical references to election may indeed be corporate. This is especially the case when the collective group of living, saved individuals are called “the elect” (e.g., Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus 1:1). The New Testament church as a group is God’s “chosen race” (1 Pet. 2:9), and when one is added to the church he becomes one of “the elect.” But this does not mean that predestination to salvation in no way applies to individuals. In fact, the reality of an elect group presupposes individual election. That is, contrary to Shank and Olson, individual or personal election is primary, and corporate election is secondary.

The Goal of Predestination

The next question concerns the objective or goal of predestination: *to what specific end* are individuals predestined? How this question is answered constitutes a key difference between Calvinists and Arminians. For Calvinists everything about an individual’s salvation is predetermined by God—not just the final gift of eternal life but also the required means by which the gift is received. God chooses from among the mass of unbelievers the ones he wants to save, then he predestines the chosen ones *to become believers* and thereby to receive eternal salvation. The ones he does not choose are predestined to remain in their unbelief and thereby to be eternally lost.

Arminians insist, however, that God predestines only the ends and not the means. He predetermines to give salvation to all believers, but he does not predestine certain unbelievers to become believers and the rest to remain in their unbelief. Those who accept Christ through faith do so of their own free choice. Their choice of Jesus Christ is not predestined. That choice, however, is foreknown; and as a result the choosing ones become the chosen ones, who are then predestined to receive the full blessings of salvation.

Scripture itself says nothing about individuals being predestined to believe. As Watson says, “We have no such doctrine in Scripture as the election of individuals *unto* faith.” He adds, “This predestination, then, is not of persons ‘*unto* faith and obedience,’ but of believing and obedient persons *unto* eternal glory.” As Forster and Marston put it, predestination “does not concern who should, or should not, *become* Christians, but rather their destiny *as* Christians.” They point out that Ephesians 1:4 says God chose us *in* Christ, not *to be put into* Christ.

The same is seen in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, where Paul says that “God has chosen you [Thessalonian believers] from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.” The goal of the election is salvation itself; the means by which the salvation is actualized—sanctification and faith—are themselves not predestined. In 1 Peter 1:1–2 this actualized salvation is seen to include the double cure of grace: a life of good works and justification by the blood of Jesus (“chosen ... to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood”). Baugh tries to equate this obedience to Christ with faith itself, which would mean that Peter is saying that we are indeed chosen “*unto* faith” or chosen to become believers. However, there is no good reason to think this obedience is anything other than the Spirit-driven sanctification of 2 Thessalonians 2:13 or the “good works” of Ephesians 2:10 (NASB).

Romans 8:29 states clearly that those whom He foreknew were “predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.” Some mistakenly take this to be a reference to the sinner’s spiritual re-creation in the moral image of Jesus or perhaps to the “coming of age” at which a child is given the status of full sonship (as in Gal. 4:1–7). But the context of Romans 8 shows that this predestined conformity to Christ’s image is a reference to our final inheritance, the redeemed and glorified body we will

receive at the final resurrection (Rom. 8:11, 23). “The image of His Son” refers to the fact that our resurrection bodies will be like that of Christ (Phil. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:29; 2 Cor. 3:18). Thus we as believers are chosen to become God’s glorified children (Rom. 8:30), with Christ being the “firstborn among many brethren” because he was “the firstborn from the dead” (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5), i.e., the first to be raised in a glorified body (Acts 13:34; 26:13; Rom. 6:9; 1 Cor. 15:20).

Predestination to glory is likewise the point of Ephesians 1:5 (NASB), which says, God “predestined us to adoption as sons,” as well as the point of Ephesians 1:4 (NASB), which says, “He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before him.” Both “adoption as sons” and “holy and blameless” refer to our state of future glory (see Col. 1:22).

This, then, is the end or goal of predestination: “our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23 NASB). “This is the *only predestination* taught in these passages,” says Kirk; and trying to make them teach “the predestination of some to be converted, is most hopeless indeed.” Rather, we find in them that the believer “is predestinated to stand in the glorified body of the resurrection, and to share the glory of his blessed Lord. This is the doctrine of predestination as taught in the Bible.” In other words, God predestines believers to go to heaven, just as he predestines unbelievers to go to hell. But he does not predestine anyone to become and remain a believer or to become and remain an unbeliever. This choice is made by each person, and as foreknown by God it is the factor that conditions the predestination of an individual’s eternal destiny.

The Manner of Predestination

We now turn to the *manner* in which God predestines the elect to salvation. How does it happen? Why are certain ones predestined to heaven and the others to hell? Herein lies one of the most pronounced differences between the Calvinist and the Arminian views. The key concepts are that predestination is conditional and that it is based on the foreknowledge of God.

Predestination is conditional. The Calvinist view is summed up in the phrase “unconditional election.” This means that God’s selection of certain ones for salvation is purely a matter of his sovereign and unconditional good pleasure; there is nothing whatsoever within the ones so chosen that influences God to choose them rather than others. The classical Arminian view says otherwise, affirming that election is conditional because it is based on God’s foreknowledge of who will freely meet the conditions designated by God for receiving salvation. Hunt says that unconditional election is “the heart of Calvinism,” and Picirilli declares that the view of conditional election “is the Arminian’s main point of departure from Calvinism.” These judgments may be a bit extreme, but they truly reflect the seriousness of the choice between unconditional and conditional election.

The concept of conditionality applies to both election and predestination, and in this discussion both are included even if at times only one is specifically mentioned. There is indeed a technical difference between them. That is, in *election* God chooses some specific individuals rather than others for salvation; those thus chosen are then *predestined* to receive the blessings of salvation. Both, however, are acts of God, and both are conditional since only those who meet the announced conditions will be chosen and predestined. They are the result of foreknowledge since by nature God foreknows prior to the event of creation who will and who will not meet the conditions.

For Calvinists predestination (like every act of God) is not and cannot be conditioned on anything in the creature/sinner. For Arminians, though, God's act of predestination is conditioned upon the freewill choices made by creatures/sinners in response to God's law and God's grace. That is, it is conditioned upon human decisions, first of all the decision to sin against God's law, and then the decision either to accept or reject God's offer of salvation. Those who make the right decisions are chosen by God to be a part of his family and are predestined to eternal life; those who make the wrong decisions are rejected by God and are predestined to eternal damnation.

The reason predestination is conditional is because salvation itself is conditional. Those who accept the reality of significant free will have no difficulty accepting such conditionality; indeed, it is inconsistent for any Arminian to speak of "unconditional grace" or "unconditional salvation." God's saving grace is conditional. He has freely and unconditionally made it available through Jesus Christ, but he will bestow it only upon those who meet certain sovereignly specified, gracious conditions. Likewise, whether God predestines a particular individual to heaven is conditioned upon his foreknowledge of whether that person will meet these conditions. Election is thus conditional.⁵³

Predestination is the result of foreknowledge. The second key element in the Arminian concept of the manner of predestination is the role of foreknowledge. God elects and predestines as the result of his precreation foreknowledge of the future freewill choices of all human beings. Of course, in theory, salvation could be *conditional* totally apart from foreknowledge and predestination. Prior to creation God could have specified certain conditions for receiving salvation, planning to save anyone who would ultimately meet those conditions (as in the corporate predestination view). He then could have just waited to see what decisions would be made and then sealed each person's eternal destiny with a *post facto* decree. Then after the entire course of history has been run, the final lists of the saved and the lost could be posted.

But this is not how it has happened. In fact (figuratively speaking) the entire lists of the saved and the lost are already posted and have been since before the world began. Indeed, given the biblical teaching concerning how God's knowledge transcends the flow of time, it could not have been any other way. Foreknowledge is a necessary result of God's infinite nature. Before he created this world, he knew—*foreknew*—every human decision, including those related to each individual's salvation. As a result of this foreknowledge, "from all eternity" he predestined some to heaven and the rest to hell.

Erickson rightly observes that "the role of foreknowledge in the election of persons to salvation" is a basic concept of Arminianism. It is the heart of the classical Arminian view of predestination. Arminius himself declared that God's decree to save and damn certain persons "has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity" who would believe and persevere and who would not.⁵⁶ As Dave Hunt affirms, God "gives foreknowledge as the reason for predestination. Election/predestination is always explained in the Bible as resulting from God's foreknowledge."

This straightforward view of predestination based on foreknowledge is directly affirmed in two New Testament texts. Romans 8:29 (NASB) says, "For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son." In his first epistle Peter writes to those "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Pet. 1:1–2 NASB). These verses say only that God foreknew certain *persons*; they do not say specifically *what* he foreknew about them. But in view of the Bible's teaching about the conditional nature of salvation as such, Arminians reasonably infer that what God foreknows is our decision to meet

these conditions, especially the condition of faith. As Godet says of Romans 8:29, “In what respect did God thus *foreknow* them?... There is but one answer: foreknown as sure to fulfil the condition of salvation, viz. *faith*; so: foreknown as His *by faith*.” Forlines agrees: “Based on his foreknowledge He knows who will believe in Christ and has chosen them in Christ (Eph. 1:4).” The reference to calling and justifying in Romans 8:30 may imply that faith is the object of the foreknowledge on which predestination is based. In the New Testament both calling and justifying are linked to the decision to believe: God’s call must be answered by faith, and justification is given only to faith.

One often overlooked object of divine foreknowledge possibly intended by Romans 8:29 is suggested by Romans 8:28 itself, namely, love for God. We must not overlook the connection between these two verses, as if verse 29 exists apart from any context. Verse 29 begins (after the conjunction) with the relative pronoun “whom” (or “those”). The antecedent for this pronoun is in verse 28, namely, “those who love God.” God foreknew those who would love him, i.e., he foreknew that at some point in their lives they would come to love him and would continue to love him unto the end. See the parallel in 1 Corinthians 8:3, “But if anyone loves God, he is known by him.” This is exactly the same idea as Romans 8:29, the former referring to knowledge and the latter to foreknowledge.

We should also note that Romans 8:29 begins with the causative conjunction *hoti*, “for, because.” This most likely goes with “we know” in verse 28. Thus the thought is simple: We know that God works all things for the good of those who love him and are called into his eternal family according to his purpose. How do we know this? Because, having foreknown from eternity that they would love him, he has already predestined them to this state of eternal glory! Thus we can be sure that the temporary trials of this life are not able to nullify what Almighty God himself has already predestined will occur! Rather, he uses them in ways that prepare us to enjoy eternity even more.

Calvinists reject this simple connection between foreknowledge and predestination, of course. At issue, they say, is the meaning of the word *foreknow*. Since *ginosko* means “to know,” and *pro* means “before,” it would seem obvious that *proginosko* means “to know beforehand” in the sense of prior cognitive awareness. God certainly has such precognition. Because of his unique relation to time, his knowledge is not limited to the now; he knows the past and the future as well as he knows the present. The verb *foreknow* is used in Romans 8:29 and in four other places in the New Testament: Acts 26:5; Romans 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:17. (The noun is used twice: Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:2.) Everyone agrees that in Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17, where it refers to human foreknowledge, it has this simple meaning of precognition or prescience.

But Calvinists argue that in the texts where God is the subject, both the verb and the noun have connotations that are altogether different from prescience. The basic nuance, they say, is that of love and affection: “whom he foreloved.” As Murray explains, since the word *know* itself at times is “practically synonymous with ‘love,’ to set regard upon, to know with peculiar interest, delight, affection, and action,” foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 (and 1 Pet. 1:1–2) must mean “whom he knew from eternity with distinguishing affection and delight,” or “whom he foreloved.”

Another connotation Calvinists include in *proginosko* in the context of predestination is the idea of selecting or choosing. As noted above, Murray calls it God’s “distinguishing affection.” The Greek word, he says, “is not the foresight of difference but the foreknowledge that makes difference exist.... It is sovereign distinguishing love.”

The key word here is *distinguishing*. For Calvinists God's foreknowledge is the act by which he (unconditionally) makes distinctions among people, *choosing* some out of the mass of future mankind to be the sole recipients of his saving grace. Foreknowledge is the same as election. As Moo sums it up, "The difference between 'know or love beforehand' and 'choose beforehand' virtually ceases to exist." For Romans 8:29 one Greek lexicon defines *proginosko* as "choose beforehand." Erickson agrees that "foreknowledge as used in Romans 8:29 carries with it the idea of favorable disposition or selection as well as advance knowledge." It has the "connotation of electing grace," says F. F. Bruce.⁷⁰ It can mean "He chose," says Baugh, or "whom he chose beforehand," says Jewett.⁷²

As many Calvinists see it, then, in the final analysis God's foreknowledge is actually equivalent to predestination itself. As Jewett says, "We are elect according to the *foreknowledge* (*foreordination*) of God the Father." Baugh approves of translating *proginosko* [*proegno*] as "he predestinated."

What evidence do Calvinists give for this peculiar definition of foreknowledge? They refer mainly to a few selected biblical uses of the verbs for "to know," in which they attempt to find the connotations of "choose" and/or "love." These include the places where "know" is a euphemism for sexual intercourse, plus a few other Old Testament uses of *yada* (Hebrew for "know"), usually Genesis 18:19; Exodus 2:25; Jeremiah 1:5; Hosea 13:5; and Amos 3:2. Also cited are these New Testament texts: Matthew 7:23; John 10:14; 1 Corinthians 8:3; 13:12; Galatians 4:9; and 2 Timothy 2:19. Since "know" in all these passages allegedly means much more than simple cognition, they conclude that "*foreknow*" in Romans 8:29 and elsewhere also means much more, namely, "distinguishing love bestowed beforehand." Thus, "whom he *chose* beforehand, he also predestined."

How may we respond to this? Primarily, by a thorough analysis of how the Bible uses the words for "know" and "foreknow." Such an analysis may be summarized as follows. First, noncognitive connotations for *ginosko* are virtually nonexistent in secular Greek. Moo admits that the Calvinist definition of foreknowledge sounds "somewhat strange against the background of broad Greek usage."

Second, the use of "know" as a euphemism for sexual relations contributes nothing toward this Calvinist view since it refers specifically to the sexual act and not to any love that might be associated with it. Also, the act of sexual "knowing" in no way includes the connotation of choosing but rather presupposes that a distinguishing choice has already been made (via marriage). Finally, the use of "know" for this act is much closer to cognition than either loving or choosing; it connotes cognitive knowing at the most intimate level.

Third, biblical texts where "know" and "foreknow" seem to have a connotation of love or affection (e.g., Exod. 2:25; Hos. 13:5) prove nothing because they usually do not specify the *reason* for God's love knowledge, and they certainly do not suggest that it was unconditional. In fact, 1 Corinthians 8:3 (NASB) seems to say it is conditional: "The man who loves God is known by God."

Fourth, an analysis of the New Testament texts where the words for "know" have persons as their objects, i.e., where the action of knowing is specifically directed toward persons and not facts as such, shows that in such cases these words never have the connotation of "choosing" or "imposing a distinction." This applies to *ginosko* (used about fifty-two times in this way), *epiginosko* (about fifteen times), and *oida* (about forty-three times).

Such an analysis yields helpful insights into the meaning of God's foreknowledge. In order of increasing specificity, the three basic connotations of "know a person" are as follows.

Recognition. In this case “to know” means to recognize someone, to know who he is, to know his identity or his true identity, to be able to identify him for who he is, to be acquainted with him, to be familiar with him, to understand him, to know his true nature. This is by far the most common connotation. It is a purely cognitive act. It does not impose an identity upon someone but perceives that identity. This includes the idea of recognizing someone as belonging to a particular group as distinct from those who do not. This is the sense in which Jesus “knows” his sheep (John 10:14, 27), even as his sheep know him (John 10:14; see 2 Tim. 2:19). This is the connotation of “know” that applies to “foreknow” in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1–2.

Acknowledgment. Here “to know” means not only to have a cognitive knowledge of someone’s identity but also to acknowledge that identity. As such it is an act of will, though it presupposes an act of cognition. The most important thing is that this acknowledging does not impose a particular identity upon anyone but simply confesses it. See Mark 1:24, 34; Acts 19:15; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 16:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

Experience. The third and most intense connotation of “to know” when a person or persons are its object is to know experientially, to experience a relationship with someone. Again, it presupposes cognition but goes beyond it. Most significantly, such knowing is not an act that initiates a relationship but simply experiences it. This connotation is found especially in 1 John. Matthew 7:23; 1 Corinthians 8:3; and Hebrews 8:11 could be either (1) or (3).

In each case the act of knowing does not create a person’s identity or his distinction from other people. It rather presupposes an already existing identity or distinction; the act of knowing perceives and in some cases acknowledges that identity or distinction. These connotations for knowing fit the term *foreknowledge* well as it is used in Romans 8:29 and elsewhere. Those whom God from the beginning recognized and acknowledged as his own, he predestined to be members of his glorified family in heaven. (The connotation of experiencing a relationship does not transfer well to the concept of *foreknowledge* since *foreknowledge* as such precedes the existence of its object, precluding an experienced relationship.)

In any case, an analysis of all the uses of “know” with persons as the object undermines the notion that it means “predestine” or “choose,” and thus fails to support the Calvinist idea that *foreknowledge* is the same as election or choosing beforehand. Olson is adamant about this: “It is my proposition that a lexical study of the uses of *yada*, *ginoskein*, and *proginoskein* uncovers not the slightest scintilla of hard evidence that there is such a selective connotation.” Forster and Marston concur, declaring that they have found no biblical text where “the sense intended by the writer would not be radically changed by putting ‘chosen’ instead *yada* or *ginosko*.” Olson rightly notes that if *foreknowledge* is basically the same as predestination, then Paul’s use of both terms in Romans 8:29 makes no sense: “Thus any definition of *proginoskein* which would make it in any way synonymous with *proorizein* would absolutely destroy the logic of Paul’s (and the Spirit’s) sequence. This would reduce it to a mere redundancy and totally undo the symmetry of the development. I believe this is the final refutation of any pregnant connotation for *proginoskein*.”

The fifth conclusion from our analysis is that the various New Testament uses of “foreknow” and the two uses of “foreknowledge” do not comfortably bear the connotations of “forelove” and “choose beforehand.” Acts 26:5 and 2 Peter 3:17 do not refer to God’s *foreknowledge*, but they clearly refer to precognition. Romans 11:2 refers to God’s *foreknowledge* of Israel as a nation and not to any individuals within it and not even to the saved remnant within the ethnic nation as a whole. The context suggests that God’s precognition of Israel included a *foreknowledge* of their persistent rebellion and idolatry, as well as a *foreknowledge* that a remnant would remain

faithful. Because he foreknew there would always be an abiding remnant identified as the true spiritual Israel (Rom. 9:6), he did not abandon his ethnic people, even though he foreknew most of them would never respond to his offer of grace (Rom. 10:21).

The cognitive connotation of *proginosko* is found also in other New Testament texts using the term. In 1 Peter 1:20 Christ is the one foreknown from the foundation of the world; and in the context precognition, not choosing, is the preferred meaning. The contrast is between the hidden and the revealed. Even though the Father knew from the foundation of the world that Christ the Son would be our Redeemer, he did not reveal it until the last days.

The use of the noun *foreknowledge* in 1 Peter 1:1–2 is consistent with the non-Calvinist understanding of “foreknow.” This text speaks of those who are *chosen* according to *foreknowledge*. Thus a clear distinction is made between foreknowledge and choosing, and there is no reason to see in foreknowledge anything other than its basic meaning of precognition. Thus the relationship between foreknowledge and election here is exactly the same as that between foreknowledge and predestination in Romans 8:29.

Acts 2:23 also refers to the foreknowledge of God the Father; its object is Jesus Christ and the circumstances of his death. Jesus was delivered up “by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.” “Predetermined plan” is equivalent to predestination. God had already determined from eternity that Christ would die for our sins. That he was delivered up “by foreknowledge” means that God foreknew all the human acts of participation in Christ’s betrayal and death, such as those of Judas and Herod. God did not predetermine these acts, but he knew them in advance and therefore could work his plan along with them and through them.

Sometimes Calvinist exegetes try to equate the foreknowledge and predetermined plan in Acts 2:23 by invoking a rule of Greek grammar. Here is how MacArthur argues: “According to what Greek scholars refer to as Granville Sharp’s rule, if two nouns of the same case (in this instance, “plan” and “foreknowledge”) are connected by *kai* (“and”) and have the definite article (the) before the first noun but not before the second, the nouns refer to the same thing.... In other words, Peter equates God’s predetermined plan, or foreordination, and His foreknowledge.” Wuest puts it almost exactly the same way, that in such a case the second noun “refers to the same thing” as the first; therefore Acts 2:23 shows that predestination and foreknowledge “refer to the same thing.”

This argument, however, is seriously flawed. Both MacArthur and Wuest misquote Sharp’s rule. The rule does not say that the two nouns in the construction described above “refer to the same thing.” It says only that in such a case the second noun “always relates to the same person that is expressed or described in the first noun.” There is a huge difference between *relating* to the same person (or thing) and *referring* to the same person (or thing). Carson says it is an exegetical fallacy to assume that the latter or strict form of Sharp’s rule has universal validity. He says, “If one article governs two substantives joined by *kai*, it does not necessarily follow that the two substantives refer to the same thing, but only that the two substantives are grouped together to function in some respects as a single entity.” Also, Sharp states his rule as applying only to persons, not to things. As one Greek scholar says, “Non-personal nouns disqualify the construction”; he cites Acts 2:23 as a specific example of this.

The preponderance of evidence thus shows that “foreknowledge” is not equivalent to election or choosing and that in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1–2 it refers to nothing more than the cognitive act by which God knew or identified the members of his family (as distinct from all others) even before the foundation of the world. He identified them by the fact that they were (would be) the ones who met (would meet) the required conditions for salvation. Knowing

through his divine omniscience who these individuals would be, even at that point he predestined them to be part of his glorified heavenly family through resurrection from the dead after the pattern established by the firstborn brother, Jesus Christ.

Though a biblical basis is lacking for it, attaching an element of affection to the concept of foreknowledge is not destructive to the Arminian view, as long as these cautions are observed: (1) the element of affection must never be equated with choosing or foreordaining,⁸⁶ and (2) the primary meaning of *proginosko* must always be understood to be *prescience* or *cognitive knowing*. Hunt is probably right: “To foreknow is simply to know in advance and can’t legitimately be turned into anything else.” But if one wants to think, as Picirilli does, that in the Bible foreknowledge “is, at least some of the time, something more than mere prescience”—such as “previously loved and affectionately regarded as his own”⁸⁸—he must remember that such “foreloving” is secondary to and actually the *result* of foreknowledge as prescience, which is the primary and only solidly grounded meaning of the word. The bottom line is found in this statement: “Predestination to eternal life is plainly conditioned upon the foreknowledge of God... What ever else ‘foreknow’ may mean, it means foreknow.”

In summary, the Bible teaches that God predestines or chooses by name certain individuals to eternal salvation, but he does so only on the basis of his foreknowledge or precognition that these individuals will meet the conditions for salvation as set forth in his Word.

History of the Arminian View

The classical Arminian view of predestination, in essence, says that the omniscient God foreknew all who would of their own free choice trust in his saving grace; and on the basis of that foreknowledge, he predestined them to eternal life. He likewise foreknew all who would not trust him for salvation and justly predestined them to eternal condemnation. Though this is called “the Arminian view,” it has actually been present in Christian thought almost from the beginning.

Philip Schaff observes that up until Augustine, all the Greek fathers “had only taught a conditional predestination, which they made dependent on the foreknowledge of the free acts of men.” Some second-century fathers acknowledged God’s foreknowledge,⁹² with “The Shepherd of Hermas” relating it to predestination in a general way. In explaining why all do not repent, he says that to those whose hearts God “saw were about to become pure, and who were about to serve him with all their heart, he gave repentance; but to those whose deceit and wickedness he saw, who were about to repent hypocritically, he did not give repentance.” At about the same time Justin Martyr speaks of the end times as the time when “the number of those who are foreknown by him as good and virtuous is complete.”⁹⁴ Equating Scripture with the mind of God, Justin says, “But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall be certainly punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God had created them so.”

In the third century Origen strongly defends God’s foreknowledge in reference to predictive prophecy, saying that it does not affect free will since it is not causative and implies only the simple futurity of an event, not its necessity. He says that Romans 8:29 shows “that those whom God foreknew would become the kind to conform themselves to Christ by their sufferings, he even predestined them to be conformed and similar to his image and glory. Therefore there precedes a foreknowledge of them, through which is known what effort and virtue they will

possess in themselves, and thus predestination follows, yet foreknowledge should not be considered the cause of predestination.”

Fourth-century writers affirming this view include Ambrosiaster, who says, “Those who are called according to the promise are those whom God knew would believe in the future.” Concerning Jacob and Esau in Romans 9:11 Ambrosiaster says, “Therefore, knowing what each of them would become, God said: *The younger will be worthy and the elder unworthy.* In his foreknowledge he chose the one and rejected the other.” Also, “Those whom God foreknew would believe in him he chose to receive the promises.”¹⁰⁰ Another fourth-century writer, Diodore of Tarsus, says that God does not show mercy to one and harden another “by accident, for it was according to the power of his foreknowledge that he gave to each one his due.”

As Harry Buis notes, even Augustine in his earlier writing shares this thinking before he arrived at what would become known as the Calvinist view. Pelagius and his disciples continue to emphasize the predestination-by-foreknowledge view. Pelagius says, “Those whom God knew in advance would believe, he called.”¹⁰³ He says Romans 9:15 means, “I will have mercy on him whom I have foreknown will be able to deserve compassion.” In the years following the rift between Augustine and Pelagius, the semi-Pelagians rejected Augustine’s new deterministic view of predestination and continued to emphasize “a predestination to salvation conditioned on the foreknowledge of faith.”¹⁰⁵ For example, John Cassian taught that “God’s predestination must be in the light of what He foresees is going to be the quality of our behaviour,” as Kelly summarizes it. Commenting on Romans 8:29–30, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. 466) says, “God did not simply predestine; he predestined those whom he foreknew,” i.e., “Those whose intention God foreknew he predestined from the beginning.”

Throughout the Middle Ages this view was held alongside the Augustinian view; it “reappears again and again,” as Buis notes, for example in Duns Scotus, and in William of Occam and the Occamists. Though the major Reformers sided with Augustine, most of those identified with the Radical Reformation either abandoned or revised that view and taught the restoration of free will through universal prevenient grace.¹⁰⁹

Though the classical Arminian view of predestination obviously did not begin with Arminius, it is clear that he held to this view. He sums up his doctrine of predestination thus, that from eternity

God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing grace, *believe*, and through his subsequent grace *would persevere*, according to the before described administration of those means which are suitable and proper for conversion and faith; and by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who *would not believe and persevere*.

“*This doctrine of Predestination,*” he says, “*has always been approved by the great majority of professing Christians,* and even now ... it enjoys the same extensive patronage.”

Concerning God’s foreknowledge Arminius is quick to admit that he does “not understand the mode in which He knows future contingencies, and especially those which belong to the free-will of creatures.” But God does have such foreknowledge, in its true sense of prescience. Some of his decrees are occasioned by “the foreseen free act of rational creatures,” e.g., the decree to send Christ into the world “depends on the foresight of the fall.”¹¹³ Likewise “God by his own prescience, knows who, of his grace, will believe, and who, of their own fault, will remain in unbelief.” Just as God predetermines to punish some because of “the foresight of future sin,” so does he predestine to salvation those who are foreseen to believe, according to these three

assertions: “(1) ‘Faith is not an effect of election.’ (2) ‘Faith is a necessary requisite in those who are to be elected or saved.’ (3) ‘This requisite is foreseen by God in the persons to be elected.’”¹¹⁶

The bottom line, as Bangs says, is that “Arminius has reversed the relationship of foreknowledge to predestination” that was characteristic of the Augustinian view which he learned from the main Protestant Reformers and has returned to the view of the ancient church fathers.

Arminius and his followers had considerable influence. This was especially the case in England where the Arminian doctrine ultimately affected the beliefs and teachings of John Wesley. In a sermon on predestination based on Romans 8:29–30 Wesley asserts that “God *foreknew* those in every nation who would believe, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things.” For God it is not a literal foreknowledge, since all things are present before him in an eternal now; but from our perspective it is a true foreknowledge. “In a word, God, looking on all ages, from the creation to the consummation, as a moment, and seeing at once whatever is in the hearts of all the children of men, knows every one that does or does not believe, in every age or nation. Yet what he knows, whether faith or unbelief, is in no wise caused by his knowledge. Men are as free in believing or not believing as if he did not know it at all.” The next step after foreknowledge is predestination. “In other words, God decrees, from everlasting to everlasting, that all who believe in the Son of his love, shall be conformed to his image.”¹²⁰ Wesley says, “As all that are called were predestinated, so all whom God has predestinated he foreknew. He knew, he saw them as believers, and as such predestined them to salvation, according to his eternal decree, ‘He that believeth shall be saved.’ ... Who are predestinated? None but those whom God foreknew as believers.”

Wesley specifically explains Romans 8:29 thus: “‘For whom he did foreknow’ *as believing*, ‘he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.’” This aptly sums up the view of most Arminians today, whether they be Wesleyan or non-Wesleyan in their general theology.

Thus it is clear that the view of predestination known today as classical Arminianism has a long and consistent history.

Theological Presuppositions of the Classical Arminian View of Predestination

The classical Arminian view of predestination does not exist in a vacuum; it is one element of a consistent doctrinal system. The purpose of this section is to summarize the theological presuppositions that constitute the general framework for it. That is, the classical Arminian view of predestination presupposes a certain interpretation of the following concepts.

God’s Will or Purpose

Calvinism’s view of God’s will or purpose is set forth in its doctrine of the eternal, efficacious, comprehensive, and unconditional decree. Arminians also believe that God has an eternal decree, but they usually speak of it as his eternal purpose. More importantly, Arminians do not believe that this eternal purpose is comprehensively efficacious and unconditional.

Scripture certainly teaches that God has a purposive will by which he decrees that certain things will absolutely occur. This efficacious purpose is represented by the Greek terms *boule* (Acts 2:23; 4:28; 13:36; Eph. 1:11; 6:17), *boulomai* (1 Cor. 12:11; James 1:18), *thelema* (Matt.

26:42; John 6:40; Eph. 1:5, 9, 11; Rev. 4:11), *thelo* (Rom. 9:18), *prothesis* (Rom. 8:28; 9:11; Eph. 1:11; 3:11), and *protithemi* (Eph. 1:9).

Contrary to Calvinism, however, the Bible itself clearly shows that God's purposive (efficacious) will does not include all things. It is not comprehensive; it does not include "whatsoever comes to pass." This is seen in the fact that sometimes the above words that speak of God's determinative purpose are used to represent God's *desire* for certain things to happen which in fact do not happen. Jesus wanted the inhabitants of Jerusalem to come to him, but they refused (Matt. 23:37). God desires all men to be saved and to come to know the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), but this does not happen. The same words at times refer to contingencies that occur *contrary* to God's own desire and will. Some little children will be lost, even though it is not the Father's will (Matt. 18:14). Though it is contrary to God's purpose, some will never repent and therefore will perish (2 Pet. 3:9).

The most fundamental aspect of God's purposive will is that he has certain *general* purposes which he will infallibly accomplish through his sovereign power. For example, it is God's eternal purpose to glorify himself, to share his goodness with other personal beings, and to provide salvation for sinners. Then, in order to accomplish these general purposes, God has also determined to cause whatever *specific means* are necessary to bring them about. In order to manifest his glory, God determined to create all things (Rev. 4:11); in order to share his goodness, he created personal, freewill beings who are able to honor him and give him thanks (Rom. 1:21).

Having foreknown the entrance of sin into his creation, in order to provide salvation for sinners God determined to become incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth and to die for the sins of mankind (Acts 2:23; 4:27–28; Eph. 1:4–10; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8). In order to accomplish his purpose through Jesus of Nazareth, God determined to use a specific nation (Israel) to prepare the way for his coming. Much of the biblical teaching about God's purposive will refers to his creation and use of Israel as a nation (Deut. 7:6–8), his use of other nations related to Israel (Isa. 14:24–27; 37:26; 46:9–11), and his election and use of individuals within and related to Israel (e.g., Abraham, David, Cyrus, Pharaoh; see Rom. 9:7–18). Once his purpose for Israel and his initial redemptive purpose for Jesus had been accomplished, it was God's eternal plan, through the preparatory work of chosen apostles (John 15:16; Gal. 1:15), to bring the church into existence by combining believing Jews and believing Gentiles together into his new "chosen people" (Rom. 11:17–24; Eph. 3:1–11). It was then his predetermined plan to use the church as the locus of salvation and the means of evangelism until the end of the age (Eph. 1:10).

In all of these matters God's will or purpose is efficacious, causative, or determinative. Since the divine determination to bring them about occurred prior to creation, God's purposive will is in essence equivalent to predestination. The main difference between the Arminian's purposive will and the Calvinist's eternal decree is that the latter is comprehensive while the former is not.

The Nature of Created Reality

The main reason Arminians do not see God's purposive will as comprehensive is because they have a certain view of the nature of created reality. By God's own sovereign decision, the kind of world he chose to create is able to operate and progress in such a way that God does not need to be the direct cause of all things. In fact, most specific things that happen in the world are not caused by God.

God could surely create many different kinds of reality, but in our case he did in fact choose to create a world endowed with *relative independence*. Our world includes two major forces with their own relatively independent power to initiate events, i.e., two *causal* forces besides God himself: natural law and free will. The existence of these causal forces is a part of God's own purposive decree.

Especially important is the existence of beings who possess a significantly free will. This kind of free will (which is the only kind that is genuinely free) is sometimes called the power of opposite choice. As Geisler says, "At a minimum, freedom means the power of contrary choice; that is, an agent is free only if he could have done otherwise." Also, a will is significantly free only if the choices it makes are not caused or determined, either directly or indirectly, by an outside force. Thus we can say that truly free will is the ability to choose between opposites without that choice's being fixed or determined by some power outside the person's own will. This applies especially to the sinner's ability either to believe or to reject the gospel. As Forlines says, "In Arminianism there is agreement that human beings have freedom of choice. This includes the freedom to place their faith in Christ upon hearing the gospel, or conversely they can refuse to place their faith in Christ."¹²⁵

Calvinists and other determinists usually are reluctant to abandon the concept of free will altogether; but if they retain it, they usually redefine it so that it is compatible with the comprehensive, efficacious decree. According to such compatibilism, the will is considered to be free because its decisions are directly determined by one's own inner motives and desires. That is, one is conscious of choosing to do whatever he wants to do. The reason this is not truly free will, though, is that (according to compatibilism) God implants within us the specific motives and desires that will inevitably cause us to make only the choices that God has determined we shall make. Nevertheless, in this view the will is still called "free" since it is *not conscious* of being caused or compelled to make those choices. The person is only doing what he wants to do, says Feinberg, even though he "could not have done otherwise, given the prevailing causal influences." Therefore, this is "a genuine sense of free human action, even though such action is causally determined."

Arminians rightly reject this as a counterfeit or spurious concept of free will. The psychological feeling of freedom cannot replace the true inward ability to make a genuine choice between opposites.

At the same time Arminians rightly reject all Calvinist caricatures of truly free will, such as the so-called "liberty of indifference" according to which all choices are seen as arbitrary, unpredictable, capricious, and random. An example is Erickson's description of Arminian free will as "total spontaneity, random choice."¹²⁸ This is hardly a responsible characterization. The ability of the will to choose between opposites does not require equal influence toward both sides; sometimes the will opts for a certain choice against overwhelming influences in the opposite direction (see Amos 4:6–11; Hag. 1:1–11).

The reality of truly free will is a key ingredient in the Arminian system and a necessary presupposition of the Arminian view of predestination. Such free will is inconsistent with the concept of a comprehensively efficacious decree or an all-inclusive purposive will of God. In fact, a world that contains forces with the built-in ability to independently initiate ("create") events makes it necessary to speak of "the will of God" in two other senses besides his purposive will. One is God's *permissive* will, according to which God simply allows to happen most physical events produced by natural law and most decisions produced by freewill beings. He may of course decide to *prevent* any planned or projected event from happening (James 4:15),

which would be an instance of his purposive will. God's purposive and permissive wills together are comprehensive (though only the former is efficacious), encompassing "whatsoever comes to pass." We must not allow these two kinds of divine will to overlap, however—a Calvinist error that results in the loss of genuine permission.

The third sense in which we may speak of "the will of God" has to do not with actual events but with potential events. These are the choices and actions that God wills or desires for his freewill creatures but which can be rejected or left undone by them. This is sometimes called God's *preceptive* will because it includes God's precepts or commands which we will either obey or disobey (e.g., Matt. 7:21; 12:50; Rom. 2:18; 1 John 2:17). This aspect of God's will also includes God's *desires* for us, especially his desire that no one should be lost but that all should be saved (e.g., Matt. 18:14; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). God's will in this sense is not always realized (Matt. 23:37; Luke 7:30). Thus this aspect of God's will is not efficacious; our conformity with it is the choice of our free wills. This is simply the nature of the reality God himself freely chose to make.

God's Sovereignty in Dealing with Creation

How one understands the sovereignty of God directly relates to his view of predestination. If one begins with a concept of sovereignty that requires God to be the ultimate cause of all things and does not allow anything about God to be conditioned by anything outside of God, he cannot avoid the Calvinist concept of unconditional predestination. Arminianism, however, rejects such a concept of sovereignty as arbitrary and unbiblical. For Arminians the key words for divine sovereignty are *control*, not causation; and *conditionality*, not unconditionality.

God could have created a universe in which he would be the sole cause of all events, but he chose instead to create freewill beings who themselves have the power to choose and initiate events. As a result God is *not* the sole cause of whatsoever comes to pass in this universe. As Picirilli notes, "Man is therefore an *actor* in the universe." This in no way contradicts God's sovereignty because he freely and sovereignly chose to make this kind of world. This is not a limitation imposed upon God from outside himself; it is a freely chosen self-limitation, an *expression* of his sovereignty.

But how can God maintain his sovereignty in such a universe if he himself does not cause everything? The answer is in the word *control*: through his infinite power and knowledge God maintains complete control over everything that happens. The word *control* should not be equated here with causation as if God were operating a universal control panel that manipulates and micromanages every event. Rather, God controls all things in the sense that he is "in complete control of" every situation: he monitors, supervises, plans, permits, intervenes, and prevents as he pleases through his infinite knowledge and power.

God exercises his sovereign control especially through his permissive will, which presupposes divine foreknowledge of future freewill choices. Such foreknowledge gives God the genuine option of either permitting or preventing men's planned choices, and prevention is the ultimate control. James 4:13–15 chastises the man who blithely says, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." But wait a minute, says James, you are not taking account of God's sovereignty. "Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that'" (NASB). In other words, it is not wrong to have plans, but we should always acknowledge God's power to veto them (as in

Luke 12:19–20). This is the significance of Proverbs 19:21, “Many plans are in a man’s heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand” (see Prov. 16:9 NASB).

This highlights the fact that having free will gives human beings only a *relative* independence since the sovereign God maintains the right and power to intervene in the world’s circumstances in whatever way he chooses. Through his special providence he can intervene in and influence the laws of nature without actually violating them and thus use natural events to influence human decisions. The reality of free will means that such influence can be resisted (Amos 4:6–11; Hag. 1:1–11); thus God sometimes exercises his right to intervene in natural and human events in a direct way. This means he sometimes suspends natural law and performs miracles; it also means that he is able to suspend free will itself if his purposes require it (as with Balaam, Num. 23–24).

That God has such sovereign control means that although the creation has been endowed with independence, such independence is only relative. True control does not require causation, predetermination, or foreordination of all things; but it does entail causative intervention when necessary. Free creatures are usually allowed to go their own way, but God can and will intervene when his purposes require it.

The other key word for the Arminian concept of sovereignty is *conditionality*. Such a concept is contrary to the Calvinist doctrine of an unconditional decree, which says that nothing God does can be conditioned by the creature. God cannot react or respond to anything outside himself and be sovereign at the same time. A. A. Hodge says it clearly: “A conditional decree would subvert the sovereignty of God.”

The idea that sovereignty demands unconditionality, however, is an unwarranted presupposition, one which necessitates the unacceptable compatibilist redefinition of “free will.” This presupposition stands in direct contradiction to God’s sovereign choice to create beings with a genuinely free will. If we are truly free, then God’s own decisions and actions are sometimes *reactions* to, i.e., are *conditioned* upon, circumstances initiated by creatures.

In fact, most of God’s works in this world are his reaction or response to foreknown human acts. This is the way the Bible pictures it. Virtually every major action of God recorded in the Bible after Genesis 3:1 is a response to human sin. The Abrahamic covenant, the establishment of Israel, the incarnation of Jesus, his death and resurrection, the establishment of the church, the Bible itself—all are part of the divine reaction to man’s sin. Likewise, God’s act of bestowing salvation upon individuals, and the act of predestining that this will happen, are God’s response or reaction to human faith-decisions. In like manner God’s act of condemning some to hell is conditioned upon their sin and their refusal to repent.

Some of the concepts most crucial to God’s sovereign control over his creation are in fact *reactive* in nature. This is true of genuine permission of particular events, as well as any divine preventive intervention to preclude such events. Such permissive and preventive decisions are conditioned by creatures’ intentions as foreknown by God. Calvinists attempt to absolve God from responsibility for sin by declaring his eternal decree regarding sin to be permissive rather than efficacious. But this contradicts the Calvinist concept of sovereignty, the essence of which is unconditionality (“God always acts; he never reacts”). As Erickson describes it, Calvinism declares that the nature of God’s sovereign decree means that “humans have had no input into what God has planned”; “God is not dependent on what humans decide.” That is, God’s dealings with man are unconditioned. Real permission, however, is simply incompatible with such unconditionally; and those Calvinists who understand this are forced to speak oxymoronically of “efficacious permission.”¹³⁸

Another crucial concept that is conditional by its very nature is foreknowledge itself. The content of the mind of God which is called “foreknowledge” is conditioned by the events that take place in the world as foreseen by God before they even exist. Calvinists reject such a notion of passive knowledge, declaring it to be unworthy of God and contrary to his sovereignty. Conditioned knowledge, says Chafer, “places God in the unworthy position of being dependent upon his creatures.” If God’s foreknowledge is not thus dependent upon his creatures, what does cause it? “His foreknowledge of future things . . . rests on his decree,” says Berkhof.¹⁴⁰ One problem with this idea, of course, is that such unconditional knowledge is not true foreknowledge of what creatures will do; it is rather God’s simple knowledge of what he himself plans to do.

All of these unnatural and strained concepts within Calvinism (compatibilist “free” will, efficacious permission, nondependent foreknowledge) can be avoided by simply rejecting the arbitrary notion that divine sovereignty demands unconditionality, as Arminianism does. Arminians freely assert that much of God’s knowledge and many of God’s actions are conditioned by his creatures, but they insist that this in no way impinges on his sovereignty since this is the kind of universe he sovereignly chose to make. An arrangement where God reacts to man’s choices would be a violation of sovereignty only if God were forced into it, only if it were a necessity imposed upon God from without. But this is not the case. It was God’s sovereign choice to create a universe inhabited by freewill beings whose decisions would to a great extent determine the course of his own actions. It is arbitrary and false to say that such a situation negates divine sovereignty when the situation itself is the *result* of his sovereignty.

The point is that a truly sovereign God does not *need* to cause or predetermine all things in order to maintain complete control over his creation; his sovereignty is *greater* than that! Nor does God’s freely chosen universe in which his actions are sometimes conditioned by his creatures diminish his sovereignty; it does in fact *magnify* it! What is at stake here is not just man’s freedom but God’s freedom also. A sovereign God is a God who is free to limit himself with regard to his works, a God who is free to decide *not* to determine if he so chooses, a God who is free to bestow the gift of relative independence upon his creatures without losing control over them. This is true sovereignty.

God’s Foreknowledge

The fourth presupposition of the Arminian view of predestination is a particular concept of divine foreknowledge. It is affirmed that God had a complete foreknowledge of the entire history of the created universe, prior to the act of creation itself. Some speak of such foreknowledge as *eternal*: God “foresaw the future from all eternity,” says Forlines. “From eternity past God has known all that would happen in the universe and in the minds and affairs of men,” says Hunt.¹⁴² Whether this foreknowledge has been present in the mind of God literally for eternity is not the crucial point; what matters is that it was there before any part of this universe had come into existence.

The biblical affirmations of divine foreknowledge are abundant and unassailable. God tells us that the sure mark of deity is the ability to declare what is going to take place, to announce what is coming (Isa. 41:21–23). This is exactly what God has done: “I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done” (Isa. 46:9–10; see Isa. 42:8–9; 44:7–8; 45:20–21; 48:3–7). In all these texts God asserts his exclusive possession of knowledge of the future.

The whole possibility of predictive prophecy depends largely upon God's genuine foreknowledge. The mark of a true prophet, says the Lord, is if the thing he predicts comes true (Deut. 18:20–22). After Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream about the statue, he said, "The great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future" (Dan. 2:45 NASB). Just before Moses died, God told him about the future apostasy of the Israelites (Deut. 31:16–21). In these and other cases God is not just declaring what he himself plans to do in the future but is also foretelling what human beings will be doing of their own free will.

Other specific references to foreknowledge include Romans 11:2, which says that God foreknew his people Israel. Also, he foreknew the justification of the Gentiles (Gal. 3:8). In Psalm 139:4 David mentions how God knows his words before he (David) even speaks them; in verse 16 he says that God knew all the days of his (David's) life before they had even begun. God knew Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb (Jer. 1:5). He knew that Cyrus, king of Persia, would release Israel from Babylonian captivity and help them rebuild Jerusalem (Isa. 44:28–45:13). The fact that names have been written in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world is a clear indication of God's foreknowledge (Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

Of greatest importance is the fact that the New Testament specifically relates foreknowledge to the predestination of individuals to salvation (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1–2). The death of Jesus likewise involved a combination of foreknowledge and predestination (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:18–20).

We should not be surprised that the Bible so freely and abundantly affirms divine foreknowledge; this is simply one aspect of the omniscience of God, who "knows all things" (1 John 3:20 NASB). "He knows what will happen because he is all-knowing and therefore the future is as plain to him as the past."

Acceptance of this biblical testimony to God's foreknowledge is one of the main things that distinguishes classical Arminianism from openness theology. The latter's rejection of foreknowledge is not new in Arminian ranks. In 1890 the Arminian D. Fisk Harris, in his polemical work against Calvinism, called attention to a number of fellow Arminians who "deny this divine foreknowledge on the ground that its acceptance necessitates the denial of human freedom and responsibility." But Harris himself, like contemporary classical Arminians, found the Bible's testimony conclusive. He rightly asserted, "It is this firm adherence to the Bible that has compelled me to disagree so emphatically with that class of Arminian thinkers who deny the divine foreknowledge."¹⁴⁵

Regarding foreknowledge, classical Arminians also differ from Calvinism in two distinct ways. First, Arminians believe that much of what God predestines is in a real sense based on his foreknowledge of certain things. This is especially true of his predestination of some individuals to heaven and others to hell. Because he foreknew that some would freely accept the free offer of grace and meet the conditions for receiving it, God predestined them to eternal life (Rom. 8:29). In contrast to this, Calvinism consistently says that God's foreknowledge of all things is based upon his predestination or foreordination of all things through his efficacious, unconditional decree. In fact, according to this view, the only way God is able to know the future is *because* he has predestined it—a limitation upon God's omniscience on which Calvinists and openness theologians strangely agree.

Calvinists clearly affirm this alleged dependence of foreknowledge upon predestination. Shedd says, "The Divine decree is the necessary condition of the Divine foreknowledge. If God does not first decide what shall come to pass, he cannot know what will come to pass." Strong agrees: "No undecreed event can be foreseen." Thus "God cannot foreknow actualities unless he

has by his decree made them to be certainties of the future.... He foreknows the future which he has decreed, and he foreknows it because he has decreed it.”¹⁴⁷ Pink says emphatically, “Is it not clear that God foreknows what will be *because he has decreed what shall be?*... Foreknowledge of future events then is founded upon God’s decrees, hence if God foreknows everything that is to be, it is because he has determined in himself from all eternity everything which will be.” Commenting on Acts 2:23, Baugh says “that God had clear prescience of all that surrounded Christ’s death ... because he had determined to bring it about.” Also, “it was certain and foreknown because God had determined to accomplish it.”

There could hardly be a sharper contrast between Calvinism and Arminianism than this. For the former, predestination always precedes foreknowledge; for the latter, at least regarding human deeds and destinies, foreknowledge precedes predestination.

The second way in which the Calvinist and Arminian views of foreknowledge differ is in its definition. For Arminians foreknowledge is almost always understood in a cognitive sense, i.e., it is primarily *prescience*, an actual prior knowledge or mental awareness of future events. Calvinists, however, usually insist that “foreknowledge” is something other than knowledge as such. In a general sense “foreknowledge” is predestination. “ ‘God’s foreknowledge’ is of such a character that its object is foreknown with absolute certainty, and then it is identical with predestination.” As Harris perceptively observes, “The Calvinistic doctrine of God’s foreknowledge is no foreknowledge. It is simply foreordination.”¹⁵¹

Also, in a more specific sense, when the foreknowledge of human beings is cited in Scripture as the basis for their predestination to salvation (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:1–2), the Calvinist almost always redefines it as foreloving or forechoosing (as discussed earlier in this chapter). This strained reinterpretation of foreknowledge is necessary in order to reconcile it with Calvinism’s efficacious, unconditional decree.

One of the most common objections to the Arminian understanding of God’s foreknowledge as a real and simple prescience of man’s future freewill choices is that such a notion is actually incompatible with free will. The claim is that if God has foreknown from precreation time every choice that everyone will ever make, then all human choices are fixed or certain and therefore cannot be free. Foreknowledge thus rules out free will.

This is a common Calvinist criticism. Baugh calls it “an Achilles’ heel for Arminianism. If God infallibly foreknows the free choices of humans, then these choices must be certain in a way that excludes the Arminian (libertarian) conception of free will.” As Westblade put it, “Infallible foreknowledge of an event presupposes the necessity of that event and therefore precludes its real freedom.”¹⁵³ Openness theologians usually make the same point. Richard Rice declares, “In spite of assertions that absolute foreknowledge does not eliminate freedom, intuition tells us otherwise. If God’s foreknowledge is infallible, then what he sees cannot fail to happen.... And if the future is inevitable, then the apparent experience of free choice is an illusion.” As Hunt sums up the problem, “If God knows what every person will think or do, and if nothing can prevent what God foreknows from happening, then how can man be a free moral agent?”¹⁵⁵

Classical Arminianism has always denied the validity of this criticism and has always taken great care to show that foreknowledge in no way negates the contingency or freeness of freewill choices. This view “affirms that the future is perfectly foreknown by God and yet is, in principle and practice, ‘open’ and ‘undetermined.’ ” Foreknowledge does not cause or determine any of the events so foreknown, any more than an observer’s witnessing of present events that are unfolding before him has any causative influence on those events. On the contrary, it is the events that cause the knowledge, whether it be present knowledge or foreknowledge.

Also, once an event has occurred, it becomes a past event and thus becomes “fixed” or “certain” in the sense that it cannot be changed. But this does not mean that any freewill choices involved in that event are somehow robbed of their freeness, just because the event has taken on the characteristic of certainty. As Harris (citing Moses Stuart) correctly asks, “ ‘Does the certain knowledge we now have of a past event, destroy the free agency of those who were concerned in bringing about that event? Did any previous knowledge of the same necessarily interfere with their free agency?’ ” The answer is obviously no. Therefore, as R. A. Torrey concludes, “Foreknowledge no more determines a man’s actions than afterknowledge. Knowledge is determined by the fact, not the fact by the knowledge.”¹⁵⁸

It is true, then, that all future events, including freewill choices, are certain to happen as foreknown; but the foreknowledge is not what *makes* them certain. Raymond says, “All that foreknowledge does is to *prove* the certainty of future events, and that must be admitted without proof; all things will be as they will be, whether known or not, whether decreed or not; the future history of the universe will be in one single way and not two.” But if this is true, then how is foreknowledge different from foreordination? It differs with respect to that which *makes* man’s future acts certain. What makes them certain? The foreknowledge itself? No, it does not *make* them certain; it only means that they *are* certain. Then what makes them certain? *The acts themselves*, as viewed by God from his perspective of eternity. All would agree that past events are certain. What makes them so? The simple fact that they have already happened the way they happened. The acts themselves have made them so. This same principle establishes the certainty of foreknown future events.

But still the critic asks, “If future choices are certain, how can they be free?” The source of the confusion seems to be that both Calvinism and openness theology are reading too much into the concept of *certainty*, wrongly equating it with *necessity*. Westblade and others are incorrect in thinking that “infallible foreknowledge of an event presupposes the *necessity* of that event.” Long ago Augustine argued that foreknowledge does not negate free will, calling such an idea “strange folly!” That foreknowledge makes our choices *necessary*, he said, is a “monstrous assertion.” Arminius also distinguished between certainty and necessity: “Certainty pertains to the knowledge of God; the necessity of an event, to the will and decree of God.”¹⁶² Again he says, “For the word ‘*certainly*’ is used in respect to the divine prescience; but ‘*necessarily*’ in respect to the decree of God.” Harris says, “With the great body of Arminians I readily grant that the foreseen actions of free agents are absolutely certain in the sense that they will occur as God foresees them: but this does not prove that they must so occur.”¹⁶⁴

The proper distinction is between “will certainly occur” and “must occur.” As Forlines correctly notes, Robert Picirilli “has an excellent treatment on this subject” as he explains the relationships among certainty, contingency, and necessity. Picirilli shows that a contingent event can be certain without being necessary: “ ‘shall be’ (certain) is not the same as ‘must be’ (necessary).” “Certainty is not necessity”; it is “simply futurity.”¹⁶⁶

In conclusion, according to Arminians, even before creation God had true foreknowledge (prior knowledge, prescience) of all future events, including all freewill choices. This foreknowledge was neither determined by nor equivalent to predestination but rather in many cases was the basis of the latter (as in Rom. 8:29). Even though this foreknowledge means that every future event was indeed certain to happen as foreknown, in itself the foreknowledge does not render any future event necessary and therefore does not negate free will.

The next theological presupposition of the Arminian view of predestination is a certain view of how God is related to time. Arminians believe that predestination is based on true foreknowledge. But this raises the question: how is foreknowledge possible? How is it possible for God, in his precreation existence, to foreknow a future that has not even happened yet? The answer: it is possible because he is infinite or unlimited regarding time; he is “the eternal God” (Rom. 16:26 NASB), the eternal and immortal King (1 Tim. 1:17). As eternal God he transcends the limitations of time in two senses: quantitatively and qualitatively.

Though some deny it, the biblical data support the concept of God’s eternity in the sense of beginningless and endless quantitative duration: he has always existed in the eternal past and will always exist in the eternal future. He has existed “from everlasting” (Ps. 93:2 NASB), and he “lives forever” (Isa. 57:15 NASB; see Rev. 4:9–10; 10:6; 15:7). He is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 41:13 NASB). “Before the mountains were born or you gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Ps. 90:2 NASB; see Ps. 102:25–27). God is the one “who is and who was and who is to come” (Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8 NASB). He is the first and the last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Isa. 44:6; Rev. 1:8; 21:6). This is why “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8 NASB; see Ps. 90:4). This does not mean that all moments of time are the same or simultaneous for God. It just means that to one who is eternal, one finite period of time is no more significant than any other finite period.

This linear, quantitative sense of God’s eternity is not the crucial point for foreknowledge, though. What makes foreknowledge possible is that God is also eternal in a qualitative sense. That is, in a significant way he is outside the flow of time and is not bound by its limitations. This does not mean that God is outside the flow of time in every sense. As indicated above, God *exists* in an eternal duration of successive moments, which means that in some sense the passing of time is part of the divine nature in and of itself, totally apart from creation. This is in effect the denial of the classical theistic concept of the *timelessness* of God, or the eternal simultaneity of the divine nature. The latter is the idea that with God there is no succession of moments or even a consciousness of succession of moments. God’s being, all of his acts, and all of his knowledge coexist as one eternal *now*, in a single, simultaneous present. There is no past or future, no before or after, with God. Though his acts appear on a historical continuum from our perspective, for God himself all his acts, as well as the contents of his consciousness, are frozen in a single, unvarying, eternal simultaneity.

In my judgment this idea of God’s eternity is an extreme view based on nonbiblical philosophy rather than on biblical teaching. Everything Scripture tells us about God indicates that he does experience the passing of time in an everlasting succession of moments. He exists and acts in the present moment. From God’s own perspective some of his acts (such as the creation) are in the unalterable past, while some (such as the final judgment) are yet to come, and even God must wait for their time to arrive.

What *does* it mean, then, to say that God is eternal in a qualitative sense? In what sense *is* he outside the flow of time and therefore not bound by its limitations? Biblical teaching shows that this is true in the sense that his *consciousness* (his knowledge) is not bound by time. Though he exists and acts in the ongoing present (not in a single eternal present), and though he is conscious of existing and acting in this ongoing present, in his consciousness he stands *above* the flow of time and *sees* the past and the future of his creatures just as clearly and certainly as if they were present. This is how his foreknowledge is possible.

It is important to see that the reality of foreknowledge does not require the classical theistic view of divine timelessness or simultaneity. This is contrary to theologians such as Geisler, whose whole theology is based on classical theism and who defends foreknowledge on the basis of divine timelessness: “*nothing is future to God.*” Geisler says that this “classical view of God” has been held by all “traditional Arminians”; but this is questionable. Some contemporary classical Arminians do accept such a view. Hunt, for example, says that God is “by very definition outside of time and thus time is unrelated to Him”; “God, being timeless, lives in one eternal now”; “for God there *is* no time”; everything is “one eternal present” to him. On the other hand, not all contemporary classical Arminians accept this view of God. Forlines, for example, says that the consistent “eternal now view ... cannot stand”; it is “without merit.”¹⁷⁰ I agree with Forlines.

Classical Arminianism says that God’s predestination of individuals to salvation is based on his foreknowledge of their future freewill choices; it says that such foreknowledge is possible because the eternal God’s knowledge or consciousness is not limited by time; he sees the future *as if* it were present. But how is it *possible* for God to see the future if it has no objective reality? We may never know the answer to this question simply because of the qualitative difference between the nature of the transcendent, infinite Creator and us finite creatures. True piety has long affirmed that “the finite cannot contain the infinite”; finite minds cannot grasp all the implications of God’s unlimited existence.

Thus Forlines is right to leave the “how” of foreknowledge in the realm of inscrutable mystery. We cannot deny God’s foreknowledge simply because we do not understand it. Long ago John Kirk warned us not to try to reduce God’s knowledge to our human level. He declares that “had not man presumed to limit and pare down the power of Jehovah’s knowledge to the level of the standard of our own, he would never have asserted that God could not foreknow an event which is in its nature perfectly *contingent.*” We should simply accept what Kirk calls “the divine glory of foreknowledge”¹⁷⁴ without declaring that it must either be explained or be denied. We must accept it as true simply because the Bible affirms it. As Harris says, the Bible “clearly teaches that God does know the future free actions of men without explaining the *modus operandi.*” The inability to understand the “how” does not give us the right “to invent a theory which shall unequivocally conflict with the plain teachings of the Word”; nor do we want to have a God who can be fully comprehended.

In the final analysis Harris is right: “To say that it can not be true because we can not see how God can thus foreknow, is to substitute ignorance for argument.”

God’s Plan for Salvation

The Arminian view of predestination also presupposes a certain view of the nature of salvation. This is true because all the elements of God’s plan of salvation had to be in place from the moment he determined to create this world of freewill beings and consequently foreknew that all would fall into sin and need redemption. Thus even prior to creation God had already determined how he would infallibly work out his plan of salvation in the context of our freewill universe. This redemption plan is the heart of God’s “eternal purpose” or purposive will; everything associated with it was from the beginning predestined to occur. Exactly what did God predetermine to do?

How salvation would be accomplished. The first thing God predestined regarding salvation was the manner or method by which it would be accomplished and made available to sinners.

Here is an unconditional element of predestination: God purposed to accomplish salvation through the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity as Jesus of Nazareth and through the incarnate One's own atoning death and resurrection. He purposed this in conjunction with his foreknowledge of the actions of the human participants in the drama, but the essential events were sure to happen according to God's "predetermined plan" (Acts 2:23); those who crucified Jesus were only doing what God's hand and purpose had "predestined to occur" (Acts 4:28). In this sense Christ as our redemptive sacrifice "was foreknown before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20) with a foreknowledge that was indeed based on predestination.

In predetermining how salvation would be accomplished, the primary object of predestination was Jesus Christ himself. But in order to bring his saving work to pass, it was necessary for God secondarily to foreordain all the essential *means* of accomplishing this. This refers mostly to the selection (election) of certain nations and individuals to be used as instruments for bringing Christ into the world and then for beginning the process of applying the saving results of his redemptive work to the world. This is predestination to *service*, not to salvation.

The most obvious example of this predestination to service is God's unconditional choice of the nation of Israel to be the context for bringing the Savior into the world. For this purpose God chose the Jews "to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:7 NASB). To this end he said to them, "You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you" (Isa. 41:9 NASB). As a result the nation of Israel was blessed in abundance with manifold special privileges (Rom. 3:2; 9:4–5). Such predestination for service did not include, however, a similar election to salvation (see the next main section).

In like manner God in the person of Jesus Christ chose certain individuals to be apostles who would help to lay the foundation for the church—also a role of service, not guaranteeing salvation (Luke 6:13; John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19). As Olson says, none of these texts "says anything about a doctrine of election to salvation," and the fact that Judas was among those so chosen shows that the purpose for this choice was not salvation (John 6:70).

Much of the biblical data about predestination and election (e.g., Rom. 9) refers to this utilitarian predestination, which is part of God's eternal purpose regarding how salvation would be accomplished, not how it would be applied to individuals. A main source of Calvinism's error on this subject is failure to distinguish properly between utilitarian and redemptive predestination. See, for example, Erickson's misapplication of Romans 9 and John 15:16. Amazingly he applies the latter text to Jesus' initiative "in the selection of his disciples to eternal life."

How salvation would be applied. God's predetermined redemptive plan included not only his predestination of the way in which salvation would be *accomplished* but also his predestination of the way in which it would be *applied*. From beginning to end the *way* of salvation is decided and specified by God alone. This preserves God's sovereignty in the matter of salvation without his having unconditionally to choose which individuals will actually receive it.

First of all, in his eternal purpose God predetermined to apply salvation *conditionally*. As Miley explains it, "The actual salvation of the soul is not an immediate benefit of the atonement, nor through an irresistible operation of divine grace, but is attainable only on a compliance with its appropriate terms." That is, "our actual salvation" is "a conditional benefit of the atonement." The essence of such conditionality is clearly seen in God's lament over Israel in Isaiah 65, "I permitted myself to be sought by those who did not ask for me; I permitted myself to be found

by those who did not seek me. I said, ‘Here am I, here am I,’ to a nation which did not call on my name. I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people” (vv. 1–2 NASB). God is so anxious to welcome sinners back that he in effect jumps into their path, waves his arms, and yells, “Here I am!” But the people ignore him; thus he declares, “I will destine you for the sword, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. *Because I called, but you did not answer; I spoke, but you did not hear*” (v. 12 NASB, emphasis added).

That God’s way of salvation is conditional is consistent with our nature as freewill beings. Human free will and the conditionality of salvation go together. Miley rightly points out that many New Testament texts offer salvation to sinners on the basis that certain specified conditions must be met and on the other hand exclude from salvation those who refuse to meet the conditions. He cites Mark 1:15; 16:15–16; John 3:16, 18, 36; and Acts 2:38. The fact that salvation is offered conditionally presumes that individuals, even in their sinful state, have the freewill ability to meet those conditions. “If no free personal action of our own has any conditional relation to our salvation why should such action be imperatively required, just as though it had relation?” asks Miley.¹⁸² Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem shows that its inhabitants were lost because of an act of their own free will, not God’s selective will: Jesus wanted (*thelo*) to receive them, but they were not willing (*ou thelo*).

That God’s way of salvation is conditional is also consistent with the sovereignty of God since God himself is the one who determined that it shall be this way and since God himself is the one who determined what the conditions are. No one imposed this plan upon God; it was his own unconditional, sovereign choice. As Picirilli says, “If the sovereign God unconditionally established faith as the condition for salvation (and therefore for election), then His sovereignty is not violated when He requires the condition.”

How does this relate to predestination? The bottom line is that if salvation itself is conditional, then predestination and election to salvation must also be conditional. Conditional salvation would be completely inconsistent with unconditional election. Arminians see conditionality at both levels: God’s predestination of some to eternal life is conditioned on his foreknowledge that they will meet the specified conditions for receiving salvation.

In the second place, God’s predetermined plan for applying salvation included his decision to bestow it upon individuals only on the basis of *grace*. That is, his eternal purpose is that the event of receiving salvation will be both conditional and gracious. Some think that these two characteristics are incompatible; they assume that grace by its nature must be unconditional. John Murray says, “If grace is conditioned in any way by human performance or by the will of man impelling to action, then grace ceases to be grace.” This is a serious error, sometimes based on a false equation of *unconditional* and *unmerited*. Not all conditions are meritorious, however. Sometimes the error of seeing conditions and grace as incompatible is based on a confusion between the accomplishment of salvation and the application of such. God’s accomplishment of salvation through Jesus Christ is indeed unconditional, as are the love and grace which motivated him to make this provision in the first place; but the gracious application or bestowing of that salvation upon individuals is conditional. Sometimes the error is simply the product of Calvinism’s view of sovereignty as such, which does not allow God to do *anything* conditionally. That is, if the eternal decree is necessarily both comprehensive and unconditional, then there is no way that salvation can be regarded as conditional. But as we have seen, this is a false view of sovereignty.

In the final analysis, there is no reason to think that a gracious salvation cannot be a conditional salvation. The fact that the Bible presents it as both conditional and gracious shows that these characteristics are compatible.

That God's plan for applying salvation is both conditional and gracious means that the *particular* conditions he has specified for receiving salvation are consistent with grace. This is true of course of the primary condition, namely, faith. Paul himself specifically affirms the complementarity of grace and faith in Romans 4:16 and Ephesians 2:8. As a condition for salvation, nothing could be more natural than faith and more compatible with the nature of grace as a gift. Since our salvation is accomplished by the work of someone else (Jesus) and since it is offered to us as a free gift, the only thing we can do is accept (believe) God's Word that this is so and hold out an empty hand to receive the gift. Faith is often identified with this empty hand. It is the exact opposite of merit.¹⁸⁷

To say that faith is the primary condition for salvation does not mean it is the only condition, contrary to the belief of many. Most Arminians would have no problem adding repentance as a condition; and a right understanding of Romans 10:9–10 suggests that confession of faith in Jesus Christ is also a condition since in the text it is parallel in every way with faith itself. Others see baptism as a salvation condition, perfectly consistent with grace.¹⁹⁰ For our present purpose, however, it is not necessary for Arminians to agree on the complete list. Given that salvation is both conditional and gracious, the only issue here is whether the specified conditions are consistent with grace.

To say it another way, we cannot include anything in the conditions for salvation that is a *work* in the Pauline sense of the word (Rom. 3:20, 28; 11:6; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). A work in Paul's sense cannot be defined simply as "something you do" since Jesus calls faith itself a work in this generic sense (John 6:28–29). Rather in the Pauline sense a meritorious or nongracious work is specifically a "work of law" (Rom. 3:28 NASB), i.e., an act of obedience to a law-commandment given by God as the Creator to men as creatures. Such meritorious "works of law" do not include the Redeemer's gracious instructions to sinners on how to receive salvation (e.g., Luke 3:3; John 3:16; Acts 2:38; 16:31; Rom. 10:9–10). If an act such as repentance or confession were a meritorious condition (a "work of law") that conflicts with grace, we can assume that God our Redeemer would never have specified it as a condition for salvation in the first place. Whatever conditions God has sovereignly required are gracious conditions.

I am emphasizing this point over against those Calvinists who caricature the Arminian view of conditional election as predestination based on foreseen *works* or foreseen *merit*, as if predestination based on the foreknowledge of man's meeting *any* conditions, even faith itself, would be contrary to grace. Such is the implication of this statement by Calvin: "But it is a piece of futile cunning to lay hold on the term foreknowledge, and so to use that as to pin the eternal *election* of God upon the *merits* of men, which election the apostle everywhere ascribes to the alone purpose of God." Berkouwer likewise asserts that "election does not find its basis on man's works and *therefore* not in his foreseen faith." Such criticism of the Arminian view of predestination is patently unfair and misguided, in view of the biblical teaching on the conditionality of salvation and therefore of election.

In conclusion, God's predetermined plan for accomplishing and applying salvation as described here is part of his eternal purpose, the purpose according to which he predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies those whom he foreknows will respond to the call (Rom. 8:29–30).

Human Sinfulness

The final theological presupposition for the Arminian doctrine of predestination is a certain view of the nature of man as a sinner. The Calvinist view of unconditional election necessarily follows from the doctrine of total depravity. The essence of total depravity is that a sinner's spiritual nature is so corrupt that he is totally unable to respond positively to the general gospel call. This is why God must choose whom he will save, which he does unconditionally as part of his eternal decree. Then at a time determined by God, he selectively issues to his chosen ones a special inward gospel call, which efficaciously and irresistibly regenerates their sinful natures and implants within them the gift of faith.

Classical Arminianism has a different view of the nature of man as a sinner. While there are variations in the explanation of why this is so, all Arminians believe that at the time of the hearing of the general gospel call, every sinner has the free will either to accept or to reject it. This is in essence a denial of the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. Some Arminians believe that no sinner is ever totally depraved; others believe that all people are initially afflicted with total depravity but that God through a universal preparatory grace mitigates the depravity and restores a measure of freedom. Either way the result is the same: when the moment of choice comes, sinners have a freedom of the will to meet or not to meet the conditions for salvation. This is a prerequisite for the Arminian concept of conditional election.

Thus, for Calvinists, the universal presence of total depravity means that the only gospel call which anyone can answer must be selective and irresistible. For Arminians the universal absence of total depravity (whether by nature or by grace) means that the only gospel call God issues is universal and resistible. For Calvinists total depravity dictates that the final decision of who is saved and who is not must be made by God. For Arminians the final decision belongs to each individual.

In the Arminian system it does not really matter whether this freewill ability to accept or reject the gospel is regarded as *natural* (as in Pelagianism), as *restored* for all at conception via original grace, or as restored for all at a later time through the Holy Spirit's intervention in an act of prevenient grace.¹⁹⁴ What matters is that when the gospel message reaches the sinner, he is *not* in a state of unremedied total depravity and thus of total inability to believe in Jesus without an unconditional, selective, irresistible act of the Spirit. Rather, every sinner is able to make his own decision of whether to believe or not. Erickson has it right, that a "major tenet of Arminianism is that all persons are able to believe or to meet the conditions of salvation. . . . But is there room in this theology for the concept that all persons are able to believe? There is, if we modify or eliminate the idea of the total depravity of sinners."

Some Arminians basically accept the view described above but still claim to believe in total depravity. For example, Fisk says he believes that man is totally depraved but that this does not entail total inability. This is self-contradictory, however, since the latter is the essence of the former. Another example is Picirilli, who says he (like Calvin and Arminius) accepts total depravity, including total inability.¹⁹⁷ But when he adds that this total depravity is universally canceled to the point that all who hear the gospel have the ability to resist it, he in effect negates the main consequence of total depravity; it is no longer "total." Though he calls himself a "moderate Calvinist" and claims to believe in total depravity, Norman Geisler similarly strips the doctrine of its essence (total inability).¹⁹⁹ Such approaches as these, I believe, are confusing and misleading. Retaining the term while denying the traditional heart of the doctrine it represents blurs the distinction between Calvinism and Arminianism at a crucial point.

Predestination in Romans 9

This section presents an Arminian interpretation of Romans 9. This is a key passage for our discussion since it usually serves as a main proof text for the Calvinist view of predestination. It is the “bedrock” and “lynchpin”²⁰¹ for the concept of the unconditional election of individuals to salvation. Thus it is crucial to show that this doctrine is not taught in this chapter.

The Overall Purpose of Romans 9

There is considerable agreement that the issue being addressed in Romans 9 is the righteousness of God, as stated in the question Paul raises in Romans 9:14 (NASB), “There is no injustice with God, is there?” Specifically, has God been unjust in his dealings with Israel? This question was raised in Paul’s day by the conjunction of three interrelated states of affairs. First is the unquestioned fact that God had chosen Israel to be his special people beginning with Abraham and had showered them with unparalleled supernatural blessings from that point on (Rom. 9:4–5). Second is the Jews’ own assumption that their special relationship with God included an implicit promise of salvation for practically every individual Israelite. Their attitude seemed to be, “God chose us to be his own special people; therefore he is obligated to save us.” As Picirilli says, “Those Jews would contend that God had unconditionally promised to save all Israel and would therefore be unrighteous if He failed to keep that promise.” The third state of affairs is Paul’s emphatic teaching in Romans 1–8 that most Jews were in fact lost (e.g., Rom. 3:9). This fact was the source of “great sorrow and unceasing grief” for Paul (Rom. 9:2 NASB), but to the Jews themselves such a claim implied that God was dealing unfairly with them. If masses of Jews are unsaved, surely God’s promises to them have failed, and he is therefore unrighteous.

Paul knows that in view of these three facts, the question of God’s righteousness in his treatment of the Jews will arise. Is God unrighteous when he does not automatically save the Jews? How can God reject those whom he has elected? Does the non-salvation of the Jews mean that he has broken his covenant promises to them? “May it never be!” Paul emphatically says (Rom. 9:14 NASB). Indeed, “it is not as though the word of God has failed” (Rom. 9:6 NASB).

Though most agree that everything Paul is doing in Romans 9–11 is designed to establish this point, there is strong disagreement concerning *how* these chapters show that God’s promises to Israel have not failed. All agree that the theme of divine election is the main point, but the disagreement is over the *nature* of this election. Specifically, is Paul talking about election to *salvation* or election to *service*?

The Calvinist approach is that in Romans 9 Paul is teaching the unconditional election of some individuals to salvation (and for many, the unconditional reprobation of all others to hell). The question is framed thus: why are some (Jews) saved and others lost? The answer is that it is simply a matter of God’s sovereign, unconditional choice. An example of this is John Piper, who asks, “Does election in Rom. 9:1–23 concern nations or individuals? And does it concern historical roles or eternal destinies?” His answer: “The evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of the view that Paul’s concern is for the *eternal* destinies of those *within* the nation of Israel who are saved and who are accursed.” Thomas Schreiner agrees: “Calvinists typically appeal to Romans 9 to support their theology of divine election. In particular, they assert that Romans 9 teaches that God unconditionally elects individuals to be saved.”

Some Arminians actually agree with this view up to a point. They, too, understand Paul to be explaining why some (Jews) are saved and some are lost. That is, they see Paul as speaking of election to salvation. For example, Picirilli says of Romans 9, “The purpose of verses 14–24 is to argue that the sovereign God is the one who determines who will be saved... God still saves whom He wills and damns whom He wills, Jews or otherwise.” How is this different from the Calvinist view? It differs in that the Arminians who read Romans 9 in terms of election to salvation assume and assert that this election is conditional, or corporate, or according to foreknowledge. In my judgment, though, such qualifications are difficult to sustain in view of the teaching of Romans 9 itself. But this is not a problem since in the final analysis it is not necessary for Arminians to attempt to apply such qualifications to this election since it is not an election to salvation at all but an election to service.

Whether it be presented by Calvinists or Arminians, this soteriological interpretation of the election in Romans 9 is wrong because it does not really address the question of God’s righteousness but rather intensifies it. It does not address the question because it does not deal with the role of ethnic Israel as a whole, which is really what the problem is all about. In the minds of the Jews, the problem was simply this: “Why are so many Jews lost, when God has promised to save them all?”

According to most Calvinists, Paul’s answer to this question goes something like this: “It’s true that God made a covenant with Abraham and with Israel that includes salvation promises. So why are not all Jews saved? Because God never intended to give this salvation to *all* Jews in the first place. All along he had planned to make a division within Israel, unconditionally bestowing salvation on some and unconditionally withholding it from the rest.”

But how does this answer the charge that God is unrighteous or unfair in his dealings with the Jews? In my judgment this is *no answer at all* to the main question! If this is all Paul can say, then God is made to appear even more unrighteous and unfair than ever.

The only approach to Romans 9 that truly addresses the issue of God’s righteousness as it relates to ethnic Israel is that the election spoken of in verses 7–18 is election to service. Paul’s thesis is that God’s word of promise to Israel has not failed (Rom. 9:6a). Why not? The answer is Romans 9:6b (NASB), “For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel.” Here Paul is not distinguishing between two groups *within* Israel, the saved and the lost, with the ensuing discussion focusing on how God unconditionally makes the distinction. Rather, the contrast is of a different sort altogether. There *are* two groups, but they are not completely distinct from each other. One is actually *inside* the other, as a smaller body within a larger body. Both groups are called Israel, but they are different kinds of Israel. The larger one is ethnic Israel, the physical nation as a whole; the smaller belongs to this group but is also distinguished from it as a separate entity, i.e., as the true spiritual Israel, the remnant of true believers who enjoy the blessings of eternal salvation.

But the contrast between these two Israels is not that one is saved while the other is lost. This cannot be, since the smaller (saved) group is also a part of the larger body. What is the difference between these two Israels, and why does Paul even bring it up here? The key difference is that *God’s covenant promises to these two groups are not the same*. The promises God made to ethnic Israel are different from the promises he has made to spiritual Israel. Paul is saying, in effect, “You think God has been unfair to ethnic Israel because all Jews are not saved? Don’t you know there are *two* Israels, each with a different set of promises? You are actually *confusing* these two Israels. You are taking the salvation promises that apply only to the smaller group and are mistakenly trying to apply them to Israel as a whole.”

Here is the point: there are two “chosen peoples,” two Israels; but only remnant Israel has been chosen for salvation. Contrary to what the Jews commonly thought, ethnic Israel as a whole was *not* chosen for salvation but for service. God’s covenant promises to physical Israel as such had to do only with the role of the nation in God’s historical plan of redemption. Their election was utilitarian, not redemptive. God chose them to serve a purpose. The Jews themselves thought that this election involved the promise of salvation for individuals, but they were simply mistaken. This same mistake lies at the root of the Calvinist view that the election in Romans 9 is election to salvation. This is Piper’s root exegetical error, as he strains mightily to read salvation content into the blessings described in Romans 9:4–5. He concludes that “each of the benefits listed in 9:4, 5 has saving, eschatological implications for Israel,” and then proceeds to try to explain why such benefits were not enjoyed by all Jews. His answer is that God makes a distinction within Israel, unconditionally choosing to apply these saving benefits to only some Jews. Schreiner takes a similar approach, saying that Paul’s thesis in Romans 9–11 as stated in Romans 9:6—that “the word of God has not failed”—refers to God’s promises to save his people Israel.

Even Forlines, an Arminian, interprets God’s covenant promises to Abraham and his seed (as in Gen. 13:14–15; 17:8) as including “the promise of eternal life.” But this is simply not true. The terms of the covenant God made with Abraham and later with Israel as a whole did not include a promise to save *anyone* simply because he or she was a member of the covenant people. The key promise God made to Abraham and his seed was this: “In you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3 NASB), a promise that was fulfilled when “the Christ according to the flesh” ultimately came from Israel (Rom. 9:5 NASB). All the other promises and blessings were subordinate to this one and were designed to bring about its fulfillment. None involved a promise of eternal salvation for the individual members of the covenant people. The blessings listed by Paul in Romans 9:4–5 do not include salvation content.

The *main point* of Paul’s discussion in Romans 9 is that God has the sovereign right to make this distinction between election for service and election for salvation and to choose individuals or nations to fill certain roles in his plan without also saving them. This is exactly what God has done with ethnic Israel. This nation was unconditionally chosen for service, but this election did not at the same time unconditionally bestow salvation upon all so elected. Jesus’ choosing of the twelve apostles (John 15:16) is almost an exact parallel, as is the choosing of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17–18). The fact that God used Pharaoh for his redemptive purposes did not require the latter to be saved, and the same is true of Israel. If God wants to use the Jews in his service yet deny them salvation because of their unbelief, that is perfectly consistent with his righteous nature and his covenant promises.

Where does salvation enter the picture? Salvation is bestowed upon spiritual Israel only—the “vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:23 NASB) or the remnant (Rom. 9:27–29; 11:5), those Jews who met the gracious faith conditions for receiving it as spelled out in Romans 1–8 and 9:30–10:21. Schreiner is seriously wrong when he claims that the election-to-service view of Romans 9 does not address the question of Israel’s salvation. The issue with which Paul is dealing is the question of why *all* Israelites are not saved. His answer has nothing to do with a supposed unconditional election to salvation but with the fact that the promise of salvation was never made to the *nation* in the first place. The whole point of Romans 9 is that one must not equate election to service with election to salvation.

The above interpretation of Romans 9 is clearly borne out by the overall structure of Romans 9 and 10. After posing the problem and his basic answer to it (9:1–6), Paul first discusses unconditional election for service (9:7–18), then conditional election to salvation (9:19–10:21).

Romans 9:7–18. In this first section Paul asserts God’s sovereign right to choose and use (for service) anyone he pleases on his own terms. He is free to elect individuals or groups to serve his purposes without saving them. The point Paul is establishing in these verses applies to ethnic Israel, not spiritual Israel.

Verses 7–13. A common understanding of these verses is that they show how God unconditionally chose to save *some* Israelites but not others. For example, Baugh says these verses show that “saving grace depends upon predestination.” As Forlines sees it, just as God distinguished between Isaac and Ishmael, and between Jacob and Esau, so “there is no reason to believe that all of the Covenant Seed of Abraham (those who descended from Abraham through Jacob) are saved.”²¹⁴ Such an explanation assumes that these verses are about how God chooses remnant Israel for salvation and rejects the rest for damnation, i.e., about *how* the smaller group in Romans 9:6b is set apart from the larger group. My understanding, though, is that verses 7–13 are talking about the larger group itself, i.e., ethnic Israel as a whole and how it came into being in the first place.

The progression of thought is thus: Not all members of physical Israel are also members of spiritual Israel (9:6b); *neither* are they called the children of Abraham just because they are physically descended from Abraham (9:7a). Thus verse 7 begins a separate thought. The paragraph through verse 13 focuses on the origin and role of ethnic Israel as such, explaining the manner in which God called them into his service. The main point is that this is *different* from the way he calls individuals to salvation. Only when the two are confused do questions about God’s faithfulness to Israel arise.

Calvinists are right that the election described in 9:7–13 is unconditional; they are wrong to assume it is election to salvation rather than election to service. The main reason Paul cites the “divine distinguishing” between Isaac and Ishmael, and between Jacob and Esau, is to emphasize the sovereign, unilateral way in which God established the nation of Israel and enlisted it into his service. Isaac and Jacob thus represent ethnic Israel as a whole, not the elect within the nation. Ethnic Israel existed only by God’s gracious choice and promise. God alone controls the selection process and the terms of selection. The ones *not* chosen (Ishmael and Esau) are not thereby condemned to hell; they are simply excluded from having a part in the working out of God’s redemptive plan.

All of this was done so that “God’s purpose in election” (Rom. 9:11 NIV) would not fail, namely, his purpose to bring “the Christ according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:5 NASB) into the world. God made clear from the beginning that he was going to accomplish this purpose through this particular family regardless of their individual decisions and the direction of their personal piety. He showed this in the way he chose Isaac over Ishmael and Jacob over Esau, and this is the purpose according to which he chose and dealt with the Israelite nation as a whole. Just as “God’s purpose in election” did not depend upon the spiritual status of the twins he chose from Rebekah’s womb, so it did not depend upon the salvation status of the Jews in Paul’s day.

The overall main point of this section is God’s sovereign freedom to set up his plan of redemption as he chooses. He can choose whomever he pleases, whether individuals or nations, to carry out his redemptive purposes, apart from their own choice or cooperation, if necessary. His chosen servants do not have to be a part of spiritual Israel to be of service to him, and he is

not obligated to reward them with eternal life just because they have played their part in the messianic drama. There is no inherent connection between service and salvation.

Verses 14–16. Next Paul explicitly raises the question of God’s righteousness or faithfulness and implicitly relates it to his treatment of ethnic Israel as a whole: “What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!” (verse 14 NASB). God has the sovereign right to choose for service without an accompanying promise of salvation. But one might ask, how do we know that God has this right? Here is the point of Paul’s citation of God’s declaration to Moses, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (Exod. 33:19 NASB; see Rom. 9:15). That is, Paul does not give some logical or rational defense of God’s right to choose for service as he pleases; rather, he establishes this right by the simple quoting of the authoritative words of God as recorded in inspired Scripture.

The common understanding of these two verses (Exod. 33:19 and Rom. 9:15) is that they must refer to salvation because of the terms used: grace, mercy, compassion. This is not the case, however. The terms used in these verses do not inherently signify *saving* grace and mercy, in the sense of eternal salvation; in fact, they are often used for non-soteriological grace or favor and temporal mercy and compassion. The first verb used in Exodus 33:19 is *chanan*, which often refers to God’s temporal blessings. Basically it means “to do someone a favor, to show favor, to be merciful and kind, to bestow a blessing.” For example, in Genesis 33:11 Jacob says to Esau, “God has dealt graciously with me,” i.e., in giving him material wealth. Also, in 2 Samuel 12:22 (NASB) David says, “The LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.” That is, God may grant my request to spare the life of Bathsheba’s child. In the Psalms David often prayed for God to “be gracious” to him by giving him the strength to overcome his physical enemies (e.g., Ps. 31:9; 41:10; 56:1).

The second verb used in Exodus 33:19 is *racham*, which along with its cognates often refers to the attitude of compassion, mercy, or pity upon someone in any kind of need. When used of God’s compassion, these words usually refer to his temporal blessings upon national Israel. For example, because God is compassionate, he will not destroy his people (Deut. 13:17; Ps. 78:38). A common idea is that because of his compassion God restores his people from captivity. For example, “Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel’ ” (Ezek. 39:25 NASB). “I will ... have compassion on his dwelling places” (Jer. 30:18 NASB). (See also Deut. 30:3; Isa. 14:1; 49:10, 13; 54:7–8, 10; Jer. 31:20; 33:26; Zech. 10:6.)

As in Exodus 33:19, these two words (*chanan* and *racham*) and their cognates are often combined in the Old Testament to describe the nature of God’s dealing with his people as a nation. They are the basis for God’s decision to bless his people, to spare them, to deliver them, to keep them intact as the people through whom he would work out his plan of redemption. For example, “The LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them” and did not allow Syria to destroy them (2 Kings 13:23 NASB). (See also 2 Chron. 30:9; Isa. 30:18; Ps. 102:13.)

Paul’s quotation from Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:15 is taken directly from the Septuagint, which uses the Greek words *eleeo* and *oiktiro*, which are close in meaning. The verb *eleeo* (“have mercy, be merciful”; cf. the noun *eleos*, “mercy”) is used in Romans 9:15, as well as in 9:16 and 9:18. At times it refers to God’s saving mercy (e.g., Rom. 9:23; 1 Tim. 1:13, 16; 1 Pet. 2:10); but more often it is used in the temporal sense of showing compassion to the poor, sick, or needy (Rom. 12:8; Phil. 2:27). Thus, it is used as a prelude to a request for such mercy: “Have mercy on me, and help me” (e.g., Matt. 9:27; 15:22; 17:15; 20:30–31; Luke 16:24). Most

significantly, it is sometimes used to refer to God's choosing or calling someone for service, specifically, Paul's call to be an apostle: 1 Corinthians 7:25; 2 Corinthians 4:1.

In view of the broad array of meanings for all the words involved here, including many that are not related to salvation, it is presumptuous to assume that Paul is using them in Romans 9:15 to refer to election to salvation. In view of the many uses of the Hebrew terms to refer to God's preservation of Israel as a nation, and Paul's use of *eleeo* to refer to his calling to be an apostle, it is reasonable to interpret the terms here in 9:15 as referring to God's choice of the nation of Israel to play a crucial role in his covenant purposes.

The words imply that when God chooses anyone for service, such as Israel, he is bestowing great favor upon that person or nation, whether that person or nation is saved or not.

Thus far we have shown that the words *mercy* and *compassion* in Exodus 33:19 and Romans 9:15 do not *necessarily* refer to saving mercy since they have other legitimate uses compatible with election to service. But how do we know that the latter is the connotation intended here? The only way to decide this is to analyze them in reference to their contexts, especially the context of Exodus 33:19 (cf. the narrative from 32:9 to 34:10). Such an analysis shows that, when God says in this text that he will be gracious to and show compassion upon whomever he chooses, his statement has nothing to do with choosing anyone for salvation, temporal or eternal. Rather, he is declaring *his right to do as he chooses with the nation of Israel*. In this case he is exercising this right by sovereignly choosing to spare them as a nation and to continue to use them in his redemptive plan.

Paul is applying this statement in a similar way in Romans 9:15. That is, it is a matter of God's sovereign mercy that he has chosen this nation for his purposes in the first place, and certainly even more so that he has spared and preserved them even this long, allowing them finally to be the physical source of the Savior's presence in the world (Romans 9:5).

Romans 9:16 does, I think, express the concept of unconditional election; but Paul is applying it only to election for service and not to election for salvation.

Verses 17–18. How does the example of Pharaoh fit into the progression of Paul's argument? The apostle has shown that God's treatment of the Jews is not unjust because he has complete sovereignty in the way he chooses those who will serve his purposes. The way he chose Isaac and Jacob demonstrates this by example, and this is further confirmed by the citation of the general principle from Exodus 33:19. All of this together shows that God is free to choose whomever he pleases for roles of service.

But this in itself does not fully address the issue of the Jews. The question specifically is whether God is unjust because he called the nation of Israel into his service while at the same time condemning many if not most individual Jews to hell. If God is going to use them, is he not thereby obligated to save them? This is the point addressed in verses 17–18. Here Paul shows from the Old Testament that God's sovereignty in election for service includes the prerogative of choosing and using people without saving them. His premiere example is Pharaoh. Not only was he chosen via God's sovereign mercy, but he was also hardened or confirmed in his unbelief.

It is common to take verse 18 as referring to election to salvation and rejection to hell, with the former applying to Moses and the latter to Pharaoh. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the first place, there is nothing in this verse about eternal destinies, either heaven or hell. "Mercy" here means the same as the mercy and compassion of verse 15, i.e., the favor God shows when he bestows on someone the privilege of playing a role in the drama of redemption.

Second, there is no reference to Moses in this verse at all. Paul has said nothing specifically about Moses in this passage except that God revealed to him the great principle in Romans 9:15. At most that principle applied to him in context in the sense that God chose to answer his prayer. But he is not set forth here as Pharaoh's counterpart, as the object of God's mercy in contrast to Pharaoh as the object of God's hardening.

Rather, the whole of verse 18 refers to Pharaoh. In this context Paul has deliberately chosen to introduce him as an example because he is a perfect paradigm for God's treatment of Israel as one chosen for significant service in God's redemptive plan. In this sense God "had mercy" on Pharaoh just as he had mercy on Israel by choosing Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the entire nation to fulfill his covenant purposes. But God not only exercised his sovereign right to raise Pharaoh up for a specific purpose (v. 17); he also chose to use him for this purpose without saving him. In this sense Pharaoh is exactly parallel with Israel regarding the key point of this whole chapter: God's right to choose for service ("have mercy") without also choosing for salvation.

It is important to note that verse 18b ("he hardens whom he desires," NASB) does not mean that God hardened Pharaoh's heart in such a way that he was thereby caused to be an unbeliever. The Old Testament account of the events preceding the exodus from Egypt make clear that Pharaoh had already hardened his own heart against God. The main senses in which God hardened his heart were in extending or protracting Pharaoh's own self-caused hardness and in focusing it upon a particular situation. By doing this God thus caused Pharaoh to prolong his ultimate and inevitable decision to let the people go until all the plagues could be inflicted (cf. Exod. 4:21; 7:3; Rom. 9:17). In this way God used Pharaoh both in spite of his lost state and because of his lost state but without in any way causing his lost state.

This is the exact pattern of God's dealings with ethnic Israel as a whole. In his mercy he chose them for service, and he used them for his purpose both in spite of the fact that many (most) of them were lost and even *because* they were lost. As in the case with Pharaoh, the Jews who had hardened their own hearts toward God were in turn hardened by God early in the new covenant era in such a way that God accomplished a specific purpose through that very hardness (Rom. 11:7–11, 25).

The bottom line is that God's treatment of Israel is perfectly fair and just. He unconditionally chose and used them for his purposes, but this does not mean that they thereby had any claim on God's saving grace. They were both *chosen* and *hardened* at the same time. Thus there is no inherent connection between service and salvation, as the example of Pharaoh shows.

Romans 9:19–10:21. In Romans 9:19–10:21 Paul does turn to the subject of salvation, as he discusses what distinguishes the saved remnant within Israel from the unsaved Jews. Here it is clear that God's choice of the remnant is conditional, in accordance with the already established principle of justification by faith. God does separate spiritual Israel from the unsaved mass (9:19–29), but the agent of separation is faith, not election (9:30–10:21). In the latter section there is no hint of unconditional election to salvation or damnation; rather, it is clear that the separation between the lost and the saved Israelites is the result of their own choices, either to believe or to disbelieve. The Jews who were lost had no one to blame but themselves and their own stubborn wills. God himself is pictured, not as sovereignly deciding in his own secret will who will be saved and who will be lost, but as a loving God who invites all to be saved: "But as for Israel he says, 'All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people'" (10:21).

This is how this main section ends. Is Israel's lost state a reflection on God, evidence of his unfaithfulness, an indication that his word has failed (9:6)? No, God has faithfully kept his word to Israel in every way. He kept every promise he made to the nation relating to their covenant purposes and privileges (9:1–29). He has sent the Messiah and given them every opportunity to trust in him for personal salvation (9:30–10:21). Their refusal to accept him is their own fault.

Conclusion

In conclusion we shall note two ways in which a proper understanding of Arminian conditional predestination should affect us. First, it should give us a keen sense of personal responsibility. It respects our God-given free will and our ability to come to our own decision regarding faith in Christ. It makes the blame rest solely upon us if we do not meet the gracious conditions for election to glory. It relieves God of the apparent awful stigma of somehow being arbitrary and unjust for choosing some and rejecting others. It forces the unbeliever to face the problem of his own destiny squarely and without excuse. He cannot say, "What's the use? My fate is sealed anyway." Conditional election also warns the believer that he must give diligence to make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10 KJV).

Second, the doctrine of conditional predestination should give us a sense of personal peace. Usually it is Calvinists who make such a claim. To know, they say, that our salvation in no way depends on our own sinful and fickle selves but wholly upon the sovereign grace of God should give the believer great peace of mind. But in reality, the idea of unconditional election has been the source of great anguish to many. "Since I can do nothing but wait," they say, "how can I know whether God has chosen me?" If the reason for choosing one person and not another lies wholly within the secret counsels of God, a person may *always* be uncertain of his status. Even if he knows himself as a believer, he may always wonder if his faith is a genuine gift of God or a temporary and ineffective imitation conjured up by his own deceptive will (see Matt. 13:5–7, 20–22).

The classical Arminian view of conditional election, however, is a source of great comfort. How can one be assured that he is among God's elect? Because God has revealed the conditions we must meet to be given this status, and everyone can know whether he or she has met the conditions. There is no mystery. If a person has not met the conditions, then he must be warned that the doctrine of predestination is not intended to be a comfort for unbelievers. If he has met them and is continuing to meet them, then he can confidently sing, "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine; O what a foretaste of glory divine!"²²

²² Cottrell, J. W., Pinnock, C. H., Reymond, R. L., Talbott, T. B., & Ware, B. A. (2006). [*Perspectives on election: five views*](#). (C. O. Brand, Ed.) (pp. 70–134). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Scriptural Support for the Arminian Perspective

Two differing models for understanding the way God carries out His sovereign purposes with human beings are explained. These were the *cause* and *effect* model and the *influence* and *response* model. The *cause* and *effect* model best serves unconditional election. The *influence* and *response* model best serves conditional election.

The ultimate question for a biblical, systematic theologian to try to answer is: Which view of election is taught in the Bible? Romans 9, which has been considered to be the bedrock of Calvinism, is best understood as teaching election that is *individual*, *eternal*, and *conditional*. The first problem that I need to deal with in this chapter is the meaning of predestination in the New Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE AND MEANING OF PREDESTINATION

The Greek word for *predestinate* is *proorizō*. It means to predetermine that a particular thing will take place. It is found six times in the New Testament (Acts 4:28; Rom. 8:29–30; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:5, 11).

Acts 4:28

Acts 4:28 uses *proorizō*: “to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.” In this verse, *proorizō* refers to what happened at the cross as having been predetermined by God. God had predetermined that Jesus Christ would be crucified and in connection with that event He would suffer the full wrath of God and make atonement for the sins of the human race.

1 Corinthians 2:7

First Corinthians 2:7 reads: “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory.” In this verse, it is the revelation of the New Testament gospel (“the wisdom of God in a mystery”) that Paul speaks of as being determined by God. God had predetermined that at the appropriate time, which to God was a specific time, the New Testament gospel would be revealed.

While Acts 4:28 and 1 Corinthians 2:7 do indeed indicate that God has predestinated or foreordained that certain things will take place, they do not address the subject of the election of believers. The remaining verses where *proorizō* occurs are pertinent to the question of individual election. The question that demands our attention is: Does the use of *proorizō* in any of these verses tell us that God has predetermined or predestinated that a particular person will believe?

Romans 8:29–30

In Romans 8:29–30, Paul states: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” It is obvious that the aim of predestination in verse 30 is the same as it is in verse 29. In verse 29, the aim of predestination is for those whom God foreknew “to be conformed to the image of Christ.”

I understand that there is a problem surrounding the meaning of *foreknow* and *foreknowledge* in the New Testament. I will address that later when I look at the occurrences of the words for

foreknowledge. It is quite clear that these verses do not say that the people under consideration were predestinated to believe. Rather, it is saying that those who do believe are predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Ephesians 1:5

Ephesians 1:5 reads: “having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” The “us” of the verse is a reference to those who had been chosen in Christ. I will comment on that verse later when I look at the verses where the Greek word for *election* occur. The word that is translated “adoption as sons” is *huiiothesia*. The literal meaning of the word is “son placing.” The defining passage for the meaning of *huiiothesia* is Galatians 3:19–4:10. It is in Galatians 4:5 that the word occurs. But a study of 3:19–4:10 is necessary in order to grasp what is meant.

In this passage, Paul is telling us that in the Old Testament God viewed His believing children as being in a state of immaturity. The Mosaic Law with its civil and ceremonial laws was adapted to immaturity. Paul is telling us that, in connection with the coming of Christ, God has placed His believing children in the position of adult sons.

Paul spoke of the Law as being a *paidagōgos* (Gal. 3:24). In wealthy Greek and Roman families, a young boy was placed under a *paidagōgos* from ages 5 or 6 until 16 or 17. The *paidagōgos* was a trusted slave. This slave would go with the young boy for his protection and to instill the family values in the young boy. The KJV translates *paidagōgos* as schoolmaster. That translation might have been useful when the KJV was translated, but that is not the case now.

We do not have an exact parallel in our culture to the *paidagōgos* of Paul’s day. Probably, the nearest parallel would be a *nanny*. The words *tutor* or *guardian* pick up the meaning somewhat. It is impossible to understand what Paul is saying about the *paidagōgos* without being assisted by a knowledge of the Greek and Roman culture of Paul’s day.

An understanding of the word *paidagōgos* is necessary before we can understand Paul’s use of the word *huiiothesia*. The time of *huiiothesia* (adoption) refers to the time when the parents released the young man from the *paidagōgos*. This took place when the young man was about 16 or 17. It was the time when he was released from a childhood method of treatment to one in keeping with the maturity of adulthood. Galatians 3:19–4:7 teaches us that in connection with the coming of Christ, God released His children from the *paidagōgos*. The use of *paidagōgos* in Galatians 3:24 is a metaphorical reference to the Mosaic Law with its civil and ceremonial laws.

Adoption (*huiiothesia*) in the New Testament does not refer to the legal process of taking one who was not born to parents and making him or her a member of the family. Rather, it refers to taking one who is a member of the family and making him or her a *huios*. *Huios* is the Greek word for “son.” It refers to one who is a legal heir of legal age. The one so adopted has the privileges of an adult heir. The first privilege to be bestowed is the release from the *paidagōgos*. That means the release from the responsibility of living by the civil and ceremonial laws of the Mosaic Law.

The predestination Paul spoke of in Ephesians 1:5 was the predestination of us as New Testament believers to *huiiothesia* (adoption) as explained above. Again, we see that it does not say that certain ones are predestinated to believe. Rather, this predestination was that of New Testament believers who would be adopted and, thus, delivered from the Mosaic Law as the *paidagōgos*. I realize that the meaning of adoption needs much more explanation than I have given here.

Ephesians 1:11

Ephesians 1:11 reads: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” The phrase “we have obtained an inheritance” is a translation of *eklērothēmen*, which is the first person plural, aorist passive indicative of *klēroō*. The question to be decided is whether believers were “made an inheritance of God” or whether believers were “given an inheritance.” Were we predestinated to be God’s inheritance or we were predestinated to receive an inheritance from God? Either of these would be true statements. For support for the idea that believers may be viewed as God’s inheritance, see Deuteronomy 32:8–9. The only pertinent question then is: What is the meaning here?

For our present purposes, we do not need to decide which of these is meant. No matter which of these meanings is the true meaning, it will not present a problem to conditional election. It is clear that it is not saying that people are predestinated to believe.

CONCLUSION

This study of *proorizō*, the Greek word for *predestinate*, has not settled for or against either conditional election or unconditional election. While it has not settled the question, it has not done damage to conditional election. Those who believe in conditional election have as much right to the word *predestinate* as those who believe in unconditional election. We do have a different understanding of the terminus of *predestination* as it relates to the act of faith. But as it relates to believers, we see predestination as having the same terminus that Calvinists do.

Those who believe in unconditional election believe that God has unconditionally chosen certain ones to believe and be saved. He predestinates those whom He has chosen to believe. In this case *faith* is the terminus of predestination. The Classical Calvinist approach works on the *cause* and *effect* model in producing faith in the individual. In the Classical Arminian approach, God works on the *influence* and *response* model in getting the response of faith from the individual. This difference in the understanding of the nature of the divine contribution in bringing a person to saving faith is the great continental divide between Classical Calvinists and Classical Arminians.

As it relates to the terminus of predestination in the verses that I have examined, the terminus, as it is believed by Classical Arminians and Calvinists, would be the same. There would, of course, be a difference in how God would achieve these goals.

The terminus of predestination in Romans 8:29 is clearly *that believers would be conformed to the image of Christ*. Classical Arminians and Classical Calvinists would agree that God has predestinated believers to be conformed to the image of Christ.

In Ephesians 1:5, the terminus of predestination is *adoption*. Classical Calvinists and Classical Arminians would agree that God predestinated New Testament believers to be adopted. Differences on the interpretation of adoption would have nothing to do with whether a person is a Calvinist or an Arminian.

In Ephesians 1:11, if the true meaning is that believers are predestinated “*to be God’s inheritance*,” that would not present a problem to either Calvinism or Classical Arminianism. If the true meaning is that believers are predestinated “*to have an inheritance*,” that would not present a problem to either Calvinism or Classical Arminianism.

Predestination is just as essential for Classical Arminianism as it is for Calvinism. If there is no predestination, there is no gospel. Our gospel says that God has predestinated salvation for

everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and He has predestinated that all who do not believe in Jesus Christ will be condemned to eternal death (Jn. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12; 16:31; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8; and others). It is the fault of Arminians that we have almost forfeited the word *predestination* to the Calvinists. As Arminians, we need to reclaim the word *predestination*.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE AND MEANING OF *FOREKNOW* AND *FOREKNOWLEDGE*

The Greek word *proginōskō* (to foreknow) occurs five times in the New Testament. It is found in Acts 26:5; Romans 8:29; 11:2; 1 Peter 1:20; and 2 Peter 3:17. The Greek word *prognōsis* (foreknowledge) is found only twice in the New Testament—Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2.

2 Peter 3:17

The Apostle Peter says in 2 Peter 3:17: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked.” In this verse, *proginōskō* refers to human knowledge. Peter was saying that, since they know the damage that has been done by these false teachers, they should be on their guard lest they be led astray. They already knew (knew beforehand) the end result of those false teachers.

Acts 26:5

Acts 26:5 reads: “They [the Jews who accused Paul] knew [Greek, *proginōskō*] me from the first ...” In this verse, *proginōskō* refers to the knowledge that a person has before the present moment which is *fore[before] knowledge*. We would say “prior knowledge.” In 2 Peter 3:17, a person is in possession of a knowledge that makes him aware of the consequences that a particular thing will bring.

Divine foreknowledge as we will see it used in the other verses is different from what is mentioned in Acts 26:5 and 1 Peter 3:17. It refers to a knowledge that God had of events in eternity past. This kind of knowledge is knowledge of an event before it occurs.

Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20

Acts 2:23 speaks of “Him [Jesus of Nazareth], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” Calvinists believe these verses confirm their idea that the Greek words for *predestination*, *election*, and *foreknowledge* are essentially synonymous. They take the use of the word *foreknowledge* (*prognōsis*) in “being delivered by the determined purpose and the foreknowledge of God” to be *efficacious*.

I believe as strongly as any Calvinist that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was prearranged and predetermined. The determined purpose of God and the foreknowledge of God prearranged and predetermined the crucifixion of Christ. I do not believe that this verse requires us to understand the word *prognōsis* (foreknowledge) to be *efficacious*, thus making it synonymous with *predetermined* or *predestinated*.

I believe that the proper understanding of *prognōsis* in Acts 2:23 is *instrumental*. The foreknowledge of God enabled Him to see the future as if it were present. I do not believe that everything was or is *present* to God. But He saw the *future* as fully and completely as He does the present.

It is important to realize that God did not foresee the future as a passive observer. He did not simply raise the curtain of time and look at a future that was already fixed before He looked. He planned the future. But when He planned the future with regard to human beings who were made in His image and thus were personal beings with a mind, heart, and will, He chose to work with them in accord with the *influence* and *response* model. He has a *cause* and *effect* relationship with the material universe, but such is not the case with human personality.

The cross of Christ was a predestinated event. At the same time, numerous human beings were involved in one way or another in the effecting of the event. Since human beings with free will were involved in the crucifixion event, we must understand the role of God's foreknowledge in predestinated events. It is important for us to keep in mind the observations made in the previous paragraph as well as what was stated in Chapter 2.

It is the kind of God that I have just attempted to describe (a God who was not a mere spectator) who foresaw the future from all eternity. As He foresaw the future, He saw it as it would progressively unfold from: (1) the result of His creative activity and His divine influence; (2) the result of the devastating influence of sin; (3) the result of the response that human beings would give as a result of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the Word of God, and the ministry of the redeemed; (4) the result of all of the influences that would come from all sources outside Himself; (5) the result of all the influence that He would bring on people through His power and His infinite wisdom. He saw, then, everything that He sees and is doing now. He is the same God now that He was then. Everything that He is doing now is just as real as it would be if He had not known it in advance.

God's omniscience and wisdom furnished Him with all the information and the "know how" that was needed for Him to arrange the death and suffering of Jesus Christ as the means of atonement for the sins of the world. With the aid of His infinite knowledge and wisdom, the determinate counsel was able to predetermine the crucifixion of Christ in eternity past. In this arrangement, foreknowledge was aiding, but foreknowledge as foreknowledge did not bear a causal relationship to the plan for the crucifixion to occur. Without foreknowledge, the determinate counsel could not have prearranged and predetermined the plan.

I think I have shown that there is no necessity whatever to give *foreknowledge* in Acts 2:23 a *causal* force with the result that it would be synonymous with *predestination*. I have read the comments on the use of *proginōskō* and *prognōsis* in several commentaries on Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20. I have tried to understand the reason that Calvinists consider it a valid and necessary conclusion to understand *predestination*, *election*, and *foreknowledge* to be essentially synonymous. I have also read the explanations given in several lexicons and theological dictionaries on these words. Most of what they say is based on the usage of *proginōskō* and *prognōsis* in Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:20.

The verb *proginōskō* occurs three times in the Septuagint (Wisdom 6:13; 8:8; and 18:6). The meaning of *proginōskō* in the apocryphal *Book of Wisdom* is "to foreknow" or "to know in advance." The noun *prognōsis* is found in the apocryphal book *Judith* in 9:6 and 11:9. The use in 11:9 is understood as foreknowledge. The only use of the word *prognōsis* outside the New Testament that I have found is used to support the view that foreknowledge is an equivalent of predestination is found in *Judith* 9:6. Paul Jacobs and Hartmut Krienke give the meaning "of God's foreknowledge decreeing the fall of the Egyptians." They take "foreknowledge" in *Judith* 9:6 to be the equivalent of "decreeing." *The Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* is in agreement. On *prognōsis*, it reads, "It is found in the LXX at Jdt. 9:6 with reference to the predeterminative knowledge of God." It will be helpful to look in *Judith* 9:5–6:

For thou hast done these things and those that went before and those that followed; thou hast designed the things that are now, and those that are to come. Yea, the things thou didst intend came to pass, and the things thou didst will presented themselves and said, 'Lo, we are here'; for all thy ways are prepared in advance, and thy judgment is with foreknowledge (*prognōsis*).

I have found no defense given for the understanding that in Judith 9:6 *foreknowledge* is synonymous with *predestination*. It is true that *predestination* is spoken of in verses 5 and 6. But there is no reason to believe that *foreknowledge* has the same meaning as *predestination*. I think the meaning is that God's judgments were made in eternity past with the aid of His foreknowledge.

Peter says in 1 Peter 1:20 that Christ, as the lamb without blemish and spot, "indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." The word translated "foreordained" in 1 Peter 1:20 is *proginōskō*. The RSV translates it as "destined." The NIV has "chosen." The NEB translates "predestined." The NASB settles for "foreknown." I believe that the words *foreordained*, *destined*, *chosen*, and *predestined* are all appropriate words to apply to the fact that the atoning work of Christ on the cross was prearranged, preplanned, and predetermined in eternity past. God was not caught off guard by the fall of the race into sin. The plan of redemption was already made and determined before the fall of Adam and Eve took place in the chronological order of events. What was planned and determined in eternity past took place when Jesus died on the cross. What was in the mind of God in eternity past was "manifested for us in these last times."

When properly understood, I do not have any trouble with the words *destined*, *chosen*, *prearranged*, *preplanned*, *predestined*, and *predetermined*. Not only do I not have trouble with these words; I am as convinced of their truth as any Calvinist is. I do have a problem with translating *proginōskō* "predestined," or "chosen," or any words with a similar meaning.

Even if the true meaning in 1 Peter 1:20 is "predestined," it should be translated "foreknown." "To foreknow" is the proper translation of *proginosko*. To give it the meaning "foreordained," "destined," "chosen," or "predestined" is an interpretive translation. The Greek word *proginōskō* and the English word *foreknow* have exactly the same possibilities of meaning foreordained. When *proginōskō* is translated as "foreordination" or some word that is equivalent, the translator has become an exegete. He is giving a debatable meaning of *proginōskō* as the translation. Exegesis should be found in commentaries, not translations. If *proginōskō* means foreordained, it is the responsibility of the exegete to defend the interpretation with evidence. I am not aware of any strong defenses of the idea that "predestined" is one of the established meanings of the word *proginōskō*. The translation "foreordained" shows an influence of Calvinism to make *foreknowledge* synonymous with *predestination*. When this twist is given to the word foreknowledge, in the end predestination becomes the foundation for foreknowledge. God knows the future because He has predestinated it.

Whatever should be taken from 1 Peter 1:20 can be properly understood by taking *proginōskō* to mean "foreknown." The plan of God to provide atonement through the death of Christ was foreknown by God in eternity past. For this to have been foreknown meant, of course, that Jesus was chosen for the purpose of providing atonement by His death and that it was preplanned, predetermined, and prearranged. All of these concepts, while true, are true by necessary inference from the nature of God and from the direct teachings of Acts 2:22 and 4:28, not by the meaning and use of *proginōskō*.

Calvinism's insistence that *proginōskō* and *prognōsis* are to be taken as synonymous with predestination is without foundation from both biblical and extrabiblical usage.

Romans 8:29

Paul says in Romans 8:29, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The ones that are referred to by “whom he foreknew” are “those who are the called according to His purpose” in verse 28. Those who have now been called according to His purpose were foreknown by God in eternity past.

From the standpoint of conditional election, there are two possible ways to understand foreknowledge as it is used in 8:29. Meyer explains: “God has fore-*known* those who would not oppose to his gracious calling the resistance of unbelief, but would follow its drawing; thereafter He has fore-ordained them to eternal salvation; and when the time had come for the execution of His saving counsel, has called them, etc.” (ver. 30).

Godet offers the same view, worded somewhat differently, “There is but one answer: foreknown as sure to fulfill the condition of salvation, viz. faith; so foreknown as His by faith.”

Lenski takes a somewhat different approach concerning the word know (Greek *ginōskō*). The meaning is “to know with affection and with a resultant affect.” He goes on to say that to add the prefix “fore” (Greek *pro*) “dates this affectionate knowing back to eternity.”

If there is any doubt where Lenski stands on election, the following statement from him should settle the issue: “If it be asked why God did not foreknow, foreordain, call, justify the rest, the biblical answer is found in Matt. 23:37 and similar passages: God did not exclude them, but despite all that God could do *they* excluded themselves.”

Lenski’s view is probably the correct view. “Whom he foreknew” speaks of knowing persons rather than simply knowing something about them. God foreknew the elect with affection, or He foreknew them as being His. There is no conflict whatsoever with this understanding of foreknowledge and conditional election.

What Meyer and Godet say about foreknowledge as referring to foreknowledge of faith is a necessary inference. To know a person implies a time of getting acquainted with that person. If God foreknew the elect as being His, it is necessarily inferred that this foreknowledge presupposes the person’s belief in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Romans 11:2

Romans 11:2 states that “God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.” In this verse, the reference is to the *affectionate foreknowing* of Israel as the Covenant People of God. The emphasis in this verse is the knowledge of corporate Israel as the people of God. It would be interesting to develop the concept of foreknowledge in this verse further, but that would involve a discussion of the place of Israel in the redemptive plan of God. That would lead us away from our present concern, which is how God’s foreknowledge fits in with individual election and predestination. Romans 11:2 illustrates for us the use of foreknowledge as God’s affectionate *foreknowing*. But it does not add additional light on foreknowledge and individual election.

1 Peter 1:2

First Peter 1:2 speaks of those who are the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...” If we were to understand *prognōsis* (foreknowledge) as meaning predestination here, that would mean that election would be grounded in predestination. I think I have shown up to this point that there are no grounds for believing that foreknowledge is synonymous with predestination. This verse merely tells us that election is according to foreknowledge. It does not tell us what in foreknowledge formed the basis of election. It does not settle whether election was conditional or unconditional.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE AND MEANING OF ELECTION

The word *eklegomai* occurs 21 times in the New Testament. *Eklektos* occurs 23 times. *Eklogē* occurs seven times. Many of the occurrences of these words do not have any bearing on the New Testament doctrine of election. However, I will examine every occurrence that has a bearing on this study.

THE WORD *EKLEGOMAI*

The Gospel of John

This word *eklegomai* is found in John 6:70; 13:18; 15:16, 19. I have already dealt with these verses in Chapter 4 under the heading “The Occurrences of the Word *Eklegomai*.” *Eklegomai* is the verb form of the word for “elect.” In the occurrences in John, it is translated “chosen.” In each of these cases, the reference is to the Twelve Apostles. The reference is that Jesus had chosen them to be His apostles. There is no problem for conditional election if it did include election to salvation. For additional comments, see the treatment referred to above in the previous chapter. Of the occurrences of this word in the New Testament, the only other place that would help shed light on the doctrine of election is Ephesians 1:4.

Ephesians 1:4

Ephesians 1:4 reads: “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” This verse is probably the most important verse in the Bible on the subject of election. It makes very clear that believers were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. In no uncertain terms, it puts election in eternity past.

From the context of Scripture, it seems to me that the “us” is to be taken as a group of individuals who were chosen *individually*. Paul makes it very clear in Romans 9 that election is *individual*, not *corporate*. For a more thorough discussion, I would refer the reader to my comments in Chapter 3 under the heading, “Paul’s Appeal to the Jews to See That Election Is Individual, Not Corporate.” To support my case that election is individual, I will once again give the quotation that I gave in Chapter 3 from Thomas R. Schreiner which relates to Paul’s treatment of individuals in Romans 9:15–21. Schreiner calls attention to the use of the singular in these verses. He explains:

The word *whom* (*hon*) is singular, indicating that specific individuals upon whom God has mercy are in view. The singular is also present in the reference that Paul draws from Romans 9:15, in 9:16. God’s mercy does not depend on “the one who wills, nor the one who runs.” The conclusion to all of 9:14–17 in 9:18 utilizes the singular once again: “God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.” In the same vein 9:19 continues the thought: “*Who (tis)* resists his will?” And Paul uses the singular when he speaks of one vessel being made for honor and another for dishonor (9:21). Those who say that Paul is referring only to corporate groups do not have an adequate explanation as to why Paul uses the singular again and again in Romans 9.

What is of particular importance in Ephesians 1:4 is that Paul says, “He has chosen us in him.” We are chosen in Christ. He does not say that we were chosen *to be in Christ*. At this point, I believe that Calvinism is in trouble. According to Calvinism, the elect were chosen by God as His very own *before* the decree to provide atonement. They were His at that very

moment. In both Supralapsarianism and Infralapsarianism, the decision to elect some and reprobate others *precedes* the decree to provide atonement.

Calvinism contends that this verse means, “chosen by God as His very own before the provision of atonement.” Following this election, according to Calvinism, God decreed to provide atonement for those who were elected. Then He decreed that those who were elected would be regenerated. This would guarantee that they would be efficaciously brought to exercise faith in Christ. It was decreed that, upon the experience of this efficaciously guaranteed faith, the person would be justified and placed in Christ.

This puts Calvinism in serious contradiction with Paul. Calvinism says that the elect were chosen by God as His very own before the decree to provide atonement. Paul says, “The elect were chosen in Christ.”

Arminius was right when he said, “God can ‘previously love and affectionately regard as His own’ no sinner unless He has foreknown him in Christ, and looked upon him as a believer in Christ.” Arminius goes on to make a very insightful statement: “For, if God could will to any one eternal life, without respect to the Mediator, He could also give eternal life, without the satisfaction made by the Mediator.”¹⁶ Arminius puts his finger on what is probably *the most serious problem in Calvinism*. For the most part, Calvinists have been advocates and defenders of the satisfaction view of atonement. For election to precede, in God’s plan, the provision of atonement violates the foundation on which the satisfaction view of atonement rests.

The satisfaction view of atonement insists that the holiness of God requires that *the guilt problem must be solved* before God can enter into fellowship with a fallen member of the human race. The only way that can happen is for a person to have the death and righteousness of Christ applied to his or her account. That takes place when a person places his faith in Jesus Christ and is placed in union with Christ.

It is not the prerogative of sovereign grace to enter into a personal relationship with a person *apart from the application of the death and righteousness of Christ* to his account. If that is the case, it was not the prerogative of sovereign grace in eternity past efficaciously and affectively to know or elect a member of the human race apart from foreknowing him or her to be in Christ. Calvinism is harmed rather than helped by Ephesians 1:4.

THE WORD *HAIREOMAI*

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” *Haireomai* occurs only three times in the New Testament. The other two places (Phil. 1:22 and Heb. 11:25) refer to choices by human beings. The related word *haritizō* is used only one time in the New Testament. It is found in Matthew 12:18 in a quotation from Isaiah 42:1. In this use, it is said by God the Father to the Son, “Behold my servant, whom I have chosen.”

There does not seem to be any special significance in the use of *haireomai* rather than *eklegomai* in 2 Thessalonians. There is some thought given to the view that “from the beginning” refers to “the beginning of Paul’s ministry among them.” Others take “from the beginning” to refer to eternity past. Neither view presents a problem for conditional election. The salvation spoken of was experienced by “belief of the truth.”

The Word *Eklogē*

This is the noun form. It refers to those who are chosen or elected. It is important that we remember that election refers both to our election by God in eternity past and to the election of God in time. When the New Testament speaks of a person (or persons) as being among the “elect” or “chosen,” it means that God has chosen them already. People whom God foreknows to be people who will be saved in the future are not referred to as elect.

The use of the word *eklogē* in the following references assumes that the people under consideration have already been saved: Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; Mark 13:20, 22, 27; Luke 18:7; Romans 8:33; 16:13; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:9; and Revelation 17:14. It is true that those who are saved in time were chosen by God in eternity past. But no person is designated as being “elect” or “chosen” unless he has already been saved.

The only use of the noun *eklogē* that is helpful in formulating the doctrine of election in eternity past is 1 Peter 1:2. It occurs in the plural form. The meaning is “elect ones” or “chosen ones.” Peter goes on to tell us that this election took place in accordance with *foreknowledge*. While it clearly tells us that this election took place in eternity past, it does not address the subject of whether this election was conditional or unconditional.

THE QUESTION OF WHETHER ELECTION WAS CONDITIONED ON FAITH

It is true that the Bible does not specifically say that foreknown faith was the condition of election in eternity past. The Calvinist is correct when he says that the Bible does not tell us why God chose the elect. However, silence on why God chose the elect gives no support for unconditional election. To recognize that God did not spell out for us in the Bible why He chose the elect is not the same as saying that we cannot know whether there was a condition and what that condition was. God’s being the same yesterday, today, and forever means that if we know why God chooses people now, we can reason back to why God chose the elect in eternity past.

As Arminius has said well:

Hence, God acknowledges no one, in Christ and for Christ’s sake, as His own, unless that person is in Christ. He who is not in Christ, can not be loved in Christ. But no one is in Christ, except by faith; for Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, and we are ingrafted and incorporated in him by faith. It follows then that God acknowledges His own, and chooses to eternal life no sinner, unless He considers him as a believer in Christ, and as made one with him by faith.

In commenting on “the conformity to Christ” that is predestinated in Romans 8:29, Arminius explains:

Therefore, no one is predestinated by God to that conformity, unless he is considered as a believer, unless one may claim that faith itself is included in that conformity which believers have with Christ—which would be absurd, because that faith can by no means be attributed to Christ, for it is faith in him, and in God through him; it is faith in reference to reconciliation, redemption, and the remission of sins.

It is abundantly clear that salvation is by faith now. I do not think I need to give further development for the case that if salvation is conditional now, it necessarily leads to the conclusion that election in eternity past was conditional. The burden of proof is on those who think otherwise.

A CLARIFICATION ON THE QUESTION OF GROUND AND CONDITION

Our study of atonement and justification distinguished between the *ground* of justification and the *condition* of justification. The same distinction must be made in election. The ground of election is that God foreknew us as being in Christ (in union with Christ). Thus, He chose us *in Christ*. That is what Ephesians 1:4 tells us. Since the condition for being in Christ is *faith in Christ*, it is necessarily implied that God foreknew that the person would meet the *condition* of faith in Christ.

THE EXTENT OF THE OFFER OF SALVATION

Where the Word *Called* Is Used or Implied

In Matthew 22:14, Jesus said, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” In Acts 17:30, Paul said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.” It is generally agreed, even by Calvinists, that there is a general call that makes the gospel available to all people.

Some attention needs to be given to the use of the word *called* in the epistles. Calvinists make a point of saying that whenever the call is mentioned in the epistles, it refers only to believers. My response is that to refer to believers as being “called ones” does not mean that the call has not been extended to anyone else. A speaker at a special occasion may address the audience as invited guests. The only thing that he is affirming is that those who are present have been invited. They are not intruders. It does not mean that no one else was invited. When believers are referred to as “called,” it is not necessary to conclude that others have not been called.

The Appeal to “Whoever Will”

To understand the thrust of “whoever will,” we need to remind ourselves again that, among the Jews in New Testament times, the prevailing view was that the Abrahamic Covenant automatically saved all Jews. We must keep this in mind when we consider how a Jewish audience (Jn. 3:15–16) would have understood an appeal to “whoever will believe in Jesus.” It certainly means more than a simple, “Salvation is offered to anyone and everyone who will believe and receive it.” The design is to break through the concept of corporate election or salvation and let them know that salvation is on an individual basis. It is for whoever will and only whoever will. The emphasis on only is strong because it is intended to bring an end to the concept of unconditional corporate election or salvation. The aim is to show that salvation is on an individual basis instead of a corporate basis.

John 4:13–14 is spoken to the Samaritan woman. In view of the conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans, the “whoever” in this verse is meant to assure the Samaritan woman that the life-giving water Jesus was offering was for her too.

Romans 9:33 comes at the end of a chapter in which Paul had poured out his heart to the Jews who had been blinded by the idea of a corporate election wherein all Jews were automatically saved. He desperately wanted to see his kinsmen saved. The “whoever” of this verse is intended to show that the salvation offer was for the Jews, but also to emphasize that it was made only to whoever would believe in Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and Savior.

In Romans 10:11–13, “whoever” is intended to make known that the offer extends to Greeks (Gentiles) as well as Jews. But when the reference is made to Jews, the intent is to make known that, while it was a genuine offer of salvation, it was also intended to emphasize that only

“whoever,” among the Jews, would believe in Jesus Christ as Messiah, Lord, and Savior would be saved. It was also making the claim that there was no difference between the way the Gentiles would be saved and the way of salvation for the Jews.

The contexts of these passages do not give the slightest hint that this “whoever will” is only offered to a “select few.” Neither Jesus nor Paul inferred that, though this offer was to everyone, it had no real possibility of being received by anyone except those whom God had already unconditionally chosen. There is no suggestion that the only hope of a positive response rested on a person first being regenerated.

THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

Classical Calvinists are either Supralapsarians or Infralapsarians. Both Supralapsarians and Infralapsarians believe in limited atonement. They believe that the decree to elect preceded the decree to provide atonement. The decree to provide atonement was made specifically for the purpose of providing atonement for the elect. From their viewpoint it is better to speak of the *intent* of atonement than to speak of the *extent* of atonement. But either way it is stated, Jesus died only to make atonement for the elect.

Sublapsarian Calvinists believe that God decreed the provision of atonement for all mankind. This was followed by the decree to elect some unconditionally for salvation. Sublapsarian Calvinists reject that point of Classical Calvinism referred to as limited atonement. These are referred to as Four-Point Calvinists. Some who have advocated this position say that God provided salvation for everybody, and nobody responded. Then God decreed to elect some unconditionally.

In the first edition of his theology text, Henry C. Thiessen adopted a modified form of Sublapsarianism. He explains: “We believe that the decrees are in this order: 1. The decree to create, 2. The decree to permit the fall, 3. The decree to provide salvation for all, and 4. The decree to apply that salvation to some, to those who believe.” Thiessen’s “modified form of Sublapsarianism” is consistent with Arminianism. I accept it as my own.

It is interesting that many who believe in unconditional election think that the case for unlimited atonement is so compelling that they accept it. However, it seems to me that limited atonement fits more logically with unconditional election and the Calvinistic scheme.

I do not deem it necessary to give a thorough defense of the doctrine of unlimited atonement. The case must be strong and obvious because there are many who believe in unconditional election and yet they part with Classical Calvinism and adopt unlimited atonement. This is the position of Augustus Hopkins Strong and Millard J. Erickson.²⁵ Henry C. Thiessen is one who believes in both conditional election and unlimited atonement, although he joined the Calvinists on the doctrine of perseverance. Robert E. Picirilli, a Classical Arminian, gives an excellent and more thorough treatment of the subject of the extent of atonement in his book *Grace, Faith, Free Will*.

Another reason I will not give an extensive treatment of unlimited atonement is that no one will ever become a Calvinist because he was first convinced of limited atonement and then embraced the other points of Calvinism. Even when he is convinced of other points, he will have some difficulty with limited atonement.

I will now give a very brief rationale for unlimited atonement.

John 3:16

John 3:16 states: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” The only way anyone would ever question that *world* in this verse meant anything other than every human being is that he comes to the verse with a theological conviction that will not allow him to believe that. In this case the burden of proof is on the person who wants to place a restriction upon the scope of the word *world*.

1 Timothy 2:6

Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:6 that Jesus “gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” The only possible reason for understanding “a ransom for all” any other way than that Jesus’ death was a ransom paid for the sins of the whole race is that the person has a conflict between that interpretation and some other doctrine. This verse occurs in a context where Paul says, “Who [God] will have all men to be saved” (verse 4). The ransom was provided for “all.” The “all” of verse 6 is the same as the “all” of verse 4.

Hebrews 2:9

Hebrews 2:9 reads: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” The burden of proof is on the person who would place a restriction upon “everyone.” The only natural reading of Hebrews 2:9 is that Jesus died for every human being.

1 John 2:2

The Apostle John in 1 John 2:2 says that Christ is “the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins* of the whole world” (KJV). No one should deny that the most natural way to understand this verse is to reckon that the propitiatory sacrifice was intended to make atonement for the sins of the whole world. The only people who would think otherwise are those who believe in either Supralapsarianism or Infralapsarianism. The only reason for taking a verse whose meaning is apparent, and applying a strained interpretation (i.e., trying to make it fit the idea of limited atonement) would be their belief that the decree to elect preceded the decree to provide atonement. In such thinking, God decided whom He would save. Then, He decided to make atonement for those He had elected.

THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Classical Calvinists believe that to hold to the satisfaction view of atonement precludes the possibility of unlimited atonement. They claim there are two insurmountable problems for those who believe in a satisfaction view of atonement if they at the same time reject limited atonement: (1) The only logical alternative to limited atonement for one who believes in the satisfaction view of atonement would be universal salvation. (2) If, as described by the satisfaction view of atonement, Christ died for those who are never saved, it would mean double payment with respect to those who spend eternity in hell.

UNIVERSAL SALVATION OR UNLIMITED ATONEMENT A NECESSARY RESULT

Calvinists argue that, if Jesus paid the full penalty for the sins of the whole race, all for whom Christ died must of necessity be saved. This is true since His death settles their account and

therefore forms the necessary basis for their forgiveness. Either Christ died for everybody and everybody would be saved, or He died only for the elect and only the elect will be saved, or so the argument goes. It is thought that for one who believes in the satisfaction view of atonement that the only way to escape universal salvation is to believe in limited atonement.

The answer is found in the kind of substitution involved. Christ died for the whole world in a *provisionary* sense. He suffered the penal wrath of God for sin, but that fact alone does not place His death on everybody's account. It is effectual for the individual only as it is placed on a person's account. It can be placed on a person's account only as a result of a union with Christ. Union with Christ is conditioned on faith.

The Calvinist may want to insist that the objection is valid and that Christ died only for the elect. The only way this argument could have any validity would be to deny the possibility of provisionary atonement. If there can be no provisionary atonement, it does follow that if Christ died for a person *his justification is never provisionary but always real*.

In explaining the view of limited atonement, Louis Berkhof comments: "The Calvinists teach that the atonement meritoriously secured the application of the work of redemption to those for whom it was intended and their complete salvation is certain."

A close look at what Berkhof said will show that it does not rule out the provisionary principle in atonement. He says that the atonement "makes certain" the salvation of those for whom it was intended. He did not say that the atonement automatically saved everybody for whom it was intended. Calvinists do not teach that the elect are justified before they experience faith. They teach that the person for whom Christ died will of a certainty be justified, but they do not consider a person justified until he experiences faith as the condition of justification. Thus, atonement is provisionary until the time it is applied. The only way to deny the provisionary nature of atonement is to consider *all* people for whom Christ died to be justified *before* they experience faith.

Once we accept that atonement is *provisionary*, we invalidate the objection that penal satisfaction either leads to universalism or limited atonement. Provisionary atonement applied on the condition of faith and on the grounds of a union with Christ answers this objection and sustains the penal satisfaction view.

DOUBLE PAYMENT WITH REGARD TO SINNERS WHO GO TO HELL

The discussion above about provisionary atonement and union with Christ answers this objection. The death of Christ is not on the sinner's account who goes to hell. His account does not show a double payment. It is true that his sins were paid for *provisionally*, but there is no problem with justice which forbids collection of double payment as long as there is no double entry on the person's account.

THE DESIRE OF GOD AND THE SALVATION OF SINNERS

I believe we are to conclude that God deeply desires His message of salvation to go out to all people, and He desires a positive response from all who hear this message. There are two passages that speak particularly of this concern of God. These are 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and 2 Peter 3:9.

1 Timothy 2:1–4

1 Timothy 2:1–4 reads, “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The only limitations on how many and which people are saved are: (1) our failure to confront people with the gospel and (2) the failure of people who hear the gospel to respond properly to the gospel. Verse 4 is not telling us that God has *planned* that all people be saved. Rather it tells us that it is His desire that all men be saved. The thought that it means anything other than that God has a desire for all people to be saved would never come up unless a person approaches these verses with a theological bias against this view. Nothing in these verses suggests that God does not desire that all people be saved.

2 Peter 3:9

2 Peter 3:9 states: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” In 2 Peter 3:4, Peter reminds us that there would be scoffers who would say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.” These scoffers misunderstand the delay of Christ’s return. In verse 9, he tells us that we are not to consider that this delay means that Jesus is not coming again. Rather, the delay is an indication that God is giving sinners time to repent. When Peter says that God is “not willing that any should perish,” the word for “willing” (*boulomai*) means “to intend,” or “to purpose.” It is not God’s purpose to plan unconditionally to bring about the eternal death of anybody. He does not unconditionally and sovereignly choose some for damnation.

CONCLUSION

I recognize that there are many Calvinists who are very strongly committed to evangelism and worldwide missions. I respect them for this, and I appreciate it. At the same time, I think Calvinism most surely dulls the concern of many. Clearly, in the teaching of unconditional election, obedience or lack of obedience to the Great Commission will not change who or how many people are saved.

As Arminians, we should feel rebuked by those Calvinists who are faithful in their obedience to the Great Commission. If conditional election is correct, and I believe it is, we must get under the burden of reaching lost people for Christ. We must feel deeply about it. We must feel convicted about it. And we must do better.²³

²³ Forlines, F. L. (2011). [*Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation*](#). (J. M. Pinson, Ed.) (pp. 169–195). Nashville, TN: Randall House.

Universal Reconciliation and the Inclusive Nature of Election



THOMAS B. TALBOTT

Christians have traditionally believed that, because they are saved by grace, they can take no credit for their own salvation or even for a virtuous character (where such exists). All credit of this kind goes to God. And understood properly, this doctrine of salvation by grace has three important virtues, among others: it can undermine pride and self-righteous feelings of superiority in the Christian believer; it can encourage the believer to acknowledge his or her solidarity as a sinner with the entire human race, including the most monstrous and deranged criminals; and it can provide the believer with the greatest possible assurance that all will be well in the end.

But once one postulates a final and irrevocable division within the human race between the company of the redeemed in heaven, on the one hand, and the hopelessly lost and eternally damned, on the other, an obvious question arises. Given that we all start out equally as sinners, just what accounts for this final division among us? And no appeal to the mysterious counsels of God can conceal the obvious answer: either the explanation lies in the will of God—that is, in God’s freedom to extend his mercy to some and not to others—or it lies in how we humans exercise our own freedom with respect to the mercy that God freely extends to all.

The Augustinians, as I shall call them, take the first alternative, opting for a doctrine of limited election; and the Arminians, as I shall call them, take the second, opting for a doctrine of conditional election. Christian universalists, by way of contrast, insist that election is neither limited in scope nor conditional in nature; election is, after all, an expression of God’s love for the world, the whole world, and God’s love is neither limited in scope nor conditional in nature. Against the idea that God’s love is limited in scope, the New Testament declares that God at least wills or desires the salvation of all humans (1 Tim. 2:4) and is not willing that any of them should perish (2 Pet. 3:9); indeed, it is precisely for this reason that God sent his Son into the world to be “the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2 NIV). And against the idea that God’s love is conditional in nature, St. Paul in particular proclaimed the good news that no failure, no deceitfulness, and no lack of faith on our part can “nullify the faithfulness of God” (Rom. 3:3–4 NASB).

Accordingly, in opposing a doctrine of limited election, Christian universalists stand shoulder to shoulder with their Arminian brothers and sisters who share their view that God, whose essence is perfect love, extends his love and mercy to every person equally; and in opposing a doctrine of conditional election, they also stand shoulder to shoulder with their Augustinian brothers and sisters who share their view that God will eventually accomplish *all* of his will in the matter of salvation. But in opposing the idea of unmitigated tragedy, such as is implicit in any doctrine of everlasting separation from God, they part company from both their Arminian and their Augustinian brothers and sisters.

I shall divide what follows into four parts. In part 1, I shall argue, first, that a doctrine of limited election is inconsistent with the Johannine declaration that God *is* love, and second, that it is riddled with logical impossibilities in any case; in part 2, I shall argue further that a doctrine of limited election flatly contradicts St. Paul’s teaching in Romans 11 and also requires an utterly fantastic construal of Paul’s statements about all human beings; in part 3, I shall argue that the

Augustinians have totally misunderstood Romans 9, in part because they do not interpret this chapter in light of Paul's own conclusion in Romans 11; and finally, in part 4, I shall argue that the Augustinian understanding of unconditional election and irresistible grace, unlike the Augustinian understanding of limited election, accurately reflects Paul's own teaching on the matter.

Part 1: Love and the Nature of God

God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him (1 John 4:16b NKJV).

I begin with the declaration in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that God not only loves but *is* love. How should we interpret this Johannine declaration? Most Christian philosophers writing today would probably interpret these texts, as I do, to mean that love is part of God's nature or essence; using philosophical jargon, we might say that, according to these texts, lovingkindness is an *essential* rather than an *accidental* property of God.

The author of 1 John was not, of course, a philosopher and did not, fortunately, employ philosophical jargon in his writings; nor was he likely even familiar with the philosophical distinction between an essential and an accidental property. But he clearly employed "God" as a proper name (as opposed to a title), the name of a distinct person whom we ought to adore and worship, and he said concerning *this* person that he *is* love. The point, then, hardly seems to be that God just *happens* to love us, as if it were a happy accident that he does; the point seems to be that it is his nature to love us. In a broadly logical (or metaphysical) sense, it could not have been otherwise. That this is, at the very least, a natural interpretation seems indisputable. Commenting upon 1 John 4:8, the conservative New Testament scholar, Leon Morris, thus wrote: "*God is love.* This means more than 'God is loving.' It means that God's essential nature is love. He loves, so to speak, not because he finds objects worthy of His love, but because it is His nature to love. His love for us depends not on what we are, but on what He is. He loves us because He is that kind of God."

But this interpretation, which seems to me exactly right, is in fact more controversial than some might expect. Many theologians, most notably some of the Augustinians, reject the idea that loving-kindness is an essential property of God; John Calvin, for example, explicitly considered this idea and explicitly rejected it, as we shall see. And the reason for his rejection is clear: If God freely chooses to make *some* persons, but not *all*, the object of his love and mercy—if, that is, he freely bestows his love and mercy upon a limited elect, as Calvin insisted—then it must be possible for God not to love someone; and if that is so much as possible, then loving-kindness is not one of his essential properties.

Unfortunately, not all theologians in the Augustinian tradition are as clear on this point as Calvin himself was (and in the end even Calvin contradicted himself). According to Daniel Strange, for example, "God does not have to love all of humanity ... for Him to be love." But you might as well say: "God does not have to believe all true propositions in order to be omniscient." If it is so much as possible that God should not believe a true proposition, then omniscience is not one of his essential properties; and similarly, if it is so much as possible that God should not love someone, then love is not one of his essential properties either. So clearly the question of whether loving-kindness is an essential property of God is not merely academic but goes to the heart of Augustinian theology. Let us therefore pose a twofold question: how *do* the Augustinians interpret the Johannine declaration that God is love?—and what, if any, are the exegetical and theological merits of their interpretation?

In Search of an Augustinian Interpretation

When I first began to wonder how the proponents of limited election might interpret 1 John 4:8 and 16, I immediately encountered three difficulties as I began to search for an answer.

First, not all the proponents of limited election seem to regard these texts as particularly important. Louis Berkhof, for example, wrote an entire systematic theology without citing either of the texts in question; and though Calvin did comment upon them briefly in his commentary on 1 John, he evidently did not regard them as important enough even to mention in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. When one thinks about it, this is truly astonishing. Calvin's *Institutes* is a monumental work of over 1,500 pages; in it he sought to provide an exhaustive summary of Christian doctrine, as he understood it, along with the biblical support for it. In the Westminster Press edition, the index of Bible references alone is 39 pages of small print with three columns per page. And yet, in this entire work, as massive and thorough as it is, Calvin never once found the Johannine declaration that God is love important enough to discuss. How, one wonders, could this have happened? Here is a statement that, to all appearances at least, provides a glimpse into the nature of the Christian God, and in his *Institutes* Calvin ignored it altogether; he did not even try to explain it away.

A second difficulty I encountered as I began my search was that the proponents of limited election are sometimes inconsistent in the various claims they make. When he contemplated God's relationship with the redeemed in heaven, for example, Jonathan Edwards wrote: "The Apostle tells us that God is love, 1 John 4:8. And therefore seeing he is an infinite Being, it follows that he is an infinite fountain of love. Seeing he is an all-sufficient Being, it follows that he is a full and overflowing and an inexhaustible fountain of love. Seeing he is an unchangeable and eternal Being, he is an unchangeable and eternal source of love."

Here Edwards said that God is an "infinite," "overflowing," "inexhaustible," "unchangeable," and "eternal source of love." But when he contemplated God's relationship to the damned, Edwards also wrote: "In hell God manifests his being and perfections only in hatred and wrath, and hatred without love." By "hatred without love," he evidently had in mind an attitude quite incompatible with love. So how, I ask, are we to reconcile the second quotation with the first? Suppose Edwards had said, in one place, that God's *righteousness* is "infinite," "inexhaustible," "unchangeable," and "eternal," and then had said, in another, that God acts toward some people—say, the nonelect—in some expedient way *without righteousness*. That would have posed a similar problem of interpretation. How could God's righteousness be both infinite and eternal if it is also limited in the sense that he sometimes acts without righteousness? And similarly, one wonders, how could God be an infinite, inexhaustible, overflowing, and eternal source of love if his love is also limited in the sense that he sometimes acts without love? Like Strange, Edwards appears to have embraced a logical inconsistency.

Perhaps the most serious difficulty I encountered, however, was a seemingly intentional kind of subterfuge. Consider how the Reformed theologian, J. I. Packer, interprets 1 John 4:8 and 16 in his book *Knowing God*. A strong proponent of limited election, Packer in effect asks whether the proposition, *God is love*, expresses "the complete truth about God." By way of an answer, he juxtaposes two assertions. He begins one section with this italicized sentence as a caption: "'*God is love*' is not the complete truth about God so far as the Bible is concerned"; then, three pages later, he begins his next section with this italicized sentence as a caption: "'*God is love*' is the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned." From the perspective of a Christian who looks to the Bible as an authority, however, these captions are even more perplexing than Edwards's apparent inconsistency. If the proposition, *God is love*, does not

express the complete truth about God so far as the Bible is concerned but does express the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned, it would seem to follow that either the Bible or the Christian is mistaken.

And what, one wonders, does Packer mean by “the complete truth about God” anyway? In a perfectly obvious sense, the proposition, *God is love*, does *not* express the complete truth about God, not if God is also omnipotent and omniscient; but that would be true, I should think, both so far as the Bible is concerned (at least on Packer’s account) and so far as the Christian is concerned. Does Packer really want to say that the Christian’s perspective is different from that of the Bible?

Clearly not. Like Edwards, Packer has simply stumbled over a text that he finds difficult to incorporate into his overall theological perspective. As a close reading of his discussion will reveal, a recognizably consistent pair of theses lie behind the confused forms of expression in the two captions quoted above. The thesis of his second caption is really this: “According to the Bible, God loves the Christian with a perfect form of love”; and the thesis of his first caption is really this: “According to the Bible, God does *not* love *all* human beings with a perfect form of love.” We can show that these are indeed Packer’s theses in the following way. Packer makes two excellent and profound points. The first concerns the nature of God’s actions: “This is what God does for those he loves—*the best He can*; and the measure of the best that God can do is omnipotence!” The second concerns a condition of God’s own happiness, which “will not be complete,” says Packer, “till all His beloved ones are finally out of trouble.” Accordingly, Packer leaves us with exactly three possibilities: either (1) all persons will eventually be reconciled to God, or (2) God’s own happiness will never be complete, or (3) God does not love all created persons. Now Packer clearly rejects both (1) and (2), and that leaves only (3), namely, that God does not love all created persons.

So far as I can tell, moreover, Packer sees all of this clearly, though he fails to make it explicit. His confusing caption—“‘God is love’ is not the complete truth about God so far as the Bible is concerned”—is merely his way of opting for (3) without calling too much attention to it. But in the end his readers are bound to ask the obvious question: “Does the Johannine declaration imply that God loves all persons, or does it not?” To this question Packer can give one of three possible answers: “Yes,” “No,” and “I don’t know.” As we have just seen, the answer he in fact gives is, “No,” but it almost seems as if he recoils from the answer he gives. He probably felt a burden to express himself with sensitivity and caution on a difficult matter, lest he put off his readers with a clear statement of his own position. So he ends up trying to conceal his position, even as he articulates it, behind a curtain of ambiguous and confusing language.

The Loving Nature of God

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Augustinians, who restrict God’s love and mercy to a limited elect, really have no clear idea how to handle 1 John 4:8 and 16. As a further illustration, consider how Calvin flatly contradicted himself when he was forced to say something about these texts, however briefly, in his commentary on 1 John. He began by observing, correctly, that the author of 1 John “takes as granted a general principle or truth, that God is love, that is, that his *nature* [or essence] is to love men” (my emphasis). He then went on to write: “But the meaning of the Apostle is simply this—that as God is the fountain of love, this effect flows from him, and is diffused wherever the knowledge of him comes, as he had at the

beginning called him light, because there is nothing dark in him, but on the contrary he illuminates all things by his brightness. Here then he does not speak of the essence [or the nature] of God, but only shows what he is found to be by us [i.e., by the elect].”

Having just told us that the Johannine declaration *is* a statement about the nature of God, Calvin went on to provide some additional reasons for taking it so: just as God is light in the twofold sense that “there is nothing dark in him” and “he illuminates all things by his brightness,” so God is love in the sense that he is the source or “fountain of love.” But then, by way of a conclusion that seems to come from nowhere, Calvin flatly contradicted himself and took it all back: in declaring that “God is love,” he concluded, “the Apostle . . . does not speak of the essence [or the nature] of God, but only shows what he is found to be by us” [i.e., by the elect]. Nor did Calvin explain himself any further; he simply moved on to other matters.

Though such an explicit contradiction is no doubt bewildering, Calvin’s conclusion that “the Apostle . . . does not speak of the essence [or the nature] of God” remains just what his overall theological perspective requires. It also indicates that he saw more clearly than Packer does exactly where the issue must be joined. The issue is not, as Packer has caricatured it, whether the proposition, *God is love*, expresses the complete truth about God. The issue is whether it expresses a truth about the nature or essence of God—whether, in other words, it ascribes an essential property to God. If it does, then God could not possibly fail to love someone or fail to seek anything other than the best for those whom he does love.

Consider now how Packer defends his Calvinistic interpretation of the Johannine declaration. Even as Calvin compared the divine attribute of love with that of light, so Packer points to two other Johannine statements “of exactly similar grammatical form”: “God is light” and “God is spirit”; he then informs us that the “assertion that God is love has to be interpreted in the light of what these other two statements teach.” But these other two Johannine statements unquestionably *are* statements about the essence (or the nature) of God. In 1 John 1:5 (NKJV), we read that “God is light and in him is no darkness at all.” This is not a declaration to the effect that, by a happy accident, God *happens* to be free from all darkness, all impurity, all unrighteousness; nor is it a declaration that God has *chosen* to remain free from all darkness in his relationship to some fortunate people only. It is instead a declaration about the essence (or nature) of God. And similarly for the assertion in John 4:24 that God is spirit.

As Calvin acknowledged in a comment upon this passage, “Christ himself calls God in his entirety ‘Spirit’ ”; and this implies “that the whole essence of God is spiritual, in which are comprehended Father, Son, and Spirit.” But then, if *God is spirit* implies “that the whole essence of God is spiritual,” why should not *God is love* likewise imply that it is God’s essence (or nature) to love? Packer insists that the latter proposition is a mere “summing up, *from the believer’s standpoint* [my emphasis], of what the whole revelation set forth in Scripture tells us about its author.” But just what is that supposed to mean? Would Packer (or Calvin, for that matter) interpret the statement that God is spirit in the same way? Would he describe this as a mere “summing up, from the believer’s standpoint,” of the revelation about God? Certainly Calvin never described God’s spiritual nature in this way, and I doubt that Packer would either. He would surely recognize that, given the spiritual nature of God, the expression “from the believer’s standpoint” adds little but confusion.

Given Packer’s own principle of interpretation, therefore, we are entitled to conclude that, in Johannine theology at least, God is love in exactly the same sense that he is spirit and is light; that is, it is as impossible for God not to love someone as it is for him to exhibit darkness rather than light.

In at least one place, moreover, Packer seems to acknowledge all of this. For he writes: “To say ‘God *is* light’ is to imply that God’s holiness finds expression in everything that He says and does. Similarly, the statement ‘God *is* love’ means that His love finds expression in everything that He says and does.” But if God’s holiness “finds expression in everything that He says and does,” and his love likewise “finds expression in everything that He says and does,” then in God there is no such thing as a holy act devoid of love or a loving act devoid of holiness. Accordingly, God’s holiness and his love must be, at least, logically compatible; and if that is true, then the presence of divine judgment and divine wrath—which are but particular expressions of God’s holiness—would no more imply the absence of God’s purifying love than the presence of his love would imply the absence of his holiness.

The Paradox of Exclusivism

Our discussion so far has underscored two points: first, that the Johannine declaration that God is love is without question an assertion about the essence (or nature) of God, and second, that, so interpreted, this single declaration is utterly inconsistent with any doctrine of limited election. But let us now set these two points aside for a moment, and let us grant, at least for the sake of argument, the possibility that God might not truly love all people. If we grant that assumption, then it may appear as if God is utterly free, as Calvin insisted, to will the good for some, namely the elect, and not to will it for all others.

But the appearance is misleading. If loving-kindness were merely an accidental property of God and not part of his essence, then it would indeed be possible that, for some sinner *s*, God does not truly love *s*. It would not follow, however, that God could *both* love some person *s** who also loves *s* *and*, at the same time, fail to love *s*. It would not follow, for example, that God could *both* love Isaac, who loved his son Esau so dearly, *and*, at the same time, hate Esau in the sense of willing that Esau should come to a bad end. Nor would it follow that God could *both* love Jacob, who eventually came to love Esau as a brother (see Gen. 33:10), *and* literally hate Esau. To the contrary, even if loving-kindness were not part of God’s essence, God still could not love some persons (the elect) without loving all other persons as well.

Consider first a mere awkwardness in the doctrine of limited election. If God has commanded us to love our families, our neighbors, and even our enemies, as the New Testament consistently affirms, then a doctrine of limited election carries the awkward implication that God hates (or simply fails to love) some of the ones whom he has commanded us to love. Jesus declared that we are to love our enemies as well as our friends, so that (a) we might be children of our Father in heaven and (b) we might be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect (see Matt. 5:43–48); that is, we are to love our enemies because God loves them, and we should be like God in just this respect. So why should God command us to love some of the ones whom he himself fails to love? The reply that we can never know in this life who are not the objects of God’s love may seem to provide a practical reason for loving all, lest we fail to love a true object of God’s love. But such an answer hardly accords well with the words of 1 John 4:8, “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Though the above paragraph registers a mere awkwardness in the doctrine of limited election, a more substantial puzzle emerges as soon as we ask ourselves how God could possibly love Isaac without loving Esau as well. According to Packer’s excellent statement, quoted above: “This is what God does for those he loves—the *best He can*; and the measure of the best that God can do is omnipotence!” So just what is the best that omnipotence could do for Isaac? Or, to

put it another way, what is the nature of the good that God wills for those whom he does love? He no doubt wills that they should achieve happiness of some kind. But just what is the relevant *kind* of happiness? Let us call it true *blessedness* or, to borrow Richard Swinburne's expression, *supremely worthwhile happiness*.

Among the various conditions of such happiness, two are especially relevant for our present purposes. If I should be so unloving as to take pleasure from the misery of others, then whatever pleasure I take from it would be far removed from true blessedness; and if I should remain blissfully ignorant of some tragedy that, if known, would undermine my happiness altogether, then my blissful ignorance would not be worth much in the end. Accordingly, my happiness will qualify as supremely worthwhile, a form of true blessedness, only when (a) I am (finally) filled with love for all others and (b) no false beliefs or ignorance of any kind are essential to it. If God truly loves (or wills the best for) Isaac, therefore, then he wills that Isaac should achieve true blessedness in the end; he wills, in other words, that Isaac should become the kind of person who loves (or wills the best for) all others, including Esau.

Consider next the way in which love, or willing the good for another, binds people's interests together even as it renders them more vulnerable to misery and sorrow. Whenever two people are bound together in love, their purposes and interests, even the conditions of their happiness, are so logically intertwined as to be inseparable. Paul acknowledged this point when he commented concerning his fellow worker Epaphroditus: "He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another" (Phil. 2:27). Given Paul's love for his friend, then, any good that befell his friend would also be a good that befell Paul; and any evil that befell his friend would likewise be an evil that befell Paul. It is a point about the logic of love that the New Testament endorses again and again. First John 4:20 thus declares: "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars"; they are liars because it is simply not possible to hate those whom God loves and, at the same time, to love God. Or, as Jesus put it in his much misunderstood account of the judgment of nations: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren [or loved ones], you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40 RSV).

But the reverse is true as well. Just as we cannot love God and hate those whom he loves, neither can God love us and, at the same time, hate (or even fail to love) those whom we love. If I truly love my own daughter, for example, and love her *even as I love myself*, then God cannot love (or will the best for) me unless he also loves (or wills the best for) her. For I am not an isolated monad whose interests are distinct from those of my loved ones, and neither is anyone else. If God should do less than his best for my daughter, therefore, he would also do less than his best for me; and if he should act contrary to her best interest, he would also act contrary to my own.

Calvin seemed to believe, however, that I might at least *experience* God as loving and kind, provided that I am one of the elect, even if God should choose not to love some of my own loved ones. But except in a case of blissful ignorance, which is not true blessedness, how could that be true? Could Isaac, consistent with his love for Esau, both *know* that God refused to love (indeed hated) his beloved son and, at the same time, experience God as loving and kind? Not unless he were somehow mentally deranged.

Suppose that in the aftermath of a boating accident my daughter and I should both start floundering in the water, too far apart to be of help to each other; suppose further that a man in another boat could easily rescue both of us, if he should choose to do so; and suppose, finally, that he should choose to rescue me (by throwing me one of several life rings in his possession)

even as he permits my daughter to drown. We might imagine him to reason as follows: “If I permit the girl to drown, the man will be even more thankful for his own rescue and will therefore be even more inclined to reward me handsomely.”

As twisted as such “reasoning” surely is, it seems comparable to the following: “If God passes over some sinners and refuses to extend his mercy to them, then the fortunate elect, despite their love for some of the lost, will be even more thankful for the (gratuitous) mercy extended to them and will therefore have even more grounds to praise God for their own undeserved salvation.” Is the latter “reasoning” any better than the former? Clearly not. Unless he were in some way ignorant of God’s attitude, Isaac could no more experience as loving and kind a God who literally hated Esau than I could experience as loving and kind a man who refused to throw a needed life ring to my daughter.

So herein lies a paradox, it seems, at the heart of Augustinian theology. The idea that God loves some people but not all, that he loves Isaac but not Esau, or that he divides the human race into the elect and the nonelect, is necessarily false. For even if, as Calvin insisted, the proposition, *God is love*, does not express a truth about the essence of God—even if God could have chosen not to love us—he could not choose to love some of us without also choosing to love all of us. That is why Paul, at least, so often spoke in terms of corporate wholes, the most important of which was the human race as a whole; even if it were possible that God should withhold his mercy from the human race as a whole, he must either extend it to the human race as a whole or extend it to no sinful humans at all. The reason, as we have seen, has to do with the inclusive nature of love.

For any two people, s and s^* , you choose, either a bond of love will exist between them where s wills the best for s^* , or it will not. If such a bond does exist, then God cannot will the best for s without willing the best for s^* as well. But even if such a bond does *not* exist, God still cannot will the best for s unless he wills that s should become the kind of person who is filled with love for, and therefore wills the best for, all others. And God cannot will that s should become the kind of person who wills the best for all others, I contend, unless God himself wills the best for them as well. Hence, God cannot love one person unless he loves all others as well.

The Sin of Exclusivism

The argument of the previous section establishes, I believe, that Augustinian exclusivism or the doctrine of limited election entails a logical absurdity. But there is another side to the argument, which I have not yet emphasized, and in expressing this other side I run the risk of offending some who are far more virtuous and far more loving than I. For it does seem to me that a belief in limited election is, in one important sense, an expression of sin or human rebellion. Does this mean that, as I see it, those who accept such a doctrine or think they find it in the Bible are worse sinners than those of us who do not accept it? Of course not. Many deeply engrained and culturally conditioned patterns of thought, like the “us versus them” mentality, may reflect sinful tendencies common to the human race as a whole, and perhaps all of us, at various times in our lives, unknowingly express such sinful tendencies in a variety of different ways.

But in what sense, one may ask, does Augustinian exclusivism express a sinful pattern of thought? It expresses, first of all, a temptation as old as religion itself: the temptation to distinguish between the favored few—to which, of course, we belong—and everyone else. We see the crudest manifestation of this temptation, perhaps, in some of the primitive religions, where people seek the favor of God (or the gods) in an effort to achieve an advantage over their

enemies. Here the aim seems to be to possess the tribal god, or at least to pacify him with sacrifices, so that one can control him and even use him as a weapon against one's enemies. The last thing one may want, at this stage in one's religious development, is a God whose love and mercy extends to all persons including the members of enemy tribes, and the last commandment one may want to hear is that we must love our enemies as well as our friends.

In no way, however, are such attitudes of exclusivism limited to primitive religion; to the contrary, they are widespread and persistent, and they lie behind some of the most important religious struggles in many different ages. In the Old Testament, no less than in the New, we encounter a prophetic tradition that not only condemns such attitudes but testifies to their persistence and destructive power. A good early example is the story of Jonah and his refusal to preach to the Ninevites. For according to the story, Jonah's disobedience arose from his hatred of the Ninevites: the fact that he simply did not want them to repent and be saved. When they did repent and the Lord therefore spared their city, Jonah became so angry and distraught that he literally wanted to die.

Now a doctrine of limited election ultimately reflects attitudes similar to those of Jonah. For those who accept such a doctrine either sincerely desire that God's mercy should extend to all people, or they do not. If they do, then they are, given their own theology, more merciful than God; and if they do not desire this, then their attitudes are little different from Jonah's in this regard. We thus approach another logical impossibility built right into the heart of Augustinian theology. So long as I love my daughter as myself, I can neither love God nor worship him unless I at least *believe* that he loves her as well. For my love for God, if genuine, entails, first, that I respect God and approve of his actions; second, that I am grateful to him for what he has done for me; and third, that my will is, on the important issues at least, in conformity with his will.

But if I truly love, or desire the best for, my daughter and God does not, then (a) my will is *not* in conformity with God's will in this matter, (b) I could not consistently approve of God's attitude toward my daughter, and (c) neither could I be grateful to him for the harm he is doing to me. Nor is this merely to register a point about my own psychological makeup; the whole thing, I want to suggest, is *logically* impossible. As a matter of logic, either I do not love my daughter *as myself*, or I do not love God with all my heart, or I do not believe that God himself fails to love my own daughter.

Of course, people are not always consistent and do not always see all the implications of their own beliefs; neither do they always believe what they *think* they believe. I have known several people who, after some tragedy or the death of a loved one, discovered that they did not really believe everything they had previously thought they believed. Still, certain beliefs—a racist ideology would be an example—unquestionably do interfere with a person's capacity to love. If a racist is also a Southern gentleman, then he may be gracious, loving toward his family and friends, and a person of many good qualities; his demeanor may be utterly different from that of skinheads or members of the American Nazi Party. But for as long as he *truly* believes that he belongs to a superior race or that his black neighbors are less than fully human, his racist ideology will interfere with his capacity for love and will inevitably separate him from some of his neighbors; he cannot, in other words, *both* hold his racist beliefs *and* love his black neighbor as himself.

Neither could the first-century Jews *both* believe that God restricts his love and mercy to the physical descendants of Abraham *and* love their Gentile neighbors as themselves. And for similar reasons neither can those Christians who believe that God has divided the world into the

elect, whom he loves, and the non-elect, whom he despises, *both* love their neighbors even as they love themselves *and*, at the same time, love with all their heart a God who refuses to love some of their own loved ones.

Lest I be misunderstood here, I should perhaps repeat a point made at the beginning of this section. My point is not that exclusivists in theology or even racists are, on balance, worse than anyone else. I presume that, when God finally perfects our love for others, we shall all find that we have had to shed some deeply ingrained beliefs. But the fact is that some beliefs, particularly faulty beliefs about God, do undermine our capacity for love and do separate one person from another. When we finally learn to love our neighbor even as we love ourselves, therefore, we shall find that such beliefs have fallen away from us like the shackles they are.

Part 2: God's Unrestricted and Unconditional Mercy

For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all (Rom. 11:32).

We have seen so far that the Augustinian understanding of limited election is utterly inconsistent with the loving nature of the Christian God and, in particular, utterly inconsistent with the Johannine declaration that God *is* love. We have also seen that this doctrine is riddled with logical impossibilities in any case. But we have not yet addressed St. Paul's view of the matter or the view of the New Testament in general. So in this part of my essay, I shall argue that the Augustinian understanding of limited election is not only inconsistent, but obviously inconsistent, with the whole thrust of Pauline theology.

Not only did Paul nowhere *embrace* a doctrine of limited election; he was, so I shall argue, a vigorous opponent of this doctrine, which he clearly regarded as heretical. The clarity and power of his explicit and sustained argument against it, moreover, explains why it virtually disappeared from the early church for several centuries until St. Augustine finally revived it in the early fifth century. Of course Paul combated the specific form that the doctrine had taken in his own day: the idea that God restricts his mercy to a single nation, namely the nation of Israel. He did not address—or try to anticipate—every conceivable form that the heresy might take in the future; he did not specifically discuss, for example, the Augustinian view that restricts God's mercy to a limited elect drawn from all nations and all classes of people. He did not discuss this view because he had never heard of it. For his purposes it was enough to point out that God will save everyone “who calls on the name of the Lord” (Rom. 10:13) and “everyone who has faith” (Rom. 1:16), whether the person be a Jew or a Greek. But though Paul never discussed Augustine's particular version of limited election, he did address and explicitly reject the understanding of justice and mercy that underlies it; so in that respect, his doctrine, set forth in Romans 11, that God is merciful to all and merciful even in his severity clearly did rule out the Augustinian view, as we shall see.

Are Justice and Mercy Separate and Distinct Attributes of God?

As the first Christian thinker to endorse a doctrine of limited election, Augustine's influence over subsequent generations of Christian thinkers was enormous, in part because he set forth a simple and captivating theological picture. But his simple picture also rests upon a faulty philosophical idea, one that perverts, I believe, the biblical understanding of both God's loving nature and his sovereignty in the matter of salvation. What the Augustinian picture finally

illustrates, therefore, is the power of a faulty philosophical idea, particularly when articulated with skill and conviction, to influence how subsequent generations read the Bible and even what they are able, and not able, to see in it.

So just what was Augustine's faulty philosophical idea? It was the idea, to which he clung tenaciously in his later life, that justice and mercy are distinct and different attributes of God. In the *Enchiridion*, he thus argued that all human beings, by reason of their relationship to Adam, are part of "a corrupt mass"; all of them, the children no less than the adults, therefore, *deserve* everlasting punishment. He argued further that God selects from this corrupt mass a limited elect, drawn from all classes and all nations, to which he extends his mercy; having made *them* a special object of his love, he saves them from their sin. The rest God simply leaves in their sin and guilt, and they have, Augustine insisted, no grounds for complaint thereupon. For God merely gives them the punishment they deserve. So the rest are objects of God's justice, but not his mercy, and that is possible only if justice and mercy are distinct and different attributes of God.

Such a faulty understanding of justice and mercy is by no means restricted to the Augustinians, however. For in his great epic poem *Paradise Lost*, John Milton, who clearly rejected any doctrine of limited election, nonetheless described Christ's willingness to die for our sins this way:

No sooner did thy dear and only Son
Perceive thee purpos'd not to doom frail Man
So strictly, but much more to pity inclin'd,
Hee to appease thy wrath, and end the strife
Of Mercy and Justice in thy face discern'd
Regardless of the Bliss wherein hee sat
Second to thee, offer'd himself to die
For man's offense.

According to Milton, then, the fall of the human race produced a conflict within the heart of God, a "strife" between his justice and his mercy, and Christ's atonement somehow managed to resolve the conflict. Presumably the source of the conflict was this: As a righteous judge, God willed something for the fallen human race that he could not possibly will in his role as a loving father; and as a loving father, he willed something that he could not possibly will in his role as a righteous judge. As a righteous judge, he willed that justice should prevail; and since justice requires retribution for sin, he was quite prepared to punish sin—in hell, for example—without any regard for the sinner's own good. But as a loving father, he also wanted to forgive sin and to permit his loved ones to escape the terrible punishment they deserved on account of their sin.

Hence the strife within the heart of God, and hence the need for an atonement that would appease the wrath of God—that is, satisfy his justice—and put an end to the strife. It is almost as if, according to Milton, Christ died not to effect a cure in us but to put an end to a bad case of schizophrenia in the Father. That may be a bit of a caricature, but it illustrates the point that, according to Milton and a host of Augustinian theologians, Christ died in order that God might be merciful to sinners without doing violence to his own sense of justice.

It is noteworthy, however, that Augustine's understanding of justice and mercy flatly contradicts his own commitment to the philosophical doctrine of divine simplicity: the difficult (and, I suspect, finally incoherent) idea that each attribute of God is identical with God himself and with every other attribute of God. But however incoherent the *full* doctrine of divine simplicity may be—and we can simply let the proverbial chips fall where they may on that

issue—the idea that God’s *moral nature* is simple seems to me both coherent and profound. According to this idea, God’s love is identical with his mercy, which is identical with his justice, which is identical with his holiness, which is identical with his righteousness, etc. So how, one wonders, could Augustine accept *both* this kind of identity, which his own doctrine of divine simplicity also implies, *and* a doctrine of limited election?

In the case of Augustine, it is possible that, after embracing a doctrine of limited election, he simply changed his mind on the matter of divine simplicity. But a more recent Augustinian, Daniel Strange, embraces both limited election and divine simplicity in the context of the same essay!—an incoherent combination, if ever there was one. Consider again Strange’s curious assertion, quoted above, that “God does not have to love all of humanity ... for Him to *be* love.” Would Strange make a similar claim about God’s justice? Would he say that God does not have to treat all people justly in order to be just? I doubt it. But given the doctrine of divine simplicity, God is perfectly just in his treatment of all people only if he is perfectly loving, perfectly compassionate, and perfectly merciful in his treatment of them all as well. So if God is not perfectly loving, perfectly compassionate, and perfectly merciful in his treatment of the nonelect, then he is not perfectly just in his treatment of them either.

Clearly, then, no proponent of limited election can consistently accept a doctrine of divine simplicity or consistently agree with George MacDonald, who once wrote: “I believe that justice and mercy are simply one and the same thing: without justice to the full there can be no mercy, and without mercy to the full there can be no justice.” Neither, therefore, can a proponent of limited election accept Paul’s clear and explicit argument in Romans 11 that all of God’s actions—even his severity toward the disobedient—are, in the end, an expression of his boundless mercy.

Romans 11: An Explicit Argument against Limited Election

The argument of Romans 11 is exquisitely simple. God is merciful to all; therefore, the doctrine of limited election is false. What we encounter here is a glorious vision of mercy without limit of any kind—a severe mercy, perhaps, but mercy nonetheless. For even in the case of the disobedient, those who have refused to call upon the name of the Lord, Paul insisted that God permits their disobedience and permits them to stumble only for the purpose of being merciful to them. In verse 7 Paul thus wrote: “What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened” (or blinded). He then explicitly asked whether God’s severity toward these unbelievers—the hardening of their hearts, for example—implied an ultimate rejection of them: “Have they [the nonremnant who were cut off and hardened] stumbled so as to fall?” (v. 11). “Is this a doctrine of limited election?” he in effect asked. And his reply was most emphatic: “By no means!” Are there limits of any kind to God’s mercy? By no means!

It seems as if the proponents of limited election inevitably stumble and fall themselves whenever they confront Paul’s devastatingly simple answer to his own simple question. According to John Piper, for example, the hardening of which Paul spoke in verse 7 “is a condition that leaves part of Israel unresponsive to the gospel and so excludes them from salvation.” Excludes them from salvation? Would that be forever or just temporarily? If Piper means only that the non-remnant Jews were excluded from salvation temporarily, then they were no different, in that respect, from Paul himself. For Paul was also unresponsive to the gospel and

was even a religious terrorist before he finally repented and became reconciled to God on the road to Damascus.

If Piper means, however, that the non-remnant Jews were excluded from salvation forever—and the whole thrust of his argument suggests that this is indeed his meaning—then he has flatly contradicted Paul’s own words in verse 11. For as John Murray has pointed out, the construction at the beginning of verse 11 (translated “So I ask”) “is Paul’s way of introducing a question intended to obviate a conclusion which might seem to follow from what precedes.” It is almost as if Paul had said, in other words, “Don’t make the mistake of interpreting my previous remark in the way that John Piper does, that is, in a way that implies ultimate rejection.” So how does Piper square his interpretation of verse 7 with Paul’s own clarification in verse 11? Well, he never mentions verse 11, at least not in the work where he gives the above interpretation of verse 7. And when challenged in another context with Paul’s explicit claim that those who had stumbled, according to verse 7, did not stumble so as to fall (with ultimate consequences), Piper replied as follows: “Notice that this [i.e., the “they” in verse 11] is not a reference to all Jews, but to Israel as a corporate whole conceived of as an entity that endures from generation to generation made up of different individuals from time to time.”

But that could not possibly be right because in verse 7 Paul had already distinguished between three groups of people: Israel or the nation as a corporate whole, “the elect” or the faithful remnant, and “the rest,” that is, the nonremnant Jews who were hardened. Now the antecedent of “they” in verse 11 could not possibly be the faithful remnant; they are not the ones who stumbled and were hardened. Nor could it be the nation as a corporate whole, for Paul had just distinguished between two groups within that corporate whole: the faithful remnant who did not stumble and were not hardened and “the rest” who did stumble and were hardened. Accordingly, the antecedent of “they” in verse 11 must be “the rest,” the nonremnant Jews or the ones whom God had hardened. Even the Reformed New Testament scholar John Murray admitted this when he asked: “Is not the denotation of those in view [in verse 11] the same as those mentioned in verse 7: ‘the rest were hardened? And is not Paul thinking here of those in verse 22: ‘toward them that fell, severity’?” The answers are, “Yes” and “Yes.”

But somehow Murray failed to draw the obvious conclusion that “they” (i.e., the nonremnant Jews) did not fall with ultimate consequences and therefore were not excluded from salvation. Perhaps, like many others, Murray was simply unable to fathom the idea that in Paul’s scheme of things God’s severity, even the hardening of a heart, is itself an expression of mercy; Murray therefore insisted, even as Piper does, that “those who stumbled did fall with ultimate consequences.” But that could not possibly be right either. For the “denotation of those” mentioned in verse 11 is not only “the same as those mentioned in verse 7”; it is also the same as those mentioned in verse 12, that is, those whose “full inclusion” will mean so much more than the stumble that made their full inclusion possible.

In Paul’s own words: “Now if their stumbling means riches for the world, and if their defeat means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!” And again: “For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead!” (v. 15). Throughout the entire chapter Paul was talking about the unbelieving Jews (“the rest”), and throughout the entire chapter his third-person plural pronouns consistently refer back to the unbelieving Jews and not to Israel as a corporate whole.

Now Paul fully appreciated, it seems, the radical nature of his thesis that God’s severity, no less than his kindness, is an expression of mercy; he fully appreciated that his readers would find such a teaching, which is so foreign to our ordinary ways of thinking about justice and mercy,

hard to understand and therefore hard to accept. To forestall the anticipated objections, therefore, he in effect warned his readers to be wary of their normal ways of thinking and told them not to regard themselves as wiser than they are (v. 25) in the face of a fundamental mystery, which is this: “A hardening has come upon part of Israel,” he said, “until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved” (vv. 25–26). God may have hardened part of Israel, but he did so, Paul insisted, as a means of saving all of Israel and all of Israel *including those who were hardened*. And lest a reader still miss the point, Paul repeated it one more time with an absolutely explicit statement: Though the unbelieving Jews were in some sense “enemies of God” (v. 28), they nonetheless became “disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy” (11:31 NIV). You simply cannot get any more explicit than that. But though Paul’s *specific* point about his disobedient kin was glorious enough, the general principle (of which the specific point is but an instance) was even more glorious yet: “For God has imprisoned *all* in disobedience so that he may be merciful to *all*” (11:32, my emphasis).

The message of Romans 11, then, is that God is always and everywhere merciful, even as he is always and everywhere righteous. His rejection of a sinner, if we can call it that, is always temporary and always serves an overriding redemptive purpose; even when he shuts people up to their disobedience—blinding their eyes, hardening their hearts, or cutting them off for a season—he does so as an expression of his mercy or compassion for them. Nor can one counter this glorious message by insisting, as so many have, that Paul’s “all Israel” in 11:26 does not include, for example, Israelites who have already died. For though I think that this is quite mistaken, I am not here presenting Romans 11 as a complete argument for universalism. I am instead presenting it as Paul’s argument against limited election, against the idea that God sometimes acts righteously but without mercy or compassion, as if that were even a logical possibility.

For whether sinners are free to reject God forever, God himself never rejects anyone. In that respect, the central claim of Romans 11 is in perfect agreement with Lamentations 3:22, 31–32: “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. . . . For the Lord will not reject forever. Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.” The God described here is not one who restricts his mercy and compassion to a chosen few.

Consider, finally, two important features of Romans 11:32. First, Paul’s use of *for* shows that verse 32 is not, as some have supposed, a mere summary of verses 30 and 31; nor is it a mere summary of anything else in the chapter. As the grand finale of Paul’s theological essay, verse 32 makes a general claim that grounds or explains several specific points made in the chapter. As an illustration, suppose that I should say something like the following: “You know that Hollywood stars, however highly they may think of themselves, are mere mortals in the end, and the same is true of sports heroes and famous politicians. For, however highly they may think of themselves, all humans are mere mortals.” Here it is obvious that my claim about all humans is not a mere summary of my several claims about Hollywood stars, sports heroes, and famous politicians; nor do these specific instances of my generalization provide an excuse for denying that it also applies, for example, to schizophrenics with delusions of immortality. And similarly for Paul’s general claim in 11:32: why is it, according to Paul, that the nonremnant Jews who stumbled did not stumble so as to fall with ultimate consequences? Because God is merciful to all. Why was the hardening that came upon part of Israel destined to be but one contributing factor in the salvation of all Israel? Because God is merciful to all. Why did Paul’s unbelieving kin become

“disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy”? Because God is merciful to all. “O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” (11:33).

Second, the parallel structure of 11:32, so typical of Paul, should eliminate any possibility of ambiguity. For the whole point of such a parallel structure is for the first “all” to determine the reference of the second. And it is simply inconceivable, to my mind at least, that Paul had here forgotten, or simply did not have clearly in view, the whole thrust of his teaching throughout his letter that each and every human being, with the one exception of Jesus Christ, has been shut up to disobedience. It is likewise inconceivable, therefore, that Paul did not mean to say what his sentence in fact does say, which is that God is merciful to each and every human being. As I have expressed the point elsewhere:

According to Paul, the *very ones* whom God “shuts up” to disobedience—whom he “blinds,” or “hardens,” or “cuts off” for a season—are those to whom he is merciful; his former act is but the first expression of the latter, and the latter is the goal and the *purpose* of the former. God hardens a heart in order to produce, in the end, a contrite spirit, blinds those who are unready for the truth in order to bring them ultimately to the truth, “imprisons all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.”

When “All” Really Means All

A remarkable feature of the standard Augustinian exegesis of the Bible is how often “all” arbitrarily becomes *some*, and Augustine’s own explanation of 1 Timothy 2:4, where we read that God wills or “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” illustrates the point nicely. Though the meaning of this text seems clear and straightforward, here is how Augustine tried to explain it away: “The word concerning God, ‘who will have all men to be saved,’ does not mean that there is no one whose salvation he doth not will . . . but by ‘all men’ we are to understand the whole of mankind, in every single group into which it can be divided. . . . For from which of these groups doth not God will that *some* men from every nation should be saved through his only-begotten Son our Lord?”

So it is not God’s will, said Augustine, to save every individual from every group and every nation; it is merely God’s will to save all kinds of people, that is, *some* individuals from every group and every nation.

But why should anyone accept such an interpretation as that? In support of it, Augustine pointed to the context, which singles out a specific group of people—not several groups, mind you, but a single group—for special mention. Though we should pray for all people (1 Tim. 2:1), the text specifically mentions “kings and all who are in high positions” (1 Tim. 2:2). Seizing upon this reference, Augustine argued that God wills salvation only for the elect, only for some persons from all groups: “kings and subjects; nobility and plebeians; the high and the low; the learned and the unlearned; the healthy and the sick; the bright, the dull, and the stupid,” etc. But that will never do. For the text explains exactly why “kings and all who are in high places” are singled out for special mention. We should pray for those in positions of authority, it says, so that “we may lead a quiet and peaceable life” (1 Tim. 2:2). The mere fact that the text provides a special (and quite understandable) reason we should pray specifically for those whose job it is to keep the peace—the kind of prayer, incidentally, that one can hear almost any Sunday in some churches—hardly justifies Augustine’s contention that “all humans” really means “some humans from all classes and all nations.”

The text goes on to specify a second reason we should pray for all; we should do so because “Christ Jesus, himself human . . . gave himself a ransom for all” (1 Tim. 2:5). The full passage (1 Tim. 2:1–2:7) thus includes three references in sequence to all humans. We are to pray for all humans (1 Tim. 2:1), first, because God wills or desires the salvation of them all (1 Tim. 2:4), and second, because Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for them all (1 Tim. 2:5). Now the “all humans” in 1 Timothy 2:1 could not possibly be limited to some from all classes and all nations. For even if one should accept a doctrine of limited election and should hold that the reason we are to pray for all people is that we have no way of knowing who is elect and who is not, it would still be true that, according to our text, we are to pray for all people, not just some of them. So unless one supposes, in the absence of any grammatical or textual evidence at all, a shift of reference in the text, the “all” whose salvation God sincerely desires includes everyone for whom we are to pray, and the “all” for whom Jesus gave himself as a ransom includes everyone whose salvation God sincerely desires.

In the words of the New Testament scholar Luke Johnson, “As the one God wills the salvation of all, the one mediator gives himself for all.” No other interpretation is even remotely plausible. The Arminians can rightly deny that, taken by itself, 1 Timothy 2:1–7 entails universalism, because the text leaves open the question of whether God’s desire for the salvation of all will ever be satisfied. But the Augustinian interpretation requires that we simply ignore what is right there before our eyes.

When we turn, furthermore, to a theological context such as Romans 5:12–21, where Paul identified his reference class with great clarity, we discover just how carefully he sometimes used the expression “all humans” (or more literally “all men”). For here Paul made abundantly clear that, when he spoke of all humans, he had in mind the whole mass of humanity with only two possible exceptions: the first and the second Adam. And he excluded the second Adam, or Jesus Christ, from his “all humans” for several obvious reasons: First, he did not think of Jesus as merely human—*fully* human, perhaps, but not *merely* human; second, he did not think of Jesus as a sinner, and in 5:12 he identified his reference class as all humans *who have sinned*; and third, for the very reason that he did think of Jesus as the savior of all, he did not include Jesus among the “all” who are being saved.

But in Romans 5, at least, Paul also seems to have excluded the first Adam from his “all humans.” For in 5:14 he distinguished Adam, who first sinned and brought doom upon the entire human race, from those whose sins had a less profound effect upon the human race as a whole; he also called Adam a “type” of Jesus Christ or of “the one who was to come,” and he did so to indicate that Adam and Jesus Christ stand in an analogous relationship to the whole of humanity. So in that sense he distinguished both Adams from his “all humans” or the whole of humanity. And in 5:15 he continued to contrast “the one” and “the many” in two instances: In the first, Adam is “the one” who stands in a special relationship to “the many” or the whole of humanity; in the second, Jesus Christ is “the one” who stands in a special relationship to “the many” or the whole of humanity. As Paul himself put it in Romans 5:15, “If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!” (NIV). So insofar as Adam brought doom upon the human race as a whole and Jesus Christ undid the doom and restored the human race to life, neither of them was strictly in view when Paul spoke of “all humans,” which included all the merely human and sinful descendants of Adam.

It is absolutely clear, then, that in Romans 5 Paul employed the two expressions “all humans” and “the many” to pick out exactly the same group of individuals. As John Murray has pointed

out: “When Paul uses the expression ‘the many,’ he is not intending to delimit the denotation. The scope of ‘the many’ must be the same as the ‘all men’ of verses 12 and 18. He uses ‘the many’ here, as in verse 19, for the purpose of contrasting more effectively ‘the one’ and ‘the many,’ singularity and plurality—it was the trespass of ‘the one,’ ... but ‘the many’ died as a result.”

Similarly, it was the righteous act of “the one,” but “the many” are granted justification and life as a result. In order to eliminate any possibility of ambiguity, moreover, Paul then employed one of his favorite devices in verses 18 and 19: a parallel structure and a “just as, ... so also” construction. Given such a parallel structure, it is simply inconceivable, to my mind at least, that Paul intended to shift reference within the context of a single sentence. He could easily have written: “Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all humans, so also one man’s act of righteousness brings justification and life to some of them, or to all of the specially favored, or to some people from all nations and classes.” But Paul used every grammatical device he could think of to avoid this kind of misinterpretation. The whole point of his parallel structure and the “just as, ... so also” construction was to make two parallel statements about exactly the same group of individuals; the whole point was that *all of those* who are subject to condemnation, as a result of Adam’s sin, are also the beneficiaries of Christ’s act of righteousness.

Mind you, I am not, at this point, presenting Romans 5:18 as an explicit statement of universalism; I am claiming only that you cannot escape a universalistic interpretation by insisting that the second “all” is restricted in a way that the first is not. For Paul intentionally constructed his sentence in a way that would make it obvious that both instances of “all” pick out exactly the same group of individuals.

But the specter of universalism no doubt explains why so many strive so mightily to explain away the clear sense of the text. According to Douglas J. Moo, for example, “Paul’s point [in verses 18–19] is not so much that the groups affected by Christ and Adam, respectively, are coextensive, but that Christ affects those who are his just as certainly as Adam does those who are his.” In support of this widespread contention, Moo appeals to Paul’s use of “all” in other contexts.³⁷ “That ‘all’ does not always mean ‘every single human being,’ ” he writes, “is clear from many passages, it often being clearly limited in context (c.f., e.g., Rom. 8:32; 12:17–18; 14:2; 16:19)”; hence, there is “no linguistic barrier,” he concludes, to supposing that the second “all humans” is more restrictive than the first.

But in fact there are serious “linguistic barriers” to Moo’s interpretation, most notably the parallel structure of Paul’s sentence and the care with which he distinguished between “the one” and “the many” with respect to his “all humans.” Nor do any of Moo’s references have the slightest relevance to these “linguistic barriers.” We can certainly agree with him that in neither Paul nor any other author does “all” always mean “every single human being”; in the statement, “All rocks have weight,” for example, “all” obviously does not mean “every single human being.” And if this seems like a rather cutesy remark, I would point out that in two of Moo’s cited examples, Romans 14:2 and 8:32, the relevant reference class is not even that of human beings! Consider Romans 14:2, where the unstated reference class is that of *edible foods*: Whereas some, Paul in effect said, believe in eating all edible foods, both meat and vegetables, others believe in eating vegetables only. More often than not, the reason that an implicit reference class, such as edible foods, is left unstated is as familiar as it is simple: When the context already makes a reference class clear, it is simply not necessary to state it explicitly. Not

even Romans 3:23, where Paul declared that all have sinned, explicitly identifies the relevant reference class of human beings.

Following Moo's strategy, therefore, one could always contend that even in Romans 3:23 "all" is "limited in context," because neither dogs nor birds nor unfallen angels have in fact sinned. It is a neat trick: First misidentify a reference class; then, argue that "all" is "limited in context" because it does not refer to each and every member of your misidentified reference class.

As an illustration of just how faulty the Moo strategy is, suppose that a future racist society should come to regard our country's Declaration of Independence as a sacred document, and suppose further that some scholars in this society, being determined to explain away the statement, "All men are created equal," should scour other letters and documents of the time in order to find instances where "all" is used rather loosely. We might suppose that they find "some fifty places," perhaps in some narratives of the Revolutionary War, where "the words 'all' and 'every' are used in a limited sense" (whatever, exactly, that unclear expression might mean). Would this have any bearing on the meaning of "all men" in the statement, "All men are created equal," as it appears in the Declaration of Independence? It is hard to see why it should. And it is no less hard to see how the Moo/Boettner strategy is even relevant to the correct interpretation of Romans 5:18 or any other universalistic text in Paul.

When examining the use of "all" in any text, it is always critical to distinguish between two different sorts of contexts: those where "all" is combined with a relevant noun, which either explicitly fixes or helps to fix the reference class, and those where it is not combined with a relevant noun. In the latter contexts, it is up to the reader to identify the reference class accurately—which, in the case of Paul's letters, is rarely a difficult task. For whenever Paul used "all" in the context of some theological discourse, he seems always to have had in mind a clear reference class, stated or unstated, and he referred distributively to every member of that class. When he said that God "accomplishes *all* things according to his counsel and will" (Eph. 1:11), he did not, it is true, literally have in mind everything, including numbers and propositions and sets of properties; he had in mind every *event*. Everything that happens in the world, he was claiming, falls under God's providential control. And similarly for his remark that "*all* things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28 KJV); here he meant not just *some* events, but *all* events. Or again, when Paul asserted that "God has put *all* things in subjection" to Christ (1 Cor. 15:27), he clearly had in mind all *created* things; and so, as he pointed out himself, this does not include the Father (15:28). But it does include every member of the class he had in mind.

Beyond that, Paul never spoke of the human race as a whole, at least not in a context of doctrinal exposition, in a way that omitted anyone—except, perhaps, the first and the second Adam. And even if he had spoken rather loosely in some contexts, that would have had no relevance to those contexts, such as Romans 5:18; 11:32; and 1 Corinthians 15:22, where he employed special grammatical devices for the purpose of eliminating all ambiguity. Nor is there a single shred of evidence that by "all" Paul ever meant "some" or that by "all humans" he ever meant "some humans from all classes." And because he explicitly stated that God is merciful to all and merciful even in his severity, he also explicitly rejected any view that would restrict God's mercy to a limited elect.

Part 3: Understanding Romans 9

I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion (Rom. 9:15).

Romans 9–11 is a sustained theological discourse in which Paul took up the problem of Jewish unbelief and systematically defended his thesis that God has every right to extend his mercy to all the descendants of Adam, including Gentiles. The body of discussion is sandwiched between Paul’s expression of “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” in Romans 9:2 and his expression of great joy and wonder at the end of chapter 11. So just what transformed Paul’s “unceasing anguish” over the condition of his unbelieving kin into ecstatic praise at the end of chapter 11? Was it not precisely the message of chapter 11?

As something of an aside, I would point out that in Romans 9–11 we encounter a literary structure much like that of a fairy tale. Essential to any good fairy tale, according to J. R. R. Tolkien, is the “sudden joyous ‘turn’ ” and the consolation it brings. A good fairy tale thus “denies (in the face of much evidence, if you will) universal final defeat ... [thereby] giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.” In a similar vein, Paul’s discourse in Romans 9–11 begins with “unceasing anguish” and the *apparent* “dark side of any doctrine of election,” as the New Testament scholar, James Dunn, has called it. The apparent darkness may seem to include God’s supposed hatred and rejection of Esau, the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, and a lot of “orc-talk” about how Paul’s beloved kin are little more than “vessels of wrath fit for destruction.” No wonder the discourse begins with “unceasing anguish!”

But then comes the sudden joyous turn at the end of chapter 11. We learn that we have misconstrued the whole story, and we finally begin to penetrate the glorious eschatological mystery behind it all: how rejection is always temporary and always serves a merciful purpose, how even the hardening of a heart is an expression of mercy, and how the election of one, such as Jacob, is always on behalf of all others, including Esau. As James Dunn has correctly summarized the point, “God hardens some in order to save all; he confines all to disobedience in order to show mercy to all.” So all is grace and mercy in the end, and no lesser vision could have transformed Paul’s “unceasing anguish” into his ecstatic praise of God at the end of chapter 11.

My point is that we must allow the glorious eschatological vision at the end of our “fairy tale” to reshape our understanding of the whole story, and that is only a sound exegetical procedure anyway: It would be exegetically irresponsible not to interpret the early stages of Paul’s argument, as developed in chapter 9, in light of Paul’s own conclusion in chapter 11. But it sometimes seems as if the Augustinians stop reading, either literally or metaphorically, around 9:24 or so. In the *Enchiridion*, for example, Augustine set forth a summary of Christian doctrine, as he understood it; and though his summary is saturated with quotations from Romans 9, it contains not a single reference to Romans 11, which he evidently regarded as less essential than Romans 9 to Paul’s understanding of divine mercy.

I find this truly astonishing, sort of like Calvin’s failure in the *Institutes* even to mention the Johannine declaration that God is love. No less astonishing to me is that John Piper could write an entire book on Romans 9:1–23 without ever citing either Romans 11:11 or 11:32. The implication of such omissions is that these texts have no relevance to a correct interpretation of Romans 9. But the issue of their *relevance* should be utterly noncontroversial, because it is simply not possible that God should *both* refuse to extend his mercy to Esau *and*, at the same time, extend it to all, as 11:32 at least *appears* to say he does. So how can Piper give a

responsible interpretation of Romans 9 without even mentioning a text that functions as the conclusion of Paul's argument and at least *appears* to contradict Piper's own interpretation?

Be all of that as it may, I shall now argue that the real message of Romans 9 is just the opposite of what the Augustinians have claimed it to be.

St. Paul's Inclusive Understanding of Election

In Romans 9:6 Paul insisted that the widespread unbelief among his Jewish kin carried no implication that "the word of God had failed"; and when he spoke of God's "purpose in election" (v. 11 NIV) and how it continued through the choice of Jacob "not by works but by his call" (v. 12), his implication was again that this "purpose in election" had not failed. But just what did he mean by "God's purpose in election?"

Based upon Ephesians 1:9–10, we can say that God's purpose in election expresses his eternal "good pleasure"; it is simply his decretive will, as the Augustinians often call it, "a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth." Given the close association and similarity of structure between Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20, we can also infer that "this plan to gather up all things" in Christ is a plan to reconcile all people to God through Christ. For as Colossians 1:19–20 explicitly states, "God was pleased [i.e., it was God's good pleasure] ... to reconcile to himself [through Christ] all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (NIV).

In view of the stress that the Augustinians typically place on God's "good pleasure" or decretive will, they would do well, I believe, to place an equal stress on texts, such as Ephesians 1:20 and Colossians 1:20, that tell us exactly what God's good pleasure or decretive will or purpose in election is. In the latter text Paul applied the concept of reconciliation, which is explicitly a redemptive concept, to the entire creation; he also specifically associated this reconciliation with the peace that the blood of the cross brings and specifically cited his own readers (v. 21) as examples of the kind of reconciliation he had in mind. Without question, therefore, he had in mind the reconciliation of all people in the full redemptive and restorative sense. God's "good pleasure" or decretive will, in other words, is precisely his loving will to be merciful to all (Rom. 11:32), to reconcile the entire world (or all of humanity) to himself (2 Cor. 5:19), and to achieve this end through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But if that is true, if it is God's "good pleasure" or "purpose in election" to reconcile all of humanity to himself, why the initial *appearance* of exclusion in Romans 9? Why the division between Isaac and Ishmael, between Jacob and Esau, and between "the children of the flesh" and "the children of the promise"? There is, I believe, a relatively simple explanation. Paul normally spoke of an all-encompassing election *in Christ*; in Ephesians 1, for example, he asserted merely that God chose "us"—not one person rather than another (e.g., Isaac rather than Ishmael), but simply *us*—"in Christ before the foundation of the world" (1:4). And this predestined "us" in no way *requires* a rejected "them."

But at the beginning of Romans 9, Paul's interest was more historical, as he wrestled with the meaning of Jewish unbelief. Among the many advantages that belong to the Israelites, he listed these two: "Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all" (9:5 NIV). He then went on to review some early (and utterly familiar) Jewish history: how Israel had come into being as a nation in the two generations following Abraham, and how the line of descent from Abraham to Jesus had begun with the election of Isaac and

Jacob. One could hardly over-emphasize, moreover, the importance that Paul placed on this idea that Jesus Christ was the promised offspring (or seed) of Abraham. In his letter to the Galatians, he had earlier written, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring; it does not say ‘And to offsprings,’ as of many; but it says, ‘And to your offspring,’ that is, to one person, who is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). In Romans 9, however, the emergence of Israel as a nation and the line of descent between Abraham and his seed, namely Jesus Christ, was the focal point of his attention. That line of descent could not possibly have passed through both Isaac and Ishmael, and neither could it have passed through both Jacob and Esau.

In the relevant historical context being reviewed in Romans 9, therefore, election has both a particular and a universal aspect; and both are reflected in the original promise to Abraham. The particular aspect emerges clearly in the promise, to which Paul alluded in Romans 9:9, that Sarah would give birth to a child and would thus provide Abraham with a line of physical descent, so that he could become the father of a great nation and a blessing to all nations. Neither Ishmael nor any child not born of Sarah, however righteous that child might turn out to be as an adult, could have fulfilled this part of God’s promise to Abraham. But the promise also had an obvious universal aspect which already included, so Paul stated in Galatians 3:8, the central message of the Christian gospel. For the essence of that promise was that through Abraham’s offspring, identified in Paul’s mind as Jesus Christ, God would bless all nations, not just the nation of Israel. Observe also that neither Ishmael nor Esau were Israelites or descendants of Jacob; they were passed over, therefore, in exactly the same sense in which all other Gentiles living at the time were likewise passed over.

It seems to me a pointless exercise, then, to deny, as some commentators do, that in Romans 9 Paul had in mind the election of the specific individuals named “Abraham,” “Isaac,” and “Jacob.” When Paul spoke of Jacob’s election (9:11) and cited the Old Testament prophecy that the “elder shall serve the younger” (9:12), it is true that he lifted his quotation from a context in which nations, not individuals, were definitely in view. In Genesis 25:23, we thus read that the Lord declared to Rebecca: “Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.” Similarly, when Paul quoted the words, “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau” (9:13), which he lifted from an oracle that the prophet Malachi had delivered to Israel, he again quoted from a context in which nations, not individuals, were in view. But the issue here is Paul’s context, not these Old Testament contexts; and given the use to which the New Testament writers typically put the Old Testament, we cannot suppose uncritically that the Old Testament context from which Paul lifted his quotations determined his own use of them.

According to F. F. Bruce, among others, Paul did indeed have in view the peoples of Israel and Edom, rather than the Old Testament characters who bore the names “Jacob” and “Esau”; and according to Johannes Munck, “Romans 9:6–13 is speaking neither of individuals and their selection for salvation, nor of the spiritual Israel, the Christian church. It speaks rather of the patriarchs, who without exception became the founders of peoples.” It is doubtful, however, that even Malachi would have disassociated the individuals, Jacob and Esau, from their progeny, the latter being seen as but an extension of the former. And furthermore, when Paul indicated that the election of Jacob took place before the twins were “born or had done anything good or bad” (9:11), he surely did have the individuals, Jacob and Esau, principally in view. Was not the whole point to illustrate “God’s purpose in election”: how it continues “not by works but by his call” (9:11–12)? And was not the familiar struggle between Jacob and Esau for the birthright—the fact that it went to the younger brother rather than to the older one—just what illustrated his

point in a forceful way? Ernst Käsemann thus seems at least half right when he comments: “The quotations [from Genesis and Malachi] are taken out of their context.... For Paul is no longer concerned with two peoples and their destiny, ... but timelessly ... with the election and rejection of two persons who are elevated as types.”

But on what textual grounds does Käsemann suppose, along with so many others, that the election of one person implies the rejection of another? For many, the idea that rejection is the inevitable “dark side” of election functions almost like an *a priori* assumption. James Dunn thus writes: “The election of one implies as an unavoidable corollary the nonelection, that is, rejection, of another.” But why should that follow? Why should the election of Isaac and Jacob in particular imply the rejection of Ishmael and Esau? For that matter, why should the election of Abraham imply the rejection of all others, living at the time, whom God could have called out but did not? In fact, since election is an expression of love, as even the Augustinians agree, the *logic* of election is just the opposite of what Dunn has said. For as we have already seen, God could not love Jacob without also loving Esau (assuming that both exist), and neither could he make Jacob the object of his electing love without making Esau its object as well.

The critical exegetical issue, however, concerns not the logic of election, but Paul’s own view of the matter, and not one word in Romans 9–11 implies a final and irrevocable rejection of Ishmael, Esau, Pharaoh, the non-remnant Jews, or anyone else. To the contrary, Abraham was chosen as a blessing to all nations, including Esau and his progeny; and for exactly the same reason, Jacob was chosen on behalf of Esau as well. So yes, God does, according to Paul, elect or choose individuals for himself. But God never treats anyone as an isolated monad, and the election of one person is always on behalf of others; it reaches beyond the chosen person to incorporate, in a variety of complex ways, the community in which the person lives and, in the end, the entire human race.

That is why the idea of a “remnant, chosen by grace” (Rom. 11:5) played such an important role in Paul’s argument that God has not rejected his people as a whole (11:1). For contrary to what the Augustinians would have us believe, it was not a mere tautology that Paul here defended, something like: “A remnant, chosen by grace, proves that God has not rejected the remnant, chosen by grace.” Instead, the “remnant, chosen by grace,” proves that God has not rejected the whole of which the remnant is a part. The faithful remnant is always a pledge, in other words, on behalf of the whole and also the proof that “the word of God” or his “purpose in election” has not failed (9:6). Or, as Paul himself put it in 11:16, “If the part of the dough offered as first fruits [or the faithful remnant] is holy, then the whole batch [that the faithful remnant represents] is holy” in God’s eyes as well.

God’s Severe Mercy: Three Examples

If you fail to interpret Romans 9 in light of Paul’s own conclusion in Romans 11, or fail to appreciate Paul’s inclusive understanding of election (how the salvation of a single individual is a pledge on behalf of the human race as a whole), then Romans 9 is apt to appear dark and unforgiving. For Paul’s understanding of God’s love and mercy was anything but sentimental. But once we begin to glimpse the merciful purpose behind God’s severity, as Paul explains it in Romans 11, Romans 9 turns out to be no problem at all.

Consider first the quotation in 9:13 from the prophet Malachi: “I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.” It is important to set aside, right at the outset, a distracting irrelevancy. In an effort to ameliorate things a bit, Charles Hodge suggested, as have many others, that in Romans 9:13

“hatred” does not imply “*positive disfavour*,” but instead means only “*to love less, to regard and treat with less favour*.” And even Dunn, despite his accurate understanding of chapter 11, likewise writes: “To ‘love’ Jacob (that is, to lavish love on Jacob) means to ‘hate’ Esau (that is, to withhold such affection from Esau).” But why should that be true? Why should my love for my son (even lavishing love on my son) imply a withholding of love from my daughter? If I were so much as to love my daughter *less* than I do my son, then that would surely imply a defect in my moral character; and similarly, if God were even to have loved Esau *less* than he did Jacob, then that too would have diminished his holy character and have contradicted Paul’s repeated declaration that God shows no partiality to anyone.

What we have in 9:13, therefore, is an obvious case of hyperbole, where hyperbole is *by intention* literally false. We encounter an almost identical hyperbole in the words of Jesus: “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters ... cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). Though no Christian would likely misinterpret these words to mean that we should *literally* hate the members of our family, some do misinterpret them to mean that we should love the members of our family *less* than we do Jesus. But Jesus’ hyperbole, no less than Paul’s use of the quotation from Malachi, is *by intention* literally false. Was it not Jesus, after all, who commanded us to love others, including the members of our family, even as we love ourselves? And was it not Jesus who pointed out (in the parable of the sheep and the goats) that anything less than a perfect love for those whom Jesus loves is also less than a perfect love for Jesus himself? If that is true, then it is simply not possible to love our family *less* and, at the same time, to love Jesus *more*. Accordingly, we hate the members of our family in the relevant metaphorical sense only when we love them more, not less; and similarly, God hated Esau in the relevant metaphorical sense only because he loved him to the fullest extent possible, not less.

So just what is the relevant metaphorical sense in which, according to Paul’s hyperbole, God supposedly hated Esau? The answer is implicit in what we have already said. The election of Jacob unto salvation carried no implication of Esau being rejected. But in addition to being chosen as children of God, such patriarchs as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were *also* chosen to play a unique role in redemptive history—one that also involved their earthly concerns and perceived interests in important ways. We are all familiar, as Paul’s Jewish readers certainly were as well, with the bitter struggle between Jacob and Esau for the birthright and for their father’s blessing: how (through Jacob’s trickery) Esau lost the very thing that, given all the conventions governing ancient Semitic society, was rightfully his. Because Jacob and Esau both wanted, or thought they wanted, the same thing, their perceived interests had come into conflict; and so not even God could have settled this particular conflict without appearing to favor one of the twins over the other.

It is often that way. The events that transpire in our earthly lives often do favor the perceived interests of some over those of others; and with respect to many earthly struggles, a winner does indeed imply a loser. In the case of Jacob and Esau, God had already decided, even before they were “born or had done anything good or bad,” who would win and therefore who would lose in their struggle for the birthright (Rom. 9:11). Esau was destined to lose not because he deserved to lose but in order that God’s “purpose in election”—that is, the means by which he extends his mercy to all people including Esau—might continue. The prophecy to Rebecca, “The elder [Esau] shall serve the younger” [Jacob], thus captures the full and complete meaning of God’s so-called hatred of Esau.

Consider next the hardening of Pharaoh's heart to which Paul alluded in 9:17–18. Those who view such hardening as an instance of God causing someone to sin have simply failed to acquaint themselves, I believe, with the intricacies of causal-sounding language. But though God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was in no way a *sufficient* cause of any sin, it was nonetheless an instance of what, according to Romans 11:32a, he does to every descendant of Adam (except Christ): He simply shut Pharaoh up to, or imprisoned him in, his own disobedience. Here two points in the Exodus account are perhaps relevant: First, God consistently hardened Pharaoh's heart in connection with the single command, "Let my people go," and second, Pharaoh was essentially a coward who had exalted himself above the Hebrews for many years (see Exod. 9:17).

So perhaps the first question to ask is this: How would Pharaoh likely have responded if God had *not* hardened his heart and therefore had *not* given him the strength to stand in the presence of the "signs and wonders" performed in Egypt? The obvious answer is that Pharaoh would most certainly have caved in much sooner than he did. Does this mean that he would also have repented? Clearly not. Being easily cowed in the presence of superior power, which is just what the plagues in Egypt represented, is no real virtue. So God simply gave Pharaoh the strength to stand, or at least renewed his strength between various plagues, so that he would not be cowed too easily.

But that is only half the story. According to Romans 11:32b, the other half is that God's actions toward Pharaoh, like his actions toward anyone else, were also an expression of mercy. Here we might speculate that, had God permitted Pharaoh to be cowed too easily—after the first plague, let us suppose—then Pharaoh's haughty arrogance would have remained largely hidden, at least from his own view. It is a familiar fact of experience: Cowardice sometimes "protects" us from the sin we secretly wish to commit. When sheer cowardice prevents a man from committing adultery, for example, it may also "protect" him from a terrible web of lies and deceit, a true prison of sorts. So if the transformation of a heart is far more important than outward conformity to moral rules and even more important than cowardly obedience to the command of God, then having the strength to act upon one's innermost desires might easily serve a redemptive purpose.

In the case of Pharaoh, his God-given strength to disobey God's command no doubt revealed to him, in a way that perhaps nothing else could have revealed, the self-destructive and self-defeating character of his own self-exaltation. And, however one interprets the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, we can be confident that God gave him exactly what he needed at the time and exactly what would do him the most good over the long run. When the walls of water were crashing over his head and all of his evil plans and ambitions were clearly coming to ruin, Pharaoh may then have been, for all we know, in a far more hopeful condition than he ever had been at any previous time during his earthly life.

Consider, finally, Paul's distinction in Romans 9:22 between the vessels of mercy and the vessels of wrath and why, in the context of Paul's overall argument, every vessel of mercy must represent the destruction of a vessel of wrath. Just who were, first of all, the vessels of wrath that occupied Paul's attention here? Were they not precisely Paul's unbelieving kin about whom he expressed such "unceasing anguish" at the beginning of Romans 9? And were they not also the non-remnant Jews whose hearts, according to 11:7, were hardened? If so, then the vessels of wrath to which Paul referred in Romans 9:22 were the ones concerning whom he later made two claims: first, that "as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors" (Rom. 11:28), and second, that "they have now become disobedient in order that they too might receive

mercy.” So clearly, Paul’s distinction between vessels of mercy and vessels of wrath, like his distinction between the new creation in Christ and the old person that the new creation replaces, could not possibly be a distinction between those *individuals* who are, and those who are not, objects of God’s mercy.

To the contrary, a vessel of wrath just *is* the old person, even as a vessel of mercy just *is* the new creation in Christ. For as Paul himself explicitly stated in his letter to the Ephesians, using a slightly different metaphor, even Christians (or the new creations in Christ) first came into this earthly life as “children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3); they were at one time, in other words, “vessels of wrath fit for destruction.” And just as a new creation in Christ requires the absolute destruction of the old person, so every vessel of mercy represents the absolute destruction of some vessel of wrath. In no way, therefore, do such expressions as “children of wrath” or “vessels of wrath” represent a determinate and eternally fixed category of individuals; and if Paul himself, like everyone else, first came into this earthly life as a vessel of wrath (call him Saul), then a paraphrase that captures part of the meaning of 9:22–23 is this: “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience Saul, a vessel of wrath fit for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for Paul, a vessel of mercy that he has prepared beforehand for glory?”

Because the paraphrase is intended to startle, I should perhaps clarify one point: I make no claim here that at the time of writing 9:22 Paul was consciously contrasting his former life as an unbeliever (or as a vessel of wrath) with his then present life as an apostle of Christ; nor do I have any doubt that in 9:22 Paul had Pharaoh and the unbelieving Jews principally in view. But if Paul himself, like all other Christians, first came into this earthly life as a vessel of wrath, as he surely did, then God endured with much patience this particular vessel of wrath, along with all the others, in order to make known the riches of his mercy to the believing Paul. What the above paraphrase illustrates, therefore, is only what Paul himself explicitly stated in 11:32. In Romans 1 Paul also spoke of God giving people over “to impurity” (1:24), “to degrading passions” (1:26), “to a debased mind and to things that should not be done” (1:28); God forces people to experience, in other words, the consequences of their sinful actions and to confront the life they have chosen to live. He does this to all people, including Pharaoh, because in no other way could he be merciful to each and every one of them, as 11:32 explicitly states that he is.

Is There Injustice on God’s Part?

After reviewing briefly the election of Isaac and Jacob, Paul went on to raise a question about injustice (Rom. 9:14–16). But why should a question concerning injustice even arise at this point? Was it because Paul really did accept a seemingly unjust doctrine of limited election? Clearly not. It was Paul’s opponents, not Paul, who believed in limited election; his opponents would have seen no injustice, for example, in the election of Isaac and Jacob, or even in a literal interpretation of “I have hated Esau.” It was not this reminder of history, in other words, that motivated the question about injustice; it was rather the implication in Paul’s teaching that election depends not upon physical descent from Abraham (9:6–8) and not upon works (9:12), but upon God’s sovereign mercy alone (9:16). What seemed unjust to Paul’s contemporaries was his teaching that the Gentiles could attain “righteousness through faith” (Rom. 9:30) without converting to Judaism, without keeping the Jewish ceremonial law, and without having their males circumcised. For as they saw it, such teaching implied that God, having broken his promise to Abraham, was unjustly extending his mercy to the Gentiles.

Paul's question, then, is essentially this: "Has God acted unjustly in extending his mercy to Gentiles as well as to Jews?" Paul's remarks about Jacob and Esau, which occur just prior to the question, are not what generate the question but part of his *answer* to the question. Like a good debater, he meets his opponents on their own ground and prepares them for his answer even before raising the question. For none of Paul's opponents would have denied God's right to violate human tradition and convention in the matter of Jacob and Esau. According to tradition—that is, according to the conventions governing ancient Semitic society—the birthright, the blessing, and the headship of the tribal family should have passed from Isaac to Esau rather than from Isaac to Jacob. But if none of Paul's opponents would have denied God's right to violate that tradition, then neither, Paul in effect argued, should they deny God's right to violate the tradition that would restrict God's mercy to the physical descendants of Abraham, or at least to the circumcised and to those who keep the Jewish law.

Having disarmed his opponents even before raising his question, Paul then sets forth his unassailable answer, a quotation from Exodus 33:19 in which the Lord declares: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." This is an idiomatic expression that stresses not the *indeterminacy* of God's mercy, as some Augustinians have supposed, but rather its *intensity* and *assuredness*. As one Old Testament scholar, Frederick Bush, has pointed out, "The meaning that the expression is normally given in English, i.e. an arbitrary expression of God's free, sovereign will, makes almost no sense in the context" of Exodus 33:19, where it is a revelation of the very name, or essence, or goodness of God. It is, says Bush, "equivalent to 'I am indeed the one who is gracious and merciful.' "

And similarly for Paul's own context. To all of those, such as many of Paul's own kin, who would insist that God has no right to extend his mercy to a given class of persons—whether it be the Ninevites in Jonah's day, the Gentiles in Paul's day, or the non-Christians in our own day—Paul in effect quoted the Lord as saying: "I will have mercy upon whomever I please." There is absolutely nothing in view here except God's unlimited and inexhaustible mercy—a mercy that, although no doubt severe at times (as Esau and Pharaoh might well have attested), is nonetheless utterly reliable and therefore secures our hope for the future. For as Paul had already pointed out in the first part of Romans 3, no human disobedience or unfaithfulness can nullify the faithfulness of God. God will continue to meet our true spiritual needs and to consume all that is false within us, regardless of what choices we make, good or bad. So however important these choices may be for the here and now, or even for the immediate future, our *destiny* "depends not upon human will or exertion, but upon God who shows mercy."

Part 4: The Triumph of God's Salvific Will

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39 KJV).

According to Christian universalists, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ achieved a complete victory over sin and death—an eschatological victory, if you will, but one that already guarantees the eventual destruction of both. God will not, therefore, merely quarantine evil in a specific region of his creation, a dark region known as hell; he will instead destroy it altogether, as the annihilationists also insist. But whereas the annihilationists believe that God will in the end annihilate some of his own loved ones, some of the very ones created in his own image, the

universalists believe that God will eventually destroy evil in the only way possible short of annihilating the objects of his love: by saving them from their sins.

Christ Victorious

So how should a Christian understand Christ's victory over sin and death? According to Romans 5:12–21, Jesus Christ rescued the entire human race from the doom and condemnation that Adam originally brought upon it and, in the process, unleashed the power that will eventually bring justification and life to all human beings. As we have already seen, both instances of “all humans” in verse 18 pick out exactly the same group of individuals; there is simply no question about that. Nor is there any doubt that, according to this text, Jesus Christ did something *on behalf of* all human beings or the human race as a whole. But if, as some Arminians might contend, he brought to all people something less than full justification and life—an *offer* of salvation, perhaps, or a possibility of some kind that each individual remains free to reject—then the possibility of an ultimate defeat remains. For the possibility yet remains that Christ might be less successful in saving the human race as a whole than Adam was in corrupting it. So did Paul contemplate such a possibility in Romans 5?

In support of an affirmative answer, some commentators, such as Douglas Moo and John Blanchard, appeal to 5:17, where the expression “those who receive the abundance of grace” appears. According to Moo, “The deliberately worded v. 17, along with the persistent stress on faith as the means of achieving righteousness in 1:16–4:25, makes it clear that only certain people derive the benefits from Christ's act of righteousness.” And similarly for Blanchard: “The only ones [according to 5:17] who ‘reign in life’ are ‘those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness’; those who do not receive these things remain under the devastating reign of death.”

Note Blanchard's words “those who do not receive these things.” Where in the context of 5:17 did Paul say anything about a group of people *not* receiving “God's abundant provision of grace”? Where did he even leave this open as a possibility? Suppose that I should comment upon those who receive the precious gift of life from their biological parents. Would my comment carry any implication that some people do not receive this precious gift? Of course not. So why struggle so hard, even to the point of drawing an obviously fallacious inference, just to overpower a text, such as 5:18–19, that is as glorious as it is clear? Let us concede, at least for the sake of argument, that 5:17 endorses this idea: (1) only those sinners receiving the abundance of grace will be saved. From (1) it simply does not follow that (2) some sinners will never receive the abundance of grace, and neither does it follow that (3) not all sinners will be saved. Even worse for Blanchard's interpretation is the following: If you simply conjoin (1) above with the assertion in 5:18 that Christ brings justification and life to all human sinners, it follows, as a deductive consequence, that all human sinners will indeed receive the abundance of grace. So unless Blanchard is prepared to foist upon Paul his own fallacious inference, verse 17 provides no grounds whatsoever for supposing that some people will never receive the abundance of grace.

To the contrary, the expression “much more surely,” which appears in both verses 15 and 17, provides an additional reason for supposing that the effects of Christ's one act of righteousness, as Paul understood them, are far greater, and therefore far more extensive, than the effects of Adam's disobedience. As M. C. de Boer has argued: “Unless the universalism of vv. 18–19 is taken seriously ... ‘how much more’ is turned into ‘how much less,’ for death is then given the

last word over the vast majority of human beings and God's regrasping of the world for his sovereignty becomes a limited affair." And that surely *is* the issue. Which is greater and therefore more extensive: the effects of Adam's sin, or the effects of Christ's act of righteousness? Which will triumph in the end: sin and death (at least in the lives of millions), or Jesus Christ?

Unlike Blanchard and Moo, Howard Marshall at least recognizes that we cannot read into 5:17 any implication that some will *not* receive the abundance of grace. But Marshall nonetheless contends, incorrectly, that Paul left such an eventuality open as a possibility. For according to Marshall, "Paul's statement [in 5:17] means that all individuals will be saved provided that they believe, and it is left open whether they will do so." Marshall thus assumes, as do Blanchard and Moo, that in 5:17 Paul used the verb *lambano* ("to receive") in a sense that would mean something like "to take hold" or "to accept believingly." But it is nearly certain that Paul was *not* using *lambano* in this way; indeed, he almost never used it this way in any context, such as Romans 5, where the thing received is divine judgment, divine grace, or a divine gift of some kind. In any such context as that, Paul always thought of God as the active agent and human beings as the *recipients* of some divine action.

In Romans 13:2, for example, those who receive (or incur) judgment do so in the same passive way that a citizen might receive a summons to court, a criminal might receive a prescribed punishment, or a boxer might receive severe blows to the head; and in Romans 1:5, those who "have received grace and apostleship" do so in the same passive way that a newborn baby might receive life. Similarly, as John Murray has argued, the "word 'receiving' [in 5:17] ... does not refer to our believing acceptance of the free gift but to our being made the recipients, and we are regarded as the passive beneficiaries of both the grace and the free gift in their overflowing fullness."

Does this mean that, according to Paul, salvation is possible apart from faith or belief? Not at all. It could mean, consistent with the rest of what Paul wrote, that even our faith and belief are a work of God within. But even that seems a stretch in the present context, where the focus of Paul's attention was the objective work of Christ, not our personal faith or belief in response to it. If the latter had been his concern here, as it was in chapter 4, he would have used the same verb here, namely *pisteuo* ("to believe" or "to trust"), that he used in chapter 4; he would not have chosen a verb that is just as applicable to the recipients of judgment as it is to the recipients of grace. That he chose the verb *lambano* shows that his intention in Romans 5 was to compare the *effects* Christ's act of righteousness with those of Adam's sin. He insisted that Christ more than undid the harm that Adam had inflicted on the human race as a whole; Christ defeated death on behalf of all people and unleashed into the cosmos the power that will bring eternal life to them all (see v. 21).

If any doubt should remain concerning how Paul understood Christ's ultimate triumph over sin and death, 1 Corinthians 15:20–28 should, I believe, finally put it to rest. For here we read that Christ will turn his kingdom over to the Father only after he has destroyed *every* competing rule and *every* competing "authority and power" (v. 24). The victory pictured here is thus absolute and total, with death being the last enemy to be destroyed (v. 26). A literal translation, however, would be, "The last enemy, death, is being destroyed" (present passive), which could imply, as Anthony Thiselton suggests, that "the *process* of annihilation" has been "*already set in motion* by Christ's (past) death and resurrection." In any event, Christ must continue to reign "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" (v. 25); and when all things are finally brought into subjection to Christ, "then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all

things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all” (v. 28). All separation from God will then be a thing of the past. “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things [will then] have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

Now just what did Paul mean when he suggested that Christ would “put all his enemies under his feet”? Verse 27 implies an equivalency between someone’s being put under the feet of Christ and someone’s being brought into subjection to him, and Paul’s clear implication here is that some people, who are not in subjection to Christ at one time, are then brought into subjection to Christ at some later time. So how should we understand this idea of someone *not yet* being in subjection to Christ? If the powers and authorities that Christ is bound to destroy involve *competing wills*, then the answer is clear: a competing will (or a will not yet in conformity with Christ’s own will) is, for that very reason, not yet in subjection to Christ; that is, it has not yet been reconciled to God through Christ. For there is but one way in which a competing will can be brought into subjection to Christ: it must be won over so that it voluntarily places itself in subjection to Christ. No willing agent, after all, could ever be *entirely* in subjection to Christ involuntarily; the very idea is self-contradictory. If one should be subdued against one’s will, or defeated in battle like John Milton’s Satan, then one’s *will* would precisely not be in subjection to Christ. Indeed, even after being defeated in battle, Milton’s Satan found that “the mind and spirit remains / Invincible”:

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what else is not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me.

The author of such a speech could hardly be in subjection to Christ, and so, as Milton’s Satan illustrates (perhaps contrary to Milton’s own intention), there is but one way for God to defeat a rebellious will and to bring it into subjection to Christ. He must so transform the will that it voluntarily places itself in subjection to Christ. God could easily annihilate, no doubt, anyone with a rebellious will, but that would neither bring the rebellious will into subjection to Christ nor satisfy God’s loving nature. As a paradigm of subjection, therefore, we need look no further than Christ’s own subjection to the Father, as depicted in 1 Corinthians 15:28. No one would deny, I presume, that Christ’s subjection to the Father is voluntary and implies voluntary obedience; it finds perfect expression in the prayer that Jesus uttered shortly before his arrest and crucifixion: “Yet, not my will but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). That is the only coherent form that absolute subjection could take. If, as is not even possible, Christ’s will should be in conflict with the Father’s on some important point, if he should not want to comply with his Father’s will but should nonetheless be forced to do so *against* his will, then he would be no different from Milton’s Satan in this regard. But according to our text, *all* things and therefore *all* wills will eventually be brought into subjection to Christ in the same sense in which Christ places himself in subjection to the Father, a sense that clearly implies voluntary obedience and reconciliation in the full redemptive sense.

The destruction of the last enemy, which is death, carries the same implication of universal reconciliation. For death is a spiritual condition that involves far more than the corruption and disintegration of the body, and it is closely associated in Pauline thought with the power of sin itself (see Rom. 8:2). If “the flesh” in Pauline theology involves “the whole personality of man as

organized in the wrong direction,” and if to “set the mind on the flesh is death” (Rom. 8:6), as Paul explicitly declared, then death, like sin, includes anything that separates us from God. And not even God, therefore, can destroy death altogether while keeping sin alive throughout an eternity of hell. For as I have elsewhere stated: “Death is destroyed (and all of its bad effects nullified) only to the extent that those subject to death are made alive. Indeed, if death should achieve a final victory in the life of a single person, then that would provide a clear answer to Paul’s rhetorical question: ‘Where, O death, is your victory?’ (1 Cor. 15:55). But the question is not supposed to have an answer.”

So even if Paul had never written the words: “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22 KJV), we could still be confident that, according to Paul, all of those who die in Adam will in fact be made alive in Jesus Christ. For the bringing of all things into subjection to Christ already entails that all persons will eventually belong to Christ, and the final destruction of death already entails that all who are subject to death will be made alive. The parallel structure of 1 Corinthians 15:22, so similar to Romans 5:18 and 11:32, merely makes explicit, then, what is already implicit in the context. When the power of the cross, which is the transforming power of love, successfully brings every rebellious will into conformity with Christ’s own loving will and Christ then turns his kingdom over to the Father, then and only then will God truly be all in all.

Victory or Defeat?

Paul’s grand vision of a total victory over sin and death thus stands in luminous contrast to the Arminian picture of a defeated God. For though the Arminians insist, even as the universalists do, that God at least wills or desires the salvation of all sinners, they also hold that some sinners will defeat God’s will in this matter and defeat it forever. As C. S. Lewis once put it, “I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*.” So even though God himself never rejects anyone, at least not forever, he will nonetheless permit some of his loved ones to reject him forever, if that is what they should irrationally choose to do. In the case of the damned, at least, God grants ultimate sovereignty not to his own loving will but to an utterly irrational human decision.

Now Jerry Walls, for one, objects to my putting the matter this way. For all such talk of God suffering a defeat, he argues, “is cleverly misleading at best”: “God’s love can be declined but it cannot be defeated. The only meaningful sense in which God’s love could be defeated would be if he ceased to love those who rejected him and his love turned into hate. But in my view he never stops loving those who reject him. Rather, his love shines all the brighter by remaining steadfast in the face of such rejection.”

And I certainly agree with Walls concerning this: a loving God, who values human freedom, will no doubt *permit* his loved ones to do many things that he would prefer them not to do. So as Walls goes on to write: “Even Talbott must agree that things happen in this world that God does not prefer unless he wants to say that all atrocities down the ages have been willed and determined by God.” That is correct. In no way do I believe, for example, that God directly caused the atrocities at Auschwitz; nor do I believe that he wills or desires such moral evils as the rape and murder of innocent children. At the very most, he willingly permits such atrocities as Auschwitz, not for their own sake but for the sake of some greater good or some larger redemptive purpose—a greater good not only for people in general, but especially for the victims of such atrocities themselves.

I nonetheless find Walls's complaint perplexing, to say the least. How can he deny that the damnation, or even the loss, of millions whose salvation God sincerely desires would represent a tragic defeat of God's loving purposes for them? Contrary to what Walls implies, you do not in general defeat a loving purpose by bringing about that the loving purpose no longer exists or by turning someone's love into hatred; you defeat a loving purpose by preventing it from being realized. So, if Walls truly believes, as I know he does, that God sincerely wills or desires the salvation of all, he surely must concede that the eternal loss of a loved one would represent a horrendous defeat of God's loving purpose for the human race as a whole. Indeed, if someone's rejecting God forever does not count as a defeat, why should someone's repentance and faith count as a victory? Or suppose, as is logically possible on Walls's view, that all human sinners should freely and irrevocably reject Christ, despite God's best efforts to save them. Would that not count as a defeat? If not, then the concept of *defeat* seems empty of meaning; if so, then the loss of a single loved one should count as a defeat as well.

A distinction that I have drawn repeatedly (and Walls ignores in the passage quoted above) is between *irreparable* harm, on the one hand, and harm that can be repaired or canceled out at some future time, on the other. When we humans confront the possibility of serious and irreparable harm—that is, harm that no mere human can repair or cancel out at some future time—we feel justified in interfering with someone's freedom to inflict such harm. We feel justified, first of all, in preventing one person from harming another irreparably; a loving father may thus report his own son to the police in an effort to prevent the son from committing murder. And we may feel justified, secondly, in preventing our loved ones from harming themselves irreparably as well; a loving father may thus physically overpower his teenage daughter in an effort to prevent her from committing suicide.

This does not mean, of course, that a loving God, whose goal is the reconciliation of the world, would prevent every suicide, every murder, or every atrocity in human history, however horrendous such evils may seem to us; it follows only that he would prevent every harm that not even omnipotence could repair at some future time, and neither suicide nor murder is necessarily an instance of that *kind* of harm. Just as loving parents are prepared to restrict the freedom of the children they love, so a loving God would restrict the freedom of the children he loves, at least in cases of truly irreparable harm. The only difference is that God deals with a much larger picture and a much longer time frame than that with which human parents are immediately concerned.

So the idea of *irreparable* harm—that is, of harm that not even omnipotence can repair—is critical, and Paul's doctrine of unconditional election (along with the closely associated doctrine of predestination) is his doctrine that, despite the many atrocities in human history, God never permits truly irreparable harm to befall any of his loved ones. From the beginning—that is, even "before the foundation of the world"—God built into his creation, so Paul insisted, a guarantee that his salvific will would triumph in the end. Accordingly, all of those whom God "foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.... And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). Arminians typically argue that the predestination (or foreordination) of which Paul here spoke rests upon foreknowledge, where foreknowledge, as they interpret it, is a mere precognition or prevision of someone's faith, or of someone's decision to accept Christ, or of someone's free choice of one kind or another.

But a twofold objection to any such interpretation seems to me utterly decisive: first, the object of God's foreknowledge in 8:29 is simply people, not their faith or their free choices, and second, Paul used the same word "foreknow" (*proegno*) when he wrote: "God has not rejected

his people whom he foreknew” (Rom. 11:2). And here Paul had in view not the faithful remnant whose proper choices, one might claim, God had already foreknown; instead, he had in view those unbelieving Israelites of his own day who had rejected Christ and whose hearts were still hard and impenitent. They were foreknown, in other words, despite their disobedience, and they remained objects of God’s electing love (“as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors”), not because they had made the right choices, but because “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28–29).

To be foreknown in the relevant Pauline sense, then, is simply to be loved beforehand. All of those whom God has loved from the beginning—that is, all the descendants of Adam—are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. So not only did Paul hold that Jesus Christ achieved a complete victory over sin and death; he also held that there was never the slightest possibility that God would lose any of those loved ones whose salvation he had already foreordained even before the foundation of the world.

Predestination without Determinism

That Paul believed in predestination now seems to me undeniable. The Augustinian mistake lies in the doctrine of limited election, which so clearly contradicts the central teaching of the New Testament; it does not lie in the doctrine of unconditional election, which confronts us on almost every page of the New Testament. When the latter doctrine is divorced from the idea of limited election, it no longer inspires fear and anxiety but inspires instead the greatest conceivable hope and sense of consolation. Still some may wonder about the role of free choice and moral effort in Paul’s predestinarian scheme. Just what role do free choice and moral effort play in our lives if our eventual salvation is secure from the beginning? Fortunately, Paul not only addressed this question directly but also provided a clear answer to it.

Because our eternal destiny, as Paul understood it, lies in God’s hands and not in our own, it is indeed secure. But Paul also provided a clear picture of how our choices, even if causally undetermined, could nonetheless play an essential role in a redemptive process whose end is foreordained and therefore secure. “Note then,” he wrote in Romans 11:22, “the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God’s kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise, you also will be cut off.” As this text illustrates, Paul clearly believed that our own actions—even our free choices, if you will—determine how God will respond to us in the immediate future; they determine, in particular, the form that God’s perfecting love will take. If we continue in disobedience, then God will continue to shut us up to our disobedience, thereby forcing us to experience the consequences of our choices and the life we have chosen to live; in that way, we will experience God’s perfecting love as severity. But if we repent and enter into communion with God, then we will experience his perfecting love as kindness.

Essential to the whole process, then, is that we exercise our moral freedom—not that we choose rightly rather than wrongly but that we choose freely one way or the other. We can choose today to live selfishly or unselfishly, faithfully or unfaithfully, obediently or disobediently. But our choices, especially the bad ones, will also have unintended and unforeseen consequences in our lives; as the proverb says, “The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps” (Prov. 16:9). A man who commits robbery may set off a chain of events that, contrary to his own intentions, lands him in jail; and a woman who enters into an adulterous affair may discover that, even though her husband remains oblivious to it, the affair has a host of

unforeseen and destructive consequences in her life. In fact, our bad choices almost never get us what we really want; that is part of what makes them bad and also one reason God is able to bring redemptive goods out of them. When we make a mess of our lives and our misery becomes more and more unbearable, the hell we thereby create for ourselves will in the end resolve the ambiguity and shatter the illusions that made the bad choices possible in the first place.

That is how God works with us as created rational agents. He permits us to choose in the ambiguous contexts in which we first emerge as self-aware beings, and he then requires us to learn from experience the hard lessons we sometimes need to learn. So, in that way the consequences of our free choices, both the good choices and the bad ones, are a source of revelation; they sooner or later reveal—in the next life if not in this one—both the horror of separation from God and the bliss of union with him. And that is why the end is foreordained: all paths finally lead to the same destination, the end of reconciliation, though some are longer and a lot more painful than others.

But if our salvation is guaranteed from the beginning and guaranteed no matter what choices we make in the present, then where is the incentive, many would ask, to repent and to enter into communion with God? Why not just keep on sinning if we are going to be saved anyway? That question, however, betrays a terrible confusion. Paul himself, I would point out, raised a similar question: “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). And he never rejected, furthermore, the assumption behind the question, namely, that the more we sin, the more grace will indeed abound. To the contrary, he endorsed this assumption when he wrote, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Rom. 5:20). Not in a million, or a billion, or even a trillion years could our sins ever outduel the grace of God. So why did Paul answer his own question, correctly, with his characteristic, “By no means”?

He did so because of his firm conviction that sin is utterly irrational. For how, he in effect asked, could those who have “died to sin,” and therefore understand its true nature, continue to sin (6:2)? Is not sin (or anything that separates us from God) precisely the problem, the very thing making our lives miserable? And similarly, that the misery and discontent that sin brings into a life can serve a redemptive purpose—because it can provide in the end a compelling motive to repent—hardly implies that one has a good reason to keep on sinning and to continue making oneself more and more miserable in the process.

Accordingly, the well-worn analogy of the grand master in chess remains as apt as ever. When a grand master plays a novice, it is foreordained, so to speak, that the grand master will win but not because he or she causally determines the novice’s every move or even predicts each one; the end is foreordained because the grand master is resourceful enough to counter *any* combination of moves that the novice might freely decide to make. And similarly for the infinitely wise and resourceful God: he has no need to exercise direct causal control over our individual choices in order to “checkmate” us in the end; he can allow us to choose freely, perhaps even protect us from some ill-advised choices for a while, and still undermine over time every conceivable motive we might have for rejecting his grace. For once we learn for ourselves—after many trials and tribulations, in some cases—why separation from God can bring only greater and greater misery into our lives and why union with him is the only thing that can satisfy our deepest yearnings and desires, all resistance to his grace will melt away like wax before a flame.

Conclusion. Christian universalists believe that, apart from a corporate salvation of the human race as a whole, there can be no real grace and no worthwhile salvation for any individual. For where is the grace in a doctrine of limited election? Is God being gracious to an

elect mother, for example, when he makes the baby she loves an object of his “sovereign hatred,” and does so, as some believe he did in the case of Esau, even before the child has done anything good or bad? In the end, it seems, a doctrine of limited election replaces grace with a *horrible decree*, one that separates the redeemed forever from some of their own loved ones; and perhaps no other doctrine, not even the doctrine of everlasting punishment itself, has *as a matter of historical fact* produced so much anxiety in the lives of those who actually believe it. It also flatly contradicts Paul’s explicit and repeated teaching that God, being merciful to all (Rom. 11:32), shows no partiality to anyone, and it is riddled, in any case, with logical impossibilities, as we have seen. So if a Christian were forced to choose between the doctrine of limited election and that of conditional election, the latter would be by far the preferable choice.

But the doctrine of conditional election, which requires that grace be supplemented by our human free choices, also carries some unfortunate implications. For it too carries the threat, at least, that some of our loved ones will eventually be lost forever; it also undermines the Christian’s solidarity with the human race as a whole and seems to provide the redeemed with grounds for boasting. If our own free choices determine our ultimate destiny in heaven or hell and the redeemed are those whose free choices are of a superior moral quality (because, unlike the damned, they did not reject Christ), then that difference, at any rate, is not a matter of grace at all. But beyond all of that, the consistent testimony of the New Testament is that, like a good shepherd who pursues the one lost sheep “until he finds it” (Luke 15:4), the Hound of Heaven pursues all of his loved ones until he finally reconciles them all to himself.

The gospel is truly good news, therefore, and truly glorious in its utter simplicity. Its message is that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has already achieved a complete victory over sin and death in this sense: though these defeated enemies of true blessedness remain a terrible part of our present reality, their eventual destruction is already guaranteed and so also, therefore, is the reconciliation of the world and every person in it. For no power in the universe, not the power of death itself and not even the power of our own recalcitrant wills, can finally “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39).²⁴

²⁴ Cottrell, J. W., Pinnock, C. H., Reymond, R. L., Talbott, T. B., & Ware, B. A. (2006). [*Perspectives on election: five views*](#). (C. O. Brand, Ed.) (pp. 206–261). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational



CLARK H. PINNOCK

What a joy it is and what a privilege to be asked to reflect upon the important subject of divine election in a book where others, worthy scholars all, set forth their insights alongside my own and interact. What an opportunity too for readers to see the range of interpretive options and consider where they themselves stand. I am particularly glad to be able to deal with this particular subject because, although it is a glorious truth, it is also for many a dark tenet and a heavy burden. Alongside issues of interpretation then lie issues of pastoral concern. I find myself wanting to offer believers relief by presenting the doctrine to them as the really good news it is. I would be delighted if many readers would experience surprise and delight at what I have to say. Theology sometimes creates distress, but it can also open the doors of understanding. It can restore the joy of our salvation by removing barriers to insight. Without accepting his views in their entirety, I resonate with Karl Barth's bold declaration: "The doctrine of election is the sum of the gospel because, of all the words that can be said or heard, it is the best: that God elects man and that God is for man as the One who loves in freedom."

Divine election (I will be contending) is not about a few sinners being selected arbitrarily for salvation and the rest being consigned to hellfire. Rather it is about God's willing the salvation of all nations and calling an elect people in order to realize it. God's love does not fall short—it is a perfect, not a partial, loving. How we handle election speaks volumes about our understanding of the character of God and the universality of the gospel. How we handle divine election will say a lot about our vision of Christianity as a whole. Does God love the world, or does he pick and choose who will live and who will die by what criteria God only knows and decides? Is God good? Is God fair? Is God loving? There is a lot at stake in this discussion. The key thing to remember in my view is that divine election does not exclude but aims at the salvation of the nations. It upholds and does not negate the truth that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

Weighing heavily on my mind as I write is the realization that many people inside and outside the churches have been devastated by the teaching, both narrow and exclusive, stemming from Augustine. Though purporting to inspire in us awe before a sovereign God, what it does is lead us to doubt God's loving character. I want to overcome if I can election's unhappy returns and give my readers relief from the effects of this awful interpretation so that they might learn once again to rejoice in the overflowing grace of God. Everyone (I think) knows that election is not much preached about these days, and understandably so, because the traditional version contains little gospel. What I will contend is that, when rightly understood, it invites being proclaimed and proclaimed boldly.

This is my thesis: *divine election is best understood when we take it to be corporate and vocational*. Election is about a people and their God-given task. It is about ecclesiology and missiology. This (I maintain) is the preponderant witness of the Bible on this subject. We see it in what Peter writes: "You are a *chosen race* (corporate), a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, *in order that* (vocational) you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Election is not about the destiny of individual persons for salvation or damnation but about God's calling a people who in the New Testament setting live according to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and proclaim good news to

the world. The goal of the electing will of God is not the salvation of a few but the gathering of the nations into an eschatological fellowship. Calling an elect people is a means to that noble end as the community discharges its task of cooperating with God in bringing it about. The focus is not on the salvation of the elect body itself (though this is assumed) but on the hoped-for consummated new humanity.

Through the prophet Amos, God refers to the working of his elective will even among the Philistines and the Arameans, in a way parallel to his choice of Israel, as if to say that the election of Israel is not something entirely unique and without parallel (Amos 9:7). We are given more than a hint here of a philosophy of history based on the election of many nations in all their variety. If one covenant is good, two or more covenants are surely better. The work of God is not restricted to a covenant with Jews and another one with Christians. Might not the story of another people contain traces of God's loving care making them too a people of God also? Does it not say in the Apocalypse, "They will be my peoples (plural)," and, "The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it" (Rev. 21:3, 26 AT)

Much distress has been caused by the way in which the doctrine of election has been interpreted in individualistic (not corporate) and abstract (not historical and vocational) terms. It has missed the central point of election and been responsible for troubling God's people, raising doubt into their minds as to whether they are elect—as if this could possibly be a question for believers. Thinking instead of election as corporate and vocational spells relief. In this view election is about God's calling a people in the midst of history (initially Israel and subsequently the church of Jews and Gentiles), not to a salvation which is exclusively theirs but to a salvation which is open to everybody. In tender love God has chosen a people for himself and given them a universal salvific vocation. Election is not an end in itself but foreshadows the reconciliation of the world; and, as such, it is a broad and not a narrow concept. Thus it presents a joyful and not a fearful prospect.

The elect body is the vehicle of the love of God for all nations. Election has a communal character; and, as far as individuals are concerned, it focuses on the functions that they will perform on humanity's behalf. I cannot say it often enough: election is an inclusive, not an exclusive, category. It does not spell exclusiveness relative to others who are passed over but signals a movement toward the inclusion of all the rest.

As for the place of the doctrine in systematic theology, I am inclined to position it under ecclesiology, not in theology proper as Barth does and not in soteriology as Calvin does. I put it under the doctrine of the church since in election God chooses a people for his name's sake and for the sake of world missions. It was eccentric (I think) of Barth to place it under the doctrine of God, to make the point in support of the precious truth of God's universal salvific will. Of course I grant the point and agree that election does express it. But why detract from the corporate and vocational nature of election which is primary? What Barth uses election for (to establish God's universal salvific will) is better done directly by an appeal to the texts which plainly teach it, like Titus 2:11 and 1 Timothy 2:4. As for Calvin's putting election under soteriology and in a double predestinarian manner, one can only wish that he had let that piece of Augustine's legacy languish and fade as all the Eastern and most of the Western churches have wisely done.

This is what I will be arguing: that believers are chosen in Christ and caught up in God's offer of salvation as a people who have the whole of humanity in view. The election of the community is part of God's comprehensive will to save humankind. It is not aimed at a few souls and them alone but at humankind as a whole. Election is also not a mark of pride, a self-distinction from others who are presumed to be rejected. It begins modestly, in the call of

Abraham, but has in view the blessing of the nations (Gen. 12:3). It begins with a few but aims at summing up all things in Christ (Eph. 1:9). Being “elect” signifies that one is taking part in the future of God’s salvation and ultimately the consummation of creation. It is (at this point) an open question exactly which individuals will finally belong to the eschatological fellowship and which will not. While there is no guarantee of universal reconciliation, the door is open to the salvation of all who repent (2 Pet. 3:9). And every Christian can and should hope for a large salvific result. Meanwhile, the church serves as a provisional representation of the eschatological fellowship of humanity to be renewed in the kingdom of God and works toward the ingathering of an ever-larger fellowship. The church is an open catholic community symbolizing the destiny of all mankind.

Historical Developments

Theology is an unfinished business and a human construction even when it is based upon divine revelation. As Paul put it, what we now know is partial and preliminary to the fuller understanding that will be ours at the Lord’s return (1 Cor. 13:12). Theology is always a venture and may require that we grow and mature as hearers of the Word of God. Traditions can be precious, but the developments in this case had an unhappy beginning. There has always been, as Barth put it, “a problem of a correct doctrine of the election of grace.” That’s putting it mildly. Few doctrines have been so misunderstood, and few have caused so much controversy and suffering. Folks without number have been vexed by the thought that God aims to bring only a handful of souls to heaven and to consign the rest to the rubbish heap, making it sound as if God only cares for a select number and not for humanity at large. It sounds as if God has a double plan, one for elect people and the other for reprobate people even before history began! Who has not felt at some time or other that this is a travesty, including (and perhaps especially) its defenders, who have the misfortune of having to live with it?⁹

The central problem of election is easy to grasp. Historically, the doctrine has been taken to mean the election of individuals. Surprisingly, this has been true of both the predestinarians and the non-predestinarians. On the one hand the church fathers before Augustine, such as Origen, wishing to avoid determinism, stressed the freedom of human subjects as the basis of election and the origin of the distinction between the elect and the nonelect. At least this takes into account the historical nature of election and does not place the blame of reprobation on God. It simply grounds election in the divine foreknowledge. Seeing in advance our future conduct, God sets us on the way to salvation or perdition on the basis of our own free and foreseen decisions. Divine election rests on God’s knowledge of the future free choices of human beings. In effect then, God endorses our self-election. We choose God and God returns the compliment. But this is not altogether satisfactory because it reduces the meaning of election as an unconditional act of God’s grace and makes it more than a little redundant. It turns God’s election into a human act of self-election. Nevertheless, it is better than the other early view of election—Augustine’s.

The first true predestinarian was Augustine. The church fathers before him would certainly have rejected his views, holding as they did to libertarian freedom. The bishop of Hippo corrected Origen’s mistake only to make things much worse. Somehow, he got the idea that election was an act of God for saving individuals prior to any prevision of the future conduct of the creature. For him election was an expression of divine sovereignty, unconditionally and not based on anything the creature has done. Now it has to do only with God’s good pleasure and, as such, is said to be comforting and a reason to thank God. That is as may be, but at the same time

it created a set of problems which are legendary. Calvin did not exaggerate when he admitted that his doctrine of election, whereby God predestines some to salvation and others to destruction, is “dreadful indeed” (*Institutes* 3.23.7). What could be more inconsistent, he muses, than that, out of the common multitude of needy persons, some should be predestined to salvation and others to destruction. Such a doctrine would surely undermine a theologian’s ability to hold and defend the goodness of God, who because of this now appears to be the author of a great evil. As Dave Hunt cryptically and rightly asks, “What love is this?”

How surprising it is that John Henry Cardinal Newman, when he celebrated Augustine’s theological legacy, did not include among his contributions to theology the doctrine of sovereign saving grace. It had become for him a branch on the tree of doctrinal development to be pruned. As Jaroslav Pelikan observes: “His doctrine of double predestination was repudiated in later generations but even the repudiation was formulated in Augustinian terms.”

Some who adopt the Augustine framework interpret it more rigorously than others. Supralapsarians among the Calvinists emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God even in respect of sin and the fall. After all, the divine Potter can do exactly as he likes with the clay. In this view, God does not just permit the fall; it is an integral part of the divine decree even though it makes God appear to be the author of evil and equally the cause of both salvation and damnation. Infralapsarians (on the other hand) are a little squeamish. Even while holding to double predestination, they wish to introduce an element of conditionality into it, as Arminians do. But it doesn’t really help them since even for them the fall is part of the divine decree and everything that happens is part of the greater good. But the infralapsarians feel better if they can say that the damned actually deserve to be damned and God is not to be blamed. Neither view, however, can really avoid blaming God for this gloomy situation.

With regard to both these traditions of divine election in the early church (Origen and Augustine), one is on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, if the distinction between the elect and nonelect rests on human conduct which God foreknew, election has little gracious character. It is little more than self-election. Furthermore, it assumes exhaustive definite foreknowledge, whose ontological grounding is uncertain and which I cannot accept on either scriptural or philosophical ground. On the other hand, if election is solely a result of a decision on God’s part whereby the nonelect are passed over for no reason, where is the justice in that? And why would God be calling the nations to come to him if no one who has been excluded beforehand can respond, being denied the grace of the Holy Spirit?

What a bad start this notion of election had in the history of doctrine! Both models diminish the truth of it, Origen by making it trivial and Augustine by making it revolting. One view makes God nominally sovereign, waiting to rubber-stamp human decisions; the other makes God a tyrant who hides behind mystery. It is little wonder why the church at the Synod of Orange (A.D. 529) took a more moderate position. It rejected double predestination and attributed the condemnation of anyone to his or her own resistance to grace. And in the case of the elect, though their faith is a gift, grace is not thought to be irresistible, which would do violence to human freedom. The council was seeking a better way, as we all should be. Surely the Scriptures do not warrant either of the two original paths taken by the tradition.

Karl Barth, the greatest theologian in the Calvinistic tradition, writes: “I would have preferred to follow Calvin’s doctrine of predestination much more closely, instead of departing from it so radically. I would have preferred, too, to keep to the beaten tracks when considering the basis of ethics. But I could not and cannot do so. As I let the Bible speak to me on these matters, as I meditated on what I seemed to hear, I was driven irresistibly to reconstruction”

(*Church Dogmatics* II/2, x). What concerned Barth most (and what concerns me, too) was the way in which Calvin's doctrine placed a shadow over the goodness and saving purposes of God. It made it sound as if God were saying to humanity, not "yes," but "yes" and "no." Barth was concerned that the doctrine in this form denied God's universal salvific will, and he spoke of "the pathetic inhumanity" of the traditional view. He even quoted John Milton as saying: "I may go to hell but such a God will never command my respect."

Election as Corporate and Vocational

The election traditions of the Bible point us in a different direction. Election in the Bible has to do with God's strategy for the salvation of the nations. The calling of a new people with its new way of being together in the world, this is God's plan to turn the world right-side up. It has to do with what Yoder calls "the original revolution."¹⁷ Our election texts do not focus on God's eternal choice of individuals for salvation or damnation but emphasize the election of a people with a history-making vocation. Even Jewett admits that "in the Bible the elect are generally spoken of as a class, not as individuals per se." (Not that this prevented him from devoting most of his book to individual election anyhow.) The Bible speaks in corporate terms about election, and plural language dominates these texts. We do not find the individualistic emphasis which is so commonly held. Where individuals are seen as chosen, it is always for a task and for some supportive role in salvation history. William Klein concludes his study: "The [biblical] data present an impressive case that election is not God's choice of a restricted number of individuals whom he wills to save but the description of that corporate body which, in Christ, he is saving."¹⁹

The solution to the problem of divine election is (I think) to view it as corporate and historical, not as individualistic and abstract. The late Colin E. Gunton captures the point when he observes that theologians have treated the notion "as more concerned with the otherworldly destiny of a limited number of human beings than with the destiny, in and through time, of the whole world."

While it is true that the election of Israel could be understood, as Jonah may have understood it, in negative terms vis-à-vis other nations, it actually has a more benign meaning. Israel is called to be a witness to everyone. Election begins with the call of Abram. After the cataclysm of Babel, he was chosen to be the one in whom all the nations of earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3). In the calling of this man to leave home and go somewhere else, a step was taken in the story of salvation. Obviously, the patriarchs were not chosen for their goodness—what a rogue Jacob was!—but to be the means, nevertheless, for the redemption of the world. This is a strange sovereignty true enough, but it is the way in which God decided to work. God established a special relationship with Abram with world-transforming potential. The covenant, unilateral in origin, was bilateral in its outworking. God committed himself to this covenant with Israel, a lowly tribe, and established a relationship which will eventually include all peoples. Israel was and is God's experimental garden, a place where things are tried out for the benefit of all mankind.

Divine election has mission in view. It carries with it responsibilities whether they are mentioned or not. God declares: "You shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5). The election is of a people (it is corporate); Israel is God's holy people and treasured possession. God says: "You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession"

(Deut. 7:6). God gave Israel a most-favored-nation status and for a reason. God said: “If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession” (Exod. 19:5 NIV). Israel was not called to an exclusive salvation but to a priestly vocation intended to bring the whole world to God. She was bound to God by a special love which is meant to spread to the whole world.

Similarly, the church is not the realm of exclusive salvation. Its calling is to reconcile the nations to God through its praise and ministry. The church is the means by which the world will return home to God. This understanding mitigates the exclusivity while pointing to the divine calling and central role we have been given in God’s purposes for the world.

Election then is not for privilege but for service. God chooses a people to serve him. The corporate side is unconditional. As for individuals, there was no guarantee that each and every one would always enjoy the privileges. Indeed, they could be cut off from the people (Exod. 12:19). God remains faithful to his people but has expectations—the vocational aspect. God expects things from his people. He expects them to keep God’s covenant and live holy lives. God warns, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2). They have been blessed, but with favor come expectations. God loves the people in Israel but has a ministry in mind for her, namely, a mediating role in the salvation of the world. Isaiah expresses the heart of it. Most succinctly God says, “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). The idea of a priestly kingdom suggests that Israel is going to serve as a representative people and will have a mediating role within the wider world. This is made plain in the New Testament, too. The church is not an end in itself; it has been given the power of the Spirit in order to take the gospel to the world and to make disciples of every nation.

What is the thinking behind a corporate and vocational election? The election of a people creates a community which has the potential to be and to become an exemplary anticipation and advance representation of the eschatological fellowship for which humanity itself is destined in the kingdom of God. God calls a people in order to change history. Because of his love for the whole race, God reached out to Abram and set in motion a plan to reconcile sinners. He called into being a people bearing God’s name among the nations, a vehicle through which history could be brought to its intended consummation. Election was the historically essential presupposition without which the subsequent history of salvation could not have unfolded the way it did. The community, graciously chosen, would be God’s covenant partner with the salvation of the whole race in view.

Let me say it again: the goal of election is the creation of a people and not, in the first instance, the salvation of solitary individuals. It establishes the firstfruits of a new humanity whose praise and whose distinctive way of being in the world is God oriented. Under the law of Christ, the church has a way of being in the world (a polity, if you like) which corresponds to Israel’s way but which also allows for changes consequent upon the movement from being a particular ethnic group (Israel) to being a community which incorporates every nation (church). The church is like Israel in being called out and distinguished from the rest of humankind but unlike Israel in that representatives from every nation are openly included, not needing to be circumcised and not having to cease to be the particular people they are as Gentiles.

Under this interpretation election does not narrow things down but opens things up. The community as a chosen race does not spell exclusivity relative to others who are passed over but carries with it the promise of the inclusion of humanity. The aim of God’s electing purposes is the fellowship of a renewed humanity in the kingdom of God. It does not have to do with elect

individuals in abstraction from history but with God's having a people to bear him witness. Notice, the number of the redeemed remains open to anyone and everyone who is brought into the fellowship by the preaching of the gospel. Whereas individuals are the focus of the conventional views of election, the election of a people is the issue in the Bible's traditions. Amid the strife of world history, God's elect people are called upon to offer a model of his kingdom. The elect are pressed into the service of a greater fellowship; election is not for their benefit alone.

The church is the elect community, and individual believers are caught up into it by faith and baptism. As God's people in the service of the kingdom, they are an anticipation of the unity of humanity under God. The community points beyond itself to the final purposes of God. The church is not an end in itself but a sign of the coming kingdom. God calls a people so that they can be involved in the restoration of the world. Election is a movement toward a goal, not an end in itself. In electing, God puts us to work and makes us partners in the mending of creation. It is often overlooked that election is not a call to privilege but to service. One's "vocation" as a believer is not the job by which to earn a living. Our calling is to be partners in God's work of salvation. Mission and outreach, not salvation as our private possession, is the goal of election. Too often we have taken our own salvation to be the goal and assigned mission to paid emissaries. Too often we can be so busy edifying ourselves that we have little time for our neighbor. Barth notes that the Bible contains stories of calling, not stories of conversion as such, and the goal of them is to bear witness. Like Paul's "conversion," it was an event in the history of mission as this "instrument" which God has chosen comes on line (Acts 9:15).

To reiterate: the elect community is a provisional representation of the future of humanity. Having experienced salvation, it proclaims the mighty acts of God to everyone. It is not that faith is first exercised in the human heart and the church is added as an afterthought. God is aiming to establish a new human community, and the church is the firstfruits of it and imperfectly embodies what is coming. Pannenberg writes: "The human society at which God's eternal election aims will find its definitive form only in the eschatological fellowship of the kingdom of God. God's work of election in history is oriented to those that are still on the way to this goal." One could say that the church has an eschatological horizon and is the proleptic manifestation of the kingdom of God in history. It is the beachhead of the new creation and the sign of the new order in a world that is coming to an end (1 Cor. 7:29).

What about individuals then? Election is corporate and comprehends individuals in association with the elect body. Whereas in the Augustinian tradition, election to salvation is unconditional for individuals and contingent when it comes to the elect body, in the Bible election to salvation is unconditional for the elect body and contingent when it comes to individuals. This is how I see it: God's mercy is freely available and the elect body open to any and all who hear God's call. When we preach the gospel, we give to people outside the community an opportunity to become members of the elect people of God. Before the foundation of the world, God chose to have a people and destined them to be holy and blameless in love. When a person believes in Jesus, he or she is incorporated in the body of Christ, and all that had been predestined for the group now applies to that person as well. God is sharing his life with the world and does so through the instrumentality of Jesus Christ and his church.

God knows that some will respond but not (I submit) exactly who. He has predestined the church to be conformed to the image of his Son and uses it to bear witness to the rest of humankind. The election of Israel, too, did not have in view only salvation; it also had in mind a priestly vocation, intended to bring the whole world to God. The love by which God loves the

church is meant to spread into the whole world. The church is not a community intended for a salvation exclusively its own. It comes with a calling to reconcile the world to God through its praise and ministry.

God foreknew his bride. It says that “those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). What he foreknows is a group of people (believers) in contrast to another group (unbelievers) whom he did not foreknow. Obviously Paul is not talking about prior information here! This is not foreknowledge in the cognitive sense. It has to do with loving people ahead of time. As his people we are preloved by God. It is not that God foreloved select individuals as opposed to others whom he did not love. What God loved from the foundation of the world was the bride of Christ considered as a corporate whole. There is no reason to suppose that God knew precisely who would constitute and make up the elect body.

God’s calling is a genuine calling, and it takes place in time. It is not all decided from eternity. It calls for a decision here and now. Peoples’ fate is not sealed one way or the other. The early attempts to understand election were not successful. Whether the distinction between the elect and the non-elect rests on observing their conduct through foreknowledge, thereby undermining the gracious character of election, or whether it rests solely on the decision of God whereby he simply passes over the non-elect irrespective of their conduct runs up against the category of God’s calling. In either case there is no room left for a free decision to the call of God on the part of the creatures in their historical situations. It results in a monstrosity—an outer calling for everybody and an inner calling only for some.

God’s election of the people is the basis of God’s election of individuals who associate with it by saying “yes” to God’s call. The obedience of faith is what makes our “calling and election sure” (2 Pet. 1:10 NIV). Remember the widow who is God’s elect and who calls out for justice (Luke 18:7). She is one of the suffering elect people of God who will experience God’s protection and salvation. Faithful Jews and faithful Christians are “the elect” then, not because God pre-temporally and arbitrarily chose them and not others but because they belong by faith to his chosen people and are members of the elect body. “Elect” is a status enjoyed by all believers including all in the future who will believe in Jesus.

To reiterate: whereas for Calvin election applies to individuals unconditionally and who comprise the corporate body incidentally, for the Bible election is corporate and comprehends individuals in association with the elect body. That Christ will present the elect people, the bride, to himself is unconditional. But, as for individuals, he will present them only if they continue in the faith which is contingent (Col. 1:23). In my reading of the Bible, election is God’s choice of a people; and, when individuals are said to be chosen, it is in connection with the people and for the people.

What might be meant then by the New Testament sometimes saying that God “foreknows” his people (Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet. 1:2)? Light is shed on this in Romans 11:2, where Paul says that God has not rejected his people whom he “foreknew.” In Christ, before the foundation of the world, God foreknew and foreloved all believing creatures. They have a special place in God’s heart and a glorious future whoever they are. In creating the universe, God decided that (at least) some of his creatures would share in the divine life. He decided that some would become conformed to the image of the perfect humanity manifested in Jesus and would constitute a new community. God decided that there would be such creatures and that he would call them into communion with himself through the church. He committed himself to justify them if they responded. God foreknew them, in that he had decided that there would be some such creatures,

that some of them would respond and be glorified. It is not necessary to believe that God knew in particular exactly who they would be. God is simply envisaging and intending that there will be some and determining (predestinating) that some will be conformed to the image of his Son. By means of repeated and patient preparation and assistance, some will respond affirmatively without God knowing exactly who.

In speaking of an elect people, God is not talking about specific individuals but a group or a class, the membership of which is still undetermined. God does not have to know from eternity past exactly which persons would actually be conceived and born and which would respond to his call. Who they all are is something that will manifest itself. One should not equate foreknowing with foreseeing. It is a relational and not merely a cognitive term. Only one individual is said to have been elect by name—Jesus Christ; everyone else who is elect is elect in him. When we believe, we step into the realm of God’s everlasting love.

Israel in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament are considered the chosen people of God. What should we think about how things stand with unbelieving Israel now? Has Israel been superseded by the church, or is she still God’s people? Many Christians have thought of Israel as discarded, as a negligible people now passed over and deserving of no appreciation. But this does not seem to be Paul’s view: “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew” (Rom. 11:2 NRSV). He adds: “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29). God is faithful to his promises in spite of intransigence. “If we are faithless, God remains faithful—he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). He says, “They are enemies and yet they are still loved” (Rom. 11:28). Indeed, Paul adds, God has even found a way to redeem the situation. In the wake of Israel’s unbelief, the salvation of both Jews and Greeks has become a possibility, a net gain. Therefore, our calling regarding Israel is not to ignore them or merely tolerate them or even make them a special target of mission, but (as Paul says) we are “to make them jealous” (11:11, 14). That is, we are so to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ and so to witness to messianic fulfilment that Israel will reconsider and experience a change of heart.

The church is to confront Israel, not in a battle of words but in committed competition—something which so far has not been very convincing. So far, looking at the unredeemed state of the world and, alas, of the church too, the Jews have not yet found it possible to accept Jesus as the Messiah. But we can sympathize; we too regret the unredeemed nature of the world and the church. And we too pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as in heaven.” We too await fulfilment and consummation.

Election as Christocentric and Representational

The foundations of the doctrine of election as corporate and vocational are laid in the Old Testament. The New Testament supports this pattern and enriches it. What I see is the corporate-vocational doctrine with a Christological-representational twist. In brief, we are faced with the election of Jesus Christ and a double representation in him of Israel and humanity at large. Owing to the failure of Israel to heed God’s call in the old covenant and to recognize Jesus’ proclamation, Peter says, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner” (1 Pet. 2:7). And, he adds, Jesus the Christ is now what is chosen and precious in God’s sight (1 Pet. 2:4). Through the wisdom of God, the faithful Son of the Father is carrying the mission of Israel forward and is creating a new form of the elect people alongside her. Now we hear about a bridegroom and an elect bride, chosen in Christ. Now we hear about a last Adam,

who embodies the new humanity. We hear how it is that, in him, through faith and baptism, we as individuals become part of the elect servant and of the new creation itself.

The Election of Jesus Christ

We noticed in the Old Testament how, although election is fundamentally corporate, individuals are “chosen” to play important roles in the life of the community. In the Hebrew Bible, God chooses the heroes of the nation: Abraham (Neh. 9:7), Jacob (Ps. 135:4), Moses (Num. 16:5, 7), David (1 Sam. 13:13–14), Amos (Amos 7:14–15), Jeremiah (Jer. 1:4–8), etc. God also chooses the priesthood and various kings and prophets. Similarly in the New Testament, Jesus chooses apostles to follow him. Individuals are elected to tasks in God’s mission.

Most striking in this context is the choice of one individual—Jesus Christ—whose vocation it is to be the Savior of the world. We hear God’s voice at the baptism of Jesus: “You are my Son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). God says at the transfiguration: “This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him” (Luke 9:35). This was no election to salvation (Jesus did not need to be saved) but to service. In particular, he is the one through whom God brings salvation. Dying on the cross, he was taunted in these terms: “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” (Luke 23:35). God has chosen this individual to be the Savior of the world. This was to be his calling and election. No other specific person is pre-temporally chosen in this way.

Much about the future is as yet undecided. It awaits for agents to have their “say so.” Much belongs to the category of “what might be.” But not everything is merely possible. God has decided on certain things. The defining event of history, the death and resurrection of Jesus, is one of those things. They did not just happen. They were part of God’s plan for the redemption of the race from long ago. It was certain that Jesus would suffer crucifixion and triumph over death, but that does not imply that everything about these events was fixed. Figures like Pilate and Herod played their roles, but of their own free will. There was a combination of the divine purpose and human machinations. It was a vile murder but also something much more (Acts 2:23). It was the plan of God to provide a redeemer. The Son would be delivered up into the hands of evil men, but God would override their plans. God decreed the salvation of the world through Jesus but did not approve of all the means by which it was brought about. For example, God did not approve or ordain that men should curse him and spit on him. It was a vile murder but one which God used for the world’s salvation. Here we have a predestined event with non-predestined players.

The Representation of Israel

Before Jesus came, Israel had been God’s experimental garden, a place where God could try things out and see what kind of a response he would get. Israel was God’s vineyard from which he expected a good yield but which often proved unproductive. It was an experiment that could become decisive for the world, which is why God “chose” them. He wanted a people to receive his love and walk in his ways. Sadly, it did not always work out that way. God is faithful, but how unfaithful we humans are! Relentlessly the prophets exposed the sins of Israel. How near to failure God’s experiment with this people would seem to be. But the prophets did not give up hoping. They kept on believing that “in that coming day” God will restore his people (Ezekiel

36:32). On the boundaries of the New Testament, we meet up with John the Baptist who like an Old Testament prophet announces the strong One who is to come and who will bring the kingdom of God near. Languishing in prison, John experienced doubts, but Jesus reassured him and carried it through. Like John, we believe that Jesus Christ was God's next and decisive step in a continuation of the way he had gone and the path he had trodden with Israel long before. At last the kingdom of God was among us.

The point and meaning of the election of Israel is now to be found in Jesus of Nazareth. Her vocation is seen in the presence of this one person. Jesus is the concrete realization of God's dealings with his people and reveals the shape of the preparatory history. In the New Testament the election is narrowed down to Jesus Christ himself. The need for his role arose from the failure of Israel and from the fact that something else had to be done if the goal is to be reached, namely, reaching of the nations. Someone had to act in Israel's name and on Israel's behalf. This is what Jesus Christ did as "minister to the circumcision" (Romans 15:8).

Something new then was being built on the history of Israel in which God's call became particular in a decisive way. The offices of the prophets, priests, and kings of Israel, through whom God dealt with Israel, are now seen to be concentrated in Christ who is the concrete realization in person of God's dealings with his people and revealing of the shape of the preparatory history. In him God's universal reconciling design is exposed and achieved. The role of Jesus was not isolated from the foregoing history of Israel. This is not an isolated epiphany but a decisive phase in the path that had been followed for centuries. Jesus was a decisive step and a continuation of the way God had gone with Israel before. John the baptizer may have seen the covenant event between God and the people ending in a great judgment, but Jesus saw this as a great opportunity to play a unique and definitive role to act on God's behalf. The way has opened up for him to serve as Israel's representative, as the obedient servant in whom the covenant could be made firm. He knew that he was the elect of God and chosen with purpose. He was sent by the faithful God to an unfaithful people to realize the covenant on behalf of Israel.

Israel responded to this divine initiative, with rejection but it issued in a breakthrough, nevertheless. The age of salvation had arrived, even though Israel still did not enter in. Even with the Gentiles flooding in, God's dispute with Israel remains undecided. Had the age of salvation moved toward completion in accordance with the prophetic vision, the way would have been open for a new world community with Israel at the core plus all those from the nations who would turn to Israel's God. But because the majority in Israel withdrew from it, the appearance of Jesus, contrary seemingly to the intent, led to two forms of the people of God: with Israel continuing the old covenant as if Jesus had not come and the Gentiles with a remnant of Jews operating out of a new covenant through Jesus and the Spirit. In line with the way in which God achieves his goals with open routes, the process toward the renewal of the human race has gotten under way.

A new facet in the doctrine of divine election is now visible. Election is now seen as relative to the Son, to his mission, death, and resurrection. Jesus is "the elect" par excellence and God has chosen to elect us "in him." We become part of the corporate "us" in the body of Christ. Election does not create a scheme which divides humankind into two camps. God's election of Jesus extends to all who are "in him" and who will be "in him." Election is God's "yes" to the human race. Believers participate in his election by faith and baptism. God's choice of him extends to all those who are in him. Election is God's choice of a bride for his Son. He has ordained that those in Christ by faith would belong to it.

Often, we view salvation in juridical terms. But it needs also to be understood as participation in Jesus Christ. By faith we share in his death and resurrection. In a mysterious and mystical way, believers enter into a new realm and constitute a new humanity. They belong to a new corporateness which signifies the age to come. In Christ, with Christ, into Christ, and through Christ—all such expressions speak of a new corporate reality. It is the presence of the risen Lord with us in the community which is his body and the realm of the Holy Spirit. Christ is conceived of as a kind of location into which the convert is inserted. It makes us all part of the process of world transformation. Participatory union with Christ is the heart of Paul's theology. In him we are elect, called, justified, sanctified, redeemed, and made alive.

The Representation of Humanity Itself

In a broader way, Jesus represents not only Israel but humanity itself. In Paul's writings, Christ and Adam are representative figures which are compared and contrasted. Paul writes: "Just as one man's trespass (Adam's) led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all (Christ's)" in Romans 5:18. Or again: "For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor. 15:22). In such expressions, Adam is humanity itself, an individual who represents the whole human race. Jesus Christ is also a representative figure, the eschatological counterpart of primeval Adam. Each begins an epoch which is established by their action. In this way human beings are viewed as being either "in Adam" or "in Christ." Adam represents a fallen humankind, while Jesus is the type and prototype of the new humanity which is to come. He is the author of a new humanity and the embodiment of human destiny. The way God found in his wisdom to deal with the problem of human sin was to send his Son in solidarity with humankind in its existence under the powers of sin and death.

Paul's logic would be summed up later in the classic formulations of Gregory of Nazianzus: "What has not been assumed cannot be healed" (*Epistle* 101.7). And in the formulation of Irenaeus: "Christ became what we are in order that we may become what he is" (*Adversus Haereses* 5). Or, in Athanasius: "He became man that we might become divine" (*De Incarnatione* 54).

What does this mean? I think that it means that, in the coming of Jesus, the future of God's reign that he proclaimed was present by anticipation. He was himself a sign of the coming kingdom of God. In an antithesis to the old humanity, Jesus spells the origin of a new human being, a reality that has overcome sin and death. Thus, Jesus is the eschatological new human being, and we who are elect in him look to the summing up of all things in him. Election is oriented toward the goal of consummation. Pannenberg writes: "In the coming of Jesus the future of God and his reign that Jesus proclaimed were present by anticipation. In person, Jesus was a sign of the coming divine rule, so that by him and in fellowship with him people may be assured even now of their participation in the future salvation of God."

The gospel is about our becoming truly human. It is about the humanization of men and women. Being a Christian is about being human in a new way. It is about having a new orientation in thought and life. It is about being oriented to God and not to idols. Salvation is aimed at man's well-being. It involves having a new orientation, a new approach to life, a new standard, and living model for our relations to God and the neighbor. The goal is that we may live differently—more genuinely, more humanly, more like Jesus. It's about the new creation which is coming to be. It is about Jesus Christ.

Barth is right to focus on the election of Jesus Christ who represents the whole race. Not just Israel and church but all of humankind is elect in him. Jesus is God's elect; and, if we are elect, it is in and with his election. In contrast with the Reformed tradition, according to which God has elected some for salvation and others for perdition, Barth maintains that God's election is centered on Christ only. It refers to this one individual and not to individuals at large. He has a Christological doctrine of election which reveals his will to save and not reject Adam's race. In election, God is for us, not against us. In him, the entire race has been chosen for salvation. He repudiates double predestination. God's decision to be gracious leaves no doubt. All humanity swims in a sea of grace whether they know it or not. Barth reads the Bible through the lens of Jesus. His cross reveals God's grace for all people, not just a few lucky ones.

But Barth takes this too far. He takes this to imply the actual justification of humankind and (therefore) moves in the direction of universal salvation. It is as if grace cannot ultimately be defeated in anybody's life. It's a kind of Reformed universalism. If God can save anyone and everyone, he will surely do so, given the combination of unconditional election and irresistible grace for Barth. How could it be otherwise? But Barth does not hold the objective and the subjective in proper tension. Faith is the condition for the concrete realization of salvation which does not take effect apart from it. It has nothing to do with merit (Rom. 4:16). But we need to leave room for a human response. It is right to be optimistic about every one since Christ has died for them. There is no necessity that any be lost. But God's love must woo them and win them. Universal opportunity, yes; universal salvation, not likely. God's love appeals to human freedom; it does not swallow it up. To those who say no to God finally, he gives them what they want most—the opportunity to be themselves, enslaved forever by the autonomy they have demanded.

God's desire to save all sinners is clear, and election does not contest it. Indeed, election is an instrument and means to make salvation happen. It is a corporate category and comprehends individuals in association with the elect body. The goal is to have creatures who participate in the trinitarian fellowship which will be actualized at the final consummation. The community of faith now is an expression but not the final expression of God's will to love. At this time election means selection, but the number of the elect remains open to all who may later on be added. Election comprehends all men and women potentially and no one unconditionally. It is open to all. Faith is the subjective means and baptism and eucharist are the outward means of identification with Christ in his election.

No Horrible Decree, No Self-selection

A person could be in considerable agreement with what has been said so far and still maintain that there is, in the Bible, in addition to these truths, a divine election alongside them which does involve the selection of certain individuals to be saved and not others. What if there were, in addition to corporate election with a vocational focus, what John Frame calls "a stronger kind of election"? Might there also be what has been called a soteriological double predestination? Is there a selection/election of individuals underneath the corporate/vocational dimension? Although I do not find the Bible to be teaching such a belief—the election of certain individuals to salvation and the predestination of the rest to damnation—it must be taken seriously because it has been widely accepted since Augustine, especially in Calvinistic circles. Although this notion in my view derives from bad habits of interpretation, built up over the generations, nevertheless, it is important to remove this obstacle to a good understanding which

has dogged our path for centuries and placed a dark shadow over a basic tenet of the Christian message that “God desires everyone to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).

One reason election as a selection of individuals to be saved has seemed a plausible interpretation despite its doubtful morality is that modern readers find it hard to grasp the biblical notion of corporate solidarity. The Bible may be familiar with the idea whereby community is prior to the individual, but we are not used to thinking in these terms. It is not that individuality is foreign to the Bible or that individuals are swallowed up into the group; it is just that biblical writers find thinking about an elect “body” easier than we do. We tend more naturally to think of the individuals who make it up. It is not as easy for us to think of people receiving election as part of an elect body. We are more used to thinking of God electing “me” rather than God electing “us.” We have to recognize that our election as believers is the result of our participation and incorporation by faith and baptism in the body of Christ. What gives us hope is not a speculation as to whether we are chosen. It is membership in the community that gives us hope since God has chosen the bride in Christ and for Christ before the foundation of the world. Everyone who believes is part of this elect group, and the others are free to believe and enter into it.

God chose a people without determining the specific individuals who would belong to it. Every believer who is in Christ is chosen and predestined to be holy and blameless. This is God’s purpose for them and the grace that they were given “in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim. 1:9). As R. P. Shedd writes: “Election does not have an individual emphasis in Paul, any more than it did for Israel in the Old Testament. Rather, it implies a covenant relationship through which God chooses for himself a people. This collectivism is of supreme importance for understanding the implications of election in Christ.”

It is natural for us Westerners to ask how there can be an elect body without the selection of individuals to populate it. The fact is though that this is not a biblical problem. Strong individualism, however, is foreign to the Bible’s way of thinking where the perspective is corporate. Our individual chosenness rests on our being partakers in the body of Christ and in our affiliation in his church. Election is not God’s choice of a restricted number of individuals whom God is willing to save—it is a description of the corporate body which God is in fact saving through Jesus. Election is not a limit on the mercy of God but its very expression. Individuals become part of the elect body simply by responding to the call of God.

Having appealed to texts in support of divine election as corporate and vocational, as Christocentric and representational, I must now say something about important texts to which others (especially Calvinists) refer and determine whether they can be reasonably interpreted in the way I am suggesting.

In a most important text, Paul writes: “Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love” and then he adds, “as a plan for the fullness of time to gather up all things in him” (Eph. 1:4, 10). Notice the grand sweep there is in Paul’s vision. He looks back to the pretemporal election in Christ of a people and then forward to the fulfilment of God’s plan for human history. He is not talking about the otherworldly destiny of a limited number of people but about the destiny of creation itself. What we have here is the election of a people for the sake of the rest. It is an expression of God’s will to save humanity through the agency of this community. The elect are the people whose role it is to bring salvation to the world. The focus is not on individuals; God would save everyone if he could (1 Tim. 2:4).

Individuals will be called to salvation through the mission of the church and will become elect when incorporated into the elect body by faith in Jesus.

What is happening is that God's choice of Jesus now extends to all who are "in him." As members of the community, they share in the benefits of God's gracious choice. As Klein writes, "Christ is the principally elected one and God has chosen a corporate body to be included in him." As Markus Barth writes, "Election in Christ must be understood as the election of God's people. Only as members of that community do individuals share in the benefits of God's gracious choice."⁴⁵

Paul again writes: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:29–30). In Romans 11:2 Paul speaks of Israel as the people "whom God foreknew." In this text too, he is not thinking of individuals but of the people as a whole who had turned away from God. In both texts he is envisaging a people, and God's "foreknowledge" of them in each case is not a precognition of them as individuals but a loving of them in advance as a group. He is thinking of the elect body which is predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. In these texts Paul is not saying that God previsioned all the actual individuals who would be saved. He is saying that the church (and Israel) as a corporate reality has always been in God's heart. He is viewing them as a body, not as individuals.

Had Paul meant to speak of individuals, he would have fallen into a self-contradiction. If foreknowledge here means precognition, why would God be said only to preknow believers? Does he not foreknow unbelievers too? And is every believer "called, justified, and glorified?" Surely not. Did he not say that persons can fall from grace (Gal. 1:4)? Can one not be justified and not glorified? Paul is not speaking to the issue that interests us most, as to whether God knew in advance which specific individuals would belong to the elect body. That question (thank God) is open. All who confess Christ are subsumed under God's plan and are part of that body. Paul is not talking about individuals elected in eternity but about the historical saving plan of God. God has in mind a chosen race that will take the salvation of God to the nations. Paul is contemplating the purpose of God for his elect people. Pannenberg writes: "Only in detaching the statements in Romans 8:29–30 and 9:13, 16 from the context of salvation history in which Paul set them makes it possible to link them to the abstract notions of election that since the days of Origen and Augustine have been determinative in the history of the doctrine of predestination."

Romans 9–11 represents a tremendously important block of teaching. In it Paul is speaking about God's purpose in the election of Israel. It grieves him so deeply that the Jews have turned away from the gospel that he writes, "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart" (Rom. 9:2). Later on, he confesses, "My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1 NRSV). Paul faced a tremendous conundrum. How is it that God can be said to remain faithful to his people which he had chosen and at the same time could be calling Paul to preach a gospel for Jew and Greek?

What makes it tolerable for him is the insight that even Israel's unbelief plays a role in God's plan. Specifically, it opened the door for Gentiles to be saved. Paul writes, "Through their stumbling, salvation has come to the Gentiles" (11:11). This is what he had said to the church at Antioch about the success of his mission: "God ... opened the door of faith for the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). What a tribute to God's competence and resourcefulness (Rom. 11:33). As for

Israel, God will deal with them in his own way and time; but in the meantime our task as Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ is to live in such a way that the Jews can infer from our lives that we are worshipping the God of Israel in truth.

Paul's remarks in Romans 9–11 are about God working in world history to show mercy to both Jew and Gentile (11:32). It's not about the salvation of individuals per se. The emphasis on sovereignty is to emphasize the freedom of God to do things in his way without in any way casting doubt about the broad goal of salvation. If in fact (perish the thought) the unbelief of the Jews were due to God's decision and, therefore, was something God sovereignly wanted, why would Paul experience sorrow, and why would he want the people to be saved whom God does not want saved? He makes clear that Jews missed salvation because they do not strive for it on the basis of faith but works (Rom. 9:32).

Paul's subject in Romans 9–11 is salvation history with the goal of global outreach. There is no hidden decree here but only good news through and through. God has not annulled his covenant with the Jews. There is still a remnant of the faithful, as there was in the days of Elijah. At the moment (granted), and for the time being, the relationship is going through a rough patch. Nevertheless, the people of God are expanding with the flowing in of the Gentiles. And our hope is that, at least by his return, the Jews too will be saved (Rom. 11:26). People who struggle with Romans 9–11 would be greatly helped if they would stop reading it as if it were about divine pan-causality and start reading it as being about God's covenant faithfulness. God is not addressing the issue of the salvation of individuals in Romans 9. He is pondering the issue of God's covenant with Israel. "Has God's word failed?" Has the covenant been rescinded? At stake here is God's fidelity to Israel as his covenant partner, not double predestination. It has to do with God's sovereignty to use Gentiles, if he chooses to. If they believe and the Jews refuse, that will not stop God from carrying on with his plan to reach all the nations. God is a flexible potter who knows how to work with willing clay. Did anyone before Augustine read Romans 9 in a deterministic way?

Romans 9–11 is about the sovereignty of God to do things his way and the orientation is corporate. There is no arbitrariness as regards individuals. God's goal is to have mercy on both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 11:32). To achieve it, God even uses something as horrific as Israel's unbelief. Paul writes: "Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, 'the elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau' " (Rom. 9:11, 13). The point is that God decided that the line should go through Jacob, not through Esau. This was God's sovereign choice and had nothing whatever to do with individual salvation. God simply chose Jacob and his offspring rather than Esau and his offspring. Paul quotes Malachi to make his point where the issue is clearly two nations and not individuals. It is all about God as the flexible potter who can work the clay into ever new forms (Jer. 18:4; Rom. 9:21).

Some read Romans 9 as if God loves some and hates others, but this is wrong. Geisler refutes this notion effectively. He argues that the passage is not speaking about individuals but about nations. The "Esau" Paul refers to is the nation of Edom and the "Jacob" is the nation of Israel, as the Malachi reference makes clear (Mal. 1:2–3). As for Pharaoh, he hardened his own heart before God hardened it. God sent the plagues to get him to repent; but, since he refused, the result was well deserved hardening. The vessels of wrath were not destined to destruction against their will. They deserved to be put aside, God having endured their disobedience long enough. One simply cannot read Romans 9 this way. The idea that God has decided unilaterally to leave some untouched by grace is a scandalous note and in flagrant opposition to the gospel. It

conceals the outrageous love of God revealed to all humanity in the cross and puts it under the shadow of God's supposed equally outrageous hatred. To this reading we must say no.

Not every text which is relevant to election mentions the word. There are also indirect "proofs" which are appealed to. For example, there are texts that seem to assert that everything is foreordained, in which case the salvation of individuals must be foreordained along with everything else. In Psalm 139, for example, we read, "In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed" (v. 16 NRSV). A text like this seems to support a predestinarian outlook which could undergird the election and/or rejection of individuals. However, in this poem (and it is a poem), the psalmist gives expression to the intimacy of God's acquaintance with him. He reflects on how God cared for him from conception and wrote down in a book all that what was possible for this human life. The language is not perfectly clear as to what is exactly implied. It does not say, for example, that everything that will ever happen in this lifetime is written down. And elsewhere in the Bible we are told that what is written down in such a book can be changed (Exod. 32:33; Rev. 3:5). What is "predestined" then may not actually occur! It may be conditional and dependent on other factors. God's plan for us all is a flexible one and takes account of every possibility. We should not read too much into a text like this. Of course, God knows an incredible amount about our future since he is infinitely wise, but this does not prove that his knowledge is strictly limitless with respect to the future.

In the book of Acts, Luke writes, "When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and, as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers" (Acts 13:48). Apart from the verb "destined," the context makes the meaning plain. The action of the Jews, having decided not to accept the message, leads Paul to turn to the Gentiles. Thus the door is now open to them to enter into salvation (Acts 14:27). What does this "being destined" or "disposed (Greek *tasso*) for eternal life" mean then? The context decides it. It means that the Gentiles believed because of the fact that God's plan of salvation, given Israel's negative decision, now includes them. The Jews had rejected the gospel, but the Gentiles were eager to receive it. Those who reject the message are unworthy of eternal life while others who accept it reveal by their response to God's Word that they are numbered with the saints. The word *disposed* has to be understood in the context where the meaning is after all very clear.

Admittedly, Acts 13:48 comes close to suggesting that God might determine who will believe. But there is no mention of any pretemporal election, and the narrative is clear. The Jews have disqualified themselves by their rejection while the Gentiles have an open door and are opting in. William Neil remarks: "It is not in any sense narrowly predestinarian, as if some are scheduled for salvation and others for damnation. In this case, the Jews of Antioch as a whole rejected the offer of eternal life, while some—by no means all—of the Gentiles accept it. Those who accepted the gospel fulfil the purpose of God that all men shall be saved and by their response show that they are worthy to be numbered with the saints of heaven."

Again, Luke writes, "The Lord opened [Lydia's] heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). Though not strictly an election text, this verse is cited because it seems to support the notion that sinners are totally depraved and (therefore) cannot respond to God unless coerced. Given their sinful condition, only efficacious and not merely prevenient and assisting grace can help. In this way, the Calvinist view of election may be thought to rest on and be inferred from its dark view of sinful man's plight. What really motivates its view of election then is its anthropology. Were grace merely assisting, it would never be sufficient. Were grace not irresistible, it would involve a human factor and not be by grace alone.

But we should not read too much into this text. In conversion, there is always a divine side and a human side (salvation is, after all, by grace through faith). While this text truly mentions only the divine side, it does not deny that there is a human side. The opening of her heart was God's work; the response of faith was hers. Given the type of personal relationship that we enjoy with God as significant creatures, we know that God does not go in for manipulative measures. The Bible issues innumerable and sincere invitations for people like Lydia to respond to God's message. They by no means assume that people cannot believe. Quite the contrary. These invitations reveal that God wants freely chosen and truly personal relations with us. God makes the initial move by saying yes to us. Then it is our turn to respond with a yes or a no. Such a response cannot be coerced.

In another text Paul writes, "For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you [literally "knowing your election"], because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:4-5). Paul knew that these disciples were associated with the elect body because of their ready reception of the gospel which confirmed to him their elect status. He means that, when people hear the gospel and respond to it, they establish their inclusion in the elect body. As Peter puts it, they make their calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). This is how Paul knows where they stand *vis a vis* Christ's elect body. There is no hint here that God chose specific people to respond and not others. Perish the thought.

In another text, Paul is thankful, he says, "because God chose you as the firstfruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13). Paul could say that of this or any congregation that God chose them as a community to be the first-fruits of salvation through the work of the Spirit in their lives and through faith in Jesus Christ. Notice here again the double agency: the Spirit's work in us and our response to the call of God. The Thessalonians really were the first-fruits of a new humanity. For this purpose God called them through the proclamation of Christ Jesus. God's action in us is necessary but not causally sufficient. One is saved by responding to the work of God in one's life.

If we prefer the reading in verse 13 which says, not "first-fruits," but God chose you "from the beginning" to be saved (the manuscript evidence is evenly divided), the meaning would not change because it has always been God's purpose to save sinners in this way. God did choose a community in Christ pre-temporally which gets actualized in history by the work of the Spirit and through people's faith. Both facets must be present. In some of its forms, synergism must be resisted but not in every form. Augustine's extreme rejection of it has been a terrible burden for the churches. Fortunately, his radical monergism of salvation was rejected by the Eastern church and was never completely accepted by the Western churches. And although important to the conservative reformers, it was powerfully critiqued by Wesley and replaced by an evangelical synergism which is by now, I think, nearly universally accepted.

In 2 Timothy, Paul remarks that God "saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Tim. 1:9). Here Paul is affirming that God's call to salvation does not result from the works that we do but from God's own loving heart according to a plan which was put into effect before history started. Before creation, God elected Jesus Christ and all of us in him to be his elect people.

In a mysterious text the Lord Jesus says to the apostles, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matt. 13:11 and parallels, Mark 4:11 and Luke 8:10). In context, Jesus is giving his disciples insight into the

in-breaking of the kingdom of God. They are wondering how it is that some are given to know and some not. (This is a question which still puzzles.) The truth is that in God's purpose those who reject the truth in Jesus, who turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to it, do not find salvation. His parables reveal the truth to those who have eyes to see and ears to hear but does not do so for those with calloused hearts. Those with hardened hearts bring judgment on themselves. Jesus did not make them blind; he speaks in this way because they are blind. We should not interpret the phrase "it is given" to refer to a divine choice to save or to damn. Those who respond to the message are blessed and stand to gain more insight; while those who reject the truth doom themselves and never grow insight. God's rejection of anyone is always and only a response to man's prior rejection of him.

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "Everything that the Father gives me will come to me and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37). It sounds like a done deal, doesn't it? But notice that it's everything (neuter) not everybody which is the Father's gift, calling attention to the collective aspect of the gift. God gives Jesus, among other things, a company of believers, and Jesus will not reject any of them who look to him and come to him.

Again Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me" (John 6:44). This is certainly true. Apart from prevenient grace, no one can come to Jesus. This is a central truth shared by us all. But there is no reason to suppose that this is a selective or irresistible drawing or pulling. If it were saying that, it would lead to universal salvation, since (later on) Jesus says he will "draw" everyone (John 12:32). Jesus is not saying that God only draws some and them in a coercive manner while abandoning the rest. He is simply saying that there is no salvation apart from the divine initiative. As he says later on, "No one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father" (John 6:65). No one can obtain salvation without divine enablement. But that assistance is neither coercive nor irresistible. Anyone at all is eligible to be drawn by the Father.

Concerning unbelievers, Peter writes, "They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do" (1 Pet. 2:8). Is it that they are meant to stumble and disbelieve, or is it their disobedience which dooms them? Surely it is not that they were destined to disobey the word and thus stumble. Peter is saying that those who disobey the word of God are going to stumble—that's inevitable. If people will not accept the gospel, they are doomed. There is no thought about God's appointing some people to disobey. They stumble because of their disobedience, not because they are unpredestined. How could one seriously believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus would appoint people not to believe for his glory? What kind of glory is that?

Jesus said, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). What does he mean by that? In the context of the parable, there is a larger group who are invited but prove unworthy and a smaller group who respond to the invitation. The chosen ones are marked out as God's elect because they respond in the proper way. They came to the supper and wore the prescribed wedding garment. The parable makes plain that any who were not among the "chosen" were unchosen because they refused the call. It was in their power to be among the chosen, but they preferred to remain aloof. God calls us, but whether to associate with the elect body or not is ours to decide. God issues the call, but it is up to us to be among the elect. The challenge is not to remain aloof or hang around outside the banquet hall.

Luke reports that in Antioch Paul and Silas "related all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith for the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). In saying that God "opened the door of faith," were they making a predestinarian statement? I don't think so. They were simply reporting how God had now opened up possibilities of missionary work among the Gentiles.

Now that most of the Jews had declined the gospel, the way was open to the Gentiles. In this case, God brought good out of evil. Now the doors of the kingdom are thrown open to any and all who believe.

Jesus said to the disciples, “You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). Jesus chose these men to be disciples and to be his friends, not servants. Therefore, he was telling them everything he was doing and everything he had heard from the Father. He has chosen and appointed them to join him in his mission. Being chosen for salvation does not come into the picture. This is a vocational election to go and bear lasting fruit as his disciples.

Jesus says, “The Son gives life to whomever he wishes” (John 5:21). Of course Jesus gives life to whomsoever he chooses, but who are they? They are those who honor him by hearing his word and believing. There is no secret election here. There is a conditional element; honoring Christ is the important issue, and this was precisely what his opponents were not doing. The way to life is faith in Jesus. He does not give it to a select few who have been arbitrarily favored. No, Jesus gives life to all who believe. These are the terms of the deal.

John records, “They could not believe, because Isaiah also said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts” (John 12:39). Does this mean that God prevented the Jews from responding? How could anyone suppose that? Their nonresponse was due to their hard-heartedness. If and when God hardens people, it comes as a response to prior unbelief and disobedience, and there was a precedent in Isaiah’s day of it. How can anyone come to faith when they spurn God’s word? It would be a contradiction in terms. Continual rejection can only incur God’s hardening, such that faith becomes virtually impossible. It can consign a person to a state of intractable unbelief. God’s hardening of them was a response to the adamant self-will of these people. The person who rejects God’s word incurs a divine response where faith becomes an impossibility.

I know many other verses are quoted in this connection, but I have referred to enough of them to make my point. Scripture does not require believers to hold to the seemingly pernicious doctrine of soteriological double predestination, and what a relief! To get a sense of how problematic such a doctrine is, one only has to listen to what its defenders say. The best of them know well how heavily burdened it is with extraordinarily difficult problems. Calvin himself was candid when he admitted that it is “a dreadful decree” (*Institutes* 3.23.7). Millard Erickson concurs: “Of all the doctrines of the Christian faith, certainly one of the most puzzling and least understood is the doctrine of predestination. It seems to many to be obscure and bizarre.” With regard to these matters, John S. Feinberg writes, “Sometimes it would be easier not to be a Calvinist. An intellectual price tag comes with any conceptual scheme but the one that comes with Calvinism seems beyond the resources of human intelligence to pay.”⁶¹ It makes one long for them to be set free from this burden and for the world at large to be told how unnecessary all this is.

You can feel the pain when Calvin struggles with what he calls five “false accusations” which to the non-Calvinist seem to be very much on target (*Institutes* 3.23). Though he considers the doctrine “unjustly burdened” by them, the fact is that these criticisms seem well-founded to me. They are so insoluble that one can only admire Calvin for his honesty in not just sweeping the problems under the table. To his credit he doesn’t. First, he wonders if his doctrine of election does not make God a tyrant. This is a reasonable suspicion in light of the arbitrary way God is said to assign some to salvation and others to damnation. To be honest, it does sound “more like the caprice of a tyrant than the lawful sentence of a judge,” as he puts it. Even the sin

which makes men so hateful to God was, he says, ordained by God, and toward them God acts with neither mercy nor justice. In the end, given this doctrine, one can only give up and admit that God can do whatever he wants and that we have no right to question it. Suppose a man had two sons, both of them equally guilty of a misdemeanor, and he punished one but not the other. There's no getting around it—such a father is unfair. And if he gets glory from it, he ought to be ashamed.

Second, Calvin wonders whether his doctrine of election does not take all guilt and responsibility away from man. Indeed, it would seem to. After all, Adam's fall and all our unrighteousness are decreed by God and not merely permitted. (Calvin rejects the category of permission.) How then can we be said to have any role in our own calamity? This is a great mystery. Calvin's doctrine means that we have no choice in whether we are saved. We are treated as puppets and not as real persons. Our freedom is, as Helm delicately put it, "a deterministic freedom."⁶⁴ For most of us, this is no freedom at all. We have no meaningful responsibility in any of this.

Third, Calvin worries whether his doctrine might not suggest that God shows partiality. Yes, it would appear so. Though everyone needs mercy equally, divine mercy is dispensed only to some. Clearly this is unfair with respect to distributive justice. In this view, it means that many people will never have an opportunity to be saved. This makes God a respecter of persons and partial. God does play favorites and loves men and women unequally. This would involve God in unjust judgments contrary to Scripture (Lev. 19:15; Acts 10:34–35). Calvin has the burden of retributive justice, which lacks a basis in human responsibility, and also the burden of distributive justice, which is dispensed arbitrarily.

Fourth, Calvin worries that his doctrine of election might destroy zeal for an upright life. Indeed, if God has decided either death or life for everyone unconditionally, it makes no difference how we conduct ourselves, since the predestination cannot be helped or hindered. It would seem to put any sense of responsibility into jeopardy. It would seem to discourage any and all motives to exertion. What would be the basis for preaching the gospel to the nonelect?

Fifth, in a similar vein, he asks whether it would not make admonitions meaningless and whether it might not be unfavorable to good morality? It would seem to do so if the means as well as the ends are predetermined. (Thankfully, we humans do not always follow the logic of our presuppositions and are saved from their dire consequences.)

The most troubling aspect of Calvin's position is not mentioned. His doctrine of double predestination contradicts the universal salvific will of God which lies at the heart of the gospel. Paul writes that God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). He also states, "We have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). He writes, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all" (Titus 2:11). And Peter writes that God does not want "any to perish" (2 Pet. 3:9). Although Calvin's view claims to be based on the Bible, it is not. In teaching that grace is given only to a limited group and that God passes over the rest of mankind, it is at odds with Scripture. It fails to do justice to the teachings of the Bible, in which God's will for the salvation of mankind is expressed. I. Howard Marshall writes, "We must be content simply to register our feeling of certainty that this is a false interpretation of the New Testament."

At stake is the loving character of God. Though God's love is central in worship and piety, there can be a disparity when it comes to theology. The tradition has had great difficulty handling this theme. Preferring abstract categories like immutability and/or apathy and/or sovereignty, it has driven love away from the center of the Christian message. It has not been

able to think of God along the lines of a personal, loving, and relational God. If we highlight the abstract categories, we will not be able to make the love of God primary and will find ourselves able to imagine a doctrine as awful as Augustine's. If you start with philosophy and allow natural theology to operate, you will have great difficulty in speaking of God's love as anything more than mere beneficence in which God cares for us but not about us. You will miss the deepest truth of all, that God is essentially relational and loving. Even theologies as good as Erickson's do not make the love of God primary but promote formal doctrines undergirded by philosophical assumptions which undermine the centrality of love. For John Frame, God's power, not God's love, is primary, and this is typical.⁶⁸

God is a triune communion of love who does not love merely occasionally or arbitrarily but essentially. We have a triune and relational God who creates out of love and for love. We have a God who brings into being significant others who can experience divine love and reciprocate it. Love is not just an attribute among many which may or not kick in. It is the nature of God and central to God's project. It's not just one of the *loci* but belongs to the structure, the point of integration and thematic unity. If you accept the biblical picture of divine love, you will find yourself needing to reconsider the abstract categories that have been used for God, and you will have nothing whatever to do with the horror of double predestination. Let us not start with the metaphysical being of God and then insert love somewhere down the line as an add-on. This is the heart of the matter: the triune God loves in freedom and longs for relationships with his significant creatures. God is for us; his "yes" is greater than our "no."

The grace and love of God are at stake. What I want to say with Jerry Walls is that "God will do everything he can, short of overriding freedom, to save all persons. Indeed, God will compensate for a lack of opportunity to receive salvation in this life and will make sure that all persons have a fair and full opportunity to receive the eternal life for which all persons were created. If this is so, then all persons will have the opportunity to experience full satisfaction and happiness. The only ones who will not do so will be those who freely and decisively refused the offer of grace."

Conclusion

In this essay, I have lifted up God's sovereign and unconditional election, which is corporate and vocational in nature, ecclesiological and missiological. It involves no horrible decree, no double predestination, and no God of doubtful character. My aim has been to formulate a doctrine which is truly God's election (that is, it is not our own self-election) and one which can be celebrated (that is, it is not an arbitrary selection). This subject constitutes a huge pastoral concern. I share Dave Hunt's lament when he writes, "My heart has been broken by Calvinism's misrepresentation of the God of the Bible and the excuse this has given atheists not to believe in him."

Exclusivity, in the sense of a restrictiveness of salvation, is a hard habit to break. Once people get it into their head that they are specially privileged, it is hard for them to remember that these privileges belong to others also. The Jews of the Old Testament believed that they were God's favorites and sometimes entertained the idea that he had no use for other nations. But God is not the special property of one group. Those who know God are meant to make him known. Divine election is a wonderful gospel doctrine. God has unconditionally elected a people

to serve as the vehicle of salvation for the whole of humanity. He has not limited his efforts to save a few individuals as an end in itself. His is an election without a shadow. God has chosen a people for the sake of all the nations. This interpretation of it upholds the perfect love and goodness of God. God's ways are fair; he saves all he possibly can. He does not leave anyone out arbitrarily.

Once you see divine election as the election of a people for the sake of everybody else, it becomes possible to say to all and sundry: you are all loved, you are all chosen to be God's children. Do not believe the lies that the world is telling you. Don't believe either the theological mistakes that create anxiety. Truth is, you are God's beloved. And your being chosen does not mean that others are not chosen, too. They, too, enjoy God's embrace. Therefore, I say to every reader: make your calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). Accept your vocation as a member of the elect body in Christ. Let us join in the original revolution and be a distinctive people and salt of the earth. Let us be a people who march to the beat of a different drummer.²⁵

²⁵ Cottrell, J. W., Pinnock, C. H., Reymond, R. L., Talbott, T. B., & Ware, B. A. (2006). [*Perspectives on election: five views*](#). (C. O. Brand, Ed.) (pp. 276–314). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

A Consistent Supralapsarian Perspective on Election

iv.

ROBERT L. REYMOND

In this essay I will argue over against Arminianism, Amyraldianism, infralapsarianism, and inconsistent supralapsarianism the case for consistent supralapsarianism, the view of the order of decretal elements in God's plan of salvation that contends that, because the biblical God as a God of eternal purpose was governed in everything he planned by the purposive principle, to bring glory to himself as the God of grace, he placed the salvation of certain particular fallen men by Christ at the forefront of everything else in the plan as its end and arranged all the means to achieve that end in a retrograde order.

Of course, when the average Christian today hears the phrase, "God's plan of salvation," most likely he will think of the three or four things that a gospel tract he has read declares that the sinner must do in order to be saved, such as: (1) "You must acknowledge that you are a sinner and need to be saved," (2) "You must believe that Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sins," (3) "You must ask Christ to forgive you of your sins," and (4) "You must put your trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord."

While these are things that the sinner must surely do in order to be saved, they hardly constitute the content of God's "plan of salvation." And it is only a debased theological perception, but one quite current in our time, that would suggest that it is. What the expression has more properly designated since the days of the Reformation is "the order of the decrees" in the mind of the one living and true God of eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11).

Of course, most Christians today have given little or no thought to the subject even though only slight reflection should lead any Christian to conclude that it would be an irresponsible if not an irrational God who would create the world and direct its course of events with no prior plan or purpose behind such activity—or who would not direct the world he created at all. The Bible, however, has a great deal to say—much more than one might suppose at first blush—about the divine purpose standing behind and governing this world and the men who inhabit it. Benjamin B. Warfield has justly remarked about God's plan:

That God acts upon a plan in all his activities is already given in Theism. On the establishment of a personal God, this question is closed. For person means purpose: precisely what distinguishes a person from a thing is that its modes of action are purposive, that all it does is directed to an end and proceeds through choice of means to that end... If we believe in a personal God, then, and much more if, being Theists, we believe in the immediate control by this personal God of the world he has made, we must believe in a plan underlying all that God does, and therefore also in a plan of salvation. The only question that can arise concerns not the reality but the nature of this plan.

This being so, our present purpose will be to guide the reader through the labyrinth of intricate issues and details of what I believe is one of the most important (and surely one of the most fascinating) topics that Scripture would give any man warrant to study—what Warfield describes as the *nature* of the eternal plan of salvation or more technically the specific order of the elements in the plan.

That God from all eternity freely and unchangeably decreed whatever comes to pass in earth history is a given in Reformed Christian theism. That he did so by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, yet so that neither is he the author of sin, nor is violence done to the will

of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away but rather established, is also a given of Reformed Christian theism. In sum, for Reformed Christianity God is the absolute sovereign of the entire universe, both providentially and soteriologically.

Accordingly, Reformed Christians believe that every Christian should have a God-centered theology. And if he gives the Bible its due, not only will his theology be God-centered, but the gospel he espouses will uphold the sovereign grace of God in all its purity. He will reject every suggestion that men contribute anything ultimately determinative to their salvation. He will have discovered from his study of holy Scripture that just as the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, so also the chief end of God is to glorify and to enjoy himself forever. He will have learned from Scripture that God loves himself with a holy love, that he loves himself with “all his heart, soul, mind, and strength,” that he himself is at the center of his affections, and that the impulse that drives him and the goal he pursues in everything he does is his own glory!

To illustrate, the biblically informed Christian will know that God created all things for his own glory (Isa. 43:7, 21). More specifically, he will know, in order that God might show forth through a redeemed community, that is, his church, his “many-splendored” wisdom to the principalities and powers in heavenly realms (Eph. 3:9–10), that in the Old Testament he chose Israel for his renown and praise and honor (Jer. 13:11), that it was for his name’s sake and to make his mighty power known that he delivered his ancient people again and again after they had rebelled against him (Ps. 106:7–8), and that it was for the sake of his name that he did not reject them (1 Sam. 12:20–22), spared them again and again (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44), and had mercy upon them and did not pursue them with destruction to the uttermost (Isa. 48:8–11). He will have learned from holy Scripture that it was for his own glory that God did all these things (Ezek. 36:16–21, 22–23, 24–32). He will know too that Jesus came the first time to glorify God in doing his Father’s will and work (John 17:4, 6), that every detail of the salvation that Jesus procured and that he himself enjoys God arranged in order to evoke from him the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14), and that Jesus is coming again “to be glorified in his saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed” (2 Thess. 1:9–10 NASB).

Recognizing this—that according to holy Scripture God in all his activity in the world is ultimately concerned to glorify himself in all that he does—the biblically informed Christian, standing in the tradition of the great Reformers of the sixteenth century, will not hesitate to declare that this same concern—to glorify himself—is central to God’s eternal plan.

Accordingly, he will not hesitate to declare, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, that “God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (III/i), and that by the decree of God, “for the manifestation of his own glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death” (III/iii)—without controversy, surely one of the “deeps” of the divine wisdom.

Concerning those of mankind predestinated unto life, the biblically informed Christian will joyously proclaim that “God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen [them], in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace” (III/v).

Concerning “the rest of mankind,” the biblically informed Christian true to God’s Word will solemnly yet faithfully preach and teach that “God was pleased, according to the unsearchable

counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice” (III/vii).

Of course, these two groups making up the totality of mankind, he will also teach, do not arrive at their divinely determined destinies arbitrarily with no interest on God’s part with respect to what they would believe or how they would behave before they got there, for he is aware that “as God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto” (III/vi), such as the Son’s atoning work, the Father’s effectual calling of the elect through the Spirit’s regenerating work, by which work repentance and faith are wrought in the human heart, the Father’s act of justification and the Spirit’s work of sanctification.

And the biblically informed Christian is also aware, while it is true that God’s determination to pass by the rest of mankind (this “passing by” theologians designate “preterition” from the Latin *praeteritio*) is grounded solely in the unsearchable counsel of his own will, that his determination to ordain those whom he passed by to dishonor and wrath (condemnation) took into account the condition which alone deserves his wrath—the fact of their sin.

This eternal plan or purpose (Eph. 3:11), the biblically informed Christian will affirm, God began to execute by his work of creation (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 8). He will also affirm that from the creation of the world to this present moment God has continued to execute his eternal purpose to bring glory to himself through his providential exercise of his almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness, this his providence extending itself to all his creatures and all their actions, “even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such [permission] as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them [all the sins of angels and men], in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends” (Westminster Confession of Faith, V/iv).

Adam’s sin, he will affirm, “God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsel [which counsel in its perfection eternally existed before the creation of the world], to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory” (Westminster Confession of Faith, VI/i). By his sin Adam fell from his original state of righteousness (*status integritatis*)—a state in which it was possible for him to sin or not to sin (*posse peccare aut posse non peccare*)—and so “became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the parts and faculties of soul and body” (*status corruptionis*) (Westminster Confession of Faith, VI/ii)—a state in which it was not possible for him not to sin (*non posse non peccare*). And he will declare that, because Adam was the covenantal (federal) representative head of his race by divine arrangement, his first sin was imputed and his corruption conveyed to all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation (Westminster Confession of Faith, VI/iii).

Accordingly, all mankind (with the sole exception of Christ who did not descend from Adam by ordinary generation) God regards as sinners in Adam. And because of their covenantal representation in Adam’s sin (their “original sin”) as well as their own sin and corruption, all men are continually falling short of the ethical holiness of God and the righteous standards of his law (Rom. 3:23) and thus are under his sentence of death.

But in accordance with his gracious elective purpose, God, the biblically informed Christian with great delight will also preach and teach, is pleased to save his elect, and to save them forever, by Christ’s atoning death in their behalf and in their stead and by the Holy Spirit’s application of the benefits of Christ’s redeeming virtues to them. And though the elect do

assuredly trust in Christ to the saving of their souls, yet they contribute nothing ultimately determinative of that salvation since even their trust in Christ is a saving gift (Eph. 2:8). All that they bring to their salvation is their sin and moral pollution from which they need to be saved. Salvation from beginning to end belongs ultimately and wholly, then, to the Lord (Jon. 2:10), to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

All of these articles of faith the biblically informed Christian will hold to be true to the teachings of holy Scripture. He will, in short, espouse the Reformed faith that is in turn simply the faith of holy Scripture itself. And all this, I say, is a given of Reformed theism.

Before we address the order of the elements in God's eternal plan of salvation, however, it is important that we first set forth the significant biblical evidence for the *fact* of his eternal plan of salvation itself and the central aspects of its content.

The Fact and Central Elements of God's Eternal Plan

The advanced student of theology may be tempted to skip this section and go directly to the discussion of the order of God's decrees, but a review of the pertinent New Testament material will be beneficial to him if it does nothing more than remind him of the fullness of Scripture's witness to the fact of God's eternal plan. As for the reader who may have a certain reticence, if not total resistance, toward any such discussion of God's decrees, even were it conducted by the saintliest man among us, that would seek to understand the logical order in which God planned what he did, a simple rehearsal of some of the basic biblical material about the plan should help to ease his suspicions that men who do so are "rushing in where angels fear to tread." For what God has revealed concerning his plan he surely desires people to attempt to understand.

With regard to the fact itself, for the mind informed by Scripture there can be no question. As Warfield has noted, for the Christian mind "the only question that can arise concerns not the reality but the nature of this plan." And once the reticent reader clearly sees that the eternal plan of God has several major elements that pertain to him and begins to reflect upon the discussion that follows this section, he may even become convinced that it is imperative that he subscribe to a particular order for the several elements of the plan.

God's "Eternal Purpose"

Perhaps it will reassure the theological student for whom this entire subject is new if we begin by considering a general term found in Ephesians 3:11 (NIV). Here Paul speaks of God's "*eternal purpose* which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord." Five brief comments are in order here.

First, the Greek word translated quite properly here as "purpose" (it may also be translated "plan" or "resolve") is in the singular: God has one overarching purpose or plan. This plan, of course, has many elements, as we shall see.

Second, Paul describes God's purpose or plan as his "*eternal purpose*," literally, "purpose of the ages," intending by the Greek adjectival genitive that there was never a moment when God had a blank mind or a time when God's plan with all of its parts was not fully determined. He never "finally made up his mind" about anything. This is just to say that God has *always* had the plan and that within the plan itself there is no chronological factor *per se*. The several parts of the plan must be viewed then as standing in a teleological rather than a chronological relationship to one another.

Third, the person and work of Jesus Christ are clearly central to God's "eternal plan" because Paul says that God "accomplished" or "effected" it "in the Christ, Jesus our Lord." The closely related earlier statement in Ephesians 1:9 echoes the same truth: Paul states there that "the mystery of [God's] will, according to his *good pleasure*" he *purposed* to put into effect in Christ—that "purposed good pleasure" being "to bring all things in heaven and on earth under one head in Christ." Here we learn that God's eternal plan that governs all his ways and works in heaven and on earth, he purposed to fulfill in Christ. Clearly, Christ, as God's Alpha and Omega, is at the beginning, the center, and the end of his eternal purpose.

Fourth, this eternal purpose or plan, directly and centrally concerned as it is with Jesus Christ, is accordingly directly and centrally concerned with soteric issues as well. In the verses immediately preceding this reference to God's "eternal purpose which he accomplished in the Christ" Paul declares that God "created all things in order that through the [redeemed] church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (3:9–10). He then follows this statement with the words of 3:11 to the effect that the indicated activity in 3:9–10 was "*according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in the Christ, Jesus our Lord.*" The church of Jesus Christ—God's redeemed community—also clearly stands in Jesus Christ, then, at the beginning, the center, and the end of God's eternal purpose.

This soteric feature of the divine purpose receives support from the other passages in the Pauline corpus where he refers to God's "purpose." In Romans 8:28 (NASB) Paul declares that Christians were effectually "called [to salvation] *according to [his] purpose.*" In Ephesians 1:11 he says that Christians were made heirs of God, "being predestined *according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*" (NKJV). And in 2 Timothy 1:9 Paul affirms that "God saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but *according to his own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity*" (NASB).

Finally, we learn from Romans 9:11–13 that the elective principle in God's eternal purpose serves and alone comports with the grace principle which governs all true salvation. Here we see the connection between God's grace and his elective purpose dramatically exhibited in God's discrimination between Jacob and Esau, which discrimination, Paul points out, occurred "*before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad*" (NIV; see Gen. 25:22–23). Paul elucidates the *rationale* standing behind and governing the divine discrimination signaled in the phrase, "in order that God's '*according to election purpose*' might stand [that is, might remain immutable]," in terms of the following phrase—"not *according to works but according to him who calls [unto salvation],*" which is equivalent to saying, "not according to works but according to grace."

Paul teaches here that God's elective purpose is not, as in paganism, "a blind unreadable fate" which "hangs, an impersonal mystery, even above the gods," but rather that it serves the intelligible purpose of "bringing out the gratuitous character of grace." In fact, Paul will refer two chapters later specifically to "the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5 NKJV).

From just this much data we can conclude that God has a single eternal purpose or plan at the center of which is Jesus Christ and in him his church, and which entails accordingly also at its center such soteric issues as God's election, predestination, and effectual call of sinners to himself for salvation in order to create through them the church, which in turn serves as the vehicle for showing forth, not the glory of man (see Rom. 9:12; 2 Tim. 1:9), but the "many sides" of his own infinite grace and wisdom (Eph. 3:10), this latter term a synonym for the plan itself.

Christ's Cross Work in the Plan

In Luke 22:22 (AT) Jesus taught his disciples that “the Son of Man is going [to the cross] *in accordance with the [divine] decree.*” Echoing the same truth later, in Acts 2:23 (AT) Peter proclaimed: “This one [Jesus], *by the determining purpose and foreknowledge* of God, was handed over, [and] you with wicked hands put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” In both Jesus’ and Peter’s statements, the church finds indisputable reason for believing that the cross of Christ was central to the eternal plan of God. Accordingly, in Acts 4:24–28 (AT) the entire church affirmed that Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and leaders of Israel, had done to Jesus “what your hand and your will *predestined* should happen.”

And while one cannot dogmatize here, it is possible that it is God’s eternal plan of salvation in and by Christ’s cross work to which Hebrews 13:20 (NASB) refers when it speaks of “the blood of the *eternal* covenant.” If this is its referent, then again Christ’s cross work is represented as a central aspect of God’s eternal purpose. One learns from these verses that not only Christ but also his cross work (that is, his sacrificial death in the stead of others) was an integral part of the divine decree.

God's Foreknowledge and Predestination in the Plan

From Romans 8:29–30 we learn of other aspects of God’s eternal purpose or plan. Paul tells the Christian that “[the ones] whom [the Father] *foreknew* (that is, set his heart upon in covenantal love), he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son, ... and whom he *predestined*, those he *called*, etc.” Two things are clear from this.

First, we learn that in his eternal plan (note the *pro*-prefixes [“before”] attached to the first two verbs) God “foreknew” (that is, “set his heart upon”) certain people in covenantal love and “predestined” their conformity to his Son’s likeness. And in this context (Rom. 8:33) Paul designates those whom God has always so loved as “God’s elect.”

Why have we interpreted the first verb “foreknew” (*proegno*) as we have? Reformed theologians have uniformly recognized that the Hebrew verb *yda* (“to know”—see its occurrences in Gen. 4:1; 18:19; Exod. 2:25; Pss. 1:6; 144:3; Jer. 1:5; Hos. 13:5; Amos 3:2) and the Greek verb *ginosko* (“to know”—see its occurrences in Matt. 7:22–23; 1 Cor. 8:3; 2 Tim. 2:19) can mean something on the order of “to know intimately,” “to set one’s affections upon,” or “to have special loving regard for” and that the verb *proegno* intends something approximating this meaning rather than the sense of mere prescience in Romans 8:29.

Reformed theologians also understand Paul to mean here that God did not set his love upon the elect from all eternity because of foreseen faith or good works or perseverance in either of them or any other condition or cause in them moving him thereunto. To assert that he did, they insist, not only intrudes circumstances and conditions into the context which are absent from it but also flies in the face of the teachings of Romans 9:11–13 that election is according to grace and not according to works, of Ephesians 1:4 that God chose us before the creation of the world “that we should *be* holy” (NKJV) and not because he saw that we *were* holy, and of 2 Timothy 1:9 that he saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of *his own* purpose and grace.

Second, we learn also from the tight grammatical construction between the verbs “predestined” and “called” that what God planned in eternity, he executes in this created world. So there is a clear connection between his plan and his execution of his plan. He is the author of

both. The former is the “blueprint” of the latter. The latter is the “historical construction” of the former.

God's Election of Some Men in the Plan

In Ephesians 1:4–5 (AT) Paul tells us that God the Father “chose us in him [Christ] *before* the creation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him, in love *having predestinated* us unto sonship by adoption through Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Here in this great doxology to God the Father, Paul avers in no uncertain terms that from all eternity God has chosen the Christian to holiness and predestinated him to sonship. And he did so, Paul writes, “according to the good pleasure of his will” (see also in this same regard Eph. 1:9, 11). And here, writes Murray,

it is to trifle with the plain import of the terms, and with the repeated emphasis, to impose upon the terms any determining factor arising from the will of man. If we say or suppose that the differentiation which predestination involves proceeds from or is determined by some sovereign decision on the part of men themselves, then we contradict what the apostle by eloquent reiteration was jealous to affirm. If he meant to say anything in these expressions in verses 5, 9, and 11, it is that God's predestination, and his will to salvation, proceeds from the pure sovereignty and absolute determination of his counsel. It is the unconditioned and unconditional election of God's grace.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 (AT), the last verse that we will consider in this connection, Paul informs his readers—whom he describes as “brothers who have been loved by the Lord”—that “God chose you from the beginning unto salvation.” This verse, in addition to the previous verses cited, underscores the truth that from all eternity God had determined upon a course of salvific activity for himself that would result in the salvation of his beloved children from sin and death.

From all this it should be clear that no Christian can legitimately doubt the fact or reality of God's eternal plan of salvation. When Reformed theologians speak, then, of God's eternal purpose or God's eternal plan of salvation, they refer to this eternal salvific decision-making on God's part concerning Christ and his cross work and the election and predestination of men to salvation in him. With this scriptural data before us, we may now turn to a discussion of the nature of God's eternal plan.

The Nature and Governing Principle of God's Eternal Plan

Among Reformed thinkers one may find essentially three basic perceptions of the nature of God's eternal plan of salvation: the Amyraldian, the infralapsarian, and the supralapsarian. I will discuss each of these in turn, anticipating that the reader will see by the time we reach the end of our discussion both the biblicality and the logic in the supralapsarian perception.

The Amyraldian Perception (the Inconsistent Governing Principle)

While all Reformed Christians are committed to the particularistic principle, that is to say, to the discriminating or electing element, in God's eternal purpose, some Reformed theologians

designated “Amyraldians” after Moise Amyraut (Amyraldus) (1596–1664) of the theological school of Saumur in France who developed the scheme (also known as “hypothetical universalists,” “post-redemptionists,” “ante-applicationists,” and “four-point Calvinists” for reasons which will become clear later) depart from classic Reformed particularism and unite with Arminians in their view of Christ’s cross work. They maintain that the Bible teaches that Christ died for all men without exception. Here, they maintain, is at least one aspect of the divine activity looking toward the salvation of everyone that is universal in its design. In other words, Amyraldians maintain that while the Bible does indeed declare that in his eternal plan of salvation God discriminates among men and chooses an elect who alone will be saved, yet Christ died savingly not just for God’s chosen elect but for all men without exception.¹⁴ But how can this universalistic aspect of the divine activity be adjusted to the particularistic aspect of the divine activity that, after all, is the hallmark of the Reformed (or Calvinistic) soteriological vision?

Amyraldian theologians resolve for themselves the tension between soteric particularism on the one hand (which they are convinced the Bible teaches) and the universalistic design of Christ’s cross work on the other (which they are equally convinced the Bible also teaches) by analyzing God’s eternal plan of salvation and by positing a specific arrangement or order for its several parts or elements. This order, they claim, justifies their soteric vision.

The Amyraldian arrangement of the several major elements or decrees of God’s eternal plan of salvation is as follows: First, the decree to create the world and (all) men; second, the decree that (all) men would fall; third, the decree to redeem (all) men by the cross work of Christ; fourth, the election of some fallen men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others); fifth, the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to the elect.

A cursory analysis of the Amyraldian scheme will show, because they postpone the discriminating decree to the fourth position, that the first three decrees are necessarily universal with respect to their referents since God has not yet introduced any discrimination into the plan (which explains my insertion of the word “all” in parentheses in each of them), with only the last two being particular in regard to their referents, namely, the discriminating decree to elect some men to salvation that comes immediately after the decree to redeem men (hence the scheme’s name “post-redemptionism”) and immediately before the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits (hence its name “ante-applicationism”) and the particularistic application decree itself.

In other words, Amyraldians postulate that in the one “eternal purpose” of God, his first decree pertains to the creation of the world and of all men who would populate it. His second decree pertains to the fall of Adam and in him of all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation. The third decree pertains to the cross work of Christ, and since no “distinguishing decree” yet appears in the order, the referent of its work is all men without exception or distinction. Amyraldians contend that the biblical passages that ascribe a universal reference to Christ’s cross work (see “all men” in John 12:32; Rom. 5:18; 8:32; 11:32; 2 Cor. 5:14–15; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; and “world” in John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:19) must be taken seriously and reflect an order of the decrees in which the decree to save mankind by Christ’s cross work necessarily precedes the decree to discriminate among people.

Because, however, some biblical passages also clearly mention the fact of election, Amyraldians acknowledge that the election factor must also be taken seriously and given a place in the eternal plan of salvation. Therefore, they willingly include it in their conception of the plan of salvation, placing the electing decree that discriminates among men *after* the “cross work decree” (which conception, they contend, preserves the cross’s “unlimited” design and justifies

the presence of the biblical passages that speak of Christ's cross work in universal terms) and *before* the decree concerning its application. The upshot of the Amyraldian arrangement is that the actual execution of the divine discrimination comes not at the point of Christ's redemptive accomplishment which is universal in intent but at the point of the Spirit's redemptive application which is limited to the elect.

While their conception satisfies the Amyraldians and preserves for them the right to regard themselves as "Calvinistic" (since they grant a place in their arrangement of elements for the particularistic principle which is the hallmark of Calvinism), those creedal churches within the Reformed world which have adopted the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith have uniformly rejected it, and in my opinion quite properly so, for three basic reasons.

First, Amyraldianism is a logically inconsistent form of Calvinism in that its scheme has the persons of the Godhead working at cross-purposes with one another: by decree the Son died with the intention to save all men, and by decree the Spirit savingly applies Christ's saving benefits to only some of those for whom Christ died. Each person's labor cancels out the intention of the other's labor.

Second, Amyraldianism is equally illogical in that it implies, because the Son and the Spirit by their respective labors are both simply executing the Father's "eternal purpose" for them, that an irrational element, which in effect imputes confusion to the divine purpose, resides in God, which in turn assaults the rational character of God and his eternal plan. Warfield rightly asks, "How is it possible to contend that God gave his Son to die for all men, alike and equally; and at the same time to declare that when he gave his Son to die, he already fully intended that his death should not avail for all men alike and equally, but only for some which he would select (which ... because he is God and there is no subsequence of time in his decrees, he had already selected) to be its beneficiaries?"

He answers his own question:

As much as God is God ... it is impossible to contend that God intends the gift of his Son for all men alike and equally and at the same time intends that it shall not actually save all but only a select body which he himself provides for it. The schematization of the order of decrees presented by the Amyraldians, in a word, necessarily implies a chronological relation of precedence and subsequence among the decrees [or the other alternative which, as we suggested above, is irrationality within the divine mind—RLR], the assumption of [either of] which abolishes God.

Third, when Amyraldians urge that the Bible teaches that both by divine decree and in history Christ's death, represented by it as unrestricted regarding its referents, was intended to save all men without exception (the doctrine of unlimited atonement), Amyraldianism must necessarily join forces with Arminian universalism and turn away altogether from a real substitutionary atonement "which is as precious to the Calvinist as is his particularism, and for the safeguard of which, indeed, much of his zeal for particularism is due." But this is to wound Christianity as the redemptive religion of God fatally at its heart, for (unless one is prepared to affirm the final universal salvation of all men) one cannot have an atonement of infinite intrinsic saving value, that is, an atonement that really saves, and at the same time an atonement of universal extension. One can have one or the other but not both. I will explain.

If Christ by his death actually propitiated God's wrath, reconciled God, and paid the penalty for sin (which is what I mean by an atonement of infinite intrinsic value), and if he sacrificially substituted himself *for (peri), on behalf of (huper), for the sake of (dia), and in the stead and*

place of (anti) sinners, then it follows that for all those for whom he substitutionally did his cross work he procured their salvation and guaranteed that they will be saved. But since neither Scripture, history, nor Christian experience will tolerate the conclusion that all men have become, are becoming, or shall become Christians, we must conclude that Christ did not savingly die for all men but for some men only—even God’s elect.

If, on the other hand, Christ did his work for all men without exception, and if he did not intend its benefits for any one man in any sense that he did not intend it for any and every other man distributively, since again neither Scripture, history, nor Christian experience will allow the conclusion that all men are saved, it necessarily follows that Christ actually died neither savingly nor substitutionally for any man since he did not do for those who are saved anything that he did not do for those who are lost, and the one thing that he did not do for the lost was save them. It also follows necessarily, since Christ by his death actually procured nothing that guarantees the salvation of any man, and yet some men are saved, that the most one can claim for his work is that he in some way made all men salvable. But the highest view of the atonement that one can reach by this path is the governmental view of the atonement that holds that Christ’s death actually paid the penalty for no person’s sin. What his death did was to demonstrate what sin deserves at the hand of the just governor and judge of the universe and thus preserves the honor of his government of human society when he forgives people.

This means, of course, that the actual salvation of those who are saved is ultimately rooted in and hangs decisively upon something other than the work of him who alone is able to save men, namely, in something that those who are saved do for themselves. In spite of this shortcoming, the governmental view insists that Christ’s death was intended only as a public display to the world of the suffering that God the just Governor of the universe thinks human sin deserves. While he could have simply bypassed his law’s moral demand, “the soul that sins, it shall die,” and forgiven mankind had he wanted to, that path would have had no value for human society.

Therefore, in order that society would take seriously the need to be morally governed by him, God, in the place of punishing sinners as he threatened he would do, substituted a great measure that was unpleasant and filled with grief for Christ. This “substitution” may appear on the surface to be redemptive on a universal scale, but it is hardly a substitutionary atonement since it does not save the world and the ground for the sinner’s forgiveness shifts to *his* repentance, *his* faith, *his* good works, and *his* perseverance in all of these! But this is just to eviscerate the Savior’s cross work of all of its intrinsic saving worth and to replace the Christosoteric vision of Scripture with the autosoteric vision of Pelagianism.

For these three reasons “consistent Calvinism” (Warfield’s description) has rejected Amyraldianism and followed two other proposed orders, traditionally known as “infralapsarianism” and “supralapsarianism,” in its arrangement of the decrees in the one “eternal purpose” of God. To a consideration of these proposed arrangements we will now turn.

The Infralapsarian Perception (the Historical Governing Principle)

The consentient testimony of consistent Calvinism, acutely aware of the pitfalls inherent within Amyraldianism, is that, regardless of the arrangement of the decrees to which one finally concludes, both the decree to save men by Christ and the decree to apply his saving benefits to them by the Holy Spirit must appear in the order of the decrees logically (not chronologically) after the distinguishing or electing decree. By this single adjustment all of the difficulties lurking within Amyraldianism are swept away. For now Christ dies for the elect, and the Spirit applies

his benefits to the elect, and both are working consistently together to fulfill the Father's single redemptive purpose—to save the elect. Accordingly, all consistent Calvinism raises God's discriminating decree from the fourth position, the position where Amyraldians insert it, at least to the third position in the order of decrees (as we shall see, supralapsarianism raises it even higher), as follows: First, the decree to create the world and (all) men; second, the decree that (all) men would fall; third (the discriminating decree), the election of some fallen men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others); fourth, the decree to redeem the elect by the cross work of Christ; fifth, the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to the elect.

The instructed Christian will immediately recognize in this proposed arrangement the Calvinistic scheme known as “sub-” or “infralapsarianism.” The terms literally mean “below [*sub*] or after [*infra*] the fall [*lapsus*]” and denote the position in the order of the decrees that the discriminating decree sustains to the lapsarian (fall) decree. As its name implies, this scheme contends that the discriminating decree must be inserted immediately *after* the decree that man would fall. Admittedly, in agreement with the Canons of Dort, most consistent Calvinists espouse this scheme because it represents God as distinguishing among men as sinners, which, they contend, represents God as both gracious and tender toward the elect sinner as well as holy and just toward the reprobated sinner. To advance the discriminating decree to any position *before* the decree respecting the fall, they argue against the supralapsarian (“before [*supra*] the fall [*lapsus*]”), depicts God as discriminating among men as men rather than as sinners (we will suggest later that there is a way to avoid this charge), which in turn makes God appear to be arbitrary, to say the least, if not also the author of sin.

Supralapsarian Calvinists have raised the following objections against the infralapsarian scheme: First, the infralapsarian scheme cannot account for the election and reprobation of angels. There are “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21 NIV), but they were not elected out of a totality of their fallen order as the infralapsarian scheme affirms is true of elect men, inasmuch as the elect angels never fell. Moreover, the angels who fell, though they are creatures of God as equally in need of redemption as are fallen men, will know no divine efforts to redeem them (see Heb. 2:16; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Apparently, for reasons sufficient to himself, God simply by decree granted the grace of perseverance in holiness to some angels and denied it to the others. If God did so relative to the destiny of angels, did he not do so, to use the infralapsarian's word, “arbitrarily”? And if he did so, is there any reason he should not have done so regarding the destiny of humans? (I personally think the more appropriate, nonpejorative word that should be used here is “sovereignly” rather than “arbitrarily.”)

It is true, of course, that the ground of God's dealings toward one order of his creatures (angels) may not be the same for his dealings toward another order of his creatures (humanity), but if any weight is given to it at all, it is a fact that the analogy between the elect angels and elect humans favors more the supralapsarian scheme (to be presented shortly) than it does the infralapsarian scheme.

Second, although the infralapsarian's concern to represent God's reprobation of some sinners as an act of justice (evidenced in his placing the discriminating decree after the decree concerning the fall) issues a proper caution against any depiction of God which would suggest that he acts toward men with purposeless caprice, nevertheless, if he intends by this to suggest that God's reprobation of these sinners is *solely* an act of justice (condemnation alone) which in no sense entails also the logically prior sovereign determination to “pass them by” and to leave them in their sin (preterition), then he makes reprobation solely a *conditional* decree, a position

in accord with the Arminian contention that God determines the destiny of no man, that he merely decreed to react in mercy or justice to the actions of men.

But then, as soon as the infralapsarian acknowledges (as he must if he would distance himself from Arminianism) that sin is not the sole ultimate cause of reprobation and that God who works all things according to the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:11) decreed the fall of man and by his decree of reprobation, which entails both preterition (the “passing by”) and condemnation, determined the destiny of the non-elect sinner, his insistence over against the supralapsarian that the discriminating decree must not be advanced to any position prior to the decree concerning the fall lest God appear to be responsible for sin and arbitrary in his dealings with men loses all of its force. Why? Because the infralapsarian also must envision God’s preterition regarding the non-elect as ultimately being grounded wholly and solely in his sovereign will, apart from consideration of the fact of their sin.

Consequently, the infralapsarian position simply does not relieve the difficulty that it seeks to address. Besides, whether God discriminates among men viewed simply as men (one supralapsarian arrangement admittedly does indeed suggest this) or among men viewed as sinners makes little difference from the perspective of every fallen human objection and consideration not grounded in Holy Scripture. To the rebellious objector a God who determines to leave even one man in his sin when he could save him from it is hardly less arbitrary and cruel than a God who determined some men unto damnation from the beginning.

In other words, from the perspective of bare sinful human considerations, God is still “arbitrary” if he was in a position to determine to save every sinner but determined to save only some sinners and to leave the rest in their sin and then to condemn them for it. Berkhof rightly observes: “The Infralapsarian . . . cannot maintain the idea that reprobation is an act of divine justice pure and simple, contingent on the sin of man. In the last analysis, he, too, must declare that it is an act of God’s sovereign good pleasure, if he wants to avoid the Arminian camp. . . . [His] language may sound more tender than that of the Supralapsarians, but is also more apt to be misunderstood, and after all proves to convey the same idea.”

Third, espousing as the infralapsarian scheme does the view that the *historical* principle governs the order of the decrees and arranging as it does the order of the decrees accordingly in the order that reflects the temporal or historical order of the corresponding occurrences of the events which they determined (as indeed the Amyraldian scheme does also), this construction can show no purposive connection between the several parts of the plan *per se*. In a single, consistent, purposive plan, one may be pardoned if he assumes that any and every single member of the plan should logically necessitate the next member in the order so that there is a purposive cohesion to the whole. The historical arrangement simply cannot demonstrate, for example, why or how the decree to create necessitates the next decree concerning the fall, or why the decree concerning the fall necessitates the following particularizing decree.

Fourth, because the infralapsarian scheme can show no logical necessity between the first two decrees (the creation decree and the fall decree) and the three following soteric decrees, it “cannot give a specific answer to the question why God decreed to create the world and to permit the fall.” It must refer these elements to some general purpose in God (such as his general glory as Creator) that has no discernible connection to the central redemptive elements in the “eternal purpose” of God, which severance between creation and redemption could justify the dualism of a natural theology. Berkhof registers this objection in these words:

The Infralapsarian position does not do justice to the unity of the divine decree, but represents the different members of it too much as disconnected parts. First God decrees to

create the world for the glory of his name, which means among other things that he determined that his rational creatures should live according to the divine law implanted in their hearts and should praise their Maker. Then he decreed to permit the fall, whereby sin enters the world. This seems to be a frustration of the original plan, or at least an important modification of it, since God no more decrees to glorify himself by the voluntary obedience of all his rational creatures. Finally, there follows the decrees of election and reprobation, which mean only a partial execution of the original plan.

Fifth, the infralapsarian scheme, by espousing the historical order of the decrees, reverses the manner in which the rational mind plans an action. The infralapsarian scheme moves from means (if, indeed, the earlier decrees can be regarded as means at all, disconnected as they are in purpose from the later decrees) to the end, whereas “in planning the rational mind passes from the end to the means in a retrograde movement, so that what is first in design is last in accomplishment,” and, conversely, what is last in design is first in accomplishment.

Sixth, the infralapsarian scheme does not come to grips with the teaching of certain key Scripture passages as well as the supralapsarian scheme does. In Romans 9:14–18 and 9:19–24 Paul responds to two objections to his teaching on divine election that he frames in question form: (1) “What then shall we say? Is God unjust?”—the question of divine fairness, and (2) “One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will?’ ”—the question of human freedom. Now it seems to the supralapsarian, if Paul had been thinking along infralapsarian lines, that he would have found it sufficient to answer both questions something like this: “Who are you, O sinner, to question God’s justice. Since we all fell into sin, God could justly reject us all. As it is, in mercy he has determined to save some of us while leaving the rest to their just condemnation.” But this he did not do. As we shall see, in response to both objections he simply appealed to God’s absolute, sovereign right to do with men as he pleases in order to accomplish his own holy ends.

In Romans 9:15–18, in response to the first question (divine fairness), contrasting Moses—his example of the elect man in whose behalf God has sovereignly determined to display his mercy (9:15; see also 9:23)—and Pharaoh—his example of the non-elect man whom God has sovereignly determined to raise up *in order to* (*hopos*) show by him his power and to publish his name in all the earth (9:17; see also 9:22), Paul concludes: “Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden” (9:18 NIV). As we just said, here he responds to the question concerning the justice of God in view of his elective and reprobative activity by a straightforward appeal to God’s sovereign right to do with men as he pleases in order that he might exhibit the truth that all spiritual good in man is the fruit of his grace alone.

Then in Romans 9:20b–24 (NIV), in response to the second question (human freedom), after his indignant, stinging rebuke, “Who are you, O man, to talk back to God,” Paul employs the familiar Old Testament metaphor of the potter and the clay (see Isa. 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Jer. 18:6) and asks, “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?” Paul teaches here (1) that the potter sovereignly makes both kinds of vessels, and (2) that he makes both out of the same lump of clay. The metaphor would suggest that the determination of a given vessel’s nature and purpose—whether for noble or for common use—is the potter’s sovereign right, apart from any consideration of the clay’s prior condition. This suggests in turn that God sovereignly determined the number, nature, and purpose of both the elect and the non-elect in order to accomplish his own holy ends, apart from consideration of any prior condition which may or may not have been resident within them

(see Rom. 9:11–13). Proverbs 16:4, in my opinion, aptly expresses the intention of the metaphor: “The Lord has made everything for his own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

So here, as earlier, in response to the second objection to his doctrine Paul simply appeals again to God’s sovereign right to do with men as he pleases in order to accomplish his own holy ends. And he registers his appeal without qualification even though he fully understands that the “man who does not understand the depths of divine wisdom, nor the riches of election, who wants only to live in his belief in the non-arbitrariness of his own works and morality, can see only arbitrariness in the sovereign freedom of God.”

This feature of the metaphor means then, at the very least, that there is no scriptural compulsion to place the discriminating decree in the order of decrees after the decree respecting the fall. Furthermore, it lays stress on the divine will as the sole, ultimate, determinative cause for the distinction between elect and non-elect, one point the supralapsarian scheme emphasizes.

The infralapsarian agrees, of course, that the divine will is the sole determinative cause for the distinction between elect and non-elect, but he insists that the “lump” about which Paul speaks here is mankind already viewed by God as fallen (see, for example, the commentaries by Hodge and Murray, *in loc.*). But if this were the case, God would only need to make one kind of vessel from the lump—the vessels for noble use. He would not need to make the vessels for common use—the “sinful” lump would already represent them. As it is, the metaphor expressly affirms that the potter makes both kinds of vessels from the lump, suggesting that the lump has no particular character beforehand—good or bad—which would necessarily determine the potter toward a given vessel’s creation for one kind of use or the other. This feature of the metaphor also favors the supralapsarian scheme.

Then, in Ephesians 3:9–10 (AT) Paul teaches that God “created all things, in order that now through the church the many-sided wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Here supralapsarians urge, Paul teaches that God created the universe, which creative act reflects his prior creation decree, not as an end in itself but as a means to an end. And what end is that? Elsewhere (Rom. 1:20), Paul teaches that by glorifying its maker’s power and “architectural skill” (no work of God, simply by virtue of the fact that it is his work, can avoid doing so), creation serves the condemnatory aspect of the particularizing decree by leaving men who would plead ignorance of God in the final judgment “*without excuse.*”

But in Ephesians 3:9–10 Paul affirms that the end for which all things were created is not simply the end of glorifying God as maker in order to leave men without excuse when he condemns them, but rather, and more primarily, of providing the arena and all the necessary conditions for God’s redemptive activity to manifest itself in order that he might show forth, through the redeemed church, his many-sided wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm.

Further indications that in his “eternal purpose” God integrated the purpose of creation and the creation ordinances into the more primary redemptive plan which he accomplished in Christ are (1) the fact that God’s creation rest was the symbol of the Sabbath rest which the redeemed people of God will enter upon at the *Eschaton* (Gen. 2:2; Heb. 4:4–11), (2) the fact that God intended the original marriage ordinance from the beginning as an earthly representation of the relationship between Christ and the redeemed church (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4–6; Eph. 5:30–32), and (3) the fact that God “subjected creation to frustration” specifically because of human sin (Gen. 3:17–18), determining that in empathy with the redeemed all of nature would “groan as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time,” and that, for “its own liberation from

bondage to decay,” it would have to “wait in eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God” at the time of their physical resurrection when their bodies will be redeemed, at which time creation too “will be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19–23 AT).

In sum, supralapsarians urge, the infralapsarian scheme (1) implies that God originally intended creation to serve some (undefined) purpose other than his final redemptive purpose and history’s ultimate end, a theological construction which could be used to justify the erection of an unscriptural natural theology, (2) runs the risk of failing to reflect as clearly as it should that God decreed and grounded the predestination and foreordination of men purely and solely on sovereign considerations within himself, and (3) ultimately, as Berkouwer states, “does not solve anything.”

The Supralapsarian Perception (the Teleological Governing Principle)

In light of these difficulties with the infralapsarian arrangement of the order of the divine decrees, supralapsarians, including such eminent Reformed thinkers as Theodore Beza of Geneva, William Whitaker and William Perkins in the sixteenth-century Church of England, Franciscus Gomarus and Gisbertus Voetius in seventeenth-century Holland, William Twisse, first prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, and in more recent times Geerhardus Vos, offer another arrangement. But most supralapsarians, after placing the discriminating decree in the first position, for some inexplicable reason then abandon their own insight that “in planning the rational mind passes from the end to the means in a retrograde movement” and arrange the remaining decrees not in a retrograde order but in the order in which the events to which they refer occurred historically (the effect of which will become clear as we proceed).

Thus the more common (though inconsistent) supralapsarian arrangement is as follows: first (the discriminating decree), the election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others); second, the decree to create the world and both kinds of men; third, the decree that all men would fall; fourth, the decree to redeem the elect who are now sinners by the cross work of Christ; fifth, the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to these elect sinners.

An analysis of this arrangement of the order of decrees will show, because the discriminating decree is placed at the head of all the other decrees with the others then proceeding in the order in which the events to which they refer took place in history, that God at the point of discrimination is represented as discriminating among men simply as men inasmuch as the decree respecting the fall does not come until the third point.

Other supralapsarians, such as (possibly) Jerome Zanchius, Johannes Piscator, Herman Hoeksema,³¹ and Gordon H. Clark, have suggested, with minor variations among them, that the decrees should be arranged in an order that more consistently reflects the rational principle in planning:³³ first (the discriminating decree), the election of some sinful men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others in order to make known the riches of God’s gracious mercy to the elect); second, the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to the elect sinners; third, the decree to redeem the elect sinners by the cross work of Christ; fourth, the decree that men should fall; fifth, the decree to create the world and men.

In this latter scheme the discriminating decree stands in the first position with the creation decree standing in the last position. It should also be noted that in this arrangement of the decrees, *unlike in the former*, God is represented as discriminating among men viewed as sinners and not among men viewed simply as men. The election and salvation of these elect sinners in

Christ becomes the decree that unifies all the other parts of the one eternal purpose of God. This revision of the more common supralapsarian arrangement addresses the infralapsarian objection against supralapsarianism *per se* that it depicts God as discriminating among men viewed simply as men and not among men viewed as sinners. And if this revision does in fact overcome this major infralapsarian objection against supralapsarianism, it becomes a significant step in advancing the cause of supralapsarianism over infralapsarianism. So it should be weighed seriously by all infralapsarians and supralapsarians alike. How it is that this revised scheme is able to depict God as discriminating among men as sinners, even as the infralapsarian scheme does (but for an obviously different reason), will become clear as we elucidate now the two principles which govern this revision of the supralapsarian order.

The primacy of the particularizing principle. Persuaded as they are that Scripture places the particularizing grace of God in Jesus Christ, God's Alpha and Omega, at the beginning, the center, and the end of all God's ways and works, those supralapsarians who offer the revised or what may be called the more consistent supralapsarian order make the particularizing principle the central and unifying principle of the eternal purpose of God. (All supralapsarians share this concern, by the way.) Therefore, these supralapsarians believe it both appropriate and necessary so to arrange the decrees that every decree is made to serve this primary principle. Accordingly, they postpone to the fourth and fifth positions respectively, after the explicitly redemptive decrees, the lapsarian decree and the creation decree in order to make the fall and even creation itself serve the particularistic purpose of God.

Contrary to the infralapsarian assertion that "creation in the Bible is never represented as a means of executing the purpose of election and reprobation," all supralapsarians insist that the created world must never be viewed as standing off over against God's redemptive activity even for a moment, totally divorced from the particularizing purpose of God, which is the ultimate concern of God's "eternal purpose," and fulfilling some general purpose(s) unrelated to the redemptive work of Christ. They insist so on the ground that such a representation of creation shatters the unity of the one eternal purpose of God and provides a base within the eternal decree itself for the development of an unbiblical natural theology. As we have seen, they are persuaded that Ephesians 3:9–11 expressly affirms that creation's purpose is subservient to God's redemptive purpose and that the same subservience is suggested in Romans 1:20; 8:19–23.

In sum, they are persuaded first that God created all things in order that he might show forth through the redeemed community, his church, the glory of his wisdom and grace in accordance with his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. Second, they are convinced that he determined that creation by its revelation of his "eternal power and divine nature" would condemn the reprobate. They are also confident that by its reflexive "agony and ecstasy" creation would empathize with the church's agony and ecstasy.

Two exegetical objections to this principle. First, concerning Ephesians 3:9–10 (AT) infralapsarians argue that the *hina* clause commencing verse 10 should not be connected syntactically to the immediately preceding participial clause in verse 9, "[in God] who created all things," but to the penultimate participial clause in verse 9, "[the mystery] which was hidden from the ages in God." By this construction they suggest that Paul intended to teach that God hid the administration of the "mystery" of the church from men in ages past in order that he might reveal it to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm *now* in this age through his (and the other apostles') preaching. Infralapsarians marshal to their side in support of this interpretation of Paul's earlier teaching in Ephesians 3:4–6.

Supralapsarians, of course, do not deny that Paul's preaching played a part—indeed, a significant part—in making known through the church “come of age,” to a degree to which it could not have been made known by the church “under age” in former times, the many-sided wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realm. But they insist that infralapsarians commit two errors by rejecting the nearer participial clause in the sentence as the clause to which the *hina* clause of 3:10 should be attached (which participial clause is clearly the closest possible antecedent clause and the one which grammarians ordinarily would recommend when determining a following word's antecedent).

First, they reduce the nearer clause, as Gordon H. Clark points out, to a “meaningless excrescence on the verse.” Charles Hodge, for example, writes: “The words ‘who created all things,’ is entirely subordinate and unessential ... and might be omitted without materially affecting the sense of the passage.”³⁷ But this leaves the phrase serving no intelligible purpose, since it was hardly necessary for Paul to identify the God about whom he spoke as the God “who created all things” or to teach his readers the fact that their God did create all things—surely they would have known these things.

Second, they in effect divorce the creation from God's particularizing purpose in Christ and allow it to have a *raison d'être* that moves, by implication, in a direction other than the redemptive *raison*. But this implies that God has (or had) two purposes, not directly related to each other: a general purpose that the original creation (which includes unfallen man) was somehow to fulfill (but which purpose had to be abandoned when man, the human part of creation, fell) and a specific redemptive purpose. This in turn implies that God's redemptive purpose was not at first central to his eternal purpose but was even subordinate to the more original general purpose of the creation and man. To avoid these highly questionable implications, supralapsarians urge that it is much better to recognize the presence of the nearer participial clause as the antecedent to the following *hina* clause and to give it its full force as the “lead-in” idea to 3:10.

Third, in their alternative interpretation of Paul's teaching in Romans 8:19–23, infralapsarians contend that supralapsarians make too much of the relationship between creation and the church when they interpret creation's “reaction” to the church's redemptive conditions as a “reflexive” one. But the “reflexive relationship” on creation's part cannot be avoided. Surely there is a divinely imposed reflexive relationship between creation and the changing fortunes of the church—Paul expressly affirms it to be so. And he declares that the church does not await creation's liberation from its bondage to decay, but the other way around: creation awaits what is expressly said to be the church's full and final “redemption” (*apolutrosin*) at the resurrection. In other words, creation's “fortunes” are directly dependent on redemptive considerations. All this being so, how better to describe creation's relationship to the church than as a “reflexive” one?

The purposive principle governing the rational mind. All supralapsarians aver as a second consideration (though only those who affirm the revised scheme offer an order of the decrees consistent with this consideration) that in all purposive planning the rational mind is governed by the principle of determining first the end to be accomplished and then the appropriate means to attain that end; and in the case of the means themselves in the plan, each of which becomes an “end” of the immediately following means in keeping with the principle that in planning the end precedes the means, the rational mind determines them in retrograde order from the point of the determined-upon end back through all the means necessary to the accomplishment of the ultimate end. The rational mind recognizes that only in this way is each

element of the plan purposive and contributory to the purposive coherence of the entire plan. And God is a purposing planner!

To illustrate: suppose a rational planner decides to buy a car. This is the end that he will pursue. He knows that he must determine the end first, and only then does he determine the appropriate means to achieve the end. (A rational mind is actually capable of doing both instantaneously; by the phrase “only then” we intend a logical or teleological, not a chronological, order.) Never would a rational car buyer first leave home with twenty-five thousand dollars in his pocket, understanding his action to be a means to something, and only then determine the end which his action of leaving home was intended to be a means to. The end always precedes the means in a rational mind.

The rational planner also realizes, if he would achieve his end, that he must actually execute the means he determines are essential to that end in a particular order. For example, suppose the car buyer has determined that between the point where he finds himself—in bed at home and “carless”—and his determined end of purchasing a car stand five means necessary to his becoming a car owner, namely, (1) getting out of bed, (2) leaving home, (3) arriving at the car dealership, (4) agreeing with the car salesman on the purchase price of the car, and (5) arranging a loan for the agreed-upon sum. The rational car buyer realizes with respect to these particular means that he cannot first arrange for the agreed-upon loan, then agree with the car salesman on the purchase price of the car, then get to the car dealership in order to speak with the car salesman, then leave home, and then get out of bed. To attempt to do so would doom to failure at the outset his attempt to reach his desired end. Never would a rational car buyer execute the means to his end in a manner that would only frustrate his plan and lead to failure.

But there is another aspect to rational planning that is not always taken into account, a feature that we have alluded to already. How does the rational mind go about determining the means that are necessary to reach a determined end? Because it recognizes that each means in any purposive chain of means, except for the last one (last, viewed from the point of the determined end), of necessity is the “end” of the means that follows it, and because it is necessary always to pass from the end to the means to the end, the rational mind will not begin from the point where it finds itself and determine from that point the first means to the end. Rather, the rational mind (in the case of men, it may do this at times without even realizing it, while at other times it will be conscious that it is doing so) will begin from the determined end and in a retrograde movement work back in its planning to the point where it finds itself at the moment. Only in this way does each means answer purposively to the need of the former means.

To use our car buyer illustration one more time: The car buyer has determined that he will purchase a car (his ultimate end). But in order to do that (given his present circumstance), he determines, as the first means to his ultimate end (which means becomes the “end” of any second means that he determines would be necessary), that he must arrange a loan for the agreed-upon sum. But in order to do that, he determines, as the second means to his ultimate end (which second means becomes the “end” of any third means that he determines would be necessary), that he must agree with the car salesman on the purchase price of the car. But in order to do that, he determines, as the third means to his ultimate end (which third means becomes the “end” of any fourth means that he determines would be necessary), that he must get to the car dealership. But in order to do that, he determines, as the fourth means to his ultimate end (which fourth means becomes the “end” of any fifth means that he determines would be necessary), that he must leave home. But in order to do that, he determines, as the fifth means to his ultimate end (which means becomes the “end” of any sixth means that he determines would be necessary, but

since in our illustration it is the last means it does not become an “end”), that he must get out of bed.

In purposive planning, each element of the plan necessarily answers the need of the preceding element, so that there is purpose in each member and purposive coherence governing the whole plan. This is actually the way the truly rational mind purposes or plans, and one will have no trouble accepting this as so if he will recognize, first, that the purposing mind always determines the end before it determines the means to achieve it, and second, that each means in any plan necessarily is the “end” of the means that follows it in the plan.

One final point: It is exceedingly important to note that when he finally carries out his plan, the rational planner executes the means (if he acts purposively) in the precise inverse order to the order in which the means he determined upon appear in the plan. That which is last in design is first in accomplishment and that which is first in design is last in accomplishment. To use our car buyer illustration a last time: the last means he determined upon in the plan (he must get out of bed) is the first means which he executes in the accomplishment of the plan, and the first means he determined upon in the plan (he must arrange a loan for the agreed-upon sum) is the last which he executes in the accomplishment of the plan.

All supralapsarians take seriously the biblical truth that God is a God of purpose, as we have emphasized, who must necessarily do all that he does purposively just because he is a God of rational purpose. It is inconceivable to them that God would decree to create the world for no purpose or would decree to create it for some purpose unrelated to his one final purpose. Accordingly, in light of their perception of the manner in which the rational mind plans (and who will deny that God is rational, since the only alternative consistent with such a denial is that he is irrational) and then executes its plan, the more consistent supralapsarians urge that the order of God’s eternal plan is the precise inverse to the order in which he executes it. Since God initiated the execution of his eternal purpose by first creating the world, the decree to create the world is the last in design, and since God’s eternal purpose culminates with redeemed sinners praising him in the *Eschaton* for the glory of his particularizing grace made theirs through the cross work of Christ (see 2 Thess. 1:7–10; Rev. 19:1–8; 21:9–27; 22:1–5), the decree to bring that to pass (the end) is the first in design.

In other words, while the execution of the divine purpose is indeed “infralapsarian” in the sense that God’s redemptive activity necessarily follows in history the historical fall, the plan itself behind all this is supralapsarian. But while all supralapsarians share the same basic perception of the principles that govern the order of the decrees, traditional supralapsarians have unwittingly failed to work out the order of the decrees in a manner consistent with their own perception of things and have done a disservice to their cause as a result. By placing the discriminating decree first and then simply arranging the remaining decrees in the historical order, they abandon the purposing principle of arrangement which alone relates the discriminating decree to the fall of man, and accordingly they represent God as discriminating among men as men—since they may be regarded as sinners only after the decree concerning the fall—leaving themselves open thereby to the infralapsarian charge that we have already noted.

The more consistent supralapsarian, however, submits the following order of the decrees, which reflects, it must be emphasized again, not a chronological but a teleological order within the divine plan: First, for the praise of the glory of his grace God elected some sinful men (note: in order to reveal the glory of his grace, he views these men as transgressors of his law from the outset; how it is that they may be so viewed is determined by the fourth decree) to salvation in Christ (Eph. 1:3–14) and for the praise of his glorious justice reprobated the others.

In order to accomplish this end, he determined that, second, the Holy Spirit would apply Christ's accomplished redemptive benefits to elect sinners of the New Testament age and those same redemptive benefits anticipatively to elect sinners of the Old Testament age, the necessary first condition to the consummation of the original determined end.

In order to accomplish this means (which necessarily becomes a second "end"), he determined that, third, Christ would actually redeem elect sinners of both the New and Old Testament ages by his cross work, the necessary second condition if the Holy Spirit was to have Christ's redemptive benefits to apply.

In order to accomplish this means and to provide the context that makes Christ's cross work meaningful (which necessarily becomes a third "end"), he determined that, fourth, men would fall in Adam, their federal head, the necessary third condition if Christ's redemptive benefits were to have any elect referents needing redemption.

In order to accomplish this means (which necessarily becomes a fourth "end"), he determined that, fifth, he would enter into a covenant of works with the first man "wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (Westminster Confession of Faith, VII.ii), making Adam thereby the race's federal head as well, and then providentially "permit" the federal head to fall, but this fall to occur "not by a bare permission, but such [permission] as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing . . . , in a manifold dispensation, to his own holy ends" (Westminster Confession of Faith, V.iv; see also VI.i), and yet to bind, order, and govern the entire Adamic temptation in such a way that "the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin" (Westminster Confession of Faith, V.iv; see also III.i), all these features of the plan comprising the necessary fourth condition if men were to experience a moral and ethical fall.

In order to accomplish this means (which necessarily becomes a fifth "end"), that is, in order that a moral "lapse" on man's part could occur, he determined that, sixth, he would create Adam in a condition of holiness (*status integritatis*) but also in a mutable condition (*posse peccare et posse non peccare*) "so that he might fall from it" (Westminster Confession of Faith, IX.ii).

In order to accomplish this means (which necessarily becomes a sixth "end"), that is, in order to provide the necessary arena in which all this could take place, and to do so with such an evident display of his attributes as to leave fallen men who would eventually even deny his existence without excuse, he determined that, seventhly, he would create and providentially preserve (actually the preserving was determined teleologically prior to the determination to create) the universe (since this is the last means in the plan, it does not become a seventh "end" requiring a following means).

This revision of the more common supralapsarian arrangement, since the first part of the one eternal purpose is teleologically integrated with every element following it, allows God from the first to discriminate among men viewed as sinners and posits for the world a redemptive reason for its creation.

Then, when God put his plan into execution—in inverse order to the order in which the several parts appear in his plan—he created the world and Adam and entered into covenant with Adam, making him the race's federal head. Then Adam fell and all men descending from him by ordinary generation fell in him. Then Christ redeemed the Old Testament elect by his (for them) anticipated cross work and the New Testament elect by his accomplished cross work, with the Holy Spirit applying anticipatively his redemptive benefits to the Old Testament elect and

applying his accomplished redemptive benefits to the New Testament elect, all leading to God's finally achieving his determined end—enhanced by the reprobation of the nonelect—even the praise of his glorious electing grace in Christ toward undeserving sinners. Each historical occurrence is purposive because it is the execution of an element of God's one eternal purpose that answers not chronologically but teleologically to the need of the immediately preceding element of the plan.

Four theological objections to this principle. In addition to the two exegetical difficulties already considered, infralapsarians, such as the Reformed Baptist theologian Roger R. Nicole, have certain theological difficulties with this supralapsarian vision (though Nicole acknowledges that this arrangement of the several decrees in the one eternal purpose is “very attractive,” possessing a “lucid simplicity” about it).

The first among these objections is the contention that since the decree to create human beings appears here in the distant position from the first, these people—whether viewed as elect and reprobate sinners or simply as elect and reprobate people makes no difference—can be regarded at the point of their election and reprobation in the first position only as “bare possibilities” and not real people, that is to say, as nonexistent entities who can be contemplated not as created but at best only as potential or creatable men. But how, the infralapsarian inquires, can God determine any particular condition for entities that, in the order of the decrees, he has not yet even determined to create? Surely, Charles Hodge, following Francis Turretin, is correct, the infralapsarian urges, when he writes: “Of a *Non Ens* ... nothing can be determined. The purpose to save or condemn, of necessity must, in the order of thought, follow the purpose to create ... the purpose to create of necessity, in the order of nature, precedes the purpose to redeem.”

The supralapsarian response to this objection is twofold: (1) If the infralapsarian is right when he insists that concerning an entity whose existence God has not yet decreed he can determine nothing, then God could not have even determined to create the world and human beings (the infralapsarian's first decree), since the decree to create them, which entities would necessarily have to possess some characteristics, would necessarily entail the prior determination of these characteristics, which before he decreed to create them, according to the infralapsarian's prescription, are nonentities about which nothing can be determined. Furthermore, (2) if God must determine to create human beings before he can determine any and every further characteristic about them—for example, whether they would be bad or amoral or good, and if the latter whether they would stay good or become bad, and if the latter whether he would punish them or redeem them, and if the latter whether he would redeem all of them or only some of them (the infralapsarian historical order), then it follows that God does not decree his first act with his last in view, which means that he does not purposively decree anything!

Therefore, since the infralapsarian must affirm, for the sake of his own order, that God could determine characteristics for the world and human beings as well as actions on their and his part anticipatory of his decree to create them, then he should be willing to acknowledge that God could determine ultimate ends for people logically prior to his decree to create them. If, however, he persists in his objection that God could determine no purpose for the world and mankind until he had first decreed to create them, then he is saying by implication that God decreed the existence of things for no rhyme or reason, which is to ascribe an inherent irrationality to the decrees of God. And this is to fall away from Christian theism altogether.

While it is true that the creation of human beings was not yet decreed at the point in the purposing order where they were elected or reprobated, yet, since God's decree is eternal with no

chronological antecedence or subsequence in it, there was never a moment when people, viewed as created people, did not certainly exist in it. In fact, the first decree as the final “end” decree, because it had to do with mankind viewed both as sinful people and as created people, rendered the fall and creation decrees (teleo)logically necessary. Accordingly, their existence as created people was as decretally real and certain in the divine mind at the point of the first decree as it was at the point of the fifth decree.

Second, and again Nicole in particular raises this objection to the view being espoused here, infralapsarians charge that “serious difficulties arise from the attempt to view the order of decrees as the reverse of history.” Nicole illustrates his concern this way:

The relation of the application of salvation by the Holy Spirit to the impetration of salvation by Christ is identical for all the elect. But Abraham and Augustine are not chronologically on the same side of the Cross [his point here is that this would seem to split the decree of application in two, with it appearing both before and after the decree to provide salvation by Christ—RLR]! It would appear, therefore, that the historical order is after all not a precise mirror of the logical relationships in the mind of God.

It is strange that as astute a theologian as Nicole would register this objection against this proposed scheme; for, if nothing more could be said, it applies equally to his infralapsarian order in which the decree to redeem the elect by the cross work of Christ is followed by the decree to apply Christ’s redemptive benefits to the elect. Even in this arrangement, if nothing more could be said, the application decree needs to be split in two to effect the salvation of the elect before the cross and the salvation of the elect after the cross. Of course, more can and indeed must be said by both the infralapsarian and the supralapsarian. And it is this: there is a certain measure of distortion in speaking of only five decrees as we have with respect to both representations.

Third, infralapsarians charge that the supralapsarian scheme, in its zeal to place God’s particularizing decree at the beginning of all that God planned for men, too severely construes the fall of Adam, which was an act of rebellion on his part against God and which meant the spiritual ruin and misery of some men at least, as a necessary part of the divine plan (indeed, even a “fortunate” event for the elect in that it paved the way for their salvation in Christ). To this objection the supralapsarian responds with a series of questions for the infralapsarian: “Did God, according to your understanding of the order of the decrees, decree the fall?” The infralapsarian knows, as Warfield—an infralapsarian himself—acknowledges, that if he answers this question in the negative he has fallen away not only from Calvinism but also from genuine Christian theism altogether. When he therefore acknowledges that God decreed the fall, the supralapsarian has a second question: “Did he have a purpose in mind for it when he did so?”

Again, the infralapsarian knows, if he answers in the negative, that he has fallen away from Calvinism as well as Christian theism. When he therefore acknowledges that God decreed the fall for a purpose, the supralapsarian asks yet a third question: “Did that purpose play a role in God’s redemptive plan or in some other plan?”

Again, the infralapsarian knows, if he answers, “In some other plan,” that he must admit, first, that he knows nothing concerning the content of this other plan, and, second, that this other plan (whatever its content) has been frustrated inasmuch as God’s redemptive purpose in Christ directly addresses the fall and the exigencies created by it (which he avers were intended to fulfill a role in another plan). This is plain from the fact that God’s redemptive purpose reverses the fall and its effects with regard to elect persons and nature itself (see Rom. 5:12–19; 8:19–23). When he then acknowledges, as he must, that the fall fulfills a purposive role in God’s redemptive plan, the supralapsarian finally asks:

Wherein then do we differ, since neither of us believes that sin *per se* is good, and since we both believe that sin is intrinsically evil and proceeds only from the nature of second causes; since neither of us believes that God is the chargeable cause of sin, and since we both believe that God decreed from all eternity that the redemptive aspects of his particularizing purpose would address the Fall and its effects in behalf of the elect? Must we not both acknowledge then that God decreed the Fall and its effects to provide the condition from which Christ would redeem God's elect? And if so, do we not both stand in this respect on precisely the same ground?

The supralapsarian is deeply committed to the belief that the fall has significance as a real event of earth history only as it is allowed to stand in the biblical philosophy of history as a means to an end in relation to God's one eternal plan of redemption, on the ground (along with the others that have already been offered) that *the state of the elect as children of God in Christ by divine grace is ultimately a higher, more glorious, and more praiseworthy end than the state of all men as children of God in un fallen Adam by divine creation.*

Fourth, infralapsarians contend that the supralapsarian scheme is an overly pretentious speculation in its analysis of the manner in which God plans. Better is it, they argue, to be satisfied with the more modest, less pretentious historical order for the decrees. Again the supralapsarian response is twofold: (1) The infralapsarian's charge that the supralapsarian is "pretentiously speculative" because he would attempt to determine the principle which governed the divine mind as God decreed what he did before the creation of the world lacks any real force since the infralapsarian too, after analyzing the divine purpose, offers his order of decrees as the order in the divine mind, thereby tacitly suggesting a governing principle. It is simply a case of determining which of the two is the more likely principle—the historical or the teleological—and the supralapsarian is convinced that his conclusion is more biblical over all and reflects more clearly the purposing character of the mind of God.

The supralapsarian denies that his arrangement is a "pretentious speculation" or "the invention of unaided human intellection." Rather, he insists that it is simply the result of exegesis of divinely revealed information about the nature and ways of God (see my many references to holy Scripture throughout this entire present discussion) and legitimate "sanctified" deductions "by good and necessary consequence" (Westminster Confession of Faith, I.vi) based upon the results of that exegetical labor.

Conclusion

While every consistent Calvinist will be either infralapsarian or supralapsarian, in my opinion the supralapsarian vision of God's eternal plan of salvation holds the exegetical and deductive edge. It certainly satisfies as well as the infralapsarian vision does the demands of all the pertinent teachings of Scripture, integrates more intelligibly than the infralapsarian vision does the several parts of the one divine purpose to magnify the particularizing grace of God in Jesus Christ, and elucidates better than the infralapsarian vision does the teleological principle which surely governs the whole of the order of the decrees of God who does everything that he does for a purpose and as an aspect of his one overarching eternal purpose.

Some readers may be put off by the consistent supralapsarian's vision and feel that it is lacking in evangelical warmth and not conducive to sincere and earnest gospel preaching. I do not share this opinion, of course. Not a single feature of this vision prohibits the supralapsarian from maintaining with infralapsarian Calvinists everywhere that the redemptive activity of God

in Christ—the beginning, the center, and the end of all his wisdom, ways, and works—must be central to the church’s proclamation as well. He glories in the cross as God’s special exhibition of grace to sinful mankind, and he recognizes that the proclamation of the gospel, with the Spirit’s enabling, animating blessing, is the God-ordained means of reaching lost sinners for Christ.

Just as the apostle who wrote Romans 9 and Ephesians 1 could with no contradiction also declare: “I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24 NIV) and could also write: “When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16 NIV), and, “Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8 NIV), so the supralapsarian knows that the same holy burden to be used of God to reach the lost must be his as well. And far from his doctrine of predestination being an impediment to his carrying out the Great Commission, in concert with the infralapsarian he sees it as the guarantee and surety that his ministry will not be in vain. As he preaches the gospel to people everywhere, he knows that God by his Word and Spirit will call his elect to salvation.

Before detractors conclude then that their negative judgment is just, due to some fault in the supralapsarian vision itself, perhaps they should examine themselves to see whether their evaluation may not be due to the fact that they are simply uncomfortable with a soteric vision that places God’s sovereignty over the lives and destinies of people so manifestly in the forefront of all of his ways and works with them. No doctrine signalizes the *solī Deo gloria* principle more and no doctrine humbles proud people more than the supralapsarian vision of predestination. It should not surprise even the saintliest Christian to find his heart reacting at first against it.

Whatever one finally decides about the infra/supra debate or about the inconsistent/consistent supra debate (and these debates should not become a basis of party strife among Calvinists), if a Christian upon examination should discover—and this is the more serious matter by far—that his dissatisfaction is with the particularism of the entire Calvinistic vision due to the desire for a doctrinal system that allows room for people to contribute in some ultimate and decisive way to their salvation, then it must be said—said, of course, with all charity and Christian good will but said nonetheless—that he has not yet learned the alphabet of Christianity as the redemptive religion of divine grace.

It only remains to point out in conclusion that this eternal order of the decrees, purposive throughout, Reformed dogmaticians for the most part (for example, Louis Berkhof) have come to designate as the *pactum salutis* or “covenant of redemption” to distinguish it from the concrete, tangible execution of the specifically redemptive aspects of the same eternal decree which they designate the “covenant of grace.” There seems to be some justification for this designation, first, in the fact that the persons of the Godhead determined before the foundation of the world what role each would fulfill in the redemption of the elect, and second, in the words of Hebrews 13:20 (NIV) where the writer speaks of “the blood of the eternal covenant (*diathekes aioniou*).”

Some Reformed scholars, it is true, have preferred other designations for the order of the decrees. For example, Cocceius spoke of it as the “counsel of peace.” Warfield was satisfied to refer to it as “the plan of salvation.” Murray preferred the designation, “the inter-trinitarian economy of salvation.” The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks of it simply as “God’s eternal decree” (see the title of chapter 3). But regardless of what term is finally adopted, Murray is surely correct when he writes,

The truth concerned is all-important. For it is not only proper, it is mandatory that in the plan of salvation as eternally designed and as executed in time, we discover the grandeur of the arrangements of divine wisdom and love on the part of the distinct persons of the Godhead, and recognize the distinguishing prerogatives and functions of each person and the distinct relations we come to sustain to each person as we become the partakers of God's grace. After all, our study of the plan of salvation will not produce abiding fruit unless the plan captivates our devotion to the triune God in the particularity of the grace which each person bestows in the economy of redemption, and in the particularity of relationship constituted by the amazing grace of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.²⁶

²⁶ Cottrell, J. W., Pinnock, C. H., Reymond, R. L., Talbott, T. B., & Ware, B. A. (2006). [*Perspectives on election: five views*](#). (C. O. Brand, Ed.) (pp. 150–194). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Divine Election to Salvation: *Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian*



BRUCE A. WARE

Just a moment's reflection reveals how differently we commonly think within our evangelical churches from how Paul (and other biblical writers) thought about the doctrine of election. What is often to us a "controversial" and "potentially divisive" doctrine to be ignored, at best, and repulsed, at worst, was for Paul, most notably, one of the sources of his greatest joy and strength. Consider Ephesians 1. Paul begins this letter commending praise to God the Father for the many rich and wondrous blessings he has granted us in his Son (Eph. 1:3). And so as not to leave us wondering just what these blessings are that he has in mind, he proceeds to enumerate them in the verses that follow (Eph. 1:4–14). Where does he begin his recitation of God's wondrous blessings? What blessing tops the list?

Of all things, the very first blessing he extols, the one that, in the apostle's mind, constitutes the basis for the rest of the blessings that follow, is the truth that God "chose us in Him [Christ], before the foundation of the world [*ezelezato emas en auto pro kataboles kosmou*], to be holy and blameless in His sight" (Eph. 1:4 HCSB). And rather than leaving this notion quickly (as one would drop an unexpectedly hot pan picked up from the stove), instead he adds to this opening thought, marveling now that in love, God "predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:5–6 HCSB). Let's not miss the significance here. When Paul thinks of why God is worthy of being praised, of what God has done for his people that should elicit from them deep, passionate, and wondrous worship, to the glory of his name, for the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:6), the very first thing that comes to his mind, and flows from his pen, is this truth: God chose us! God predestined us!

I cannot help but wonder if people in most of our churches were asked to list the reasons God is to be praised—that is, if they wrote down all of the blessings they could think of that God has provided for them—how many of our people would include election on the list? And, if it makes the list, for how many would election *top* the list? One thing seems clear: if we think one way about something, and Paul (and other biblical writers) think another way about the same thing, we are the ones in need of correction—not Paul or the Bible! Why does Paul value the truth that we often tend to shun? Why does Paul lead with a doctrine that many pastors wouldn't dream of preaching on lest they breed controversy and risk a possible church split? What did Paul have in mind with this teaching on divine election, and why is it so important?

This chapter proposes to explain and defend the position that Paul—and the Bible—understands and presents divine salvific election as unconditional, individual, and infralapsarian. Just a word of explanation of each of these elements of election may be helpful.

We are concerned with the Bible's teaching of "salvific election," that is, election to salvation. There is no question that election is used in other contexts and with other senses than election to salvation, *per se*. But the richest sense of the Bible's use of election is of sinners' election to salvation. As Paul writes, "But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13 HCSB). It is this glorious election to salvation we wish here to explain and defend.

“Unconditional election” refers to the claim that God’s selection of those whom he would save was not based upon (or, not “conditioned” on) some fact or feature of those individuals’ lives, in particular. That is, God’s election of those who would be saved was not conditioned on something they would do, some choice they would make, how good or bad they might be, or anything else specifically true about them in contrast to others also enslaved to sin and deserving God’s just condemnation. Rather, God elected some to be saved according to the good pleasure of his will without respect for their individual qualities, characters, actions, or choices. His election, then, was “unconditional” as it pertains to particulars of the elect persons themselves, while it is also clearly conditioned and dependent on God’s own good pleasure and will.

“Individual election” asserts that God did more than (but not less than) choosing that the nation of Israel as a whole would be called out to be his people and that he did more than (but not less than) choosing that there would someday be a group or company of the saved including both Jews and Gentiles. Without doubt God did choose the nation of Israel to be a special nation of his (Deut. 7:6; 14:2), and he did determine that there be a “chosen race” (1 Pet. 2:9 HCSB), his church comprising all true believers in Jesus Christ, his bride made up of those men and women purified for his Son. But more than this, God also elected those individuals who make up the church, or who constitute the bride of Christ. Individual election, then, affirms that each individual saved person—man, woman, boy, or girl—was loved and favored by God before the creation of the world so that God specifically chose him or her from condemnation and ruin to be made his holy and blameless child (Eph. 1:4–5), conformed to the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

“Infralapsarian election” relates to the question of the moral condition of the whole of humanity whom God considered in his mind’s eye and out of whom he selected those whom he would save. Did God view all of humanity as (merely) created but not yet fallen (i.e., lapsed), and hence, as neither sinful nor deserving of condemnation? Or did he view humanity as the total number of all who would ever live, considered as fallen sinners, corrupted and deserving of condemnation due to their connection to Adam and his fall into sin? One thing that all sides have agreed on through the history of the church (an agreement that open theism, sadly, chooses now to dispense with, despite Scripture’s clear and direct teaching) is that from “before the foundation of the world” God had in mind exactly those whom he would save (Eph. 1:4 HCSB; cf. Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Pet. 1:20; Rev. 13:8).

But the question here is when God chose “the elect,” though he had not as of yet created the world or any of the human beings who would populate it, did he choose these elect ones from the “pool” of humanity considered as unfallen (as argued by supralapsarianism) or considered as fallen (as argued by infralapsarianism)? The position argued here is that God considered humanity as already fallen when he chose those whom he would save. That is, he looked upon the human race in his mind’s eye as those who live after (“infra”) the fall (“lapse”), and so God’s election truly is an election of lost, fallen, and condemned people whom he surely and certainly will save in Christ. In short, divine election is infralapsarian.

In what follows, we shall consider each of these three main characteristics (unconditional, individual, and infralapsarian) of the salvific election taught in Scripture. While some attention will be given to a historical overview of various aspects of our discussion, since other fine overviews exist, we will devote most of our attention to the Scripture’s own teaching on these matters. In each case positive arguments will be set forth defending the position argued here, and where appropriate, the strongest and most compelling objections will be considered and responses will be given. Throughout this discussion my hope and prayer is that the wonder of

God's gracious and saving election of sinners may be seen more clearly, that we may cherish this doctrine as we ought, and that God may be honored as he ought. In his election and salvation of sinners, to him alone belongs all glory and praise.

Unconditional Election

Definition and Explanation of Unconditional Election

Unconditional election to salvation may be defined as God's gracious choice, made in eternity past, of those whom he would save by faith through the atoning death of his Son, a choice based not upon anything that those so chosen would do, or any choice that they would make, or on how good or bad they might be, or on anything else specifically true about them (i.e., their qualities, characters, decisions, or actions) in contrast to others, but rather based only upon God's own good pleasure and will. In particular, and in light of the long-standing debate over this doctrine between Calvinists and Arminians, unconditional election specifically denies that God elects persons based upon his advanced knowledge, in eternity past, of their future decision of whether to receive Christ or not when presented the gospel. That is, divine election is not based upon or conditioned by the "foreseen faith" of those who will, in time, believe in Christ.

At its heart, the doctrine of unconditional election assures the believer that salvation, from beginning to end, is *all* of God. From God's electing in eternity past of those whom he would save, of those whom he would make "holy and blameless" (Eph. 1:4 HCSB), to the final perfection in holiness of those same elect persons who are, in time, effectually called, justified, and then glorified as they are renewed into the likeness of Christ (Rom. 8:29–30), the whole of "salvation is from the LORD" (Jon. 2:9 HCSB). To God alone, then, belongs all glory and honor, and no one may boast before the Lord of any manner of contribution to his salvation (1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 2:8–9).

For if God's election of those whom he will save is conditional—conditioned upon "foreseen faith" as is often asserted and believed in the classic Arminian tradition—then there is one ultimate action relating to our salvation that we do and God specifically does not do and cannot effect. For these Arminians, while it is true that God must provide grace (prevenient grace) for any to be enabled to believe in Christ, as both Arminius and Wesley⁴ believed, yet it remains entirely up to the individual whether he will believe. By necessity, in light of the supposed libertarian freedom of the individual, God cannot ensure that any person will believe. God does all that he can do, but the choice, in the end, is up to us. Therefore, conditional election asserts human choice and action as that which is ultimately decisive in personal salvation. Put differently, at its most crucial moment (the moment of belief or disbelief), salvation is *of us*, not of the Lord.

But because "salvation is from the Lord" in every respect, from start to finish, and because to God alone belongs all glory and boasting for the gracious saving work he accomplishes and applies to sinners' lives (1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 2:8–9), therefore the unconditional nature of God's election is highly valued by its advocates. Both the rightful glory of God and the proper humility of sinners are secured in salvation only when the work of salvation, from beginning to end, is grounded in God's unconditional elective purposes. With the psalmist, we proclaim, "Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1 HCSB). Only if God's election of those whom he determines to save is grounded on the good pleasure of God and not at all on

any quality, decision, or action that will one day be true of those persons whom God creates can we proclaim, without qualification, that salvation is altogether from the Lord, and to him alone belongs exclusive glory.

Support for Unconditional Election

While it is clear that God's election as unconditional matters much to those of the Reformed tradition, what are the strongest reasons set forth in support of this doctrine?

Key passages teaching unconditional election. First, the clearest and most compelling understanding of many passages of Scripture indicate that God's election of those whom he will save is unconditional. Consider with me some of the main texts and the rationale for unconditional election that they provide.

John 17:2, 6, 9, 24. Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 is peppered with a phrase and concept that can only be accounted for rightly by appeal to God's election as unconditional. Consider Jesus' statement in John 17:1b—2: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son so that the Son may glorify You, for You gave Him authority over all flesh; so He may give eternal life to all *You have given Him*" (HCSB; italics added). As one reads John's Gospel, one becomes familiar with the need to stop and ponder deeply and at length the profundity of what John writes. This passage is no exception! Here Jesus says that the Father has granted him authority over all people (*pases sarkos*, "all flesh") for a specific purpose (*ina*, "so").

What might this purpose be? Why has the Father granted his Son universal authority? And here Jesus amazes us by indicating the purpose is, "so He may give eternal life to all" whom the Father has "given Him" (*pan o dedokas auto dose autois zoen aionion*). Here is authority over all in order to give eternal life to some. And what identifies those select ones to whom this eternal life is given? Those "given Him" from the Father. The Father's choice of those whom he would save is then made effective as the Son is given these very ones and grants to them his gift of eternal life. The unconditional election of the Father accounts for those who receive eternal life from the Son.

As one continues reading John 17, this theme of those "given Him" from the Father continues. Jesus revealed truth about the Father to his own disciples, and these men are identified by Jesus as "the *men You gave Me* from the world" (John 17:6a HCSB; italics added). Jesus continues, "They [his disciples] were Yours, *You gave them to Me*, and they have kept Your word" (John 17:6b HCSB; italics added). A few verses later he prays for his disciples, saying, "I am not praying for the world but for *those You have given Me*, because they are Yours" (John 17:9 HCSB; italics added). And lest we think that Jesus has in mind only the selection of the disciples alone, consider the prayer that Jesus offers for all believers: "I pray not only for these [disciples], but also for those who believe in Me through their message" (John 17:20 HCSB). And who are these subsequent believers? Do they become believers simply on their own, as they hear the gospel message from Jesus' disciples and choose to believe? Instructive here is one of Jesus' concluding statements, "Father, I desire those You have given Me to be with Me where I am" (John 17:24). Clearly, as Jesus' prayer develops, "those who believe in Me" of John 17:20 (HCSB) are the same ones as "those You have given Me" of John 17:24 (HCSB).

Just as the disciples become the disciples because the Father gives these ones to Jesus, so also all future believers come to believe in Christ through the message of the disciples because God has given these to his Son. Belief is necessary, to be sure. But those who believe are those

given to Christ by the Father. The unconditional election of the Father, then, accounts for the subsequent faith and salvation of those to whom the Son grants eternal life.

Acts 13:48. In the context just preceding this verse, Paul and Barnabas had preached the gospel in Antioch. When the whole town assembled to hear their message (Acts 13:44), the Jews were filled with jealousy and began opposing and insulting Paul (Acts 13:45). In response, Paul and Barnabas turned from the Jews to the Gentiles, stating to their Jewish opponents, “But since you reject it [i.e., God’s message of the gospel], and consider yourselves unworthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles!” (Acts 13:46 HCSB). They quoted Isaiah 49:6, indicating that their very preaching to the Gentiles fulfilled what Isaiah had prophesied (Acts 13:47). Following this, Luke makes this astonishing comment: “When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed. So the message of the Lord spread through the whole region” (Acts 13:48–49 HCSB).

One indisputable aspect of Luke’s statement, “All who had been appointed to eternal life believed,” is that God’s appointment of those who would receive eternal life preceded the belief of these very people. There is, then, a *temporal priority* indicated here. God’s appointment precedes in time the belief of the people. But is there not also a *logical priority* indicated in God’s prior appointment? If, as many classic Arminians argue, God chooses those whom he knows in advance are going to choose him, then clearly the logical priority must be given to human choice, for God’s choice is logically dependent upon and a reflection of this foreseen faith. But if so, why should Luke make this point? If the real reason they believed is that it was up to them whether they believed, and nothing that God had chosen affected what they decided, then the appointment to eternal life loses its significance.

But if one considers the appointment of God to eternal life as not merely temporally prior to the human choice but also as logically prior, now this statement by Luke is filled with significance; and one can understand why he would include it. For, indeed, what Luke is stating is this: even though many Jews have rejected the gospel message, God has ordained that his gospel be spread to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–47). And, unlike the response among the Jews, encountered by Paul over and over again as he visited synagogue after synagogue, in contrast there are many Gentiles who hear the gospel and believe in Christ—so many that Luke observes, “So the message of the Lord spread through the whole region” (Acts 13:49 HCSB).

Now the natural question is this: what accounts for the fact that Jews (as a whole) who hear the gospel reject it, while increasing numbers of Gentiles, hearing the same gospel message, accept it? Answer: God appointed to eternal life those (Gentiles) who believed and were saved (Acts 13:48). So it is not ultimately a matter of human choice that determines who rejects and who accepts the gospel. Although human choice (i.e., belief in Christ) is necessary for any to be saved, what stands prior—both temporally prior and logically prior—to this human choice is the choice of God, which divine choosing is causally linked to and hence accounts for the human choice to believe. In short, these Gentiles believed the gospel, while Jews rejected the same saving message because God had chosen these very Gentiles to believe. Only an unconditional view of election can account for what Luke says here.

Romans 9:10–16. One of the clearest and strongest assertions of the unconditional nature of God’s election is given by Paul in Romans 9:10–16. Some have sought to argue that the election spoken of here has nothing to do with salvation but is rather an election to a special service designed by God. This view has been addressed at length by others, and its basis has been shown as lacking either contextual or exegetical support.⁹ To see one strong reason for rejecting this view, one need only read carefully the opening verses of Romans 9 to realize that Paul’s “intense

sorrow and continual anguish” (Rom. 9:2 HCSB) of heart for his people Israel could only be his concern over their salvation (cf. Rom. 10:1–4). The context establishes that Paul’s deepest concern for Israel was that so many Jews were not saved. His argument asserts, though, that God has not failed in his promise to save Israel (Rom. 9:6) because God has saved some Jews throughout Israel’s history in anticipation of the great and final day in which “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26 HCSB). In light of this context, and in view of the fact that the election spoken of here is God’s election of some in Israel to salvation, consider what Paul says in Romans 9:10–16.

The element of this text that is clearest of all is this: God’s election of Jacob, not Esau, was unconditional. As Paul explains, before the two had been born, and before either had done anything good or bad, God chose Jacob over his older brother Esau. That is, apart from any consideration of what these two future individuals would do, or what works they would perform, God, for his own purposes, chose one over the other. His choosing, then, was not based or conditioned on them; and so this election was, strictly speaking, unconditional. And why does Paul emphasize the unconditional nature of the election of Jacob? Answer: “So that God’s purpose according to election might stand, not from works but from the One who calls” (Rom. 9:11–12 HCSB). In other words, God wishes to establish his rightful place and authority as God by being the one who—by rights of his deity—elects one but not another. This is God’s prerogative as God, and to deny of God that he elects people unconditionally is to deny something that God here (and elsewhere) establishes about the very godness of his being God.

The correctness of this line of interpretation is confirmed as we consider the rhetorical question that Paul suggests might be raised in light of this assertion of God’s unconditional election of Jacob over Esau: “What should we say then? Is there injustice with God?” (Rom. 9:14 HCSB). The question, “Is there injustice with God?” and the moral challenge it raises only make sense if the previous discussion has established that God elects one over the other, not based on what they are or do but exclusively according to the purposes of his will. If instead God had chosen Jacob over Esau due to some quality in Jacob that commended him, or because God knew that Esau would be resistant to God’s promptings and desires, then we would all conclude that God’s election accorded with some reasonable sense of justice. In this case, God would have demonstrated that his favor shown to Jacob could be justified by the very lives, characters, and actions of the two men themselves—whose lives God would have known in advance when he elected one over the other.

But this is not the case! That is, Paul has specifically ruled out the notion that God’s election is based on what Jacob or Esau would be like or what either would one day do. Rather, his election of Jacob specifically disregarded anything about either person and was based only and completely in the hidden purpose and will of God. Therefore, the question, Is there injustice with God?, makes sense!

And Paul’s continued explanation only serves to confirm yet further that God’s election of Jacob over Esau was unconditional. After denying unequivocally that God has been unjust, he explains further, quoting Exodus 33:19, which has God saying, “I will show mercy to whom I show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion” (Rom. 9:15 HCSB). Again, what is emphasized is that the will of God—his choice of the ones to whom he will show mercy and have compassion—is the basis for God’s election, not the future lives or works or characters of those chosen or not chosen. Thus, Paul concludes this immediate discussion, saying, “So then it does not depend on human will or effort, but on God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16 HCSB). In accord with all we have seen previously, God chooses of his own purpose

and will the ones for whom he shows mercy. Specifically, his choice “does not depend” on what humans will choose or what humans will do. Rather, *God’s choice depends on God*. As God, he elects those upon whom he freely and willingly chooses to shower his mercy. His election, then, is unconditional.

Romans 11:5–7. The discussion in Romans 11 continues much of what we have already seen in Romans 9. Paul argues here that God has not rejected his people, Israel. As he has already asserted, God is being faithful to his promise to save Israel, even though the vast majority of current Israel stands outside of Christ and hence, is not saved (Rom. 10:1–4). Yet God’s faithfulness to this saving promise to Israel is demonstrated in part by his salvation of some in Israel throughout history (Rom. 9:1–29; 11:1–7) and ultimately in his salvation of “all Israel” in the end (Rom. 11:26). Here in Romans 11, Paul is establishing the fact that even now (as Paul writes), during a time in which “a partial hardening has come to Israel” (Rom. 11:25 HCSB), nonetheless God is faithful to his promise to save Israelites—albeit only a remnant within Israel during this time of widespread hardening. Nonetheless, God’s saved Israelites are testimony to God’s faithfulness, and God’s faithfulness to his promise is happening only because of God’s electing grace.

One of the most striking phrases in Romans 11:5–7 is Paul’s reference in verse 5 to the remnant as those “chosen by grace.” Grace, of course, refers to unmerited favor, of giving to someone a gift that is fully undeserved and unearned. This is clear in what Paul says here concerning grace: “Now if by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace” (Rom. 11:6 HCSB). Grace can only be grace if what grace gives is unearned, undeserved, and unmerited. If the gift of grace is based upon something that someone has done (i.e., in *quid pro quo* fashion), then grace ceases to be grace. Grace gives only as an expression of kindness and favor that is underserved.

Nearly all evangelicals would agree with what has just been stated about grace. That is, there is no real dispute over the point that grace is unmerited favor. But what is interesting here is exactly what gift Paul specifies that is given by grace. Notice that he does not say (here) that salvation is given by grace. All Arminians in the tradition of Arminius and Wesley affirm that salvation only comes to us by grace, for we are fully undeserving of the gift of salvation offered to us by the Lord. But here it is not salvation but *election* which grace gives. That is, the very choosing of the remnant to be a believing minority among the vast majority of those hardened is itself the gift specified that is granted by grace. Gracious election, in short, is unconditional election.

For this election to be gracious, it cannot depend on something done by the person elected, “otherwise grace ceases to be grace”! No, this gracious election is an election that is unmerited, undeserved, and it is an election that brings these elect persons their salvation. As if to emphasize the very contrast between the elect and nonelect, Paul observes in verse 7 (HCSB), “Israel [i.e., the majority of Jews who are unbelieving] did not find what it was looking for, but the elect [i.e., the remnant of believing Israelites] did find it. The rest were hardened.” In other words, were it not for God’s gracious choosing of the remnant, they, too, would be counted among the majority who did not find salvation at this time, the majority who have been hardened. But out of the hardened in Israel has come this remnant who encompass God’s elect, who by his grace have been chosen to be saved. Their election is gracious because they don’t deserve to be elected. Instead, they deserve the punishment that comes to those hardened against God. Here God’s grace is not only grace (unmerited favor) that saves but grace (unmerited favor) that elects. Those who otherwise would be hardened in their rebellion are instead saved, and this has

happened only because God's grace has elected them to be saved. Election, then, is unconditional.

Ephesians 1:3–6, 11. As I mentioned in the introductory paragraphs of this chapter, it is nothing short of astonishing that when Paul brings to his mind and lips specific reasons for why God should be blessed (1:3), the first and second items he recalls and celebrates are our election in Christ (1:4) and our predestination to be adopted children through Christ (1:5). What is for Paul both primary and central in the praise of God is for many today secondary at best and divisive and destructive at worst. So, what is this election of which Paul speaks?

Clearly, the main thrust that Paul makes in Ephesians 1:3–14 is that all of our salvation is of the Lord. This saving work of God began in eternity past when God elected us to be made holy and blameless through his Son, and it culminates in the future bestowal of our promised inheritance as now guaranteed by the Spirit who seals us for this day. From eternity past to eternity future, salvation is from the Lord.

Could it be, then, that our election in Christ is conditioned on something that renders it uncertain whether God truly will be able to save those whom he otherwise would will to save? Is God's saving purpose and plan subject to contingencies that may keep him from doing the very thing for which Paul here praises God? Is our salvation, in an ultimate sense, conditioned on what *we* do, whether God would will this or not? Any notion of conditional election is so clearly out of step with what Paul asserts that it simply jeopardizes and undermines the praise that is to go to God alone for this glorious saving work (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14).

Rather, it seems clear that Paul's stating that God's election of us took place "before the foundation of the world" (1:4 HCSB) is first and foremost to underscore the unconditional nature of this election. To be sure, this phrase functions as a time marker. That is, it does tell us *when* God's election of us took place—before God had even created the world. But the primary purpose for including this detail, it seems, establishes the fact that election of those whom God will save (i.e., make holy and blameless) is God's choice pure and simple, a choice with which we had nothing to do and could have had nothing to do. Why? We had not even been created! So when God chose us, only God was. Therefore, his election of us was based on God's will and purpose and was not based, and could not have been based, on our lives, characters, or choices. In short, God's election of us "before the foundation of the world" is, by necessity, an election that is unconditional.

Confirmation for the notion that God's choice of us is based on his will and purpose and not based on us comes in Ephesians 1:11. Here Paul states that we will receive an inheritance since God has predestined us to have it. According to Paul, this predestination was "according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will" (Eph. 1:11 HCSB). Incredible! God works everything according to his will, but notice that nothing is said here about God working things out according to our wills! In other words, all that God chooses is unconditional, including his predestination and election of us. The God who works everything as he so wills is the God who elects us to be holy in Christ, as he so wills. God's election of us, then, is unconditional.

2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:8–9; Ephesians 1:4. As we just observed, in Ephesians 1:4 Paul writes that God made his choice of those whom he would save "before the foundation of the world" (HCSB). In two other passages, likewise, Paul refers to God's election of his people occurring in eternity past. In both of these passages, along with Ephesians 1:4, the "time" of God's choosing of us to be saved is placed in eternity past. One must ask the question, Why does

the apostle emphasize, as he does in all three texts, that God's election of those whom he would save took place before time began?

It seems clear that the fundamental reason that stands behind these various expressions placing election before the very creation of the world and time is this: we did not yet exist, and so God's election of us simply can have nothing to do with certain truths about us! The impact of these temporal clauses, then, is much like the impact that Paul sought in Romans 9:11. There, because neither Jacob nor Esau had yet been born, because neither had done anything good or bad, therefore Paul drives home the point that God's election of Jacob, not Esau, had to do with God's purposes and good pleasure altogether and could not have been based on something true about them. Why not? Answer: they didn't yet exist! So it is here, in these three texts locating God's election as occurring "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4 HCSB), "from the beginning" (2 Thess. 2:13 HCSB), or "before time began" (2 Tim. 1:9 HCSB). Because no one existed when God's election took place, God's election of those whom he would save simply could not have to do with something about them. Rather, God's election has to do with what God chooses. In short, these time markers are in these verses precisely to instruct us that God's election to salvation is unconditional.

Effectual calling requires unconditional election. Second, Scripture clearly indicates that the gospel message calling people to put faith in Christ and be saved is meant for all people, throughout all the world. This is sometimes referred to as the "general call" (or *vocatio externa*) to salvation, extended to all people everywhere, that whoever hears the gospel is invited to come to Christ and be saved. But those in the Reformed tradition have also often noted that the "general call" is not the only kind of divine calling to salvation that is taught in Scripture. Another sense of "the call" to be saved is indicated by several texts, but these passages portray not a general but a "special" call because (1) it is a call to salvation directed only to some people, not all, and (2) it is a call that always succeeds in bringing people to saving faith in Christ. Hence, this "special call" is sometimes referred to as the "effectual call" (or *vocatio interna*) since through this call to salvation, God necessarily effects (i.e., certainly and unfailingly brings about) the person's salvation.

In brief, the general call is extended (in principle) to every person everywhere, yet not all of those who are called actually respond to the call and are saved. But the effectual call is extended only to some people (i.e., some of those who hear the general call), and when this effectual call comes to them, all of those so "called" are saved. The effectual call effects the salvation of all of those so called.

Since I have argued elsewhere that the effectual call of God is taught in Scripture and that, rightly understood, it entails the truthfulness of the doctrine of unconditional election, I here will only summarize a portion of both the biblical support for the doctrine of the effectual call and how this doctrine requires unconditional election also to be true. One passage that shows with unmistakable clarity that the "special" or "effectual" call of God is taught in Scripture is Romans 8:29–30. Notice two things about this passage. First, the calling of God to be saved here is *extended only to some* and not to all. Who, according to Romans 8:30, are those called? Answer: "those He predestined" are "also called." Thus, this call is not extended to all people everywhere but only to a certain subset of the whole of humanity, viz., only to the "predestined."

Lest we wonder if in some sense God may have predestined everyone so that when the call goes to those predestined it actually goes to all people (for all are predestined), notice that the predestined are only those whom God foreknew out of all of humanity. And notice further that all of those whom God foreknew and predestined are ultimately saved—"those He foreknew He

also predestined ... [and] justified ... [and] glorified.” As such, unless one holds to universalism (i.e., the view that all will ultimately be saved—a view already excluded by what Paul taught in Romans 2:5–11), then one must rightly conclude that only some are foreknown, and these same ones are those who are predestined and called.

Second, the calling of God to be saved here is *effectual*; i.e., it succeeds in accomplishing what the call desires by bringing those called surely and certainly to salvation. Notice that throughout these verses a pattern emerges. It begins in Romans 8:29 with “those” foreknown who are “also” predestined. Verse 30 continues the pattern: “those” predestined are “also” called, “those” called are “also” justified, and “those” justified are “also” glorified. In other words, the same people are in view from God’s foreknowledge of them to God’s ultimate glorification of these same persons. Each step in the process takes them on to the next step so that all who are foreknown are glorified. As this relates to the question of what kind of calling Paul speaks of here, it is clear, then, that Romans 8:30 refers to a calling that effects the salvation of the ones called. In other words, this call works! This call results necessarily in all of those called being saved.

While much more biblical support could be offered, this is sufficient for our present purposes to conclude that the doctrine of effectual calling is biblical. But what relation does this doctrine have to the question of whether God’s election of those whom he will save is unconditional or not? Rightly understood, these two doctrines are mutually entailing. That is, if effectual calling is true, it entails the truthfulness of unconditional election, and if unconditional election is true, it entails the truthfulness of effectual calling. Put differently, you cannot have one without the other.

Consider first the entailment if unconditional election is deemed to be true. If God has unconditionally elected just certain specific persons to be saved, and if this election is grounded only in the good pleasure and will of God and does not consider the characters, actions, or choices of these individuals, and if this election of God is certain so that those individuals cannot fail to be saved, then it follows that God must so work in them particularly such that they, but not others, are surely and certainly saved. We might say that if God has unconditionally elected them to salvation, he must call them effectively to salvation, and this calling, since it actually saves them, can be granted only to those whom he has elected. Unconditional election, then, requires God’s effectual call to those elected, so that his elective purposes for them are accomplished.

Now consider the two doctrines in reverse order. If God effectually calls only some to be saved, and if this calling, by its nature, is granted only to some such that all of those called actually and certainly are saved, then it follows that God must select those to whom this calling is extended. That is, God’s effectual calling cannot be based on how people respond to the general call since the general call includes no certainty of the salvation of those called. But since the effectual call does include the certainty of the salvation of all those called, then it follows that God must grant the effectual call to specifically selected individuals only, such that when they are called (effectually), they are surely and certainly saved. So, what name shall we give to this “selection” by God of those specific individuals to whom he extends the effectual call? Surely we could rightly speak of these persons as those “chosen” or “elected” by God to be the recipients of the effectual call. Therefore, if the doctrine of the effectual call is true, it follows that God has previously elected just those specific persons to whom he extends this call. Effectual calling, then, entails unconditional election.²³

Regeneration that precedes saving faith requires unconditional election. Third, Scripture indicates that those who believe in Christ only do so because they have been “born again,”

enabling and eliciting this saving faith. Arminians, of course, dispute this point. They argue that those who believe are regenerated. But most Calvinists understand Scripture to say that since unconverted sinners are dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), blinded by Satan so that they cannot see Christ's glory (2 Cor. 4:4), and fully unable to do anything pleasing to God (Rom. 8:6–8), therefore God must work in them to open their blind eyes, to enliven their hard hearts, and to grant them the capacity for doing what they simply could not do on their own, viz., believe in Christ so as to be saved. In other words, unbelievers must be born again so that having been given new life by the Spirit of God, they now immediately do what their new natures cry out to do in trusting Christ for their salvation.

Does Scripture indicate that regeneration precedes and grounds saving faith? Consider two passages: 1 John 5:1 and John 1:12–13. The book of 1 John offers several indicators of what the born-again person is like. For example, 1 John 2:29 (HCSB) claims that “everyone who does what is right has been born of Him [God].” The verb for “has been born” (*gegennetai*) is a perfect, passive indicative of “to beget or bring forth” (*gennaō*). The perfect tense normally indicates past action that continues into the present. So John is saying that the person who has been and is born again is like this: he does what is right. That is, being born again accounts for doing right. This surely means that the new birth precedes a righteous life; otherwise John would be teaching works-righteousness (i.e., doing “what is right” accounting for being born again)! No, rather, regeneration accounts for the “right” sort of actions and behavior of which John speaks. Similarly, 1 John 4:7 (HCSB) states that “everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.” Again, “has been born” is perfect, passive, indicative, and so the idea is clear: being born of God and knowing God are the basis by which one is able to love.

In light of this clear understanding in John, it is instructive that John also indicates that faith in Christ is likewise the outgrowth of being born of God. That is, just as doing what is right and loving are expressions of being born of God, so also faith itself is an expression of being born of God. First John 5:1 (HCSB) asserts, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Messiah has been born of God.” Here, as in the other verses just considered, “has been born” is perfect, passive, indicative; and the same logic applies. One expression of being born of God, says John, is that the person born again believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Presumably the opposite, then, is true. If one is not born again, he cannot believe that Jesus is the Messiah, just as if he is not born again, he cannot do what is right and he cannot love. Being born again, then, gives rise to doing right, to loving others; and it gives rise to believing that Christ truly is the Messiah. Faith in Christ, then, flows out of the life of one who has been regenerated.

Second, John 1:11–13 is also important. One might think, from verse 12, that a person becomes a child of God *because* he believes in the name of Christ. But this conclusion would be premature. Notice that John does not say, “He gave them the right to be children of God *because* they believed in His name.” Rather, he merely notes that these two things both happen: they are given the right to be children of God, and they believe in his name. What he does not say in verse 12 is that becoming children of God results from their faith.

But when one considers verse 13, now the causal conception and explanation is introduced. John writes of those given the right to be children of God, to those who believe in Christ, that they “were born” *of God*. That is, what accounts for them having the right to be God's children, and what accounts for their believing in Christ's name, is that they had been born of God. The verb “were born” is aorist, passive, indicating, indicating action done previously. So, because a person was born of God, this person now has the right to be God's child; and this person now

believes in Christ. Being born of God (1:13), then, precedes and grounds the reality expressed in verse 12.

This is only confirmed by what John says did *not* give rise to this believing in Christ. He says that they were born “not of blood” (i.e., not due to one’s physical descent), “or of the will of the flesh” (i.e., not due to one’s own personal determination and will), “or of the will of man” (i.e., not because of any other person’s determination or will), “but of God” (i.e., God alone is the One who has brought into existence this new life). The regeneration spoken of in verse 13, then, provides the basis for a person’s belief in Christ. Such belief could not come from oneself or be given by another. Rather, only God could grant a person the new life by which he could believe. Regeneration, then, precedes and grounds saving faith.

It should be clear, then, that if regeneration precedes and gives rise to saving faith, that regeneration requires unconditional election. As with our previous discussion of the effectual call, since only some are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and those who are regenerated unfailingly believe in Christ and are saved, then it follows that God must select those particular ones whom he chooses to grant the new birth. That is, God’s choice of those whom he will regenerate must precede the actual work of the Holy Spirit accomplishing this regenerating work. And if God must choose the particular persons he will regenerate, and if they cannot believe in Christ apart from his regenerating work, then it must be the case that God’s election of those individuals is unconditional.

It simply cannot be the case that God looks ahead in time and sees those who will believe in Christ and so elects them based on his advanced knowledge of their faith. For apart from regeneration, God would see only unbelief as he looked down the corridors of history. But since some do believe in Christ, and since regeneration is necessary for any to believe in Christ, then it must be the case that God grants some individuals the regenerating work by which they then believe. And if so, then God must select those individuals who are granted his regenerating work, and this selection cannot consider some supposed expression of faith they would have, since regeneration is necessary for saving faith to occur. In other words, God cannot choose people to regenerate by looking ahead and seeing them doing what only those already regenerated can do! Therefore, because regeneration is the enlivening work of God (alone) in the hearts of those dead in sin, and because regeneration gives rise to saving faith, the doctrine of regeneration requires the unconditional nature of God’s election to salvation.

Divine sovereignty, rightly understood, requires unconditional election. Fourth, Scripture teaches a strong sense of divine sovereignty, meaning that God exerts and maintains ultimate control of everything that occurs throughout the universe and throughout time. Paul indicates this understanding of divine sovereignty when he says that God “works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will” (Eph. 1:11 HCSB). Everything! We are justified, then, in believing that God exerts ultimate control of all that happens since his will and purpose guide history in such a way that everything that occurs happens in agreement with the will and purpose of God.

Nor does this statement stand alone. Rather, Scripture is simply filled with both explicit teachings and examples indicating that God ultimately controls all that occurs in life and throughout human history. I have discussed elsewhere what I have called the several “spectrum texts” of Scripture. These are passages indicating that both good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, health and sickness—both sides of the spectrum, as it were—are ordained and controlled by God. In fact, some texts indicate that God’s claim to exclusive deity is grounded on his being the one who alone controls all of life. Consider just one such text. Isaiah 45:5–7 (HCSB) records God as saying, “I am the LORD, and there is no other; there is no God but Me ...

I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I the LORD do all these things.” One cannot miss the emphasis God here makes, that he alone is God, and that as the true and only Lord of all, he controls darkness as well as light, disaster as well as success. He is the Lord who does “all these things.”

Either we believe God, or we don’t. As this relates here, either we believe God when he tells us that he has absolute control over all that happens, or we deny that what he says is true. Furthermore, in light of the buildup to these claims—“I am the LORD, and there is no other”—we can only conclude that God means it when he tells us that all things are carried out by his ordination, and that his own rightful claim to deity is attached to this very action. So, while it is true that God possess no “evil” (*ra*), as Psalm 5:4 makes clear, it is also true that God exerts ultimate control over all “evil” (*ra*), as Isaiah 45:7 insists. The same word, “evil” (*ra*), is used in each passage, and the lesson could not be more clear or more important: God, who is wholly good and not evil (Ps. 5:4), is the same God who controls both good and evil (Isa. 45:7). As difficult as this is to grasp, Scripture teaches this grand truth, and we must accept what God, through Scripture, tells us.

Obviously, if God controls all that happens, it goes without saying that he controls who is saved and who is not. Unconditional election is logically required from this strong, biblical definition of divine sovereignty. In Ephesians 1:11 (HCSB) Paul not only indicates that God “works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will” but also that we were “*predestined* according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will” (italics added). In other words, the connection that we already observed between a strong, biblical understanding of divine sovereignty and unconditional election is rendered explicit and is taught directly here by Paul. Predestination to salvation, for Paul, is one central element within the larger sovereign work of God, a work that encompasses absolutely everything that happens in all of time and space. Because God is sovereign, God controls all that occurs. Within his sovereign control, says Paul, stands our predestination to salvation. A strong understanding of divine sovereignty, then, requires the doctrine of unconditional election.

The only substantive form of election is unconditional election. Fifth, I return to a point made in the introduction of this chapter. When Paul sets his mind to contemplate the reasons for which God is worthy of praise, the first and second items off his lips in Ephesians 1 are “He chose us” (Eph. 1:4 HCSB) and “He predestined us” (Eph. 1:5 HCSB). One reason that seeing God’s saving election of sinners in Scripture as unconditional is compelling is this: only election understood as *unconditional* election accounts for why this biblical truth is elevated, cherished, and commended. Only if the entirety of God’s saving work really does hinge on a decision made by God in eternity past, a decision that put in motion all the other steps of our salvation and that guaranteed that those whom he chose would truly and surely be saved; only if the fact that we are now saved is owing to what God decided when he chose us to be the recipients of his grace in Christ; only if election truly is unconditional and is the decision God made of who he surely would save—only then does it make sense that this concept would receive the special attention and be given the special commendation that Scripture affords it. In short, only unconditional election really and truly is election.

Paul Jewett has expressed this point with eloquence. Writing of what he calls the *a posteriori* approach to election (i.e., the approach that sees the election of God based on the choices of men and women as God looks ahead at the lives they will live and chooses according to what they will do), he observes that this approach

gives meaning and significance to human history only at the expense of the divine agency and purpose. The emphasis it places on the human agent's choosing the Savior becomes so basic that the emphasis on God's choosing the sinner is reduced, for all practical purposes, to mere appearance. In other words, it conceives of the divine purpose as not a purpose at all but mere prescience, divine foresight of what will happen by human choice. The only purpose left that may be described as God's purpose is his decision to accept the foreseen decision of the creature. This really drains election of all significance, for it is the choice at the human level—belief or unbelief—foreseen, perhaps, but not foreordained, that constitutes the basis of “election.” One is not chosen from “before the foundation of the world”; rather, one's choice of Christ is foreseen “from before the foundation of the world.”

And a few pages later, he comments of this same view,

that such a position is in fact simply a way of saying that God does not really elect or reject anyone, but that from eternity he simply resolves to actualize a general redemptive purpose that incidentally gives rise to a distinction among men and women.... Instead of a free *divine* election *in* Christ, there is a free *human* election *of* Christ.... The Scriptures say that God chose us in Christ from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), not that he saw us from before the foundation of the world as choosing Christ. There is no possible way of reducing these two statements to a common meaning.

If one considers seriously the gravity of this doctrine to biblical writers, it becomes clear that the only conception of election that accords with the weightiness with which it is presented is the astonishing truth that God, before time and creation, chose particular sinful men and women, and that he determined on their behalf that he would do absolutely everything (and oh, how much that is!) that would be required to bring to them their sure and certain salvation. Because God chose them, in time, they would be enlivened so that they would choose him. This election of God—unconditional election—alone accounts for the place and prominence this doctrine has in the biblical record. Election to salvation, then, is unconditional election.

Objections to Unconditional Election

On Sunday morning, April 29, 1739, John Wesley (1703–1791) preached one of the most memorable and impacting sermons of his entire preaching ministry. In this sermon that was soon published under the title, “Free Grace,” Wesley took as his text Romans 8:32 (“He that spared not his own Son”), and as Wesley wrote to James Hutton the next day, he “declared openly for the first hour against ‘the horrible decree’”—an obvious reference to Calvin's own comment about the doctrine of divine reprobation, some version of which follows from the doctrine of unconditional election. In his informative discussion of Wesley's sermon and its impact on Methodism,³³ H. B. McGonigle comments, “This sermon was something of a theological *tour de force*. It revealed John Wesley, in his first sermon and publication on predestination, to be dogmatically anti-Calvinist. Although Calvin's name was never mentioned nor that of any other Calvinist writer, it was Calvin's teaching on the ‘horrible decree’ that was plainly the target.”

Wesley enumerated several objections to the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election, as many Arminians throughout history have done. In what follows, I will express and answer what seem to me to be the most serious and the most oft-repeated of these objections, endeavoring to defend the doctrine of unconditional election in light of them. Because of space limitations, the reader will have to settle for brief and sometimes less than fully adequate explanations. But I

hope that the main lines of responses are clear enough to see how this doctrine can rightly withstand these challenges.

Objection 1

Since Scripture declares plainly (Rom. 9:29; 1 Pet. 1:1–2) that divine election is based (or conditioned) on God’s foreknowledge, then it is clear that election cannot be unconditional. Both of these texts indicate that God knows from eternity past how each person will act and choose throughout all of history, and this foreknowledge includes God’s advanced knowledge of how each person will respond when the gospel is presented, i.e., whether each will believe in Christ or not. Therefore, God’s election is conditioned upon God’s knowledge of persons’ “foreseen faith” and so his election is conditional, not unconditional.

Reply. First, while God’s “knowledge” in Scripture can refer simply to God’s cognitive and factual knowledge of what occurs, in many instances it has the richer relational meaning of God having a disposition to favor and relate intimately with (“know”) certain persons. Consider in the Old Testament, Jeremiah 1:5 (HCSB), “I chose you [lit. “I knew you,” from *yada*, “to know”] before I formed you in the womb; I set you apart before you were born. I appointed you a prophet to the nations”; and Amos 3:2a (HCSB), “I have known only you out of all the clans of the earth.” And in the New Testament, consider Matthew 7:23 (HCSB), “Then I will announce to them, ‘I never knew you! Depart from Me, you lawbreakers!’ ”; John 10:14 (HCSB), “I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me”; and Galatians 4:9 (HCSB), “But now, since you know God, or rather have become known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and bankrupt elemental forces?” As such, “foreknowledge” likewise refers most often not merely to God’s factual knowledge of future affairs but is rather *God’s prior disposition to relate to and favor* (“know”) certain persons. That is, before they even exist (e.g., Jer. 1:5 HCSB), God seeks to “know” them, to favor them and relate intimately with (“know”) them.

Second, as Jewett points out, a serious problem with the Arminian reading of Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1–2 is that they read into these passages ideas that simply are not stated. In his own reply to this Arminian objection from these passages, Jewett states, “The answer is simply that these texts do not say, ‘Whom God foreknew *would believe*, he predestinated,’ nor that we as Christians are ‘elect according to the foreknowledge *which God has of our faith.*’ ” Jewett is correct. Indeed, while these texts clearly say that God foreknew *the people* whom he then elected, they do not indicate something *about them*, or some *future choice of theirs*, that God knew as the basis of his election of them to salvation. Put differently, foreknowledge here is not of some specific *propositional knowledge* about people, but it refers to God’s *relational knowledge* of certain people themselves. As Romans 8:29 (HCSB) puts it, “For *those He foreknew* He also predestined” (italics added).

Third, compelling evidence against the Arminian understanding comes from usage of the same term, “foreknowledge,” in other texts in Romans and 1 Peter, respectively. Romans 11:2 (HCSB) states, “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.” Now, if we applied the Arminian notion of foreknowledge here, this text would mean, “God has not rejected His people *whom He knew in advance would choose Him.*” But clearly this is not the case! God chose Israel, from all the nations of the world, even though she was the smallest and weakest of the lot (Deut. 7:6–8; 14:2)! It simply is not the case that God picked Israel to be his people because he knew in advance that Israel would pick him! Rather, what Romans 11:2 (HCSB) is saying is this: “God

has not rejected His people whom He *previously had been disposed to be in relationship with and favor.*” Both the usual lexical meaning of “foreknowledge” and the historical facts about God’s relationship with Israel indicate that this is what Paul means in Romans 11:2.

And consider 1 Peter 1:20 (HCSB), “He [Christ] was destined [literally, “He was foreknown”] before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the times for you.” Again, if the Arminian conception of “foreknowledge” is applied here, we would be led to think Peter meant, “Before the foundation of the world, God *knew that Christ would choose to come*, but He was revealed at the end of the times for you.” The problem with this reading is that it conflicts with how Jesus himself explained his own coming to earth, time and time again. We regularly hear Jesus saying things like, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38 HCSB); “I came from God and I am here. For I didn’t come on My own, but He sent Me” (John 8:42 HCSB); and “I do nothing on My own. But just as the Father taught Me, I say these things” (John 8:28 HCSB). Jesus uniformly credits the Father with sending him to earth, and he seeks always and only to do the will of his Father.

Instead, then, 1 Peter 1:20 must mean something like this: “Before the foundation of the world, Christ was *previously favored by God to be the One Whom He would send to come as Savior*, but was revealed at the end of the times for you.” Given that the same term for “foreknowledge” is used in such close proximity to our two key texts, and given that the Arminian understanding fails in both of these parallel texts, it seems highly doubtful that “foreknowledge” means what Arminians claim in Romans 8:29 or 1 Peter 1:1–2.

Therefore, the Arminian conception of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:1–2 suffers from lexical, conceptual, and contextual objections that show that it cannot be the meaning that the biblical authors intended. Rather, when foreknowledge is understood as God’s prior disposition to relate with and favor certain people, now these passages make clear sense. Paul would mean, “For those for whom God had a prior disposition to relate with and favor, He predestined ... called ... justified ... and glorified.” Favor, indeed! And Peter would mean, “You were chosen according to the Father’s prior disposition to relate with you and favor you, and so you were set apart by the Spirit for obedience, to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.” And, understood this way, election based on God’s foreknowledge is fully consistent with the doctrine of unconditional election. Recall that this doctrine holds that God selects whom he will save, not based on anything about their characters, actions, or choices *but in accord with his own good pleasure and will*. Election conditioned on foreknowledge, in this sense then, is fully compatible with and expressive of the doctrine of unconditional election.

Objection 2

The universal, impartial, and equal love of God for all people demonstrates that unconditional election cannot be true. Since God is love, and since God’s love is the same for all people whom he has made, it cannot be the case that the reason some are not saved is owing to *God’s choice*, ultimately. Rather, some are not saved because *they* choose not to be saved, yet God would gladly (in love) have saved them, too, had they but come. Therefore, the election spoken of in Scripture simply cannot be unconditional election.

Reply. While Scripture clearly teaches God’s universal, impartial, and equal love for all people, this is certainly not the only, or the most central, meaning of the love of God. As D. A. Carson has explained so helpfully, the Bible actually speaks of the love of God in five different senses. One of those five senses is God’s universal love for all (e.g., as seen in John 3:16). But

another sense, one more prominent in Scripture, is God's particular, selective, and discriminate love for his own people. Consider two representative passages, both of which reflect God's special love for his own people, a love that moves him to save them and benefit them in a manner that distinguishes them from all others.

First, Isaiah 43 begins in a manner that believers have often found greatly comforting. "Do not fear," God tells his people, "for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine" (Isa. 43:1 HCSB). Further, God promises, "I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you" (Isa. 43:2 HCSB). So God establishes the fact that he is the God of his people, and he will be with them to provide for them and to protect them, for as he says to them, "you are Mine."

The true significance of God's special claim upon *this* people, *his* people, is about to be seen more clearly, however. We read on: "For I the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, and your Savior, give Egypt as a ransom for you, Cush and Seba in your place. Because you are precious in My sight and honored, and I love [from *aheb*, "to love"] you, I will give human beings in your place, and peoples in place of your life" (Isa. 43:3–4 HCSB). Here, then, is the particular, selective, and discriminate love of God for his own. He loves his people Israel by saving them at the expense of ("in the place of") many lives of Egyptians. Clearly this is a reference to the favor shown the Jews at the time of their exodus from Egypt. For, although God could have given the same warning and instruction in Egypt regarding the upcoming angel of death as he did among the Israelites prior to the exodus, he did not. Nor did he intend to do so.

Instead, God warned and instructed only the Jews (Exod. 12:1–13), and since the Jews did as God said and put the blood of a slaughtered lamb over the doorposts of their houses, the angel of death "passed over" their homes. But since the Egyptians knew nothing of this means of being spared, the angel went on into Egypt and killed the firstborn in every Egyptian home and stable (Exod. 12:29–30). Accordingly, Isaiah 43 demonstrates the love of God for his people Israel, a love which is only meaningful in this passage and context by virtue of its selectivity and particularity, with God saving Israel only through the judgment and death brought to Egypt.

Second, consider the significance of this well-known and instructive passage: "Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, to make her holy, cleansing her in the washing of water by the word. He did this to present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless" (Eph. 5:25–27 HCSB). Often what is pointed out from this passage, and rightly so, is the sacrificial nature of Christ's love for the church, an amazing and costly love that is the model for all husbands to endeavor to emulate. But another principle arises when one considers this text: because Christ's love here is likened to a husband's love for his wife, Christ's love, then, is a particular, selective, and discriminate love. That is, Paul tells us that husbands are to love *their wives* as Christ loved *the church*. Without question, a husband's love for his own wife is a selective and particular love; it is a love that seeks the nurture, well-being, protection, provision, joy, and blessing of this *one woman* over all others. And so it must be!

Just imagine the response a husband would receive from his wife were he to say to her, "Honey, I love you, but I want you to know that the love I have for you is the same love in every respect that I have for all the women I meet, indeed, for all the women of the world!" If the wife responded by saying, "Well then, you don't really love *me!*" she would be right. If a husband's love for his wife is not particular, selective, and discriminate, then it is not really husbandly love. And the parallel truth is made clear and explicit in this passage: Christ loved *the church* and gave himself *for her*.

This love, by definition and necessity, then, is a love for his own bride that is different in kind and content from the general love God (or Christ) has for the world. This love, as we see from verses 26–27, leads Christ to save and purify the church. This love impels Christ to make the church “holy and blameless,” fulfilling what the Father had in election chosen for the church to become in his Son (note: Eph. 1:4 and 5:27 use the same phrase, “holy and blameless”). In short, this richest of all the demonstrations of God’s love among human beings is, by necessity, a selective, particular, and discriminate love for just some.

Two main problems surface, then, in this Arminian objection. First, it misunderstands the Bible’s teaching on the love of God. It “flattens” God’s love and so reduces it to only one of the biblical senses of God’s love. Theological reductionism is dangerous simply because it errs by telling only partial truths. Arminianism, then, tells a partial truth about the love of God, but because it presents it as the whole, it distorts what Scripture actually says. Second, due to the reductionism just mentioned, the richest and most incredible sense of the love of God for human beings is lost, viz., God’s committed, sacrificial, faithful, loyal love for his own people. Just as “husbandly” love is destroyed altogether if a man were only capable of loving all women (including his wife!) equally and exactly in the same way, so here God’s love for his own people is lost when the distinctiveness of this greatest of God’s loves is denied. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1, we should bless and praise God the Father because “*in love* He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself (Eph. 1:4b–5 HCSB; italics added). His electing love (Eph. 1:4–5), his saving love (Eph. 5:25–27) is, by necessity, a gracious, selective, and particular love for which God is worthy of the highest praise and honor.

Objection 3

Unconditional election stands directly opposed to God’s own desire that all be saved. Out of his universal love for all, God has a universal desire for the salvation of all sinners. Ezekiel 18:23; 1 Timothy 2:4; and 2 Peter 3:9 all teach, in their own ways, that God does not desire the wicked to perish but rather that he wills that all be saved. Since this is taught in Scripture, it simply cannot be the case that God unconditionally wills that he certainly will save only some such that he also wills that others certainly perish. Election, then, must be conditional upon the freewill choices of human beings who reject God’s loving desire that all be saved.

Reply. My reply must be far briefer than this objection deserves, but thankfully other fine and more extensive treatments are available. The heart of the answer here is much like what we saw in the previous discussion. On the question of the will of God regarding salvation, the Bible presents God’s saving will in two ways, not one. Yes, Arminians are correct to point to passages teaching the will of God that all be saved. And many Calvinists, including myself, will grant that these texts teach the universal saving will of God, much as I also am fully convinced that the Bible teaches the universal love of God for all people. But the Bible’s teaching does not stop here. Rather, Scripture teaches also the specific and inviolable will of God that some surely and certainly be saved along with its teaching that God wills the salvation of all.⁴¹ The *particular will of God* surely and certainly to save some (i.e., the elect), stands alongside the *universal will of God* that all be saved. How can it be both ways? Consider just one pair of passages that illustrates these “two wills” of God, and then I’ll offer a few summary comments.

First Timothy 2:3–4 (HCSB) states, “This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who *wants everyone to be saved* and to come to the *knowledge of the truth*” (italics added), and 2 Timothy 2:24–26 (HCSB) says, “The Lord’s slave must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able

to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps *God will grant them repentance to know the truth*. Then they may come to their senses and escape the Devil's trap, having been captured by him to do his will" (italics added). One feature common to both of these passages is that for people to be saved, they need to come to the knowledge of, or to know, "the truth." Yet, while they share this in common, they differ insofar as in 1 Timothy 2:4 (HCSB) God "wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth," but in 2 Timothy 2:25 (HCSB), God must "grant them repentance" for them "to know the truth" and be saved.

In other words, God wills that all be saved, but unless God wills to grant repentance they cannot be saved. Or yet again, God wills both that all be saved, and God wills that only those to whom he grants repentance be saved. God's will, then, is both universal and particular, desiring in the first case that all be saved and in the second case that only some be saved.

Perhaps two summary comments are in order. First, whether we can understand fully how it is that God can possess *a universal love for all*, along with a *particular love for his own*, or how God can possess a *universal will that all be saved*, along with a *particular will that elects only some to be saved*—whether we can grasp fully how both can be true—nevertheless, we are bound to the Scriptures! The Arminian view errs on these matters, not fundamentally by falsely teaching what the Bible says but by teaching only part of what the Bible says without accepting other teachings which do not easily fit with what already has been accepted. When half-truths become presented as whole truths, misrepresentation and error are inevitable. We must have a determination to accept all that Scripture teaches, and clearly it teaches both sets of truths on these issues.

Second, I do think we can understand something of how God can genuinely desire the salvation of all yet ordain and determine the salvation of only some. We can understand something of this because we experience much the same reality at times in our human experience. I recall watching a PBS special many years ago that told the story of an agonizing decision Winston Churchill had to make during WW II. Hitler's messages to his frontline troops and U-boats were sent to them encoded, and the German units possessed decoding machines (called "enigmas") to read and know what he was instructing them. Allied scientists developed their own version of such a decoding machine, and they would intercept Hitler's messages, decode them, and call Churchill, telling him what Hitler had instructed. On one occasion Churchill learned through his scientists' hard decoding work that Hitler had planned, in three days, to send a squadron of bombers over the English channel to bomb the small city of Coventry (a munitions factory lay just outside of the city). Obviously, Churchill wanted to call the mayor of Coventry, have the city evacuated, and save his people. But as recounted in this PBS special, Churchill never made this call. Instead, just as he had been told, German bombers flew over Coventry and bombed it mercilessly, unanticipated by all in the city, resulting in many English lives lost and much property destroyed.

Why didn't Churchill warn the city? The answer is this: if he had called the mayor of Coventry and had the city evacuated, the Germans would have known that Churchill had been able to decode Hitler's instructions. But then this intelligence-gathering advantage would be lost. Churchill believed that the entire war effort was at stake here, that is, that he could save Coventry, but he could not save these people and also win the war. He chose, then, not to save those whom he could have saved—those whom, in one sense, he willed very much to save—because he valued even more highly the fulfillment of the mission that the allied forces win the war.

Clearly all illustrations break down at some point, but where this one helps especially is here: One can possess both the *will and the ability to save certain people*, and this will can be genuine and the ability real. Yet one can also possess, at the same time, a *will not to save those same persons whom one could have saved*. Why would one not save those whom one both could and wants to save? Answer: One would will not to save only if there are *greater values and higher purposes* that could only be accomplished in choosing not to save those whom one could save, those whom one would otherwise want to save. Scripture does give us some indication that this is the case with God.

Consider Romans 9:22–24 (HCSB): “And what if God, desiring to display His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience objects of wrath ready for destruction? And what if He did this to make known the riches of His glory on objects of mercy that He prepared beforehand for glory—on us whom He also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?” Here, as throughout all of Scripture, the glory of God is the supreme value of God. And so we, his creatures, must simply bow and accept what God in his infinite wisdom, holiness, goodness, and power has determined will bring to expression the greatest glory to his name. That both wrath and mercy, both deserved judgment and undeserved grace, both hell and heaven should be planned from all eternity by the perfect mind and heart of God, we must accept since God has told us that this is his ultimate will and that this alone will manifest the fullness of his matchless glory. In the end we must, in our own minds and hearts, let God be God. And we must honor him both for who he is and for the glorious display of his just wrath against deserving sinners as the backdrop for the manifestation of the splendor of his mercy, shown to others who likewise deserved only his condemnation but are now granted his gracious and glorious salvation in Christ.

Objection 4

If unconditional election is true, then it must be the case that those elected to salvation *must* believe in Christ, and those not elected *cannot* believe in Christ. But if so, this raises two big *moral* problems: (1) human beings cannot really be free in their response to the gospel, since they are not able, when responding, to have chosen otherwise, and (2) God cannot rightly and justly hold the unsaved responsible for rejecting the gospel when, in their rejection, they did the only thing they could do, and it was not in their power to do otherwise. In brief, both human freedom and moral responsibility are undermined by the doctrine of unconditional election.

Reply. First, on the question of human freedom, it simply is not the case that we humans have the kind of freedom that Arminians assert we have. Called “libertarian freedom” or “contra-causal freedom” or “freedom of contrary choice,” the Arminian claims that we are only free if, when we choose one thing, we were able—all things being what they are at the moment of our choice—to choose otherwise. That is, we are free in choosing A if, when we choose A, we could instead have chosen B (where B is an action included in the set of logically possible actions other than A). While this notion of freedom has intuitive appeal, it stands up neither to reason nor to Scripture.

Reason. Suppose (along with libertarians) that when we choose A in a given situation, S, we could have chosen B. This means that any reason (or set of reasons) explaining why we chose A would be the *identical* reason (or set of reasons) explaining, instead, why we would choose B. For after all, since our reason(s) for making the choice are included in S, it follows that there is *no choice specific reason* (or set of reasons) for why we chose A over B. (Note: If our reason(s)

were not included in S, then this would mean we were not in identical circumstances in making the choice—yet this is something upon which the libertarian notion of freedom depends.) But if our choice of either A or B stems, then, from the identical reason (or set of reasons), our choosing of A instead of B, or B instead of A, reduces to arbitrariness. This is why many Calvinists have labeled the Arminian notion of freedom a “freedom of indifference.” The point is not that when we choose we have no reason. Rather, it is that when we choose, any reason (or set of reasons) we have must be the identical reason (or set of reasons) for why we might instead have made the opposite choice—this makes us indifferent in respect to choosing A *or* B, and thus there is no accounting for why we chose A *and not* B.

The Calvinist notion of freedom, on the other hand, explains fully why we choose A and not B. Our freedom is not a freedom of indifference, but a “freedom of inclination”—that is, we choose and act out of our natures so that we do what we *most want* (i.e., what we are *most inclined*) to do. We are free in our choices if, when we make a choice, we are not constrained or coerced but rather we do exactly what we *most want* to do.

Take an example: suppose a dieter chooses to pass up a piece of chocolate cake. He might say to a friend, “I really want to eat that piece of cake,” but if he passes it up, then it is the case that he wanted something more than he wanted to eat the cake, viz., he *wanted most* to stick to his diet. But it stands to reason that if we do what we most want at any given moment, then it cannot be the case that when we choose what we do, we could have chosen otherwise. That is, given the exact conditions that pertain when we make a choice, our wills give expression to the *one thing that we most want in that situation*, so in that situation we do what we have to do, i.e., what we most want to do. In this sense, then, we are not able to do otherwise. Change—perhaps even slightly—the situation, the conditions, the circumstances, and yes, we could (and probably would) do otherwise. But under the particular conditions in which we make a given choice, we do the one thing we most want, and in this sense, we cannot do other than the one thing we want *most* to do.

Scripture. Scripture abounds with examples of how our free acts accord with God’s prior will and purpose so that although we do what we most want, and so we act freely, nonetheless we are fulfilling God’s plan and so we could not do otherwise. Space permits only one example: Through the prophet Isaiah, God announces, “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger—the staff in their hands is My wrath. I will send him against a godless nation; I will command him to go against a people destined for My rage, to take spoils, to plunder, and to trample them down like clay in the streets” (Isa. 10:5–6 HCSB). Amazingly, God states that the nation of Assyria, with its military prowess and might, is actually a tool in his hand, commanded by him to carry out his will. Assyria has no clue that this is the case (see Isa. 10:7, 12–14), but the fact remains that Assyria is the rod of God’s anger against his people Israel.

Yet notice how this passage began: *Woe* to Assyria! One might think that if God has raised up Assyria to do his will, if God commands Assyria to bring this devastation upon the people of Israel whom God is hereby judging, that Assyria would not be held morally responsible. But this is not so. Rather, they do God’s will, and they are judged for doing the very thing they do. Verse 12 (HCSB) makes this clear: “But when the Lord finishes all His work [i.e., of judgment through Assyria] against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He will say, ‘I will punish the king of Assyria for his arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes.’ ” Yes, Assyria does God’s express will, and Assyria is held accountable for all the evil they do from the willful arrogance of their hearts.

And consider one more point: the freedom of Assyria, then, cannot be a freedom of contrary choice; no, they must do the will of God, for God has raised them up for this purpose and

commanded them to carry out his will. Rather, their freedom is found in this: *they do exactly what they most want to do*. Notice indications of this in these statements: “But this is not what he [Assyria] *intends*; this is not what he *plans*” (10:7 HCSB); “*My hand seized* the idolatrous kingdoms” (10:10 HCSB), “*I have done this* by my own strength” (10:12 HCSB); “*My hand has reached out*, as if into a nest” (10:14 HCSB; italics added). Although God has willed that Assyria be the tool by which he would bring his judgment on Israel, yet Assyria carries out its evil plans and purposes entirely as it most supremely wants to do. God’s sovereign plan is carried out, then, through the free and responsible actions of this wicked people.

Second, if one has followed the previous discussion carefully, one can already detect how the issue of the justice of God in holding people morally accountable for the evil they do may be answered. In particular, how can God rightly and justly hold the unsaved responsible for rejecting the gospel when, in their rejection, they did the only thing they could do and it was not in their power to do otherwise? The answer, in brief, is this: so long as those who reject the gospel act out of their own natures and inclinations, choosing and doing what they most want, then they are fully responsible for their actions. A supposed power of contrary choice is not necessary for God to hold people accountable. Since both reason and Scripture demonstrate that the so-called power of contrary choice is an illusion and does not really exist, obviously God is not bound to make sure people have it before holding them morally responsible for their actions.

Rather, unsaved people have natures that do not seek God (Rom. 3:11), natures dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), natures blinded to the truth of the gospel (2 Cor. 4:4), such that they are hostile to God and unable to please him (Rom. 8:6–8). When unsaved people hear and reject the gospel, they do what their natures *most want* to do, and hence they are fully responsible. It is not necessary for them to have had the moral ability to accept the gospel (when they reject it) for God to hold them accountable since this notion (of the so-called power of contrary choice) is both contrary to reason and Scripture. Rather, unbelievers do the one thing they most want to do, and so they choose freely and with moral culpability when they hear the gospel of Christ and say, “no.”

But allow me to take this one step further. The situation I’ve just described is the case for all sinful human beings, for all of us share in the sin of Adam and its consequences (Rom. 5:12–19). Were it not for God’s effectual call on the lives of his elect, were it not for his giving of irresistible grace to those whom he had chosen to save out of all of humanity deserving destruction, none of us would ever have believed in Christ and been saved. Therefore, those who reject Christ deserve the condemnation they receive, for they did what they most wanted in that choice to say “no” to God’s gracious offer of salvation. And those who receive Christ cannot boast at all in their receiving the eternal life that comes by faith (1 Cor. 1:26–31; Eph. 2:8–9), for apart from God’s effectual and gracious work in their lives, to open their hearts (Acts 16:14) and their eyes (2 Cor. 4:6), they, too, would never have come. God is sovereign, and yes, we are free and responsible. Both of these truths are taught in Scripture, they are compatible, and those of us who cherish the Scriptures and bow to their authority must accept both as true.

Objection 5

If unconditional election is true, then it must be the case that those elected to salvation *must* be saved, and those not elected *cannot* be saved. But if so, this raises a significant *practical* problem: both prayer for the unsaved and evangelism to reach the unsaved are undermined, since

due to God's election, the elect cannot fail to be saved and the non-elect cannot, under any circumstances, be saved. So why pray? Why share the gospel?

Reply. The answer to these related practical questions is the same for each: God not only has ordained the "ends" (i.e., the goals or outcomes or purposes) that he has designed for all of creation, but he also has ordained the "means" that are necessary to occur for the ends to be fulfilled. As this relates to unconditional election, yes it is absolutely true that the elect most surely and certainly will be saved, and that the non-elect are just as certainly left in their sinful condition to experience the consequences of their sin. But again here, we see that Scripture has more to say than this one thing. Scripture is also unambiguous and insistent that people must put faith in Christ to be saved (Rom. 3:22–23; Gal. 2:16). One of the most stirring calls upon Christians to commit themselves to getting the gospel out to people who have not heard comes in Romans 10. Get the significance of this point! Throughout this discussion the reader will no doubt have noticed several references to Romans 9 and Romans 11 in support of unconditional election. Right in the middle of this discussion, in relation to unsaved Jews for whom Paul has a deep and abiding burden, he makes some telling statements in Romans 10:12–15. Here, in the chapter following Paul's declaration on God's behalf, "I will show mercy to whom I show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom. 9:15 HCSB), Paul now declares, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13 HCSB).

And of course, both statements are true. Yes, God has elected those upon whom he surely will show mercy, and they will be saved. But how will they be saved? Answer: Only as they hear the gospel proclaimed to all, throughout the world, and only as the Spirit works in them to see the glory of Christ in the gospel and come to saving faith. The means of gospel proclamation are absolutely necessary for the elect to be saved.

Consider two other passages. First, Paul writes, "Keep in mind Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descended from David, according to my gospel. For this I suffer, to the point of being bound like a criminal; but God's message is not bound. This is why *I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation*, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:8–10 HCSB; italics added). The apostle Paul, who celebrates and teaches that God has elected people to be saved, understands this election not as a barrier to evangelism but as an incentive! For Paul, how very wrong it is to think that election undermines gospel witness. Just the opposite is the case. Because God has elected people to be saved and because they will only be saved as they hear the gospel and believe in Christ, therefore Paul says that he endures all the suffering and persecution that he has "for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10 HCSB). Gospel witness to the unsaved is empowered, not hindered, by the realization that God has chosen people out there who, upon hearing the gospel of his Son, will come. But hear they must, and come they will.

Second, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know My own sheep, and they know Me, as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father. I lay down My life for the sheep. But *I have other sheep* that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and *they will listen to My voice*. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:14–16 HCSB; italics added). Jesus has already made clear that the true mark of his own sheep is that they hear his voice and they follow him (John 10:4–5). Now he indicates that there are other sheep of his but sheep who have not as yet heard his voice and so they are not now following him. They *are* his sheep, though, for he says, "I *have* other sheep that are not of this fold," not, "I will seek to acquire other sheep." So they are his sheep, but they have not yet come to him, and so they are not now of his fold. How then will they come? How will these sheep belonging to Jesus become part of his fold? Answer: they must hear

his voice! And when they hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, because they are his sheep, “they *will* listen” to his voice, and they *will* become part of “one flock” with “one shepherd.”

Gospel proclamation, then, may be thought of as speaking forth the voice of the Good Shepherd through the voice of the evangelist or missionary. As we bear witness to Christ and his saving death, through our voices the Spirit brings the voice of Jesus to the hearts of the elect. Those sheep that belong already to Jesus but are not yet part of his fold will hear, and they will come. Such is the confidence and joy of gospel proclamation that accords with the glorious doctrine of unconditional election. And such is the conviction that propelled the fathers of the modern missions movement—William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and Adoniram Judson, for example—to take the gospel to foreign lands. The elect will come, they were convinced. But they will come and be saved *only* as they hear and believe the gospel. So missionaries must go!

Both of these passages have focused on evangelism, but the same principles apply to prayer in regard to the unsaved. We must pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth workers into his harvest (Matt. 9:38), pray that doors are opened for the proclamation of the gospel (Col. 4:3), pray that we and others remain alert in the midst of spiritual warfare (Eph. 6:10–18), pray for those witnessing to have boldness to speak as they should (Eph. 6:19–20), and pray that the word of the Lord would spread rapidly and be glorified (2 Thess. 3:1). In all these ways and more, we are to pray in order for the purposes of God in saving the elect to occur. Both prayer and evangelism, then, are *necessary* in the outworking of God’s purposes so that while the ends that God has designed surely will be accomplished, they will only come to pass as those means, ordained by God as necessary to the completion of his work, are carried out. Both prayer and evangelism, then, are empowered activities for the Christian through the realization that God has ordained these as the necessary means to accomplish the glorious and gracious saving work he has designed.

Individual Election

Definition and Explanation of Individual Election

Individual election to salvation may be defined as God’s gracious choice, made in eternity past, of the specific individual persons whom he would save by faith through the atoning death of his Son. That is, Scripture teaches not only that God the Father chooses to save “a people” or “the church” or “a bride” for his Son but also that those particular persons who comprise the saved people of God, or the church, or the bride of Christ, are themselves unconditionally elected by God to be saved.

Support for individual Election

Key passages teaching individual election. First, many of the passages examined earlier in support of seeing election as unconditional also indicate that this unconditional election by God is of individuals whom God, in time, then saves. Consider some passages supporting the individual election to salvation.

John 6:37, 39; 17:2, 24. John 6:37 is helpful on the question of whether election to salvation is corporate only or specific individuals are in view. Here, Jesus tells those who have refused to believe in him, “Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never cast out.” And in verse 39 (HCSB), he says, “This is the will of Him who sent Me:

that I should lose none of those He has given Me but should raise them up on the last day.” Two things are clear. First, Jesus declares that *specific persons* are given to him by the Father. The point of Jesus saying what he does in verse 37 was so that the Jews who rejected Jesus would conclude that they have not been given to him. If they had been, they would have come. But their disbelief and hardness of heart are evidence that they have not been given to Jesus by the Father. In contrast, Jesus tells them, “Everyone the Father gives Me will come to Me.” Therefore, some specific ones are given to Jesus by the Father, and other specific ones are not.

Second, that all of those given to Jesus by the Father are saved further confirms that *specific persons* are given to Christ by the Father. This is clear from both verses (“The one who comes to Me *I will never cast out*,” and, “I should *lose none* of those He has given Me but should *raise them up on the last day*”). Accordingly, those given to Jesus from the Father cannot be understood as the Father giving the Son the whole world (so that the Father has no control over who actually chooses to come and be saved) or as the Father giving Jesus some unspecified but empty “group” of the saved. Rather, here *each and every one* of those given to the Son is saved; he will lose *none* of them but will raise each one up on the last day. Since only some are saved in the end and since all that the Father gives the Son are saved, it follows that the Father gives the Son specific individual persons whom the Son then surely and certainly saves.

Jesus’ prayer to the Father in John 17 indicates his desire and longing to give eternal life “to all You have given Him” (John 17:2 HCSB) and to bring to glory “those You have given Me” (John 17:24 HCSB). For this to be a meaningful request requires that Jesus understand the Father to have given him certain specific individuals whom he would save. The alternative, it seems, is senseless. Could the Father have given Jesus an empty set of “ones saved by Jesus,” which set was then filled by whoever chose to become a part of this set through their own personal faith in Christ but of whose constituents the Father exerted no control? If this is the case, then the Father gave the Son no one at all, and there is no point in speaking of the Father giving these to the Son. Instead, the Father would only have given the Son the mandate to save, but whoever actually is saved depends on whoever comes. Of course, this is a logical possibility, but it is not a possibility that accords with the statements in John 17:2 and 24 (and many similar texts). Rather, the only meaningful way of understanding Jesus’ statements in these verses is in affirming that the Father gave specific persons to the Son, for whom he prays, and to whom he longs to grant eternal life.

John 10:16. When Jesus states, “*I have other sheep* that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they *will listen* to My voice” (John 10:16 HCSB; italics added), surely this means that there are other specific individuals who are already his, specific ones who surely will be saved (“They will listen to My voice”), but as yet they have not been saved. If, instead, it was possible for any and all of the sheep of the world to hear his voice and follow him, then this statement would make no sense. In that case he doesn’t presently have any other sheep, but he would hope to be able to gain some more in time. Rather, here he indicates that specific sheep, among all the sheep of the world, are already his. When these specific sheep hear his voice, what marks them as his sheep is that they *will* hear his voice and come. Specific and individual election is required to make meaningful sense of what Jesus says.

Acts 13:48. “When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed” (HCSB). The individual nature of election is clear from the fact that many Jews had just heard the gospel and had rejected it (Acts 13:44–46). But, in turning to the Gentiles, Paul encountered a different response with many Gentiles believing. But when Luke records this phenomenon, he does not say, “Unlike the Jews

who rejected the gospel, many Gentiles believed unto eternal life.” This surely would not have been wrong or inaccurate, but it would have left out one of the main points Luke built in. What Luke wants to get across is just why these specific Gentiles believed when the response previously had been so distressing. Luke underscores the point that “all who had been appointed to eternal life believed.” In light of the fact that the gospel was spread widely among many, yet only some came, it is significant here that “all” (or some translations have “as many as,” still indicating a set number of persons) of some category are saved. Who are these? All whom God appointed are saved. It simply won’t work to import the notion of corporate election of an empty set of “the saved.” This cannot account for the fact that all those appointed are saved. Individual election to salvation is the only reasonable reading of what Luke records here since “all” (or “as many as”) must refer to the specific persons appointed by God to believe in Christ in contrast to others who are not saved.

Ephesians 1:4–5; Romans 8:29–30. These important and familiar texts also support the individual election of specific persons to salvation. In both cases, persons, not categories or classes, are said to be “elected” or “predestined.” Notice that Paul says, “God chose *us*” in Christ (Eph. 1:4 HCSB), “He predestined *us*” to be adopted (Eph. 1:5 HCSB), and “*those* He foreknew He also predestined . . . and *those* He predestined, He also called; and *those* He called, He also justified; and *those* He justified, He also glorified” (Rom. 8:29–30 HCSB). Granted, Paul has in mind many persons. But many persons making up a category (i.e., those chosen) is different from an empty category to be filled however others see fit. These verses indicate that the election of persons accounts for the presence of the category, and not the reverse. Why is there a church? Why is there a people of God? Why is there a saved community? The answer is that God chose *us*, he predestined *us*, i.e., he called *those* individuals who would make up the company of the redeemed. Individual election is called for by these glorious texts, and what joy to think of God’s eternal plan of salvation that had in mind each and every specific person whom he chose to save through the liberating work of his Son.

Effectual calling requires individual election. It simply is impossible to deny individual election to salvation if the means by which each and every saved person comes to faith in Christ is the Spirit’s effectual call, a call that necessarily moves each one to saving faith. Now, it is true that if the only kind of divine calling taught in Scripture were the general call, a corporate rather than individual notion of election would work well. The general call, then, is compatible with a corporate notion of election.

But if all who are saved are actually called by God also through the effectual call (as argued above), then the discriminating and selective nature of this call—of who is called in this way and who is not—indicates that God’s choice of who to save is made on the individual level. The effectual call, then, by nature of its being selective, requires that the choice of those to whom this call is extended is individual, not corporate.

Unconditional election requires individual election. As we have seen, the doctrine of unconditional election asserts that God chooses whom he will save, not based on any fact or feature of people’s lives but according to his good pleasure and will. Upon hearing this, some might think, then, that such an election could not be individual, since God does not consider features of individuals’ lives in deciding whether to choose them to be saved. This misses the point, however, that he still chooses the individuals who will be saved although nothing about their choices, actions, or character figures into the “why” of his choice. God still chooses each person who is saved but not because of the person himself or herself.

Perhaps the example in Romans 9 of Jacob and Esau will help bring this point home. You'll recall that Paul says of them, "For though they had not been born yet or done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to election might stand, not from works but from the One who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger" (Rom. 9:11–12 HCSB). Clearly the unconditional nature of election is emphasized in verse 11. Yet, while nothing particular about them was the basis of God's election, their identities as "Jacob" and "Esau" were established clearly so that God specifically chose one, not the other. Unconditional election, then, does not undermine individual election, but it does ensure that none who are elected may rightly take credit, in any respect, for their being elected by God. So, while unconditional election assures us that the *basis* of God's election is devoid of any quality or choice or action in our own lives, it also instructs and amazes us that the *subjects* of God's election are indeed specific, individual persons. Unconditional election, rightly understood, requires that our election to salvation is individual.

God's exhaustive definite foreknowledge requires individual election. There is a sense in which any Arminian who attempts to understand election as merely corporate (i.e., God chooses the "empty set" of the "saved," which set is filled only by the free choices of people in time) can only do so by ignoring or denying the exhaustive definite foreknowledge of God. That is, since God knows everything about the future of the world he will create "before" he ever takes the first step in creating it, it stands to reason that he must know, as part of this exhaustive knowledge of all that will transpire, exactly and particularly who will come to Christ and be saved and who will reject Christ and be condemned. That is, God's exhaustive foreknowledge, as understood by all Christian denominations throughout all of history, requires that God know precisely the constituents that make up "the saved" at the same "instant" that he chooses, in fact, to save. Individual election, then, is logically required when one holds to exhaustive definite foreknowledge.

One further comment is in order in light of the openness rejection of exhaustive definite foreknowledge. Obviously because open theism denies that God can know the future free choices of his moral creatures, God cannot know from eternity past any of the individuals who will be saved. More precisely, he cannot know whether any individuals will be saved or who they are, if in fact they are saved. Furthermore, God cannot know which individuals will actually live, what any of them will do, how long they might or might not live, or anything else about human life on the planet he seeks to populate with his free moral human beings. It is clear, as one contemplates seriously the openness proposal, that the ignorance of God regarding the future of human history is vast indeed.

One implication of the openness denial of exhaustive definite foreknowledge for the doctrine of election, then, is that it places God in the position of considering the idea of saving fallen human beings as a mere contingency plan, at best. Since he cannot know that the fall will occur (though he may, contrary to John Sanders, consider that the fall is likely), he certainly cannot know that he will need to save anyone. And, since he cannot know who will need to be saved (indeed, he cannot know that there will be any actual persons living who need to be saved), he cannot plan on anyone's salvation, in particular. The result of all of this is to make the eternal plan of God to save sinners both speculative and impersonal, and this stands in direct conflict with the Bible's own portrayal of God's plan of salvation, from eternity past, as both definitive and personal—even individual. How ironic that a model of God that attempts to show God as more, not less, personal, requires a view of his saving purposes (one of the most important things God does!) as abstract and altogether impersonal.

Infralapsarian Election

Definition and Explanation of Infralapsarian Election

Infralapsarian election to salvation may be defined as God's gracious choice, made in eternity past, of those whom he would save by faith through the atoning death of his Son, a choice which considered all of humanity as fallen, sinful, and guilty in Adam, fully deserving of eternal condemnation while fully undeserving of the bestowal of any favor or kindness, according to which God elected out of the whole of this fallen and guilty humanity some particular sinners to be granted eternal life in Christ, by grace, and through faith.

Historians of the Reformed tradition have uniformly noted that the infralapsarian view has been the dominant position held by the inheritors of Calvin's predestinarianism. Clearly all the major Reformed confessions and creeds reflect either a straightforward infralapsarian view, or they speak in ways that leave the issue indefinite so that advocates of both infra- and supralapsarianism may subscribe. But no major Reformed creed has espoused a strict supralapsarian view that intentionally and explicitly excluded infralapsarians. Berkhof comments that

the Reformed Churches in their official standards have always adopted the infralapsarian position, even though they have never condemned, but always tolerated, the other view. Among the members of the Synod of Dort and of the Westminster Assembly there were several Supralapsarians who were held in high honour.... but in both the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession the infralapsarian view finds expression.

In more recent times the preference for the infralapsarian view continues among most in Reformed theology, yet there is also a greater sense expressed by some today that this debate may be misdirected. John Feinberg, for example, considers the disagreement between infra- and supralapsarians over the order of the divine decrees "fundamentally wrongheaded." He continues:

It is so because it treats God's decree as sequential—granted, it contains a logical rather than a temporal sequence, but it is sequential nonetheless. However, individual actions are not disjoined from one another so that God can pick and choose specific items as he constructs the decree for our world. Instead, as God deliberated, he was confronted with an infinite set of possible worlds. He first (logically) decided whether to create at all, and then, having chosen to do so, he chose which of the many worlds he would actualize. But in choosing any given possible world he would already see Adam and everyone else as sinners or not, and either as saved or not. In worlds with sin which is paid for by Christ's atonement, God would see at once all the sinners, saved and unsaved, along with Christ's sacrifice. There simply is no logical sequence of choices to construct when what God chooses is a whole world, not individual events, actions, etc. Hence, it is wrong to ask whether God decreed first (logically) to create human beings, to save the elect, or whatever.

Peterson and Williams also register their complaint that with Beza (not Calvin), Reformed theology took a turn back toward a fundamentally scholastic orientation with its insistence on fully developing all logical extensions of doctrines and providing complete explanations in areas that involved some degree of speculation. They write:

The return to pre-Reformation scholastic theological method enabled a more precise definition and more central place given to the notion of divine decrees and the doctrine of predestination in the thought of such Reformed theologians as Beza, Vermigli and Zanchi than they had enjoyed in Calvin's more exegetically driven theology.... Augustine's

asymmetric understanding of predestination, in which God causes belief in the elect but does not cause the unbelief of the unregenerate, is replaced by a doctrine of double predestination. The decree of God relates to belief and unbelief in the same manner. Even though Beza sought to soften the harshness of the doctrine of double predestination by emphasizing the role of secondary causes, human responsibility for sin, and the notion of divine permission in relation to human sin and unbelief, it is difficult to imagine how God escapes culpability for human sin in his thought.

Still others in the Reformed tradition are working at providing what might be viewed as a synthesis of the infra- and supralapsarian models of the divine decree. Robert Reymond, for example, has endeavored to put something of a “new face” on supralapsarianism. He suggests that while the supralapsarian view has rightly held that God’s particularist and redemptive purposes stand ultimately behind the entirety of the creation and all it involves, nonetheless supralapsarianism has suffered by seeing God’s ultimate discrimination between elect and reprobate as occurring among men *as men*, not among men *as sinners*. His proposal, then, incorporates what might be called the “infralapsarian insight” that God’s election to salvation is of *sinful men*, yet it upholds the “supralapsarian insight” that the discriminating decree of election and reprobation is prior (logically) to the Fall, being best seen, in fact, as first in the order of the decrees.

The intramural debate among Calvinists over infra- versus supralapsarianism, then, has never been fully resolved. Reflection and revision continue, and concern is rightly registered over avoiding theological speculation, especially where the moral integrity and purity of God may in any way be jeopardized. Still the predominant position advocated among most Reformed communities continues to be some version of infralapsarianism. Why in Reformed circles is the preference normally granted for this way of understanding the elective plan and purpose of God?

Support for Infralapsarian Election

Key passages teaching that divine election is to salvation support infralapsarian election. First, many passages of Scripture that speak of God’s election indicate that it is an election *to salvation*. It stands to reason, if this is the case, that God must have in view persons needing to be saved who are consequently chosen by him for that gracious saving work. But of course, if God’s election is of persons needing to be saved, then it follows that those persons elected are viewed as sinners. Only as sinners would they need salvation, and clearly their election is for this very purpose. Put differently, in eternity past and before the creation of the world, God must have had in mind that the fall into sin had already occurred when he contemplated the totality of humanity out of which he elected some to be saved. Divine election to salvation, then, is infralapsarian. Consider the following passages:

Acts 13:48. “When the Gentiles heard this, they rejoiced and glorified the message of the Lord, and all who had been appointed to eternal life believed” (HCSB). The appointment of these who believe is “to eternal life.” Therefore, their previous election considered them needing the gift of eternal life, hence they were considered sinners.

Romans 8:29–30. Here the goal of predestination includes several elements which indicate that those predestined are sinners chosen to be saved. First, they are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ. One might question if this could relate to unfallen human beings. But the reference to Christ as the “firstborn among many brothers” is unmistakably to Christ as risen from the dead and glorified (cf. Col. 1:18 HCSB). Hence, those predestined need to be raised

with Christ, which entails that they deserve, outside of Christ, death and condemnation. Sinners, then, are predestined to be conformed to the likeness of Christ, the risen One. Second, those predestined are later justified, also indicating that their state, as viewed from eternity past, is as sinners needing forgiveness, not as unfallen creatures who have no sin to be forgiven. Finally, glorification is the ultimate goal of predestination (which accords, of course, with being conformed to the image of Christ), and this, too, indicates the culmination and perfection in holiness they will receive as God's saved ones. Those foreknown and predestined by God, then, are sinners.

Ephesians 1:4. If those elected are chosen *to be* holy and blameless, then presumably, they are not viewed as holy and blameless already at the "time" of their choosing. No, rather, they are viewed as sinners who need to be made what they currently are not, as sinners who are made "holy and blameless" only by the saving work of Christ (Eph. 5:25–27 HCSB). This is confirmed by the fact that election only begins the listing of reasons for praising God that Paul offers in verses 4–14, and among the other reasons he gives is that in Christ we have received "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. 1:7 HCSB). Our election to be holy requires also the shed blood of Christ to bring to us forgiveness. Surely, then, it follows that "when" God elected us, he viewed us as sinners needing forgiveness and sinners whom he determined to make holy.

2 Thessalonians 2:13. Paul here gives perhaps the most explicit statement in Scripture that God chose those who needed to be saved. It follows, then, that God chose sinners since only sinners need the salvation for which they are chosen.

2 Timothy 1:9. Although less explicit than the previous reference, this text also indicates that God chose sinners "before time began" (HCSB). How else could it be, since God's saving us and calling us with a holy calling are linked together, as that which God has given to us in Christ before the creation of the world? Since the gift given to us is that, in Christ, we are viewed as those saved and called to be holy, it must be the case that outside of Christ we are viewed as sinful and deserving condemnation. Confirmation also comes in the reference to grace, not works, by which we receive this salvation and holy calling. If grace must be given, then the one to whom it is given is undeserving. Sin, then, stands in the background as what God overcomes despite our inability to merit or achieve our own holiness. "Before time began," then, God determined to save and call to holiness those who only by grace could be granted such favor. God's election of us in eternity past, then, views us as sinners.

1 Peter 1:1–2. Here Peter links their being chosen with their being set apart "for obedience" and "for the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ" (HCSB). Clearly both of these references indicate that the state of these persons, when viewed by God "prior" (logically) to his choosing them and setting them apart, was of those who were *not* obedient, as those who *needed* to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. God chose sinners, in other words, and his grace is manifest in that they were chosen *as sinners* to become obedient and pure.

Our election "in Christ" supports infralapsarian election. Recall that Paul specifically indicates that our election, decided by God in eternity past, was an election "in Christ." Again, Ephesians 1:4 reads, "For He chose us *in Him*, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in His sight" (HCSB). Similar language is found in 2 Timothy 1:9, where God's calling and grace are "given to us *in Christ Jesus* before time began" (HCSB). One must ask in what sense our election is "in Christ." Surely we cannot reduce this to Christ as the elect One only, as Barth has done. As indicated previously, the object of the verb, "He chose," is "us," not Christ. And surely this cannot mean merely that God chose the possibility that some undefined

number and constituency of persons would one day be “in Christ,” as Klein is prone to suggest.⁶³ This view neither accounts for the “us” as the object of God’s choosing (indicating these specific individuals as elect ones), nor does it account for why Paul would celebrate the truth of election as he here does. Klein’s conception of corporate election in Christ reduces election itself to a mere formality in which God simply ratifies our choices exactly as we make them. With Klein’s position, God certainly is praiseworthy for redemption (Eph. 1:7), but there really is no reason to extol God either for election (Eph. 1:4) or predestination (Eph. 1:5).

Rather, our election “in Christ” must refer to the fact that the Father intended, from the beginning, that there be a people who are saved by his Son and who are united with his Son in newness of life. Surely our being chosen “in Christ” establishes the means, in the plan and purpose of God, by which we will be made “holy and blameless in his sight.” This is confirmed by Paul’s later reference to the same “holy and blameless” conception, where he declares that Christ has so loved the church and given himself for her that he might present the church to himself, without spot or wrinkle, “but holy and blameless” before him (Eph. 5:27 HCSB). To be chosen “in Christ,” then, is to be selected to the unspeakable privilege of sharing in the character and the image of the risen and glorified Christ so that we become like him (holy and blameless) through the purifying work done by him (cf. Rom. 8:29 where we are predestined “to be conformed to the image of His Son”). “In Christ,” then, is the destiny of those chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), much as our adoption by God through Christ is the intended goal of our predestination (Eph. 1:5).

All of this argues, then, that as God looked upon us in eternity past as those as-of-yet unchosen, God had to have seen us as those needing to be saved, i.e., as sinners in need of a Savior. And, in his grace and love, he chose us sinners for the most incredible joy imaginable, viz., that we be united with his Son to experience the fullness and joy of his own character reproduced in us. When choosing us, then, he viewed us as sinners. God’s election of the “us” in Ephesians 1:4 is of sinners destined to be united with his Son, to the praise of his glorious grace.

God’s asymmetrical relationship between election and reprobation aligns best with infralapsarian election. Besides the biblical evidence just discussed, the other most compelling line of argument for the infralapsarian position is that it establishes, more clearly and unambiguously than its supralapsarian counterpart, that God relates to election differently from the way in which he relates to reprobation. *Reprobation* (to eternal condemnation) is based on the just judgment of God in which unrepentant and unbelieving sinners are rightly and justly given the punishment that they deserve. But in contrast, *election* (to eternal life) is based on the mercy of God by which he sends his Son to pay sin’s full penalty and thereby forgives all the elect as they are called effectually and so are saved by grace, through faith in Christ. In brief, *reprobation is conditional*, i.e., based on what sinners have done and deserve, whereas *election is unconditional*, i.e., based on the unmerited grace and favor of God despite what sinners have done and deserve.

Romans 6:23 expresses the heart of this contrast nicely: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (HCSB). Now, because it is the case that in reprobation, *sinners* receive what they deserve (“wages ... death”), and in election, *sinners* receive what they do not deserve (“gift of God ... eternal life”), what is common to those in both categories is that both are understood as sinful. God’s just judgment comes to sinners, and God’s gracious gift of eternal life also comes to sinners. Therefore, it must be the case that when God elected those to be saved, he had in view the totality of humanity in its sin and chose from among all who deserved condemnation some to be saved in order to bestow on them (and them alone)

his gracious gift of eternal life, in his Son. What the infralapsarian view makes clear, then, is *both* that God's reprobation of sinners is fully in accord with his justice and that God's election to salvation of sinners is fully and gloriously gracious. The fundamental asymmetry of Romans 6:23 is upheld in the infralapsarian position.

None of what has been argued above mitigates against the fact that God has ordained both evil and good, both sin and obedience, both reprobation and election (Deut. 32:39; Isa. 45:5–7; Eph. 1:11). But God's relationship and manner of control with regard to each of these opposite moral poles is necessarily different. Because *God is good*, all good can extend directly and immediately from his very nature; but because *God is not in the slightest respect evil*, evil simply cannot extend from him as good does, but rather his control of evil occurs through his meticulous permission and prevention of all the evil that is produced within the created order. So, while God ordains both reprobation and election with the same degree of certainty, his means of rendering each certain, or of controlling just how each is expressed, is asymmetrical both morally and operationally.

In speaking of the certainty of reprobation in the divine plan, Berkhof provides a helpful word of caution:

We should guard against the idea, however, that as election and reprobation both determine with absolute certainty the end unto which man is predestined and the means by which that end is realized, they also imply that in the case of reprobation as well as in that of election God will bring to pass by His own direct efficiency whatsoever He has decreed. This means that, while it can be said that God is the author of the regeneration, calling, faith, justification, and sanctification, of the elect, and thus by direct action on them brings their election to realization, it cannot be said that He is also the responsible author of the fall, the unrighteous condition, and the sinful acts of the reprobate by direct action on them, and thus effects the realization of their reprobation. God's decree undoubtedly rendered the entrance of sin into the world certain, but He did not predestinate some unto sin, as He did others unto holiness. And as the holy God He cannot be the author of sin.

Berkhof's comment near the end of this statement ("He did not predestinate some unto sin, as He did others unto holiness") helps us see how the infralapsarian view contrasts with its supralapsarian counterpart. In its endeavor to understand the order of the divine decrees in an *a priori* fashion, following what Reymond calls "the teleological principle," supralapsarians most commonly understand the decree of election and reprobation as discriminating among human beings who are created but not as yet fallen. What compels supralapsarians in this direction is the conviction that since God's ultimate goal is the glory of his name through the means of both condemnation and salvation (e.g., Rom. 9:22–24), from the very first God had in mind and planned the election of some in Christ and the reprobation of all others.

But while there is a clear logical force to this argument, it entails that both election and reprobation be seen as directed toward those who are unfallen and not sinful. But if so, then God's decree of *reprobation* of those not yet sinful (logically) would seem to entail the predestination of these persons not only to their assigned judgment but also to the sin for which they are judged. It is difficult to see, in this case, how God can escape the charge of being the author of sin. And the decree of *election*, also of those not yet sinful (logically), would seem to entail both (1) the undermining of grace (since they are chosen when they are neither guilty nor deserving of judgment), and (2) their predestination, with the reprobate, to the sin out of which they are to be saved. Therefore, in the end both clear biblical teaching and deep moral concerns

have led most in the Reformed community to follow the infralapsarian understanding of election and reprobation as directed toward those comprising fallen, sinful humanity.

John Gerstner discusses Jonathan Edwards's strong and persistent opposition to supralapsarianism as expressed in both his sermons and *Miscellanies*. Gerstner writes that:

Edwards was clearly and explicitly infralapsarian in his view of the decrees. First of all, he refutes the fundamental argument of the supralapsarians. They contended that the last thing in execution was always the first in intention. That is, the actual reprobation and salvation of some proved that this was the original intention behind the creation, fall, salvation and damnation. Edwards critiques this. That principle, he contends is true "with regard to the end and all the proper means, but not with regard to every prerequisite condition"—but only with regard to the "ultimate end." ... Even more explicitly ... he states that "God's decree of the eternal damnation of the reprobate is not to be conceived of as prior to the fall."

Robert Reymond offers an alternate supralapsarian model in which God's first decree is to elect some *sinful* men to salvation in Christ, yet it is not until the fourth decree that men would actually *fall* in Adam. Obviously, Reymond wishes to escape the force of the moral objection just discussed by ensuring that the decree of election and reprobation is directed to men as sinners, but it is questionable whether this alternative approach, taken as a whole, can succeed. Consider two observations. First, it simply is not clear to me how it is coherent to speak in the first decree of "sinful men" who do not actually fall in Adam and hence *become sinners* until the fourth decree. This has something of the feel of sleight of hand, though I am confident that this proposal is offered in full sincerity. But the obvious problem is that in order for the first divine decree (i.e., that God elects *sinful* men) to have integrity and be genuine, it requires that an implicit reality be envisioned as true, viz., that mankind be contemplated as having fallen into sin. And yet this very fall into sin is not supposed to be in view literally and really in the mind of God until the fourth decree. It simply is not clear how one can have it both ways. It is a noble attempt to find a synthesis of the infra- and supralapsarian positions, but it appears to lack coherence.

Second, I do think that John Feinberg's concern about this whole discussion, quoted above, has validity. Is it possible that we are trying to line up things with a kind of precision and logical sequencing beyond what God's revelation rightly should lead us to do? Should we not understand that God sees at once the whole of the world he plans to create so that our attempts to provide logical sequencing beyond what Scripture clearly indicates may only lead to some degree of speculation? It seems to me that there is abundant and clear biblical evidence that when God elected persons in Christ, he chose those who needed to be saved (2 Thess. 2:13), that his election of them was itself a gracious and unmerited work (Rom. 11:5), that he elected them to be forgiven of sin and made holy in his Son (1 Pet. 1:1–2; Eph. 1:4), and that through their election they would be justified and glorified since they had been appointed to eternal life (Rom. 8:29–30; Acts 13:48).

Given this evidence, it seems entirely right to conclude that Scripture teaches the election, in eternity past, of fallen sinners to salvation. And perhaps this is as far as we can go. Yes, God does all for the glory of his name, and clearly God has control over all that occurs, just as certainly over the evil of this world as the good (Rom. 9:20–23). But if Scripture teaches that God elects those who are considered, in his mind's eye, as living after the fall and in their state of sin, then perhaps it is best to see that God views the whole picture at once, as Feinberg helpfully observes. Understood this way, we can (and should) affirm what Scripture says—

which requires a fundamentally infralapsarian view since God's election is to salvation of those possessing the sin and guilt incurred in the fall of Adam—while leaving to rest questions for which Scripture provides no basis for answering. One fears that the supralapsarian proposal seeks to tie some loose ends together and provide a full order of the decrees in areas where Scripture is, at best, unclear. But unfortunately it does so at the expense of what is clear in the teaching of Scripture.

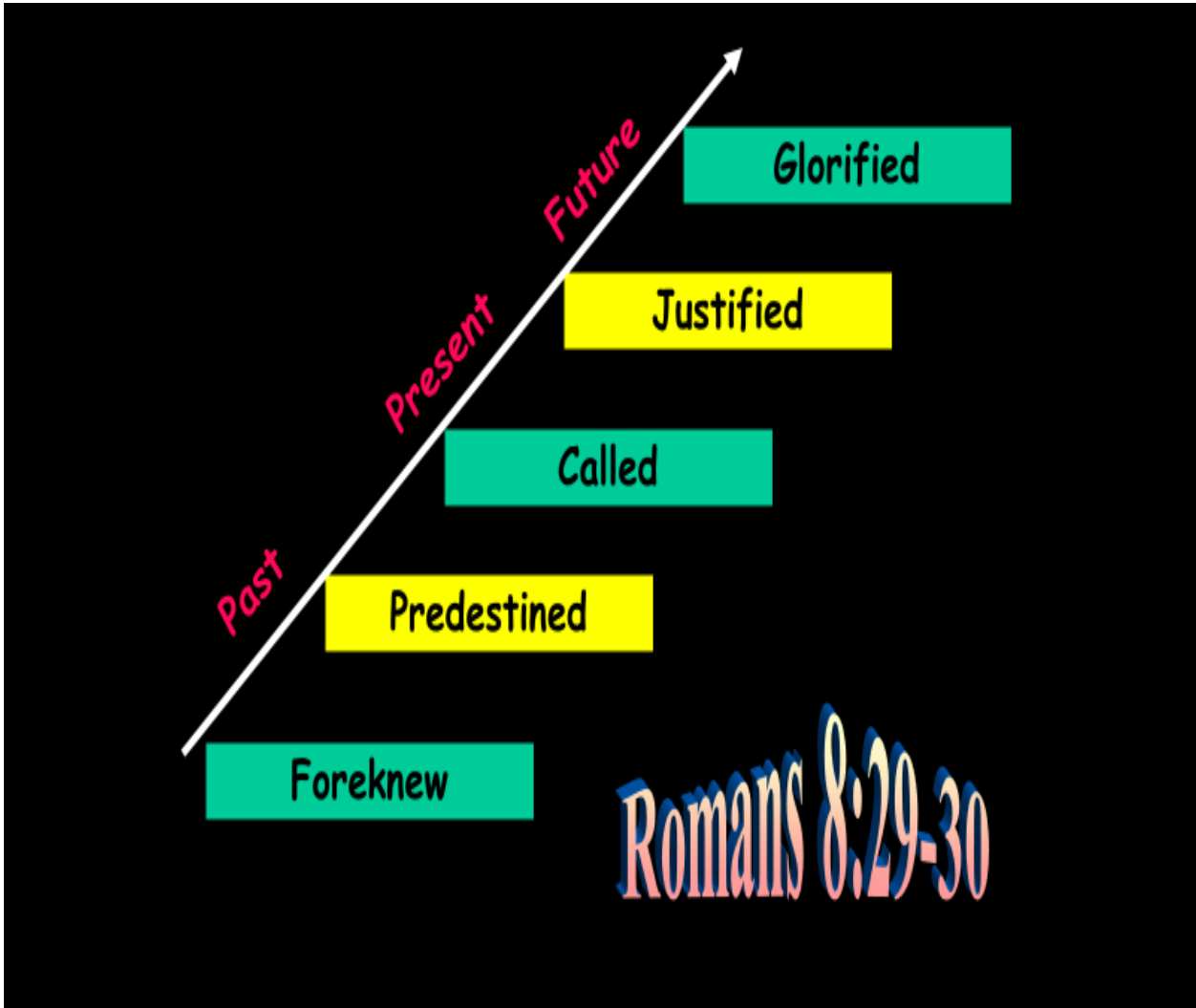
That God has chosen his elect “for salvation” (2 Thess. 2:13 HCSB) shows that the elect both need to be saved and hence that they are viewed as sinners. Perhaps wisdom would encourage us to resist speculation and rather to embrace humble celebration of the grace of God manifest in God's choice of fallen and undeserving sinners to be saved.

Conclusion

Through the depth of thought and studied reflection required to navigate the issues of the doctrine of election, may God grant greater clarity and vision for what makes this doctrine so glorious to Paul, Peter, John, and Jesus. May God favor his people with ever-increasingly open eyes to behold their salvation as *all of God* and *all of grace*. And may we see and embrace the truth that the fullness of this glorious saving work of God commenced when God looked, in his mind's eye, on the fallen human race and determined to choose some whom he certainly and surely would save in his Son, to the glory of his name. Indeed! For it is true: God has chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, and because of this we will one day be holy and blameless before him. We will receive his promised gift of eternal life. We will be conformed to the likeness of his own Son. This God will do because he chose us in Christ. May God alone be praised!²⁷

²⁷ Cottrell, J. W., Pinnock, C. H., Reymond, R. L., Talbott, T. B., & Ware, B. A. (2006). [*Perspectives on election: five views*](#). (C. O. Brand, Ed.) (pp. 1–58). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

FIVE-POINT LAPSARIANISM



THE LAPSARIAN SPECTRUM

Fatalism	Supralapsarianism	Infralapsarianism	Molinism	Arminianism	Wesleyanism	Open View	Free Will	Process View
John Gill	John Calvin	Augustine	Luis de Molina	Jacob Arminius	John Wesley	Greg Boyd	Pelagius	A. Whitehead
Muhammed	Jonathan Edwards	Charles Spurgeon	William Lane Craig		H Orton Wiley	Clark Pinnock	Charles Finney	
God ultimately causes everything that happens								
God decreed the fall		God allowed the fall				God could not prevent the fall		
Some things happen that God does not prefer								
God has two wills		God has exhaustive and certain knowledge of the future				The future can't be known		
Emphasis on Forensic righteousness before God				Emphasis on restored relationship with God				
God is all powerful				God limits his power in the interest of relationship				God is not all powerful
God is coercive whenever it suits His purposes				God can be coercive as a last resort				God isn't coercive
God's grace is irresistible / effectual		Humanity is Totally Depraved		God's grace is necessary to be saved				
		God's grace is prevenient / drawing						
Jesus died for the elect		Salvation cannot be forfeited		The gospel should be shared with everyone		Salvation can be forfeited		
		God created the world from nothing (creatio ex nihilo)						
		Calvinists						
		Particular Baptists						
		Presbyterians						
		Southern Baptists						
		Lutherans						
				Classical Arminians				
				Assemblies of God				
						Methodists		
						General Baptists		
						Catholics		

CALVIN COMPLETES AUGUSTINE

Lapsarianism: Problems Both Philosophical & Theological

Three Moral Wills Of Deity

- *Decretive Will* or God as Sovereign
- *Preceptive Will* or God's Will that we react in a certain way even if we are free to chose.
- *Dispositional Will* or that which is pleasing to God.

Post-Augustine Free Will Modification

1. The *Intentional Will Of God* - would be what God would prefer to happen.
2. The *Circumstantial Will Of God* - would be what God does due to the circumstances arising that He did not intend.
3. The *Ultimate Will Of God* - is what God can ultimately achieve in the various circumstances of life due to the sinful rebellion of man.

Infra-lapsarianism [also sub-lapsarianism]:

God created man wholly but permitted him to fall through the self-determination of his free will. God made up His mind about man's punishment after the fall not before.

The Aquinas-Augustinian Modification:

The Future Not Fully Written – Omniscient God operates through "Middle Knowledge."

Middle Knowledge is the theological term for the parental space given God's children. God knows us doubly as our Creator & in relationship as our Father. Theologian Augustine conceived man as having an actual free choice within God's pre-choice. John Calvin would have nothing to do with this nonsense. He agreed with the Lutheran concept regarding decisions of the Hidden rather than revealed God & supported the school called

Supra-lapsarianism [also "deus absconditus"]

God before time and at the beginning with man decided the masses of men would be lost – pre-destination of happy remedy becomes fore-ordained fatalism of doom. In their pastoral care dealing with the "evangelical despair" due to this belief in the Doctrine of Election this school incorporated Luther's idea of – The Three Lamps Of Reason:

Light of Nature – Natural Law & Reason

Light of Grace – Faith & Gospel Resurrect

Light of Glory – We See How Just In Hereafter

Initial Dispute Calvinists Versus Arminians:

Repeating Pelagius – this would ascribe to God a two-fold

ignorance – one of His own creature & two of His own command

From Laurence Vance Book: “The Other Side of Calvinism”

CHAPTER: UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION & SUBSECTION: LAPSARIAN SYSTEMS

The debate in Reformed Theology concerns neither the extent nor the eternal nature of the decrees but rather the relation of the decrees of election and reprobation to the Fall. Within the scope of the divergent opinions maintained by Calvinists, there surfaces three systems of thought: supralapsarianism, infralapsarianism, and sublapsarianism. W. E. Best explains how these systems got their principal name: “The word lapsarian comes from the Latin word *lapsus* which means the ‘Doctrine of the Fall.’” Because God’s decree is supposed to be a singular, eternal decree, the titles of these systems pertain not to the *actual* order of the decrees in relation to the Fall, but to their *logical* order, “The eternity of the decree also implies that the order in which the different elements in it stand may not be regarded as temporal, but only as logical.”

Among five-point Calvinists, the minority view, due to its foreboding overtones, is supralapsarianism, *supra*, from the Latin meaning “above,” and the word for the Fall, *lapsus*. This scheme has God decreeing election while men are *creabilis et labilis* (certain to be created and to fall). The opposing view is infralapsarianism, from the Latin *infra*, meaning “below,” and *lapsus*. Because of the charge that supralapsarianism makes God the author of sin and is the direct cause of the damnation of men, most Calvinists have digressed to the “infra” position in which men are considered *creatus et lapsus* (created & fallen). The initial difference between these systems is aptly stated by Berkouwer: “Originally it was a matter of different interpretations of the relationship between predestination and the fall. The question arose whether in the counsel of God the fall of man had been willed by Him.” This naturally led to a difference in interpretation of the manner of the rejection of the “non-elect.” The result of the former viewpoint was the damnation of the rejected according to the sovereign good pleasure of God, while the latter claimed to ground the underlying cause of condemnation on man’s sin. From these disputes came the question concerning the succession of God’s decrees as related to the Fall – one putting

election and reprobation above (before) the Fall and the other below (after) the Fall. Thus, in this system, as Berkouwer pertinently states, the Creation and the Fall “form, so to speak, the means by which that primary predestination decree becomes realized.” That is, God first decided to elect some men to heaven and reprobate other men to hell, so upon creating them, he made them fall, using Adam as a scapegoat, so it would look like God was gracious in sending the “elect” to heaven and just in sending the “reprobate” to hell. The distinctive feature of this scheme is its positive decree of reprobation.

Reprobation is deliberate, foreordained, predestinated damning of millions of souls to hell as a result of God’s sovereign good pleasure and according to the “counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1: 11). Since the adherents of supralapsarianism are in the minority, and the doctrine seems somewhat extreme, it is often referred to as hyper-Calvinism by those Calvinists who wish to divert attention from what they really believe and thereby make their form of Calvinism appear scriptural. The easiest way to accomplish this diversion is to position Arminianism against hyper-Calvinism and then take plain Calvinism as a mediating position. This makes Calvinism appear orthodox. [They (the “infras” prefer to speak of

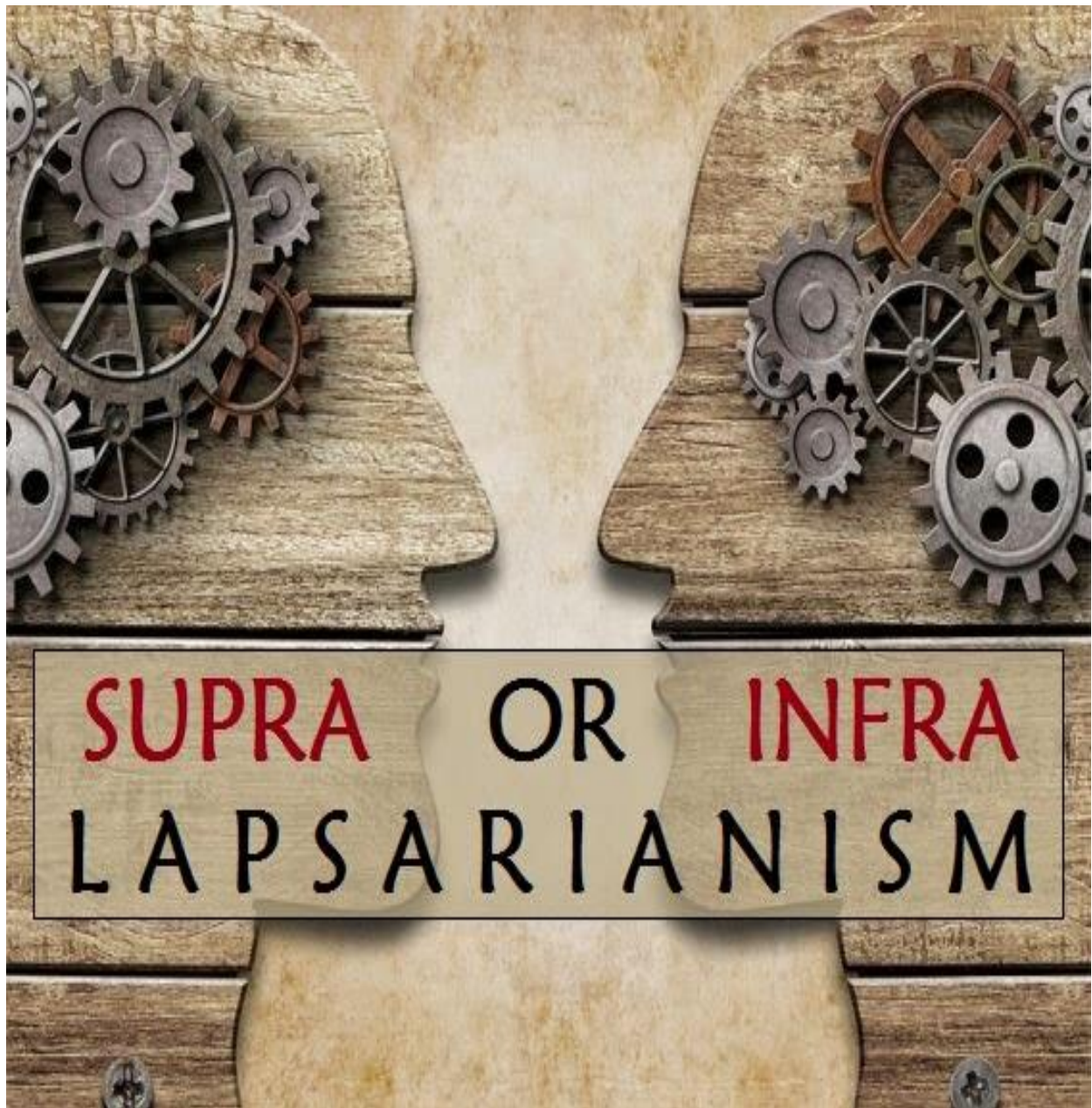
reprobation as “rejection” and as a *negative* or *permissive* decree and object to it being spoken of in terms of a *positive* decree. These “infras” similarly avoid use of the descriptive phrase “Double Predestination” instead preferring utilization of the expression “equal ultimacy.”]... The system of supralapsarianism is not hyper-Calvinism and neither does it go beyond the teachings of John Calvin...

To add to the discord among Calvinists and to confuse matters further, there is another school of thought to be examined, that of sublapsarianism. The prefix *sub* can be recognized immediately from its extensive use in English. Therefore, both *infra* and *sub* imply the same thing: “below” or “after.” Five-Point Calvinists only recognize two tenable systems: Supra and Infralapsarianism. But Calvinists who reject Limited Atonement have added a third to accommodate their viewpoint. So in this system, not only are the decrees of election & reprobation *after* the Fall, they are also *after* the Atonement. What is now called Sublapsarianism is the held view of all four-point Calvinists. So like their “infra” cousins, the sublapsarians seek to get around the bestial implications of a positive view of reprobation that parallels election.

CALVINIST CARTOONS by EDDIE EDDINGS



As in most Calvinistic marriages the first "disagreement" is usually over infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism.



What do the terms “supralapsarianism,” and “infralapsarianism” mean, and does the bible teach one or the other?

The terms “supralapsarianism,” and “infralapsarianism” (sometimes called “sublapsarianism”) have to do with the logical order of God's eternal decrees of salvation. The question, basically, is this: did God's decree to save a certain people come before (supra) or after (infra) his decree to permit the fall (laps).

Infralapsarians argue that, in order not to charge God with injustice or sin, it is necessary that God's election of men to salvation be made from a field of men who are sinners already; hence, the decree to ordain the fall must logically come before the decree to elect men to salvation. Otherwise, in ordaining to destruction men who had not yet fallen, the charge could be made against God that he was responsible for their sin and rebellion, which his eternal plan demanded of them. But no, the supralapsarian responds, God's eternal plan to redeem some and not others from the outset, while requiring sin and the Fall, does not logically make God culpable, and furthermore, it better fits the biblical evidence of God's prerogative to use evil for the accomplishment of his prior designs. God's ultimate purpose for creation and redemptive history is the triumph of the Lamb both in the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his people; and this plan logically requires the existence of sin, and also of God's triumph over that sin through righteous judgment and sovereign mercy. If God's ultimate purpose in history is the display of his glory in the person and work of Christ; and if the manifold glory of Christ includes righteous wrath against sin; then God's eternal purpose of redemption necessitated the Fall, and did not just respond to it.

The basic schema of infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism may be displayed as follows:

Infralapsarianism

1. the decree to create the world and (all) men
2. the decree that (all) men would fall
3. the election of some fallen men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others)
4. the decree to redeem the elect by the cross work of Christ
5. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to the elect

Supralapsarianism (historical)

1. the election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the others)
2. the decree to create the world and both kinds of men
3. the decree that all men would fall
4. the decree to redeem the elect, who are now sinners, by the cross work of Christ
5. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to these elect sinners

These lists display the traditional understandings of the lapsarian question. However, recent theologians have noted that neither list accurately depicts the logical way in which all reasonable creatures pursue their goals: first, they determine what they ultimately and primarily want, and then they walk backwards, as it were, through all the steps necessary to get there. If God's ultimate goal is the glory of the Lamb in sovereign mercy and righteous judgment, then there is a need for sinners; if there are to be sinners, there must be a fall; if there is a fall, there must be a world created in righteousness; hence, the logical order of God's decrees would be a modified supralapsarianism, as follows:

Supralapsarianism (modified)

1. the election of some men to salvation in Christ (and the reprobation of the rest of sinful mankind in order to make known the riches of God's gracious mercy to the elect)
2. the decree to apply Christ's redemptive benefits to the elect sinners
3. the decree to redeem the elect sinners by the cross work of Christ
4. the decree that men should fall
5. the decree to create the world and men

In any discussion of the lapsarian debate, it should be emphasized what all the views have in common: and that is, that God decreed all the events of his eternal redemption from before the creation of the world. Logically, perhaps, the last scheme is the most defensible; however, no position should be so heartily embraced as to be made binding upon men's consciences; the scriptures do not address the topic clearly enough for so firm an adherence. Perhaps a story from the life of Martin Luther would be instructive here: when some inquisitive theologian asked him what God was doing before he created the world, Luther quipped, "He was busy creating hell for foolish theologians who pry into such questions". The response is a little tongue-in-cheek, of course, but perhaps there is some wisdom in it, particularly when we are addressing the lapsarian question.

The Doctrine of Lapsarianism Definition and Description Lapsarianism means lapse. It refers to the doctrine that mankind is a fallen being. Lapsarianism refers to the 5 elective decrees of eternity past. It deals with the logical order of these 5 decrees, which were all simultaneous in the mind of God in eternity past. Lapsarianism is a technical theological term that deals with logical order of the decrees in eternity past but doesn't deal with any chronological order in time. Importance of Lapsarianism provides the logical environment as well as the logical order of the Elective Decrees: (1) Decree to create mankind. (2) Decree to permit the Fall as the extension of the Angelic Conflict.

Four Interpretations of Lapsarianism Lapsarianism has 4 schools of interpretation: (1) Supra-Lapsarianism (2) SubLapsarianism (3) Infra-Lapsarianism (4) Arminian-Lapsarianism. Supra-Lapsarianism is ultra or hyper Calvinism.

*The order of the 5 elective decrees according to **supra-lapsarianism** is as follows: (1) Decree to elect some to be saved, and to reprobate all others (Double Predestination. (2) Decree to create both elect and non-elect. (3) Decree to permit the Fall. (4) Decree to provide salvation for the elect (limited atonement). (5) The decree to apply salvation to the elect. Election is a term that applies to believers only (you cannot elect until you have believers).*

For believers to exist there must be the creation of mankind and the Fall of mankind, plus salvation offered to all mankind. Supra-Lapsarianism places election and limited atonement before the Fall instead of after the Fall. It places them before creation. The decree of election would have reference to a non-entity. Mankind is contemplated as creatable but not created. Logically, you cannot elect what does not exist. Here, the decree of election and limited atonement have no real logic so that under Hyper-Calvinism man is an abstract concept and therefore any divine determination concerning mankind is a determination regarding a nonentity. By putting election and limited atonement first the decrees would assume that non-entities exist from before and they simply don't under that principle. The problem with the order of decrees in supra-lapsarianism is that the Bible indicates the fact that elect and non-elect are taken for an existing category of creation called man or mankind or homosapiens. John 15:19, "I've chosen you out of the world" They had to be created in order to be chosen. They had to fall before they could be elected. Here, man must be created and permitted to fall before he can be saved, elected or chosen. Election is for believers only. For believers to exist there must be salvation and for salvation to exist there must be a fall and for a fall to exist there must be creation. Hyper-Calvinism is the work of a Bergundian noble and theologian who lived in 1519, Theodore Beza who became the rector of the theological school at the Academy of Geneva (University of Geneva). Hegelian Fallacy: For every thesis there must be an antithesis when you put them together you have synthesis. But if the Bible does not state the antithesis, the antithesis does not exist. The believer is said to be

predestined and the unbeliever is not. Negative volition towards the Gospel sends an individual to the Lake of Fire. The volition of man determines whether or not an individual will go to the Lake of Fire and not the sovereign will of God. Infra-Lapsarianism Infra-Lapsarianism is moderate Calvinism.

*The order of the 5 elective decrees according to **infra-lapsarianism** is as follows: (1) Decree to create all mankind. (2) Decree to permit the Fall. (3) Decree to provide salvation for all mankind (unlimited atonement). (4) Decree to elect some from among fallen mankind and to leave others in their sin. (Also called the decree to elect those who believe and to leave in just condemnation all who do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ.) (5) Decree to save the elect through faith in Christ. Sub-Lapsarianism is a form of moderate Calvinism but entirely different.*

*The order of the 5 elective decrees according to **sub-lapsarianism** is as follows: (1) Decree to create all mankind. (2) Decree to permit the Fall. (3) Decree to elect those who believe and to leave in just condemnation those who do not believe. This is also the decree to elect some out of the fallen multitude of mankind and to leave others in their misery. (4) Decree to provide salvation for the elect (limited atonement; wrong). (5) Decree to save the elect through faith in Christ. To apply salvation to those who believe in Christ.*

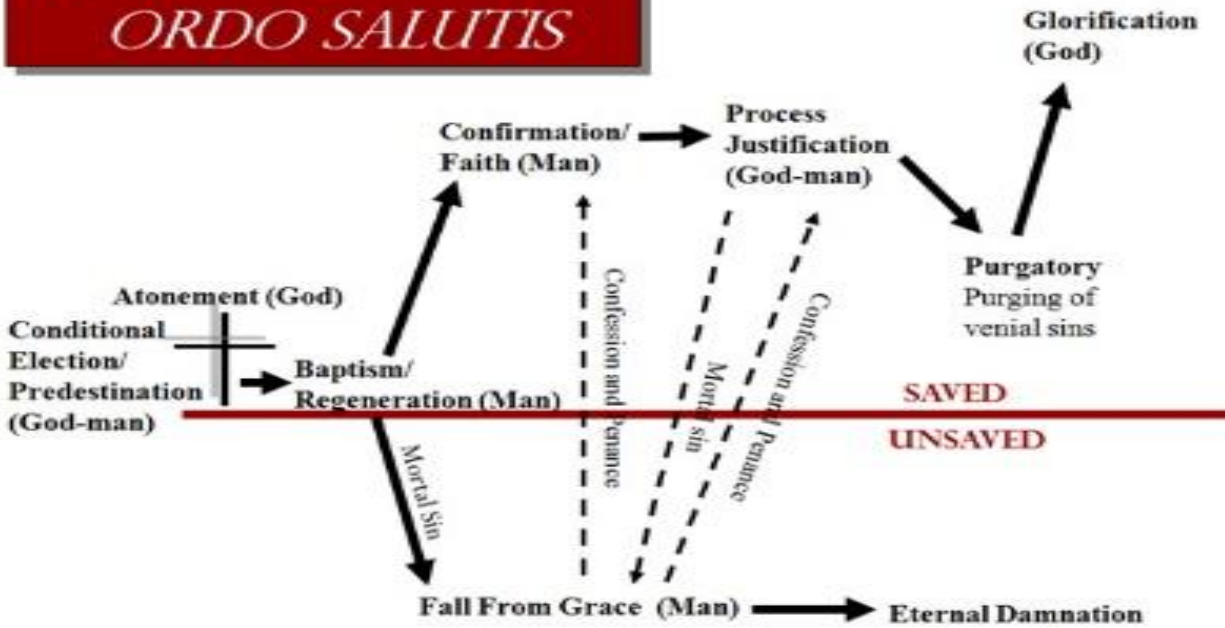
Arminian Lapsarianism Arminian lapsarianism was taught by Richard Watson. Arminian view of lapsarianism approximates infra-lapsarianism with one great exception; the Arminian view of election follows the decree to provide salvation. The Arminiests have election following rather than preceding. Furthermore, the Arminian view depends not on faith in Christ for salvation but human works called foreseen human virtue, or faith and obedience. They have a system of works for salvation, which is heresy.

The order of the 5 elective decrees according to the **Armeniestic** viewpoint is as follows: (1) Decree to create mankind. (2) Decree to permit the Fall. (3) Unlimited atonement but not understanding it correctly. (4) Salvation by foreseen human virtue (faith and obedience) otherwise salvation by works. (5) Election is an act of God in time. (Nothing to do with eternity past).

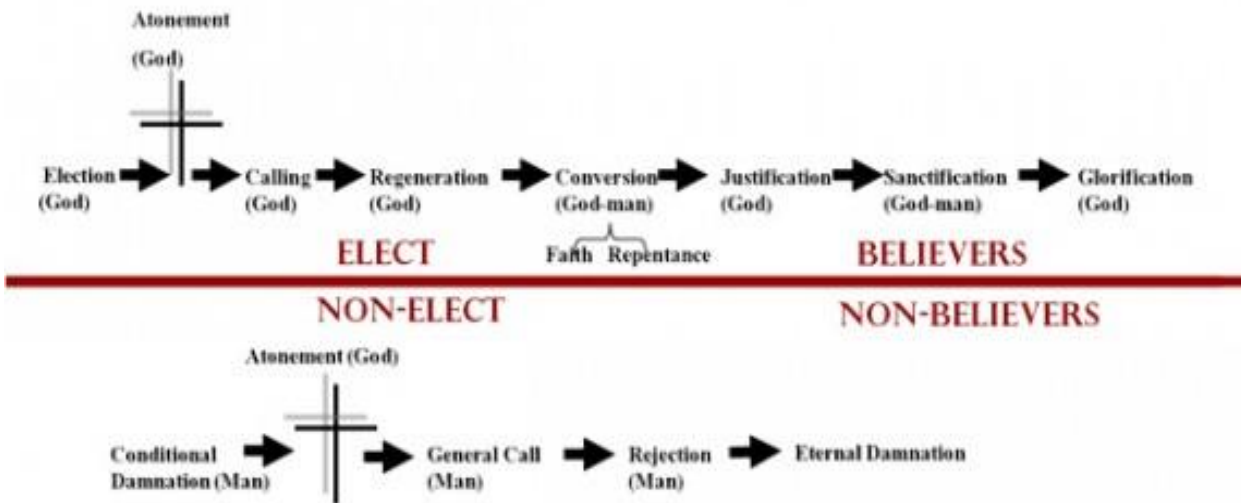
Election is a synonym for experiential sanctification they say. Infra and Sub Lapsarianism recognize the doctrine that election is the sovereign choice of God in eternity past. The Arminian's think election took place in time, which is way off. Calvinists recognize that election took place in eternity past. Men are the objects of grace after, 2 3 not before, the Fall (John 15:9; Rom. 11:5-7; 1 Pet. 1:2). Condemnation is an act of divine justice because sin has been committed (2 Thess. 1:6-9; Rom. 2:6-9). – *Internet Source*

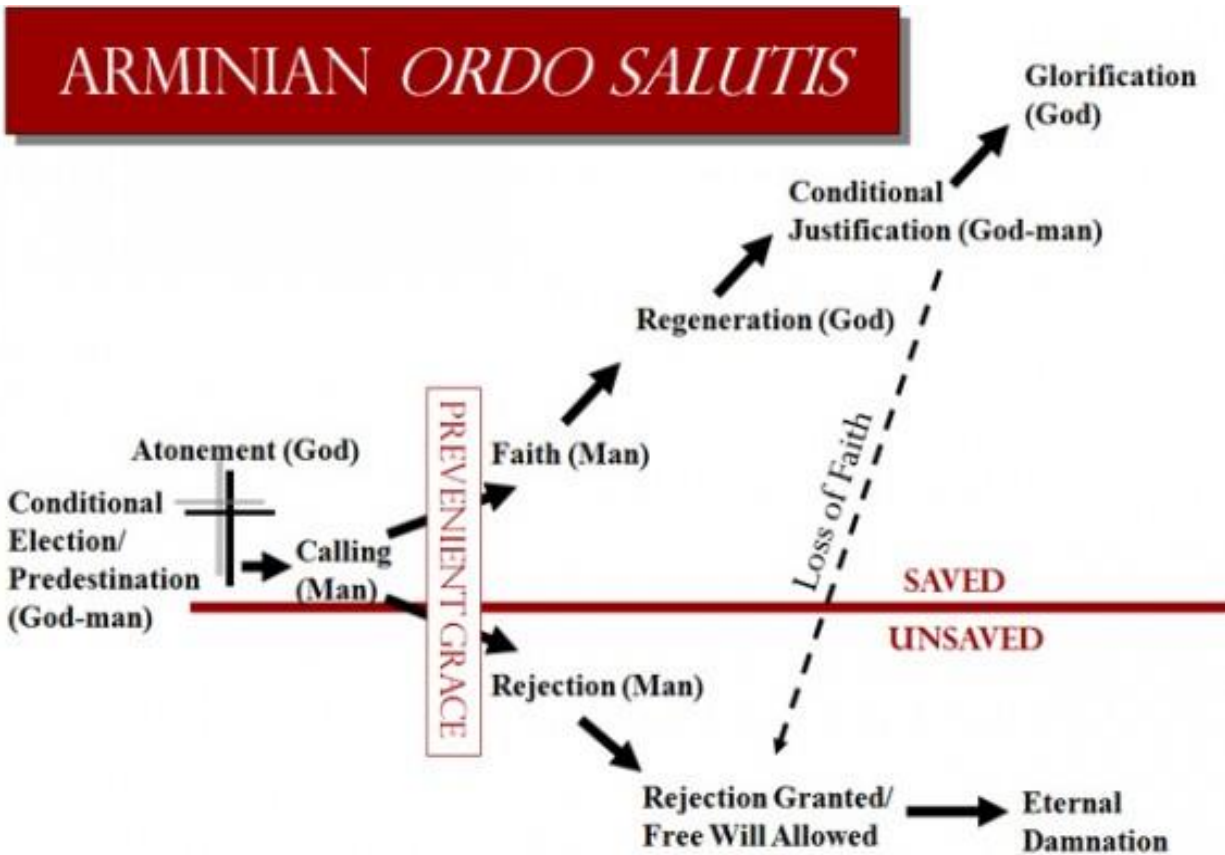
ORDERS OF ELECTION & SALVATION

ROMAN CATHOLIC *ORDO SALUTIS*



REFORMED/CALVINISTIC *ORDO SALUTIS*





The Orders of Election/Salvation

Let's return to the hypothetical case of our twin brothers Jerry and Ed. For several years both brothers had been attending church with their parents, reluctantly but there nonetheless. The gospel of Jesus Christ was a message with which they were both quite familiar. Indeed, familiarity in their case truly had bred contempt, for they both despised and quietly mocked what they heard.

But then one day seemingly "out of the blue," the gospel he has for so long abhorred begins to make sense to Jerry. The sin in which he delighted all his life is now grievous to him, and he cannot escape the gnawing discomfort in his conscience. The reality of an infinitely holy and righteous God whom he has personally offended keeps him awake at night and is distracting even while he works.

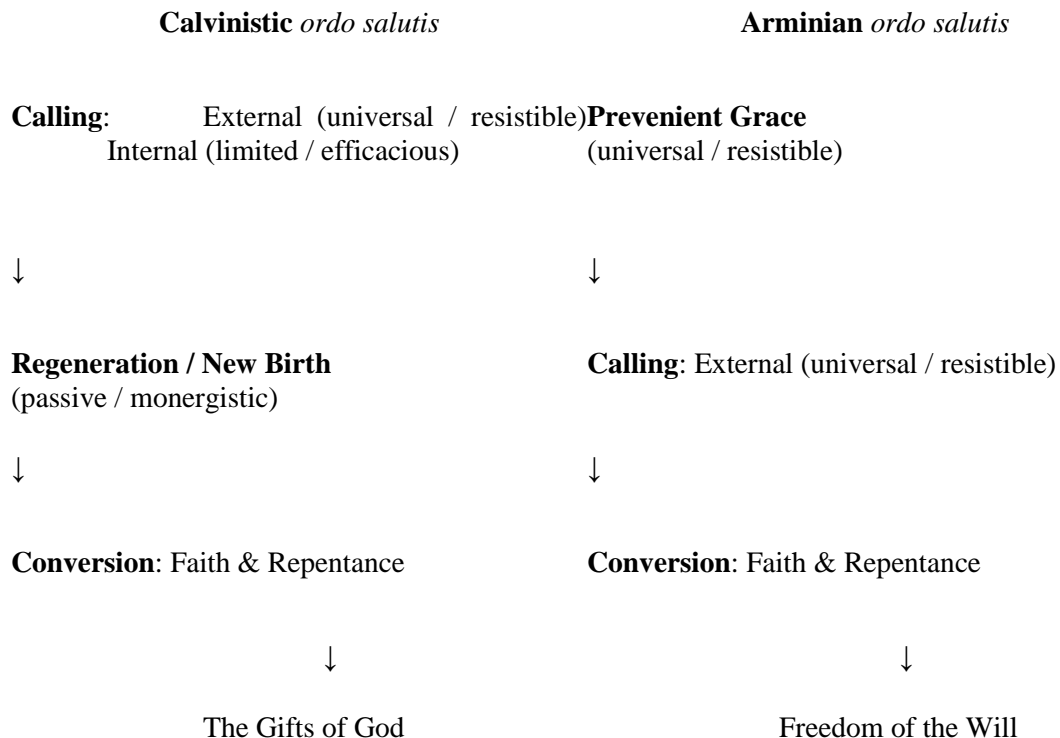
Then suddenly one Sunday morning, while listening to what he had heard so many times before, he "hears" it for the very first time. What he had read in the Bible so many times before, he "sees" as if it had only then appeared. Jesus of Nazareth, who until now held no attraction for him, suddenly seems altogether lovely and winsome. The conviction that this Jesus alone can deliver him from the spiritual turmoil, grief and guilt in which he is mired grips his heart. His soul is, as

it were, flooded with wave upon wave of peace and joy as he feels the burden of his sin lifted from his shoulders and placed upon Christ, in whom it vanished from sight. Then the words to that hymn he had so mindlessly sung countless times before ring true to his heart:

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
 Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off my heart was free;
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
 Amazing love! how can it be,
 That Thou, my God shouldst die for me?”

Oh, what joy! Oh, what delight! Oh, what calm assurance of new life, forgiveness of sins, and everlasting peace Jerry felt. Turning to his twin brother Ed, sitting quietly beside him, he expected to find another who in like fashion had come to Christ. But alas, Ed was more angry and hardened that day than ever before. And as time sped quickly by he drifted yet farther and farther away from the truth that he had hated his entire life, and sadly, farther and farther away from his brother whose new faith in Jesus Christ he simply could not understand.

What made Jerry to differ from Ed? The answer of the Calvinist is that God made Jerry to differ from his brother. Sovereign, unconditional, efficacious grace brought life to him who by his own confession merited only wrath. Theologians have always been concerned to describe the process by which a man such as Jerry comes to saving faith in Jesus Christ. As a continuation of our effort to understand divine election, I also want to try to describe what happened. Observe the following graphic portrayal of the *Ordo Salutis* and keep it in mind as we progress.



↓

Justification

↓

Adoption

↓

Sanctification

(perseverance assured)

↓

Glorification

↓

Regeneration

(active / synergistic)

↓

Justification

↓

Adoption

↓

Sanctification

(apostasy possible)

↓

Glorification²⁸

²⁸ Storms, S. (2006). [*Studies in Divine Election*](#). Oklahoma City, OK: Sam Storms.

The Arminian View: Atonement & Justification

Of all the events in the experience of Christ, His birth, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His return, His death stands central. As important as the other events are, both in themselves and in relation to His death, the death of Christ remains central, because apart from atonement there would be no forgiveness of sins. Christianity would be nonexistent. It is the birth that makes the death of Christ possible, but it is the death that makes the birth important. It is the resurrection that makes possible the application of the benefits of His death. It is the death that makes His resurrection important and makes the one who has been restored to life the Redeemer.

It is of utmost importance that we maintain a sound doctrine of atonement. The study of atonement must be done with the whole personality, not just the rational mind. While a study of atonement is fascinating in its logical consistency, it must go much deeper than that to be comprehended. It must grip the heart also. There is nothing that sheds light on the seriousness of holiness and sin like the atonement that God provided to bring forgiveness of sin. A proper view of atonement puts seriousness into the whole study of theology. Any system of ethics that does not read from atonement the seriousness of sin and the understanding of God's holiness and God's love that is seen in atonement will be grossly inadequate. Any view of grace that is not grounded in the understanding of sin, holiness, and the high regard for law that is manifested in atonement will be empty, shallow, and shot through with the tendencies of antinomianism.

It is not enough to proclaim the statement: Jesus died to save sinners. That statement must be grasped in its essential meaning before it is the gospel. That statement could be made by either a liberal or a fundamentalist, but with drastically different interpretations growing out of drastically different views of the authority of Scripture.

Most preaching falls short of giving a developed view of atonement. I hope this will be corrected. We need preaching and teaching that give a developed view of the need and the nature of atonement and how it is applied in justification. We need to preach and teach this truth often enough that our hearers will have an intelligent understanding of what Jesus Christ did on their behalf. Underdeveloped views of atonement run the risk of being replaced by false views. It is with a realization that our task is serious that we enter our study of atonement and its application in justification.

The major attention of this chapter will be taken up with contrasting the satisfaction view of atonement and the governmental view of atonement and the resulting views of justification. Some attention will be given to the moral influence view of atonement as advocated by liberalism.

THE PENAL SATISFACTION VIEW OF ATONEMENT

Basic Assumptions

The penal satisfaction view of atonement rests on five basic assumptions: (1) God is sovereign. (2) God is holy. (3) Man is sinful. (4) God is loving. (5) God is wise. It is from a development of the inherent principles in these basic assumptions that we see the necessity, the provision, and the nature of atonement.

Lest we fall into the trap of mechanical versus personal reasoning, it is important for us to remind ourselves that atonement is designed to settle a conflict between persons—God and man. We must see sovereignty as personally administered by one who thinks, feels, and acts. God is capable of feeling joy, satisfaction, sorrow, and holy wrath. To deny God the ability to feel is to deny the integrity of His personality. As Henry C. Thiessen explains, philosophers often say that God does not feel things, that feeling would require “passivity and susceptibility of impression from without.” They argue that this is incompatible with divine immutability. However, as Thiessen rightly argues, “immutability does not mean immobility. True love necessarily involves feeling, and if there be no feeling in God, then there is no love of God.”

Holiness is not an abstract principle, but an attribute of personality. It is not simply an attribute. It is an experience of the divine personality. It involves the principles and attitudes by which the divine personality operates. The same observations that have been made about holiness can also be applied to love and wisdom. These are experiences of the divine personality.

Man is personal. Sin is an experience of the human personality in conflict with a personal God. Atonement is designed to resolve this conflict and to form the foundation for restoring holiness as the experience of the human personality.

The Necessity of Atonement

The necessity of atonement draws on the first three of the previously given basic assumptions. God as Sovereign is both Lawgiver and Judge of the universe. This places man in a position of accountability before God. God cannot lay aside His responsibility as Judge, and man cannot escape his accountability before God—the Supreme Judge of the universe.

If there were no responsibility on God’s part and no accountability on man’s part, there would be no need of atonement, but this relationship is inescapably bound up in the nature of the case. Having established this responsibility-accountability relationship, there is still no necessity of atonement except as that necessity grows out of the holy nature of God. It is the holy nature of the One who is Sovereign, Lawgiver, and Judge that makes atonement necessary to resolve the conflict between man and God, since God has placed man under condemnation.

The Necessity for Sin to Be Punished

From the forewarned judgment against sin in Genesis 2:17 to the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation 20:11–15, the Bible repeatedly reminds us of God’s attitude toward sin. The culmination of God’s attitude toward sin is seen in the eternal condemnation of the wicked (Mt. 25:45; Mk. 9:43–48; Rom. 6:23; Rev. 21:8).

Why is there such a dreadful penalty against sin? No principle of expediency for divine government could ever justify taking such a strong measure against sin apart from absolute necessity. Our whole being abhors the idea that God would take such a drastic step as eternal punishment apart from an absolute necessity existing within the nature of God. Such a step would be a violation of both the holiness and love of God. Our confidence in God tells us that He would not have taken such a step as eternal punishment if it had not risen from a necessity in the divine nature.

God’s law issues from and is an expression of His holy nature. For holiness to be holiness, it not only differs from sin, but it is also intolerant of sin. This intolerance manifests itself in a penalty against the violation of the moral law of God. As J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., remarks, “The punishment of all that violates, or is contrary to the holy character of God is a logical implication and a necessary consequence of God’s holiness. If God is holy, it must follow that He will vindicate His holiness as against all sin and corruption which is contrary thereto.”

The holy law of God pronounces a penalty on the person who violates that law. It is the work of divine justice to execute the penalty of the law and thus protect the holiness of God. The justice of God will not tolerate any attempt to set aside or diminish the penalty of the broken law of God. There can be no forgiveness of sin without a full satisfaction of the justice of God in the payment of the penalty.

Romans 3:26 declares that the design of propitiation was to make it possible for God to maintain His justice, while at the same time justifying the sinner who comes to God believing in Jesus. The implication is that for God to justify sinners without atonement would compromise the justice of God. This cannot be. It is clear that in this passage Paul is telling us that justice required atonement before there could be forgiveness.

A proper view of both the necessity and the nature of atonement arises out of the absolute necessity for God to punish sin. This necessity comes from His holiness.

The Necessity for Absolute Righteousness

In Romans 2 and 3, Paul builds a strong case that our justification before God demands nothing less than absolute righteousness. In 2:1–3:8, Paul is particularly concerned with the Jews who have not believed in Jesus as their Messiah. He wants them to understand that they are not prepared to stand justified before God. He wants them to understand that merely being a descendant of Abraham through Jacob will not prepare a person to stand before God and receive the eternal inheritance promised to the seed of Abraham in Genesis 13:14–15 and 17:8.

The general consensus holds that Paul is addressing Jews in Romans 2. There are different opinions on what Paul is trying to say in verses 6–13. The problem centers around what Paul is trying to tell us will happen in “the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (verse 5). He speaks of judgment according to deeds (verse 6). Patient continuance in “doing good” is what will be rewarded. Those who do not obey the truth will be under the wrath of God (verses 8–9). Those who do good will receive “glory, honor, and peace.” In verse 12, he says that those who have sinned without the law (Gentiles) will perish. Those who have the law (Jews) and sin will be judged by the law (verse 12). In verse 13, he says emphatically that to have been the recipients of the law, as the Jews were, would carry no weight at the righteous judgment of God. Only those who are doers of the law will be justified.

These words have puzzled commentators. Thus, a variety of interpretations have been given. Most have concluded that verses 6–13 refer to the good works of Christians. This passage would be telling us that good works are essential evidence of being a Christian.

There are two problems with this interpretation. The first problem is that it does not fit the context. In Romans 1:18–3:20, it is clear that Paul is building a case for the argument that the whole world, including both Jews and Gentiles, stands condemned before God. No good reason can be given why Paul would depart from that theme in chapter 2 to talk about Christians doing good works as evidence of salvation. The second problem is that the works of which Paul speaks are absolute. In building his case, Paul states it from both the positive side and the negative side. On the positive side, he speaks of continuing in well doing. On the negative side, the presence of sin means judgment. In verses 12 and 13, there is no room for interpreting the “doing” to be anything less than “doing without exception.”

Another view interprets the good works as “faith.” Support for this interpretation has been sought from Jesus’ words when He said, “is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent” (Jn. 6:29). The problem with this view is that it does not fit the context.

A third view is that Paul is speaking hypothetically. If it were possible for a person to render absolute obedience to God, such a person would be justified. But, of course, such obedience is impossible for human beings.

I agree with those who hold the hypothetical view in saying that Paul's aim is to get the unbelieving Jew to see that, as a law violator, he is under condemnation. Where I differ is that I do not see it as hypothetical. Paul is not simply telling the law violator that he is condemned; he is telling him what is required of anybody who will ever be justified in God's sight.

The only way that any person can ever be justified before God is to have absolute righteousness (or to say it another way, to be considered a doer of the law). Briefly put, in 2:6–13 Paul is saying that a person must have absolute righteousness. In 3:10 he points out, "There is none righteous." In 3:20 he points out that "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight."

We must have absolute righteousness (2:6–13). We do not have absolute righteousness (3:10). We cannot produce absolute righteousness (3:20). The only hope of justification for either Jew or Gentile is to have absolute righteousness provided for us. There are two things that the justice of God will not permit a departure from: (1) Sin can under no circumstances go unpunished. (2) Under no circumstances will a person stand justified in God's presence without absolute righteousness.

There are two things that the justice of God will not permit a departure from: (1) Sin can under no circumstances go unpunished. (2) Under no circumstances will a person stand justified in God's presence without absolute righteousness.

The Nature of Atonement

Sinful man is in a predicament for which he has no remedy of his own. He is under the condemnation of eternal death. The justice of God requires that the penalty be paid. Nothing less will be accepted.

I am not suggesting that an actual council, as I will describe, took place, but I am saying that what follows illustrates the principles involved. The justice of God demanded that the penalty of sin be paid. The love of God was interested in saving man, but it had to submit to the justice of God. The wisdom of God came forth with a plan that would satisfy both holiness and love. Through the incarnation of Christ and the substitutionary death of Christ, love could fulfill its desire to save, and holiness could hold to its insistence that sin be punished.

There are two aspects of atonement: active obedience and passive obedience. Active obedience of Christ refers to the idea that He lived a life of absolute obedience to the Father. He lived an absolutely righteous life. Passive obedience refers to the death of Christ. He submitted to the wrath of God for our sins. Most of the discussion centers around passive obedience because it involved the payment of the penalty for our sins. A complete accounting of atonement also embraces the righteous life Christ lived on our behalf which was His active obedience.

The Passive Obedience of Christ

What happened in the passive obedience of Christ? The Bible is quite clear on the basic principles involved. Isaiah 53:6 tells us, "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." First Peter 2:24 reads, "who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Galatians 3:13 tells us, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Second Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us."

When Jesus Christ went to the cross, all the sins of all the world that ever had been committed, ever were being committed, and ever would be committed were laid on Him. With

our sins upon Him, He took our place under the righteous wrath of God. God poured out His wrath upon Him as if He were guilty of all the sins of the whole race. We read in Isaiah 53:10, "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief." In a very real and literal sense, Jesus took the place of every sinner.

It is a mistake to restrict the sufferings of Jesus Christ to that which the Roman soldiers inflicted on Him. The death Jesus Christ suffered by crucifixion was the least part of His suffering. His own Father inflicted the greatest suffering that was inflicted on Him. He took the place of sinners before God and drank the cup of wrath that was due sinners. He suffered as much on the cross as sinners will suffer in an eternal hell. He experienced separation from the Father. He who had enjoyed unbroken fellowship with the Father in eternity past uttered these words on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46). This was a cry of agony rather than a cry from lack of understanding.

When Jesus finished suffering for the sins of the world, He said, "It is finished" (Jn. 19:30). When these words were uttered, He was telling us that He had finished paying for our sins. The same One who had a short time before uttered the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" was now able to say, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit'" (Lk. 23:46).

When Jesus uttered the words, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit,'" this was the greatest reunion the universe has ever known. The One whose fellowship with God had been interrupted by having our sins placed upon Him had paid the penalty and removed the obstacle that separated Him from the Father. The way for His reunion was open. In opening it for Himself, He opened it for us. He identified Himself with our broken fellowship that we might be identified with His fellowship. He identified Himself with our sin that we might be identified with His righteousness.

Payment of the penalty through a qualified substitute was the only way God could save man. As William G. T. Shedd explains:

The eternal Judge may or may not exercise mercy, but he must exercise justice. He can neither waive the claims of the law in part, nor abolish them altogether. The only possible mode, consequently, of delivering a creature who is obnoxious to the demands of retributive justice, is to satisfy them for him. The claims themselves must be met and extinguished, either personally, or by substitution.... And this necessity of an atonement is absolute not relative. It is not made necessary by divine decision, in the sense that the divine decision might have been otherwise. *It is not correct to say, that God might have saved man without a vicarious atonement had he been pleased to do so. For this is equivalent to saying, that God might have abolished the claims of law and justice had he been pleased to do so.*

How was Christ able to pay the full penalty for our sins in a short time on the cross? It will help to elaborate on the penalty of sin. As the penalty of sin is related to man, it is called eternal death. The sinner will be paying it forever. Why is this so? I will suggest the following explanation. The penalty for sinning against a holy and infinite Person is an infinite penalty. Man is infinite in only one dimension of his being: his duration. Man will exist forever. The only way a human being can pay an infinite penalty is to pay it forever. Therefore, hell must be eternal.

As this relates to Christ, because of His divine nature, He is infinite in capacity. He can suffer an infinite penalty without it going into infinite time. Apart from this fact, there could have been no salvation. The only qualified redeemer is one who is the incarnation of deity. Our Redeemer had to be *man* to have the *right* to redeem. He had to be *God* to be *able* to redeem.

I am not saying that Jesus suffered the identical penalty that man would have suffered. I am saying that He suffered an equivalent penalty. If we say that Jesus went to hell for us when He

paid our penalty, we are not meaning that He went to the lake of fire. We are meaning that He was subjected to equivalent punishment.

The Active Obedience of Christ

In the discussion on the necessity of atonement above, I pointed out that, through Romans 3:20, Paul had developed a case for saying that, if we were going to stand justified before God, it was necessary for us to have absolute righteousness. For us, that was bad news. We did not have absolute righteousness (Rom. 3:10), nor could we produce absolute righteousness (Rom. 3:20). So far as our own standing on our own merits is concerned, the trial was over. We were condemned. We were helpless, but not hopeless.

Just as surely as Paul, up through 3:20, sets forth our need, in 3:21–26 he proclaims a provision of absolute righteousness by Christ to meet our need. As human beings we must be “doers of the law.” In Christ we have His righteousness which, so far as our justification is concerned, makes us “doers of the law.” Christ’s obedience becomes our obedience. It can be seen that to be doers of the law (or to have absolute righteousness) is not a requirement that is set aside by grace. Rather, the requirement, which we could not meet, was met for us by Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:18–3:20 paints a very dark picture. In 3:21 the picture changes. The same God who declared the whole world as fallen short of the standard required by His holiness has made a provision that will stand under the scrutiny of the Supreme Judge of the universe. Paul says, “But now ...” Now at this point in human and divine history, “the righteousness of God without the law has been manifested” (3:21). This righteousness is a “God-provided righteousness.” This righteousness is “without works.” It in no way takes into account our law-keeping or our failure to keep the law. It is the righteousness of Christ.

The Propitiatory Work of Christ in Atonement

The word *propitiation* is the most inclusive term in the New Testament denoting atonement. The key passage for understanding propitiation is Romans 3:25–26. It is not necessary to become involved in all the controversies about how to translate the word. Personally, I think *propitiation* or *propitiatory sacrifice* translates the word properly.

The word *propitiation* means, in the biblical setting, to turn away the wrath of God and restore a person to favor with God. The word for *propitiation* is translated “mercy seat” in Hebrews 9:5, where it refers to the lid on the Ark of the Covenant. The lid on the Ark of the Covenant was the place of propitiation in the Old Testament Tabernacle. An understanding of what happened at the place of propitiation in the Tabernacle will help at this point.

The Ark of the Covenant was located in the Holy of Holies where the high priest went only once a year on the day of atonement. The Ark of the Covenant had within it the tables of the law (the Ten Commandments). The tables of the law represented the demands of the law which were: (1) absolute righteousness and (2) a penalty against sin in case of disobedience. When the high priest slew the goat on the day of atonement and took his blood into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled it on the mercy seat, it was as if he were saying to the Law, “This symbolizes the meeting of the demands that you require from sinners.”

The animal *without spot* or *blemish* symbolized righteousness. The *slain* animal symbolized the payment of a penalty through a substitute. The satisfaction of the law was symbolized. This satisfaction included both the payment of the penalty and the provision of righteousness.

From the above discussion, we would observe that at the place of propitiation the law is satisfied. This, of course, tells us what the design of propitiation was. It was designed to satisfy

the penal demands of the law, thus making it so God can turn away His wrath from the sinner who believes in Christ and at the same time maintain His justice. It was also designed to satisfy the demand for righteousness, thus giving positive grounds for God to view favorably the sinner who believes in Jesus and at the same time maintain His justice.

What the Old Testament sacrifice did in symbol on the day of atonement, Jesus Christ did in reality. He lived a completely holy life, thus fulfilling the demand for absolute righteousness. He paid the full penalty for sin, thus fulfilling the demand for a penalty. Propitiation, to sum it up, is the full satisfaction of the demands of the law, for righteousness and the payment of a penalty, by Jesus Christ. This makes it possible for God to turn His wrath from the sinner who believes in Jesus, and to view him with favor, yet remain a God of justice.

The Revelation of the Holiness and the Love of God

In the atoning work of Jesus Christ, we have the highest revelation of God's holiness and God's love. The holiness of God is seen in its refusal to approve a way of forgiveness that did not meet every demand of the moral law of God. The highest honor ever paid to God's holiness was paid by the Son of God when He fully satisfied the demands of the law to make possible our salvation. The highest possible regard for God's holiness is manifested in the atonement.

The love manifested at the cross is the highest possible manifestation of love. It will forever remain the unparalleled example of love. The sinless Son of God, on behalf of those who had sinned against Him, suffered the full wrath of God for their sins that they might be forgiven of their sins. The cross, as no other point in history or in the future, demonstrates the supremacy of holiness and the submission of love to holiness. While the cross is the foundation of grace, it is also the foundation of the highest interest in holiness on our part.

As McDonald explains: "In the atonement God's holiness is present in penal action and God's love is present in paternal grace. The cross is the place of a judgment on sin that God cannot withdraw and of a divine love for sinners that he will not withhold."

Justification According to the Penal Satisfaction View of Atonement

The full view of atonement cannot be developed without also embracing the doctrine of justification. It is for this reason that I am treating justification here rather than in a later chapter. There are two aspects of justification. There is the negative aspect, which deals with the remission of the penalty for sin. There is the positive aspect, which deals with restoration to favor with God.

The Ground of Justification

Our justification is based on the imputation of the atoning work of Christ to our account. The chart below will help us see what takes place in justification.

We have already looked at how atonement was accomplished. Now the question: How do the death and righteousness of Christ come to be placed on our account? The condition for having the death and righteousness of Christ placed on our account is faith in Christ (Rom. 3:28; 4:1–25; Gal. 2:16; 3:1–18). Since there will be an elaboration on faith as the condition of salvation in a later chapter, I will not elaborate further at this time.

While *faith in Christ alone* is all that is involved on our part to receive the death and righteousness of Christ, there is more involved in the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to our account. The *ground* of the imputation of Christ's death and righteousness is the

union of Christ and the believer. The substitutionary work of Christ for us was not substitution pure and simple. It was a substitution of the kind that in its application made it so that the believer can say, "I have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20).

Union with Christ and the Imputation of the Death of Christ to the Believer

The Scriptural evidence is clear that it is through union with Christ that the benefits of Christ's atonement, by which we are justified, are applied to us. Paul tells us: "Likewise you also reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6: 11). "Through" in this verse translates the Greek preposition *en*. It is better to translate "in." It is "in Christ Jesus" that we are to consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God. Again, Paul says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The ground for "no condemnation" is being "in Christ Jesus."

Romans 6:1–11

In Romans 6:3–4 and Galatians 3:27, baptism is used as a metonymy. A metonymy is a figure of speech in which one word is used for another which it suggests, such as the cause may be given for the effect or the effect for the cause. An example of this is, "For He Himself [Christ] is our peace" (Eph. 2:14). The meaning is that Christ is the cause or source of our peace.

The container may be given for that which is contained. An example of this is referring to the contents of the cup as the cup in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:25). The symbol is given for the thing symbolized. I believe an example of this is baptism in the verses under study.

In Romans 6:3, Paul says, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" This verse is designed to tell us how the believer's death to sin referred to in verse 2 was accomplished. By being baptized into Jesus Christ, we were baptized into His death. It was in this manner that His death became our death. It also tells us what kind of death is referred to. It is Jesus' death. The only kind of death that He died to sin was a penal death.

In saying that baptism is a metonymy in this passage, we are saying that the wording credits water baptism with what actually belongs to that which is symbolized. Water baptism does not baptize a person into Christ. It only symbolizes baptism into Christ. It is baptism by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13) that baptizes the believer into Christ. In this baptism, we are united with Christ. In this union, His death becomes our death.

That Paul is saying that a union with Christ is accomplished by this baptism into Christ is made clear in verse 5. The word *sumphutos*, which the KJV translates "planted together," is a horticultural term. It is better translated "grown together." Conybeare and Howson give the translation, "For if we have been grafted into the likeness of his death." In a footnote they explain, "Literally, have become partakers of a vital union [as that of a graft with the tree into which it was grafted] *of the representation of his death* [in baptism]." Many modern translations translate it "united with." The meaning is that by union with Christ we have the likeness of His death. As a rule, it is simply said that we died with or in Christ. In this case, likeness is used to stress that we have the credit for His death but did not experience the pain and agony of it.

That we received Jesus' death as our death in this union is further developed in this passage. In verse 6, which is given to explain verse 5, we are told, "Our old man was crucified with Him." Our old man here is our pre-salvation self or person, not our sinful nature. When we became a new man in conversion, what we were before that time became our old man because we are now a new person.

That the crucifixion of our old man was the penal death we died with Christ is clear from verse 7 where this death results in justification. The word that is translated “freed” is *dikaioō* and should be translated “justified.” Only a penal death justifies. The only penal death that can justify us is the death of Christ.

Death by identification is further developed in verse 8, “Now if we died with Christ.” If there has been any lack of clarity about having died by our union with Christ, verse 11 should remove all doubt. Paul plainly tells us that it is “in Christ Jesus” that we are to consider ourselves to be dead to sin and alive to God.

Three things are very clear in this passage: First, Paul talks about union with Christ. Second, this union identifies us with Christ’s death. Third, this death is a penal death.

I am aware that most people understand the death to sin in this passage to be ethical rather than penal. In research for a thesis dealing with the believer’s death to sin, I became firmly convinced that Paul was referring to a penal death. Support for this position was found in commentaries on Romans by David Brown, Thomas Chalmers, Robert Haldane, James Morrison, H. C. G. Moule, and William G. T. Shedd. Some would insist on the ethical interpretation, because Romans 6 deals with sanctification. I will show how the penal death relates to sanctification in the chapter on sanctification.

Galatians 2:19–20

We are not dependent on Romans 6:1–11 alone. The penal death interpretation fits the context of Galatians 2:20. This death becomes the believer’s death by being “in Christ.” With reference to Galatians 2:19–20, Ellicot states:

The meaning is: “I died not only as concerns the law, but as the law required.” The whole clause, then, may be thus paraphrased: “I, through the law, owing to sin, was brought under its curse; but having undergone this curse, with, and in the person of, Christ, I died to the law, in the fullest and deepest sense: being both free from its claims, and having satisfied its course.”

Shedd explains that “some commentators explain St. Paul’s crucifixion with Christ, to be his own personal sufferings in the cause of Christ. But St. Paul’s own sufferings would not be the reason he is ‘dead to the law.’ Christ’s atoning suffering is the reason for this.”

Other Passages

After referring to 2 Corinthians 5:15–16 and 2 Timothy 2:11, Shedd concludes: “These passages abundantly prove that the doctrine of the believer’s unity with Christ in his vicarious death for sin is familiar to St. Paul, and is strongly emphasized by him.”

Shedd and Walvoord on Union with Christ

William G. T. Shedd and John F. Walvoord shed light on the question of union with Christ. Shedd calls the union between Christ and the believer a “spiritual” and “mystical” union. He explains that this mystical union provides the foundation for the “legal” and “federal” union between Christ and His people. It is because of their spiritual, vital, eternal, and mystical oneness with Christ that “his merit is imputable to them, and their demerit is imputable to him.” Thus, Shedd rightly argues that “the imputation of Christ’s righteousness supposes a union with him. It could not be imputed to an unbeliever, because he is not united with Christ by faith.”

John F. Walvoord makes synonymous the concepts of union with Christ and identification with Him. The believer is identified with Christ, Walvoord argues, “in his death (Rom. 6:1–11); his burial (Rom. 6:4); his resurrection (Col. 3:1); his ascension (Eph. 2:6); his reign (2 Tim.

2:12); and his glory (Rom. 8:17).” Yet, he explains, this identification is limited. Through His incarnation, Christ identifies with all humanity. However, “only true believers are identified with Christ.” As a result of this identification, some of the “aspects of the person and work of Christ” are attributed to the believer, but not the “possession of the attributes of the Second Person, nor are the personal distinctions between Christ and the believer erased. Taken as a whole, however, identification with Christ is a most important doctrine and is essential to the entire program of grace.”

Summary Comments

Identification by union makes that which was not actually a part of a person’s experience his by identification. For example, prior to the time that Hawaii became a part of the United States, a citizen of Hawaii could not have said, “We celebrate our day of Independence on July 4.” Immediately upon their becoming a state, the same person who formerly could not make the statement could say, “We celebrate our day of Independence on July 4.” What happened on July 4, 1776, became a part of their history. The history of the United States became the history of Hawaii, and the history of Hawaii became the history of the United States.

Prior to the union of Christ on the condition of faith, a person could not say, “I died with Christ.” Immediately upon union with Christ, a person can say, “I died with Christ.” The history of the cross became his history, not in the experiential sense but by identification, so that he received full credit for that death. At the same time, the history of our sins became Jesus’ history, not in the sense that His character was affected, but so they would come into contact with the penalty He had already paid for them. He took the responsibility for them, but it was a responsibility He had already assumed on the cross. It is this side of the truth which Shedd was addressing in the quotation given earlier when he said, “And their [believers’] demerit is imputable to him.”

Union with Christ and the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ to the Believer

Attention has been given thus far to the imputation of the death of Christ to the believer. Let us now turn our attention to the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. As Loraine Boettner has argued, most of the theological discussions of church history have focused on Christ’s passive obedience at the expense of His active obedience. This has resulted in a situation in which many believers who eagerly recognize that Christ died for them “seem altogether unaware of the fact that the holy, sinless life which He lived was also a vicarious work in their behalf, wrought out by Him in His representative capacity and securing for them title to eternal life.”

In speaking of the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to us, it may be that we should understand righteousness to mean “that which is required to make one right or righteous before God.” And, that would include both the penal death (passive obedience) and the righteous life of Christ (active obedience). I am inclined to agree with Robert Haldane when he says:

No explanation of the expression, “The righteousness of God,” will at once suit the phrase and the situation in which it is found in the passage before us [Rom. 3:21], but that which makes it that righteousness, or obedience to the law, both in its penalty and requirements, which has been yielded to it by our Lord Jesus Christ. This is indeed the righteousness of God, for it has been provided by God, and from first to last has been effected by His Son Jesus Christ, who is the Mighty God and the Father of eternity.

Whether or not the righteousness of God that was provided for us includes the death of Christ, it would most certainly include the righteous life of Christ.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “That we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (KJV). In Philippians 3:9, Paul says, “And be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.” Both the NASB and NIV also translate *ek* as “from.” In these verses, righteousness is ours “in Christ.” Philippians 3:9 makes it clear that Paul is talking about a righteousness that is not his own in the sense of having personally produced it, but a righteousness that is from God.

In Romans 1:18–3:20, Paul had talked about man’s need for righteousness. In and of himself, man did not and could not have righteousness. In Romans 3:21, Paul came through with a message of hope for those who were helpless. He spoke of a God-provided righteousness that was apart from personal law-keeping. It was provided by God on the condition of faith (3:22). In Romans 4:6, Paul spoke about the imputation of righteousness without works. In Romans 5:17, he spoke of the gift of righteousness. In Romans 10:3, he spoke of a righteousness that is not established by our own efforts but is submitted to. By taking all of this evidence together, we conclude that the righteousness that justifies is the righteousness of Christ placed on our account, given as a gift on the condition of faith.

Justification on Real Righteousness, Not Simply Declared Righteousness

On the condition of faith, we are placed in union with Christ. Based on that union, we receive His death and righteousness. Based on the fact that Christ’s death and righteousness became our death and righteousness, God as Judge declares us righteous.

Some give great stress to the word “declare.” They say that we are declared righteous, but we are not righteous. I beg to differ. Based on the death and righteousness of Christ becoming ours, we are righteous. The righteousness on which this declaration is made is a real righteousness. It is true that in our own persons we are not absolutely righteous, but we are not declared to be righteous in our own persons. We are declared to be righteous on the basis of a real righteousness, the righteousness of Christ. As will be seen later, the stress on the word *declared* belongs not to the satisfaction view but the governmental view.

Justification the Work of God as Judge

It is important to observe that justification is the work of God as Judge. God, as Judge, will not justify us in any way other than that which protects His own holiness and shows an interest in our holiness. The moral concerns of God are fully protected and are clearly manifested in God’s provision of atonement and justification.

A shallow look at an account balanced by a gift of the death and righteousness of Christ leads to a cheap view of grace and has serious moral consequences. It has traces of antinomianism, which lacks appreciation for the moral responsibility of the believer.

It is true that justification is by grace, which is an unmerited favor. That fact must never be compromised. It must never be corrupted. There is a right way and a wrong way to approach grace. Grace must be understood in *the context of moral law*, not moral law in the context of grace. By this I mean that we start with law, and *grace conforms to the requirements and interests of law*. We do not begin with grace and make law conform to grace. We do not begin with the gospel and then move on to law. Rather, we begin with law and then proceed to the gospel. It is only when people see how they stand before God’s law that they are ready to give proper attention to the good news of God’s grace. In the last half-century or so, much harm has

been done in the evangelical church world by preaching grace in such a way that the interests of law and holiness are not properly dealt with. The most open example of this has been those who have advocated the view that a person can receive Jesus as Savior without receiving Him as Lord.

In Romans 3:31, Paul says, “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.” The provision of grace operates within the framework of the highest regard for law. Man was condemned by the holy law of God because of his sin. The holiness of God would not tolerate a plan of redemption that did not pay full respect to the law of God. We are not talking about arbitrary law. We are talking about law as the expression of the holy nature of a personal God. We are not talking about playing around with a legal technicality as sometimes goes on in our legal system. We are talking about truth. The only plan of atonement that God would approve was one that gave full satisfaction to the holiness of God by meeting all the demands of the law. Justification must be the work of God as Judge. As Judge, He sees to it that the fullest interest of the law is maintained. No person is justified apart from the complete satisfaction of the law. The full protection and the sure manifestation of God’s moral concern is clearly seen by the way in which God provided atonement and justification. For God to be so determined to protect the interest of His holiness in atonement and then, by justification, to open the way for a Christian experience in which holiness is something we can take or leave would be absurd.

When we begin with grace or try to build grace on a weak moral foundation, we corrupt both grace and law. The hasty conclusions that are drawn in such a manner are both false and dangerous. It is reasoned that while moral responsibility might be good, it is optional. Since Jesus satisfied the demands of the law and the only condition of salvation is faith, it is felt by some that it is conceivable that a person can be a Christian and at the same time live in any degree of sin. We need to be careful in combating this error *lest we corrupt grace*; at the same time we must combat it *lest we corrupt both law and grace*. We combat it not by changing the nature of atonement and justification, but by having a view of sanctification that is an appropriate accompaniment of justification. This we will propose to do in the chapter on sanctification.

Reconciliation the Result of Justification

Atonement and justification were designed to resolve a conflict between God and man. The guilt of man closed the door of fellowship with man from God’s side. Justification opened that door. It prepares the way for reunion and fellowship with God.

Full reconciliation involves reconciliation on our part. This involves repentance and regeneration which will be discussed later. As a result of all of this we are restored to fellowship with God. The functioning personal relationship with God that we so drastically need becomes a reality in salvation. The foundation for it all rests upon atonement and justification. The logical consistency and adequacy of atonement and justification meet the needs of our mind. The forgiveness of sins and restoration to favor and fellowship with God meet the needs of our hearts.

The Governmental View of Atonement

The majority of theologians who view the Bible to be an objective, divine revelation have adhered to the basic ideas of the penal satisfaction view of atonement. There have been some who have held to the governmental view. This view was first introduced by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Adherents of this view since Grotius have included Charles Finney, James H. Fairchild, John Miley, and H. Orton Wiley. In order to avoid some of the criticisms that have been given to

this view, some have modified the governmental view, but have still held to most of the essentials. The basic assumptions of the governmental view are: (1) God is sovereign. (2) Man is sinful. (3) God is loving. (4) The end of God's sovereignty is the happiness of man.

The Necessity of Atonement

One of the basic principles of the governmental view is the rejection of the absolute necessity that sin be punished. John Miley, the nineteenth-century Wesleyan theologian and strong advocate of the governmental view says, "While thus asserting the intrinsic evil of sin, Grotius denies an absolute necessity arising therefrom for its punishment. The punishment of sin is just, but not in itself an obligation."

Sin requires punishment only as it is necessary to secure the ends of God's government. Fairchild explains the interpretation of the end of government as it is perceived by those who advocate the governmental view:

And when we speak of detriment to God's government, we should mean harm to the great interests of his rational and dependent universe. We sometimes speak of the necessity of protecting God's honor as a ruler, or of magnifying the law of God, and or meeting the claims of justice. These terms have a limited significance; but all essential facts implied are summed up in the comprehensive idea of securing the wellbeing of God's rational creatures, the subject of his government. This is the sole end of government; and when this is secured the honor of God, and of the law, and of justice, will all be safe. Atonement is adopted to secure these ends.

Since it is not an absolute necessity that sin be punished, the penalty can be set aside and never be paid either by the person or a substitute as long as another means can be provided that will protect the interests of government. It is concluded that atonement is necessary to protect the interests of government because forgiveness too easily granted would present problems.

Miley explains concerning Grotius's view: "Forgiveness too freely granted or too often repeated, and especially on slight grounds, would annul the authority of the law, or render it powerless for its great and imperative ends. Thus he finds the necessity for an atonement—for some vicarious provision—which, on remission of penalty, may conserve these ends." The necessity of atonement rests in the need of a means by which sin can be forgiven without loss of respect for government. When this is achieved, the penalty can be set aside and sins can be forgiven.

It can be seen that there is a drastic difference between the necessity of atonement in the satisfaction view and the governmental view. That difference in the necessity of atonement results in drastically different views on the nature of atonement.

The Supremacy of Public Justice

In the governmental view of atonement, public justice, not retributive justice, is satisfied. It is not *the holy nature of God* that is satisfied, but *the public good*. Charles G. Finney, as an advocate of the governmental view of the atonement, believed that the divine exercise of public justice requires the "promotion and protection of the public interests, by such legislation and such an administration of law, as is demanded by the highest good of the public." Public justice demands that legal penalties be meted out when a divine precept is violated, "unless something else is done that will as effectually serve the public interests." When the latter is done, public justice demands that "the execution of the penalty shall be dispensed with, by extending pardon to the criminal. Retributive justice makes no exceptions, but punishes without mercy in every

instance of crime. Public justice makes exceptions, as often as this is permitted or required by the public good.”

The Place of a Penalty in Public Justice

In serving the need of public justice, a penalty is a *moral force to discourage disobedience*. The death of Jesus Christ is not a penalty for sin. Occasionally some who hold to the governmental view use the word *penalty* in a loose sense but never in a technical sense. The death of Jesus Christ is a substitute for a penalty. It takes the place of a penalty and serves the same purpose as a penalty.

According to Miley, Grotius viewed the death of Christ as a penal example. “And he makes a very free use of the term penal substitution. Yet he does not seem to regard the sufferings of Christ as penal in any very strict sense—certainly not as a substitutional punishment of sin in the satisfaction of a purely retributive justice.”

Fairchild explains concerning the governmental view of the death of Christ: “*The theory presented does not present that Christ suffered the penalty of the law.... In a very proper sense the death of Christ takes the place of the penitent sinner’s punishment, as a moral force in the government of God; and thus it is that the Scriptures represent that Christ died for us; that “he bore our sins in his own body on the tree.” The suffering of Christ made the punishment of the penitent unnecessary.*

The Moral Force of the Death of Christ

It may be asked what it is that constitutes this moral force in the death of Christ and thus makes atonement possible? Fairchild answers this question accordingly:

It is an exhibition of God’s estimate of sin, in that no arrangement less significant than the coming of the Emmanuel, and his patience and obedience unto death, could be devised, to counteract the mischief of sin, and deliver men from ruin....

Again, it is to be observed that in the death of Christ sin has made an exhibition of itself.... Sin never so displayed its malignity and hatefulness, as in that infamous deed; and the sight of the cross from that day to this, has tended powerfully to make the world ashamed of sin....

It exhibits the beauty of holiness, even more impressively than the odiousness of sin. The character and consecration of the Savior is the highest exhibition of goodness and unselfish devotion that the world has seen....

Again, the cross is an exhibition of the love of God, in the sense of sympathy and compassion for sinners.... The goodness and the severity of God are united in the great lesson of the cross.

The value of Christ’s death in the governmental view is revelational. It reveals God’s attitude toward sin, that sin is odious, the beauty of holiness, and the love of God.

Justification According to the Governmental View of Atonement

Just as there is a drastic difference between the satisfaction and governmental views of atonement, there is also a drastic difference in the views of justification that grow out of these differing views of atonement.

No Imputation of Either the Death or the Righteousness of Christ to the Believer

One obvious result of the governmental view of atonement is that it denies the imputation of Christ’s death and righteousness to the believer. Fairchild, for example, argues that theologians who teach the imputation of human sin to Christ and Christ’s righteousness to human beings

“treat justification as a judicial act, a pronouncing of the sinner just before the law.... The simpler and more reasonable view is, that *there can be no transfer, or imputation, either of guilt or of righteousness.*”

Faith Imputed for Righteousness

Thus, in the governmental view, the penalty is set aside in the light of atonement when the sinner exercises faith in Christ. The chart below will help us see what takes place in justification according to this view.

Those who hold the governmental view agree that absolute righteousness is what God required of the sinner, and eternal death is the penalty for disobedience. However, in view of faith in Christ, God sets the *penalty aside*. The same consideration that would have been given to absolute righteousness is given for *faith*. Faith is not absolute righteousness, but it is counted “for” or “as” righteousness. Fairchild says, “*Faith is another word for the righteousness which the law requires.*” The exact meaning of “faith counted for righteousness” is understood with some variations among governmentalists, but all concur in denying that there is any imputation of the death or righteousness of Christ to the believer. These variations do not have any essential effect on the view.

Since justification, in the governmental view, declares the person to be righteous without this declaration being based on an absolute righteousness, it can be seen that it is appropriate to give stress to the word *declare*. The believer is declared to be righteous, but he is not righteous. This is supposed to be the way grace works. The satisfaction view does not admit this interpretation of *declare*. The believer is declared righteous because the righteousness of Christ, which is a real righteousness, is his.

Justification the Work of God as Sovereign

The judge must go by the law and uphold the law. He can declare a person righteous only as he is righteous by the standard of the law. A ruler has more latitude. This can be seen in the right of a governor to pardon.

In the governmental view, God as Ruler declares the believer righteous not by the strict standard of law but in a manner that is designed to protect the public good. This is what allows Him to set the penalty aside. The justice administered is not *retributive* justice but *public* justice. Finney explains:

Courts never pardon, or set aside the execution of penalties. This does not belong to them, but either to the executive or to the lawmaking department. Oftentimes, this power in human governments is lodged in the head of the executive department, who is generally at least, a branch of the legislative power of government. But never is the power of pardon exercised in the judicial department....

It consists not in the law pronouncing the sinner just, but in his being ultimately governmentally treated as if he were just; that is, it consists in a governmental decree of pardon or amnesty—in arresting and setting aside the execution of the incurred penalty of law.

The Technical Use of the Words *Pardon* and *Justify*

If we would be technical in the use of language, the governmental view should speak of “pardon” and the satisfaction view would speak of “justification.” In the satisfaction view, God, as Judge, declares the believer *justified* because, in Christ, all of the requirements of the law have been met. In the governmental view, God, as Sovereign Ruler, declares the believer righteous

and pardons the believer because, in view of the revelational influence of Christ's death, no violence is done to the interest of God's government.

Since we are not always technical in our use of language, *justification* and *pardon* will continue to be used interchangeably. Another factor that will keep the word *pardon* alive is that it lends itself more easily to use in poetry than the word *justify*.

Criticism of the Governmental View of Atonement and Justification

While the governmental view has many important differences that distinguish it from the moral influence theory of liberalism, it has some dangerously close parallels. (1) Both views deny that there is any principle in the divine nature that requires satisfaction in atonement. (2) Both deny that it is absolutely necessary to inflict a penalty on sin. (3) Both views consider the value of Christ's death to be revelational.

Those who have believed in the governmental view have historically believed in the doctrine of hell for those who do not receive Christ by faith. Liberalism believes in universalism. There is no penalty against sin in the strict sense of the word. In liberalism, the emphasis in the revelational value of the death of Christ stresses the love of Christ. It is God's love on the one hand assuring the sinner that there is no obstacle to his return. On the other hand, God's love is a moral force to bring about moral transformation in the sinner. The great love of God manifested in sending Jesus to die is meant to show us that God loves us and serves as a heart-moving revelation designed to bring about moral change. In the governmental view, the death of Christ reveals the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, the love of God, and God's interest in maintaining His government.

In the discussion of the satisfaction view, I set forth the reason for believing that it is an absolute necessity for sin to be punished. God's holy nature requires it. If the holy nature of God requires that sin be punished, it is a very serious matter to deny that truth. The governmental view proposes to emphasize the importance of holiness and the seriousness of sin. As weighed against the importance of God's holiness and the seriousness of sin in the satisfaction view, the governmental view falls far short. In the satisfaction view, holiness is so important and sin is so serious that nothing short of a full satisfaction of God's law can make atonement for sin. Nothing less would permit God in His capacity as Judge to declare the believer to be righteous. In the governmental view, God in His capacity as Ruler can set aside the penalty of sin and declare the believer to be righteous, who is in fact not righteous.

All of the valid principles that the governmental view proposes to uphold are done better by the satisfaction view. The satisfaction view more successfully shows the importance of holiness and the seriousness of sin. It gives a much higher view of the love of God. It creates a more solid foundation for respect for God's government.

While the satisfaction view does reveal the importance of holiness, the seriousness of sin, and the wonder of God's love, what it reveals is *not* what makes atonement. Atonement is based on full satisfaction of the demands of the law. God uses atonement as an instrument of revelation, but revelation is not a means of atonement. This revelation of God is used by God to bring people to Christ and promote holiness and love among believers.

While important differences can be pointed out in the revelation principle in the governmental view and the liberal view, I do not believe these differences are adequate to give the needed protection against liberal influence. Though I have not researched the subject to see, I am inclined to believe that history would show there had been a loss among governmentals in this direction.

The most important thing that can be said for the governmental view is that its advocates have held to a serious view of Scripture. They have proposed their view to be the Scriptural view. The advocates of the moral influence view have had a low view of Scripture. Whatever protection the governmentals have from taking up the liberal view rests far more upon their respect for Scripture than upon logical arguments to maintain the governmental view as opposed to the moral influence view.

One of the important distinctions between the satisfaction view and the governmental view is the ends they propose to serve. The governmental view is *man-centered*. It seeks to protect the welfare of mankind. The satisfaction view is *God-centered*. It seeks to vindicate the divine nature.

In my opinion, the governmental view is seriously inadequate. It is dangerously close to liberalism's view. Once a person denies the absolute necessity of the punishment of sin, there is no logical barrier that prohibits the slide into the moral influence theory. Whatever safety there is lies in the commitment to Scripture rather than a safety in the logic of the case.

OBJECTIONS TO THE PENAL SATISFACTION VIEW AS RAISED BY THE GOVERNMENTAL VIEW

Penal Satisfaction Not Necessary

For a general development of the necessity for penal satisfaction, see my treatment of "The Necessity of Atonement." At this point I want to discuss the importance of having a proper view of the necessity of atonement in order to maintain the integrity of Christian thought.

The Importance of a Proper View of the Necessity of Atonement

A person's view of the *necessity* of atonement determines his *view* of atonement. When we speak of the necessity of atonement, we mean that atonement was necessary if a way of salvation were to be provided. The provision of atonement is not a necessity. There was no provision of atonement for fallen angels.

A person's view of atonement and his view of hell must be consistent with each other. If eternal punishment is an absolute necessity, it follows that penal satisfaction by one who is both God and man would be the only means of making the forgiveness of sin possible. If penal satisfaction did not occur in atonement, *eternal punishment in hell* (the only way a *finite* person can pay an *infinite* penalty) is not a divine necessity.

In particular individuals, ideas may be held without adhering to systematic coherence. But in the community of human experience, ideas have a way of moving toward logical consistency. A particular person may believe that eternal punishment of sinners in hell is an absolute necessity and yet not believe in the penal satisfaction view of atonement. However, when minds join together to promote that approach, given enough time the inconsistency will surface. It will be seen that one cannot speak consistently of the necessity for the punishment of sin on the one hand, and on the other hand deny penal satisfaction in explaining atonement. Belief in the absolute necessity of the punishment of sin will move in the direction of the penal satisfaction view of atonement.

A particular person may not believe in the penal satisfaction view of atonement and may believe that eternal punishment of sinners in Hell is an absolute necessity. However, in the community of Christian experience, the inconsistency of such an approach will surface. If rejection of the penal satisfaction view persists, in time, there will also be a rejection of the

absolute necessity for the punishment of sin. If there is an absolute necessity that sin be punished, it follows that if Jesus Christ made atonement for our sins, it was necessary for Him to pay the penalty for sin.

There can be no satisfactory way to *maintain* the doctrine of an eternal Hell while at the same time rejecting the absolute necessity of the punishment of sin in atonement. Some may want to suggest that the problem would be eased if we would take the approach of the annihilation of the wicked rather than the view of eternal punishment. My first answer is that it is not our responsibility to look for ways that are more acceptable than that which is given in the divinely inspired Word of God. I would also say that annihilation would not be an act of kindness. It could be tolerated morally only if it were an absolute necessity. If it were an absolute necessity, how could Jesus Christ, as our substitute, make penal satisfaction? Whatever else we might say, He certainly was not annihilated!

Emil Brunner believed in annihilation, and also believed in the penal satisfaction view of atonement. However, he made no attempt to explain how Jesus Christ satisfied the penal demand for annihilation. I can understand how infinite suffering by the One who was both God and man could be equivalent to eternal suffering on the part of a finite person. I cannot understand how anything that Jesus did would be considered equivalent to annihilation. If there was any absolute necessity of any kind of punishment for sin, it would be an absolute necessity for satisfaction to be made by a *qualified substitute*. Otherwise it would not be an absolute necessity to punish sin. Our deep inner being will not tolerate the idea that God would pronounce the penalty of eternal death on any other basis than that it was an absolute necessity growing out of His holy nature.

The power with which postmodernism conditions individuals today seriously diminishes the way people feel about sin. Even Christians do not feel as deeply about sin as they did prior to the rise of postmodernism. Relativism and deep feelings about sin do not go together.

Even people who would check the right answers on a questionnaire on basic matters about right and wrong do not feel as deeply about sin as people did 40 or 50 years ago. This makes it harder for the Holy Spirit to bring conviction of sin to people's hearts. It makes it much harder for people to think of sin as being so serious that it deserves the penalty of an eternal hell. If people do not feel deeply about sin, judgment, and hell, they certainly will not feel deeply about the need of an atonement for sin that would require Jesus Christ to suffer the full wrath of God for sin. All of this makes it much harder than it once was to convince people that they need a salvation that can be provided only by Jesus Christ.

Postmodernism has contributed to a troubled and mixed-up society. That problem is a deep Christian concern. But as important as it is to help people with mixed-up lives, that is not what made it necessary for God to require atonement. It was the guilt of our sins that demanded a holy God to require atonement before He could forgive sin. Atonement is of tremendous importance for those whose lives are filled with hurting, but Jesus did not have to go to the cross because we were hurting. Rather, He went to the cross because we were guilty.

If people were hurting, and there was no problem of guilt before a holy God, a case might be made for the helpfulness of the incarnation. But there would be no case for the need of atonement. The *need* of atonement rests on human guilt and the necessity of the divine nature to punish sin—*that and that alone*.

Penal Satisfaction Through a Substitute Not Possible

There are two types of punishments meted out by the judicial system—pecuniary punishment and penal punishment. Pecuniary punishment is the punishment that takes the form of a fine. It is possible for a substitute to pay a fine for a person. Penal punishment involves a punishment of

the person. The person goes to jail, to prison, or is put to death. In our judicial system there is no substitution in the area of penal punishment. The punishment of sin is not pecuniary, but penal. Therefore, it is argued that there can be no substitution for us.

This objection does bring up a valid concern. *Substitution* pure and simple, whereby one person does something for or in the place of another, *would be invalid in atonement*.

The answer to this objection is found in the union of Christ and the believer as was discussed in connection with the satisfaction view. By identification with Christ the believer can say, "I died with Christ." The action can be considered to be his, not simply an action that was performed for him. As a result of this union with Christ, God can view the death and righteousness of Christ as *being the death and righteousness of the believer*.

In our judicial system, we cannot have penal substitution because there is no way it can be said that a person went to jail without actually going. In Christ, we can say we died with Him without actually going through this experience. Therefore, penal substitution is possible. For a more thorough discussion of how union with Christ makes it so that Christ's death and righteousness are made a part of the believer's history, see the discussion on "The Ground of Justification."

Universal Salvation or Limited Atonement a Necessary Result

Calvinists argue that all for whom Christ died must of necessity be saved since His death settles their account and therefore forms the necessary basis for their forgiveness. Either Christ died for everybody and everybody would be saved, or He died only for the elect and only the elect will be saved, the objection states.

Again, the answer is found in the kind of substitution involved. Christ died for the whole world in a *provisionary* sense. He suffered the penal wrath of God for sin, but that fact alone does not place His death on everybody's account. It can be efficacious only as it is placed on a person's account. It can be placed on a person's account only as a result of a union with Christ. Union with Christ is conditioned on faith.

The Calvinist may want to insist that the objection is valid and that Christ died only for the elect. The only way this argument could have any validity would be to deny the possibility of provisionary atonement. If there can be no provisionary atonement, it *does follow* that if Christ died for a person, his justification is *never provisionary* but always *real*.

In explaining the view of limited atonement, Louis Berkhof comments: "The Calvinist teaches that the atonement meritoriously secured the application of the work of redemption to those for whom it was intended and their complete salvation is certain."

A close look at what Berkhof said will show that it does not rule out the provisionary principle in atonement. He says that the atonement "makes certain" the salvation of those for whom it was intended. He did not say that the atonement automatically saved everybody for whom it was intended. Calvinists do not teach that the elect are justified before they experience faith. They teach that the person for whom Christ died will of a certainty be justified, but they do not consider a person justified until he experiences faith as the condition of justification. Thus, atonement is provisionary until the time it is applied. The *only way* to deny the provisionary nature of atonement is to consider all people for whom Christ died to be justified *before* they experience faith.

Once it is accepted that atonement is *provisionary*, the objection, which states that penal satisfaction leads to either universalism or limited atonement, is seen to be invalid. Atonement is provisionary until it is applied. It can be applied only on the condition of faith and on the grounds of union with Christ. When applied, atonement becomes efficacious. Then and only then

is atonement efficacious. The objection that the penal satisfaction view requires either universalism or limited atonement fails.

Considerable biblical evidence supports the truth that Christ died for every person, thus provisionary atonement was made for all people. Hebrews 2:9 makes it clear that Jesus tasted death for every man. John tells us that “And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2). In 1 Timothy 2:6, Paul tells us that Christ Jesus “gave himself a ransom for all.” In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul tells us that Jesus “is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.” This provisionary atonement is applied to whoever will meet the condition of faith (Jn. 3:16; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:13; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9; and Rev. 22:17). The fact that many Calvinists have accepted the view of unlimited atonement tells us that the biblical case for unlimited atonement must be strong and convincing.

Double Payment with Regard to Sinners Who Go to Hell

The discussion above about provisionary atonement and union with Christ answers this objection. The death of Christ is not on the sinner’s account who goes to Hell. His account does not show a double payment. It is true that his sins were paid for provisionally, but there is no double payment as long as there is no double entry on the person’s account. No person will go to hell with the death and righteousness of Christ on his account.

Antinomianism the Logical Result

Some Arminians argue that, if we receive the death of Christ and the righteousness of Christ, the way is open for license to sin. If the account has been completely settled by Christ, they argue, a person can live as he pleases.

If we think of justification *apart* from sanctification, we have *antinomianism*. However, when we understand that justification is always accompanied by sanctification, we see that the antinomian charge is invalid. It is the nature of sanctification that *disallows* antinomianism. The evidence that sanctification nullifies the charge of antinomianism will be seen in the development of the doctrine of sanctification in the next chapter.

We should not be surprised when our doctrine of atonement and justification causes us to be accused of giving license to sin. Paul was accused of the same thing (Rom. 3:8; 6:1). We should be concerned if we cannot answer the charge. We do not answer the charge by tampering with the doctrine of justification, but by setting forth the doctrine of sanctification.

Necessarily Lead to the Conclusion “Once Saved, Always Saved”

It is not hard to see why this objection would be raised, but it is easily answered. If we had actually experienced what Jesus did on the cross, it would follow that we could never be called on to pay the same price again. It is true that *as long as we have the death and righteousness of Christ we are saved. As long as we are in union with Christ, we are as safe from the wrath of God as He is.*

Is it possible for us to forfeit our salvation and be lost again? The death and righteousness of Christ are ours by identification. They remain ours only as we remain identified with Him. The identification with Christ is ours as long as we remain in union with Him. The union is ours conditionally. It is conditioned on faith in Christ. If we make shipwreck of our faith, the union will be broken. We will lose our identification with Christ. His death and righteousness will no longer be ours.

John 15:2 teaches that we can be taken out of Christ. It is the branch “in Me” that “He takes away.” I will give further discussion of this subject in the chapter on perseverance. I mentioned it here only to answer the objection raised against the satisfaction view of atonement.

Infant Salvation

In the history of the church, there have been those who have thought that infants who died without being baptized were lost. However, the tendency has been for theologians to look for some hope that those dying in infancy are spared from eternal condemnation. An article entitled “Infant Salvation” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* states that “with the Calvinist the heart is stronger than logic. Dr. Charles Hodge teaches emphatically the salvation of all infants who die in infancy, and asserts that this is the ‘common doctrine of Evangelical Protestants’ (Systematic Theology, I, 26).” Arminians have always taken the position that those dying during infancy went to be with Christ. The tendency is for most people to believe that those dying in infancy are either safe or saved.

Scriptural Grounds for Believing in Infant Salvation

The Bible does not address the subject of infant salvation directly. We go on the basis of implications. When the young son of David died, in explaining to his servants why he ceased to fast after the child died, David said, “But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me” (2 Sam. 12:23). It is inferred that David and the child would meet each other after death. The implication is that the child will be with God in eternity.

In Matthew 18:10, Jesus said, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.” The reference to “their angels” implies that they are in a favorable relationship with God. To me the implications involved in these passages give a solid foundation for rejecting the idea that infants will go to hell.

While I believe in infant salvation, I do not believe as Wesleyan theologians Summers, Fletcher, Pope, and Wiley do that infant salvation is taught in Romans 5:18–19. Romans 5:18 says “the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.” Romans 5:19 says that “by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous.” If the “all” of 5:18 is taken to refer to all who would make up the human race, it would be teaching universal salvation, which is not what these men taught. I think the “all” refers only to those who are identified with Christ.

There is no hint in the context that Paul would be specifically dealing with the question of infant salvation. Up to this point, Paul had said that the action of One Person formed the basis of salvation of all who would believe. That sounded too good to be true. An objector might ask: How could the righteousness of one person be the basis for salvation for many (all who would believe)?

When the occasion calls for it, Paul makes use of the *a fortiori* argument. This argument seeks to move from something that is harder to believe to the easier to believe. This is the kind of argument used in 5:8–10. In verses 12–21, Paul shows that it is easier to believe that Christ, One Person, can be the cause of the justification for many than it is to believe that Adam could be the cause of condemnation for many.

If a case can be made for the view that infants are identified with Christ, that would form a basis for infant salvation. In such a case, it would be an inferred meaning, not the direct meaning of the passage. These verses do not address the question of *infant salvation*. It should be restated

here that the position I am taking is infant salvation. I disagree with those who base the safety of the infant on the innocence of infants. According to such a view, infants are *safe*, not *saved*.

The Problem of Faith as the Condition of Salvation

The reason there is a problem in thinking about infant salvation is that faith is the condition of salvation. Infants are not capable of exercising faith. If they cannot exercise faith, how can they be saved?

The requirement of the condition of faith is God's way of dealing with us as persons—those who think, feel, and act. God will not transgress our personality. In requiring faith, God treats us as persons and requires a response from us. Failure to require a response in which we choose Christ would be a failure to treat us as persons. This problem does not exist with the infant. He or she is a person, but is not fully developed so as to enable the individual to exercise all the rights and privileges nor to assume all the responsibilities of being a person. There is no transgression of the individual's personality or will if God should remove his racial guilt since he is not capable of saying either yes or no. This approach may be all that needs to be said, but I will give more thoughts on the subject in the following discussion.

The Difference Between Racial Guilt and Personal Guilt

Racial guilt belongs to us simply by our being members of the human race—descendants of Adam. Personal guilt is ours because of our own personal sins. It should not seem strange if the application of atonement would be approached somewhat differently for forgiveness of racial guilt than from forgiveness of personal guilt.

Our personal sins were laid on Jesus on the cross. We receive forgiveness for them when we exercise faith in Christ and are placed in union with Him on an individual basis.

The Identification of Christ With the Race in the Incarnation and Infant Salvation

When Jesus Christ became incarnate, He became a member of the race. He identified Himself with a race that was under racial condemnation because of Adam's sin. In the incarnation, He became man and became identified with our racial guilt. Identification by union is a two-way street. In our personal union with Christ, our guilt was transferred to Christ and His death and righteousness were transferred to us.

The identification of Christ with the race in the incarnation is a two-way street. Racial guilt was transferred to Christ. When He died and paid for racial guilt, there was an automatic transfer of that payment to the account of the race. This could be done because He was identified with the race. Personal guilt could not be taken care of automatically because the incarnation, as such, did not identify Him with our personal guilt. The transfer of personal guilt to Christ and the transfer of His death and righteousness for personal guilt requires a union between Christ and the individual person.

Certain points need to be made clear. First, Jesus did not have a depraved nature. The miraculous conception of His human nature sanctified His human nature. Second, Jesus did not actually sin in Adam. He simply became identified with Adam's sin. It did not change His character any more than it did when our personal sins were laid on Him. He no more actually sinned in Adam than we actually died in Christ. Third, the identification of Christ with the race, while not changing His character, did place Him in a position in which He could assume the responsibility for racial sin and pay the penalty for it.

If we accept this view, we believe that guilt and condemnation passed on the race from Adam. If it had not been for Christ, the whole human race would have been lost, including infants. Because of the atoning work of Christ, racial guilt has been lifted from everyone. If a person goes to hell, he will go because of his own personal failure to measure up to God's standard of absolute holiness. Those who die in infancy will not escape hell because the guilt of Adam was not imputed to them, but because the atoning work of Christ is applied to them.

The Age of Accountability

This approach to infant salvation does not open the way for a person to reach the age of accountability having lived a righteous life and not need to be saved. Depravity (or original sin) is not static. The operational base of the depravity is the subconscious mind. While the subconscious mind operates below the level of consciousness, it is not passive. It is characterized by attitudes, inclinations, dispositions, drives, and passions. These traits are active. They are ready to manifest themselves in overt acts of sin. They are culpable before God. These traits stand condemned by God as traits before they are manifested in *actions*. Romans 8:7–8 assures us that depravity will manifest itself in acts of sin.

I am inclined to believe that racial guilt involves more than the guilt imputed from Adam. Depravity or original sin is not passive in those who have not reached the age of personal accountability or responsibility. Depravity manifests itself even in infants. A temper tantrum on the part of an infant is not consistent with the holiness of God. Depravity manifests itself in sinful activity before a child reaches the age of personal accountability. All sin that precedes the time of personal accountability is racial sin. All racial sin is covered because the One who went to the cross was identified with the race. The transfer of His death and righteousness was automatic. It was built into the nature of the case.

When the child reaches the age of accountability, he or she reaches that point in life as one who is already sinful. The one who is already sinful racially immediately becomes one who is sinful personally. From that moment, the only hope is from a personal union with Christ conditioned on personal faith in Christ.

The Meaning of the Age of Accountability

The Bible is addressed to those who are personally accountable. It does not deal with the question of the age of accountability. Whatever we say in this regard is in some measure speculative.

Children have some sense of right and wrong before they reach the age of accountability. In my opinion, we must distinguish between the feeling of guilt on the part of the child in relation to his or her parents and guilt in relation to God. The age of accountability is reached when the child has some realization that he or she has sinned against God.

I am of the opinion that, while general revelation alone is adequate to bring an individual to the age or time of accountability, that point is reached more quickly where children are taught from the special revelation of God in the Bible. Adequate teaching of the Bible to children, I would think, would bring a child more quickly to the time of accountability than would be the case where there is little or no biblical knowledge. The gospel would be involved in bringing the child to the time of accountability. In such a case, it would be possible for the child to be saved at that time. Those who do not have these opportunities would reach the age of accountability at a later point in life.

Those who are severely handicapped mentally would be dealt with the same way infants would. There is good reason to believe that the people who never have anything but general

revelation would not reach the age of accountability as soon in life as those who have the benefit of special revelation. However, in the light of Romans 1:18–32, especially verses 19 and 20, we must believe that at some point along the way those who reach adulthood do become accountable.

Erickson's View of the Status of Infants

Millard J. Erickson argues that all humanity is involved in Adam's sin. Thus, all people receive both Adam's post-fall "corrupted" nature and his "guilt and condemnation." Yet he explains that, as with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, human beings must engage in "conscious and voluntary decision." Without this, in his view, only a "conditional imputation of guilt" exists. This means that there is "no condemnation" until a human being reaches an age of "responsibility." If death occurs before a child is capable of such conscious and voluntary decision, then "there is only innocence, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation based upon Christ's atoning death."

Erickson explains what happens when we reach the age of responsibility and how we become guilty of Adam's sin. He contends that human beings become "responsible and guilty" when they "accept or approve" their depraved nature. At the point in people's lives at which they gain awareness of their "tendency toward sin," they may reject their sinful makeup. However, he says, if individuals "acquiesce" in their "sinful nature," they give their "tacit approval" to Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. In effect, Erickson argues, "We become guilty of that [original] sin without having to commit a sin of our own."

It will be observed that Erickson does not use the term "infant salvation." The term used in his "Author and Subject Index" is "Infants, status of." He sets forth the position of a conditional imputation of Adam's sin. At the age of responsibility, when a person approves or takes sides with the corrupt nature that he or she received from Adam, each person becomes guilty of Adam's sin. That act of approval would cause each of us to be guilty before God "without having to commit a sin of our own." If a child dies prior to that time, "there is only innocence, and the child will experience the same type of future existence with the Lord as will those who have reached the age of moral responsibility and had their sins forgiven as a result of accepting the offer of salvation based upon Christ's atoning death."

Evaluation of Erickson's View

Deep within, we cannot bear the thought that those dying in infancy will spend eternity in hell. Even Calvinists try to avoid such a conclusion. At the same time, we speak with hesitation when we try to explain why we think that is the case. We do not want to leave the impression that we have a weak view of sin or the fall of man into sin. We certainly do not want to be labeled Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian. We almost find it easier to pass over the subject and say nothing about it rather than to invite misunderstanding and accusations that may grow out of misunderstanding. It is obvious that Erickson was struggling with his thoughts and his words when he sought to set forth his view on the status of infants. This is evidenced when he introduced his discussion with these words: "The current form of my understanding is as follows." Whatever we may say about Erickson's view, he did not back off from the subject.

Erickson's hope of eternal life for the one who dies before reaching the age of responsibility is "innocence." Based on this innocence, the one dying before the age of responsibility has the same future with God as those have who have placed faith in the atoning work of Christ. Adam's

guilt is not imputed to the one who dies before reaching the age of responsibility. The imputation of Adam's guilt to the individual is conditional. It is imputed when the individual at the age of responsibility acquiesces and approves the corrupt nature inherited from Adam. At that point the individual becomes guilty of Adam's sin and his or her own acts of sin that are committed from that point on.

It seems to me that, because the race was in Adam when he sinned, the very nature of the case means that his sin was necessarily imputed to the race, including infants. Erickson sets forth a conditional imputation of Adam's sin. Through that means he seeks to protect the innocence of infants and ensure their eternal life that way. It seems to me much better and more in keeping with Scripture to recognize that the nature of the case required the imputation of Adam's sin and then believe in infant salvation as I explained it above.

Erickson tries hard to distance himself from the view that says we inherit depravity from Adam, but not Adam's guilt. But when he resorts to the conditional guilt to be imputed only upon approval of the corrupt nature at the age of responsibility, it seems that he has, in fact, distanced himself from the natural headship view of the imputation of Adam's sin to the race. While that seems to be the logic of the case, on the page prior to the one the quotations above come from, he clearly commits himself to the natural headship view. In summarizing, he explains that he espouses the Augustinian or natural headship view of the imputation of sin to the human race. Therefore, all human beings were "present in undifferentiated form in the person of Adam, who along with Eve was the entire race. Thus, it was not merely Adam but man who sinned. We were involved, although not personally, and are responsible for the sin."

When we look at all of Erickson's thoughts on the subject of the effect of Adam's sin on the race and the question of whether those who die in infancy are lost, we are convinced that he does not believe that those who die in infancy are lost. We are sure he believes that we inherit a corrupt nature from Adam. However, we are left a bit confused on the question of the imputation of Adam's guilt. On one page, he says, "We were actually present within Adam, so that we all sinned in his act. There is no injustice, then, to our condemnation and death as a result of original sin." On another page, he speaks of conditional imputation of Adam's guilt. We become guilty of Adam's sin only after we approve of the sinful nature that we receive from Adam.⁴⁴ That happens when we reach the age of responsibility. In such a case, it seems that Adam's sin is not imputed to us because we were in Adam, as taught by the natural headship view, but because we personally choose sides with the sinful nature received from Adam.

James Leo Garrett concludes that though Erickson "espoused" the natural headship view, by the way he dealt with the question of infants he "abandoned realism [the natural headship view] and instead opted for ... the Placean theory of the imputation of depravity." The Placean theory is the theory of the mediate imputation of Adam's sin as distinguished from the immediate imputation of Adam's sin.

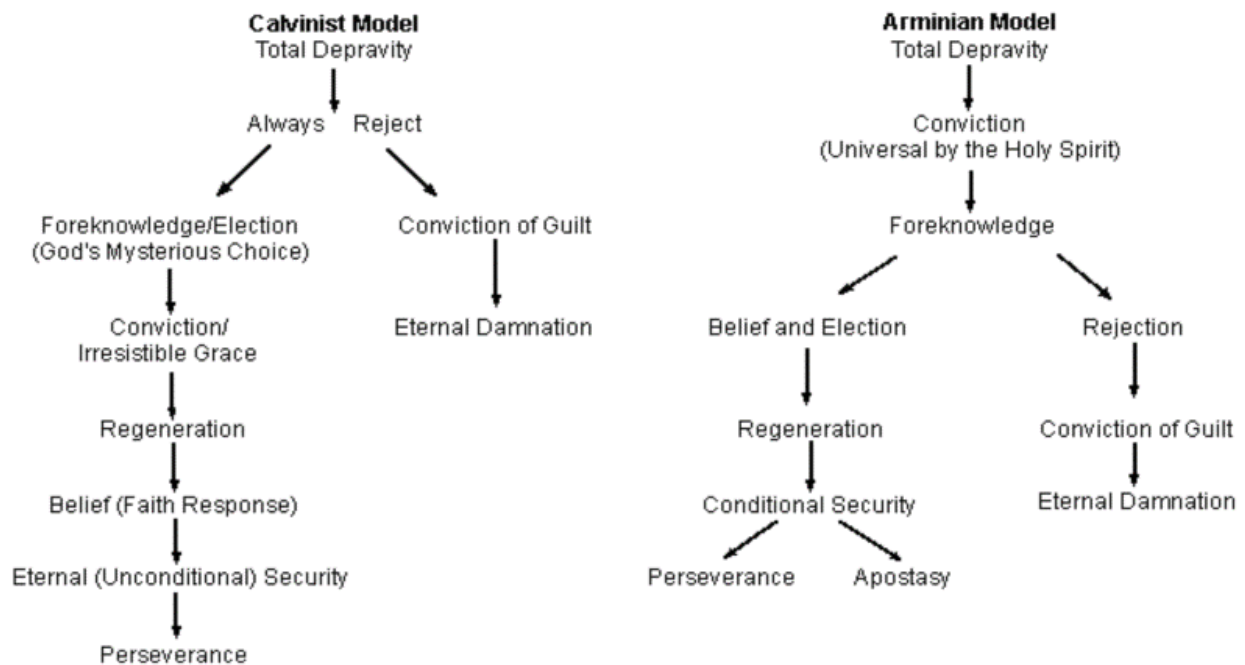
Erickson supports his conclusion with regard to infants by suggesting that there is a "parallelism between our accepting the work of Christ and that of Adam." I think we can understand why he makes this suggestion. But I think there is an important difference which makes his suggestion invalid. We were in Adam at the time of his sin. It is the fact of being in Adam that forms the basis for the imputation of Adam's sin. Being *in Adam* makes it so the imputation of his sin was required. If it was required, it could not be conditioned on some personal approval that we would give upon reaching the age of responsibility.

As it relates to our personal sins, we were not in Christ at the time of His death. The union with Christ that identifies us with Christ and makes His death ours took place at the time we

placed our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Being in Christ does not just make it *merely possible* for His death and righteousness to be imputed to us. Being in union with Christ *requires that His death and righteousness be imputed to us*. It cannot be otherwise as long as we are in union with Christ. If that be true, if we were in Adam at the time of his sin, it was necessary that the guilt of his sin would be imputed to us. When identification by union is present, imputation is not optional with God. I pointed out in my treatment of the imputation of sin that the principle involved in imputation of something from one to another is *identification by being in or in union with the person*. This is true whether it be sin or whether it be righteousness. The Scripture knows of no other way that the action of one person can be imputed to another. This is the principle involved in the imputation of the death and righteousness of Christ to the believer.

The nature of the case means that we were in Adam when he sinned. It also means that the incarnation has identified Christ with the race. In the incarnation, there was an automatic identification of Christ with racial guilt. That identification meant that when Christ made atonement, since He was identified with the race, there was an automatic application of the benefits of atonement for racial guilt to the race.

As it relates to our personal sins, it was different. They were laid on Christ (Is. 53:6). The benefits of atonement for personal sins can be applied only when there is a personal union with Christ. When a person places his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he is baptized into Christ by the Holy Spirit. At that point, he or she has the death and righteousness of Christ placed on his or her account.²⁹



²⁹ Forlines, F. L. (2011). [Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation](#). (J. M. Pinson, Ed.) (pp. 199–246). Nashville, TN: Randall House.

The Biblical Viewpoint: The Atonement

By Daniel H. King

The doctrine regarding the atonement accomplished by Christ in His suffering and death has been the subject of fierce debate down through the centuries since the "deposit of the faith" came into its final form. During apostolic times the controversy was nonexistent. The various descriptive analogues and illustrative figures gave the first generation of Christians no difficulty whatever. They were at work evangelizing the world. There was little time for pondering the thousandfold implications of the multi-faceted doctrine. With the growth of the church in power and numbers, however, scholars appeared on the scene who thirsted for the knowledge of the infinite. They had time for theorizing and imaginative natures adept at speculative thinking. Thus, history tells us that it has been the same with the atonement as with almost every other theological motif or concept, the less that was said about it in the Bible, the greater the tendency to speculate about what little was revealed. Often there was an unscrupulous "harping" upon a single area that had been obsessively focused upon—it was stressed while other important principles and passages were neglected or even denied. This has been the story of the atonement doctrine throughout the ages. At the outset, genuine biblical principles have usually been taken and stressed (and quite often mutilated in the process) to the exclusion of others that are just as "genuine" and just as "biblical." What usually has resulted is a completely unbiblical doctrine. The various histories of "Christian Doctrine" attest to this old pattern again and again. And, if histories are forthcoming in years ahead, then the story of the present-day folly will be told in objective terms that will betray both its unbiblical character and its subjective motivation. Our purpose in this study is to look at the doctrine of the atonement as it is presented in the Bible as well as pointing out historical and contemporary perversions of the concept.

At-One-Ment?

Our English word "atonement" is derived from the phrase "at one." The significance is therefore quite clear. It obviously describes a process by which two alienated parties are brought together into an harmonious relationship (in this case God and man), or the resultant unitive state. Another term describing such a state or process is "reconciliation." Moreover, in the modern usage of the word, "atonement" has taken on the more restricted meaning of the process by which the hindrances to reconciliation are removed, rather than the end achieved by their removal. Thus, when we talk about the biblical doctrine of the atonement, our intention is to make allusion to the process by which the obstacles to reconciliation between man and God were removed.

The Bible as a whole assumes the need for some "atoning action" on the part of man (but in every case devised by and thus acceptable to God), if he is to be right with God. It is accepted as a fact beyond dispute that man is estranged from God, and is himself entirely to blame for this estrangement (Isa. 59:1,2; Rom. 3:23; 5:10; 8:7; Eph. 2:12; 4:18; Col. 2:12). His disobedience to the will of God—i.e. his sin—has alienated him from God, and this alienation must first be remedied if right relationships are to be restored. The barrier raised by man's past sins must be removed (Gal. 6:7; Rom. 1:18; 6:23; Eph. 2:1). One purpose of the elaborate sacrificial system of Old Testament religion was to provide such an "atonement" for human sin. In the ritual for the consecration of priests, it is required: "Every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement" (Ex. 29:36). Similarly, the priests must make sacrifice for the sins of all the people that they may be forgiven (Lev. 4:20). In the ritual of the Day of Atonement the first of two goats is slain, but the second "shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement" (Lev. 16:9,10). This live goat is driven out into the wilderness, laden with the sins of the people. It is also possible to offer money for the temple "to make atonement for yourselves" (Ex. 30:16), as well as incense (Num. 16:47), or prayer (Ex. 32:30). In the New Testament, though, atonement is related to none of these things (except as they acted as shadows and types of the reality and anti-type). It is related entirely to Jesus Christ and His coming to earth, and especially with His death upon the cross. Much of the language of Old Testament immolationism and sacerdotalism were used to describe his death because He was both priest and sacrifice to end all Old Testament priests and sacrifices (Heb. 8:1,2; 9:11-28). In addition, the New Testament declares that in Christ and His death is all that man needs in order to find his sins forgiven (Eph. 1:7) and his life reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10); in Him is that which can cancel out the ill effects of sin (1 Jn. 2:2), release man from the burden of his guilt (Heb. 10:22), and grant him peace with God (Eph. 2:16-18). Man can rejoice in God because of the reconciliation (Rom. 5:11), having free access to God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:11,12). The "at-one-ment" has been accomplished.

Atonement Terminology

The word "atonement" itself appears many times in the Old Testament and translates the Hebrew word *kopher* (Dan. 9:24; Lev. 8:15; Ezek. 45:15). *Kopher* means "to cover, hide" (Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 497). On the other hand, the word appears only once in the King James Version of the New Testament (Rom. 5:11). In this case it is translating the Greek noun *katallage*, which is elsewhere translated "reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18,19). In the more modern translations the term "atonement" has been consistently replaced by "reconciliation" and does not appear at all. Be that as it may, the concept is present at many junctures in scripture and might even be called the central doctrine of the New Testament. As V.C. Grounds has said, "The atonement is the center of gravity in Christian life and thought because it is the center of gravity in the New Testament, as a mere census of references immediately demonstrates. According to apostolic preaching and doctrine, the significance of Jesus Christ does not lie supremely in his person or ministry or teaching: it lies supremely

in his death upon the cross ... it is the event of Christ's death interpreted not as a martyrdom, brought to pass by a miscarriage of justice, but the offering of a redemptive sacrifice ephapax (Heb. 10:1-4) (V.C. Grounds, "Atonement," in Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 71).

The terminology used by the apostles and prophets to describe what Jesus did upon the cross is essentially that of the Old Testament sacrificial system, but with a note of finality. Christ's death is called by New Testament writers a "sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2) and a "sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:12). He is therefore personally described as the "Lamb of God" (Jn. 1:29,36), and the "Lamb slain before the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8; 5:6,12), while his suitability to be offered as a sacrifice is referred to by Peter with the words "Lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1:19). Christ is said to have been offered on the cross as the "propitiation," i.e. to conciliate and appease the just indignation of the righteous God at human sin (1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10; Rom. 3:25). The "New Theology" which tries to explain away these biblical ideas is operating from a priori premises and making undue concessions to modern conceptions of the character of deity. The god of modern theology may not demand a "propitiation" for human sin, but the God of the Bible did! And, not only did he demand it, but he offered it in Jesus Christ.

The New Testament writers also allude to the atonement in Christ as a "ransom": "The Son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45); "Christ Jesus . . . gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5,6). In the past some considered the death of Christ as a payment offered to Satan to secure for man freedom from bondage to him. But how could the death of Christ at the same time be a sacrifice offered to God (Eph. 5:2) and a ransom offered to the Devil? The Bible nowhere tells us that Satan was ever paid anything. In life Christ offered no conciliations to the Devil (Matt. 4:10), much less in his death. Instead, in death Christ gained victory over death and the Devil (Heb. 2:14,15). He owed the Devil nothing and paid him his due. All was owed to God. Hence, we are "redeemed" through Christ's atonement (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14) and it can be truly said that we are "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). We were redeemed and purchased out of subservience to Moses' Law (Gal. 3:13; 4:5), from a vain manner of life (1 Pet. 1:18), and from all iniquity (Tit. 2:14). And, even these kindred concepts of "ransom" and "redemption" are ideas whose roots lie deep in the Jewish sacrificial system (Ex. 30:12; Num. 3:44-51). We do not mean to intimate, however, that the sacrificial system is the complete background for the New Testament ideas. Other Old Testament events and actions are also germane and the terms applied by Jesus and his apostles are supercharged with these historical reflections as well. For instance, Israel was redeemed from Egyptian slavery (Ex. 6:6; 15:13) and later from Babylonian captivity (Is. 43:1; 44:22; 48:20; 52:9; 63:9). These ideas are almost certainly persistent in the thought of the early evangelists as well.

History of the Atonement Doctrine

Different theories of the atonement have held sway at various intervals in the history of "Christian thought." Although not held by everyone during the period stated, the influence of each theory was certainly sufficient for us to label it "in vogue" for that era.

(1) **The Ransom or Bargain Theory.** The first recorded suggestion of this theory occurs in the writings of Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202). Simply stated, this is a theory which includes a transaction between God and the Devil. As we earlier suggested it is a take-off from Mk. 10:45. The Devil, under this scheme, is found in possession of man, and his rights as possessor cannot be ignored, however he came by them. Therefore God consents to pay a price, the death of His own Son, for the release of man. But in accepting this price the devil is deceived. He loses his power over man, and he is not competent to hold in his power the holy Son of God. Although certain details varied between the early theologians, this view stood for nearly nine hundred years as the ordinary exposition of the fact of the atonement. We have already demonstrated its unsoundness.

(2) **The Satisfaction Theory of Anselm.** This view was first successfully expostulated by Anselm of Canterbury (A.D. 1033-1109). In this view, man is seen owing God complete obedience; when he fails to render this, he sinfully robs the sovereign of the honor which he is due; because sin is an infinite affront to the divine glory which cannot be remitted simply by the exercise of mercy, God must vindicate himself in keeping with the demands of his own holy nature; hence an adequate satisfaction must be offered. But an infinite affront necessitates an infinite satisfaction, and the satisfaction must be offered by the disobedient race. So Christ is sent, thus satisfying the justice of God. As can be immediately seen, this view is essentially biblical and little can be found to discredit it. However, there are other ideas which must be represented in order to take into consideration all of the Bible picture of the atonement. Most of these have already been mentioned while others will be pointed out under other headings.

(3) **The Penal Theory of the Reformation.** In the thought of Martin Luther (1483-1546) and other Reformers it is from the point of view of legal justice that the atonement is stated. The death of Christ is the legal penalty for sin, and there is no trace of the alternative, "either punishment or satisfaction." The law demands punishment and that punishment must be endured by someone. The Bible says of the atonement, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). Luther, in turn, reflected, "When the merciful Father saw that we were oppressed by the law, and were held under the curse, and that nothing could free us from it, He sent His son into the world, and cast upon Him all the sins of all men, and said to Him: 'Be thou Peter that denier, that adulterer, that sinner who ate the apple in Paradise, that robber upon the cross; in a word be thou the person of all men,' who hast wrought the sins of all men; consider Thou therefore how thou mayest pay and mayest make satisfaction for them'. Then cometh the law and saith: 'I find that sinner taking upon Him the sin of all men and I see no sin beside, save in Him, therefore let Him die upon the cross.' And so it attacks Him and slays Him. This being done the whole world is purged of all sin and expiation is made; therefore also it is free from death and from all ills" (Luther's

Commentary on Galatians, printed 1535). Again, we find Luther's thoughts to be innately biblical, but not exclusively so.

(4) **The Rectoral or Governmental Theory.** Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) is usually credited with the first clear expression of this theory. Grotius gave up completely both the conception of God as a judge administering absolute, inviolable justice (which is the basis for the Penal theory), and the conception of God as creditor, the offended party claiming compensation for injury wrought (necessary to the Satisfaction view). He regarded punishment as the function of the state. Thus God, in his administration of punishment, is not regarded as absolute Lord, or as offended party, but rather as the Head of his government. Therefore, in the atonement God acted in such a way as to properly operate his government. He could have relaxed his law and simply remitted sin, but that would have caused no fear in wrong-doers. Punishment was therefore necessary, for a deterrent purpose, and it rested with God to impose it. The problem of government thus created was solved by the vicarious punishment of Christ. We see nothing very biblical about this view.

(5) **The Moral Theory.** The first proponent of a Moral theory (of which there have been many) appears to have been Peter Abelard (1079-1142). Abelard reduced the cross to a tragic martyrdom. He pictured it as a heartrending spectacle which exhibited the great love of God for man and draws man to obedience as the result of this wonderful act of selfless love. Certainly there is a sense in which the death of Christ should arouse in us a desire to love the God who loved us so, and in this sense it is biblical (Jn. 12:32). On the other hand, there is not much to commend any of the theories that fall into the "moral" category. The death of Christ was far more than merely a martyrdom-as we have shown.

In many modern circles this theory has been revived by neo-orthodox theologians. Each seems to be a "new" view, but in reality is only a return to the basic idea that Christ dies as an example instead of as a sacrifice, ransom, or satisfaction. For instance, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) suggested that Christ "redeemed" his people by arousing within them a God-consciousness which is a counterpart of his own. More recently, however, the atonement has moved into the subjective realm and back out again, having no objective significance at all for a time. The return to objectivity has been related to the decline and fall of existentialism. We can view this as one of the few healthy trends in modern theology.

Continued: The Theological Significance of the Atonement

By Daniel H. King

The idea of atonement in the Bible has to do with the relationship between God and men. It assumes that a breach has occurred, i.e., sin has been committed, and something must be done to bring about a reconciliation. The word "atonement" itself signifies that which brings about a harmonious relationship between the two parties. Atonement is what makes the Creator and his creature able to get along once more, in spite of past acts of rebellion.

Terminology in the Original Languages

In the Hebrew Bible "atonement" is described by several terms. The word kaphar, which is used frequently in contexts having to do with this theological process, means "to cover," "to wipe away," "to expiate," or "to placate." It is used in general to describe the effect of the various sacrifices offered in the Old Testament (cf. Exod. 29:36; Lev. 4:20; 8:14; Num. 5:8; Ezek. 43:20). Sometimes translated "to make reconciliation" or "to reconcile," the term is often closely allied with the word hata, which designates doing that by which an atonement is accomplished.

Likewise, in the Greek New Testament, several words describe this process. The various forms of hilaskomai, "to appease," "to make reconciliation," and "to atone for" provide one side of the formulation. Another term, katallasso, which means "to change, exchange," "to restore to favor," or "to reconcile," provides the other. The former series of words sets forward the notion of appeasement, while the second emphasizes the idea of reconciliation.

Sacrifice as the Central Concept

The sacrifices of the Old Testament, of course, lay the groundwork for the New Testament concept of atonement. These offerings put before the mind of the reader several important truths: (1) That there exists a rupture in the relationship between man and his God; (2) That the divine judgment upon man as sinner is just; and, (3) That the sacrifices themselves constitute a provision for man's forgiveness and reconciliation to God. In the New Testament these ideas are all assumed, and they are assumed to be correct.

The New Testament, however, adds the thought that the Old Testament sacrifices, given the nature of the sacrifices themselves (bulls and goats, etc.), did not possess the intrinsic value which made them capable of finally cleansing the human conscience from the defilement of sin and appeasing an offended deity. Therefore, according to New Testament thought, all the Old Testament sacrifices have their ultimate fulfillment in the death of Jesus Christ, who is the true Lamb of God (John 1:36) whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:23-26). It is his sacrifice which has obtained eternal redemption for the human race when he offered it to God as an atonement for human transgression (cf. Heb. 9:11).

Old Testament Atonement

No doubt the central event of the OT sacrificial system was the Day of Atonement. This grand occasion is described in several passages in the Law and one in the Prophets (cf. Exod. 30:10; Lev. 16; 23:26-32; 25:9; Num. 18; 29:7-11;

and Ezek. 45:18). Leviticus 16, though, is the most important of the accounts that are given, since it includes detailed instructions which the Lord provided to Moses concerning the preparations and ceremonies of that important day. The Day of Atonement represented the highest exercise of the high priest's mediatorial duties, and this is aptly illustrated by the description found in this account of the events of the day.

The high priest on that special day discarded his usual beautiful garments of office, and having bathed himself carefully, he donned an attire that was destitute of all its customary ornament. Instead, he put on a simple white garment symbolizing purity and becoming to one who was himself a sinner and fitting for a suppliant suing for forgiveness. He then performed three important high priestly acts, namely, the sacrifice and sprinkling of the blood of a single bullock, the killing of the goat of the sin offering and sprinkling of its blood, and the sending off of the scapegoat. These highly meaningful ceremonies were intended to cleanse the nation, the priesthood, and the sanctuary from sin. It is fair to conclude from the very fact of the Day of Atonement itself within the sacrificial ritual that in spite of all the daily, weekly, and monthly sacrifices of Israel's religious year, sin was not fully atoned for. Further, the offerings for sin throughout the year could not provide for or cover unknown ("secret") sins. Yet by such transgressions the sanctuary, the land, and the people were all rendered unclean. Thus, the Day of Atonement was instituted for the annual accomplishment of a complete atonement for all sin (Lev. 16:33).

New Testament Atonement

The OT sacrifices in general and the Day of Atonement in particular provide the backdrop of the doctrine of atonement in the New Testament. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews draws heavily upon the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement for his interpretation of the death of Christ. To this author there is no possibility of forgiveness for sinful man without the shedding of the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:22). The entire OT sacrificial system is summed up in the work performed by Jesus as the high priest of the new covenant era (cf. Matt. 26:28; Heb. 12:28). The major distinction, however, between the OT and the New in terms of this atoning sacrifice, is the efficacy of the sacrifice itself. Several points are set forth in Hebrews chapters 7-10 which show how superior the sacrifice of Jesus is to those proffered under the old system. To begin with, the ritual of the Day of Atonement had to be carried out each year, whereas Christ entered once and for all into the true sanctuary to make intercession for humankind with his own blood. The new high priest has opened a new and living way to God, a way by which all whose hearts are purged from the guilt of sin may at all times have free access to the Father. Access to God is no longer granted to the high priest alone, who was himself a sinner, ever limited as to time and place and circumstance. Christ, on the other hand, having provided an atonement for sins by entering into heaven with his own blood, has reconciled man to God and provided for him an open door to God.

Although not so heavily dependent upon OT allusions to the Day of Atonement and the sacrificial system generally, the rest of the New Testament agrees perfectly with the Hebrew writer's view of the atonement. Jesus said he came to give his life a "ransom" for many (Matt. 20:28). Paul says that Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God by the cross (Eph. 2:16), and that he has made peace by the blood of his cross, reconciling man to God in the body of his flesh through death (Col. 1:20-22). He tells us that we are justified by the blood of Christ, for God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation (or expiation) through faith in his blood (Rom. 5:9; 3:25). Peter explains that Christ suffered for all, bearing our sins in his own body on the tree, and that by his stripes we are healed (1 Pet. 2:24). John says that he is worthy of praise who "loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev. 1:5, 6).

Theological Issues Related To Atonement

One of the important theological questions which arises when we consider the biblical doctrine of atonement is the reason for it. What is the rationale for an atonement? What is the justification for its having been necessary in the first place, and why was it carried through in precisely the way that was chosen? The answers to these questions are found in Scripture and are given in a rather straightforward fashion, but the contemporary philosophical and cultural climate has led to difficulty in what are clearly rather simple theological matters.

From beginning to end, in both Old Testament and New, the origin and source of the notion of atonement lies with God. In both the legal and prophetic literature of the OT it is God who reveals the need and method of the sacrificial system. It is God who through Moses appointed the various rites and explained the benefits which they secured for the worshiper. Leviticus 16, the chapter which details the events of the Day of Atonement in the OT, begins with the words, "And the Lord spake unto Moses . . ." (v. 1), and continues with, "And the Lord said unto Moses . . ." (v. 2). At the end of the chapter, the author concludes thus: "And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the Lord commanded Moses" (v. 34). The New Testament likewise puts God at the helm in the process of atonement. As Paul says, "And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

The Bible is also clear in its explanation of the provision of an atonement for his fallen children. The prophet Jeremiah best expresses the OT rationale: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 31:3). In the NT John states it most profoundly: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The basis of the doctrine of atonement in the Bible is found in God's inexplicable love for his people, in spite of their sinful ways: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that

we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9, 10). The love of God is not to be explained by any justification other than the fact that it is his nature to love (cf. 1 John 4:7, 8). As Paul Jewett wrote: "The Lord says that he set his love upon his people, not because they were greater in number than any other — for they were the fewest — but because he loved them (Deut. 7:6-7). That is, he loved them because he loved them; the reason for his love is hidden in himself . . ." So, nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38, 39).

Now, as to why God's love should have taken the particular direction that it did, namely, sending Jesus to the cross to die a cruel death and then rise again, is a question which is more easily asked than answered. This issue has been resolved in the minds of Bible students through the years by the contemplation of several aspects of the scriptural revelation regarding the atonement, with different students placing emphasis upon particular texts and the special contribution which they offer for our understanding. Each theory which has arisen has therefore had something to commend it, even though if taken by itself it offers an incomplete view of the whole.

The Ransom Theory takes its inspiration from Matthew 20:28, where Jesus says: "The Son of man also came . . . to give his life a ransom for many." To ransom someone involves his redemption by purchasing his release through payment of a price. Some have theorized from this statement that Christ gave his life as payment to the devil to reclaim the human race. But it must be remembered that the text does not say that he gave his life a ransom to the devil, and that no other passage in the New Testament says anything of the kind. It is more likely that Jesus intends us to understand that the payment is to God, for man owes him perfect obedience, a debt which sinful man has never been capable of paying. The Bible intends us to appreciate the death of Christ as having paid that debt with his blood, while at the same time having destroyed the work of the devil (Heb. 2:14; Col. 2:15).

The Theory of Substitutionary Satisfaction, made popular by Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th-12th century, sees the atonement as the method whereby God satisfies his own sense of divine justice through a substitutionary satisfaction. Since God is holy (Hab. 1:13) and demands satisfaction from his enemies (Nah. 1:2) for all their transgressions (Rom. 1:18), the death of Christ was the way he provided in keeping with his own just nature to forgive those who have faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:24-26). Modern theologians have attacked the two basic premises of this theory: the idea of satisfaction, saying it is inimical to the fundamental insight that God is love, and the idea of vicarious suffering, arguing that it is unethical that one should die for the wrongs of another. In both cases, however, they find themselves at odds with Scripture. Both concepts are taught very plainly in the Bible, and their denial is tantamount to a denial of God's own Word about the atonement!

The Moral Influence Theory was first introduced by Abelard in the 11th-12th century also. According to this view the death of Christ provides man with a beautiful picture of God's love for the human family, leading him to repent of his sins and love God in return. As the Lord himself said, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-17), and again, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). The drawing power of God's love demonstrated at Calvary attracts men to God and stirs up in them the desire to love God in return and turn away from sin.

This latter view has become the only aspect of the idea of atonement which modern liberal theologians are willing to entertain. According to Schleiermacher the "moral uplift" brought about by this sort of "atonement" should create in the convert a new attitude toward life. It must be remembered, though, that liberal thought rejects outright the ideas of ransom and substitutionary suffering on the part of Christ. And, while we recognize the validity of those passages which clearly bring out moral influence in the redemptive process, still it is clear that there is equal legitimacy to those texts which teach the ransom doctrine as well as the vicarious substitution doctrine. In our view all three are genuine characteristics of the process and no one of them should be minimized as we talk about the atonement. However, if it might be said that precedence belongs to any one of them it would surely not be the moral influence aspect, and assuredly not to the neglect of the others as is the case in the approach taken by liberal theorists.

Conclusion

In sum, the Bible teaches that God sought to bring his erring children back into relationship with him through a process called "atonement." He set the stage in the OT for the ultimate deliverance of his people by means of a system of sacrifices which was punctuated by the annual Israelite observance of the Day of Atonement which focused specifically upon the problem of sin and its solution. In the NT God sent his Son to be the chosen Lamb, the perfect sin-offering which accomplished three spiritual goals. First, he provided a ransom or redemption price, paying the debt that man could not afford. Second, he became the substitute victim who suffered vicariously on man's behalf. He died that we might live. Third, he willingly and lovingly died in such a cruel and heart-rending fashion that he motivates the tender heart to repent and turn to God, loving him in return.

Biblical Justification – Works of Law vs. Obedience of Faith

By Ferrell Jenkins

The subject of "justification" is one that has intrigued men who have desired to know about God's plan. It is certainly a subject worthy of our very deepest concern. It is seen to be the theme of the book of Romans. In Romans 1:16-17 the apostle says: "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; for it is the power of God unto salvation unto everyone that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith; as it is written, but the righteousness shall live by faith."

Throughout this book is shown God's way of making man right or just before him. This also seems to be the theme of Galatians. It is evident, also, that James taught justification, but from a different aspect than that of the apostle Paul. This will be considered in due time. In order that we might understand exactly what we are speaking about, we must first define the terms of our subject.

Justification

The first and most evident word to be defined is justification. It is said to mean "to deem right, to do justice, to be treated rightly, to show to be righteous, to declare, pronounce righteous" (G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament). Thayer says that it means, "to judge, to declare, pronounce righteous and therefore acceptable" (A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament). Someone has denied it as meaning "a process by which wrong is corrected, and bad is made good, and good better, in the way of actual improvement of the thing or person justified" (H. C. G. Moule, "Justification By Faith," The Fundamentals, Vol. 11). Webster says, in the printing industry it means, "adjustment, as of type, by spacing it so as to make it exactly fill a line, or the cut so as to hold it in place." We can see from this curious use of the word the idea of making right that which was wrong. When a piece of type has been justified, that means that it has been corrected or set in the proper order as it ought to be. But this is simply an individual case. Otherwise the word means something quite different from an improvement of condition. It is not so much the idea of improvement in everyday life as the idea of vindication. If one is seeking to justify an opinion, or to justify a course of conduct or justify a statement or to justify a friend, it doesn't mean that he is trying to improve the status of the thing spoken of, but rather that he is trying to vindicate so as to acquit or to make free. An example of this use is found in the Old Testament with reference to the law of Moses, "If there be a controversy between men, and they come into judgment, and the judges judge them; then they shall justify the righteous and condemn the wicked." Here we can see that the righteous one is not improved but rather he is vindicated or he is made righteous in view of the law. "Justification" is a forensic word. We must realize that just because it is based in the Bible, its common usage as far as the word is concerned does not change, but simply it has a newer and different application. We believe then that the best definition for the word is "to vindicate, acquit, or to make righteous." You will notice that the one who is justified is not necessarily a sinner, in fact in the example in the law of Moses, we saw that one is justified because one was right in the sight of the law. In fact we must say that in common usage the judge justifies the righteous. He vindicates those that are acceptable in accord with the law. So there is a great difference between justification as the term is used in the court and as it is used in the Scripture. The righteous or just man is vindicated in the court. He can of course because of his conformance to law, but in God's plan it is the sinner who is made righteous or vindicated before the throne of God. In both cases it means to vindicate, but in one it is the vindication of the righteous, in the other it is the vindication of one who in reality is guilty.

Works of Law

We now find it in order to ask, "what are works of law?" We are going to discuss "works of law versus obedience of faith." We must understand what is meant by works of law. By the expression "law," any law is meant, that is, a rule or arrangement that men must follow because they are bound under it. By "works" we simply mean the deeds that are performed under law. This evidently would mean if a person by his works or deeds performed everything that the law required, he would therefore be a just, a vindicated, or a righteous person in the sight of the law. So then the question is, "Can one be justified by works of law?"

Obedience of Faith

The next term of importance is the expression "obedience of faith." By this we have reference to the obedience that comes as a result of faith. It first seems that we should define the word "faith" because many have a misunderstanding as to its true meaning. The best approach is to ask, what does faith mean in common everyday life and speech. Notice such phrases as, "we have faith in a policy, we have faith in a particular remedy, we have faith in a lawyer, or in a physician, or in a political or military leader." If we use this same

expression with relation to Jesus, we would say that we must have "faith in Jesus." The word simply means to have trust or reliance for a thing or person that is supposed to be trustworthy. Abbott-Smith says "in active sense, faith, belief, trust, confidence." Thayer says, "conviction of the truth of anything, belief." It seems very evident that this word carries more weight than the idea of a mental conviction, but rather it is the kind of practical confidence or practical reliance that is willing to follow the instruction given by one thought to be trustworthy. As we mentioned previously, to have trust in a military leader does not mean simply to have a mental conviction or opinion concerning him but to be willing to follow him in battle. The same would be true concerning the physician. If one has the proper faith in the physician he will follow the instructions given by the physician in order that he might be healed. If we have faith in a remedy and the remedy recommended is that three doses be given, we will give three rather than one. This shows faith, reliance, or confidence in the remedy. That this is the meaning of "faith" as it is expressed in the New Testament, can be seen by the use made of it in Hebrews 11. It is described as the "assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." In this chapter the worthies of old are displayed before us as they take God at His Word and follow His every command. The "elders" of times past treated that which was hoped for and unseen as solid and certain, because they had trust or reliance upon the faithful Promiser. Picture, if you will, a great factory containing machinery to make great products. With the touch of one finger on an electric switch the huge machinery can be made to operate. Such a little touch! But it is the means of contact. So it is with faith when it is obedient. It gives one contact with the greatest of all, Jesus Christ. One can then enjoy His grace, and eternal love.

By What Means Justification

The question now is asked, "By what is man justified, is it by works of law or by obedience of faith?" Is man saved by his own meritorious works under law, or by his faith in Jesus Christ? Let us study the first five chapters of Romans very briefly. We first learn that the righteous are to live by faith that is revealed in the gospel (1:16-17). After showing that all, both Jew and Gentile, are under the guilt of sin, Paul says that no flesh shall be justified by the works of law (3:20). The same thing, is taught in Galatians where he says, "Now that no man is justified by the law before God, is evident (3:11)." The righteousness of God that is revealed in the gospel is "apart from the law" (3:21). It is made known through faith in Jesus, and we are justified by His grace (3:22, 24). God justified the individual who has faith in Jesus (3:26). Boasting is excluded by a "law of faith" (3:27). This is in harmony with Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8-9, "for by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory." All men are justified in the same way (3:30). The greatest of all Old Testament examples is called in to show that man can be justified apart from the law, by faith. He says, "for if Abraham was justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not toward God" (4:2). And again, "Now to him that worketh, the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but is of debt (4:4)." It is evident that Abraham was not justified by works of law for if that had been the case God would have owed him justification. It is shown that righteousness was reckoned apart from works, by the statement of David (4:6-8). Then it is pointed out that Abraham was justified by faith before circumcision. The apostle further shows that through Jesus Christ we have access to the grace by faith (5:1-2). We must remember also that we are "justified by his blood" (5:9). It would, of course, be necessary that one come in contact with the blood before this justification could be accomplished. A passage in Paul's address at Antioch of Pisidia sums up very well the point under discussion. It states that "by faith every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses (Acts 13:39)." In Galatians the contrast between the two means is seen when the writer says, "that a man is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we believed on Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (2:16)."

James and Paul

Different individuals have felt unsympathetic toward the teaching of James because there is an apparent contradiction between him and Paul on the doctrine of justification. James used Abraham as an example of justification by works. It should be noted though, that the Jacobean letter does not say that one is justified by work apart from faith, but rather that the faith of a person is not sufficient for justification unless it is coupled with works. Instead of meritorious works of law, it seems that James has in mind that practical application of faith. This certainly corresponds with what we have said concerning the definition of "faith." In the Pauline epistles there is found this same type of teaching. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith working through love (Gal. 5:6)." James and Paul, along with all the other writers of the New Testament, are in full agreement that man is justified by a faith that is obedient and not by meritorious works of law.

Justification by Faith According to Scripture

By Mike Willis

In recent months, brethren have turned once again to reconsider the basis of our justification before God. To those familiar with restoration history, this theme is not new; brethren wrestled with it and with the denominational perversions of it in the early years of the attempt to restore New Testament Christianity. Some among us today are making the same mistake as the denominationalists regarding the basis of our justification before God. Hence, I think that this material on justification should be useful to our readers. **What Is Justification?**

The basic idea of justification is to be declared legally innocent-to stand before God without accusation and thus be recognized and treated as righteous. We use the word "justify" in a different sense today; for example, someone says, "I was justified in spanking my child" and means that he had a sufficient cause for giving the child a spanking. That is not the way in which the word "justification" is used in the Bible. It refers to man standing approved before God, spotless and without sin, because his sins have been washed away in the blood of Jesus. That this is its basic idea is seen in these passages: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:33-34).

There have only been two ways of being justified before God ever suggested to man: (a) through sinless perfection and (b) through forgiveness. The former method is also referred to in the Bible as justification through works; the latter is referred to as justification through faith. To help us contrast these two methods of justification, I want to reproduce this chart to make the following contrasts crystal clear:

By Works of Law	By Faith in Christ
1. Meritorious (Rom. 4:4).	1. Gratuitous (Rom. 3:24).
2. To the sinless (Gal. 3:10).	2. To the sinful (Rom. 4:5).
3. Stands before God:	3. Stands before God:
a. Without pardon (Rom. 3:20).	a. Through pardon (Rom. 4:6-8).
b. Without grace (Rom. 4:4).	b. By grace (Rom. 3:24).
c. Without Christ (Gal. 2:21).	c. Through Christ (Rom. 3:24).
d. Without faith (Rom. 4:14).	d. By faith (Rom 3:28).
e. Without obedience of faith (Rom. 4:14).	e. Through obedience of faith (Rom. 4:12).
4. Results in:	4. Results in:
a. Boasting (Rom. 4:2).	a. Exclusion of boasting (Rom. 3:27, 1 Cor. 1:31).
b. Reward as a debt (Rom. 4:4).	b. Reward as a gift (Eph. 2:8).

With this chart before us, let us itemize some of the distinctions between justification by works and justification by faith:

1. Justification through the works of the law is an earned salvation; justification through faith is by grace. The man who has lived a sinless life has earned his salvation. Hence, Paul wrote, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due" (Rom. 4:4). God should grant the man who has not sinned salvation because He has no basis on which to condemn him. On the other hand, the man who is justified by faith is justified by grace, because God, in His mercy, has forgiven him of his trespasses. Paul again wrote, ". . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24).

2. The man who is justified by works must be sinless; the man who is justified by faith is a sinner. If the man who is trying to be justified by works is going to be justified at all, he must never sin because he who sins is under the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10). The man who is trying to be justified by faith is seeking to be justified through the blood of Jesus Christ. "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5). He freely recognizes that his transgressions classify him as an ungodly man and petitions God for forgiveness. When he is justified, he is justified on the basis of being forgiven.

3. The standing before God of the two parties is very different. The man who stands before God justified by works stands before God (a) without pardon (because he has not sinned); (b) without grace; (c) without the need of Jesus Christ. The man who stands before God justified by faith stands before God (a) through pardon (Rom. 4:6-8); (b) by God's grace (Rom. 3:24); (c) through Jesus Christ's blood (Rom. 3:24); (d) by faith (Rom. 3:28); and (e) through the obedience of faith (Rom. 4:12).

4. The man who is justified by works can boast (Rom. 4:2) because he has earned his salvation; God is obligated to give salvation to the sinless man because he has earned it (Rom. 4:4). On the other hand, the man who is justified

through' faith has no personal grounds for boasting; he can only boast in what God through Jesus Christ has done for him (Rom. 3:27; 1 Cor. 1:31). His eternal inheritance is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8).

Although we can theoretically speak of two systems of justification, practically there is only one system of justification because no man can live a sinless life. "We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). No man can be saved through the works of the law (Rom. 3:19, 20; Gal. 3:10; Rom. 7:9) because he cannot perfectly keep that law. Had men been able to be justified through perfect obedience to a law, the law of Moses would have been just as sufficient to save us as any law which God could have provided. Hence, the system of justification through works renounces a need for a Savior (Gal. 2:19-20) and, thus, frustrates the grace of God. Anyone who professes that man can be saved through perfect obedience to the law renounces any need for Jesus Christ.

Salvation Through Works

I know of no more abused term today than "salvation through works." Today, "salvation through works" is taken to mean any system which says that man's eternal salvation is conditioned upon his personal response to the gospel. For example, I am charged with teaching "salvation through works" when I preach that a man must believe, repent, confess and be baptized in order to receive forgiveness of sins. Too, some among us assert that we are teaching "salvation through works" when I teach that a man must repent and pray for the forgiveness of the sins which he commits following his becoming a Christian. Both charges only reflect the ignorance of what is meant by "salvation through works" as it is used in the Bible.

If you have understood anything that I have said thus far, you will now understand that "salvation through works" is a biblical term which refers to a system of justification based on perfect obedience to law. Those who are using the term "salvation through works" to refer to either the "plan of salvation" or the need for repentance and prayer in order to obtain forgiveness of sins committed after baptism are either ignorantly or willfully perverting a Bible term. I know of no one among us who is teaching "salvation through works" in the biblical usage of the term! All charges to that effect are absolutely groundless.

Salvation Through Faith

Salvation through faith, though a profound Bible doctrine, is very much misunderstood. It is, as has already been shown, the only means whereby men can be saved. Since so many misunderstood salvation through faith, let me make one or two observations about it. First of all, faith is not a work whereby we merit God's salvation; rather, it is a condition for receiving His grace. If I said, "I will give you one million dollars if you will walk around this block backwards," no one who walked around the block backwards and received the million dollars would think that he had worked to earn that money. He would perfectly understand that walking around the block backwards was a condition which the man met to receive the money.

Secondly, the external acts of faith manifest as much reliance, if not more, on Jesus as does belief itself and, therefore, may become conditions of salvation just as certainly as faith is a condition of salvation. This being true, baptism is as much a condition of salvation as faith is. Let us clearly understand that one is not earning his salvation when he is baptized into Christ; rather, he is simply meeting another condition in order to receive his salvation. For this reason, we read of the "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26) in the great book which speaks of justification through faith. In the example of Abraham who was justified by faith, Paul showed that Abraham was justified before God when he took God at His word and did what he said. The faith which justifies is an obedient faith!

Any blessing which is conditioned on the obedience which springs from faith is scripturally represented as conditional on faith itself for whatever is suspended on an outward manifestation of faith is thereby suspended on the faith thus manifested. This is exactly the reason James wrote, "You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected" (Jas. 2:22). Hence, though faith cannot constitute the grounds of justification (only the blood of Christ can be the grounds of justification) any more than perfect obedience can, yet the blessing of God may be conditioned as much on obedient acts as on the act of believing itself.

Some brethren have no proper concept of justification through faith. They seem to understand that one has made salvation dependent upon "salvation through works" the moment he states that one must obey any of the commandments of God in order to be saved. One of two things is true: either salvation is given to man conditionally or unconditionally. If it is given unconditionally, then all men will be saved since Christ died for all men. However, if it is given conditionally, then man must in some sense respond to God's grace in order to receive. If there is so much as one response required, that one response deserves to be labeled "salvation through works" to the same extent as if there are five responses required to receive the gift of salvation. Actually, the obedience to the commands of God are conditions of salvation and cannot properly be called "salvation through works." Labeling these conditions for salvation as "salvation through works" is only a theological smokescreen being used to justify fellowship, with those who refuse to obey God's word!

Those who are shouting that we are teaching "salvation through works" are doing so for one reason: that they might justify their fellowship with those who are engaged in supporting institutionalism, the sponsoring church, instrumental music, missionary societies, etc. Brethren, do not be deceived by this. Their main purpose is to lead the Lord's people into an unholy alliance with those bent on making the Lord's church a human denomination. All of this double talk about "salvation through works" is only an attempt to say that those who are using instruments of music in worship, supporting benevolent and evangelistic societies from the church treasury, and perverting the organization of the New Testament church through the sponsoring church arrangement can be saved without the cessation of their false practices. Are you ready to accept that?

Presumptions of Germinal Transformation

Regeneration or the New Birth

Who or what is the cause of this radical spiritual transformation that the Bible refers to as “regeneration” or being “born again”? Pelagians understand regeneration to be nothing more than reformation, a mere exchange of one set of habits for another set (achieved, of course, by a free act of will). Since man is not constitutionally depraved, that is, depraved by nature, being at worst the innocent victim of bad examples and other circumstances beyond his control, he does not need re-creation, only redirection.

Arminians believe that regeneration is brought to pass by the divine will and human will working in conjunction with one another. Or if they say that God alone regenerates, he does so only when and because the individual believes by a free act of will, or does not resist the overtures of grace. For example, we are told that “God cannot and to say the same thing—*will not* regenerate a heart that will not admit him. God respects the sovereignty-within-limitations with which he endowed man at creation” (William G. MacDonald, “The Spirit of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975], p. 86).

Calvinists insist that the sole cause of regeneration or being born again is the will of God. God first sovereignly and efficaciously regenerates, and only in consequence of that do we act. Therefore, the individual is passive in regeneration, neither preparing himself nor making himself receptive to what God will do. Regeneration is a change wrought in us by God, not an autonomous act performed by us for ourselves.

Man’s status in regard to regeneration is that of a recipient, not a contributor. Man is spiritually, in relation to regeneration, what Lazarus was physically, in relation to resurrection: dead, passive, unable to do anything at all, wholly subject to the will of him who gives life and breath to whomever he desires. Consequently, as Shedd explains,

“the new life is not implanted because man perceives the truth, but he perceives the truth because the new life is implanted. A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated. He is not regenerated because he first repents, but he repents because he has been regenerated” (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2b:509).

Here, then, is my point.

In the doctrine of regeneration we are asserting that beneath and before all positive human response to the gospel, whether faith, repentance, love, or conversion, there is a supernatural, efficacious, and altogether mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. This work of the Spirit is both prior to and the effectual cause of all activity on the part of man. To sum up, the Holy Spirit regenerates a person in order that a person may convert to God.

The doctrine of man's total moral depravity, the bondage of the will, the teaching of Scripture on faith and repentance as God's gifts to his elect, as well as the doctrine of grace, all converge to demand that we understand regeneration to be prior to and therefore the cause of faith. What follows is a brief discussion of two passages in the Gospel of John that have great relevance for our study (see also Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3, 23–25; 1 John 5:1).

1. *John 1:11–13*

“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

It is likely that here John is addressing unbelieving Jews who imagined that natural descent from Abraham was sufficient to guarantee admission into the family of God. Several observations are in order.

We must first determine the relationship between the divine begetting (v 13) and the human exercise of faith (v 12). Is receiving Christ (v 12) the prerequisite of the new birth (v 13), as if to say that the new birth is conditioned upon receiving Christ and believing on his name? Or is the begetting by God the root, cause, and presupposition of faith (as I have been arguing)? The latter is surely correct, and for several reasons.

First of all, John 1:13 is parallel with John 3:6 (“that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”). The point of the latter text is that all human and earthly effort can do nothing but produce that which is human and earthly. It cannot generate spiritual life.

Second, in John 6 coming to Christ (faith) is impossible for a man unless God draws him. In other words, John 6 denies to man any willingness to respond positively to the gospel apart from effectual grace. Are we to believe that John 1 affirms what John 6 denies? Certainly not.

Third, verse 13 says that God imparts life. The emphasis, as in John 3, is obviously on the divine source, origin, and cause of new life in Christ as over against any human or earthly or physical contribution.

Fourth, to suggest that human faith precedes and causes divine begetting (i.e., the new birth) destroys the point of the analogy. The point of describing salvation in terms of “divine begetting” is to highlight the initiative of God in making alive or giving birth to that which was either dead or nonexistent. To suggest that man can *act* spiritually before he *exists* spiritually, that he can behave before he is born, is not only ridiculous but also undermines the force of the analogy between physical begetting and spiritual begetting.

Fifth, even though the threefold negative in verse 13 refers primarily to physical begetting or aspects of the human reproductive process, it would seem extravagant for John to speak in this way if, after all, the human will does contribute to regeneration or in some way precedes and conditions the work of God.

What exactly then, does verse 13 mean? In general, the point of verse 13 is that birth into God's family is of a different order from birth into an earthly human family. One does not become a child

of God by the same process or as a result of the same causal factors as one becomes a physical child of Abraham.

Let us now look at each of the three negations. First, one does not become a child of God by being “born of bloods.” The plural form of the word blood may be explained in one of three ways: 1. the ancient belief that birth was the result of the action of blood, in this case, the blood of one’s father and mother; 2. the blood of many distinguished ancestors; 3. drops of blood. Whichever of these views (or perhaps another one) that you adopt, the point is that spiritual life is not genetically transmitted!

Second, spiritual birth is not “of the will of the flesh.” This probably refers to sexual desire, although “flesh” in John does not mean sinful lust. “ ‘The will of the flesh’ is that desire that arises out of man’s bodily constitution” (Leon Morris, 101).

Third, spiritual birth is not caused by the “will of man.” It may be that since the word for “man” here is the Greek word for a male rather than a female, the phrase refers to “the procreative urge of the male,” thus making it a more specific expression of the previous (second) phrase. In ancient days the man was looked upon as the principal agent in generation, with the woman no more than a vessel for the embryo. If these three phrases do not rule out all conceivable human causes in regeneration, the final phrase does. If regeneration is “of God,” with no additional comment, then surely it cannot be of anything or anyone else.

2. *John 3:3–8*

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?’ Jesus answered, ‘Truly truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.’ ”

This passage has been the focus of discussion for several issues not directly related to our subject. I do not intend to address them or to be sidetracked by questions concerning Christian baptism and the like (although I would like to say that a reference to Christian baptism is nowhere to be found in the text).

The reference to being born “of water” should be interpreted against the background of the Old Testament in which water was frequently a *symbol* for purification or cleansing from the pollution of sin. See Exod. 30:20–21; 40:12; Lev. 14:8–9; 15:5–27; Num. 19; 2 Kings 5:10; Ps. 51:2–3; Isa. 1:16; Jer. 33:8; Zech. 13:1. We should note especially Ezek. 36:25–26, the passage I believe our Lord had particularly in mind: “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” Thus, to be born “of water and Spirit” is to be purified from the guilt of sin and inwardly renewed, both of which are wrought in us by the sovereign regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

I only wish to make a couple of brief but important observations.

We are told in verses 6–8 of the manner of regeneration. In verse 6 we are told that “each birth completely conditions the character of its product. The natural [i.e., the flesh] cannot produce anything but the natural, and by an invariable law does produce the natural. The supernatural [i.e., the Spirit] alone produces the supernatural, and it infallibly secures the supernatural character of its issue. That which is born of the Spirit is spirit, and it is *only* that which is born of the Spirit that is spirit” (Murray, “Regeneration,” *Collected Writings*, 2:185–86). Human nature is capable of propagating or producing only human nature. It is unable to produce anything that transcends its character as human. Simply put: like produces like. Or better yet: you can’t get a spiritual effect from a physical cause.

The illustration our Lord employs in verse 8 is especially instructive. Like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit is invisible and mysterious (you “do not know where it comes from and where it is going”). Like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit is efficacious and sovereign (it “blows where it wishes”) and cannot be pinned down by human contrivance. And like the wind, the work of the Holy Spirit reaps observable fruit (“you hear the sound of it”). John Murray summarizes the message of our Lord with these words:

“While the wind is invisible, irresistible and not subject in any way to our will, it does manifest its presence where it is: we hear its effects. So is it with the new birth. It manifests itself in the fruit of the Spirit—“that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. By a secret, incomprehensible operation when, where, and how the Spirit pleases, he begets, or gives birth to, men, and this is a birth that becomes manifest in the fruits that are appropriate to its nature and purpose” (187–88).

What we have been looking at is the order or process in which salvation is received by the elect of God. We have been concerned with how the Good Shepherd draws his sheep unto himself. As is frequently the case, the hymn writer has a way of bringing it all together in a most satisfying way:

“I know not why God’s wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.
I know not how this saving faith
To me He did impart,
Nor how believing in His Word
Wrought peace within my heart.

I know not how the Spirit moves,
Convincing men of sin,
Revealing Jesus thro’ the Word,
Creating faith in Him.
But I know whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I’ve committed
Unto Him against that day.”³⁰

³⁰ Storms, S. (2006). [*Studies in Divine Election*](#). Oklahoma City, OK: Sam Storms.

The Regeneration – A Study of Matthew 19:28

By Wayne Jackson

“And Jesus said unto them, Truly I say unto you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28).

There is much controversy as to the meaning of this important passage. What does it actually teach?

The Context

The context of this passage is set in the waning days of Jesus’ ministry — within the final six months. The Lord had left Galilee and was making his way toward Jerusalem and his appointment at Calvary. Along the way he gave some pretty “tough” teaching, e.g., the forthcoming kingdom requirements regarding divorce and remarriage (19:3-12). Christ had made demands upon the wealthy young ruler that bewildered the apostles (vv. 16-26). Peter boasted that they had left all to follow the Master, and he wished to know what reward would accompany such sacrifice (v. 27).

Christ responded in two ways. First, there would be a more immediate reward for the apostles personally (v. 28); then there would be the more comprehensive promise embracing “every one” who surrendered to his authority, i.e., sacrificed for his “name’s sake” (vv. 29-30).

Regarding Matthew 19:28, the text of our focus, three major views are entertained as to its meaning.

The Premillennial View

The Premillennial (from “pre,” before, and “millennium,” 1,000) sees this text as pertaining to an alleged return of Christ to set up an earthly kingdom over which he will reign from Jerusalem with his apostles as special authority agents (see Scofield, p. 1026). This regime is supposed to continue for a literal 1,000 years.

Louis Barbieri, a millennialist affiliated with the Dallas Theological Seminary, writes:

“Though the nation [of Israel] was then rejecting His offer of the kingdom, the kingdom would come, with its extensive remaking of things spiritual (Isa. 2:3; 4:2-4; 11:9b), political (Isa. 2:4; 11:1-5, 10-11; 32:16-18), and geographical and physical (Isa. 2:2; 4:5-6; 11:6-9; 35:1-2). Christ will **then** [emp. WJ] sit on His glorious throne (cf. Matt. 25:31; Rev. 22:1)” (p. 65).

There is not a solitary text in the quotation above that has to do with a post-Christian-age, **literal reign of Christ upon the earth for a millennium**. It really is incredible that a passage like Isaiah 11:1ff would be so applied, when an inspired apostle gives it a Christian-age application (cf. Romans 15:12). And the prophetic thrust of Isaiah 35:5-6 is adapted by Jesus to his earthly ministry (see Matthew 11:5), not to some earthly regime following his Second Coming.

Daniel 7:13-14 / Matthew 19:28

There is another point worthy of serious consideration in this connection. Many scholars have seen a parallel between the “Son of Man” imagery in the Matthew text, and that set forth in Daniel 7:13-14 (see, for example, Blomberg, p. 301). The parallelism suggests that the same event is under consideration in both texts. If that is the case, then the Matthew passage cannot refer to an event connected with the **return** of Christ, for the scene in Daniel’s document depicts the glory associated with Christ’s **approach to heaven**, hence, is an allusion to the reign of Jesus that commenced following his ascension back into heaven (cf. Acts 2:30-36). See also MacKnight (p. 334).

The Heavenly Reward Concept

Some scholars see Matthew 19:28 as a promise, fortified with symbolism, of the special honor to be bestowed upon the apostles in the final, heavenly order of things. Not infrequently, the notion of a “renovated earth” is incorporated into this concept. Lenski, for instance, represents this viewpoint. He says that the “regeneration” finds its fulfillment “‘when the Son of man shall seat himself on his throne of glory,’ namely visibly before the whole world, which he will do on the great day of judgment. This ‘rebirth’ thus refers to the rebirth of the world.” (p. 759; see also Foster, pp. 1028-1029).

Though I do not incline to this viewpoint, I do not consider it to be of any particular danger, if one does not argue for a **literal** renovation of the material earth (which, unfortunately, many do), a position that is contrary to the clear testimony of Matthew 24:35, 2 Peter 3, and Revelation 21:1.

The Present Messianic Era

The third idea is that the “regeneration” of Matthew 19:28 refers to the Christian age that commenced on the day of Pentecost.

The word “regeneration” (*palingenesia*, from *palin*, “again,” and *genesis*, “a birth”) is found but twice in the New Testament (Matthew 19:28; Titus 3:5). In the latter text, the term is employed in a spiritual sense — of the conversion process (consummated at baptism) by which one becomes a “new creature” in Christ. Why it should be assumed that it takes on a material sense in Matthew’s account, without sufficient evidence for that conclusion, is somewhat puzzling. Generally, references from Philo and certain Greek secularists are used to buttress the idea that a renewal of the “cosmos” is the thrust of Matthew 19:28. But why should these writers carry more weight than the evidence of the New Testament itself? The fact is, the “eschatological” interpretation has been imported into the text due to certain theological presuppositions. In this regard, even some lexicographers have become commentators.

The Matthew 19:28 / Acts 3:21 Connection

Scholars frequently point out that *palingenesia* belongs “to the same conceptual field” as such expressions as “new person,” “new creation,” and “restoration” — in Acts 3:21 (Balz & Schneider, p. 8). This is an important point. Many scholars specifically identify Matthew 19:28 and Acts 3:21 as pertaining to the same time/event.

In Acts 3:21 Peter says that God is going to “send the Christ who has been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive [retain; cf. NIV] until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of his prophets that have been of old”. It is generally conceded that the “regeneration” of Matthew 19:28, and the “restoration” of Acts 3:21, represent the same thing.

Concerning this text, I am taking the liberty of quoting from my commentary on Acts (Jackson, p. 40).

“Verse 20 indicates that Christ was a divine ‘appointment’ in the plan of God, and though the Lord is now in heaven, the Father will ‘send’ Jesus back again (an allusion to the second coming). For the present, however, the heaven ‘must hold’ (McCord) the Lord until ‘the times of restoration of all things.’ Or, as another version has it: ‘He must remain in heaven until the time comes. . .’ (NIV). What is the ‘restoration of all things’? It is not a universal salvation (cf. Mt. 7:13-14), nor the restoration of national Israel ‘to its destined status’ in a millennial, earthly reign of Christ (as asserted by Vine, 662). Rather, it is the fulfillment of God’s purpose in attempting to reclaim fallen humanity, as now being implemented in the gospel age, the consummation of which will occur when Christ comes again. Here are two crucial points from the context itself. (1) In the chronology of the passage, the second coming of Christ occurs after the ‘restoration,’ not before it (as per premillennialism). (2) The apostle specifically parallels the ‘times of the restoration of all things’ (21), with ‘these days,’ i.e., the Christian age (24). Note the phraseology:

- The prophets spoke of the restoration of all things (21)
- The prophets spoke of these days (24)

The parallelism is too obvious to miss. Even the millennialists concede that the ‘these days’ of verse 24 is ‘the Messianic Age’ (Toussaint, 362).”

Concerning this “restoration,” J.A. Alexander wrote:

“Till this great cycle has achieved its revolution, and this great remedial process has accomplished its design, the glorified body of the risen and ascended Christ not only may but must, as an appointed means of that accomplishment, be resident in heaven, and not on earth” (p. 118).

The Throne of Glory

The motive for associating the period of “regeneration” in Matthew 19:28 with the Second Coming, as many do, appears to be on account of the connection between “regeneration” and the “throne of his glory,” which, later on in Matthew 25:31, is identified with the Lord’s return. But as every serious Bible student knows, words can be employed in different senses in various contexts. For instance, numerous times in Matthew’s Gospel the word “kingdom” is

used of the church (cf. 16:18-19), yet in 25:34, “kingdom” refers to that regal realm that is to be “inherited” at the time of the Savior’s return.

The fact is, Christ’s entrance into his “glory,” and being seated upon his “throne,” are used synonymously with the commencement of his reign on Pentecost (see: Luke 24:26; cf. Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:37; see also: Acts 2:30ff; Philippians 3:21; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3; 2:7; 1 Peter 1:21).

J.W. McGarvey observed:

“[Christ] sat down on that throne when he ascended up to heaven, and he will still be seated on it in the day of judgment. . . ‘The regeneration’ then, is contemporaneous with this period, and therefore it must be that process of regenerating men which commenced on the Pentecost after the ascension. . . ” (p. 170).

F.F. Bruce stated that the “regeneration” was “inaugurated by Jesus’ death and resurrection” and that it was the same as the “church” of Matthew 16:18, “in which,” he says, “the apostles would exercise the authority promised in 16:19; 18:18” (p. 71).

Thrones of Authority

The reference to the apostles sitting on “thrones” judging the tribes of “Israel” would be a reference to the authority of these men, as bequeathed by Christ, and implemented by their subsequent teaching in the church (the new Israel of God — Galatians 6:16) and as manifest in the sacred writings that remain authoritative today. As Coffman pointed out:

“This was not a reference to literal thrones but to spiritual thrones of eminence and authority in Christ’s kingdom, from which they should exercise influence, not over fleshly Israel but over the spiritual Israel which is the church (Rom. 9:6; Gal. 3:29)” (pp. 298-299).

We believe that this final concept is a very legitimate interpretation of Matthew 19:28, though one that appears to have been overlooked, or disregarded, by most modern commentators.

The Gospel Truth About – Original Sin & Inherent Depravity

Does Original Sin Damn?

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This study is designed to answer the question that serves as its title! However, several definitions are in order, and will help in preventing misunderstanding and confusion.

(1) Original sin: Refers to the transgression of Adam and Eve, our first parents, in the Garden of Eden, at the behest of Satan. God had stipulated that the "tree which is in the midst of the garden," was not to be touched, or its fruit eaten, "lest you die" (Gen. 3:3).

(2) Death: This word has one basic meaning, but it has two fundamental applications. The one basic meaning is separation. The two fundamental applications are physical death and spiritual death. Spiritual death is man's separation from God, due to man's transgressions. Physical death is the separation of the fleshly body and the, soul or spirit of man. When the spirit departs, the fleshly body is said to be dead, or to have died.

(3) In Genesis 3:3, the death spoken of by God, was both physical and spiritual! If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they could have continued to live eternally in the Garden of Eden. But, by sinning, they separated themselves from God, spiritually, and God's penalty was physical death which they brought upon themselves, and which was the consequence to the descendants of Adam and Eve.

(4) Satan's definition of the word death, in Genesis 3:4: "you will not surely die," was the physical application. Adam and Eve did not die physically that day, when they sinned. However, later on in Genesis 3, the penalties are listed that would be visited upon mankind and womankind . . . as well as a penalty upon serpents, for Satan's having used the serpent's body in accomplishing his evil scheme.

Some Scriptures Which Illustrate Sin (Death)

"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezek. 18:20).

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6).

The foregoing Scriptures establish that an individual is answerable for his own sins. That we "have gone astray," indicates that prior to "our going astray" we were upright. As infants, before developing to a state of accountability, we were created by God, righteous! "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen. 1:31).

Physical Death Is Inherited From Adam And Eve Spiritual Death Is The Result Of One's Own Sins

I suggest that the numerous false doctrines concerning original sin, are the direct result of failing to note the difference between physical death and spiritual death. This is well illustrated in 1 Timothy 5:6 - "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives," meaning that the person who gives himself over to carnality and sensual living, though yet alive, is spiritually dead. This misunderstanding and misapplication of spiritual versus fleshly death has a long history in the doctrines of men.

Pelagianism In The Early Fifth Century

Two men in the year 411 A.D., spread some teachings that caused controversy in the Greek and Latin churches. Pelagius and Caelestius held to six points: (1) Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died. (2) Adam's sin harmed only himself, not the human race. (3) Children just born are in the same state as Adam before his fall. (4) The whole human race neither dies through Adam's sin or death, nor rises again through the resurrection of Christ. (5) The (Mosaic) Law is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel. And (6) Even before the advent of Christ there were men who were without sin. The Latins emphasized the guilt rather than its punishment, as the chief characteristic of original sin. The Greeks on the other hand, stressed the punishment, rather than the guilt. I suggest that only (3) above, is scriptural in content. All the rest of the six points are unscriptural or anti-scriptural.

Calvinism In The 16th Century

John Calvin (1509-1564) introduced and defined the doctrine that bears his name. This false teaching holds: That God predestines some to everlasting life, while others are consigned to damnation. Nor does their destination depend upon their foreseen virtue or wickedness. As a result of Adam's sin (original sin), the entire nature of fallen man is totally corrupt. Any righteousness is imputed wholly from outside or exterior forces. Coupled closely with this doctrine of being "consigned to heaven or hell," and one is helpless in changing one's destiny, is the "eternal perseverance of the saints" or "once saved, always saved" (the inability of "falling from God's grace"). Yet there is scarcely

a single book of the New Testament but what teaches just the opposite of "once saved, always saved."

Arminianism: A Reaction To Calvinism (17th Century)

Jacobus Arminius, was born in Holland in 1560. He was a professor at the University of Leyden. After his death, his followers now known as "the Remonstrants" published the following five points: They opposed (1) Predestination in its defined form; as if God by an eternal and irrevocable decision had destined men, some to eternal bliss, others to eternal damnation, without any other law than His own pleasure. On the contrary, they thought that God by the same resolution wished to make all believers in Christ who persisted in their belief to the end blessed in Christ, and for His sake would only condemn the unconverted and unbelieving. They opposed (2) The doctrine of election according to which the chosen were counted as necessarily and unavoidably blessed and the outcasts necessarily and unavoidably lost. They urged the milder doctrine that Christ died for all men. They opposed (3) The doctrine that Christ died for the elect alone to make them blessed and no one else, ordained as mediator; on the contrary, they urged the possibility of salvation for others not elect. They opposed (4) The doctrine that the grace of God affects the elect only, while the reprobates cannot participate in this through their conversion, but only through their own strength. And, they opposed (5) The doctrine that he who had once attained true saving grace can never lose it and be wholly debased. They held, on the contrary, that whoever had received Christ's quickening spirit had thereby a strong weapon against Satan, sin, the world, and his own flesh.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that the followers of Arminius, reacted toward Calvinism with substantial truth from Scripture.

Summation From Holy Scripture

- (1) All of God's creation was upright and good (Gen. 1:31). Man subsequently chose to practice sin.
- (2) Little children are blessed of God, and adults need to become like little children (Matt. 18:1-5).
- (3) The son does not inherit the guilt of his father (Ezek. 18:20). A given individual answers for his or her own sin (Ibid.).
- (4) Mankind went astray; departed from their former upright status (Rom. 3:23; Isa. 53:6).
- (5) The first recorded sin in the church at Jerusalem involved a husband and wife who were Christians, but who then sinned, and died (Acts 5:1-11).
- (6) Simon, a Christian, but formerly a sorcerer, sinned after becoming a child of God. He was said to be: "For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity" (Acts 8:9-25).
- (7) The Apostle Paul was aware that he could so sin as to be eternally lost (1 Cor. 9:27).

(8) The Apostle Paul warned the Galatian Christians concerning the danger of falling from grace (Gal. 5:4).

(9) The Apostle Peter warned Christians about turning from the holy word and being overcome (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

(10) The church in Ephesus had left its first love and was told to "Remember therefore from where you have fallen." (Rev. 2:5).

Conclusion

Thus, to answer the question: "Does original sin damn?" Adam's and Eve's sin damned Adam and Eve. Their sin did not damn their posterity! Their sin did bring physical death upon the earth and to their descendants.

What Does Man Inherit From Adam?

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"That the sin of Adam injured not himself only but also all descending from him by ordinary generation, is part of the faith of the whole Christian world. The nature and extent of the evil this entailed upon this race, and the ground or reason of the descendants of Adam having involved in the evil consequences of his transgression, have ever been matter of diversity and discussion."[\(1\)](#)

Theologians speak of Adam's sin as "original sin" and they usually define it to mean "that man has gone very far from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil." Consequently, they say that all men, as the descendants of Adam, have this original depravity, derived from continual descent from father to son. There are four (4) principal hypotheses, to one or the other of which all the various explanations offered on this subject may probably be reduced.

Theories

(1) The first theory is that the whole human race was literally in Adam as the oak is in the acorn, and thus participated in his transgression.[\(2\)](#) Augustine taught that "human nature in its totality was present seminally in the first man; not personally but a common act of mankind in their collective or undistributed form of existence."

(2) The second theory is that Adam was the representative of the race; that as a king, or as an ambassador, or a congress represents the nation, and the entire nation is held responsible for the act of its representative, so Adam represented the human race, was chosen as the type to stand for humanity, and by his trial the whole race was tried, thus sinning in his sin and falling in his fall. Acting thus as representative for the race, his sin was imputed, i.e. charged, to the whole race.

Berkhof wrote: "When he (Adam) sinned in this representative capacity, the guilt of his sin was naturally imputed to all those whom he represented; and as the result of this they are all born in a corrupt state."[\(3\)](#) This theory explains (in the proponents' minds) why the descendants of Adam are only responsible for the one sin which he committed as head of the human race, and why Christ, who was not a human being, does not share in the guilt.

(3) The third theory holds that Adam fell, and in falling became a sinner. The universal law of nature is that like begets like. So all his descendants have inherited from him a nature like his own, a nature depraved and prone to sin. Those who maintain this theory add, usually, that man is not responsible for this depraved nature, and that he is not in any strict

sense guilty before God for it. . . . In other words, this school distinguishes between sin and depravity, holding all sin to consist in voluntary action, and depravity to be simply that disordered state of the soul which renders it prone to commit sin. . . . According to this view, mankind are overwhelmed in ruin, which Adam brought upon the race, but are not guilty except as they become so by personal conduct.(4)

Tertullian thought the soul consists of human substance and it comes into existence with the body in and through generation as a transmission from the seed of Adam. This is "Truducianism," a philosophy which means that the soul as well as the body is begotten by reproduction from the substance of the parents. It is the opposite of "Creationism," which is the doctrine that God creates a new human soul for every human being that is born.

The Bible teaches that God "formeth the spirit of man within him" (Zech. 12:1) and that He is "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 16:22; 27:16). Hebrews 12:9 states, "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

J. Barmby stated: "Our earthly parents transmit to us our carnal existence; our spiritual part, in whatever mysterious way derived or inspired, is due to our Divine parentage; and it is in respect of this that we are God's children and accountable to him" (Pulpit Commentary). Though Hebrews 12:9 does not teach Creationism. as opposed to Truducianism, it does teach, as Barmby said, our Divine parentage. Hence, we do not inherit a depraved and evil nature since God is the Father of our spirits and we are His offspring (Acts 17:29).

(4) The fourth theory, known in theological language as Pelagianism, denies that there is any connection between Adam and his posterity, or that the race is in any sense held responsible for, or on account of, Adam's sin Each soul, for itself, chooses its own destiny by its voluntary choice of good or evil, right or wrong.(5)

Obviously, and very succinctly, the Bible teaches what is stated in #4. Jesus taught that the kingdom of heaven is as little children or infants (Matt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17). Certainly, Jesus was not saying the kingdom was like little depraved sinners! Man has free will to come to the Lord (Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17). Space does not allow an extensive study on this matter. Compare other articles in this special series.

Post-Apostolic Teachings

The views about "original sin" and "inherited depravity" arose after the days of the apostles. Tertullian (145-220) was the first to use the expression vitium originis to describe the stain or blemish or defect from which man's nature suffered since the Fall; so that while his true nature

is good, evil has become a second nature to him. But this "original sin" he did not regard as involving guilt.⁽⁶⁾ The moral powers might be enfeebled by the Fall, but with one voice, up to the time of Augustine, the teachers of the church declared they were not lost.⁽⁷⁾ Athanasius (293-373), father of orthodoxy, maintained in the strongest terms that man has the ability of choosing good as well as evil, and even allowed exceptions to original sin, alleging that several individuals, who lived prior to the appearance of Christ, were free of it.⁽⁸⁾

Cyril of Jerusalem (died 386) assumed that life of man begins in a state of innocence, and that sin enters only with the use of free will. It is said that Chrysostom (345-407) passed a sincere censure upon those who endeavored to excuse their own defects by ascribing the origin of sin to the fall of Adam. Others, such as Hilary (died 367) and Ambrose of Milan (340-379) taught the defilement of sin by birth. However, neither excluded the liberty of man from the work of moral corruption.⁽⁹⁾

Inheritance from Adam

Interestingly, the Rabbis taught, as recorded by Edersheim, that Adam lost six things by his sin. They are: the shining splendour of his person, even his heels being like sun; his gigantic size, from east to west, from earth to heaven; the spontaneous splendid products of the ground, and of all fruit trees; an infinitely greater measure of light on the part of the heavenly bodies; and finally, endless duration of life. But even these are to be restored by the Messiah.⁽¹⁰⁾

What we inherit from Adam or what consequences we suffer as a result of his sin are set forth in Genesis 3 and other places. The modernists contend that the Genesis 3 account of the Fall and the consequences thereof, are nothing more than allegory or fable. But Horne wrote, "It has been the fashion with minute philosophers and philosophising divines to endeavor to explain away the reality of the fall, and to resolve it all into allegory, apologue, or moral fable; but the whole scheme of redemption by Christ is founded upon it, and must stand or fall with it; a figurative fall requiring only a figurative redemption."⁽¹¹⁾

Genesis 3 is a historical account of man's fall and we observe the following things man inherits or receives as a consequence of Adam's sin.

(1) The penalty of physical death. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (v. 19). God had said to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). We see this sentence pronounced on Adam after he had eaten the forbidden fruit and fallen in 3:19. Indeed, dying, he died.

Paul wrote, "For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:21-22).

(2) The continuous struggle between descendants of woman and serpent. The hostility commenced between the woman and her destroyer was to be continued by their descendants. . . . the seed of the serpent being those of Eve's posterity who should imbibe the devil's spirit and obey the devil's rule. . . . and the seed of the woman signifying those whose character and life should be of an opposite description, and in particular the Lord Jesus Christ, who is styled by preeminence "the Seed" (Gal. 3:16-17), and who came to "destroy the works of the devil."[\(12\)](#)

Thus Genesis 3:15 has been rightly called the "maternal promise," the "protevangeli-um," meaning the first proclamation of the gospel. We would not want to claim that this "maternal promise," in its deeper application, refers exclusively to the Christ. It is obvious that in the first part of the verse the terms "the seed of the woman" and the "seed of the serpent" are collective nouns and they indicate an ongoing spiritual conflict between the seed of the woman will gain the ultimate victory, a victory not won by the collective seed of the woman, but by that one unique seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by Him alone.[\(13\)](#) However, through Him we can be conquerors (cf. Jn. 12:31; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 17:14).

(3) Pregnancy and childbirth attended by pain. "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (v. 16). For woman the bearing of children is to be a difficulty. The pains which will come to her will threaten her own life, she will go down to the very gate of death before her children come into the world. Too, she will be dependent on her husband and he will rule over her.[\(14\)](#)

(4) Physical hardship, painful toil, disappointing vexations and hard struggle. "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the bread of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. . . ." (vv. 17-19). So serious was man's transgression that on account of him the ground is cursed. How is it possible for a curse to be placed upon the ground since it is inanimate and not responsible? What is meant is that the curse upon the ground is with respect to man, so that the one who will feel the effects of the curse is not the ground but man himself.

Instead of a friendly earth, a curse now spreads out over the ground and man stands as it were upon enemy soil. Adam is to eat of the ground. It will not deny him its produce, but his eating will be in sorrow. All labor will be difficult. Man will have to engage in severe struggle for his own existence. He will till the soil, but it will send forth thorns and thistles.⁽¹⁵⁾

(5) Environmental influences and conditions for temptations. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Paul does not say how these were made sinners by the disobedience of Adam, nor how they are to be made righteous by the obedience of Christ. It is pure assumption to argue that the disobedience of Adam is imputed to his offspring, or that the obedience of Christ is imputed to anybody. Neither guilt nor personal righteousness can be transferred from one person to another, but the consequences of either may, to some extent, fall upon others.

By his sin Adam brought about conditions that make every person subject to temptation. In this way he made sinners.⁽¹⁶⁾ "It was through the conditions brought about by Adam's sin that the temptations and environmental influences tended to cause man to sin, that by his disobedience many were made sinners. Actually they were made sinners by their own sins, and not his."⁽¹⁷⁾

In the midst of this earthly life we toil, struggle and die. There is nothing we can do to earn the right to partake of the tree of life. There is only One, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, who makes it possible for us to obtain eternal life and gain access to the tree of life in the heavenly paradise of God. In this second Adam there is life, hope and peace. Only in Him who was dead and liveth for evermore, do we have life.

Endnotes

1. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, Part 2, p. 192.
2. McClintock and Strong, Vol. 9, p. 765.
3. (NOTE: No corresponding number found in original document) Ibid.
3. L. Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, p. 144.
4. McClintock and Strong, *op. cit.*
5. Ibid., p. 766.
6. J.F. Bethune-Baker, *An Introduction to the Early History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 307.
7. Ibid.
8. K.R. Hagenbach, *History of Doctrines*, Vol. 1, p. 293.
9. Ibid., pp. 293-295.
10. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus*, Vol. 1, p. 166.
11. Thomas Horne, *Introduction to the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, pp. 143-144.
12. *Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 1.
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Calvinism And Adam: A Parallel

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Calvinism tells us three things. (1) Man is born in sin. This is the doctrine of total, hereditary depravity. Total means all, whole or complete. Hereditary means one receives it from his parents, which in this case means from Adam, hence, adamic, original sin. Depravity means bad, wicked, evil. Thus, every person born into this world is, at birth, thoroughly, utterly sinful. (2) The Holy Spirit regenerates the sinner directly. Man can do nothing to effect his deliverance from his unhappy state of depravity. Man is wholly passive in his redemption. The "enabling power" of the Spirit must regenerate the totally wicked sinner before he can respond to the call of the gospel. This "direct operation of the Holy Spirit" is performed without the subject's will or choice. Since one is totally dead, he must be given life before he can act. Therefore, the Holy Spirit, without means or agency, regenerates, gives life, to the soul. (3) Those regenerated cannot die. Once the Spirit infuses life, that life cannot be lost - "once saved, always saved." As man cannot undo his fleshly birth, so he cannot surrender his spiritual birth, says Calvinism. Once born of the flesh, one cannot be unborn; so, once born of the Spirit, once cannot be unborn - "once in grace, always in grace."

The above analysis and description is a fair representation of the creeds and beliefs of denominationalism. Our line of attack in this article shall be focused on the events in the garden of Eden from whence this theology allegedly, initially sprang. Because of Adam's sin, we are all born in sin, utterly disposed to all evil, totally foreign to all good ' and in need of the generation of the Spirit in our dead heart to give us life which cannot be forfeited. So, we shall go to the root of it all, to Adam, Eve and the bowers of their paradise.

The creeds explain to us our sin, but they do not tell us why or how the first pair was led to sin. Let us look at it from a parallel perspective.

First, "Total Hereditary Righteousness". Adam was created, body, soul and spirit, by Jehovah Himself. He did not experience a human or animal birth. He came directly from God. We may safely assume, therefore, that he was totally, hereditarily righteous. His parent, his Creator, had no sin, and he was sinless at his birth. Later, we learn that he sinned, but how did he come to sin? If we are born totally, hereditarily depraved, and, consequently, can do no good, how could Adam, born totally, hereditarily righteous, do any evil? That question must be addressed by the Calvinist. When he answers it, he will answer himself and dissolve his position, but answer it he must.

Second, "The Direct Operation of the Devil". Did the devil's unholy spirit perform a direct operation on the heart of Adam, this totally, hereditarily righteous man, to give him death and enable him to sin? That is what we should expect. If a totally depraved man requires a direct working of the Spirit on his heart to give him life and empower him to obey God, why would not a totally righteous man require a direct work of the devil on his heart to give him death and empower him to obey the devil?

The sinner is "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1; Col. 2:13), and as a dead man cannot act until he is given life, so the sinner cannot respond to God until the Spirit gives him life, Calvinism

says. Keep the parallel in mind - Adam was just as "dead to sins" (cf. Rom. 6:2; Col. 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:24) as the sinner is said to be "dead in sins." Now, did it take a direct work of the devil on Adam's heart to enable or to empower him to sin? If one dead in sins is unable to effect righteousness until the Spirit gives him spiritual life, is one who is dead to sin unable to effect unrighteousness until the devil gives him spiritual death? Adam was "dead to sin," yet he was able to sin without a miraculous act of the devil's unholy spirit on his heart. So, one who is "dead in sins" is able to obey God without a miraculous act of the Holy Spirit on his heart. If not, why not? Adam was led to sin by the spoken word of the devil. By means of lying, through incentive, inducement, enticement, Adam was led to sin (Gen. 3:1-6; Jas. 1:13-15). The word of the devil allured this totally righteous man, this man who was dead to sins, to commit sin and die. The word of God can allure, therefore, totally depraved man, the man dead in sins, to obey God and live (Jn. 5:25), or else the word of the devil is more powerful than the word of God (Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12).

From this conclusion there is no escape.

Third, "Once Lost, Always Lost".- Once Adam sinned, he should have been lost, irretrievably lost, if the parallel holds true. He should have been unable to hear the word of God and respond to it after he died spiritually, but is that what we find? Notice that Calvinism says that when the totally depraved sinner receives life, he is impervious to the call of the devil; he cannot be led by the devil to eternal ruin. What was the state of Adam? He could hear and obey God after his sin (Gen. 3:7f), but we are told that the regenerated child of God cannot hear and obey the devil after his regeneration. But since Adam could hear, reason, and follow God after his fall, then, the saved one can hear, reason and follow the devil after his salvation (2 Pet. 3:17; Heb. 3:12).

To summarize, observe some chart comparisons:

Calvinism:	Adam:
Total Hereditary Depravity (Cannot Obey God)	Total Hereditary Righteousness (Cannot Obey Devil)
Direct Operation of Holy Spirit Required	Direct Operation of Devil Required
Once Saved, Always Saved	Once Lost, Always Lost
The Facts Are:	
(1) Man sins when drawn by lust and enticed (Jas. 1:13-15; 2 Pet. 1:4)	(1) Adam sinned when drawn away by lust and enticed (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:3)
(2) The devil appeals by word, offering motive (2 Pet. 3:17; 2 Tim. 2:26)	(2) The devil enticed Adam by word, offering motive (Gen 3; 2 Cor. 11:3)
(3) Sin produces death (Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:15)	(3) Sin produced death in Eden (Gen. 3; Rom. 6:23)
(4) Dead sinners, "dead in sin," can "hear the voice of the Son of God" and "live" (Jn. 5:25)	(4) Adam, "dead to sin," could hear the voice of the devil and die (Gen. 3)
(5) After receiving life, saved may hear and obey devil (2 Tim. 4:2-4; Psa. 106:12, 24; 2 Pet. 3:17)	(5) After receiving death, Adam could hear and obey God (Gen. 3:7f)

Calvinism And Ezekiel 18

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For many years, those of mainstream Calvinism have taught that the son bears the guilt of his father's sin. Reaching back to the original sin of Adam, these same teachers have condemned all under the guilt of Adam's transgression. This article seeks to find the biblical teachings concerning such guilt.

The Bible student is aware that such a doctrine of inherited sin or total depravity is discussed in two Old Testament passages by prophets dealing with a rebellious and fallen Judah. Jeremiah (31:29-30) and Ezekiel (chapter 18) both deal with the false proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." In both cases, with Ezekiel being the longer explanation of the concept of individual responsibility, the proverb is condemned as being contrary to the will of God.

From Ezekiel's writing, we can learn three important lessons.

First, God, in explaining His judgment to the people of bondage, states the falseness of the proverb. "As I live, you shall no longer use this proverb in Israel." But why should they wish for such a proverb to be true? Obviously, it allows one to shift the blame for sin. If one could merely proclaim one's status before God to be a result of Adam, or one's father, etc., then the feeling of guilt is removed. People are fond of doing so even in today's world. "The devil made me do it," or "it's all their fault that I am the way I am," are attempts to cast off responsibility for one's actions. Judah would like to have thought God unfair for punishing them continually in Babylon for their fathers' sins. This they would do before acknowledging their own failure.

But so did their fathers. Adam would rather blame God for giving him Eve and then Eve for tempting him, as the cause of his sin, than to admit in the very presence of God his own failure to obey God's will (Gen. 3:12). Saul found it more honorable to blame the people for his failure to kill King Agag and the animals as God had said than to just admit his failure to lead responsibly before the all-seeing God (1 Sam. 15:13-15). Their attempts failed and so will ours.

One should understand that while God is just at this point laying bare the false concept of inherited sin, the concept had never been true. God has always held man responsible for just the sins he individually commits. And God further gives reasons as to why he so judges. "All souls are mine," He says. God has no respect of one man over another. AD are accountable to Him. God rules, therefore, with equity (cf. Col. 3:25; Acts 10:34; 1 Pet. 1: 17). That means that everyone starts at the same point with God and will finish his course based upon his own record and not another's. Therefore, God concludes, "The soul that sinneth, It shall die." Personal responsibility to God is again taught in Romans 5:12, "for all have sinned." As if to reinforce His statement, God repeats this message to Judah in verse 20 of our text. "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. . . ." is plain enough that any Calvinist should be able to understand.

Secondly, God illustrates His point and further expounds that man does not bear the guilt or righteousness of another! (This point is critical in view of the theology of some who have gone out from among us relative to imputed righteousness.) A series of questions is presented. What happens to a righteous man who continues so (vv. 5-9)? This righteous man is then described as one who has not worshiped idols (v. 6) and has treated others fairly (v. 7). This one has done faithfully those things commanded of the law (v. 9). The pronouncement: "He is just, he shall surely live."

Then what happens to his son who becomes unrighteous? The son is described as being immoral (vv. 10-11) and an idolater (v. 11). "Shall he then live? ... he shall surely die; his blood be upon him" (vv. 13,18). The righteousness of his father has not spared nor excused his iniquity. Nor has he been condemned for the sin of Adam but for his own transgressions. (This also surely condemns the idea of universal salvation.)

But this second man has a son (the first's grandson) who repudiates the sin of his father (w. 14-17). He is as righteous as his grandfather. If Calvinism is true, he should be counted as estranged from God due to the iniquity of his father. "He shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live" (v. 17). Surely he would be condemned for his father's sin before being condemned for Adam's. But neither were the case. He stood just before God because he was obedient to the God of heaven.

Finally, God reminds the nation of Judah, so torn from God because of disobedience, that a man can change (vv. 21,24). God says that a wicked man can serve Him by turning from sin (v. 21). In the New Testament, this is referred to as repentance. The righteousness of the man, God says, is remembered; his wickedness, forgotten (v. 22; cf. Isa. 1: 18). The responsibility is upon man to turn from sins (Acts 2:40; 2 Pet. 3:9). God would have one also to realize the need for faithful obedience to His will (v. 21; cf. Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9). Thus, if a man is lost, only he is responsible for such. He cannot blame Adam nor his parents nor society.

But dear ones, the righteous man can also change (vv. 24-26). One can leave righteousness and follow the pathway of the wicked (v. 24). God asks, "Shall he live?" (cf. Rev. 21:8) Could God ignore his unfaithfulness? Adam and Saul are perfect examples of this failure, and they show the consequences of one turning from God. The Scripture in verse 24 of our text says that his wickedness shall be remembered and his righteousness forgotten (cf. 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

This final point shows two tenets (at least) of Calvinism to be wrong. Man is responsible to God to respond to God's loving grace so as to cause God to count his faith as righteousness. And once a person has started toward heaven, it is possible for that one to so live as to die and be lost. If these verses do not show this plainly, then this scribe has missed the point. One is responsible to live before God righteously; all wickedness is abhorred. May we, therefore, so live as to so die that we might live forever with Him who is perfect in all His judgments.

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Original Sin and a Misapplied Passage

By **Wayne Jackson**

•

The doctrine of original sin—the notion that one is born into this world hereditarily totally depraved—is widely believed in the religious world.

For example, the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* (1530), Lutheranism's creed, asserted:

[A]ll men, born according to nature, are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without confidence towards God and with concupiscence, and that this original disease or flaw is truly a sin, bringing condemnation and also eternal death to those who are not reborn through baptism and the Holy Spirit (Article II).

This, of course, explains the practice of infant baptism as advocated by numerous sects.

Likely, the passage that is commonly appealed to in an attempt to justify the concept of original sin is Psalm 51:5.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity; And in sin did my mother conceive me.

Does this verse provide a basis for the doctrine of original sin? Assuredly, it does not. But let us carefully study the matter.

Preliminary Principles

First of all, it needs to be initially recognized that this passage is Hebrew poetry. And Hebrew poetry abounds with bold and imaginative figures of speech; it is frequently characterized by a freedom which departs from customary forms of expression. It is, therefore, a mistake of great magnitude to extract statements from poetical literature and thus employ them as a foundation for doctrinal schemes.

This is precisely the error of the materialists (Watchtower Witnesses, Armstrongites, etc.) who dip into Old Testament poetical books, like Psalms and Job, for their doctrines of soul-sleeping and the annihilation of the wicked.

Secondly, one of the primary rules of Biblical interpretation suggests: “The language of Scripture may be regarded as figurative, if the literal interpretation will cause one passage to contradict another” (Dungan n.d., 196).

There are numerous Bible verses, in plain, literal language, that affirm the innocency of infants, and Psalm 51:5 must not be arrayed against these. Consider the following:

- (1) Scripture plainly teaches that sin is not inherited. “[T]he son shall not bear the iniquity of the father” (Ezekiel 18:20); every person is responsible for his own conduct (Romans 14:12).
- (2) Human sinfulness commences in that period of one’s life that is characterized as youth (Genesis 8:21; Jeremiah 3:25).
- (3) A child must reach a certain level of maturity before he is able to choose between evil and good (Isaiah 7:15, 16).
- (4) The qualities of little children are set forth as models for those who would aspire to enter the kingdom (Matthew 18:3; 19:14) and for those already in the church (1 Corinthians 14:20). Surely the Lord was not suggesting that we emulate little, totally corrupt sinners!
- (5) The human spirit is not inherited from one’s parents; rather, it is given by God (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Hebrews 12:9). Hence, at birth it must be as pure as the source from whence it comes.

Clearly, babies are not born in sin.

Psalm 51:5 Analyzed

Having shown what Psalm 51: 5 **cannot** mean, we now turn to some possible views of the passage that do not violate portions of Scripture found elsewhere.

(1) Since Psalm 51 is one of David's penitent psalms revealing the anguish resulting from his adulterous conduct with Bathsheba, some have felt that verse five contains words that are **figuratively** put into the mouth of the child conceived by that illicit union (2 Samuel 11:5), thus acknowledging the sinfulness of that relationship. The sinfulness is therefore attributed to the parent and not the child.

T. W. Brents commented:

Whatever may be the meaning of this passage, it **can not be the imputation of sin to the child**. 'In sin did **my mother** conceive me:' that is, she acted wickedly when I was conceived. Were the wife to say, 'In **drunkenness** my husband beat me,' or the child that 'in **anger** my father whipped me,' surely no one would attribute drunkenness to the wife or anger to the child; neither can they impute the sin of the mother to the child (1957, 133, 134).

(2) Others have suggested that David alludes to an incident in his ancestral lineage, an adulterous affair (Genesis 38), whereby he was considered **ceremonially** defiled because he was of the tenth generation of that unlawful intercourse (Deuteronomy 23:2). This is probably a rather remote possibility.

(3) Most likely, however, Psalm 51:5 merely refers to the fact that David **was born into a sinful environment**. We all are conceived in and brought forth into a sinful world. But we do not actually sin until we arrive at a stage of spiritual responsibility.

Perhaps David also, by the use of dramatic language, alludes to the fact that sin had characterized his whole life, **relatively speaking**.

In a similarly poetic section, for example, Job, in denying that he had neglected his benevolent responsibilities, affirmed that he had cared for the orphan and the widow **from his mother's womb!** Surely, no one believes

that on day one of Job's existence that he was out ministering to the needy! In fact, the Hebrew parallelism of this verse (Job 31:18), clearly indicates that the word "womb" is used in the sense of youth.

A Concluding Problem

Those who employ Psalm 51:5 to buttress the doctrine that sin is inherited from one's mother are faced with a serious problem. Jesus was both conceived by and brought forth from a human mother (Luke 1:31). If original sin is inherited from one's mother, Christ had it. If, however, someone should suggest that depravity is received only from the father, Psalm 51:5 cannot be used to prove it, for it mentions only the **mother!**

The truth of the matter is, the doctrine of original sin is not Biblical. It had its origin in the writings of the so-called "church fathers" in the post-apostolic era. Such men as Tertullian (160-220) and Cyprian (200-258) first formulated the doctrine and it was later popularized by Augustine and John Calvin.

Those who accept the plain testimony of the sacred Scriptures will reject this error.

Does Psalm 58 Teach “Original Sin”?

By **Wayne Jackson**

•

“I’ve just discovered your web site and all the wonderful Christian articles there. I’m pleased with what I’ve read, and I appreciate the fact that you are willing to address and discuss some biblical issues that are difficult. I have read your article [Original Sin and a Misapplied Passage](#). I used to think that God considered all babies innocent, and I had heard about ‘the age of accountability.’ But after learning more about the Bible, I have changed my conclusion on that. It definitely is a very hard thing to think about. Have you read Psalm 58:3ff? It seems to say that babies are seen by God as sinners. Can you explain this passage?”

We appreciate this sincere question. We are quite familiar with Psalm 58. Verses 3-6 read as follows:

“The wicked are estranged from the womb: They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: They are like the deaf adder that stops up her ear, who listens not to the voice of charmers, charming ever so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: Break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Jehovah.”

The first thing that the careful Bible student must observe is the fact that this text is a part of that body of Old Testament literature that is highly poetic in nature, and as such, is punctuated with graphic figures of speech.

These four verses contain several vivid figures, e.g., the hyperbole, the simile, and metonymy. Hyperbole is an exaggeration for emphasis’ sake; simile is a comparison between two objects by the use of “like” or “as,” etc., and metonymy involves the substitution of one name for another in order to stress an important truth.

One of the most significant sources of erroneous views about the Bible is the failure to discern the difference between the literal and the figurative expressions of Scripture. And that is precisely the problem in reading this

text, and concluding that it provides substance for the doctrine of “original sin” or “hereditary total depravity,” i.e., the notion that infants are born in sin. Our response to this question, therefore, involves an understanding of several important principles of interpretation.

First, the Bible teaches — in unambiguous prose — that moral responsibility for sin comes in the “youth” of one’s life, and not at the point of one’s conception, or birth (see Gen. 8:21; Isa. 7:16, etc.). For a more detailed discussion of this point, we refer the reader to our companion article on [Original Sin and a Misapplied Passage](#). Passages such as Psalm 51:5; 58:3ff, which are highly figurative in composition, must be brought into harmony with the literal language of prose – not the reverse.

Second, when one presses the language of these two Psalms, in order to extract the dogma of “original sin,” he encounters some insuperable difficulties. Consider the following points.

A contradiction

If the language of Psalm 51:5 and 58:3-6 is to be pressed literally, then one encounters a contradiction between the two texts. Psalm 51:5 would teach that the child is a sinner from the moment of his **conception**, whereas Psalm 58:3 would suggest that the infant does not “go astray” until he is **born** — nine months later. Which is it – if the text is strictly literal?

Going astray

The fact that the sinner is said to “**go** astray” (Psa. 58:3), rather than being “born astray,” reveals the individual’s personal culpability, rather than Adam’s responsibility (as in the “original sin” theory). Compare Isaiah’s declaration: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). No one is considered “sinful” on account of the sins of someone else (Ezek. 18:20).

An impossibility

A literal interpretation of Psalm 58:3 involves an impossibility. It has the infant “speaking” lies as soon as it is born, which every parent knows is not the reality. It **is** the case, however, that we often **figuratively** (using

hyperbole) refer to the language that one has spoken most of his life as the tongue of his “birth” (cf. Acts 2:8).

Similarly, the fact that these “estranged” people are said to have “teeth” at the point of birth (v. 6) is further evidence that the sacred writer is not speaking of a literal, newborn child. Can anyone cite a case of where a day-old child has told a lie?

Kill the baby?

If the text of Psalm 58:3ff is to be pressed literally, these little ones who are “speaking lies” must have their teeth broken (v. 6). And since they are compared to poisonous snakes, the implication is that they should be killed so that their venom will not be deadly to others. Can the reader not see the gross error in pressing this language into a literal mold?

Lions or people?

If the language of Psalm 58:3-6 is literal, one must conclude that the divine writer was not dealing with human beings at all, but with “lions” — and, in fact, lions that spoke lies (v. 6). What is this: an example of figurative language, or some kind of Walt Disney production?

One of the cardinal rules of Bible interpretation is that one must never force a scriptural statement into a situation wherein an absurdity is affirmed. Such certainly would be the case, however, if the “original sin” interpretation of this passage is maintained.

The meaning of the text, then, is simply this. When the panorama of one’s life is viewed as a whole, relatively early in life each rational person begins to move away from God into a sinful state of spiritual rebellion. He utters things contrary to the will of God – his speech being a commentary on the disposition of his heart (cf. Mk. 7:21). He does not listen and respond to the voice of the Lord. Such conduct, therefore, if pursued continuously, is worthy of punishment.

As one writer observes, these enemies of the Lord “are so evil, it seems as if they had been born to it (cf. Ps. 51:5). This is literally impossible, and those

who use this verse to argue for infant depravity surely miss the author's point" (Ash 1980, 198).

It is **not** the case that one goes astray and speaks lies **from his mother's womb** in a literal sense, any more than it was a reality that Job was caring for orphans and widows **from his mother's womb** (Job 31:18). Why is the Psalms passage considered to be literal, while the Job text is acknowledged to be figurative?

It is interesting to observe that Albert Barnes, the renowned Presbyterian commentator who believed in the dogma of "original sin," conceded that this doctrine could not be sustained from this passage by itself. He said this text spoke of the fact that men "develop a wicked character" fairly "early" in life. He acknowledged that the concept of "original sin" would have to be found elsewhere in Scripture before this context could be said to lend any support to the idea (1980, 138).

Note: Barnes' view of "original sin" was somewhat confusing. He once wrote: "The notion of *imputing sin*, is an invention of modern times Neither the facts, not any proper inferences from the facts, affirm that I am, in either case, *personally responsible* for what another man did before I had an existence" (1830, 7; emphasis original).

The reality is — the doctrine of "original sin" is not found in Psalm 58, or elsewhere in the Bible.

Can Sin Be Inherited?

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Introduction:

Hereditary total depravity is the foundation-stone of all forms of Calvinism. From this premise, the whole Calvinistic theological system is fabricated. The classic statement of this doctrine is found in the Confession of Faith of the ultra-Calvinistic Presbyterian Church:

By this sin (eating of the forbidden fruit) they (our first parents) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby they are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.

Calvinism And History

Though the above is the classic statement of hereditary total depravity, the concept did not originate with John Calvin (born 1509). This doctrine had already been explicated by the Fifth Century monk known popularly as Augustine. But the doctrine had even been promulgated before Augustine, by the Third Century "Church Father" named Tertullian. Calvinism was the theological undergirding of main-line Protestant Denominationalism that arose shortly after the Middle Ages.

But today, various forms of Calvinism have seeped into the church of the Lord through the efforts of misguided and misinformed young preachers, many of whom have been nourished at the feet of Calvinistic teachers in denominational seminaries, and have imbibed the contents of commentaries and sermons compiled by Calvinistic writers. In fact, many of these preachers' libraries are filled with virtually nothing but the books of Calvinistic writers. This partially is attributable to the fact that Calvinism has often virtually been equated with Fundamentalism. But the damage has been done none the less.

When I was just in my teens, the beloved Luther Blackmon took me aside one Lord's Day evening and advised me: "When you go off to college, be careful that you do not learn too many things that are not so! " What a timely warning that was. This precisely is what has happened to too many of our contemporary young preachers: They have learned too many things that are not so . . . and even worse, they now are teaching these denominational heresies to unsuspecting brethren. These misguided young instructors are precisely the reason why a series of articles such as are contained in this issue of Guardian of Truth are so timely and needed.

Ashdodic Language

It was said of the early Christians that their vocabulary, teachings, and practices were indicative of their having "been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Peter's speech even betrayed him on one occasion; it evidenced that he had "been with Jesus." During the Old Testament days of Nehemiah, it was said that some of God's people spoke "half in the speech of Ashdod" (Neh. 13:24). In like manner, the vocabulary of many modern young preachers evidences that they have been drinking deeply at denominational founts. One would never conclude from their doctrinal speech that they "had been with Jesus." They speak "half in the speech of Ashdod." While these educated young men use the nomenclature of Calvinism, teach the doctrines of Calvinism, make the arguments of Calvinism, and even cite the

"prooftexts" of Calvinism, they seem astounded when someone attaches the label of "Calvinism" to them! The fact is, many of them have not even explored Calvinism deeply enough to recognize that what they are so widely spouting is nothing more or less than the classic doctrines of deterministic Calvinism.

Imputed Righteousness

Be assured, brethren, the modern doctrine of "imputed righteousness" is nothing more than the flip-side of the Calvinistic doctrine of hereditary sin. One springs from the other. Calvinists teach that the sin of Adam is imputed to all mankind, but that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to that portion of mankind whom they denominate as the "elect."

Can sin, or righteousness, be transferred from one person to another? This is the question we seek to answer in this article. The transferral of sin, or imputed righteousness, precisely is what must happen if hereditary sin, or imputed righteousness, is to be accepted. One is as illogical and unscriptural as the other. The principle reason why we must now re-examine hereditary sin, as in this issue of Guardian of Truth, is because so many brethren are now teaching its flip-side: the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Can one who has the perfect life of Christ credited to his account possibly be lost? The implication of this question is the reason why so many confused young preachers (and some others old enough to know better) sound so much like they are inching toward acceptance of the impossibility of apostasy doctrine. Calvinism is a doctrine that proceeds logically from its premises. That is why it is so difficult to imbibe just a little of Calvinism. Logic requires the acceptance of all of Calvinism, or none of it. Accept this doctrine of transferring sin, or righteousness, from one person to another, and one logically then must accept the doctrine of election and reprobation. If Adamic sin is transferred to one, then his salvation is dependent upon the imputation of the perfect life of Jesus, according to Calvinism.

If sin is inheritable, why is not righteousness also inheritable? The doctrines of election and of the final perseverance of the saints are logical concomitants inextricably connected to this concept of transferring sin or righteousness from one person's account to the account of another.

About fifteen years ago, I was holding a meeting in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Brother George Eldridge, who lived in Baton Rouge, showed me a letter which brother Edward Fudge had written to someone in the Baton Rouge church. Brother Fudge has since aligned himself with an ultra-liberal church in Houston, where he now serves as an Elder. In brother Fudge's letter, he recommended that the brethren in the Baton Rouge church accept the proffered services of two liberal preachers in their work. In justifying his recommendation, Brother Fudge said something to this effect: "I do not have to live a perfect life, because Jesus lived a perfect life for me." This statement tremendously shocked me, for I readily recognized that here was an educated preaching brother who did not even understand the plan of salvation! He did not even understand that our salvation was grounded in the sacrificial death of Christ, rather than in His imputed perfect life. Christ's perfect life merely qualified Him to be our perfect and atoning sacrifice. Since this shocking experience in Baton Rouge fifteen years ago, a veritable host of other preachers among us, both young and old, have espoused the Calvinistic doctrine of the imputation of the perfect life of Christ to sinning Christians.

But Albert Barnes, himself an ardent Calvinist, exposed the fallacy of this imputation doctrine very succinctly. He said: "I have examined all the passages (the so-called "prooftexts" - CW). . . . There is not one in which the word (Greek *logidzomai* - impute - CW) is used in the sense of reckoning or

imputing to a man that which does not strictly belong to him, or of charging on him that which ought not to be charged on him as a matter of personal right. . . . No doctrine of transferring, or setting over to a man what does not property belong to him, be it sin or holiness, can be derived, therefore from this word" (Commentary on Romans, p. 102). Do not ever forget this very true statement from Barnes. It says all that needs to be said about either inherited sin, or imputed righteousness.

Definition of Sin

The fact is those who talk about imputing sin, or righteousness, really do not understand the definition of sin and/or righteousness, or else they deliberately misuse the terms in their preaching and writing. Sin is not an object, like a bag of potatoes, that can be transferred from one person to another, nor is righteousness a transferrable object.

Sin by definition is an act! Consult any number of word study books or religious encyclopedias on the Bible, and you will find sin again and again referred to as an act. Note a few of the Bible words used to describe or define sin. Hebrew Words. asham (guilt); hattah (missing); pasha (transgression); awon (perversion); ra (evil in disposition); chata (err, miss the mark); chet (error, failure); avon (iniquity); resha (impiety). Now note these Greek Words. harmartia (missing the mark); parabasis (transgression); adika (unrighteousness); asebeia (impiety); anomia (contempt and violation of law); poneria (depravity); epithumia (lust); paraptoma (offense, trespass). A careful study of the hundreds of passages where these terms are used to describe and define sin will evidence it is always something an individual does.

Note in this connection the sins of Satan (Jn. 8:44). He is said to be a "murderer," "standeth not in the truth," and "speaketh a lie." Sin is not some ethereal object that floats around in the air and lights upon this one or that one, and is therefore transferrable from one being to another. Note also that the angels who sinned "kept not their own principality, but left their proper habitation" (Jude 6). These angels did something which was wrong.

Merrell Tenny defined sin in these words: "an act of the free will in which the creature deliberately, responsibly and with adequate understanding of the issues, chose to corrupt the holy, godly character with which God originally endowed His creation" (Pictorial Bible Dictionary, p. 796). Tenny also said of the sins of Satan, angels, and men: "Their sin was an act of a group of individuals as individuals and does not involve the 'federal' or representative principle . . . their sin was . . . a deliberate act."

The Westminster Shorter Catechism correctly defined sin in these words: "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God" (cf. Lev. 19:2; Isa. 6:1-3; Rev. 4:7,8). Tenny also said sin is the "violation of the expression of God's holy character. . . . Sin may be defined ultimately as anything in the creature which does not express, or which is contrary to, the holy character of the Creator." W.E. Vine uses these terms in discussing sin: "concrete wrong doing," "a course of sin characterized by continuous acts" (1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Jn. 5:16); "a sinful deed, an act of sin," "an act of disobedience to Divine law."

The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible defines sin in these words: "Sin is an essentially historical phenomenon. It has a event-character. To become real, it must happen . . . sin . . . is historical: . . . a happening or event." Now can one transfer an historical event from one person to another? Even the thought of it is preposterous. As previously said, sin is not like a bag of potatoes which can be shifted from one person to another. Instead, it is an event, an action of one individual, and cannot be transferred to another individual. It is true, however, that the sin of one person (such

as Adolph Hitler's) may affect other people. Other individuals may suffer as a consequence of another's sinful act, but they do not bear the guilt of that person's sin.

Hereditary Sin and God's Nature

The Bible teaches that God is a Being of infinite justice and righteousness (Psa. 18:30; Tit, 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:13; Rom. 3:3,4). Scores of passages teach that judgment will be on an individual basis, in which each person shall answer for his own sins only, and for the sins of no others (see 2 Cor. 5: 10; Rom. 14:12; Mt. 12:36; Gal. 6:7-9; Col. 3:23-25; Rev. 3:4; 14:13; 20:12; Rom. 2:9, and a host of other passages which substantiate this same point).

Conclusion

The very concept of transferral of sin, or righteousness, directly contradicts God's Word. The clearest and most explicit passage on this subject, at least in my estimation, is that of Ezekiel 18:14-20. Among Ezekiel's statements is his affirmation that the person who "hath executed mine ordinances, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live. As for his father, because he cruelly opposed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, behold, he shall die in his iniquity. Yet ye say, Wherefore doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. " If God's Word is to be accepted, this passage forever shows the fallacy of hereditary sin, or transferrable righteousness.

The very concept of transferrable sin is physically, logically, philosophically, biblically, and therefore, actually impossible. The concept of hereditary sin is therefore totally absurd.

Four Facts Fatal to Original Sin

By Larry Ray Hafley

The doctrine of original or Adamic sin states that every person is born in sin. Because of Adam's sin, all men are corrupt and guilty of sin at birth. Note the testimony of the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.

By this sin (eating of the forbidden fruit-LRH) they (Adam and Eve-LRH) fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of the soul and body. They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions (Chapter 6).

Contrary to New Testament Concepts

This doctrine is contrary to at least four New Testament concepts; namely, sin, forgiveness, the death of Christ, and the judgment.

(1) The Concept of Sin. John said that "sin is the transgression of the law." When one commits sin, he transgresses (goes against, crosses) the law (1 Jn. 3:4). "All unrighteousness is sin" (1 Jn. 5:17). Anything that violates God's righteousness is sin. One who works apart from or against God's will and word is guilty of sin. He performs iniquity; he acts without divine authority (Mt. 7:21-23). Sin is the child of lust (Jas. 1:15). When one is drawn away of his own lust and enticed, lust conceives her offspring, sin, and gives it birth. We are separated and alienated from God "by wicked works" (Col. 1:21). It is our sins which are produced by the fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind (Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 2:13). This is the New Testament's concept of how one becomes guilty of sin. There is no Scripture which teaches that sin is inherited.

(2) The Concept of Forgiveness. The word of God does not describe the forgiveness of inherited sin. It does not mention forgiveness of the "guilt" of original sin. The New Testament speaks of "your sins" and of "thy sins" (Acts 3:19; 22:16). One is forgiven of his own acts of transgression, iniquity and disobedience. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 8:12).

"The body of the sins of the flesh" are put off, cut away, when God forgives (Col. 2:11-13). As the sins are those one commits, the forgiveness applies to those sins. If as the doctrine of original sin avers, all men are born guilty of Adam's sin, why is the Bible devoid of any reference to the forgiveness of it?

(3) The Concept of the Death of Christ. Christ "was delivered for our offences" (Rom. 4:25). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body" (1 Pet. 2:24). It was "in the

body of his flesh through death" that Jesus reconciled us to God (Col. 1:21,22). "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Each individual can consider that Christ died "for me" (Gal. 2:20). Why is that? Because our sins, our guilt, is of our own doing; because forgiveness is of our sins and iniquities (Heb. 8:12; Isa. 59:1,2); the death of Christ was for my sin, my guilt, my salvation; hence, "for me." The death of Christ and the shedding of His blood is never said to be for the purpose of removing inherited, original sin. However, if original, Adamic sin is universally pervasive, as the creeds of men allow and allege, should we not expect to find a reference that decrees and declares that the death of Christ removes that sin?

(4) The Concept of Judgment. New Testament judgment scenes vary in many respects, but in this one item they are all constant and consistent-man is judged by how he has lived, by what he has done. Contemplate and consider the judgment pictures of Matthew (chapters 5-7, 13 and 25). See the awe and dread of Revelation 20:10-15. Hear the admonition and warning of Galatians 6:7-9, Matthew 16:27 and Revelation 3:23. What is the single fact of all these passages? Individuals are judged by their own works. They are rewarded "according to their works." Is there a judgment view of one being condemned on account of what Adam did? Is anyone ever renounced for not ridding himself of the depravity he is supposed to have inherited from Adam? No, but if original sin exists to the extent that men claim, is it not strange that not a single, solitary judgment scene features some creatures lost because of it?

Conclusion of These Concepts

The doctrine of original sin, if true, would be an innate, inherent part of the nature of sin, forgiveness, Christ's death and the judgment. Yet, the Bible, in discussing these four themes, never once links it to them. There absolutely could not be such an omission if the doctrine of original, Adamic sin were true. Therefore, these four fundamental facts are fatal to the theory.

Hereditary Total Depravity and New Testament Proof Texts

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This study will limit itself to four New Testament texts commonly cited by Calvinists as proof of their doctrine of hereditary total depravity: Romans 7:18; 8:5-7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; and Ephesians 2:1-3. In examining these passages, I shall endeavor to illustrate the shortcomings of Calvinistic exegesis and the inconsistency of their claims. Throughout this study, I shall always try to keep in mind the following two guidelines of Whiteside when he cautions, "We must not arrive at conclusions that contradict other plain statements of the Scriptures, or give the sinner any excuse for continuing in sin" (Doctrinal Discourses, p. 108).

Romans 7:18

Calvinists like to use this passage to prove that since "no good thing" dwells in man, he must be totally in bondage to sin. The problem is that Calvinists, generally, apply Romans 7:14 (15)-25 to the regenerated who have had the total power of sin over them broken by the Spirit. Their dilemma is obvious: they cannot exegete the power of sin over the sinner out of the passage and then later find it there to prove his total depravity. In other words, since the regenerated have been redeemed from the power of original sin, they are no longer totally depraved, regardless of how great their depravity was before they were regenerated. The extent of this depravity would still have to be assumed, for the degree of the sinfulness of one's former self is nowhere in Romans 7:18 either stated or necessarily implied. This proof text on the sinner's total depravity is no proof text at all!

However, if any Calvinist wishes to apply this passage to the unregenerated sinner, the language of the text is decidedly against the idea of total sinfulness. The passage, as well as its context (7:14-25), recognizes goodness in the soul of man, for Paul says, "For to will is present with me (i.e. to do the good of the law, ALW); but how to perform that which is good I find not" (7:18). Weakness, no doubt; total wickedness, hardly!

Romans 8:5-7

In this passage, Calvinists see the utter corruption of the sinner because "the carnal mind" of the sinner, to them, seems to be wholly at "enmity against God" and thus not able to be "subject to the law of God," and, because the minding of the flesh seems to be a total minding of the flesh. (For example, see Calvin on Rom. 7:5-7.) In making their case here, they assume two things essential to their doctrine, and then, read these into (eisegete) the text.

First, they have not dealt evenhandedly with the two clauses of 8:5. They do not believe that the minding of the Spirit is absolute whereas, at the same time, they assume that the minding of the flesh is absolute. Calvin, while asking in 8:5, "who in this world can be found adorned with so much angelic purity so as to be wholly freed from the flesh?" insists that the carnal are "those who wholly devote themselves to the world." Now, my question is: If the language about minding the Spirit does not necessarily have to be taken in a total or absolute sense, why does the language about

minding the flesh have to be taken in a total or absolute sense? Let the Calvinists answer themselves on this point. What would they say to an advocate of perfectionism who argued that "to mind the Spirit" means to do so perfectly? Would they not accuse such a one of both adding to this specific Scripture and of making it contradict other Scriptures expressing the sinfulness of Paul and other good Christians? Indeed, there is no more proof in this "proof text,, for Calvinistic total depravity than for Wesleyan perfectionism.

Second, they assume that no one having either of these minds can change his mind and adopt the opposite mind. (For a reply, see Moses Stuart's comments on 8:7 in his commentary on Romans [3rd ed., p. 351], to the effect that this is reading into the text what the text does not say.) The Scriptures teach, however, that a voluntary conversion is possible. In Ezekiel 18 God insists that both the righteous and the wicked can turn from their respective pasts. And in Romans 6, Paul argues individual responsibility for any change anyone might ever make. "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?' I (v. 16) Again, the proof text proves what no one denies, namely: that, when men mind the flesh, they are sinners.

1 Corinthians 2:14

From this passage, the Calvinists get utter impotency not only of the sinner to believe the gospel but also of the gospel to impart faith to the sinner. For example, Calvin emphasizes "how great is this weakness . . . of the human understanding of the sinner (*italics mine, ALW*), that is not only "not willing to be wise" but also not "able" to be so. "Hence," concludes he, "faith is not in one's own power, but is divinely conferred," and "the gospel," thus he denies, "is offered to mankind in common in such a way that all indiscriminately are free to embrace salvation by faith."

The issue, here, is: Can the natural man's attitude about the things of God be changed from the presumption of "foolishness" to the conclusion that these things are, in fact, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (1:24)? Since this verse speaks only of the continuing attitude of the worldly man, what are the facts regarding the possibility of him changing his mind and becoming a believer without God's directly enabling him to do this? What is the nature of the "can not" of the natural man? Is it an inborn ability or an inability born simply of his present antagonistic mindset? (For a perceptive analysis of the natural man's inability due to his antagonistic mindset, see William Barclay's *The Letters to the Corinthians*, p. 32.)

The proof that the natural man's problem is an antagonistic mindset is found in Paul's solution for the natural man. To change the natural man's mind, Paul relied on two things: (1) the Spirit's wisdom, i.e. the simple, non-philosophical preaching of Christ; and, (2) the Spirit's power, i.e. the miracles or signs of God (1 Cor. 2:14). Such reliance was in order "that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (2:5). And what were the results? See Acts 18:8 where "many" obeyed the gospel. Undoubtedly, some of them had the mindset which had pronounced as foolish the message of the Gospel; namely that an executed Jewish "criminal" was the Savior

of the world. (To see how Paul handled the worldly mind of Christians, carefully study his argument in 1 Cor. 3.) In conclusion, Paul's natural man is simply the sinner who does not obey the gospel until he changes his views and becomes willing to do so.

Ephesians 2:1-3

Calvinists try to exploit the terms "dead" (v. 1), "nature" and "children of wrath" (v. 3c) to construct their doctrine of hereditary total depravity. They argue that the sinner by his innate nature is born dead in Adam's sin and thus from birth is under the wrath of God.

Their first problem is that the terms they focus on are ambiguous in meaning, and that their clausal relationship of thought to the statement of 1-3b is, also, ambiguous. The questions, in the first case, are: Is "nature" inborn or acquired, and if inborn, is it necessitarian nature or permissive nature? Is "wrath" God's wrath or man's wrath? And does children of wrath mean characterized by wrath on man's part or liable to wrath from God's side? In the second case: Does 3c give the cause for man's actual sins (i.e. inherited sin) or the consequence of sinful deeds (i.e. "And so were by nature the children of wrath")? Clearly, this passage cannot be used to prove anything until these ambiguities are cleared up.

Their second problem is that the context of Ephesians is against them regarding the nature of death and the reason for God's wrath coming upon man.

The Calvinists are wrong both on the cause of death and its extent. Paul does not attribute death to original sin but to actual sins when he remembers that the Ephesians "were dead in (i.e. through, ASV) trespasses and sins" (2:1). Calvin himself confirms this when he states, "He (i.e. Paul, ALW) says that they were dead,- and states, at the same time, the cause of the death trespasses and sins. " Here, Calvin's exegesis is right; his theology is wrong. Further, Calvin answers himself on the necessity of the totality of death via his inconsistency on the totality of life, which is its opposite. On the one hand, he overstates theologically the extent of the fact of death, "Out of Christ we are altogether dead, because sin, the cause of death, reigns in us," but, on the other hand, he admits that "regeneration only begins in this life; the relics of the flesh which remain, always follow their own corrupt propensities, and thus carry on a contest against the Spirit" (Rom. 7:14). In short, if the life is not total, why should the death, which is its opposite, be total?

The Calvinists are also wrong on the cause for God's wrath coming on man and the time when it does so. In Ephesians, Paul has God's wrath coming on man as the result of his actual sins and at the time when he sins (see 5:6). The issue is: Does it come upon sinners because (and thus after) they sin, or is it already upon man, even as a baby, because of inherited sin? If it does not come upon the person in 5:6, an unambiguous statement, until they are sinners, how could Paul say in 2:3c, an ambiguous statement, that it had already come upon them at birth because of original sin?

Conclusion

Due to limitations of space, I have not been able to show what each of these passages does teach; I have only been able to show that they do not teach what the Calvinists say they teach. Throughout this study, I believe it has been shown that Calvinists cannot prove their doctrine from the Scriptures. They try hard indeed, but their efforts are doomed to failure because they have to assume that the Scriptures teach that which they need to prove from the Scriptures. And if we were to grant, for argument's sake, their assumptions, what would the result of their doctrine mean for man?

It would be very discouraging indeed, for as Whiteside says:

People who reach the stage of depravity are utterly beyond the hope of redemption. Such were the people before the flood, and such were the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. To be totally depraved means to be totally lost now and in the world to come (Romans, p. 162).

Consequences of Hereditary Total Depravity

When one accepts a proposition, there are certain logical consequences which follow. That is true when one accepts the proposition "There is no god" or "Man is the product of evolutionary development." There are certain logical consequences which result from such an affirmation.

Similarly, if one accepts the doctrine of inherited total depravity, or some watered-down version of it, there are certain logical and doctrinal consequences which follow. Not everyone who accepts inherited total depravity is consistent in his reasoning; hence, many who accept the premises reject the conclusions (without giving logical reasons for rejecting them). We do not charge that everyone who believes man has an inherited corrupt nature teaches these consequences; rather, they are the logical consequences drawn from the premise.

Logical Consequences of Inherited Total Depravity

1. It makes man totally unable to will or do good. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith describes man's condition after the fall:

From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions . . . Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation ... The man who is born into the world cannot will or do any good.

2. It makes man without free will. Many who accept hereditary total depravity will deny that this conclusion follows from the premise. Aylett Raines summarized their teaching well when he wrote, We know that the advocates for the confession tell us that man has a free will. They proceed on the presumption that man has a free will and acts freely, because, although he can do nothing but sin, and can will to do nothing else, yet he is free to do as he wills (A Refutation of Hereditary Total Depravity, p. 13).

Denial of free will stands in conflict with these passages which teach that man has the ability to choose between good and evil: John 5:40; 7:17; Revelation 22:17; Matthew 22:3; 23:37; Luke 7:30; Joshua 24:15; Psalm 119:130; Proverbs 1:29; Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Hosea 5:15; Genesis 4:7.

3. It releases man from moral responsibility. Each of us would admit that man is not responsible for doing what he cannot avoid doing (e.g., man is not morally reprehensible because he gets hungry or thirsty). According to hereditary total depravity, man cannot avoid sinning because of his corrupted nature. Man sins of necessity. How can man be held responsible for doing that which he could not avoid?

The doctrine of inherited total depravity provides for sinful man exactly what he wishes - an excuse for sinning. Why does man sin? Not because he willfully chooses to rebel against God, but because he cannot prevent sin in his life since he has inherited a sinful nature. Sinners like to hear that their sins are a result of a natural incapacity, rather than of any fault or neglect of their own. Then they can sin without remorse.

4. It makes God responsible for sin. According to the doctrine of inherited total depravity, God willed that Adam's corrupted nature would be passed down to his descendants. Inheriting this corrupt nature, man can only will to do evil; from this corrupted nature all sins proceed. Hence, man sins because of God's decree. Even Calvin was dismayed as he contemplated this decree of God. He wrote, Again I ask: whence does it happen that Adam's fall irremediably involved so many people, together with their infant offspring, in eternal death unless because it so pleased God? Here their tongues, otherwise so loquacious, must become mute. The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chap. XXIII, no. 7).

Those who teach that man has a sinful nature shift the blame for what he does from the sinner to the author of his nature!

Thus we see that this theory brings man into the world wholly defiled in all the faculties of soul and body, opposed to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, not even able to will any spiritual good accompanying salvation, until God converts and translates him into the state of grace, so as to free him from his natural bondage, and enable him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good, then, if God never converts him and he is finally lost, who is to blame for it? Surely, not man, for he could not even will or desire his own salvation, or prepare himself thereunto. Why did Christ command that the Gospel be

preached among all nations, and to every creature, promising salvation to those who would believe and obey it, when He must have known, if this theory be true, that they could neither believe nor obey it? - nay, they

could not even so much as will or desire their salvation, or any thing good connected therewith, to say nothing of doing anything to secure it. And why did He threaten them with damnation if they did not believe it, when, according to the theory, they would have no more power to believe it than they have to make a world? (The Gospel Plan of Salvation, p. 140)

6. It indicts the goodness of God. The theory teaches that God willed to pass a corrupted nature to Adam's posterity with the result that man has no ability to obey the will of God; he can only will to do evil. Then, it teaches that God punishes man because he disobeys. The injustice in this would be comparable to a person punishing a newborn infant because he could not feed himself.

7. It makes the invitation to respond to the gospel ridiculous, if not altogether ugly. The gospel invitation is extended to every man (Matt. 11:28; Rev. 3:20; 22:17). The doctrine of inherited depravity states that man has wholly lost any ability to do any spiritual good; he has no ability to respond to the invitation until God sends His Spirit to enable Him to do so. Hence, preaching the gospel of Christ to a man who has an inherited sinful nature is merely tantalizing that man, like holding a cool cup of water in front of a man who is dying of thirst and who has no ability to obtain the water. We are cruelly deluded by the Lord, when He declares that His loving kindness depends upon our will, if the will is not able to respond to His offer of grace. The offer of grace is plain mockery of man.

8. It makes exhortations to righteous living and rebukes of sin meaningless. Why exhort a man to do what he cannot do - live righteously? Why condemn him for doing what he cannot avoid doing - sinning? Either God is mocking us when He enjoins holiness, piety, obedience, chastity, love, and gentleness and forbids uncleanness, idolatry, immodesty, anger, robbery, pride and the like or He requires only what is within our power to do. Inherited depravity would require us to believe that God is merely mocking us.

Doctrinal Consequences Of Inherited Depravity

Several false doctrines have derived from the doctrine that man is born totally depraved. We need to be reminded that these false doctrines are connected to inherited depravity.

1. The doctrine of unconditional election and unconditional reprobation. Jack W. Cottrell wrote, Why does the Calvinist continue to insist on unconditional predestination, even when sovereignty and grace are not at stake? What is the imperative which necessitates it? The answer is the doctrine of total depravity, which in its essence means that all persons as the result of Adam's sin are from birth unable to respond in any positive way to the gospel call. There is a total inability to come to the decision to put one's trust in Christ. This point is truly the keystone in the Calvinistic system. This is what makes unconditional election logically and doctrinally necessary ("Conditional Election," Grace Unlimited, Clark H. Pinnock, editor, p. 68).

Hence, the doctrine that God, from all eternity, predestined who would be saved and who would be lost is the doctrinal and logical consequence of inherited total depravity. The doctrines of unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints are logical sequences in the system.

2. Infant baptism. The modern practice of infant baptism is derived from inherited total depravity. John F. Rowe said,

Augustine is the originator of the doctrine of "original sin," or "total hereditary depravity." He flourished in the fourth century. His postulates from his reasoning process are these: The whole human family is totally depraved, by virtue of the first transgression. Infants are totally depraved because they are constituent parts of the human family. But, inasmuch as they can neither think, nor reason, nor believe, nor exercise any sort of freedom of will, something must be done to wipe out the stain of original sin. The act of baptism is the regenerating act, in his speculative theology, that removes from the soul of the infant the stain of original sin! (History of Reformatory Movements, p. 442)

3. Illumination. Those who believe that man has inherited a totally depraved nature also teach that the Holy Spirit must illumine the Scriptures in order for man to understand them. The Westminster Confession of Faith says,

Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word. . . (Article I, No. 6).

4. Personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Those denominations which teach that man has inherited a totally depraved (sinful) nature from Adam are compelled to teach that the Holy Spirit must indwell the Christian in order for him to overcome his sinful nature. According to the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, this indwelling Spirit enables man to understand the Scriptures (Article 1, No. 6), to make him willing and able to believe (Article VII, Nos. 2-3), to strengthen him that he might resist sin's temptation (Article XIII, Nos. 2-3), to make him conscious of his sin (Article XV, No. 3), and to enable him to do good works (Article XVI, No. 3). Without the assistance of the indwelling Spirit, man is unable to overcome his sinful nature.

5. Immaculate Conception. This doctrine teaches "that the Virgin Mary was conceived without the stain of original sin." The doctrine was invented to prevent the conclusion that Jesus was born with the stain of original sin.

Practical Consequences of Inherited Total Depravity

Even as there are logical and doctrinal consequences of this false doctrine, there are also practical consequences. Here are a few of them:

1. A feeling of spiritual insecurity. If one holds the position that he has a sinful nature, he will have the concept that sin engulfs him like a cloud. Regardless of how devoted he is to God and to His service, he will always feel that there are sins in his life. If you were to ask such a person, "What sins have you committed?" he might not enumerate any. Nevertheless, he has a feeling of spiritual insecurity because he believes that he has a sinful nature.

Denominations which teach that man has inherited a sinful nature from Adam also teach a system whereby this defect in nature is overcome. The Calvinists teach that the perfect righteousness of Jesus is imputed to the believer so that God sees Jesus' perfect obedience instead of the believer's imperfections. The Wesleyans, teach that a second work of grace occurs whereby the believer is sanctified.

Those who accept that man has a sinful nature will continually be searching for a means to find security, whether it be in imputed righteousness, continuous cleansing, or some other means.

2. Passivity in obedience. Those who believe that man has a sinful nature sometimes reach the conclusion that man is passive in his salvation and sanctification (strict Calvinists take this position). After teaching such a person the way of salvation, he may reply, "I just do not feel like obeying the gospel yet." He will await some mysterious working of the Holy Spirit before obeying the gospel. Until and unless he receives this miraculous operation of the Spirit, he will not obey the gospel. His condition is helpless and hopeless until the Spirit effects his salvation.

Conclusion

Some among us refer to their "sinfulness" in such a manner that the concept is practically equivalent to "sinful nature." They do not mean by "sinfulness" a list of sins of which they are guilty. Rather, they mean their "tendency to sin." I do not charge those who use this expression with believing the consequences enumerated in this article. However, if by "sinfulness" they mean "an innate sinful nature," they have accepted the basic tenets of inherited total depravity, regardless of how watered-down and inconsistent their concept of it might be.

As one considers the consequences resulting from this false doctrine, he should understand why even the slightest indications that men believe in inherited depravity must be opposed. The doctrine of inherited total depravity undermines the power of the gospel to affect salvation in the life of man, destroys man's ability to believe the gospel and live a sanctified life, and attacks the perfect purity of Jesus Christ or denies that He became like us. The doctrine of inherited depravity is not some unimportant theological doctrine without practical consequences. It is a doctrine which takes the heart out of the gospel message. As such, it must be resisted and opposed wherever it raises its ugly head. –
Mike Willis

Hereditary Total Depravity Pervades Denominationalism

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Throughout history man has sought to shift the blame for his sins onto someone else's shoulders. The ancient Babylonians spoke of man being created out of the blood of a rebel god named Kingu. Naturally such a race could not help being rebellious itself. Even before the coming of Christ the Jews were speaking of the yetser ha ra, or "evil inclination" with which all men were born. It should not be surprising, therefore, to find that people professing Christianity have behaved pretty much like all other men in this respect. In the history of "Christian theology" this tendency has manifested itself in the development of the intertwined doctrines of original sin and hereditary total depravity. The doctrine of original sin affirms that all descendants of Adam inherit both the guilt and the consequences of his sin. The doctrine of hereditary total depravity follows with the declaration that all such descendants of Adam are so completely corrupted and depraved by it that they cannot, of their own free will, do any truly good work. They cannot, of their own free will, even turn to God. Now this doctrine of total depravity is commonly thought of as a Calvinistic doctrine, and is especially associated with the Presbyterian Church here in this country. It is the purpose of this article to show that the doctrine in fact pervades most of the denominational world.

Augustine and Catholicism

The doctrine had its beginning among Christians in the early Patristic period. Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose all taught the whole human race somehow participated not only in the consequences of Adam's sin but in the sin itself. Ambrosiaster claimed biblical support for the doctrine by translating Romans 5:12 "in whom all sinned" in reference to Adam. But it was Augustine of Hippo (commonly St. Augustine) who integrated the doctrine into a fully developed system of theology. And the writings of Augustine have shaped and influenced the thinking of professing Christianity more than the works of any other man since the time of the New Testament itself.

Augustine taught that the whole human race was present in the first man Adam, and thus, in his sin, we sinned. Each descendant of Adam and Eve is born just as much a sinner as they were. Not only that, but the impairment of their nature which God inflicted on Adam and Eve in punishment for their sin "became a natural consequence in all their descendants" (City of God, xiii. 3). Moreover, it is not just a corrupted physical nature that we have inherited from Adam, but our "human nature was so changed and vitiated that it suffers from the recalcitrance of a rebellious concupiscence. . . ." (Ibid.). Augustine was not exactly a Roman Catholic, but only because he lived around AD 400 and Catholicism was still in the formative stage. But Augustine was very much a part of that formation, and his theology soon became the dominant theology of Catholicism. The doctrines of original sin and hereditary depravity were, therefore, deeply entrenched in Catholicism from the very beginning. From the time of Augustine to the Protestant Reformation, Catholic theologians debated the exact nature of the original sin and its transmission and the degree of totality in the inherited depravity. But these debates produced only minor variations and left the basic doctrine more firmly established than ever. In the meantime the doctrine had begun to generate such secondary doctrines as infant baptism (to remove original sin) and the immaculate conception of Mary (to protect her from contamination with original sin). But these matters are discussed elsewhere in this issue.

Total Depravity Pervades.

That the doctrines still remain as part of the theological foundation of modern Catholicism can be seen by consulting any standard Catholic reference work. In *The Teachings of the Catholic Church* (1948), George Smith devotes thirty pages to a defense of the doctrine in even more rigorous terms than Augustine would ever have stated the matter.

The Protestant Reformation

The council of Trent (1545-63) was convened as a Catholic response to the spreading Protestant Reformation, and it pronounced an anathema on any who denied the doctrine of original sin. But the doctrine was hardly a bone of contention for the reformers. They considered themselves just as much heirs of Augustine as the Catholics did.

Of course the most rigorous statements of the doctrines of original sin and total depravity were made by John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1560). Yet it is crucial to see that the doctrine was not limited to Calvin and his more direct spiritual heirs, but that it permeated the thinking of almost all the reformers and was enshrined in all the great creeds of the Protestant Reformation, and thus has been passed down in some form or other to almost every Protestant denomination in existence today.

Consider Martin Luther. Original Sin and Total Depravity are especially associated with Calvin while Luther is usually thought of as preaching about faith and grace. But one of the most influential works ever written by Luther was titled *Bondage of the Will*, the title reflecting the thesis of the book that man's essential nature has been so depraved by sin that his will is entirely in bondage to sin and he is incapable of willing any good at all. Man is thus entirely dependent on a gracious gift of faith from God in order to be saved. Lutheranism no less than Presbyterianism is thus pervaded by the doctrine. Indeed, the Augsburg Confession (1530), subscribed to by virtually all Lutherans, declares that "all men begotten after the common course of nature were born with sin. . ."; that "man's powers, without the Holy Spirit, are full of wicked affections, and are too weak to perform any good deed before God."

Identical assertions are found in *The Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) of the German Reformed churches, the *Belgic Confession* (1561) of the Dutch Reformed churches, the *Scotch Confession of Faith* (1560) of the Church of Scotland, and the *Canons of the Synod of Dort* (1618-19) which are accepted by the Reformed (Dutch) Church in America.

Especially important are *The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (1571 and 1801) which declare for the benefit of Anglicans and Episcopalians that "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians so vainly talk); but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil. . . ." These words have found their way into several subsequent creedal statements including the *Articles of Religion* which are still being printed in the *Discipline of the Methodist Church*. Similar affirmations are found in the creeds of the Quakers and the Congregationalists.

But the most influential of all Protestant creeds, at least in the English language, has surely been the *Westminster Confession*. Concerning the sin of Adam and Eve, it declares that "They being the root of all mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation. From this original

corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions. " Now, anything with the name Westminster is generally associated with Presbyterianism today. And the Westminster Confession was actually produced by the Church of England, and comes about as close as any English-language creed can to being a universal Protestant Creed.

The universal nature of the Westminster Confession can be illustrated by the Baptists. Baptists often claim to have no creed but the Bible. But the Baptist Confession of 1688 is basically just another edition of the Westminster Confession, with significant changes made only in the areas of church organization and subjects of baptism. Of course, Regular Baptists and Calvinistic Baptists accept the Westminster confession also.

That Baptists generally accept the doctrine of original sin is also illustrated by The New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833), which has been printed in the Baptist Church Manual for American Baptists. It says that man was created in holiness, but sinned and fell, "in consequence of which all mankind are now sinners." The wording of this confession is softer and more ambiguous than some creeds. But Baptist theologian A.H. Strong is not ambiguous at all: "The Scriptures represent every human nature as totally depraved" (Systematic Theology, 1896, p. 341). Indeed, though Baptists don't advertise the doctrine of original sin all that much, the strength which the doctrine has in Baptist theology is clearly evidence by the very popular doctrines of Justification by Faith Only and Once Saved, Always Saved, which are derived from the doctrine of original sin.

Rumblings of Discontent

There have, of course, been periodic rumblings of discontent surrounding the doctrine of original sin and total depravity in Protestantism. The first major challenge came from the teachings of James Arminius (1560-1609), the critical points of which are summed up in The Five Arminian Articles prepared in 1610 as remonstrances to the various Dutch confessions mentioned above. But it must be noted that Arminius and his heirs never denied the doctrine of inherited original sin itself.

The principle spiritual heirs of Arminius today are Wesleyan denominations such as Methodists, Nazarenes, and Pentecostals. Their discontent with Calvinism has centered around the exact extent of the consequences of original sin. Most especially, they are anxious to deny the related doctrines of absolute predestination and unconditional election. They affirm that man does have free will, and that saving grace can be resisted by the exercise of that free will. They likewise debate about the nature of the transmission of original sin. But the doctrine of original sin itself is never seriously challenged. Methodist acceptance of the doctrine has been illustrated above by the fact that the statement on original sin and total depravity which is found in the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England has been incorporated verbatim into the Articles of Religion published in the Discipline of the Methodist Church. Acceptance of the doctrine among Wesleyan groups is further illustrated by Nazarene theologian H. Orton Wiley who says, "Not only are all men born under the penalty of death, as a consequence of Adam's sin, but they are born with a depraved nature also" (Christian Theology, Vol. 2, p. 98). A few other groups, such as the Cumberland Presbyterians and the Free-Will Baptists, have likewise rejected the predestinarian implications of Calvin. But like the Wesleyans, they retain the doctrine of original sin without question.

Likewise, it may fairly be said that Arminians; do not really believe in total hereditary depravity. They generally affirm that some truly good works can be performed by unregenerate man. But in the long

run that turns out to be an inconsequential distinction because they continue to affirm that man was sufficiently depraved for it to be impossible for him to believe and respond to the gospel apart from the assistance of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, the doctrine of original sin is intimately bound up in one of the most distinctive doctrines of Wesleyan churches - entire sanctification. According to their theology, the root of original sin remains in man even after he has been converted. It can only be removed by a second work of grace whereby man is thoroughly purged from every inclination to sin, and entirely sanctified - able from that point on to live without sin. But again, man can only achieve this state by a miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit to overcome the last remnants of his depraved nature.

Several Protestant groups have sought other means of mollifying the consequences of the doctrines of original sin and total depravity. For example, both the Methodists and the Church of the Brethren deny that children are born in sin (though the Methodists used to affirm this). But they do so without actually letting go of either original sin or total depravity. They would say that every child conceived does in fact inherit the original sin and depraved nature of Adam. But, they say, that original sin is immediately forgiven by the atoning act of Christ's sacrifice.

I do not know of any major Evangelical Protestant body which unequivocally denies either original sin or inherited depravity. Even neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth cling tenaciously to the doctrines. They are as systemic to Protestantism as is the doctrine of salvation by faith only. Of course we must remember that many of the individual members of these denominations may not believe the doctrines.

Modernism and The Spirit Of The Age

There is, however, an element of Protestantism which has rejected both doctrines, but not for reasons that we would like to see. Modernism, which has deep inroads into many Protestant bodies, and virtually controls some denominations such as the United Methodist Church, the United Presbyterian Church, and the United Church of Christ, denies both original sin and inherited depravity. But this denial springs, not from a respect for Scripture, but from a total disregard for Scripture. They reject the biblical account of creation and they believe the story of Adam and Eve is just a myth. As theistic evolutionists they deny that there ever was an historical Adam. Thus, they cannot believe in either original sin or inherited depravity.

Indeed, many such modernists deny, not just original sin, but virtually deny sin itself. They believe man is really good at heart, and needs only to be set free from oppressive and antiquated ideas of sin and guilt. And this affords me an opportunity to bring this article to a close with a warning. While it is surely good for us to probe the tragic errors of the doctrines of original sin and inherited depravity, let us not forget that the even more dangerous spirit of our age is to deny sin and depravity altogether. While denying that we inherit either the sin or the depraved nature of Adam, let us remember that we are, of our own will, sinners. And without blaming anything on Adam we must still confess that the heart of man is "deceitful above all things, and exceedingly corrupt" (Jer. 17:9).

Special Status Determinative Double Down

Limited Atonement + Unconditional Election = DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

Election, Predestination and Foreordination: Conditional or Unconditional



Calvinism teaches that each individual was unconditionally predestined or foreordained by God's sovereign decree before the world began. This predestination or foreordination is unconditional, having nothing to do with the will, choice, obedience, or character of the individual. Those who are saved and destined to eternal life are said to be "elect."

The alternative to Calvin's view of unconditional election would be free will or free moral agency - the doctrine that salvation is conditional and each individual has a choice whether or not to meet the conditions of forgiveness. Which view does the Bible teach

Introduction:

One of the fundamental doctrines of Calvinism is "unconditional election," also known as predestination or foreordination.

Consider these quotes from the *Westminster Confession*:

"God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: ... By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed: and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto ... The rest of mankind God was pleased ... to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin ..." - Chap. III, p 1-7.

"All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ ... This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein ... Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, ... yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved ..." - Chap. X, p. 1-4.

Hence, God unalterably decreed certain individuals to go to heaven and others to go to hell, without in any way considering the character, conduct, obedience, choice, attitudes, or desires of the individual. This denies that man has free will or free moral agency.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Bible teaching about election, predestination, and foreordination to see whether they are conditional or unconditional.

The Bible definitely teaches that the elect have been predestined by God to eternal life (Ephesians 1:3-14). [Cf. Rom. 8:28-33; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9; 2 Thess. 2:13.] The question is: How is it determined whether or not any specific individual is among the elect? Is this determined by an unconditional, unchangeable decree of God? Or does God offer salvation to all men, and then give each individual the power to choose for himself whether to accept or reject that offer?

Part 1: Evidence that Salvation of Individuals Is Conditional

I. Salvation Is Offered by God to All Men.

Calvinism says that the decision whether or not a particular individual will be saved is entirely up to God, and man cannot influence that decision. If we can prove that God offers salvation to all men, then it must follow from Calvinism that *all people will be saved!* But that conclusion is clearly false. Hence, the Calvinistic concept of unconditional election must be false.

A. God Desires All Men to Be Saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 - God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [Note: This is the same "all men" for whom we should pray - v1.]

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

If God sincerely wants *all* people to be saved and wants none to perish, and if the decision is entirely up to Him (man has no choice), then all people will be saved and none will be lost! The logical conclusion of unconditional election must be universalism!

Yet we know only a few will be saved and most lost (Matt. 7:13,14) [22:14]. Hence, either God does not sincerely want everyone saved, or else man does have a choice!

B. God's Grace Is Extended to All Men.

Because God wants all to be saved, He has shown all men mercy and favor by offering them salvation.

Titus 2:11 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Note that what God's grace brings to all is "salvation."

C. Jesus Died to Offer Salvation to All Men.

1 Timothy 2:6 - Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all (the same "all" that God wants to be saved - v4).

Hebrews 2:9 - By the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. This "everyone" refers to those who are subject to the fear of death (v15), which is every human.

John 3:16 - God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Note that the ones Jesus died to save are all those in the world whom God loves. Yet He loves even His enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Romans 5:18,19 - Justification came unto "all men" by Jesus' righteous act (His death). This was the same "all men" on whom condemnation came as a result of Adam's sin. So, however many people are condemned by sin, that is how many can receive the benefit of Jesus' death.

The intent of Jesus' death was to offer salvation to all men. If these passages are true, then either all men will be saved (which cannot be), or else there is something each man must do to determine whether or not he will receive the benefit of Jesus' death.

D. God's Offer of Salvation Is Preached in the Gospel to All Men.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 - Men are called to glory by the gospel. To whom is this call extended?

Mark 16:15,16 - The gospel should be preached to every creature in the whole world. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. [Matt. 28:19]

Acts 2:38,39 - The promise of remission and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for ALL, as many as God calls. But the call is sent to everyone in the world!

Calvinists respond to these points by saying that the gospel should be preached to all, however no one can respond to that call unless the Holy Spirit unconditionally works directly on their heart to empower them to respond. But this makes the preaching of the gospel simply a pretense. If the Holy Spirit makes the choice unconditionally, why not doesn't the Spirit just lead the person to salvation and forget the preaching?

Acts 2:39 says the promise of the Spirit is to *all* that are called, and we have shown that all humans should be called by the gospel, Jesus died for all, etc.

II. God Has Decreed Conditions of Salvation which All Men Can Meet.

Calvinism says there is nothing in man that acts as a condition that moves God to choose any certain man to save him. Man is "altogether passive." However, notice the following conditions that the Bible lists as necessary for salvation, and note further that the Bible says everyone can meet these conditions.

A. Men Must Believe in Christ.

Mark 16:15,16 - The gospel is for the whole world. Those who believe and are baptized shall be saved.

John 3:14-16 - Jesus died for the whole world, and *whosoever* believes should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Scriptures clearly teach that faith is a condition to salvation, and anyone in the world may meet that condition.

B. Men Must Repent of Sin.

Acts 17:30,31 - God commands *all* men *everywhere* to repent. This refers to all the people who will be judged by Jesus, which means everyone in the whole world.

2 Peter 3:9 - God does not want any to perish but *all* to repent.

Note that all who will be judged must repent (Acts 17:30,31). But those who need to repent are the ones God does not want to see perish. Hence, God does not want anyone in the world to perish. He wants them all to repent.

The Scriptures clearly teach that repentance is a condition of salvation, and everyone on earth must meet that condition.

C. Men Must Confess Christ and Be Baptized.

Matthew 10:32 - *Whoever* confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

Mark 16:16 - The message preached to everyone in the world is that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Acts 2:38,39 - The message to *all*, whoever God calls by the gospel, is that *everyone* must repent and be baptized for remission of sins.

Summary

Romans 10:13,14,17 - *Whoever* calls on the Lord will be saved, but to call one must believe, and to believe one must hear the gospel. The gospel is to be preached to all, and of those who hear it, whoever calls on the Lord will be saved.

The Scriptures clearly teach that salvation is conditional, and that every person is able to meet those conditions.

Calvinists respond to these points by saying that the only people who can truly meet these conditions are the people whom the Holy Spirit unconditionally chose and empowered to do so. But again, this turns the preaching of these conditions to all people a farce. If salvation is not conditional, why did God state conditions? If not everyone can meet the conditions, why did God insist that they be preached to everyone?

The above passages clearly teach that everyone can obey the conditions, but Calvinism flatly contradicts this and denies that everyone can obey.

III. God Grants to Each Person the Power to Accept or Reject Salvation.

If as Calvinism teaches, no conditions man can meet will affect whether or not God saves him, then man has absolutely no choice regarding his salvation. If God chooses the man, he will be saved regardless of the mans' choice. If God does not choose the man, he will be lost regardless of his choice. Hence, man's choice is irrelevant to his salvation. However, the Bible teaches man does have a choice in whether or not He will please God and be saved.

A. Each Person Is Able to Choose Whether or not He Will Meet the Conditions of Salvation.

Consider the following passages. Why would God say these things if people have no power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions necessary to be pleasing to Him?

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 - God promised blessings to Israel if they would obey Him (28:1-14) and curses if they would disobey Him (28:15-68) [cf. chap. 29,30]. Then He urged them to *choose* life.

Joshua 24:15 - Likewise, Joshua exhorted Israel to *choose* what god they would serve. [Cf. Exodus 32:26; 1 Kings 18:21]

Hebrews 11:24,25 - Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but *chose* to share ill treatment with God's people, rather than to enjoy sin. [Luke 10:42]

Isaiah 1:18-20 - God reasons with man, He does not compel them against their will. If men were *willing* to be obedient, God would bless them. If they refused and rebelled, He would punish them.

Matthew 23:37 - Jesus *wanted* to gather Jerusalem under His wings, but they *were not willing*! Note: Jesus preferred one choice, but the people rejected it because it was not according to their choice.

Clearly God does not choose men unconditionally and then compel men to accept His choice. He wants them all saved and invites them to accept His will, but He allows them to choose how they will respond to His invitation.

Matthew 13:14,15 - Certain people would not turn ("be converted" - KJV) and be (spiritually) healed by Jesus, because *they* closed their eyes and did not accept His teachings. Clearly Jesus was willing to heal these people if they were converted, but they resisted His teaching by their own choice.

Revelation 22:17 - *Whosoever will*(KJV) may freely take of the water of life. It is a matter of man's *will*, and each person may determine his own will.

B. Each Person Has a Role in Determining His Own Destiny.

According to Calvinism, there is nothing in man's conduct or choice that influences one way or another whether or not God will save that person. Hence, nothing a man does will in any way affect his salvation. Yet note these passages that show that what man does definitely will affect His eternal destiny.

1 Peter 1:22 - *You* have purified *your* souls in *your* obedience to the truth.

Romans 6:13,16-18 - Present *yourself* to God and your members as instruments of righteousness. To whom you present *yourself* as a servant to obey, that is your master - either sin or obedience. They were freed from sin because they became *obedient* to the teaching delivered to them.

2 Corinthians 8:5 - The Macedonians gave *their own selves* to the Lord.

Philippians 2:12 - Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling.

1 Timothy 4:16 - Take heed to *yourself* and to the doctrine ... for in doing this you will *save* both *yourself* and those who hear you.

Acts 2:40 - Be saved (*save yourselves* - KJV) from this perverse generation.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - God was pleading with men, through His ambassadors, to BE reconciled to God. Clearly God wants men to come to Him. But He does not compel, He pleads. Men must then take the step that determines the final outcome.

Based on these Scriptures, how can it be concluded that man is "totally passive" in salvation? How can it be that taught that nothing in man is a condition that influences whether or not God chooses to save him?

Clearly all these passages show that man does have the power to choose and that what we do will determine whether or not God chooses to give us eternal life.

C. God Is No Respector of Persons.

Romans 2:6-11 - If God chooses to save some but not others, either the choice must be based on the conduct of the people (hence, conditional) or else God is a respector of persons. [Cf. Acts 10:34,35]

Calvinists respond that this simply means God will save people of all nations. But that is not all the passage says. It says He is not a respecter of persons because His choice of who to save or condemn is based on *man's conduct*! He gives eternal life to those who continue doing good, and gives tribulation to those who are disobedient.

For God to grant eternal life to those who do not choose to meet the conditions, or for Him to punish those who do meet the conditions, would constitute respect of persons. Calvinism is a system inherently based on partiality, favoritism, and injustice! Worse yet, it makes God guilty of all of these!

IV. One Who Is Chosen May Later Become Lost.

If salvation is unconditional and nothing one does will affect his salvation, then a person decreed to be among the elect would be saved no matter how he later acted. He could not possibly so act as to be lost because the choice was unconditional.

So, if we can show that people, once saved, later so acted as to be lost, then we have proved salvation must be conditional, and Calvinism is wrong.

An example - 2 Peter 2:1

Men who have been bought by Jesus can yet deny Him and be destroyed. Clearly the choice of man's destiny is not unconditional. It does depend on man's conduct.

The solution - 2 Peter 1:10

To "make our calling and *election* sure" we must add the listed qualities to our faith. Then we will not stumble but will enter the eternal kingdom. It is conditional!

There are numerous other passages showing a child of God can so sin as to be lost. That is another whole subject. But every such passage proves that salvation is conditional and disproves Calvinistic election.

[For further information, see our article on "Once Saved, Always Saved"]

Conclusion to Part I

Calvinism compared to a king

Calvinism's doctrine of election pictures God like a king who has thousands of people imprisoned in his dungeon (for another man's crime - the sin of Adam). He declares to them:

- 1) I want all of you to be set free.
- 2) I have genuine mercy and love for all of you, so I extend my pardon to all of you.
- 3) So much do I love you that my son has paid the penalty so everyone of you can go free.
- 4) Therefore, whichever ones of you choose to do so may leave your cells and go free!
- 5) However, your cells are still locked and I am the only one who has the key.
- 6) So regardless of what you say, do, or want, I will unconditionally open a few doors and let some of you go. The rest of you, regardless of what you say, do, or want, I will unconditionally leave your cells locked, and you will stay imprisoned forever!

Did the king really want all the prisoners set free? Did he really have love and mercy for all, extend pardon to all, and have his son pay the penalty for all? If so, and if freedom was unconditional, why were not all prisoners set free?

Did the prisoners really have a choice about whether or not to be set free? If they did, why did the king free only certain ones regardless of their choice? If they had no choice, why did the king say they did have a choice?

Calvinism makes God unloving, unjust, untruthful, insincere, and a respecter of persons. If Calvinism is true, we may as well throw our Bibles away, because they surely do not mean what they say!

The proper conduct of such a king.

How would a king act if he really believed what this king said? First, he would not have imprisoned anyone except for their own crimes.

Then he might pardon all the prisoners, but that would treat the truly penitent the same as the hardened criminal.

He could be true to his will by offering *conditions* of pardon to all the prisoners (such as they must confess their crime, ask for pardon, and pledge loyalty to the king and do works of service for him, etc.). Then each prisoner would have the right to choose whether or not to meet the conditions. He would free those who would meet them, but not the rest.

This would act in harmony with the king's wish that everyone be free (because he really hopes everyone will meet the conditions). Pardon would still be an act of mercy. But the king is still just if he keeps in prison those who refuse to meet the conditions.

This is exactly the course God has chosen.

Part 2: Answers to Defenses of Unconditional Election

I. Bible References to Election and Predestination

The New Testament unquestionably refers to "election" and "predestination."

Calvinists often quote these passages as though the mere mention of the words proves their brand of predestination.

But we all agree that God has "chosen" (elected) certain people, and that the elect have been foreordained to eternal life. The question is: ***How is it determined whether or not any particular individual is or is not among the elect***, and is that determined unconditionally or conditionally.

The Bible doctrine of predestination is that God chose a body or group of people to be saved, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to be in that body.

To illustrate, consider a country with voluntary military service. The president chooses the Marines for a mission. The General calls the Marines an "elect" body because the

President chose them (rather than the Navy, Army, etc.). But the President did not choose each individual. He chose the body, but each individual decides whether or not to be in that body.

Another illustration: An elite company chooses to place its product for sale in a certain store. The store owner then refers to his employees as an elect or chosen group of people. But they were chosen as a group, not individually. Each individual employee enters that company only by meeting certain conditions.

God's "elect" is just another name for the faithful members of the church. God predestined the faithful to be saved, but each individual decides whether or not he will be among the faithful. Hence, the saved are the elect, but this is conditional (not unconditional) and they do have a choice. Consider the evidence:

A. People Are "Elect" According to the Will of God.

Ephesians 1:5,11 - We are predestined according to His will, according to His purpose. [Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:7]

Calvinists assume God wills to choose each individual unconditionally. But where do these passages say this?

The will of God regarding man's salvation is revealed in the Scriptures. We have already proved by Scripture that it is God's will to offer salvation to ALL, then to let each individual CHOOSE whether or not he will respond.

B. People Are Elect "in Christ."

Ephesians 1:4 - God chose us "*in Him*" (Christ). [Cf. v6 - in the beloved; v7 - in whom; v10,11 - in Him; V3,10,13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:10]

Note other passages about those in Christ.

Consider their circumstances in Christ:

- * Made nigh unto God (Eph. 2:12-17)
- * New creatures (born again) (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3,4)
- * No condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- * Grace (2 Tim. 2:1)
- * Salvation (2 Tim. 2:10)
- * Eternal life (1 John 5:11,12)
- * All spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3)

Clearly those "in Christ" are the elect, destined to salvation.

But how does an individual come into Christ?

Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 6:3,4 - We are *baptized* into Christ, after hearing, believing, etc. This makes us members of God's family the church, saved from our sins.

Again, salvation is conditional. It is offered to all, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions. This does not contradict the Bible doctrine of predestination but is part of it.

C. People Are Elect in Christ's Spiritual Body, the Church.

Passages

Ephesians 1:3-14 - Paul is addressing the elect in Christ. But the rest of the book refers to them as the church, the body of Christ - this is the theme of the book.

1:22,23 - Jesus is head of the church, His body.

2:13,16 - To be reconciled "in Christ" is to be reconciled in His body or household (v19), the temple of the Lord (v21,22).

3:10,11 - We are predestined according to God's purpose (1:11), but His eternal purpose is revealed in the church.

5:22-33 - Jesus is Head and Savior of the body, having loved it and gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse it. Note that it is a **body** or group that is destined to be saved. [Cf. 3:21; 4:4,16

1 Peter 2:9,10 - The ones "chosen" or elected are a race, a nation, a priesthood, a people. We are chosen as a body, a group, the church.

Note the circumstances of those in the church.

Acts 20:28 - Jesus purchased the church with His blood.

Acts 2:47 - All the saved are added to the body (church) by the Lord.

Clearly the church is the elect, those destined to be saved. [Matt. 16:18]

But how does one enter the church?

1 Peter 1:22,23 - The elect (1:1,2; 2:9) are those who "purified your souls" in **obedience** to the truth and so were born again - born into God's family, the church (1 Tim. 3:15)

1 Corinthians 12:13 - We are baptized into the one body.

Acts 2:38,41,47 - When we repent and are baptized, we receive remission and are added by the Lord to the church.

So, from eternity, God knew there would be people willing to obey Him. He purposed to establish the church (Eph. 3:10,11) as the body that would contain all saved people (5:23,25). These would be His special people, the elect (1:3-14). This body He decreed to be destined for eternal glory (1:3-14).

However, each individual has been given by God the power to choose to meet the conditions to enter that body or not enter. Once in the body, each has the power to continue faithful and receive the reward or to fall away and be lost (these will be removed from the body before it enters glory - Matt. 13:41-43; Rev. 17:14; 2 Peter 1:10).

II. The Sovereignty of God

Since God is the absolute, all-powerful ruler of the Universe, it is argued that He must absolutely govern everything that happens on earth (see quotes from Westminster Confession). This means He must personally choose whether or not each individual will be saved. The decision must be completely His, and no one else can determine the outcome. To say that man has a choice is to deny the absolute sovereignty of God. [Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28; 11:36; 1 Chron. 29:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10]

Response: There is no doubt that God has the sovereign right to do whatever He wills to do. The question is: **What is it that God has willed to do?** Has God chosen to unconditionally determine the eternal destiny of each individual, or has He chosen to

offer salvation to all men and give each man the choice whether or not to accept based on conditions? *If God is truly sovereign, then if He wishes, He has the right to give man the power to choose!*

A. Has God Ever Granted Anyone the Right to Choose Anything?

If God has ever granted anyone the right to choose anything, then it would not violate His sovereignty to give man the right to choose salvation.

Calvinists admit that Adam had the right to choose whether or not to obey God. If so, then God's sovereignty is not violated simply because He gives man the power to choose. Why then would it violate His sovereignty to give us also the right to choose?

If man never has the right to choose about anything, then God must have decided to make man (and Satan) sinners!

If God's sovereignty means He has decreed everything about men, and we have no choice about anything, then He must have decreed that Adam and all men must commit sin. This means God is responsible for the fact men commit sin and suffer the consequences. Man had no choice. We are all sinners because God chose for us all to become sinners.

Yet God hates sin and commands men not to sin (Prov. 15:9; 6:16,17; etc.). So the consequence of Calvinism is that God decreed that man must do the very thing God hates and commands men not to do. God is therefore divided against Himself (Matt. 12:25; 1 Cor. 1:13; 14:33). How can they avoid the charge that their view makes God hypocritical?

Illustration: Calvinism makes God like a father who commands his son not to go in the street, and if he goes, the father will spank him. Then the father carries the son into the street and spansks him for going there!

B. There Is a Difference Between What God Unconditionally Decrees and What He Chooses to Permit.

God is the absolute ruler of the Universe. But this does not deny His right to give men the power to choose.

God unconditionally decrees that some things must come to pass.

In this case, His decree must come to pass, and no one can change it. [1 Chron. 29:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Psa 115:3; 33:11; Job 23:13; Isaiah 14:27; 46:9,10; Prov. 21:30]

Yet the Scriptures teach that God has decreed to allow men (and Satan) to have the power to choose and make some decisions.

Consider some examples:

* God does not tempt man to sin (James 1:13). Yet man faces temptation. Why? Because God permits Satan (within limits) to tempt man (Job 1). [Note 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31]

* God hates sin and commands men not to practice it (see above). Yet sin exists. God is not the source of it, else He is not righteous but contradicts Himself and forces men to do what He Himself hates!

The truth is that God gave man the power to choose to obey or disobey, having warned them of the consequences. Having decreed that man has the power to choose, God

respects His own decree and permits His creatures to choose, even when those choices displease God.

* In the same way, God has decreed (as shown in the Scriptures already studied) that man has the power to choose whether or not to obey His conditions of forgiveness and thereby become one of His elect.

No, man is not free to do absolutely anything we want (can we destroy God?). God has placed limits on us, but one thing He has granted us is the power to obey Him or not. This is not a violation of God's sovereignty, nor is it weakness on His part, for He is the one who decreed that man has this power!

Do you deny that a sovereign God could give man the power to choose?

If God is truly sovereign, then He can decree whatever He chooses. If so, then He can decree that man has the power to choose! If you deny this, then it is *you*, not us, who deny the sovereignty of God!

The question is not whether or not God is sovereign. The question is: What did the sovereign God decide to do? The Bible says God decreed to give man the power to choose whether or not to obey. This is what it means for "all things" to work according to His purpose.

C. God's Sovereign Government Is Controlled by His Will and Character.

God must act in harmony with His own will.

Man can never limit God, but God can and often does limit what He does according to His will. He may choose not to exercise certain powers He possesses in order to accomplish some higher purpose.

The consequence of Calvinism is that God acts in ways that are contrary to His own revealed will. He says that man can choose whether to obey or disobey Him and that salvation is for all and that there are conditions everyone can meet to be saved (as shown in preceding Scriptures). However, Calvinism says none of this is true, we have no choice, etc.

God must act according to His character

There are some things God cannot do because they would violate His character.

* God cannot lie - Titus 1:2

* God cannot sin (He is always righteous) - 2 Chron. 19:7

* God cannot deny Himself - 2 Tim. 2:13

* God cannot change - Hebrews 13:8

The consequence of Calvinism is that God continually acts contrary to His character. He hates evil, yet He decrees that men practice evil. He cannot lie, yet He says things in the Bible that are not true, etc.

III. Romans 9:6-24

Several statements in this passage "sound like" Calvinistic predestination:

V11-13 - God chose Jacob even before he and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. He hated Esau and loved Jacob.

V15-18 - God has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills. This is determined by God, not by the person who "wills" to receive His mercy.

V19-24 - God forms men for destruction or glory like a potter with clay.

This is the main proof text on which Calvinistic predestination rests. They argue that this means God chooses to eternally save or condemn men unconditionally, entirely according to God's whim.

A. Such a View of Romans 9 Contradicts Other Scriptures.

This view contradicts all the other passages showing God wants all to be saved, gives them the power to choose, etc.

See previous material. The Bible does not contradict itself. Yet this view would surely make the Bible self-contradictory. We must search for a view which harmonizes with all the Scriptures.

This view contradicts the overall teaching of the book of Romans.

1:16 - The gospel is God's power to save *everyone* who believes (it is conditional, and everyone can meet the conditions).

2:6-11 - God is *no respecter of persons*. For each individual, eternal life or condemnation is determined by what he *does*, good or bad.

5:18,19 - Justification by Jesus' death comes to *all* men - the same all men who receive condemnation as a result of Adam's sin.

6:13,16-18 - Man must yield his own members to God to be made free from sin.

This view contradicts the immediate context of Romans 9-11.

All three of these chapters discuss God's dealing with the nation of Israel.

9:1-3; 10:1 - Paul hopes and prays for the salvation of Israel. Why so if he believed that some would be damned by God's unchangeable decree?

10:13 - *Whosoever* calls on the Lord will be saved.

10:21 - God spread His hands to Israel (inviting them), but they refused.

11:7-14 - "The rest" of Israel were not elect, but were hardened. Nevertheless, Paul was trying "by any means" to save some of them! Why so? Calvinism says if they were non-elect and were hardened, they cannot be saved.

11:19-24 - Non-elect Israelites were "cut off" because of unbelief, and Gentiles were grafted in. But those Israelites could be grafted in again and Gentiles could be cut off again, depended on their belief or unbelief. Salvation is conditional; non-elect people can change and be accepted.

11:32 - God offers mercy to *all*. This must include the non-elect Israelites being discussed. And since God is no respecter of persons, it much also include all Gentiles.

Romans 9, the main Calvinist proof text, creates insurmountable difficulties and contradictions, if it is explained as Calvinists do.

B. What Does Romans 9:6-24 Mean?

The context: the theme of Romans 9-11 is the condition of Israel as a nation.

9:4,5 - Paul discussed the exalted position (blessings and privileges) God formerly gave the nation of Israel under the Old Testament. They received these simply because they

were members of the nation, but this did not prove they would or would not be saved eternally.

9:6-23 - Paul defended God's sovereign right to use the nation of Israel as He chose. In particular, God was not obligated, as some seemed to think, to give an exalted position to every person who physically descended from Abraham.

9:24-11:32 - Paul discussed the blessings available to Israel under the gospel and how they could receive those blessings.

9:6-13 - God's promise to Abraham did not require Him to give an exalted position to every physical descendant of Abraham.

The Old Testament itself shows that God chose the descendants of Isaac (not of Ishmael) and then chose those of Jacob (not of Esau).

The context discusses a promise about Abraham's seed or children (v7,8).

This was not a promise to *save* any of them eternally. It was a promise to make them a great nation, give them Canaan, and make them the ancestors of the Messiah. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 22:16-18; Deut. 4:37,38; 9:4f; Gal. 3:16.)

Hence, the "election" or choice (v11) does not refer to the election to eternal life, but to the ones through whom these promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. This is the election that was made before Jacob or Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. It was an election in which "the elder would serve the younger" (v12), not an election to eternal life! (God often spoke of Israel as His elect or chosen nation, but that had to do with this promise to Abraham, not eternal life.)

The statement "the elder will serve the younger" refers to two nations - the nations that would descend from Jacob and Esau - not to the two men themselves!

Genesis 25:22,23 - The original passage quoted in Romans 9:12 expressly says that the statement refers to two nations. If this meant all Israelites would go to heaven and all Edomites be doomed, that would indeed be respect of persons.

"Loving Jacob and hating Esau" likewise has no reference to eternal destinies.

This statement was made long after both men had died, not before their birth - Malachi 1:2,3. The only one of the statements made before their birth was "the elder will serve the younger."

This statement also refers to the nations that would descend from the men, not to the men themselves (see the context of Mal. 1).

"Hate" means a lesser love, like Christians must hate their families and their own lives (Luke 14:26). It has no reference whatever to salvation! (Must we wish our families to be eternally damned?)

These statements merely prove that the promise of God to Abraham did not obligate him to give an exalted position to every physical descendant of Abraham. Old Testament history shows, in fulfilling this promise, God repeatedly made choices between individuals regarding whose descendants He would use in fulfilling the promise.

No application whatever is made here to eternal destinies. Later, however, Paul did discuss salvation, and there he showed that God is not obligated to save all Israelites but only a "remnant" (11:1-5).

9:14-18 - God shows mercy according to His own will.

The decision as to who will receive mercy is a decision made by the one who shows the mercy, not by the one who receives it (v15,16,18).

Mercy is a favor shown to one who does not deserve it. It follows that the one who wants mercy (the one who "wills" or "runs" - Israel) cannot set the conditions under which it will be given. This is determined by the one who extends the mercy.

The application to Israel is that they could not insist (as they apparently thought they could do) that God must continue to give them a favorable position, just because He once did so. They had received a favorable position by God's mercy, but He could withdraw it anytime He so chose.

The key word here is the word "will."

God gives mercy to whom He "will." Calvinists assume (without proof) this means that God wills to unconditionally send some folks to heaven and others to hell. Now God can do whatever He wills to do; but does the context here say that is what He wills to do? If so, where? This passage is not talking about eternal destinies.

Now salvation is a matter of mercy, so God can show mercy on whom He wills - men cannot dictate the terms of salvation. But God's will regarding salvation is revealed in the Bible, and on that subject we have seen that His will is to offer salvation to all conditionally and let men choose whether or not to comply. That will is stated later and elsewhere. But it is not even under discussion here.

This passage is describing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (v17).

Whereas God used Israel in a favorable way in fulfilling His promise to Abraham, He also used Pharaoh in an unfavorable way. Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt when Israel became a great nation and when they left to go to the promised Canaan.

The Old Testament account shows that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but only after Pharaoh had already several times hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; Cf. Psalm 95:8; Heb. 3:8)

God used Pharaoh, but for what purpose? V17 - He used him that God might show His power and that His name might be declared to the whole earth (by the plagues and crossing the Red Sea). This is not talking about anyone's eternal salvation but about an act by which God brought honor to Himself.

Nothing here says God unconditionally caused anyone to do evil or to be lost without choice. Pharaoh was already (by his own choice) a wicked man, so God used him to accomplish His purpose and bring glory to Himself.

In fulfilling His promise to Abraham, God showed mercy to Israel and hardened their enemy, Pharaoh. He used men and nations to accomplish His purpose. But this is not talking about their salvation. He never violated any man's right to choose to obey Him or disobey Him.

God gave Israel an exalted status as a nation to use them for His purposes in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Having done this, He had the right to withdraw that exalted status, for it never did have anything to do with what they deserved. And above all,

nothing here says anything about how God decides whom He will or will not save eternally.

9:19-24 - The potter and the clay

God here affirms His right to deal with men however He pleases. Man has no right to object.

The application in context is to the nation of Israel.

In particular, God can make of the same lump (Israel) vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. God had exalted Israel in the past to accomplish His will in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. That promise had been completely fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. If God then chose to withdraw Israel's "most-favored-nation" status, they had no right to object (as some apparently were doing).

To affirm a person has power to do whatever He chooses, does not of itself tell you what He has chosen!

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 - Paul argued that preachers have the right to marry or to be supported financially. In fact, however, he refused to exercise neither of those rights. Matthew 26:39,53,54 - God had the sovereign power to save Jesus from death, but it was not His will to save Him.

You may affirm that you have the power to slug me with your fist, but you have not chosen to do so (not yet).

So God here affirms His right to make choices however He pleases, but that does not of itself tell us what His choice will be. It surely does not tell us how He decides who will be saved, since that is not even being discussed here.

This passage does not apply to man's eternal destinies but to God's right to withdraw Israel's privileged status as a nation.

God's choice here pertained to how He used the nation of Israel in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. He used them for many years in a way that exalted Him. When the promises had been fulfilled (because Jesus died), there was no longer any reason to continue their exalted status. So God withdrew it. That was His right, just like a potter could make whatever He chose from a lump of clay.

Nevertheless, regarding salvation God does have the right to do whatever He chooses (consistent with His character). But nothing here says anything about what He has chosen or how He will determine who will be saved or lost.

Later, in 9:24-11:32, Paul does discuss God's choice regarding who will or will not be saved. There he shows that God offers mercy to all (11:32). Those who believe and obey will be saved (10:13-17). This is exactly what we learned to be true in multitudes of other passages.

God has the right to do whatever He wills with man. He used Israel for His purpose, then ceased to use them. He is not here discussing salvation, yet God can save us or not save us according to any standard that He chooses. The standard that He chose was to offer salvation to all on the basis of conditions and let each man decide whether or not to meet the conditions.

IV. People Whom God Foreknew

Before they did good or evil, God foreknew that certain people would be sinners, prophets, etc. Examples:

Judas - John 13:21-26; 6:70f; Matthew 26:20-25,50; Acts 1:16-20,25

Pharaoh - Exodus 4:21; 14:17,18

Prophets - Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15

Calvinists argue that, since God knows everything, He must know all about a person's life, even before he is born. Once God knows a thing, then it is decreed and cannot be avoided. Therefore, one's eternal destiny is decreed before his is born. He has no choice.

A. God Does Not Force People against Their Will to Be Good or Bad, but He Can Foreknow What Choices They Will Make.

Judas was already evil before He betrayed Jesus - John 12:6. This evil was nowhere predicted.

Pharaoh was also evil before God hardened his heart - Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12.

God did not make these men evil. He simply foreknew what choice they would make, then He used them accordingly. If foreknowing and prophesying a thing means that God *decreed* it, so men have no choice, then since the men sinned, it must be that God *decreed them to commit sin!* This violates His righteous character, as already discussed. Jesus' death was also foreknown and prophesied - Isaiah 53; John 3:14; 12:27; Matthew 16:21. Nevertheless, Matt. 26:53 shows that Jesus had the power to stop it. He had a choice despite the fact the matter had been prophesied.

God foreordained that Jesus would die (1 Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Luke 22:22). This involved a sin committed by those who killed Him. If this means it was decreed, so men had no choice, then again God decreed that men must commit sin!

B. Though God Foreknew What Some Men Did, That Does Not Prove He Foreknows All the Acts of All Men.

God is both all-powerful and all-knowing. His power to know is just a part of His overall power. He has the power to do anything He chooses to do. But does He do everything He has the power to do? Obviously, there are many things God could do that he chooses not to do. To claim that God is all-powerful is not to say that he will actually do everything He has the power to do.

Since His power to know is part of His overall power, does it not follow that, just as He may choose not to exercise His power to do some things, so He may not exercise His power not to know some things about the future? As with all His other powers, can He not choose to know only those things that suit His purposes? If we really believe that God is all-powerful, then wouldn't that include the power to choose not to know some things about the future, if He wills to not know them?

Consider some examples that appear to indicate that God did not know certain things before they happened. But then He deliberately chose to exercise His power to know them.

Genesis 11:5 - At the tower of Babel, God "came down to see" what the people were doing.

Genesis 18:20,21 - God went to see what Sodom and Gomorrah were doing.

Genesis 22:12 - After Abraham had proved he was willing to offer Isaac, God said, "**Now** I know that you fear God ..." Did He not know beforehand?

I know that God chooses to know everything that has happened in the past, because the Bible says so. He will bring every work into judgment with every hidden thing -- Ecc. 12:14; etc.

God can do whatever He chooses to do. But we only know what He chooses to do by what He says in the Bible. I know He chooses to know everything in the past because the Bible says so. I also know that He has the **power** to know anything in the future that He chooses to know, and I know that He has exercised His power to know **some** in the future, because the Bible says so. The question is: Where does the Bible say that God has chosen to know **everything** will happen in the future in the life of **every** individual? The passages above appear to me to indicate that God chose not to know certain things **before** happened.

In any case, by whatever means one explains it, it cannot be denied that God's power to foreknow the actions of people does not invalidate man's power to choose. The Bible clearly says that God allows men to choose to do good or evil.

Conclusion

Calvinist arguments must fail because they make God a violator of His own will and of His own righteous character.

Salvation is offered to all men, so any one can receive it. But each individual must choose for himself whether or not to respond, and each one is capable of so choosing.

Does this mean that salvation is by the power of men, not of God's power? No!

Illustration: Suppose a man is drowning, but a sailor throws him a life preserver attached to a rope. The drowning man by himself was powerless to be saved. The sailor was his savior. But the man still had to choose to take hold and continuing holding on until he was in the boat.

So God is the source and provider of salvation. Salvation is by God's grace. But He has decreed that each individual must choose for Himself whether or not to accept the salvation offered. – *The Gospel Way*

Election Without Reprobation?

Mike Willis
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As we examine the Calvinist doctrines of salvation, we need to also examine what Calvinists teach about reprobation. The strict Calvinists have no hesitancy in stating emphatically that God has decreed the damnation of certain men. They state, By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III, No. 3).

After having stated their belief about God electing some to salvation, the writers of the Westminster Confession of Faith stated their belief about God's treatment of the reprobate.

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extended or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to passby, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice (Chapter III, No. 7).

Even the early Baptists wrote openly of their conviction that God has predestinated some unto life and others unto eternal damnation. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith states this doctrine as follows:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated or foreordained to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, to the praise of his glorious grace; other being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation, to the praise of his glorious justice (Section III, No. 4).

Their creed goes on to discuss how the reprobate are damned because God withholds from them a sufficient amount of grace to cause them to be saved. Hence, strict Calvinists had no trouble stating their belief in both election and reprobation.

But, my brethren, Calvinists have long ago perceived that the doctrine that God damned some people to hell was not all that popular. Who wants to believe that this reprobate baby who died in infancy long before it was old enough to commit a single sin will burn forever in hell because God predetermined that this should occur to the praise of His glory?

Yet, this is what strict Calvinism teaches. Most rational men want nothing to do with such a damnable, pernicious doctrine. Hence, in recent years, Calvinists have begun to back off of the doctrine of reprobation. They want to continue to believe in election but deny that they believe in reprobation.

In Present Truth magazine, Klaas Runia wrote as follows about this problem:

When L. Berkhof gives his proof for the doctrine of reprobation, he begins with the following statement. "The doctrine of reprobation follows from the logic of the situation. The decree of election inevitably implies the decree of reprobation. If the all-wise God, possessed of infinite knowledge, has eternally purposed to save some, then He ipso facto also purposed not to save others. If He has chosen or elected some, then He has

by that very fact also rejected others." And L. Boettner opens his discussion of "Reprobation" with these words: "The doctrine of Predestination of course logically holds that some are foreordained to death as truly as others are foreordained to life. The very terms 'elect' and 'election' imply the terms 'non-elect' and 'reprobation.' When some are chosen out others are left not chosen."

It is of course true that 'logic' does play an important part in theology. Reformed theology has always freely acknowledge its good right. The Westminster Confession states that "the whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary consequence, may be deduced from Scripture" (Ch. 1, vii. By this very means the church has developed its doctrine of the Trinity also its Christology, yet the question must always arise; is a particular consequence 'good and necessary'? In general we must say that especially at the point of an eternal decree of reprobation we have to be most careful. And one should ask oneself: why does Scripture itself not draw this conclusion, if it is so natural and so logical! (Vol. V, No. 6, p. 28).

The author in Present Truth chose to call this a "paradox" and left it unresolved. The truth of the matter is that some Calvinists want to believe in election without accepting the logical conclusion of the doctrine, reprobation. That doctrine is just a little too sour for their taste. Hence, they choose to abide in inconsistency rather than accepting the logical consequences of their damnable heresy.

My brethren, please keep in mind the logical conclusions to which Calvinism leads. It states that God has predetermined every event in history. Hence, God has predetermined, not foreknew, that the greater majority of men would die in sin, whether inherited or committed, and be eternally punished in hell. He predetermined that this would happen for the praise of His glory. We must not allow the Calvinists the luxury of not accepting the logical consequence of the doctrine of election.

Does God Want Men To Perish?

It seems ridiculous to pose such a question, yet this is exactly the question we must pose to deal with reprobation. This doctrine teaches that God has decreed, predetermined, and foreordained that the great number of men in this world would end up in hell for the praise of His glory. Inasmuch as God wants to be praised by men, He certainly wants these men to end up as He has willed that they be. Hence, this is by all means a legitimate question for Calvinists to answer. Does God want the greater portion of mankind to burn eternally in Hell. Calvinists say yes; the Bible says no. Read the following passages:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

Contrary to what Calvinists teach, God gets no pleasure out of watching the wicked perish and burn forever in Hell. The prophet Ezekiel stated this plainly as he wrote:

But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live? (Ezek. 18:21-23).

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezek. 33:11).

The God which the Calvinists worship is a horrible God indeed. He obtains some kind of sadistic pleasure in watching people burn forever in hell. He creates a large number of men for the express purpose of watching them die in sin and burn forever in hell! Who can worship such a God?

The Calvinist doctrine destroys the plain statement of Scripture that God is love. Rather, Calvinism demands that God be a god of hatred. He hates more people than anybody else; He hates them longer than anyone else can hate them inasmuch as He hates them prior to their coming into this world and forever after they come into this world. Having hated more people than anyone and harboring this hatred forever, God would become a God of hatred! As a matter of fact, God would have this hatred toward every man except that select little group of "teacher pets" whom He arbitrarily chose to elect to salvation.

Conclusion

This doctrine of Calvinism is by all means the most repugnant of the doctrine presented in that system. Men tend to turn their eyes away from it and look at the positive points of Calvinism. Indeed, some among us are even intrigued at the idea of "once in grace, always in grace." Others like the idea that God personally called me to give me faith and repentance so that I could be saved. These doctrines which attract men cannot be logically maintained without accepting the conclusion that God damns the non-elect of His own will. The doctrine of reprobation is one of the main reasons for rejecting Calvinism in all of its parts.

(The following is a direct quotation of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics Vol. II/2* with a few modifications to the text from the T&T Clark study edition, by replacing the original Greek and Latin quotations with the corresponding italicized English Translations from the footnotes. I've also added the bold-italicized headers and broken up longer paragraphs for readability.)

Development of Single Predestination:

Augustine himself did receive here a salutary check, as is shown by the fact that on the whole he avoided reducing God's twofold dealings to one common denominator, even in concept. By *predestination* he always (or almost always) understood *predestination to grace* (a definition taken over by Peter Lombard, *Sent. I, dist. 40 A*) and therefore *predestination to life*. Predestination consists positively in *election*, and does not include *reprobation*. Thomas Aquinas held a similar concept. For him predestination was *means, pre-existing in God, of the transmission of eternal life* (*S. th. I, qu. 23, art. 1 c*), or, according to a later definition: *a predestination from eternity for those things which are to exist, by the grace of God, in time* (*S. th. III, qu. 24, art. 1 c*). Thomas, like Augustine, does set the two alongside: *God willed among men a number whom he predestined, to be given his goodness according to the manner of his mercy by which they are spared; and a number whom he reprobated, by the manner of his justice, by which they are punished* (*qu. 23, art. 5 ad. 3*). But more clearly than Augustine he regards *reprobation* as in fact a separate genus, quite apart from and standing to some extent only in the shadow of *predestination*. A similar view was held in the 14th century even by such strong "predestinarians" as Gregory of Rimini and John Wyclif.

Development of Double Predestination:

Already, however, Isidore of Seville in the 7th and Gottschalk in the 9th century had taught a doctrine which differed formally from that of Augustine: *Predestination is twofold: either of the elect for rest, or of the reprobate for death* (Isidore, *sent. 2, 6, 1*). *Just as God has predestined all the elect to life by the free gift of his grace alone ... so he has also predestined every reprobate to the punishment of eternal death, by what is most evidently the most just judgment of his righteousness* (Gottschalk, according to Hinkmar, *De praed. 5*). In this case predestination is an over-ruling concept, including both election and rejection. This was the usage adopted by the Reformers. In Luther's *De servo arbitrio [Bondage of the Will]*, in Zwingli's *De providentia* and in the writings of Calvin, predestination means quite unequivocally double predestination: double in the sense that election and rejection are now two species within the one genus designated by the term predestination. It is true that not only

in Luther but in Calvin too there are passages to dispense with this fatal parallelism of the concepts election and rejection: *It is necessary to say that God, by his eternal decree, of which the cause depends on nothing else, has destined for salvation those whom he pleased, and whom -- leaving others out -- he graced with his free adoption to enlighten them by his own Spirit, that they might receive the life offered to them in Christ. But he decreed also that others should be freely unbelieving, so that destitute of the light of faith, they should remain in the darkness (De aet. Dei praed. C.R. 8, 261 f.).* So, too, in the famous definition in the *Institutio* (III, 21, 5): *We call the eternal predestination of God that decree in which he has it established in himself what he wills to become of each man. For all were not created in a like state. Rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others. Therefore, just as each person is made for one or other of these ends, so we can say that they are predestined either for life or for death.*

Balancing of Double Predestination by the post-Calvin Reformed Dogmaticians, and how Arminianism is also Double Predestination:

It was quite in the spirit of Calvin, and yet quite fatal, when many of the older Reformed dogmaticians thought that they ought to balance against the concept of the election of grace that of an election of wrath. Although they attempted to amend the doctrine, it is noteworthy that even the Arminians could not escape the concept of a "double" predestination in this sense: *The predestination of God is that divine decree by which he established in the decree of his will before all temporal ages to choose those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ, to adopt them as his sons, to justify them, and if they persevere in the faith, to glorify them eternally. But he chooses to reprobate / reject, to blind and to harden those hard-hearted unbelievers, and if they persist in their hard-heartedness, to condemn them in eternity (P. a Limborch, Theo. chr., 1686, IV, 1, 5).* As against that, it is one of the merits of the *Canones* of the Synod of Dort (1619) that a definition of predestination was there given (I, 7) which, although it did not, of course, exclude the divine reprobation, did not include or append it as an autonomous truth, being content to state positively what *election* is: *the immutable decree of God in which, before the foundation of the world were laid, according to the most free decree of his will, out of his undiluted grace, he elected in Christ unto salvation a definite multitude of certain men (out of the whole human race which had fallen from its original wholeness into sin and death by its own fault) neither better nor more worthy than others, but laid up in the same wretched state as those others. He established Christ as the mediator from eternity, the head of all the elect, the basis of salvation, and decreed to give to him those who are to be saved, and effectually to call and bring them to communion with hi through his own Word*

and Spirit, to give them truth faith in him, to justify, to sanctify, and in the end to glorify those he had powerfully kept in communion with his Son, as a demonstration of his mercy and for the praise of the glorious riches of his grace. Whatever else one may think of the formula, in this form the doctrine of predestination certainly did take on again the character of evangelical proclamation which it had lost in the definitions in which it referred simultaneously and equally to grace and non-grace, salvation and reprobation.

The mistake in using "mystery" to soften the revelation of Double Predestination:

While they could not evade the importance of the content of his doctrine, some of Calvin's more timid contemporaries were much exercised about the danger of misunderstanding. They expressed the view that the doctrine of predestination out to be reserved as a kind of secret wisdom for theologians of sobriety and discretion, and not published abroad amongst the people. Calvin made the forceful answer that true discretion cannot consist in burying away a truth to which all truth servants of God testify, but only in the sober and reverent yet quiet open confession of what is learned in the school of the heavenly Teacher (*De aet. Dei praed C.R.* 8, 347). It would not be a true Christian simplicity, *to flee from the 'harmful knowledge' of the things which God has revealed (ib., 264).* What is revealed to us in Scripture is as such necessary and useful and worthy to be known by all. On no account, then, must the doctrine of predestination be withheld from believers (*Instit.* III, 21, 3). *For just as holiness is to be preached so that God might be correctly worshiped, so also should predestination, so that those who have ears to hear may, by the grace of God, glory in God and not in themselves (De aet, Dei praed. ib., 327).*

The balanced assertion of Double Predestination has changed the message of Good News (euangelion) to one of Bad News (dysangelion):

Calvin was right. But although his point was right, he could have made it more emphatically and impressively if his understanding of predestination had been less speculative and more in accordance with the biblical testimony; if it had been a strictly evangelical understanding. And with its *parallel lines*, with that balanced assertion of the twofold dealings of God, as a doctrine of double predestination, this is precisely what it is not. The balance gives to the doctrine neutrality which is almost scientific. It does not differentiate between the divine Yes and the divine No. It does not come down on the side of the divine Yes. On the very same level as the Yes it registers and equally definitive divine No concerning man. In such a form it is inevitable that the No should become much stronger and ultimately the exclusive note.

It is inevitable that the doctrine should in the last resort be understood as *bad news (dysangelion)*, and that as such it should be repudiated with horror (and not without inward cause).

Restoring the public presentation of Double Predestination to its positive purpose:

It is not surprising, then, that the same miserable counsel once defeated by Calvin could 150 years later be reintroduced by Samuel Werenfels as the latest wisdom--just as though nothing had happened--and that since that time it has achieved something of the dignity of a *consensus view* among the half-hearted. The basic demand by which any presentation of the doctrine must be measured, and to which we ourselves must also conform, is this: that (negatively) the doctrine must not speak of the divine election and rejection as though God's electing and rejecting were not quite different, as though these divine dealings did not stand in a definite hierarchical relationship the one with the other; and that (positively) the supremacy of the one and subordination of the other must be brought out so radically that the Gospel enclosed and proclaimed even in this doctrine is introduced and revealed as the tenor of the whole, so that in some way or other the Word of the free grace of God stands out even at this point as the dominating theme and the specific meaning of the whole utterance. It is along these lines that it will be proved whether or not the doctrine is understood in this way can it lay claim to the full publicity within in the Church rightly defended by Calvin. If not understood in this way, then even as a secret wisdom for theologians it can have no real significance, or rather it can have only a very dangerous significance.

Barth, Karl. "[*Church Dogmatics Study Edition 10*](#)" Ed. T. F. Torrance and G.W. Bromiley. *II.2 The Doctrine of Election*. Trans. G. W. Bromiley. London: T & T Clark, 2010. 15-7

Calvinism (I): Predestination and Election

By Harry E. Ozment

Historical Background

One of the greatest periods of human history was the Protestant Reformation. Prior to this movement, the Roman Catholic Church held the world in a dark, corrupted, and stagnant mire. Out of this confusion arose great men of courage such as Martin Luther in Germany and John Knox of Scotland who were intent upon reforming the religious world. One of the greatest reformers and brilliant thinkers of his day was John Calvin. Although born in France, he had to flee for his life to Geneva, where he became a leader in the Swiss reform movement. At the age of 27, he wrote his famous Institutes, which set forth his particular theories of religion and introduced what we know today as "Calvinism." Calvinism consists of five points of doctrine: (1) Predestination and Election; (2) Limited Atonement; (3) Total Hereditary Depravity; (4) Irresistible Grace; and (5) Impossibility of Apostasy. Although we may admire Calvin for his desire to reform the Roman Catholic Church, we cannot condone his "theorizing" in religious matters. Probably no set of doctrines could be found which is more destructive to faith in God's word than the tenets of Calvinism. In spite of this fact, however, many churches teach Calvinism in their official creeds and many people hold to Calvinistic ideas.

Definition

The root of Calvinism is the doctrine of "Predestination and Election." Before we can consider the doctrine at all, we must first have some idea of its nature and what it teaches. The word "predestinate" simply means to plan or determine beforehand. All will agree upon this. Therefore, the issue is not the meaning of "predestination" but rather the object of predestination.

It might be a surprise for some to know that the Bible does indeed speak of predestination and election. Paul states in Rom. 8:29-30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Paul speaks of the same idea in Eph. 1:4-5, 11: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, . . . in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

The Bible doctrine of predestination is a very simple one. In the beginning, God foresaw that man would sin. Man, of course, would not have the power to save himself from sin he would need the grace of God. God realized this, and He formulated a scheme of redemption. In this scheme, God predetermined to save a collective group or body of people (otherwise known as the church). Any person can now become a part of this body by obedience to God's scheme of redemption. That this is the Bible doctrine of predestination is proven by Paul in Eph. 3:9-10: "And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God (this is what is involved in predestination-HEO), who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church (the object or fulfillment of God's predestination, HEO) the manifold wisdom of God."

The Bible doctrine of predestination, however, is not the predestination of Calvinism. Whereas Bible predestination involves an elected body or group to be saved (which any person can be added to), Calvinism's predestination involves the election of individuals to be saved (which is exclusively limited to those persons chosen by God Himself). We read in the Presbyterian Confession of Faith: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by, and to obtain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice." (Chapter 3) The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, in commenting on Calvin's theory, states: "Calvin's mode of defining predestination was as the eternal decree of God, by which He has decided with Himself what is to become of each and every individual. For all, he maintains, are not created in like condition; but eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal condemnation for others." (p. 2436)

Errors of the Doctrine

Such a doctrine, even on the surface, seems preposterous to any Bible believer. Indeed, this doctrine destroys the Bible picture of our all-perfect God. This Calvinistic theory:

1. Makes God a respecter of persons. In chapter 3 of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith, we read: "Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions or causes moving Him thereunto." That, my dear friend, is respect of persons-pure and simple! A judge in our court system today would not be tolerated long at all employing these tactics. But the same denominational "scholars" who would condemn an earthly judge for showing respect of persons will, in their next breath, accuse God of the same thing and praise Him for it! Oh consistency, thou art a jewel! The fact of the matter is that God's infinite justice would not allow Him to act accordingly. This is emphasized again and again in holy writ. Peter said to Cornelius, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons." (Acts 10:34) Peter was trying to show Cornelius that he, as a Gentile, had a perfect right to obey the gospel and be saved. If God did not elect a particular nation for eternal salvation, how could he have been so unfair as to elect a particular person for salvation? Paul emphasized the same point in Rom. 2:11-12, "For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law." Now this is what we would expect from a fair and just God. It makes no difference if you are a Jew or Gentile (Acts 15:9; Rom. 10:12), bond or free (Eph. 6:8-9)-you will receive justice at the hand of God. Peter sums it up in I Pet. 1:17: "And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

2. Makes the invitation of God foolish. The invitation of God is found in Rev. 22:17, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Jesus expressed it this way: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am, meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matt. 11:28-30) Beautiful words, aren't they? But absolutely senseless-if Calvinism is true. Why should God invite the lost to come to Him if they are to be lost anyway? Moreover, why should the lost accept God's invitation if it would be of no benefit to them? My, what a doctrine-it robs God of His wisdom and robs Christianity of its beauty! Heaven forbid!

3. Makes the work of Satan unnecessary. The Bible reveals that there is a real person named Satan, and Peter explains his work in this way: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." (I Pet. 5:8) But why is this "devouring" necessary if Calvinism is true? In the case of the lost and "unelected" person, Satan already has full possession of his soul. It matters not how morally good that person might be nor how much he might desire to obey God-God has already consigned this person to the clutches of Satan! Why should Satan do anything in this case? On the other hand, in the case of a saved and "elected" person, his glorious fate is sealed and cannot be altered. It matters not how sinful and ungodly Satan might tempt him to be, he is bound for heaven because he was "elected." Question: Why should Satan seek to "devour" this man if such is impossible? If Calvinism is true, there is no need for Satan to stalk about as a roaring lion, seeking to lead all down the broad way to damnation-God has already done his work for him!

4. Makes accountability to God impossible. If the parable of the talents teaches anything, it teaches that man one day must give an account of what he has done in this life. "After a long time, the lord of these servants cometh, and reckoneth with them." (Matt. 25:19) There will indeed be a day of reckoning. Paul said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10) Calvinism, however, denies this is going to happen, for man has no control over his own fate and therefore is not responsible. If a man is not responsible, he cannot be held accountable. According to these denominational theorists, the judgment took place before the beginning of time in the mind of God. If Calvinism is true, why should there be another judgment at the end of time in which man gives account of something he had no control over?

5. Makes love for God impossible. The Psalmist once wrote, "O love the Lord, all ye his saints." (Ps. 31:23a) This was important under the Old Covenant. Jesus said, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment." (Mk. 12:30) However, how can man love God if Calvinism's concept of Him is true? In I Jn. 4:19 we read, "We love him, because he first loved us." But how much love does God show to that person who is consigned to the depths of hell even before he has a chance to draw his first breath? Yes, who could love a God who arbitrarily, despotically, and tyrannically chooses some to be saved and others to be damned? Calvinism is so destructive to the Biblical picture of God that it needs to be opposed with all the strength of Godfearing men. Even the Calvinists themselves admit how terrible their theory really is. Theodore Parker said, "The God of Calvinism is an almighty he cat, playing with the mice until he is ready to destroy them." (The Christian, May, 1879, p. 3) It is reported of Calvin himself: "Calvin confesses that this is a 'horrible decree.'" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, p. 2436) How could any Bible believer believe in Calvinism's theory of predestination and election? Truth Magazine, XVIII:27, p. 9-10

The Calvinist Doctrine of Predestination

By Mike Willis

There have been so much talk about Calvinism in recent studies among us, on such subjects as imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ, that I am getting the very definite impression that some among us have little acquaintance with what Calvinism really is. I would like to present a few articles on the Calvinist doctrine of election with the view of acquainting brethren with Calvinism and refuting it. Let us begin by defining the Calvinist doctrine of election. In order to do so, we must go back to the total picture of predestination.

John Calvin defined his doctrine of predestination as follows:

We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others (Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book III, Chapter XXI, Section 5).

As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction. We assert that, with respect to the elect, this plan was founded upon his freely given mercy, without regard to human worth; but by his just and irreprehensible but incomprehensible judgment he has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation, (Ibid. Book III, Chapter XXI, Section 7).

The Westminster Confession of Faith, which was adopted by the Presbyterian Church, states rather clearly this doctrine of predestination and election. Here is its statement of the doctrine:

3. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.

4. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

5. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace (Chapter III, Sections 3-5).

Hence, the doctrine of Calvinism asserts that God has predestinated some men to everlasting life and others to everlasting death. The doctrine further asserts that this foreordination to life or to death is conditioned upon God's sovereign will and not upon anything which He saw in man as to whether or not man would act to accept the riches of God's grace or not.

The System of Calvinism

Calvinism is a system so constructed that if one admits one of the propositions the rest of the doctrines of Calvinism are necessary conclusions. They remind me of a stack of dominos; if the first one falls, the rest are going to fall as well. One cannot accept part of Calvinism; he either accepts all of it or rejects all of it. The doctrines of inherited total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints are all dependent upon each other for their validity. Let me try to tie these all together in the next few paragraphs.

The doctrine of inherited total depravity asserts that all men have inherited the guilt of Adam's transgression. Having inherited Adam's sin, man is so tainted in his nature that he cannot do one good thing. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith, adopted in 1742 by the Baptist Church in America, states this as follows:

Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet, because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the Word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are sinful and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God; and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God (Section XVII, No. 7).

Hence, the unregenerated man cannot act pleasingly in obedience to God regardless of what he might do. He might want to obey the Lord but being tainted with Adam's sin, he cannot; he might want to believe in the Lord, but being afflicted with total depravity-tainted in all of his parts-he cannot.

With all men in this lost condition, God then decided to save some. (We must not forget that according to Calvinism, man is in this condition because God so willed it.) Without any action on the part of man, God predestinated that some would be saved and worked to effect their salvation. To these men, God illumined their heart through the work of the Holy Spirit in order that they might believe the gospel and be saved. To the rest, God withheld His Holy Spirit from them; hence, they cannot believe the gospel and be saved. To the Calvinist, faith is an act of God, not an act of man. God gives man faith; it does not simply come by the hearing of testimony and the will to believe. Rather, God gives faith to those whom He chooses to save.

When God chooses to give a man faith, He sends irresistible grace. According to this doctrine, man cannot help but believe the gospel and be saved. Man cannot thwart the purposes of God; hence, if God wishes for a man to be saved, he will be saved whether he personally wants to or not. Hence, God's gift of salvation is irresistible. The death of Jesus Christ was limited in its scope only to those whom God predestinated to salvation. The atonement of Jesus Christ is not universal in its scope. Rather, Jesus died only for the elect. God never intended to save all men; indeed, He willed that some go into eternal damnation for the praise of His glory. Hence, Jesus did not die to atone for the sins of these men. He died only for the elect.

Those whom God elected for salvation cannot ever fall from grace; once God has saved them, they are saved forever. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is dependent upon the doctrine of election. The Philadelphia Confession of Faith states this as follows:

The perseverance of the saints depends not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God, the Father, upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of the Spirit, and the seed of God within them, and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof. Notice how this statement ties the entire system together. Calvinists recognize that theirs is a system; one cannot accept a part of it without accepting the entire system.

Precisely at this point some of my brethren apparently do not know Calvinism. The doctrine of the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ to the believer's account is the theological justification for believing that the child of God cannot fall from grace. These brethren want to defend the doctrine of the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ to the believer's account but do not want to accept its logical conclusion that the child of God cannot fall from grace. Rather, they want this imputed righteousness to only cover sins of ignorance and weakness of the flesh; they do not believe that it will cover sins of open rebellion. In this respect, the Calvinists are more logical than my brethren by making Christ's perfect obedience cover all kinds of sins rather than dividing sin into venial and mortal categories. The other aspect of this matter which these brethren must also accept is the fact that this Calvinistic doctrine cannot be accepted by itself. It is part of a system. To accept it, my brethren are logically compelled to accept the whole system. Some are not too far from doing that. R. L. Kilpatrick, Editor of Ensign Fair, has already inherited total depravity as seen from this quotation:

The question of whether or not God's divine attribute of justice may be compromised in imputing righteousness to sinners has never bothered us too much because it is in our favor. But the idea that God could do the opposite and impute "guilt" to those who have never committed personal acts of sin does not set too well. We are inclined to ask, "How can God impute guilt to those who have never committed, positive acts of sin, namely those who have not reached the age of accountability? Doesn't sin have to be committed before it becomes accountable?"

Without the imputation of guilt upon the whole human race, there is no answer for the death of the innocent. Physical death most assuredly is a "consequence" of Adam's sin but we cannot overlook the fact that man's punishment for sin (Rom. 6:23) must rest upon a legal base. It is not enough to say that the death of the innocent is a mere "consequence", for, in the absence of guilt this would make God unjust.

If we are bothered by the negative aspect of imputation, should we not be just as bothered by the positive? In other words, wouldn't it be just as "unjust" for God to overcompensate (impute righteousness) as it would for Him to undercompensate (impute sin)? If it somehow fits within the framework of God's justice to declare righteous those who are unrighteous, then it somehow fits to declare guilt upon those who have never committed sin ("The Propagation of Adam's `Kind' "Ensign Fair, Vol. V, No. 11).

Notice that Brother Kilpatrick has accepted more of Calvinism than merely the imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ to the believer's account; he has now accepted the imputation of Adam's guilt to the account of all men, hence, inherited total depravity. His questions which he raises need to be answered by men such as Edward Fudge and Arnold Hardin. Brethren, how can you accept imputation of the perfect obedience of Christ while rejecting the imputation of Adam's guilt? You cannot consistently accept the one while rejecting the other. This is the reason that we have been charging for many months now that your doctrine of imputation logically leads to the total acceptance of Calvinism.

Conclusion

In the next few issues of Truth Magazine, I propose to examine the doctrine of election as propagated by Calvinists. I trust that you will now see the relevancy of studying Calvinism today. We are not dealing with a denominational doctrine which reared its ugly head in the sixteenth century and has since died. We are discussing matters which pertain to current issues among brethren. Although it is true that none of my brethren have yet accepted the doctrine of election as taught by Calvinists, they are presently accepting other doctrines of Calvinism. A better acquaintance with the total system should help to avert further apostasy in the coming years in this matter. We bid you give these articles your careful attention.

Truth Magazine XXII: 30, pp. 483-485

"Having Predestinated Us"

Donnie V. Rader

Ephesians 1:5 teaches predestination. That is undeniable. The text says, "having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." Just what does that mean? This passage has been greatly perverted by those who have bought John Calvin's thoughts on salvation.

Misunderstanding and Abuse of The Text

Calvinism teaches an unconditional and individual pre-destination. This is necessary in view of their doctrine of total depravity. This says that man is born in sin and is completely depraved. He is unable to do any good. He cannot believe unless God causes him to believe. Thus, any election (chosen to be saved) would have to be unconditional.

Consider how the Calvinists use Ephesians 1:5. In *The Doctrines Of Grace*, Lasserre Bradley, Jr. (speaker for Baptist Bible Hour) has a chapter on each of the major points of Calvinism. In his chapter on unconditional election he says, "election is a sovereign act of God whereby He chooses certain individuals from the fallen race to eternal life for the glory of His name. . . . One of the clearest definitions of the doctrine of election is found in the first chapter of Ephesians" (p. 14). He then quotes verses 3-5 and applies them to his chapter heading: "Unconditional Election." He adds, "By unconditional election, we mean that the choice of God was not conditional on anything within man" (p. 16).

Notice two things in the above quotes. Mr. Bradley says that Ephesians 1:5 teaches an election or predestination that is (1) unconditional and (2) individual. Thus, Calvinists wrest this text to say that before creation God arbitrarily and unconditionally selected certain individuals to be saved and certain individuals to be lost.

The Context of Ephesians 1:5

The book of Ephesians is about God's eternal purpose in Christ Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:9-10 and 3:10-11). Chapter one describes the blessings we have in Christ through God's eternal purpose. Chapter two describes the object of God's eternal purpose: salvation. Chapter three tells of the revelation of God's eternal purpose.

Back to chapter one. Verses 3-14 tell of the blessings that we have in Christ: (1) All spiritual blessings — v. 3, (2) We were chosen before the foundation of the world — v. 4, (3) We were predestinated — v. 5, (4) We receive God's grace — v. 6, (5) We have redemption through the blood of Christ — v. 7, (6) God has made known to us the mystery of his will — v. 9, (7) We have an inheritance — v. 11, (8) We receive the Holy Spirit — v. 13. The point I want us to see is that the context is dealing with God's eternal plan.

The Meaning of the Text

1. Predestinated defined. The word "predestinated" means to "mark out beforehand, to determine before, fore-ordain" (W.E. Vine, I:305). Darby's translation says "having marked us out beforehand" in Ephesians 1:5. Both the ASV and Young's Literal Translation render this phrase, "having foreordained us."

2. Two questions. No one can or should deny that our text teaches that God marked out our salvation beforehand. However, we must ask: (a) Is the predestination conditional or unconditional? (b) Did God select particular individuals or did he select salvation in Christ and all in him are chosen?

3. Conditional. Receiving salvation (being chosen or elected) is conditional upon our obedience to the gospel. Consider these simple texts.

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Heb. 5:9).

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city (Rev. 22:14).

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven (Matt. 7:21).

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace ... (Rom 4:16).

The selection is not particular individuals but choosing that those who are obedient will be saved. "God foreordained that all those who voluntarily choose to walk by faith in Christ shall be added to his family by adoption. God willed in his love that those in Christ should be his sons with the full benefit of inheritance" (C.G. "Colly" Caldwell, Truth Commentaries: Ephesians, 21). "God foreordained the provisions of salvation, the characters that should be saved, and the conditions and tests by which they would be saved. He left every man free to choose or reject the terms and provisions of salvation and in so doing to refuse to form the character God has foreordained to be his children and so predestined to everlasting life" (David Lipscomb, Gospel Advocate Commentaries: Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, 19-20). B.W. Johnson said, "The whole line of argument is general in-stead of particular" (Peoples' NT Commentary; On-line edition). This is much like a man predestinating (marking out beforehand) a secretary. His choosing is not unconditional nor is it a "marking out" of a particular individual. Before he hires anyone he marks out the qualifications. She must take shorthand, do word processing on the computer, have some knowledge of his type of business, have at least two years of college, and be in good health. She must meet these conditions. He did predestinate her. No, he did not arbitrarily choose Sally Jane. But he chose the qualities of the person who would be hired. Sally Jane meets those and is hired. We can easily see how that works with God's eternal plan.

Does John 6:37 Teach Calvinist “Predestination”?

By Wayne Jackson

“Please explain John 6:37. Who are those ‘given’ to Christ? Does this mean that they were selected by God before the foundation of the world, and are ‘elected’ — irrespective of their personal obedience?”

The passage under consideration reads as follows:

“All of those whom the Father gives me shall come unto me; and him who comes to me I will in no wise cast out.”

First, the Bible student needs to remind himself of this premise. The Scriptures are the inspired word of God (1 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Coming, then, from Jehovah as the ultimate source, they do not contradict themselves; instead, they are perfectly harmonious (Dt. 32:4; 1 Cor. 14:33a). When one encounters a passage, therefore, that may appear to conflict with plain-spoken texts contained elsewhere in Scripture, he must look carefully at the more obscure text and determine if there is a reasonable way to bring it into harmony with the other.

Having said that, let us further emphasize this point. No sacred text must be viewed in any way that would negate the following fundamental truths.

(1) Man has been granted free will (Mt. 23:37b; Jn. 5:39; 7:17; Rev. 22:17).

(2) His salvation is dependent upon his personal acceptance of divine grace, in obedience to the requirements of the gospel of Christ (2 Thes. 1:7-9; Heb. 5:8-9; 1 Pet. 4:17).

To suggest that God, before the world’s foundation, chose certain ones to be saved, and others to be lost, independent of a *personal reception of truth*, is a doctrine that cannot be sustained by the Scriptures — regardless of the number of sincere people who subscribe to it.

There are several crucial questions that must be addressed in connection with John 6:37. *When* did the “giving” of certain people to the Son take place? In *what sense* does the Father “give” these people to his Son? What *relationship* does the “giving” bear to their “coming” to him? And, what is the significance of the *promise*, “I will in no wise cast out”? Let us take each of these in order.

(3) *When* did the “giving” take place? The idea that believers were unconditionally “given” to Christ, in the eternal counsel of God before the foundation of the world, is negated by this very passage. The verb “gives” (didotin) is a present tense form, indicating action in progress; the Father, at that very time, was in the process of giving certain ones to his Son. This passage cannot possibly be employed, then, to establish a “done-deal” gift back in pre-world eternity. As Reynolds noted, “‘The giving’ implies a present activity of grace, not a foregone conclusion” (17, p. 201).

(4) In *what sense* did God “give” people to his Son? The terms “gift” and “given” are frequently employed idiomatically in the Scriptures to denote divine favor as expressed in Heaven’s redemptive work on man’s behalf — without there being any inclination of an “unconditional election.”

For example, David prophesied that Jehovah would “give” the “nations” (Gentiles) to Christ as an inheritance (Psa. 2:8; cf. Acts 4:25-26). Surely no one will contend that all Gentiles were unconditionally predestined to salvation irrespective of their response to divine truth. Even the most cursory examination of the book of Acts, from chapter 10 onward, reveals that the Gentiles were admitted into redemptive favor by yielding to the requirements of the gospel. Salvation was not as a consequence of an eternal decree independent of human obedience (cf. Acts 10:34-35,43; 11:14; 15:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:22-23).

(5) What *relationship* is there between the “giving” and the “coming” in John 6:37? There is a significant connection. The “giving” represents what God has provided in the great plan of human salvation; the “coming” represents the acceptance of that plan as manifested in the sinner’s obedience.

The subsequent context affords a wonderful illustration of this — with slightly different imagery, but with corresponding thought. Note the language of verses 44-45.

“No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Everyone who has heard from the Father, and has learned, comes unto me.”

In this passage, God's "drawing" is parallel to his "giving" of verse 37. And yet, clearly in vv. 44-45 the drawing is accomplished by hearing his word, learning, and coming to the Lord. Jehovah provides the redemptive information, but humanity must access it. By a comparison of these passages, therefore, one may logically conclude that this is how men are "given" to Christ as well. As Bloomfield once observed, "The term [gives] therefore (here and at ver. 39 and 65) must signify something compatible with the free agency of man" (I, p. 363).

When former Baptist minister Robert Shank issued his book, **Life in the Son**, it produced shock waves among Calvinists. Professor William Adams of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary characterized the book as "one of the most arresting and disturbing books" he had ever read (p. xiii). In this instructive volume, Shank has a special Appendix, "Whom Does the Father Give to Jesus?" in which he discusses this very passage. Therein the author fires this parting blast:

"There is nothing about God's gift of believers to be the heritage of the Son who died for them which somehow transforms the Gospel's 'whosoever will' into a 'whosoever must' and a 'most of you shan't.' There is nothing about it which binds men in the strait jacket of an antecedent decree of positive unconditional election and reprobation, while insisting that they are 'free'" (p. 339).

(6) Our final question is this: "What is the meaning of the affirmation, 'I will in no wise cast out'?" Some allege it suggests the dogma of the impossibility of apostasy, i.e., that no one "given" to Christ in the eternal scheme of things could ever be lost. The child of God, therefore, can never fall from grace — or so it is claimed.

The passage does not even remotely suggest this pernicious doctrine. Even Albert Barnes, who subscribed to the Calvinistic doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy (see his comment at Matthew 7:23), conceded the following, with reference to John 6:37b. "This expression does not refer to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, but to the fact that Jesus will not *reject* or *refuse* any sinner who comes to him" (pp. 246-247).

This admission, combined with the scriptural declarations that God wants all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9), and that "whosoever will" may come to Christ, are death blows to the theory that some were chosen by God for salvation, and others for damnation, before the world began. Perhaps no dogma has ever been so misguided.

Sir, I perceive, by your Discourse, that you come very nigh the Doctrine of Absolute and Inevitable Election and Reprobation. Why, to give you my Opinion freely, and as briefly as I can, I do believe, (a) That Election is the Eternal Decree of God, whereby "he freely and infallibly appointed, for the Glory of his own Name, to bring some Men to Everlasting life, through Christ." But what do you take to be the Moving Cause of this Election? (b) Neither foreseen Faith, Works, Freedom of Will, Nobleness of Birth, nor Merit of Christ, but only the good Pleasure of God. I can by no means concur in your Opinion; because, the Reason of Man's Salvation, in Scripture, is not said to be given barely from the Will of God, but from the Faith and Obedience of Men; for it is an Act of Rewarding Justice, as well, as Paternal Love and Mercy; and therefore we must distinguish very nicely between the Decree of God, and the Execution of it. For if Unbelievers, Disobedient, and Rebellious Persons be chosen to Salvation, and it is not in God's Power to revoke that Election, (as is concluded by some) I can see no Necessity of Faith and Obedience.

Then I perceive your Opinion is, that God (b) "hath Rejected some, as well as "Elected others?" Yes. What do you take to be the Moving Cause thereof? a) The good Pleasure of God. Then it is in vain to take any pains to be Religious for if Men be ordained to Destruction, will be to no purpose to strive, for they shall lose all their Labour; but if they preordained to Salvation, tho' they live never wickedly, it can't prejudice their Salvation, for they must come to their appointed End. But God has commanded us to use Mans; and such Commands are Encouragements, that God will not Men the End and Blessing to Them that use the Means as well as they can. But still, Sir, this does not remove the Stumbling-block out of my Way. For Men of your tell us that these Blessings are really given to none but the 'Elect ;' As for the Reprobates, "all Gifts whatsoever are unprofitable to them: "And the Churches, do in their Declaration, tell the World That they who 'are not Elected, all though they may be called by the Word... I must confess, that I don't think it possible for

a Reprobate to live a Godly Life, or an Elect Person to live always Lewdly and Loosely for the same God that ordains the End, 'ordains the: Means.

For who, but a Fool or a Madman, will trouble his Brain, or spend his Labour about Impossibilities? Now, if God gives a Man Power to do his Duty, then his Commands for Obeying are possible to be comply with; but if God gives us no Ability, either by with-holding his Talents, or not allowing Opportunity to improve them, I cannot see how God can be laid to render to every Man according to his Work. Neither can I think, that God would commit to my Trust and Stewardship Talents of Silver, and then expect that I should turn them into Talents of Gold. He knows his poor Creature hath no of such Virtue: he expects but an Improvement in the same kind of Talents: for you may as reasonably expect that a Man may beget an Angel, as that he should turn from Vice to Virtue, if he be a Reprobate, in Your Scene of that Word. For, how unreasonable is it to expect a Machine to act above the Sphere of its Activity? Will you expect a Watch should go twenty four Hours, when the Spring was made to go but twelve? or that a Gun should carry a thousand Bards, when the Charge that was given it will carry but five hundred? But the so are and must be the Consequences of your Doctrine...

REPLY: I believe there is a vast difference between Saving, and Common Grace: For I believe, I may have a Notional Knowledge of "Christ, and the Necessity of his Blood, and of, "the Excellency of Salvation, and yet perish; I may weep at the History of his Passion, when I read how he was used - by the Jews, and yet perish; I may come desirously to his Word and Ordinances, and yet perish; I may obey him in many Things, —escape much of the Pollutions of the World, by his Knowledge, and yet Perish; I may suffer much, and "lose much for him, parts of my Pleasures and Profits I may part with, in hopes of Salvation, and yet perish; I may be esteemed "by others, a Man zealous for Christ, and be loved and admired upon that account, and yet perish I may be a zealous Preacher of Christ and

Salvation, and reprove others for their Neglect of both, and lament the Sin of the World with most bitter and passionate Expressions, and yet perish ; I may verily think that I set more by Christ and Salvation, than by anything else whatsoever, and yet be mistaken, and perish.

RESPONSE: Again, (a) By Common Grace, a Man may not only know, but love God also; and love him as Merciful and Gracious, as better than the Creature, as best for him yea, he may love God, under the Notion of the chiefest Good, and most desirable End, in whose Sight and Fruition everlasting Happiness consistent; and by Common Grace, he may believe in Christ, or desire him as a Saviour, to free him from every Sin, and yet perish. If the Case be so, I pray, what can a Regenerate Man do more? And how is it possible to form a right Distinction between Saving, and Common Grace? All this would be but cold Comfort to a disconsolate Soul, to tell him or indeed, anyone else that he may love God, believe in Christ; and that, tho' Belief and Love are real Acts, and physically true, and have a Being, yet they are morally defective and insincere, not the same Things which have the Promises made to them in the Gospel; and consequently, are no Evidences of Spiritual Life in the Soul.

Edward Bird (theological writer.). Fate and destiny, inconsistent with Christianity: or, The horrid decree of absolute ... election and reprobation fully detected (Kindle Locations 565-663). [Kindle Edition](#).

Medieval Era Lapsarian Systems

Arminius' Reasons for Rejecting:

THIS DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION WAS/IS:

Repugnant to the nature of God,

Repugnant to the justice of God,

Repugnant to the goodness of God,

Contrary to the nature of man,

Diametrically opposed to the act of creation,

At hostility with the nature of eternal life,

Opposed to the nature of eternal death,

Inconsistent with the nature/properties of sin,

Repugnant to the nature of divine grace,

Injurious to the glory of God,

Highly dishonorable to Jesus Christ our Savior,

Hurtful to the salvation of men, and in open hostility to the ministry of the Gospel.

THE LAMBETH ARTICLES

1. God from eternity hath *predestined* certain men unto life; certain men he hath reprobated.
2. The moving or efficient cause of *predestination* unto life is not the foresight of faith, or of perseverance, or of good works, or any thing that is in the person *predestinated*, but only the good will and pleasure of God.
3. There is *predestinated* a certain number of the *predestinate*, which can neither be augmented nor diminished.
4. Those who are not *predestinated* to salvation shall be necessarily damned for their sins.
5. A true, living, and justifying faith, and the Spirit of God justifying [sanctifying], isn't extinguished, falleth not away; it vanisheth not away in the elect, either finally or totally.
6. A man truly faithful, that is, such a one who is endued with a justifying faith, is certain, with the full assurance of faith, of the remission of his sins and of his everlasting salvation by Christ,
7. Saving grace is not given, is not granted, is not communicated to all men, by which they may be saved if they will.

8. No man can come unto Christ unless it shall be given unto him, and unless the Father shall draw him; and all men are not drawn by the Father, that they may come to the Son.

9. It is not in the will or power of every one to be saved.*

**The Lambeth Articles were drawn up by Dr. William Whitaker, Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge, with input from Dr. Richard Fletcher (Bishop of London), Dr. Richard Vaughan (Bishop-elect of Bangor) and Humphrey Tyndall (Dean of Ely). The Articles were formally approved by the Archbishop of Canterbury (Dr. John Whitgift), the Archbishop of York (Dr. Matthew Hutton), the Bishop of London (Dr. Richard Fletcher), the Bishop-elect of Bangor (Dr. Richard Vaughan), and other prelates convened at Lambeth Palace, London (20 November, 1595). Dr. Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, sent the Lambeth Articles to the University of Cambridge a few days later (24 November, 1595), not as new laws and decrees, but as an explanation of certain points already established by the laws of the land. At the Hampton Court Conference of King James I and several prelates with the leaders of the Puritans (January, 1604), Dr. Reynolds made the request that "the nine orthodoxal assertions concluded on at Lambeth might be inserted into the Book of Articles." But the Lambeth Articles were never formally added to the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles (1563). They were, however, accepted by the Dublin Convocation of 1615 and engrafted on the Irish Articles (1615), which are believed to have been largely the work of James Ussher, who was to become Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland (1625-1656). In the Church of Ireland, the Lambeth Articles obtained for some time a semi-symbolical authority. It is stated that they were exhibited at the Dordt Synod (1618-1619) by the English deputies, as the judgment of the Church of England on the Arminian controversy.*

65 Errors of Predestination

01. Unconditional election is compromise with Calvinism.
02. Puts election before everything.
03. Limits salvation to a few.
04. Decreases the number saved.
05. It is non-progressive.
06. Produces fatalists.
07. Produces Hardshells.
08. Makes a hotbed for Universalists.
09. Causes infidels.
10. Puts all the responsibility on God.
11. It denies that men are born free and equal.
12. It destroys a free agency.
13. It will slacken our energies.
14. Sinners need feel absolutely no concern.

15. Christians should not worry.
16. Many people were never in any danger of being lost.
17. Many must go to Hell in spite of all they can do.
18. It lessens our love and respect for God.
19. Makes God's Word contradict itself.
20. Contradicts things already settled.
21. Puts Apostle Paul against the Bible.
22. Makes God partial.
23. Charges God with dishonesty.
24. Makes God unreasonable.
25. Makes God unjust.
26. Makes God a deceiver.
27. Non-elect thirst for salvation but have no chance.
28. Sends men to Hell for being non-elect.
29. Fights our own denomination. (Note: He's Baptist.)
30. Fights fraternalism.
31. Wants to run everything.
32. Discourages our best workers.
33. Stresses giving above everything.
34. Caused Gospel Competitive Missioners.
35. Puts too much stress on Joining the Church.

36. Non-elect never die in infancy.
37. No elect among heathens before Gospel reached.
38. Makes the Jews a puzzle.
39. All the elect are not saved.
40. All sins past, present & future forgiven when saved.
41. God does not pardon sins.
42. No use for sinners to pray.
43. Cuts the Devil out of a job.
44. Too much guess work.
45. "Hope" I am saved.
46. No "mays" or "mights."
47. Interferes with legitimate marriage.
48. Frustrates the second coming of Christ.
49. It nullifies the Judgment.
50. Opposes women's work.
51. More dangerous than straight Hardshellism.
52. Puts grace before everything.
53. Could be no unpardonable sin.
54. Causes radical changes in our revivals.
55. Kills the old-time revival.
56. Kills the evangelist's message.

57. Kills our prayers.
58. Kills our best songs.
59. Cuts out altar work.
60. Casts reflection on the old preachers.
61. Masses do not know the plan of salvation.
62. Destroys spirituality.
63. Kills all the emotion in religion.
64. Causes "Holy Rollers."
65. Contrary to our experience.

Source: "Sixty-Five Errors of Unconditional Election" by Everett G. Sisk, Baptist Seminary Instructor of the Little Bethel Baptist Association, written & published in 1925.

DISPUTING ELECTION

- Universalism & Reincarnation
- Salvation By Grace – Infant Inclusive
- Choice Conditioned By Imputed Faith

- **Salvation By Grace & Human Choice**

- Salvation Only To The Elect & All Infants
- Salvation Only To Elect & Elect Infants
- Fatalism: No Elect, No God, & No Hope

The Potter and His Vessels

God has molded each one of us into a vessel. But he has given each of us a mind of our own to either respect our maker (the Potter), or reject him.

There is a song we sing from time to time entitled "Have Thine Own Way." The first stanza of the song says "Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me After Thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still." What a beautiful song this is and when we as God's creation fully realize and understand that we are simply God's vessels and that he is the Potter (our maker), then we can humble ourselves to the point of doing whatever service we have been molded to do for the Lord!

The Vessels of God

God is truly our Potter. We can read this in the book of Jeremiah 18 verses 1-12, and also in Romans 9:22 where Paul says, "What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction . . ." Here, Paul likens us to the vessels of God and that is truly what we are. Have you ever noticed a potter working with his clay, molding that clay into a fine vessel? There is a lot of time and patience that is involved in the potter's work. Likewise, God has spent much time and effort in the creation of his vessels, you and me. In the verses pointed out above in Jeremiah and in Romans we can read where God is long-suffering with his vessels and does the very best he can with them. It is through us (his vessels) that we can see the riches of God's glory. "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23).

There are all kinds of vessels out there. There are some vessels of wrath (Rom 9:22), and there are even dishonorable vessels. Paul says, "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (Rom. 9:21). He echoes those same words in 2 Timothy 2:20. But we can see from Romans 9:21 that there are also vessels of honor and of mercy in Romans 9:23.

We Are Individual Vessels Made By God

God has molded each one of us into a vessel. But he has given each of us a mind of our own to either respect our maker (the Potter), or reject him. The choice is entirely left up to us. That is why it is so important for us to realize that had it not been for "the Potter," we would not even be here today.

Therefore, knowing this, why is it that so many still choose not to honor the very one who allowed us this opportunity to live and enjoy our short time on this beautiful earth that he also created? We can become honorable vessels unto the Lord by heeding the call. Paul says in Romans 9:23-24: "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?" One heeds the call of God by simply obeying his commandments (John 14:15).

Characteristics of An Honorable Vessel

The characteristics of an honorable vessel is that one is sanctified, fit for use, and prepared for all good works. This is what the apostle Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:21: "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work." One must purge himself from evil and join himself with doing the things of honor, approved unto God almighty! Then when one proves himself to be a vessel of honor unto the Lord certain glory will result as Paul said in Romans 9:23. What is that glory? The same glory as Paul was sensing when he told Timothy, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8). When we prove ourselves a worthy vessel, one that is serving the purpose that God designed for us to do, then we can enjoy a life eternal with God our Potter. But when we decide to do our own thing and rebel against our maker then our end is certain destruction (Rom. 9:22). Why not let "The Potter" (God) have his own way with his vessel (you and me)? – *Richie Thetford*

*Calvin's Contribution To The
Destiny & Determinism Debate:
HUMAN MORAL RESPONSIBILITY*

Reformation Theology

*Fate & Free Will:
Agent Causation
- Versus -
Causal Determinism
- Versus -
Classical Compatibilism*

Reformation Theology

THE DIVINE OMNISCIENCE

- *“We must grant that God foresees nothing as absolutely and inevitably certain which he has made contingent; and because he has designed it to be contingent, therefore, he can not know it as absolutely and inevitably certain. I conclude that God, although omniscient, is not obliged, in consequence of this, to know all that he can know, no more than he is obliged, because he is omnipotent, to do all that he can do.”*
(Adam Clarke, Commentary on Ac. 2:47).

What about verses that suggest that God has learned something He didn't know?

Anthropomorphic expressions of God's response to man's actions.

- *And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. (Genesis 11:5;)*
- *“I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know.”*
(Gen. 18:21)

Anthropomorphic expressions of God's will in revelation

- *“And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind. (Jeremiah 7:31)*
- *and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind; (Jeremiah 19:5)*
- *“And they built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jeremiah 32:35)*

*God's foreknowledge is prescient,
knowing reality before it is real,
people before they exist, and days
and events before they occur.*

- He knows what His purpose is
- *The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
the plans of His heart from generation
to generation. (Psalm 33:11)*

Difficulties with God's foreknowledge

Intro: The doctrine of God's omniscience is a powerful truth; but it is also a Truth from which men have derived gross misconceptions and misunderstandings. Let's consider three viewpoints together.

Is God's foreknowledge absolute and predetermining?

John Calvin, following Augustine, affirmed that to whatever extent God knows man's action, he does then also make them necessary. Hence, man's actions are foreordained of God; some are foreordained to life while others are foreordained to salvation.

“All are not creation on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or to death. This God has testified, not only in the case of single individuals; he has also given a specimen of it in the whole posterity of Abraham, to make it plain that the future condition of each nation was entirely at his disposal.” (Institutes, Book 3, Chapter 21, Sec. 5 as quoted in McGuiggan's commentary on Romans) “Reformation theology has contended that the divine foreknowledge contains the ingredient of divine determination. The Reformers claimed that God indeed foreknows who will believe, because believing in Christ is not a human achievement, but a divine gift imparted to men by God's grace and Spirit. Thus God's foreknowledge is not merely prescience, but knowledge that itself determines the event. That is, in Reformation thought what God foreknows He foreordains.” (ISBE)

It is true that God has foreseen what in His counsels He will do. God foreknew that His Son would die for the sins of mankind. This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. (Acts 2:23)

God foreknew and thus selected those who believed in Him would be His people. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..to those who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

Peter does not affirm that God's choice was dependent upon the merit of those who believed or that God foresaw something in people that prompted His choice. He only affirms that God set the boundaries of salvation and those to whom He writes had fulfilled God's purpose by believing in Jesus. God foreknew that those He chose would have an inheritance with Him. Also, we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, (Ephesians 1:11)

When God exercised His sovereign right to choose who His people would be and to set the terms of their inclusion, there is in that sense a predestination or foreordination that occurs. This no one can deny and the Bible plainly affirms.

But the Calvinistic doctrine of foreordination and election contradicts Biblical affirmations about both man and God.

It contradicts God's own stated will for all mankind. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

It contradicts God's statements about man's accountability and responsibility to respond to God. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (Matthew 23:37) As McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia appropriately says concerning the actions of creatures endowed with free will: "If such actions do not take place then we reach a necessitating eternal decree, which in fact, the predestinarian contends of; but it unfortunately brings after its consequences which no subtleties have ever been able to shake off—that the only actor in the universe is God himself, and that the only distinction among events is that one class is brought to pass by God directly and the other indirectly, not by the agency, but by the mere instrumentality, of His creatures." (Watson)

Must we conclude God's foreknowledge is limited because of the nature of free will?

One response is to contend God's omniscience must be qualified to mean "God knows what He chooses to know", affirming that God chooses not to know contingent events such as acts of man's free moral agency. Brents, in a vigorous anti-Calvinistic work, argues that God simply does not know what men may choose to do. He ends his chapter on God's foreknowledge by quoting Adam Clarke:

"We must grant that God foresees nothing as absolutely and inevitably certain which he has made contingent; and because he has designed it to be contingent, therefore, he cannot know it as absolutely and inevitably certain. I conclude that God, although omniscient, is not obliged, in consequence of this, to know all that he can know, no more than he is obliged, because he is omnipotent, to do all that he can do."
(Commentary on Acts 2:47).

This is unsatisfactory because the Scripture clearly reveal that God foreknew certain things that require knowledge of individual decisions.

That Pharaoh would harden his heart (Exodus 7:4).

That Cyrus would decree the return of the Israelites (Isaiah 44:28).

That the Jewish people would reject His Son and die for man's sin (Acts 2:23).

That God knows who the saved will be (Revelation 17:8).

***What about verses that suggest that God has learned something He didn't know?
Anthropomorphic expressions of God's response to man's actions.***

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. (Genesis 11:5;) "I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not, I will know." (Genesis 18:21)

Did God have to come to earth to know what men were doing?

Surely not in view of texts that show that He sees all. Hence, these expressions are anthropomorphic, suggesting to Abraham that God's judgment of the city was founded on actual knowledge obtained by first-hand experience. And he said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." (Genesis 22:12)

Did God not know whether Abraham would sacrifice His son? Is it possible that the expression anthropomorphically suggests a confirmation & a promise, like punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, based on actual first-hand experience? In both texts, God communicates to His creatures in this way that He is fully aware of their attitudes/actions.

Anthropomorphic expressions of God's will in revelation.

"And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind. (Jeremiah 7:31) and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind; (Jeremiah 19:5)

"And they built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. (Jeremiah 32:35)

The point of all these texts is that the activity of human sacrifice was not a part of God's deliberative purpose for man in commanding man's worship and service.

God's foreknowledge is complete but not determinative.

Perhaps a better solution is to affirm that God's foreknowledge is prescient, knowing reality before it is real, people before they exist, and days and events before they occur. He knows what His purpose is. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation. (Psalm 33:11)

He knows through whom those purposes would be accomplished. And not only this,

but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." (Romans 9:10-12)

He knows the outcome of the redemptive plan not merely in theoretical terms but with specificity to individuals...

I will give thanks to Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139) And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. (Revelation 17:8)

It is not necessary to make God's knowledge of man's actions causative. Simply because God knows what men may do doesn't cause the action to take place. Man still has freedom of will. He is the cause of his actions; but God knows the action. His knowledge of man's choices does not make the outcome necessary but it does make it certain because God's knowledge is perfect. In this view God's knowledge is complete; mankind's free will is preserved. There is an adequate basis for prophetic statements in Scripture.

How God knows these things is not explained to us; but perhaps it is a quality of God's eternal nature. He lives in the eternal now; therefore, both past, present, and future (dimensions of time) are not relevant in describing Him.

Conclusion: Man's understanding or misunderstanding of the omniscience of God has played a key role in the forging of the doctrine of salvation found in many churches. Even if God knows the outcome of His redemptive plan, each person must exercise his free will. You are not destined to perish in hell by God's choice; but we may very well be destined for such a place by our choice! We don't need to wait for God to do something. He has done all that His nature allows to save our souls. Now we must decide whether we will be one of those who He elected to salvation or whether we are a vessel of wrath endured by God for final destruction. I would hate to think that I lived my whole life only, for it to be said about me, that God endured my existence only so He could save others around me, but not me!

1 Peter 1:1-2 – Foreknowledge

By Wayne Jackson

In the salutation of his first letter, Peter wrote: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect. . . according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1,2). Note that the epistle is addressed to “the elect.” The Bible theme of election has been made unnecessarily obscure by baseless theological theories (e.g., Calvinism, which teaches that God, before the creation of the world, arbitrarily elected those who would be lost and saved, irrespective of obedience or disobedience on their part). There are several facts regarding this matter suggested in this context.

1. Election is according to the *foreknowledge* of God. This simply means that God, before the foundation of the world, elected (chose, determined) to provide a plan of redemption for man (whom he knew would fall from his initial holy estate), and that this choosing would be upon the basis of those who are “in him” (Christ) as opposed to those who are not (Ephesians 1:4).
2. From the divine side, election is accomplished by virtue of the *sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ*. This is a reference to the atoning death of the Son of God, who was foreshadowed by the animal offerings of the Old Testament economy (cf. Exodus 24:8; Hebrews 9:13,14). Jesus’ death satisfied the justice of God which demanded the payment for the penalty of sin (cf. Romans 3:24-26).
3. Our election involves a *sanctification of the Spirit*, i.e., by means of the Spirit’s guidance (through the word of God – John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26; 6:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:4,5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13,14) we learn of our need to be sanctified (separated from the world unto God’s service), hence, we are led to accept the heavenly election.
4. The design of Jehovah’s interest in our behalf is that we might be motivated *unto obedience*, since it is by means of our obedience that our souls are purified. (1 Peter 1:22).

So, election involves: God’s redemptive plan, Christ’s sacrificial death, the Holy Spirit’s revelation of the truth, and man’s obedience to the same!



The Great Courses Company

Great Philosophical Debates

FREE WILL & DETERMINISM

When we try to make a difficult decision, it usually seems like we have genuine options open to us. After we make our decision, it seems like we could have decided differently. However, when we think about the world more generally, it seems things happen *because* of previous factors. We tend to think that there has to be an explanation for every event, and perhaps this applies even to our decisions. The threat to free will comes from the idea that our actions happen of necessity; that is, they are inevitable. These considerations are at the heart of the problem of free will and determinism.

The problem of free will & determinism is one of the great philosophy problems. It has its roots in the earliest texts, yet the problem continues to inspire debate. As far as we know, every culture in every age has regarded people as making free choices and being responsible for their actions. Like most great philosophical problems, the problem of free will and determinism is connected with a number of other fundamental questions. The issue over determinism is a basic question about the nature of the universe. If we have free will, then this tells us something important about the world – that at least part of the world isn't determined. The problem of free will also is tied up with how we think of ourselves. We feel proud of our accomplishments and guilty for our misdeeds. The problem of free will also connects in obvious ways with deep ethical issues. If we don't have free will, then it seems like we can't be morally responsible for our actions.

PREDESTINATION IN HISTORY

Augustine (354-430)

He was the Bishop of Hippo (a city in Northern Africa, present-day Annaba, Algeria). An influential Christian thinker, his works continue to be studied. In his book *Confessions*, Augustine concluded, among many other things, that every area of the human nature was corrupted by the effects of sin.

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

As a German priest and professor of theology, his objections to church doctrine and practice initiated the Reformation. In *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther debated the great philosopher Erasmus of Rotterdam. Luther argued that original sin—Adam and Eve's sin in Eden—had so corrupted human nature, that now unaided, we are unable to do any good. Any righteousness we may have comes from God's grace.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

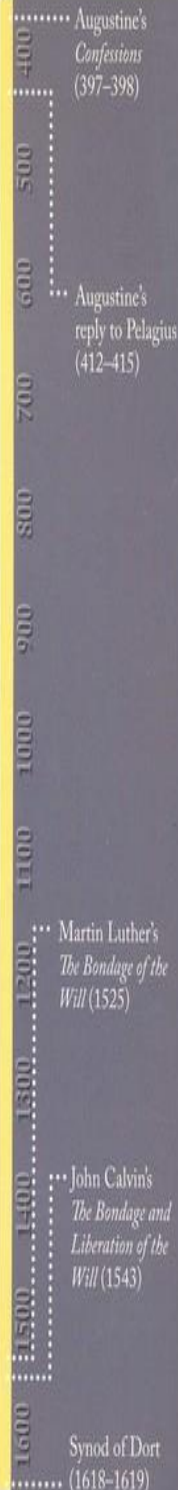
As a Reformer, Calvin had a profound influence on Protestant theology. Calvin believed that all the glory of salvation belonged to God. Calvin brought God's sovereignty and mercy together in the historical doctrine of predestination: After the fall, humanity stood condemned before God. In his mercy, God decided to save many people from this condemnation; in his sovereignty, God chose and called those who would be saved. Humans, being unable to reach out to God, received God's salvation without deserving it. That this election happens according to God's will is proof of God's sovereignty, mercy, and love. Calvin's views are well presented in his debate with the Dutch theologian Albert Pighius and in his book *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*.

Reformed churches

These are churches that follow Calvinistic teachings. They originated in countries like the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, and Germany. The Presbyterian churches, also Calvinistic, originated in the United Kingdom.

Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

Almost ten years after the death of Arminius (see next page), the Reformed theologians in the Netherlands called a Synod (assembly) in the town of Dordrecht. This synod responded to a document named "The Remonstrance of 1610," which Arminius's disciples drafted. The *Canons of Dort*, a confessional document for Reformed churches, outlines their view on God's sovereignty, election, grace, and salvation.



FREE WILL IN HISTORY

Pelagius (354-420/440)

Pelagius argued that sin had no effects on human nature. In his view, humans retained their ability to choose between good and evil. Since humans could choose good, Pelagius proposed that humans could act in a way that they can obtain God's grace. This grace would lead them to salvation and holiness. The church agreed with Augustine and declared Pelagius's teaching heretical.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

(1466-1536). He was a Dutch scholar, known for his humanist and theological works. Although an early sympathizer of Luther's ideas, Erasmus objected to Luther's views about human free will. He presents his views in his book, *The Freedom of the Will*.

Albert Pighius

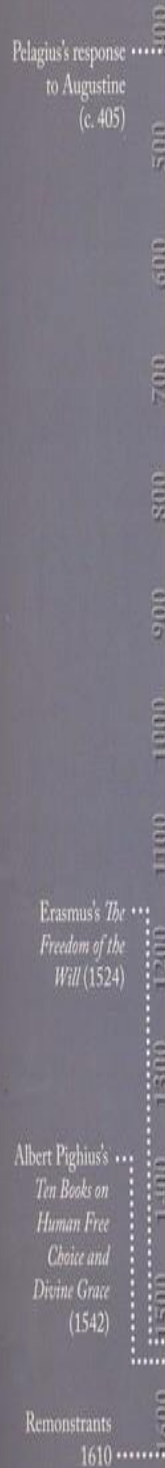
(1490-1542). He was a Dutch Catholic theologian, mathematician, and astronomer. Among his works, Pighius argued against the Reformation. In his *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*, Pighius argued that original sin did not corrupt human nature.

Arminius (1560-1609)

Arminius agreed with Calvin and the other Reformers that God's grace is essential for the beginning, the continuation, and consummation of faith. He agreed that human nature was so tainted that it is impossible for people to seek God on their own. However, Arminius considered that Christ's death conveys grace to all people. This grace, which John Wesley later called "prevenient grace," enables people to choose or reject God's offer of salvation. Arminius rejected Pelagius's views, in favor of the position that, although God's prevenient grace allows people to exercise their free will, humans cannot do such choosing without God's grace.


Remonstrants

The term was used for Arminius's students who drafted the strong protest against the Reformed church's teachings about election, predestination, and God's grace. Their writing became the basis for Arminian theology that many still hold.






FREE WILL
...
"...CHOOSE TODAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE"
- JOSHUA 24:15



PREDESTINATION
...
"THOSE WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED..."
- ROMANS 8:29



THE ORIGINATORS

JACOBUS ARMINIUS

JOHN CALVIN

N.T WRIGHT
BILL JOHNSON
JOHN WESLEY

MODERN DAY CHAMPIONS

TIM KELLER
JOHN PIPER
MATT CHANDLER

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

FREE WILL IS THE POWER AND ABILITY TO MAKE CHOICES.

PREDESTINATION IS THE DIVINE PREDETERMINING OF DESTINY.



FW // EXAMPLE

MAN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS DECISIONS. IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ADAM AND EVE WERE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR SINFUL CHOICE. C.S.LEWIS: "THE HAPPINESS WHICH GOD DESIGNS FOR HIS HIGHER CREATURES IS THE HAPPINESS OF BEING FREELY, VOLUNTARILY UNITED TO HIM AND TO EACH OTHER IN AN ECSTASY OF LOVE"

PD // EXAMPLE

THERE ARE NO ACCIDENTS. EVERYTHING IS ON PURPOSE AND PART OF GOD'S PLAN. "BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB I KNEW YOU" (JEREMIAH 1:5) RC SPROUL: WHAT PREDESTINATION MEANS, IN ITS MOST ELEMENTARY FORM, IS THAT OUR FINAL DESTINATION, HEAVEN OR HELL, IS DECIDED BY GOD NOT ONLY BEFORE WE GET THERE, BUT BEFORE WE ARE EVEN BORN. IT TEACHES THAT OUR ULTIMATE DESTINY IS IN THE HANDS OF GOD.

Issue 1: FREE WILL AND TOTAL INABILITY

What are the effects of sin in humanity? How does human sin relate to human free will? Can humans choose to move closer to God on their own?

Points of Agreement

Christians agree that the effect of sin on the human nature is fatal and reaches every area of our nature. Arminians and Calvinists agree on the total inability or depravity of humanity. In other words, total inability means that without the prior intervention of God's grace, humans cannot come to him on their own. Total depravity does not mean that humans are as sinful or evil as they can be. It means that the entirety of the human being is tainted, in one way or another, by sin.

Biblical Passages

- ✘ *As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10-12).*
- ✘ *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (Eph 2:1).*

DEPRAVITY

Human sin affects every area of humanity in every person. It means that people continue to make choices, but every choice is tainted by the effects of sin.

Arminianism

Although the effects of sin are devastating, God did not leave humans in that helpless state. God extended his grace to all humans to enable them to come to him. This measure of grace, called "prevenient grace," allows human free will to accept God's call. However, the will is also free to reject this call. Faith, then, as a gift of God, grants the power to believe. However, people must choose to exercise this faith in the act of belief. Until this faith is exercised, the Holy Spirit does not make a new heart. Faith, then, precedes the new birth.

Before God's graceful intervention, humans are unable to believe. Once God's grace, "prevenient grace," arrives, people are enabled to believe or to reject. Humans are held accountable based on their free choice of accepting or rejecting God's call.

Some Arminians believe that the effects of sin, although damaging to the extreme, were not fatal. Human nature retained a faint pulse and remained alive. Most Arminians today do not hold this view.

Biblical Passages

- ✦ *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself (John 12:32).*
- ✦ *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).*
- ✦ *This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).*

FREE WILL OR PREDESTINATION?

The expression "being saved" points to the beginning of a wonderful relationship with God. These words mean much to Christians because they encompass much: A new relationship with God and other people, the renewal of our hearts and minds, the growth of faith and obedience in our lives, and much more. How does this salvation happen? More importantly, once we are saved, can we lose our salvation? Is sharing the good news of the gospel even necessary? Do we have to do anything to be saved?

Before seeing two ways to answer these questions, let's focus on the points with which all Christians agree. Regarding God's merciful work of salvation, Christians agree that:

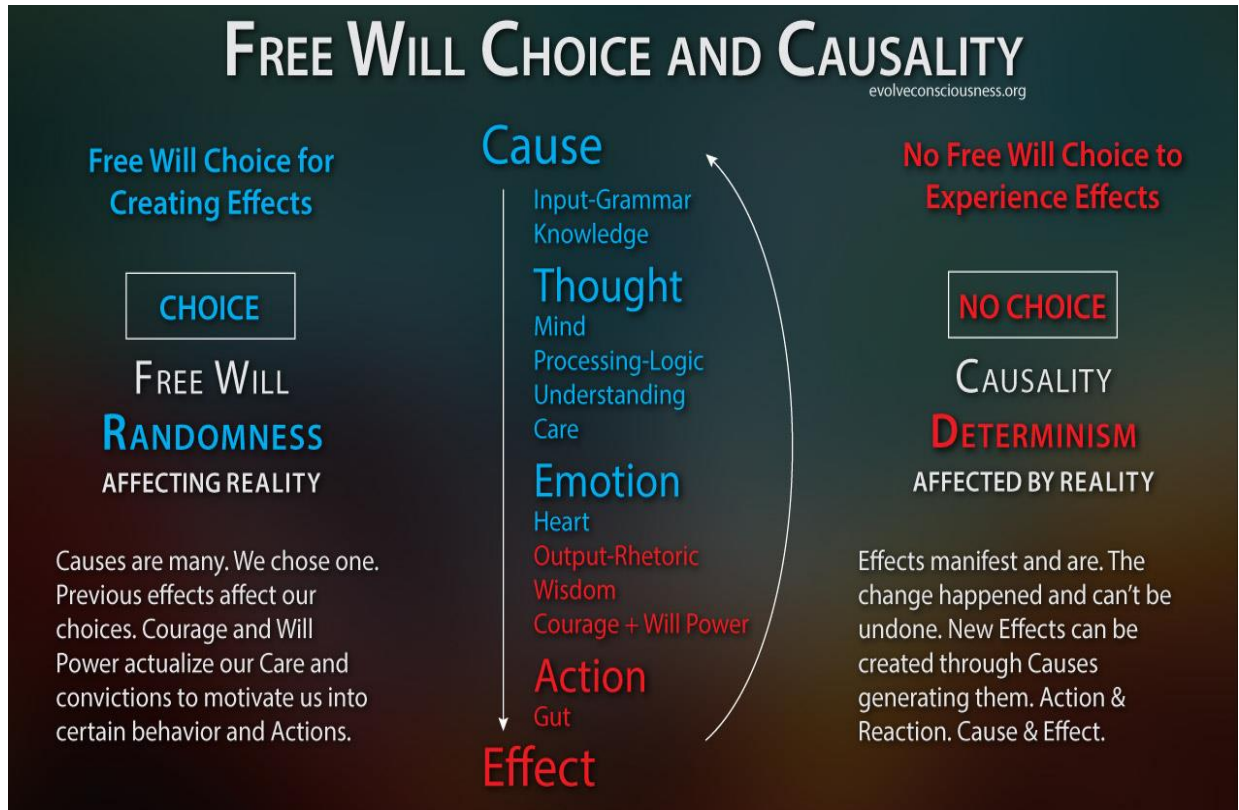
1. Because of sin, all humans need God's grace.
2. Salvation from sin and condemnation is an act of God.
3. Salvation is accomplished only by grace through faith in Christ.
4. Works, good works or works of the Law, cannot lead one to salvation.

However, Christians do not agree on how God's sovereignty and human freedom (free will) relate to each other in connection to salvation. Two views answer these questions quite differently: from a Calvinistic (predestination) or an Arminian view (free will). Although the answers available are not simple, they are important for our understanding of God's mission in the world and our responsibility as believers.

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON

This pamphlet will define and explain the terms in the following table.

See:	Arminianism	Calvinism
p. 4-5	Total depravity and free will (also called human ability)	Total depravity, also called "radical depravity" or "total inability"
p. 6-7	Conditional election	Unconditional election, also called "sovereign election"
p. 9-10	Universal redemption (also called general atonement)	Limited atonement, also called "particular, purposeful, or definite atonement"
p. 10-11	Grace can be resisted	Irresistible grace, also called "efficacious or effectual grace"
p. 12-13	Possibility of falling from grace	Perseverance of the saints, also called "preservation of the saints or believers"



Zeno's Paradox and the Problem of Free Will

John Anderton, the protagonist played by Tom Cruise in Steven Spielberg's science fiction film [Minority Report](#), finds himself in a nightmarishly paradoxical situation. As a policeman for the futuristic Pre-Crime office, Anderton relies on an elaborate information arrangement system to see crimes before they happen, and arrest the would-be perpetrators.¹ The accuracy of Pre-Crime's predictions seems infallible, until it forecasts that Anderton himself will soon become a murderer. Anderton does not even recognize the future murder victim, so how could he possibly kill the man? How can he prove his innocence, especially since the system seems to have perfect predictive accuracy? Is it possible that the system is right, and Anderton will become a murderer for reasons beyond his own knowledge or understanding? If Anderton is to avoid his apparent destiny as a convicted murderer, he must hope that the astonishing predictive accuracy of Pre-Crime leaves some room for personal freedom. He must hope that deterministic laws do not preclude the possibility of free will.

Minority Report, based on a Philip K. Dick story, grapples with the classic philosophical problems of free will. Do human beings have free will, or do physical laws determine our destinies? How can the novelty of free choice truly exist in a universe organized with such clock-like regularity? These questions have intrigued and annoyed contemplative folks for millennia, and have provided the raw material for weighty philosophical treatises and science fiction movies alike. Yet, after centuries of debate, the definitive answers to the free will dilemma have yet to be discovered. Is this problem, as some philosophers have maintained, ultimately beyond human understanding? Perhaps we need to take a new, closer look at the problem and its history. We may be able to identify conceptual flaws in the logic of many free-will arguments. More important, we may be able to find fruitful parallels between the apparent puzzles at the center of the free will debate and other difficult philosophical puzzles, such as the motion paradoxes of Zeno. Such an inquiry may yield insights relevant to the historical problem of free will and its possible solution.

The Problem: A Brief History

To the ancient Greeks, human destiny was subject to forces beyond our control, and tragedy resulted from the heroic but useless struggle against the dictates of destiny. After the beginning of the Christian era, theologians developed new concerns. They worshipped an all-powerful and all-knowing God, but soon found that the existence of this God would have rather negative implications for human freedom. If God really knew everything, he would have to know the course of all history. But if this were true, we humans seemed to be simply going through the motions like characters in a novel. We are like the protagonists of Tom Stoppard's brilliant play [Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead](#), who do not fully comprehend their status as minor [Hamlet](#) characters lacking true personal freedom.² Just as the audience attending a performance of a widely read play knows the fates of every character, God knows the future details of every human being alive, because he himself authored our destinies.

A deterministic universe also seemed to pose serious threats to morality and accountability. If we do not freely choose our actions, how can we be responsible for good or evil deeds we happen to perform? What sense could it even make to punish a criminal for breaking the law if he could not have done otherwise? Even theological doctrines, such as the rebellion of Satan and the crucifixion of Jesus, seem to become uncomfortably troublesome upon further reflection. For if Satan's fall and Christ's acceptance of the cross were ordained to happen exactly as they did, how could we justifiably despise the Prince of Lies or love Jesus? Sin could not truly exist, since the existence of sin depends on the existence of choice. Adam and Eve might have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, but they could not have violated God's will if God is omnipotent. The fall of man seems, in this light, to have been something thrust upon us by necessity, not by choice. Even worse, it becomes difficult to morally justify God's actions in history, since He must know that some of his actions will place his most beloved creation in horrible pain and misery.³

Theologians eventually devised various compromise solutions to the free will dilemma. Religious thinkers modified their definitions of omnipotence to include the possibility that human actions could be free and simultaneously known in advance by a supreme being. Foremost among these theologians was Thomas Aquinas, who worried that much disparagement of free will might lead people to doubt the reality of sin, and abdicate responsibility for their actions.⁴ These new thinkers stressed that God's vast knowledge of reality did not imply that human actions were not free. Just as an observer in a 15th story apartment window can see that two automobiles are unwittingly driving on a collision course, God's vantage point allows him to see the consequences of our actions, even when they are hidden from our own senses. We choose our actions based on our best available information, but simply don't know enough to accurately foresee the outcomes of our actions. Adam and Eve were responsible for their choice after all.⁵

Yet another, more philosophical objection to free will states that its existence is entirely dependent on the possibility of "uncaused causes." That is, if we are honestly to consider ourselves free, then we ourselves must be the only cause of our actions. We must be able to demonstrate that we do not act the way we do because prior events compelled us. But this is not reasonable, say the objectors, because every action in the material world can be traced to prior causes, and these causes themselves originate from prior causes. All causes are part of a chain of events stretching back to the very beginning of the universe.

All right, but we are people, not material objects. An inanimate clump of minerals cannot choose what it is going to do, but we can, because of our human consciousness. The materialist is not satisfied with this rebuttal. He will state that human beings are made of matter that follows the same physical laws governing everything else in the universe. We are made of atoms, and the behavior of these atoms follows known laws and results from physical causes. When we trace the histories of all the bits of matter comprising our physical bodies, we see that the movement of this matter followed inexorably from a long series of perfectly material determinants. The thing we call our mind is merely the sum of myriad interactions of material particles following immutable natural laws. With a sufficiently intimate understanding of our minds at the material level, we could no longer imagine we are acting freely.

To determinists, consciousness gives each of us a sense of personal identity that allows us to perceive that we are somehow separate and independent from the rest of the world. We seem to be free agents, exempt from external constraints. But as Leo Tolstoy observed in *War and Peace*, we cannot easily consider ourselves free when we recall prior sequences of events that limited our choices and compelled us toward certain courses of action.⁶ The military generals in Tolstoy's epic imagine they are controlling the fates of entire armies and even nations, but countless historical contingencies they are unable or unwilling to consider rigidly determine their every action. What it all comes down to, as philosophers from Friedrich Nietzsche to Galen Strawson have argued, is that we cannot be a *causa sui*, or the ultimate cause of ourselves. We had no say in the forces that produced us, and so we cannot be free in any ultimate sense of the word.⁷

Free will is simply an illusion conjured by our ignorance of the causes affecting our behavior. This is what Baruch Spinoza meant when he quipped that if a rock possessed consciousness, it would believe that it fell of its own free will.⁸ The deeper we look at the various determinants bearing upon our actions, the more free will seems to be an abstraction without meaning in the real world. This seems to be true even if, as philosopher P. F. Strawson argued in a celebrated paper, belief in free will is a deeply ingrained component of human ethical reflection — we believe in free will because denying freedom undercuts the health of our social relationships.⁹ Someone who could know the myriad effects impacting our behavior would see that our every action is completely determined and predictable. As the mathematician Laplace famously argued,

An intellect which at any given moment knew all the forces that animate nature and the mutual positions of the beings that comprise it, if this intellect were vast enough to submit its data to analysis, could condense into a single formula the movement of the greatest bodies of the universe and that of the lightest atom: for such an intellect nothing could be uncertain, and the future just like the past would be present before its eyes.¹⁰

The Search for Solutions

Undeterred, champions of free will continue to defend their theory from the clutch of determinism. One common approach is to cite the importance of non-material factors on human behavior, such as culture. We are more than mere collections of atoms or genes. We are also social creatures capable of adapting to a wide range of cultural habitats. Hasn't anthropology taught us that human nature is remarkably malleable?

Determinists object that culture has no relevance to the question of free will. They argue, quite correctly, that all choices ultimately stem from cognitive activity in the brain, which remains a material entity subject to material laws. Furthermore, it wouldn't even matter if culture allowed us to bypass our material structures altogether. If our behavior results from cultural factors, it is still determined by external factors, and we still do not freely choose our actions.

Modern opponents of determinism invoke quantum mechanics as proof that chance events have their place in nature. In quantum mechanics, we can only cite probabilities for finding particles in a particular place, and cannot determine the position of a particle in advance. Might quantum mechanics provide a means of escape from a determined existence? According to physicist Roger Penrose, in his popular book [The Emperor's New Mind](#),¹¹ quantum mechanics enables us to escape from a completely knowable and determined existence by injecting randomness into the very nature of consciousness.

Determinists respond that not every scientist thinks that quantum mechanics is a truly nondeterministic theory. Some physicists maintain that quantum mechanics equations contain hidden variables that cause determinism to prevail, despite the seeming randomness in experimental results. And even if quantum mechanics is random, how does that help the case for free will? To most people, freedom involves more than performing random actions or responding randomly to stimuli. We want to be able to *choose* our actions, not simply behave haphazardly. A life completely subject to the whims of quantum chance is just as unattractive as a life governed by predictability.

Free Will and Zeno's Paradox

The arguments for and against free will have circulated through the intellectual world for millennia, with minor variations. We may sympathize with André Gide, who once mused that all the arguments about free will have already been made, but we must continue repeating them because nobody listens.¹² Indeed, although some of the terms used in the debate may vary, the basic arguments continue to center on the likelihood of uncaused causes and the possibility of autonomy from natural laws. Whether the movements of atoms or the influence of genes and cultural conditioning control us, we are not the ultimate cause of our actions, and cannot truly be free. The existence of free will seems to depend on a logically impossible reconciliation of incompatible concepts. As Martin Gardner quips, "A free will act cannot be fully predetermined. Nor can it be the outcome of pure chance. Somehow it is both. Somehow it is neither... My own view, which is Kant's, is that there is no way to go between the thorns. The best we can do (we who are not gods) is, Kant wrote, comprehend its incomprehensibility."¹³ But are we really looking at the problem correctly? Perhaps we need to escape from the cycle of rehashed arguments and take a new look at our approaches to the problem. One way to do this may be to look for analogous dilemmas encountered during the long history of philosophy, and see if we can gain insights relevant to discussions of free will.

To my mind, some important aspects of the free will debate invite comparison to another celebrated philosophical puzzle — the motion paradoxes of the Greek philosopher Zeno. Living in the fifth century BCE, Zeno was a disciple of the great thinker Parmenides, who famously argued that change in the physical world is impossible. We cannot speak of what is not, Parmenides said, since that would involve the contradiction of speaking of things that don't exist.¹⁴ Change is therefore impossible because it involves something becoming what it is not, which plainly involves an impassable contradiction.

Zeno defended the rather paradoxical conclusions of his mentor by developing a number of paradoxes of his own. In one of his most famous examples, Zeno describes a race between the swift runner Achilles and a tortoise.¹⁵ Since Achilles runs much faster than the tortoise, we give the tortoise a head start. Everyone knows Achilles will outrun the slow, heavy tortoise, right? Don't be so sure, Zeno answers. Suppose the tortoise has a ten-meter head start. Achilles catches up that distance, but in that time, the tortoise has moved a small distance ahead. Achilles must now catch up the new distance, but meanwhile the tortoise has made further progress. It turns out that Achilles can never overtake his slower opponent, because each time he moves the tortoise has trudged another tiny increment ahead.

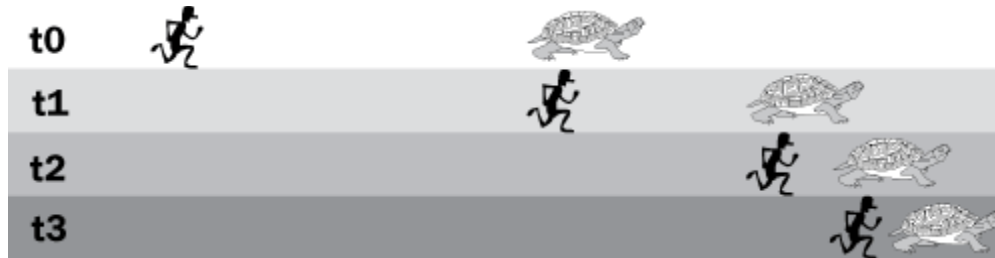


Figure 1: This illustration depicts Zeno's famous paradox of the race between Achilles and the tortoise. Achilles cannot win the race because each time he tries to catch up, the tortoise has moved another small distance ahead. Redrawn from *The Philosopher's Magazine*.¹⁶

Zeno's paradox is one of those philosophical arguments that is obviously wrong, but resists attempts to find the error. His argument baffled generations of philosophers who struggled unsuccessfully to locate the fallacies in his thinking. We needed new developments in mathematics to clearly understand where Zeno's reasoning goes astray. The mathematical concept of *series convergence* allows us to see that an infinite series of small increments can comprise a finite sum. An infinite number of increments does not necessarily produce an infinite number, but may converge on a finite number.¹⁷ This can be expressed mathematically as

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} S_n = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} a_1 + a_2 + \dots + a_n = S$$

For instance, suppose we sum an infinite series beginning with $\frac{1}{2}$, and each new term is exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ of the previous term. We are adding an infinite number of terms, but do not obtain an infinite sum, because our series converges to one:

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} (1/2)^n = 1/2 + 1/4 + 1/8 + 1/16 + \dots$$

with:

$$\lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} S_n = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} a_1 + a_2 + \dots + a_n = S$$

then:

$$S_n = 1/2 + 1/2^2 + 1/2^3 + \dots + 1/2^n$$

$$\lim S_n = 1$$

Thus, the mathematics of convergence shows that an infinite series does not necessarily imply an infinite sum. The seeming paradox in Zeno's argument arises because of our mistaken tendency to see the concepts of "infinite" and "finite" as mutually exclusive. Zeno's rigid rationalism convinces us that an infinite series of small increments prevents a finite increase in distance, but the narrow focus and hidden assumptions in Zeno's argument have tricked us into believing a fallacy. We can cross the room after all, and Achilles really does outrun the tortoise.

Paradox Lost: Rethinking Free Will Arguments

I would like to hypothesize that free will arguments contain common misunderstandings of the concepts of “cause” and “will,” and these misunderstandings are analogous to Zeno’s erroneous assumptions about the concepts of “infinite” and “finite.” Just as Zeno agonized about infinite numbers of small distances and convinced himself that all movement was impossible, most participants in the free will debate devote so much attention to the causes affecting us that they feel compelled to deny free will. Indeed, many philosophers believe the case against free will to be rock solid. Every effect has a cause, and humans cannot be the causes of their own consciousness, so we may as well just admit that free will is illusory. A few of these philosophers even smugly claim that anyone can see the logical impossibility of free will by reflecting on the relevant arguments from the comfort of his own couch.¹⁸ However, Zeno also thought he used flawless logic in his demonstration of the impossibility of motion. Just as modern determinists intimidate us by speaking of infinite chains of causes precluding our freedom, Zeno intimidated his audience by showing how infinite numbers of small increments rendered motion impossible. What if, just as in Zeno’s paradox, there is nothing truly paradoxical going on in the realm of free will after all? What if our actions could remain genuine acts of will and outcomes of a complex chain of causality, just as we could have an infinite series of small increments converge on a finite sum?

These possibilities are similar in many ways to other counterintuitive conclusions rendered understandable through careful mathematical reasoning. For instance, we tend to think that the concepts of “randomness” and “symmetry” are at odds with each other. A symmetrical pattern seems to be the very antithesis of randomness. But as physicist Taner Edis shows in his remarkable book *The Ghost in the Universe*, order and chance are closely linked. A long series of fair coin tosses likely results in random sequences of heads and tails, but the resulting randomness follows directly from the symmetry in the probabilities of obtaining two possible outcomes for each coin flip. Similarly, we observe magnets to be rotationally symmetric at high temperatures, meaning that they align themselves in every possible direction. The overall magnetization of this system is zero, because the magnets do not favor any particular direction and cancel each other out. Ironically, if the equations describing magnetism were not symmetrical, the directions of these magnets could *not* be random, because non-symmetrical equations would result in a non-zero net magnetization of the system, dictating that the magnets align themselves along a single direction.¹⁹ Symmetry and randomness are not antagonists. They are inseparable elements of a universe in which mathematically elegant laws create opportunities for contingencies.

Free will certainly poses vexing philosophical problems, but many of these problems appear to result from conceptual confusions. When we talk about free will and determinism, we immediately confront a series of conflicts between seemingly contradictory terms. When we ask if a deterministic universe implies the absence of freedom, we seem to encounter a conflict between the concepts of cause and choice. We stumble upon another impasse when we ask if quantum indeterminacy somehow enables us to have free will, because we see randomness and rational choice as complete antagonists. But we’ve fooled ourselves as much by our framing of our questions as Zeno fooled himself, and many others, by the framing of his paradoxes. We do not have to choose between complete determinacy and complete chance, or believe that free choice necessitates complete isolation from the world of causes and effects.²⁰ Instead, we can explore the ways that chance and order combine in physical laws to allow free will to exist.

The first thing we need to do is clarify what “free will” really means. It clearly cannot imply total freedom to do whatever we want, because few people worry about their inability to suddenly become lighter than air. Most people willingly accept that the nature of our human bodies imposes limits on our actions. To claim we have free will, then, is merely to claim that we have some range of possible choices. The mere presence of limits on our choice does not negate our freedom as long as real choices still exist.

To see why, consider an example provided by philosopher Daniel Dennett in his interesting book *Elbow Room*. If we see an animal at the zoo in a tiny cage restricting even the smallest movement, we deplore the poor beast’s condition, because he seems to lack freedom to do anything at all. But now imagine seeing the same animal in a spacious zoo habitat. The animal still faces limits on his freedom, but he can roam around in his quarters and “choose” to be in one place rather than another.²¹ This is the kind of freedom we would probably consider sufficient. We are mostly comfortable with the idea of limits on our choices, as long as we truly have a variety of options.

If the tradeoff between freedom and limitations is not all or nothing, neither is the tradeoff between freedom and deterministic predictability. Recall that traditional determinists argue that an omniscient being seeing all of the

causes affecting us would be able to perfectly predict our actions. This hypothetical being would be able to see that we do not actually act freely, but act under the compulsion of countless causes undetected by our limited mortal senses. This is a nice argument, but it suffers from the serious deficiencies that no one knows if such a being exists, and no one certainly knows how such a being would perceive reality. It may very well be the case that a being capable of seeing all of the causes acting on us would have more difficulty predicting our behavior. After all, the simpler of two competing scientific models often allows us to make the most accurate predictions. Predictive accuracy often decreases, not increases, with the number of parameters we include in our model!²² An all-knowing being may very well wind up with all-powerful headaches.

One reason that determinism does not imply an absence of alternatives is the role of *emergent phenomena* in complex systems. An emergent phenomenon is neither a property of any individual component of a system, nor simply the result of summing the properties of all components. Emergent phenomena are novel, and unpredicted by our knowledge of the system.²³ There are many examples of emergent phenomena at all levels. For instance, the atomic properties of hydrogen and oxygen do not convey all possible information about the properties of water, which is simply a molecule made from the combination of the two elements. Water has distinct properties, such as its surface tension and heating capacity, that belong neither to hydrogen nor oxygen and do not arise from simply combining the known properties of each. Some evolutionary biologists think that stable reproductive species in evolutionary history are emergent phenomena, ~~which changed the whole course of natural selection.~~²⁴ This illustrates another important feature of emergent phenomena — their tendency to affect other parts of the system that produced them. Genes control the inheritable traits of species, but species take the evolutionary game to a completely new level and affect the distribution of genes themselves in complex ways. This is a feature of complex systems often overlooked by strict determinist deniers of free will. Emergent phenomenon themselves are not merely affected by their surroundings, but interact dynamically with other parts of the system.

By almost anyone's definition, the human mind is a complex system. Consciousness is an emergent phenomenon of the billions of neuron interactions in our brains, and seems to be able to influence the behavior of these neurons in novel ways. Some of this novelty may also be linked to quantum level uncertainty in the states of the neurons involved.²⁵ Determinist opponents of free will, hearing this, may reiterate their objection that quantum uncertainty cannot provide a foundation for the kind of rationally considered choices we associate with free will. But as we have already seen, this objection is unwarranted, because randomness and order are not incompatible concepts. As Taner Edis' magnetic field example showed, randomness is an inherent characteristic of deterministic laws. Quantum mechanics may supply more variety for these laws to act upon, and the neurons of our brain may be close enough to the quantum size level for this variability to be considerable.

How, then, does free will work? We do not completely understand, but we have clues. And just as we needed the mathematical development of calculus to clearly resolve Zeno's paradox, we may find that the burgeoning mathematics of complexity theory will finally help us dispel our conceptual confusions about free will. Currently, it seems probable that complexity theory, together with our growing understanding of cognitive neuroscience, will throw much light on the process of making willed decisions. We will better understand how the complex arrangement of neurons in our brains leads to emergent states of conscious awareness, and the conscious mind feeds back on its neural networks to place itself in alternate conscious states. With time, we will also better comprehend how the brain converts sensory stimuli & knowledge of our environment into neural impulses and becomes part of the intricate network of causes and effects at work in our conscious minds. Finally, we will realize the conceptual confusions that cause us to see determinism and rational choice as incompatible, and will renounce our error. We will live in a deterministic world without fear, for we will no longer see determinism as a threat to the free will we cherish. - by Phil Molé

FUTILITY COMPARED

FATALISM

If it is fated for you to recover from this illness, then you will recover whether you call a doctor or not. Likewise, if you are fated not to recover, you will not do so whether you call a doctor or not. But either it is fated that you will recover from this illness, or it is fated that you will not recover. Therefore it is futile to consult a doctor.

DETERMINISM

If you are caused to recover from this illness, calling a doctor might be part of that causality. Likewise, if you are caused not to recover, not calling the doctor might be part of that causality. But either it is that you will be caused to recover from this illness, or you will be caused to not recover. Since calling a doctor might be a cause of your recovery, it isn't futile to consult a doctor.

DETERMINISM OR FREE-WILL?

THE NATURE AND IMPLICATIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY. The charge is, again, that Determinism robs praise and blame and responsibility of all meaning, and reduces them to mere verbal expressions which some may mistake for the equivalents of reality, but which clearer thinkers will estimate at their true worth. What is the use of praising or blaming if each one does what heredity, constitution, and environment compels? Why punish a man for being what he is? Why hold him responsible for the expressions of a character provided for him, and for the influence of an environment which he had no part in forming? So the string of questions run on. None of them, it may safely be said, would ever be asked if all properly realized the precise meaning and application of the terms employed. For as with the previous terms examined, it is an acceptance of Indeterminism that would rob these words of all value. Rationally conceived they are not only consonant with Determinism, but each of them implies it.

Of the four terms mentioned above—Praise, Blame, Punishment, and Responsibility, the cardinal and governing one is the last. It will be well, therefore, to endeavour to fix this with some degree of clearness. There is here, consequently, both the fact of responsibility and our consciousness of it that calls for explanation. And both require for an adequate explanation a larger area than is offered by mere individual psychology. Indeed, so long as we restrict ourselves to the individual we cannot understand either the fact or the consciousness of responsibility. By limiting themselves in this manner some Determinists have been led to deny responsibility altogether. The individual, they have said, does not create either his own organism or its environment, and consequently all reasonable basis for responsibility disappears. To which there is the effective reply that the datum for responsibility is found in the nature of the organism and in the possibility of its being affected by certain social forces, and not in the absolute origination of its own impulses and actions. It is playing right into the hands of the Indeterminist to deny so large and so important a social phenomenon as responsibility. And to the Indeterminist attack, that if action is the expression of heredity, organism, and environment, there is no room for responsibility, there is the effective reply that it is precisely because the individual's actions are the expression of all the forces brought to bear upon him that he may be accounted responsible.

The general sense of responsibility—omitting all secondary meanings—is that of accountability, to be able to reply to a charge, or to be able to answer a claim made upon us. This at once gives us the essential characteristic of responsibility, and also stamps it as a phenomenon of social ethics. A man living on a desert island would not be responsible, unless we assume his responsibility to deity; and even here we have the essential social fact—relation to a person—reintroduced. It is our relations to others, that and the influence of our actions upon others, combined with the possibility of our natures being affected by the praise or censure of the social body to which we belong, which sets up the fact of responsibility. Conduct creates a social reaction, good or bad, agreeable or disagreeable, and the reacting judgment of society awakens in each of us a consciousness of responsibility, more or less acute, and more or less drastic, to society at large. The individual sees himself in the social mirror. His nature is fashioned by the social medium, his personal life becomes an expression of the social life. Just as the social conscience, in the shape of a legal tribunal, judges each for actions that are past, so the larger social conscience, as expressed in a thousand and one different forms, customs, and associations, judges us for those desires and dispositions that may result in action in the future. Responsibility as a phenomenon of social psychology is obvious, educative, inescapable, and admirable.

Responsibility as a phenomenon of individual psychology, whether from the Determinist or Indeterminist point of view, is positively meaningless. For the sake of clearness we will first take legal responsibility as illustrating the matter. In law a man is accounted guilty provided he knows the law he is breaking, and also that he is capable of appreciating the consequences of his actions. A further consideration of no mean importance is that the

consequences attending the infringement of the law are assumed to be sufficiently serious to counterbalance the inducements to break the regulation. And as all citizens are assumed to know the law, we may confine our attention to the last two aspects.

What, then, is meant by ability to appreciate consequences? There can be no other meaning than the capacity to create an ideal presentment of the penalties attaching to certain actions. Every promise of reward or threat of punishment assumes this, and assumes also that provided the ideal presentment is strong enough, certain general results will follow. It is on this principle alone that punishments are proportioned to offences, and that certain revisions of penalties take place from time to time. Negatively the same thing is shown by the fact that young children, idiots, and lunatics are not legally held responsible for their actions. The ground here is that the power to represent ideally the full consequences of actions is absent, or operates in an abnormal manner. Moreover, the whole line of proof to establish insanity in a court of law is that a person is not amenable to certain desires and impulses in the same manner as are normally constituted people. Substantially the same thing is seen if we take the fact of responsibility in non-legal matters. A very young child, incapable of ideally representing consequences, is not considered a responsible being. An older child has a limited responsibility in certain simple matters. As it grows older, and growth brings with it the power of more fully appreciating the consequence of actions, its responsibility increases in the home, in the school, in business, social, religious, and political circles it is held accountable for its conduct, in proportion as the power of estimating the consequences of actions is assumed.

In other words, we assume not that there is at any stage an autonomous or self-directing "will" in operation, but that a particular quality of motive will operate at certain stages of mental development, and the whole of the educative process, in the home, the school, and in society, aims at making these motives effective. That is, the whole fact of responsibility assumes as a datum the very condition that the Indeterminist regards as destroying responsibility altogether. He argues that if action is the expression of character, responsibility is a farce. But it is precisely because action is the expression of character that responsibility exists. When the law, or when society, calls a man to account for something he has done, it does not deny that had he possessed a different character he would have acted differently. It does not assert that at the time of action he could have helped doing what he did. Both may be admitted. What it does say is that having a character of such and such a kind certain things are bound to follow. But inasmuch as that character may be modified by social opinion or social coercion, inasmuch as it will respond to certain influences brought to bear upon it, it is a responsible character, and so may be held accountable for its actions.

There is, therefore, nothing incompatible between Determinism and Responsibility. The incompatibility lies between Indeterminism and Responsibility. What meaning can we attach to it, on what ground can we call a person to account, if our calling him to account is not one of the considerations that will affect his conduct? Grant that a consciousness of responsibility decides how a person shall act, and the principle of Determinism is admitted. Deny that a consciousness of responsibility determines action, and the phrase loses all meaning and value. The difficulty arises, as has been said, by ignoring the fact that responsibility is of social origin, and in looking for an explanation in individual psychology. It would, of course, be absurd to make man responsible for being what he is, but so long as he is amenable to the pressure of normal social forces he is responsible or accountable for what he may be. Whatever his character be, so long as it has the capacity of being affected by social pressure, it is a responsible character.

Having said this, it is not difficult to see the place of punishment and reward, or praise and blame, in the Determinist scheme of things. On a higher plane the approval and respect of society serve to awaken a positive liking for honesty and the formation of desirable mental habits. Praise and blame rest upon a precisely similar basis. Man being the socialized animal he is, the approbation and disapprobation of his fellows must always exert considerable influence on his conduct. The memory of censure passed or of praise bestowed acts as one of the many influences that will determine conduct when the critical moment for action arrives. Every time we praise or

blame an action we are helping to mould character, for both will serve as guides in the future. And it is just because at the moment of action a person "could not help doing" what he did that there is any reasonable justification for either approval or censure. Social approval and disapproval become an important portion of the environment to which the human being must perforce adapt himself.

What use could there be in punishing or blaming a man if his actions are determined, not by realizable motives, but by a mysterious will that in spite of our best endeavours remains uninfluenced? It is futile to look for the cause of wrong-doing in education, organization, or environment. For in proportion as we recognize any or all of these factors as determining conduct we are deserting the Indeterminist position, and relinquishing the "freedom" of the will. There is no middle course. Either the "will" remains absolutely uninfluenced by threat of punishment or desire for praise, serenely indifferent to the conflict of desires, and proof against the influence of education, or it forms a part of the causative sequence and the truth of Determinism is admitted. You cannot at the same time hold that man does not act in accordance with the strongest motive, and decide that the "will" maintains its freedom by deciding which motive shall be the strongest—its own determination not being the product of previous training. One need, indeed, only state the Indeterminist position plainly to see its inherent absurdity.

If ever in any case the argument ad absurdum was applicable it is surely here. It may safely be said that the larger part of the life of each of us is passed in anticipating the future in the light of experience. But if "Free-Will" be a fact, on what ground can we forecast the future. If motives do not determine conduct, any prophecy of what certain people may do in a given situation is futile. The will being indetermined, what they have done in the past is no guide as to what they will do in the future. If motives did not decide then they will not decide now. Whether we read backward or forward makes no difference. We have no right to say that the actions of certain statesmen prove them to have been animated by the desire for wealth or power. That would imply Determinism. We cannot say that because a murder has been committed a certain person who bore the deceased ill-will is rightly suspected. This is assuming that conduct is determined by motives. If we see a person jump into the river, we have no right to argue that depressed health, or financial worry, or impending social disgrace, has caused him to commit suicide.

In the training of children stress is rightly laid upon the importance of the right kind of associates, the power of education, and of healthy physical surroundings. With adults, the beneficial influences of fresh air, good food, well-built houses, open spaces, and healthy conditions of labour have become common-places of sociology. In every rational biography attention is paid to the formative influences of parents, friends, and general environment. Medical men seek the cause of frames of mind in nervous structure, and predisposition to physical, mental, and moral disease in heredity. Statisticians point to absolute uniformity of general human action under certain social conditions. Moralists point to the power of ideals on people's minds. Religious teachers emphasize the power of certain teachings in reducing particular habits. In all these cases no allowance whatever is made for the operation of an undetermined will. The motive theory of action may not be consciously in the minds of all, but it is everywhere and at all times implied in practice. In strict truth, we cannot undertake a single affair in life without making the assumption that people will act in accordance with certain motives, and that these in turn will be the outcome of specific desires.

Human nature becomes a chaos if Determinism is denied. Neither a science of human conduct nor of history is possible in its absence; for both assume a fundamental identity of human nature beneath all the comparatively superficial distinctions of colour, creed, or national divisions. The determination of the influence of climate, food, inter-tribal or international relations, of the power of ideals—moral, religious, military, national, etc.—are all so many exercises in the philosophy of Determinism. In none of these directions do we make the least allowance for the operation of an uncaused "will." And as Determinism enables us to read and understand history and life, so it also provides a basis upon which we can work for reform. In the belief that certain influences will produce, in the main, a particular result, we can lay our plans and work with every prospect of ultimate success. Instead of our

best endeavours being left at the mercy of an undetermined "will," they take their place as part of the determining influences that are moulding human nature. Every action becomes a portion of the environment with which each has to deal. More, it becomes a portion of the agent's own environment.

DETERMINISM AND CHARACTER. The phrase "Patriotism" thus serves to arouse a group of feelings that cluster round the state and social life. "Home" awakens its own groups of domestic and parental feelings. "Duty," again, covers a wider sphere, but involves the same process. By instruction and by training, certain conditions, circumstances, words, or associations are made to call up trains of connected feelings which, culminating in a desire, imperatively demand conduct along a given line. The more complete the education, the stronger the desire; the stronger the desire, the more certain the action. The more defective the education the less the certainty with which we can count upon specific conduct. The man who acts today in one way and tomorrow in another way is not a man of strong desires, so much as he is a man whose desires are undisciplined. The man who acts with uniform certainty is not a man of weak desire, but one whose desires run with strength and swiftness in a uniform direction. And it is a curious feature of indeterministic psychology that it should take as clear evidence of the subordination of desire to "will" the man whose desire is so strong as to preclude hesitation between it and action.

The whole of education, the whole of the discipline of life, is thus based upon the determination of conduct by circumstances and character. If the principle of cause and effect does not fully apply to conduct, all our training is so much waste of time. But it is because we cannot really think of the past not influencing the present, once we bring the two into relation, that we, Determinist and Indeterminist alike, proceed with our deterministic methods of training, and in this instance at least wisdom is justified of her children. Finally, if the above be granted, can we longer attach meaning to the expression that man forms his own character? Well, if it means that a man has any share in his psychic endowments, or that they being what they are at any given time he could at that time act differently from the way in which he does act, the expression is meaningless. It is absolute nonsense. But in another sense it does convey an important truth. We must, however, always bear in mind that in speaking of a man's character we are not dealing with two things, but with one thing. The character is the man, the man is the character. Or to be quite accurate, body and mind, physical and psychical qualities together, form the man, and any separation of these is for purposes of analysis and study only. If we say, then, that a man is master of his own character, or that a man may mould his own character, we do not imply the existence of an independent entity moulding or mastering something else. We are saying no more than that every experience carries its resultant into the sum of character. Action generates habit, and habit means a more or less permanent modification of character. What a man is, is the outcome of what he has been, and a perception of this truth no more conflicts with the principles of Determinism as explained, than a stone being intercepted in its fall down the side of a hill by lodging against a tree is an infraction of the law of gravitation. In this sense, using figurative language, a man may be said to be master of himself. What he does proceeds from himself; it is the expression of his character, and his doing cuts deeper the grooves of habit, and so makes more certain the performance of similar actions in the future. It is the fact of motive springing from character which determines the act that makes the man its author. And knowledge of this supplies him with, not alone the most powerful incentive towards the determination of his own character, but, what is equally important, the only method whereby to fashion the character of others.

Cohen, Chapman. Determinism or Free-Will? . Kindle Edition Copy

DIFFERENT TYPES OF DETERMINISM

Philosophical Determinism – Cause/Effect

Scientific Determinism – Gravity Force

Genetic Determinism – Trait Program

Biological Determinism – Cranial Capacity

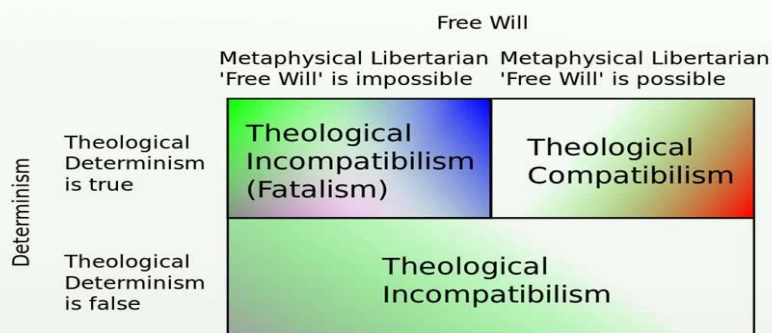
Psychological Determinism – Background

Social Determinism – Social Norms Set

Theological Determinism/Predestination:

GOD PREDESTINATES ALL ACTION

Theological determinism



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:TheologicalDeterminismXFreeWill.svg>

Difference Between Determinism & Fatalism

Determinism and Fatalism are philosophies or, in general, attitudes towards life, between which a number of differences can be identified. Both fatalism and determinism are of the view that there is nothing like a free will and that it is just an [illusion](#). If we think that we are powerless and what is destined or is our fate will happen whatever we may do an attitude that is referred to as fatalism. On the other hand, those who believe that there is a cause of every effect and tomorrow is based on what we do today are termed as determinists or having belief in determinism. This highlights that these two philosophies are different from one another. There are many other differences also that will be harped upon in this article, through an understanding of Determinism and Fatalism.

What is Determinism?

Determinism is **an advocate of cause and effect in the sense that whatever happens is a result of our past actions**. It believes that even our present is a result of our actions in the past. This should not be confused with the term determination, which highlights the possibility of actions to create a change in the course of life. In determinism, the core idea is to causality.

For an example, if a person behaves in a particular way, determinists believe that there would be an effect accordingly in the future of the person's life. The thoughts and actions are of an individual are causally linked to his future.

Determinism can be observed and also used when altering human behavior. According to this perspective, free will is seen as the opposition of determinism. The ability for human to act upon their free will is completely rejected by those who believe in Determinism.



What is Fatalism?

According to fatalism, **all events in life are preordained**. Fatalism says that it is futile to oppose what is happening and that what is going to happen, will happen and is inevitable. Fatalists would argue that talking about the past or present being different is futile as everything has been decided beforehand, and humans are merely puppets being made to dance by the almighty. Fatalism is of the firm view that whether we will be reborn or go to [hell](#) or heaven has already been decided, and we are merely following a course that has been charted for us.

There is some similarity in these approaches too as is evident by rejection of a free will and also the views on events in life. While fatalism says that events are predetermined (all events are inevitable and one cannot do anything to prevent them from taking place), determinism says that events can be re-determined but based upon our actions in the past. A fatalist will not look sideways before crossing a road as he believes that what will happen will happen and is not dependent upon his actions. On the other hand, a deterministic person believes that every action is a result of some action in the past, and thus he can take action to avoid an accident.

What is the Difference Between Fatalism and Determinism?

- Fatalism and determinism are two approaches in philosophy that have different views on events in life.
- Fatalism trivializes all human actions as it says that events in life are preordained and what is going to happen will happen, no matter what.
- Determinism firmly believes in cause and effect and justifies all events on the basis of actions in the past.

How Determinists Cross the Street

It's pretty much inevitable that you will walk across a street at some point. How you cross it is determined by a number of factors, including your desire to cross it safely. Although it's not inevitable that you will cross the street with your eyes open, it's a good bet, given your desire not to be injured or killed.

What if you come to believe that all your behavior is fully determined: that in any given situation you couldn't have done other than what you did, given all the factors operating? How might this change, if at all, your approach to crossing the street?

If determinism is true, then the way I cross the street next time is fully a function of various factors coming to bear at that time. If I cross the street with my eyes open, that's determined; if I cross it with eyes closed, that's determined too. But might the belief that behavior is determined play a role in determining how one crosses the street?

As a consequence of their belief in determinism, some misguided fatalists might say "The future is fixed: I'm either fated to get across the street safely or not. If I am fated to be hit by a car, then it doesn't matter what precautions I take. Since the future is fixed, it doesn't matter what I do." The last statement is pretty obviously a false non-sequitur, but let's see precisely why.

It is true that whether one gets across the street safely or struck by a car is determined or "fated," as the fatalist says, but of course neither he nor anyone else knows which way it will turn out. It is also true that the way one crosses the street, eyes open or eyes closed, is determined. If one desires to cross safely, then this

desire helps determine that one will cross eyes open, not closed. And clearly, the way in which one crosses the street influences the chances of getting across safely. (I omit here any discussion of the role of random influences, since these are by definition uncontrollable and presumably have an equal chance of working for or against one's safety.)

The upshot is that although whether one gets across the street safely or not is indeed determined, the choice to walk across eyes open, motivated by the desire to get across safely, plays a pivotal role in determining the outcome. The ordinary, widespread desire to live matters greatly in how people cross the street – it figures as one of the primary proximate causes of safe street crossing behavior. This desire combines with the knowledge that cars sometimes intersect with careless pedestrians (with deadly consequences) to generate the eyes-open approach to street crossing. If living another day matters to you, then keeping your eyes open matters too. This shows that what the fatalist does (keeping his eyes open or shut) indeed matters, even though his street crossing behavior is determined. So he is quite wrong to say "Since the future is fixed, it doesn't matter what I do." The deterministic unfolding of his behavior is a function of beliefs and desires, and unless his fatalism undercuts the basic desire to live, then his knowledge that his behavior is determined won't change his policy of crossing with eyes open.

Still, given the small chance that believing in fatalism might undercut the desire to live, it would be best to avoid such a belief. Unlike a belief in determinism, fatalism might in extreme cases be fatal. The best defense against this fate is to think through the problem. As we've seen, fatalism (and some less virulent forms of being despondent about determinism) – is determined by the reaching the false conclusion that it doesn't matter what one does, that one's fate is determined to be a particular outcome whatever one does. The truth is, however, that one's fate as a particular outcome is often determined by what one does, even though actions, along with one's desires and beliefs, are themselves determined. The fact that they are determined doesn't lessen their essential role in determining one's fate. The best way to avoid being fatalistic or despondent about determinism is to understand clearly that our actions do matter in bringing about the outcomes we want, even though we don't "ultimately" choose these actions, or the desires that motivate them, from some uncaused vantage point. (And besides, being uncaused choosers doesn't help matters, see "The Flaw in Fatalism").

Having read this description of how determinists cross the street, and having been inoculated against any inclination toward fatalism, you are probably asking "But why do determinists cross the street?" On this, I have no clue. – Tom Clark



Table of Stances

Hard Determinism	Compatibilism, (usually held in the form of Soft Determinism)	Indeterminism (sometimes known as 'Libertarianism')
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determinism is true & incompatible with belief in free will. ▪ Belief in free will is false, as is belief in moral responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determinism & belief in free will are compatible. ▪ Given Soft Determinism, both are true. ▪ So free actions are determined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determinism & belief in free will are incompatible. ▪ The former is false & the latter is true. ▪ Free actions are not determined.

3



Determinism, Free Will, and Moral Responsibility

- Traditional threats to free will: Fatalism (every event was *meant*). Predestination (every event is willed by God). Divine foreknowledge (every event is eternally known by God).
- Determinism: Every event is caused by a sequence of antecedent events.

Three solutions

- God is outside time, and knows the future. *How* we don't know, but we have free will, e.g. because determinism is false.
- God is inside time, determinism is false, we have free will, so God doesn't know the future. But God still knows everything it is possible to know (at any time).
- God is inside time, determinism is true, but not incompatible with free will. So God knows the future, but we have free will.



The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: **Fatalism**

Though the word “fatalism” is commonly used to refer to an attitude of resignation in the face of some future event or events which are thought to be inevitable, philosophers usually use the word to refer to the view that we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do. This view may be argued for in various ways: by appeal to logical laws and metaphysical necessities; by appeal to the existence and nature of God; by appeal to causal determinism. When argued for in the first way, it is commonly called “Logical fatalism” (or, in some cases, “Metaphysical fatalism”); when argued for in the second way, it is commonly called “Theological fatalism”. When argued for in the third way it is not now commonly referred to as “fatalism” at all, and such arguments will not be discussed here.

The interest in arguments for fatalism lies at least as much in the question of how the conclusion may be avoided as in the question of whether it is true.

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1. Logical Fatalism: Aristotle's argument and the nature of truth

The classic argument for fatalism occurs in Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), *De Interpretatione*, chapter 9. He addresses the question of whether in relation to all questions it is necessary that the affirmation or the negation is true or false.

What he says could be presented as an argument along the following lines.

Suppose that (i) p is true or p is false and (ii) not- p is true or not- p is false.

Then p is true or not- p is true.

1.1 Aristotle's solution

First we should notice Aristotle's solution. Aristotle is in no doubt that not everything that happens, happens of necessity. He accepts indeed (19a23–5) that “What is, necessarily is, when it is; and what is not, necessarily is not, when it is not.” But he goes on to say, “But not everything that is, necessarily is; and not everything that is not, necessarily is not.” So what is his solution? Here it must be said that there is more than one view.

(Aristotle, *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*, 137–42). On one view he rejects the move from truth to necessity. That may indeed be the right move to make, but in what follows I shall take it that Aristotle actually offers a different solution, which, rightly or wrongly, I shall refer to as “the Aristotelian solution”. On this view his solution is to deny that it is necessary that the affirmation or the negation is true or false when this relates to things that do not happen of necessity. What each person said was in fact neither true nor false. So we may represent the Aristotelian solution as one which rejects the law of bivalence:

The law of bivalence: every proposition is either true or false.

This suggests adopting the following rule for determining the truth-value of complex propositions some of whose constituents are neither true nor false. One considers in turn each of the possible ways in which things may turn out, and works out what truth-value the complex proposition would then have. If it turns out to be true in every case, it is true; if it turns out to be false in every case, it is false; otherwise it is neither true nor false. (van Fraassen 1966)

Of course this is not a wholly cost free line to take. Apart from the fact that it means that “ p ” and “ p is true” are not in general interchangeable, it also creates problems for truth-functionality. We normally think of “or”, “and” and

“not” as being truth-functional. That is to say, we think that the truth-values of “ p or q ”, “ p and q ” and “not- p ” are determined by the truth-values of “ p ” and “ q ”. But if we adopt the Aristotelian solution, and accept the way outlined just now of determining the truth-value of a complex proposition, “or”, for instance, will not be truth functional. In some case “ p or q ” will be true when neither p nor q is true (when, for instance, “ q ” is “not- p ”), and in some case it will not be (if, say, “ p ” is “there will be a sea-battle tomorrow” and “ q ” is “there will be a football match tomorrow”). (If one thinks in terms of there being a third truth-value, indeterminacy, say, in addition to truth and falsity, the position will be that, when p and q are both indeterminate, sometimes “ p or q ” is true, and sometimes it is indeterminate.). Similarly “ p and q ” will be false in the one case and indeterminate in the other.

However, this objection might not seem very pressing compared with the threat of fatalism. If accepting a lack of equivalence between “ p ” & “ p is true” and a failure of truth-functionality for “or” & “and” were the only alternative to accepting fatalism, most people would find it easier to accept these theoretical oddities, if oddities they are.

But there is another objection to the Aristotelian solution which makes it harder to accept — the way we treat bare predictions - this objection to the Aristotelian solution is also an objection to the argument for fatalism which was based on the assumption of bivalence. We are, effectively, rejecting the idea that if what someone says at a time is true at that time, then the state of the world at the time must determine that it is true. What we seem to be quite prepared to accept instead is the idea that for what is said to be true at a time it is sufficient if the state of the world *will* sometime be such as to determine that it is true.

There is another problem about the theory of truth which the Aristotelian argument seems to be invoking. If the theory really is that the truth of what is said depends on the state of the world at the time of the saying, does not that raise a problem for statements about the past? Suppose someone says that a dinosaur stood on this spot millions of years ago. For this to be true, must the present state of the world be such as to determine that it is? Some people have indeed thought this; and they have thought that, just as some propositions that were not true come to be true, so also some that were true cease to be true. (Łukasiewicz 1967) But this is even further from what we are naturally inclined to say. A more attractive alternative, if we wished to retain something like this theory of truth, would be to say that what happened in the past counts as part of the present state of the world, because the past, like the present, is necessary. But it is not clear why that should be enough to make it part of the present state of the world. Perhaps it would be better to take the view simply that something is true at a time only if it is necessary at that time. But then we would need some argument for this position which went beyond the simple thought that what is said is made true by the way the world is at the time it is said.

It is worth noticing some other solutions which are closely related to the Aristotelian solution, but avoid some of the problems.

1.3 Rejection of the theory of truth

But finally we should not forget that, even if we wish to retain a correspondence theory of truth, we can reject the idea that truth depends on the state of the world at the time of the utterance of a proposition or even the state of the world at the time of the reference point. We can say that it depends on the state of the world at the time of the event spoken of; or, more generally, that it depends on the state of the world at the times spoken of, if any (Westphal 2006). The solution we prefer is, however, likely to be related to the view we take about the nature of time.

2.0 An Ockhamist solution

We could also question either the first premiss or the application of it.

Is what is true of the past necessary? Well certainly pretty well everyone thinks that what happened in the past cannot be undone. The past cannot now be altered. For if one were to undo the past, that would mean that something which did happen did not happen; or, at the very least, that it was true that something happened and then later was not true that it happened. Most people (but not such a large majority) also think that something else is impossible, namely affecting what happened in the past or causing something to have happened in the past. (This is not the same thing, of course, as altering the past. If one caused something to have happened, one would not

thereby bring it about that something that did not happen did happen.) This might be called the Ockhamist solution to the problem. What Ockham (c1285–1347) says is:

Some propositions are about the present as regards both their wording and their subject matter (*secundum vocem et secundum rem*). Where such [propositions] are concerned, it is universally true that every true proposition about the present has [corresponding to it] a necessary one about the past... Other propositions are about the present as regards their wording only and are equivalently about the future, since their truth depends on propositions about the future. (Ockham, *Predestination, God's Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, 46–7)

Propositions which are in this way verbally about one time, *t*, but are really (in part) about a later time, are often said to express “soft facts” about *t*. Unfortunately, it is not at all clear quite how the notion of a soft fact should be made precise. One might, for instance, say that if a proposition about *t* logically entails a proposition about a later time, it expresses a soft fact about *t*. But if that is the correct account, it seems that many propositions expressing soft facts about the past will be necessary, even when they are partly about the future. For instance, a proposition which conjoins some plausibly necessary proposition about the past with a law of nature to the effect that in these circumstances something in the future will ensue would seem to entail something about the future; but since it is a conjunction of two plausibly necessary propositions, it seems to be necessary itself.

However, it seems there is one variety of proposition which presumably expresses a soft fact about the past, but is very plausibly not necessary, namely a proposition which is equivalent to a conjunction where one of the conjuncts is plausibly wholly about the future, and where the other conjunct does not entail it.

3. Logical fatalism: Taylor’s argument and the conditions of power

Richard Taylor argues that certain commonly accepted presuppositions yield a proof of fatalism. (Taylor 1962) The presuppositions are:

1. Any proposition whatever is either true, or if not true, false.
2. If any state of affairs is sufficient for, though logically unrelated to, the occurrence of some further condition at the same time or any other time, then the former cannot occur without the latter occurring also.
3. If the occurrence of any condition is necessary for, though logically unrelated to, the occurrence of some other condition at the same time, or any other time, then the latter cannot occur without the former occurring also.
4. If one condition or set of conditions is sufficient for (ensures) another, then the other is necessary (essential) for it, and conversely, if one condition or set of conditions is necessary (essential) for another, then that other is sufficient for (ensures) it.
5. No agent can perform any given act if there is lacking, at the same time or any other time, some condition necessary for the occurrence of that act.
6. Time is not by itself “efficacious”; that is, the mere passage of time does not augment or diminish the capacities of anything and, in particular, it does not enhance or decrease an agent’s powers or abilities.

And this argument seems equally sound. And evidently it can be generalised to yield the fatalist conclusion that it is never in our power to do anything other than what we actually do.

Are there any objections to his argument?

Well, one might certainly object to presupposition 6, on the grounds that it does indeed seem to be the passage of time which makes a difference to my power to bring about or prevent a sea-battle on a certain day. Till the day is over, I may have the power, but after the day, I have not. However, presupposition 6 does not in fact seem to play a significant role in the parallel arguments. So that cannot be the whole story.

3.1 An Aristotelian solution

The objection that Taylor himself suggests is the Aristotelian one: we reject presupposition 1 (and also, presupposition 6, since we embrace the idea that a proposition may fail to be either true or false at one time and

come to be true or false later, as a result of the mere passage of time). We would also, presumably, need to amend presupposition 5, so that it was not the lack of a necessary condition for an act which was problematical, but the existence of a condition which was sufficient for the non-performance of the act.

Is that the only objection? Must we accept the Aristotelian solution if we wish to escape the fatalistic conclusion

4. The necessity of the past and Aristotelian solutions

It is possible, it seems, to reply to the arguments for fatalism which we have considered so far, without appealing to the Aristotelian solution. We can reject the theory of truth which is crucial to Aristotle's argument; we can reject the idea that all statements which are about the past are necessary; we can reject Taylor's account of the conditions of power. And we can do this without questioning the idea that we cannot affect the past, except, at any rate, in the rather ill-defined collection of cases to which Ockham draws our attention. However, it is open to the fatalist to argue that we have no good reason for making the distinction we do between affecting the past and affecting the future. So, if we accept that we cannot affect the past, we ought also to accept that we cannot affect the future. Of course, this cuts both ways. We might equally come to the conclusion, in the absence of a good reason for making the distinction, that since we can affect the future we can also affect the past; or, if that seems outrageous, we could affect the past if natural laws did not prevent our doing so.

This objection by the fatalist is surely right about one thing. *If* we cannot affect the past, it would be good to know *why* we cannot. One possible answer would be that which an A-theorist of time might give, namely that there is a fundamental ontological difference between the future on the one hand and the present and past on the other, which consists in the fact that the present and past are real or actual, while the future is not. And it is this fact, that the future is not real or actual, which means that it is open, can be affected by what happens now; and it is the fact that the present and past are real or actual which means that they cannot be affected by what happens now. (Lucas 1989a, Tooley 1997).

Such accounts, as we have noted above, seem to support the Aristotelian solution. But they are not the only accounts. On some accounts there is no such fundamental ontological difference between the future and the present and past; the impossibility of affecting the past lies not in the fact that the passage of time puts a constraint on what can be caused, but rather in the fact that it is the direction of causation which determines the direction of time. (Swinburne 1994, Mellor 1981 and 1998) On yet other accounts the impossibility is simply a fundamental metaphysical fact which is not open to further analysis or explanation.

It is, of course, possible that the fatalist challenge about the difference between the future and the present and past cannot be successfully met. For instance, it could be argued (a) that the only successful answer would be one which appealed to a fundamental ontological distinction between the future and the present and past, but that (b) there is in fact no such distinction. (Shanks 1994; discussed in Oaklander 1998) But, as we have noted, even if this challenge cannot be met, it does not show that the fatalist is correct. The possibility remains that we can, in principle, affect the past.

5. Theological Fatalism: An Ockhamist Solution

Ockham's answer to the problem of divine foreknowledge was to invoke the difference between propositions which are really about the past (those that express "hard" facts about the past) and those which are verbally about the past but which are really in part about the future (those that express "soft" facts about the past). The crucial point was that, even if someone lacked the power to do something inconsistent with a hard fact about the past, one might have the power to do something inconsistent with a soft fact about the past. Of course, the prospects of providing a solution would be satisfying if it could be made plausible that in some cases it is in people's powers to do things which are inconsistent with *hard* facts about the past, not just soft facts. But to take that approach is, in effect, to abandon the idea of an Ockhamist solution, and to move on to the next solution.

5.3 Affecting the past

One possible solution is to suggest that Pike's second alternative is possible, without any appeal to softness of facts. According to this solution, in some cases people have the power do things which are inconsistent with the actual facts about the past, even though they are hard facts. That is to say, in some cases people have the power to

affect the past. Now some such arguments seek merely to demonstrate this impossibility without offering any further explanation for it. And it may be contended that most of the arguments of this sort which are at all compelling involve appealing to the obvious impossibility that an event might prevent its own occurrence, and to the slightly less obvious impossibility that an event might bring about its own occurrence. But, in reply to such arguments, it may be claimed that these impossibilities are not sufficient to rule out the possibility that one event might bring about an earlier event, as long as the world is so organised as to avoid these impossible outcomes. If so, it is not clear why God should not have so organised it. And in particular it is not clear why God should not have so organised things that it is possible for us to do things which affect what beliefs he holds.

However, as we have seen, other arguments for the impossibility of affecting the past go further, and incorporate an explanation for the impossibility. A successful defence against theological fatalism which appealed to the possibility of affecting the past would have to deal with these further issues.

5.4 A Boethian solution

God is, on this view, outside time; he is timelessly eternal. Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) also offered this solution. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 13) There may be a number of problems about whether a personal God could be timeless, and how, if at all, he could relate to a temporal world, but it is worth noting one particular problem. The problem is that, although this solution does not appeal to the possibility of affecting the past, it may be vulnerable to some of the considerations which would tell against that possibility. For suppose that we are unable to affect the past, and that the explanation for this inability is that, whereas the future is not real, not actual, the past and present are real and actual. Then it would seem that we would not be able to affect a timeless God's beliefs because, not being future, they would be as real as any past beliefs. (Adams 1987, 1135; Zagzebski 1991, 61) Or suppose instead that the explanation for our inability to affect the past is that, if our action brings anything about, that in itself would constitute our action's being earlier than the thing brought about. Then it might seem that the idea that we could bring about a timeless belief would have to be dismissed; the very fact that a belief was brought about would make it later than whatever brought it about, and so not timeless. (Though there would be some logical space, perhaps, for a view that, whereas it was true of *temporal* events that, if they were brought about, they must be later than what brought them about, this was not true of events in general.)

Of course, such considerations need not be fatal to the Boethian solution, because the view that the future is unreal, and the view that the temporal order is determined by the causal order are both controversial. What it does seem to mean, though, is that there is less room than one might have supposed for the success of the solution if it is impossible to affect the past. (Rice 2006)

5.5 The nature of God's knowledge

Pike's argument rests on the supposition that God's omniscience involves having beliefs. But this may be questioned. (Alston 1986) Instead his knowledge, in particular of our actions, may be thought as Russellian acquaintance knowledge; that is, as consisting of a simple cognitive relation between the knower and what is known. (Russell 1912, Chapter 5) The idea would be that, although in humans acquaintance knowledge gives rise to beliefs, God has just the cognitive relation to what he knows, without any consequent beliefs. This seems to have been the way Boethius and Aquinas thought of it. (Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book V, Prose 6; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Article 13)

How would this view about God's knowledge affect the question of whether divine omniscience entails fatalism?

Both Boethius and Aquinas thought of God as outside time, but this view about God's knowledge could also be combined with the view that he is inside time. But this would not compromise his omniscience, since, presumably, on this account of knowledge, omniscience would be a matter of knowing all the facts.

5.6 Must God be omniscient?

Of course, the threat of fatalism, when it arises from God's existence, could be averted by denying that God exists. But it could also be averted by denying that God needs to be thought of as omniscient — at any rate if omniscience involves infallible knowledge of all facts. It could be argued that God's perfection does not require the infallible

knowledge of all facts, but at most such knowledge of all facts that could possibly be known infallibly. It could also be argued that there is no need to attribute infallible knowledge to God at all. (Lucas 1986 and 1989b)

6. Theological Fatalism: Molina, Plantinga and **middle knowledge**

Some philosophers, notably Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Alvin Plantinga, have held that God knows not only what actual people will freely do in the future, but what each possible free creature would have freely done in each set of possible circumstances, if fully specific; and that he had this knowledge at the creation. (An action is free in the required sense if not causally determined and not predetermined by God.) Propositions about what a creature would do in a set of circumstances (possible as well as actual) are commonly called “counterfactuals of freedom”, and God’s knowledge of them is called “middle knowledge”. (Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the Concordia)*; Plantinga 1974, IX))

If God’s knowledge of actual future actions would constitute a fatalistic threat, his middle knowledge could not be less threatening, since, given middle knowledge, he would have knowledge of actual actions on the basis of his knowledge of the circumstances. In fact, it seems that it is more threatening.

Of course, one way of avoiding the threat would be to deny that there are in general any facts about what people would have freely done in circumstances that have not actually arisen; there may be facts about what they might have done, or what they would very probably have done; but not what they *would* have done. (Adams 1977; Hasker 1989, 20–9) Indeed this seems to be quite plausible if we really think of people’s actions as undetermined. It may help us to see this if we consider the tossing of a coin. Let us suppose that a coin is tossed on some occasion, and it comes down heads; and suppose we then ask if it would have come down heads again if we had tossed it again in exactly the same circumstances. It seems plausible, if we think that how it landed was undetermined, that the right answer is that it might have come down heads and it might have come down tails, but that it is not the case that it would have come down heads, nor the case that it would have come down tails.

So one solution to the fatalistic threat posed by middle knowledge is akin to the Aristotelian solution. Since there are no facts of the relevant sort, God cannot have knowledge of them. But, because there are no such facts, God’s lack of knowledge of how free creatures would freely act is no bar to his omniscience.

7. The Idle Argument

Aristotle mentions, as a corollary of the conclusion that everything that happens, happens of necessity, that “there would be no need to deliberate or to take trouble (thinking that if we do this, this will happen, but if we do not, it will not).” (Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 18b31–3)

This thought was spelt out in what was known as “the Idle Argument” (Bobzien 1998, Section 5). It went like this:

If it is fated that you will recover from this illness, then, regardless of whether you consult a doctor or you do not consult a doctor you will recover.

But also, if it is fated that you will not recover from this illness, then, regardless of whether you consult a doctor or you do not consult a doctor you will not recover.

But either it is fated that you will recover from this illness or it is fated that you will not recover.

Therefore it is futile to consult a doctor.

The thought, presumably, is that it is futile, because what you do will have no effect. If so, the reply given by Chrysippus (c280-c206 B.C.E.) to this argument seems exactly right. (Bobzien 1998, 5.2) The conclusion does not follow, because it may have been fated that you will recover as a result of seeing the doctor. The corresponding reply would be equally apt if we substituted “necessary” for “fated”.

Some versions of the argument omit “it is fated that”. (Bobzien 1998, 189). It goes without saying that the corresponding version of Chrysippus’s reply would deal with those versions of the argument.

This is not to say that fatalism does not pose any problem at all for the rationality of deliberation. It is just to say that the Idle Argument does not show that it poses a problem.

8. Conclusion

There are a number of arguments for fatalism and it seems that one way of countering all of them would be to adopt the Aristotelian solution, or something akin. It would be neat if it could be made out that this was the only solution, so that the fate of fatalism was inextricably linked to the fate of the Aristotelian solution. But it does not seem that this is so, **except possibly, on the assumption that an omniscient God exists, in relation to middle knowledge.**

DETERMINISM VS. FATALISM

COMPARISON

DETERMINISM

FATALISM

Incompatible with "Free Will"

Dependent on causality.

The future is causally determined.

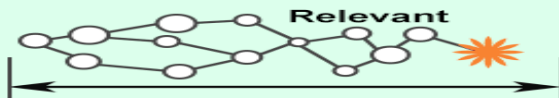
What we think, say, and do is part of the causal process.

Does not lead to defeatism, as our conscious thought and action leads to future events.

We have an effect on our future outcome.

Often a secular understanding of causality.

Causality and what it implies can be logically inferred.



Not dependent on causality.

The future is "fated" or destined.

We are fated regardless of what we think, say, or do.

Often leads to defeatist attitudes, as what we think or do doesn't matter to the fated future.

We are powerless to affect our future.

Often a religious idea of being fated by a deity or god.

No logical evidence for fatalism.



THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

Be careful of studies that mix fatalistic attitudes of lacking free will with deterministic understandings of the lack of free will. These are not the same thing.

Non-caused events do not help grant free will. Indeterminism is equally as incompatible as determinism and more problematic to willing.



FUTILITY COMPARED

FATALISM


If it is fated for you to recover from this illness, then you will recover whether you call a doctor or not. Likewise, if you are fated not to recover, you will not do so whether you call a doctor or not. But either it is fated that you will recover from this illness, or it is fated that you will not recover. Therefore it is futile to consult a doctor.

DETERMINISM

If you are caused to recover from this illness, calling a doctor might be part of that causality. Likewise, if you are caused not to recover, not calling the doctor might be part of that causality. But either it is that you will be caused to recover from this illness, or you will be caused to not recover. Since calling a doctor might be a cause of your recovery, it isn't futile to consult a doctor.

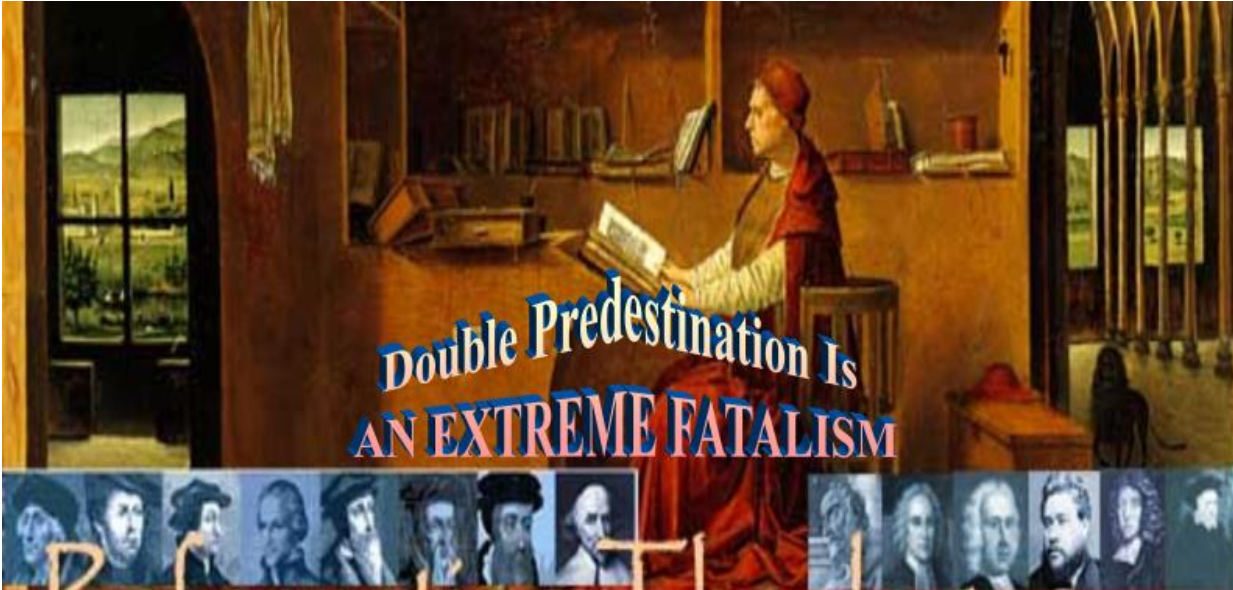


Scrutinizing Calvinism


You Apologetics 

philosophies of human freedom

	<i>ultimate origin of choice</i>	<i>freedom of choice</i>	<i>outcome</i>
Hard determinism	Divine will	human free will doesn't exist, everything is predetermined	necessarily beyond human control
Soft determinism	Divine agency directing human desires	free to act in accordance with the strongest natural inclination	inevitably beyond human control
Hard libertarianism	human agency	absolutely free to choose or refrain from a choice	contingent, always alternative
Soft libertarianism	human agency concurrent with human character	free to choose and refrain in freedom-giving circumstances	contingency depending on the range of options



Double Predestination Is AN EXTREME FATALISM



Reformation Theology

CALVIN ADOPTS CLASSIC FATALISM

- ❖ **Greek philosopher Leucippus claim assuredly –**
”Nothing happens at random, but everything for a reason and by necessity.”
- ❖ **Fatalism is a doctrine that’s tied to the idea of fate. It maintains that certain events are bound to happen no matter what one does, that the outcome is inevitable.**
- ❖ **Fate plays a central role in Homer’s epic poem the Iliad, dating back to about 750 BC. In the Iliad, the fatalistic worldview begins to get personified as fate, and fate determines things. This is somehow separate from the gods who are discussed elsewhere in the poem.**
- ❖ **Greek Gods Versus Fate. The Syrian philosopher Lucian exposes these tensions in his wonderful satire *Zeus Catechized*. The first thing he does is point out how strange it is to make sacrifices to the gods if everything is already set in stone by fate. The work precedes the dialogue between his characters Cyniscus and Zeus.**
- ❖ **Cyniscus says to Zeus: *If the Fates rule everything... why do men sacrifice to you gods and make you great offerings of cattle, praying to receive blessings from you? I really don’t see what benefit we can derive from this precaution, if it is impossible for us through our prayers either to get what is bad averted or to secure any blessing whatever by the gift of the gods.***

- ❖ **Lucian goes on to point out that there are implications for responsibility and he even questions the propriety of punishment. “If a man slay, it is [Fate] who slays, and if he robs temples , he only does it under orders.”**
- ❖ **The Reach of Fate. The Greek notion of fate is that for the Greek theologians and philosophers, the gods and fate didn’t dictate every little behavior of the mortals. Instead, it was the major life events like death, marriage, and injury, and the outcome of a war that were fated.**
- ❖ **Fate Versus Free Will. In Greek cosmology, in the Greek’s view of the universe, fate is probably just local fate. It’s fate for a particular life event. There can be an element of free will in the choices that somebody makes on the path to achieving their fate. There is, however, a lurking worry here about control. If my action – if my outcome – is fated by the gods, do I really have control over the action? Does that really count as free will?**

- Shaun Nichols Free Will & Determination Lecture

Jonathan Edwards: Free Will Philosophical Argument

When Edwards applies to those who have “human understanding in exercise,” he constructs a reasoned argument upon the subject of free will that deserves much admiration for its tight, logical connection and its vigorous statement. Indeed, from the point of view of the history of ideas, as well as from the perspective of persons who are persuaded that the latest is bound to be the most advanced philosophy, it is striking that two hundred years ago Edwards was saying the same thing that is being said today, with variation and often not so well, by the latest analysts of the determinist school. A brief summary of the agreement between Edwards’ opinions and those of many present-day philosophers needs to note at least the following crucial points: (1) Since ordinary language is notoriously inexact, “freedom” and all other terms to be used in this discussion must be carefully defined. Freedom means the ability to do what we will, or according to our pleasure. (2) That men indubitably have such freedom, and only such freedom, can be demonstrated by an exhaustive analysis of an act of volition. In defining freedom and analyzing the nature of an act of volition, questions about what *goes before* an act of willing should not be raised. By *placing brackets around* all such questions and removing them from consideration, we can be sure of sticking close to the actual *experience* of freedom and not be tempted to import into the discussion notions of freedom that are the product of confused metaphysical speculation. (3) Not only is the determination of action by will, motive, or pleasure of the agent consistent with morality, but morality actually requires determinism, since law and commandment, praise and blame apply to the motive or inclination inherent in the willing agent. (4) There can be no event without a cause. (Here, consciously or unconsciously, the brackets are removed and both Edwards and contemporary determinists introduce consideration of events before the act of willing.) There are no grounds for supposing a “pure ego” intervening from without to influence the course of voluntary action. (5) In speaking of causation, however, it is the *connection* or *correlation* between antecedent and consequent rather than efficient causation that we should have in mind. (6) Moreover, *moral* necessity needs to be distinguished from *natural* necessity, and *determinism* from *compulsion*. Determinism and moral necessity are consistent with praiseworthiness and blameworthiness (indeed, they require it), while compulsion and natural necessity are not.

Now, Jonathan Edwards was not merely a rationalist; Puritanism was also his heritage. He even states that he “should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction’s sake: though I utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin” (p. 131). Therefore, the foregoing summary of the agreement between Edwards and present-day determinists perhaps suggests the question whether after all “the wonderful one-hoss shay, / That was built in such a logical way / It ran a hundred years to the day” ever actually “went to pieces all at once,—” Does not a wheel or a splinter off the Deacon’s Masterpiece continue on among philosophical determinists today? One may raise this question without forgetting their heritage from Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume, and without ignoring the original repair work Edwards did on the “shay.”³¹

³¹ Edwards, J. (2009). [Freedom of the Will](#). (H. S. Stout & P. Ramsey, Eds.) (Revised Edition, Vol. 1, pp. 11–12). New Haven; London: Yale University Press.

CONCEALED CALVIN: Double Predestination and The Abominable Fantasy -

“God hereby indirectly glorifies his grace on the vessels of mercy. — The saints in heaven will behold the torments of the damned: “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever.” Isa. 66:24, “And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.” And in Reb. 14:10 it is said, that they shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb. So they will be tormented in the presence also of the glorified saints.

Hereby the saints will be made the more sensible how great their salvation is. When they shall see how great the misery is from which God has saved them, and how great a difference he has made between their state and the state of others, who were by nature (and perhaps for a time by practice) no more sinful and ill-deserving than any, it will give them a greater sense of the wonderfulness of God’s grace to them. Every time they look upon the damned, it will excite in them a lively and admiring sense of the grace of God, in making them so to differ. This the apostle informs us is one end of the damnation of ungodly men; Rom. 9:22-23, “What if God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?” The view of the misery of the damned will double the ardor of the love and gratitude of the saints in heaven.

The sight of hell torments will exalt the happiness of the saints forever. It will not only make them more sensible of the greatness and freeness of the grace of God in their happiness, but it will really make their happiness the greater, as it will make them more sensible of their own happiness. It will give them a more lively relish of it: it will make them prize it more. When they see others, who were of the same nature and born under the same circumstances, plunged in such misery, and they so distinguished, ☉ it will make them sensible how happy they are. A sense of the opposite misery, in all cases, greatly increases the relish of any joy or pleasure. The sight of the wonderful power, the great and dreadful majesty, and awful justice and holiness of God, manifested in the eternal punishment of ungodly men, will make them prize his favor and love vastly the more. And they will be so much the more happy in the enjoyment of it.” — **JONATHAN EDWARDS**

Four Views Of Faith

Austin Mobley

Mt. Vernon, Kentucky

Faith in God, and all involved in it, is indispensable to pleasing him (Heb. 11:6). Its importance can be seen in the fact that it is the means by which the grace of God is appropriated (Eph. 2:8-9); it is the principle by which the Christian lives (Gal. 2:20); it governs the manner of our daily walk in life (2 Cor. 5:17); and it is an integral part of the armor of the Christian (Eph. 6:16).

There is much confusion among religions as to what faith is and how it is obtained. Many think faith comes through feelings, some unusual emotional experience, or even a dream. Others have the false concept that faith comes through prayer. At least four views of faith are much in evidence today.

First is the **rationalistic view** of faith - the assent of the mind to a demonstrated truth. "The practice of guiding one's opinions and actions solely by what is considered reasonable" (Webster). This false view of faith demands that a thing be demonstrated before accepted. If it is not "reasonable" to the human mind, then it must be rejected. The rationalist would reject every miracle because he has not seen one. True faith cannot be put into a test tube; it has to do with "unseen things" (Heb. 11:1, 3).

Second is the **legalistic view** of faith. This conceives a system of good works devised by man which induces God to supply the faith that is lacking. "Conforming to a code of deeds and observances as a means of justification" (Webster). The reasoning is this: if I just do the best I can, God will make up the difference. This false concept has resulted in the counting of beads, offering human sacrifices, forbidding to marry, abstaining from meats, etc. At the judgment, Jesus will say to those who devise their own works, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (without law or faith) (Matt. 7:21-23).

Third is the **fatalistic view** of faith. This false view regards faith as a grace imparted by God and, if faith is withheld, it is not the fault of the sinner who refuses to believe. The fatalist leaves faith entirely up to the Lord who either bestows or denies it. There is no individual responsibility involved, but all events are determined by fate.

Fourth is the **realistic view** of faith. Webster defines reality as, "the character of being true to life or to fact; someone or something real; an actual person, event, situation, or the like." The realist believes that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). He believes that God has presented in His word the record concerning His Son, and men must believe that record. He places the most favorable construction upon what the Bible teaches and anticipates the best possible outcome if he accepts and obeys (Mk. 16:15-16; Rev. 2: 10). His faith is real! What is your view of faith? - Austin Mobley, Guardian of Truth

Two Dangers of Christian Fatalism

By Ray Hollenbach



“Everything happens for a reason.” Perhaps you’ve heard that before. Perhaps you’ve said it. I’d like to suggest that there’s a world of difference between “Everything happens for a reason,” and “God gives reason to everything that happens.” The first is Christian superstition; the second declares the glory of God.

The idea that God is somehow pulling the levers behind the screen of life is what I call Christian fatalism: God is all-powerful. His will cannot be denied. Therefore, everything that happens must have been part of his plan from the beginning. He was behind everything all along. Isn’t God great? It’s true: God does manage to draw wonderful outcomes from the foolishness of men. It is also true that the glory of God’s power and wisdom is frequently on display in human affairs *in spite* of our choices, not *because* of them. Part of the glory of God is his ability to accomplish his will in the midst of the complexity of a billion human choices. He does not *over-rule* our lives. He works *within* them. He is forgiving, patient, and kind. He knows our weaknesses and chooses to partner with us anyway. What some mean for evil, God turns into good. But he is never the author of that evil.

The twin dangers of Christian fatalism are that believers—who ought to be disciples—first come to believe that their sinful choices have been the will of God all along, and second, believers are tempted to believe that whatever happens in life must be ordained by God. **The first danger** strips away responsibility for our choices and undermines the call of God to repentance as a way of life. Repentance is not simply the doorway into life with God; it is the hallway as well. The New Testament word for repentance is *metanoia*, which means simply to change one’s mind, or even better, to rethink our way of life. This rethinking should be an on-going way of life. The Apostle Paul tells us “be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Renewal comes from a continual rethinking of every aspect of life. **The second danger** of Christian fatalism is that believers accept each event in life as part of God’s foreordained plan.

GENESIS TEACHES FREE WILL

In the Beginning God

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1). So opens the most popular book in the world. The first verse also opens the book of Genesis, the record of man's beginnings. One might think that such a book would open with a reasoned defense of why man should believe in God. It does not. Rather, it assumes the existence of God and begins with an account of creation. The creation narrative cannot be separated from the Bible without undermining its foundation.

Rejecting the creation narrative would undermine the following doctrines: • A belief in God as the Creator. Derivatives of the word "create" occur 106 times in the Bible (create — 54; creation — 6; Creator — 5; creature — 41). God's authority over man is tied to his being man's creator. John said, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11). • The divine origin of the soul of man. Not only does man have a soul, but he also possesses free will — a will that can be subjected to the Devil's temptations and choose to obey or disobey God. • The origin of sin. The book of Genesis reveals to us what sin is and what are its consequences. • The role of man and woman. Paul ties the headship of man to the order of God's creating male and female (1 Tim. 2:13-14). • The institution of marriage. Jesus related God's original plan for husband and wife to have a lifelong commitment to each other to creation (Matt. 19:1-12). • The scheme of redemption is tied to the creation narrative of Genesis 1-3. The role of the serpent, the great tempter of man, is revealed in this account. The origin of sin and what its consequences are for mankind are revealed in this narrative. Man's hopelessness because of his sin reveals man's need for a Savior who is the "seed of woman" and who crushes the head of that serpent (Gen. 3:15). This interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is confirmed by Romans 16:20 — "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20). • The week as a division of ordered time is derived from the creation week. This list could probably be much extended, but this suffices to establish this point: Genesis lays the foundation on which the whole Bible and God's work of human redemption is built. If one starts tampering with this foundation, he undermines the whole scheme of human redemption. Under a different metaphor, the story of human redemption is a garment woven from one thread. If one unravels a single thread of that garment, he unravels it all! The book of Genesis is one of the most important books in the Bible because it forms the basis of all revelation. It is necessary to account for the moral condition of man and his consequent need of redemption by Christ. The book of Genesis is the root whose trunk extends through all Scripture. Therefore, one must treat with utmost seriousness any attacks on the creation narrative.

The Interpretation of Genesis 1

In recent times, liberal Bible scholars (modernists) have addressed Genesis 1 as a cosmogony of the same order as non-inspired cosmogonies, such as the Enuma Elish of the Babylonians or those of the Grecian mythologies. The usual approach is to say that the author of the Genesis narrative (whether the E document of Gen. 1 or the J document of Gen. 2) borrowed from and revised these cosmogonies to write a revised version consistent with monotheism. Not believing the book of Genesis to be the work of the historical Moses, the creation narrative is usually thought to have been produced by some unknown author of the 8-7th century B.C. and pawned off as the work of Moses. The rejection of the Genesis narrative as history results in treating the creation narrative, the flood, and other miraculous things in Genesis as myth.

Another group of scholars, usually described as "harmonists," try to harmonize the Bible account of creation with the latest pronouncements of late twentieth century geology, paleontology, and other

scientific disciplines that have accepted evolution and its old earth (thought to be over 4.5 billion years old). The harmonists disagree on what things they will try to harmonize (the age of the earth, a universal or local flood, the Tower of Babel, etc.), but all of them start from the same place. They have more confidence in the pronouncements of science than in the historicity of the Genesis narrative when given its most natural meaning. So, Genesis must be made to harmonize with late twentieth century science, rather than allowing the theories of science to be judged by the Genesis narrative.

I am among those Bible students who believe the Genesis narrative is an historical account of God's creating the world in six days. I believe that this is the most obvious meaning that the language of Scripture communicates to the average man. The modernists make no effort to re-interpret the Genesis narrative; they believe that it contradicts modern science, that it cannot be harmonized with science, and that science is right and Moses was wrong. Modernists join hands with those who believe in the literal account of creation in telling the "harmonists" that they are twisting and perverting the text of Genesis in an obvious effort to bring it into harmony with science and to the distortion of the obvious meaning of the words of the Bible.

Genesis 1:1 Answers Many Theological Questions

The very opening verse of Genesis denies a number of philosophies and theologies that are presently being taught. Consider the following: 1. Genesis 1:1 denies atheism and humanism. The Scripture begins, "In the beginning God . . ." The Bible accepts the existence of a divine creator, the being of God. Any philosophy that excludes God is contrary to revelation and wrong.

2. Genesis 1:1 denies polytheism. The statement of Scripture is that God created the heavens and the earth. This stands in stark contrast to the pagan accounts of creation. The Enuma Elish, for example, relates that the body of Tiamat was torn into two pieces by Marduk for the creation of the heaven and earth. The Grecian mythologies depict a pantheon. The opening verse of Genesis affirms the oneness of God.

3. Genesis 1:1 denies materialism. The philosophy of materialism believes that matter is eternal and that there is no operation on matter by an outside force such as God. But the creation account denies the eternity of matter.

4. Genesis 1:1 denies pantheism. The doctrine of pantheism makes all of creation a part of God; the tree and the mouse are divine, as a part of God's being. But Genesis 1:1 separates God from his creation. God exists independently of his creation.

5. Genesis 1:1 denies fatalism. Fatalism believes that the world is not operated by the unguided and chance collisions of the molecules of atoms. The Scriptures teach that the world is directed by an omnipotent and omniscient God.

Conclusion

One's beliefs about Genesis 1 reflect to a great degree his belief about the inspiration and authority of the Bible. The doctrine of Bible inspiration declares that God supernaturally revealed to its authors the very words of God himself (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because the Bible is God's inspired revelation, it has authority over man. What it speaks on creation carries greater weight than the pronouncements of the educated of any age, including our own and those in the future. When men begin allowing the pronouncements of scientists to have greater weight than the inspired word of God, they have crossed a significant bridge in their thinking which takes them down a road away from God. The one who crosses such a bridge will never be the same again until he repents and retraces his steps.

If we believe in the inspiration of Scripture, let us accept whatever it teaches. This is not to imply that we should not examine every word in that text to see what its meaning is; indeed, the belief in the inspiration of Scripture forces us to work to understand what that revelation is saying. But, when those words are clearly understood, they must be accepted as the truth, without regard to what modern philosophers and scientists may assert.

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Calvinistic Election

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The doctrine of election as taught by Calvinists is a pernicious doctrine. To them, it is a doctrine which gives them comfort. The idea that God has predetermined that they would be saved, sent them the Holy Spirit to illumine their hearts in order that they might believe and repent, and made it impossible for them to fall from grace is a doctrine of comfort. It would be more comforting to them, however, if they had some genuine evidence that they were among the elect rather than the reprobate. Not ever knowing for sure whether they are among the elect or the reprobate, Calvinists have as much uncertainty about their salvation as any proponent of free-will ever felt. The difference is that the proponent of free-will knows what he must do to be saved whereas the Calvinist does not believe that he can do anything to effect his salvation or cause his damnation.

Let us notice what must happen according to Calvinism in order for a man to be saved. First of all, God must predestinate that certain person to salvation.

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter III, No. 3).

To those whom God has predestined to save, He grants salvation without any consideration as to what that man might do.

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace (Ibid., no. 5).

Inasmuch as these persons, like all of the rest of humanity, are born totally depraved, God grants to these people the Holy Spirit to illumine them in order that they might repent and believe the gospel.

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them a heart of flesh;

renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ, yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.

This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it (Ibid., Chapter X, No. 1-2).

Hence, according to the Calvinist, man's salvation stems wholly from God's free grace. Man does nothing toward saving himself; God does it all. He chooses the man without regard to what his reaction to God's offer of salvation might be; He sends him the Holy Spirit to create the faith. Man cannot resist God's offer of salvation; God's grace is irresistible. This, my brethren, is what is meant by "election" when used by a Calvinist.

The passages used to teach this doctrine are misapplied. One such passage is Romans 9-11. Here's the passage which is frequented:

And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I love, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy (Rom. 9:10-16).

This passage does not teach Calvinist election. What it does teach is that God of His own will predestined to call His Son through Jacob rather than through Esau. The passage which is quoted by Paul, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (v. 13), is a quotation of Mal. 1:2-3. The passage was written centuries after the death of both Esau and Jacob. It had nothing to do with the salvation or damnation of either one. What it referred to was God's decision to call Israel through Jacob rather than through Esau. The passage has nothing to do with God arbitrarily electing to save one man and damn another. Rather, it refers to God's choice which was made without regard to the personal righteousness of either Jacob or Esau to bring His chosen nation into existence.

Let us continue to examine this passage so frequently perverted by the Calvinists. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee,

and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore, hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth (9:17-18).

Calvinists teach that God predestinated that Pharaoh would be born into the world, rebel against God's will, and be damned in Hell. Notice that the Calvinists teach that it was God's will that Pharaoh rebel against God's will. Pharaoh simply did what God predestinated that he would do and then God turned and damned him in hell for doing what God predestined that he would do. Who can believe it?

What this passage teaches is not a thirty-second cousin to such a Calvinist doctrine. What God did was raise up Pharaoh to be king. Pharaoh was the kind of man he was because he chose to be that kind of man. What God did was to allow such a man as Pharaoh to be exalted as king over Egypt. Someone might ask, "How, then, did God harden Pharaoh's heart?" I reply, "The same way that he hardens men's hearts today." How is it that man's heart is hardened today? We seem to be able to understand how a man's heart is hardened today. The man hears the word of God, refuses to obey it a sufficient number of times that he becomes insensitive to God's will, and then becomes rather obstinate. This is exactly what happened with Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard the word of God through Moses numerous times. Moses related God's will for Pharaoh, "Let my people go." Pharaoh refused to obey so God sent the plagues to change his mind. When the plague was hard against Egypt, Pharaoh would decide to allow the people to go but when respite would come, he would change his mind. Through this method God hardened Pharaoh's heart. This passage does not teach that Pharaoh did not have free will. Even as the scriptures teach that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, they also teach that Pharaoh hardened his heart in refusing to hearken to the will of God (Ex. 8:15). Hence, what we have occurring with reference to Pharaoh is not that God predestined to bring a man into this world who He would damn without regard to his personal character. Rather, what God did was to raise up to be a king such a wicked man as Pharaoh whom He used to manifest His glory. There is no difference in God's use of Pharaoh in the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage than God's use of the Jews, Herod, and Pontius Pilate in crucifying Christ to deliver us from our sins.

The passage continues as follows:

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What

if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (9:19-23).

This passage must be understood in the context of Romans 9. This passage is discussing God's purpose to call His people Israel. We are not discussing the personal salvation of a given person. Hence, to make this passage refer to God personally selecting one man to salvation and another for damnation is contrary to the context. Rather, what is being discussed is God's purpose to choose Israel for God's chosen people (not all of which Israelites were saved forever in heaven) -and to not so choose Egypt (this does not imply that none of the Egyptians were saved in heaven). Rather, this passage is simply showing God's determination to choose Israel and to reject Egypt and all other nations.

A few months ago, I was discussing "once saved, always saved" with a Baptist preacher. During that discussion, I used Rom. 11:20-23 to show that a person could fall from grace. In that discussion, the Baptist related that Romans 9-11 was not discussing personal salvation but God's treatment of Israel. A few weeks ago, I met this same man in a discussion of the Calvinist doctrine of election. Somehow, he had forgotten that this passage was discussing Israel in this discussion for he applied it to personal salvation.

While we are considering Romans 9-11, let us notice some non-Calvinist doctrines taught in this passage. Here are some non-Calvinist doctrines taught in these chapters:

1. A desire for all men to be saved. Paul wrote, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (9:3). Again, he wrote, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved" (10:1). Here, we find Paul praying that God's will might not be accomplished if Calvinism is true. This passage contradicts the Calvinist doctrine that some are predestined to damnation and some to salvation to praise of God's glory. Paul should not have been praying that those whom God had predestinated to damnation might be saved. He should have been teaching how God would be praised through their damnation.

2. Conditional salvation. Calvinists teach that salvation is not conditional. Yet, Paul wrote as follows: "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumbling stone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 9:33). "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

"For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 10:11). "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3).

Since Calvinists teach that salvation is unconditional, this section of Scripture certainly offers them no comfort inasmuch as it offers salvation to every man conditionally.

3. Belief through the preaching of the word-According to Calvinists, a man cannot believe the gospel until the Holy Spirit illumines his mind that he might believe. Rom. 10:17 teaches otherwise; it says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." This is cofitrary to Calvinist beliefs.

4. Falling from grace. Calvinists teach that a child of God can never fall from grace so as to be eternally lost. Rom. 11:20-23 reads as follows: Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again.

Notice that some of those who had formerly been part of God's olive tree were broken off. Some who had not been part of the olive tree had been grafted in. We see men traversing from the state of being saved, to lost, to saved. We read nothing of a group of elect and another group of reprobates which can neither be added to nor diminished.

5. Elect people who were lost. Rom. 11:28 states, "As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." Hence, here were some who were elect who were enemies of Christ and the gospel and, consequently, lost. This cannot be fitted into Calvinist thought.

Conclusion

Romans 9-11 offers no hope for the Calvinist as proof of his peculiar doctrines of election and reprobation. The doctrine remains unproved. It is contrary to what is revealed about God, man, and the gospel. Calvinism must be rejected in all of its parts.

CALVIN TAUGHT & T.U.L.I.P. TEACHES A TWISTED GOSPEL OF GRACE!

by Jesus People on Errors of Calvin

Five points of Calvinism(T.U.L.I.P.)

Grace of God Is Redefined

- ⊙ Calvinism's distinctive doctrines could be better called 'the doctrines of damnation,' because they promise damnation to the majority of people. God offers no grace and no hope of salvation for them, as they are doomed from before they were even born to an eternal hell!

Grace of God Is Redefined

One of the most common arguments that Calvinists use revolves around a unique definition of grace. “If people are saved ‘by grace alone,’” they say, “then people can’t play any part in their salvation. Salvation must be 100% the work of God if it is truly salvation by grace.”

Calvinists have even labeled their distinctive doctrines as ‘the doctrines of grace,’ as if none else have a theology of grace!

Calvinism’s distinctive doctrines could be better called ‘the doctrines of damnation,’ because they promise damnation to the majority of people. God offers no grace and no hope of salvation for them, as they are doomed from before they were even born to an eternal hell!

Calvinists believe that God could have saved everyone just as easily as He saved those whom He allegedly predestined for salvation, but He was pleased to save only a small minority of those He created in His image. The rest He was pleased to foreordain to hell. We cannot help but ask, ‘If God is love, what kind of love is that?’ John Wesley, founder of the Methodists, replied, ‘That’s the kind of *love* that makes one’s blood run cold!’

Does salvation by grace require that human beings play no part in their salvation? NO! Imagine if I were bankrupt, but someone paid my debts and gave me a fresh start by means of a million dollar check & some great business advice. Would you say that my financial recovery was not ‘by grace alone’ because

I had to deposit the check into my bank account in order to enjoy the benefits of my benefactor? **Of course not!!**

Does salvation by grace require that human beings play no part in their salvation? So if such logic would be considered absurd by anyone & everyone, why is the same logic, when applied to salvation, swallowed by Calvinists?

Why do Calvinists accuse non-Calvinists of not having a gospel of grace simply because we maintain that those who are saved are those who, as the Bible teaches, don't resist God's gracious drawing? If you accept a birthday gift, is that a 'work' that lessens the grace of the giver?

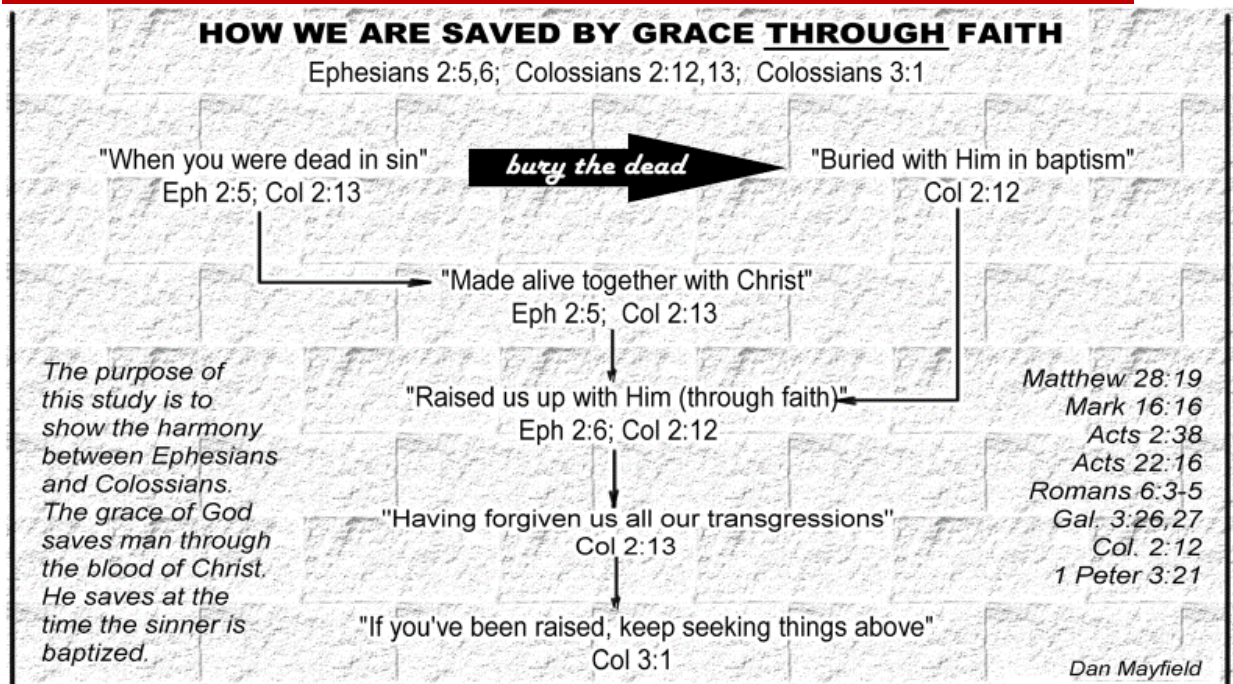
Calvinist logic that sets grace against human response is not a logic that can be supported by any scripture. There are no verses in the Bible that tell us that if salvation is of grace, then human free will plays no part in the salvation process. Rather, the Bible affirms that salvation is all of grace & also affirms that those who are saved are those who, by their own wills, do not resist God's gracious drawing.

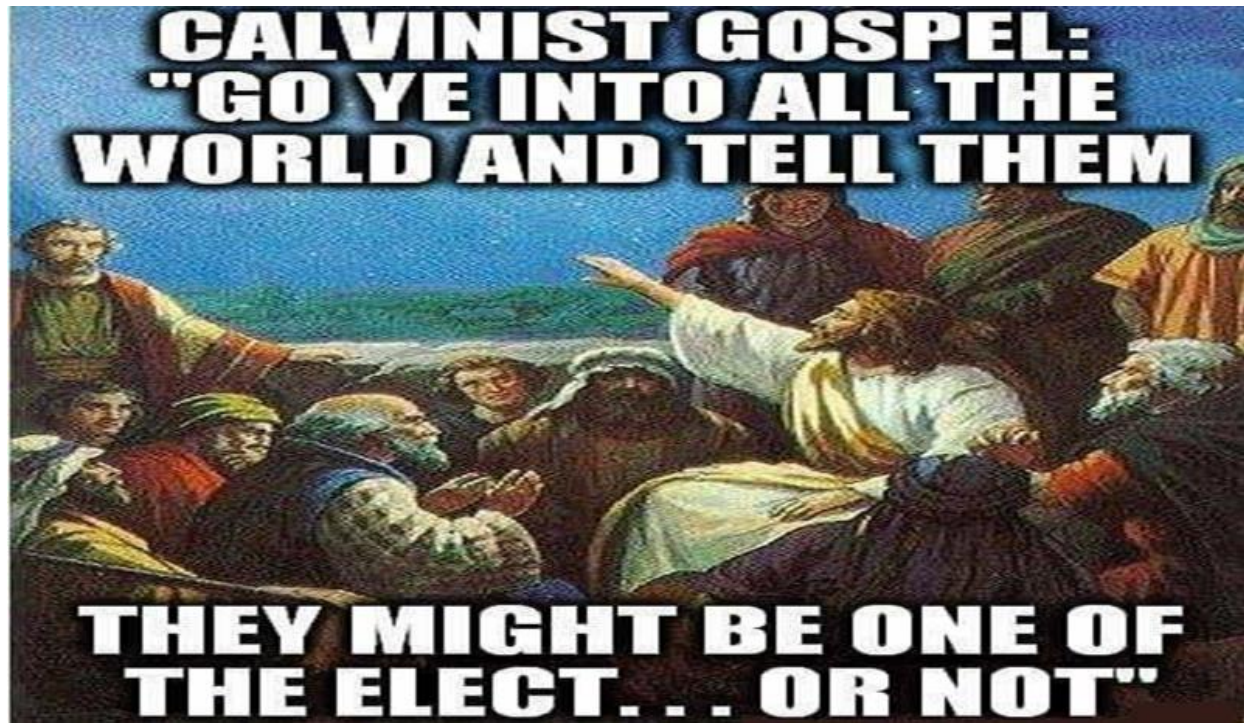
Calvinists elevate human reasoning above Scripture's revelation, making God's grace and human responsibility mutually exclusive concepts, while the Bible makes them mutually inclusive. Applying the same kind of human logic, we could claim that, because salvation is by grace alone and human responsibility plays no part, Christians can sin all they may want without eternal consequences. Yet, the same Bible that affirms salvation is by grace alone also affirms that the unrighteous 'will not inherit the kingdom of God' (First Corinthians 6: 9, 10). Does your will have anything

to do with your not stealing? If your answer is *yes*, then you have just admitted that your will plays a part in whether or not you will inherit eternal life.

Salvation is by grace from beginning to end - God graciously draws everyone in the world by means of His creation & their God-given consciences. He awes them & convicts them. He expects every person whom He so draws to seek Him {Acts 7:26}. Those who seek Him do so only because of His gracious initiative. And Jesus promised that those who seek will find {Matthew 7:7}. Scripture affirms that God 'is a rewarder of those who seek Him {Hebrews 11: 6}.

If people are incapable of seeking God, as some claim, then we would have to wonder why the Bible scripture says otherwise. – *Jesus People*





Matthew 7: Fruits Of Calvin Tulip **Mania** & **Depression**

- Bible Abused, Word Confused, Truth Obfuscated
- Makes God The Greatest Respector Of Persons
- Blinder To God's Good Grace & Cross Of Love
- Makes Of All Men Victims & Our God Merciless
- Leads To View Of Mankind Being Beyond Blame
- Broadcasting Bad News Stymies Scripture Studies
- Substitutes Subjective Experience For Elect Proof
- Robs The Human Race Of Its God-Given Dignity
- Framed Inherited Sin & Infant Baptism Doctrines
- Dishonors God & Denies Us His Justice & Mercy

**THE FIVE PETALS OF THE T.U.L.I.P.
FUNERAL FLOWER & FIVE FALSE
STRATA OF LAPSARIANISM ARE BOTH
BASED ON FALLICIOUS REASONING
PRESUMING A NON-EXISTENT PARADOX
& FLAWED CLASSICAL & MEDIEVAL
PRESUMPTIONS OF HUMAN LOGIC.**

**CALVINISTS SHOULD INSTEAD
REVISIT THE CLEAR PASSAGES OF
SCRIPTURE THAT SPEAK OF THE
FIVE TRUE STATES OF THE
HUMAN SOUL & THE TRUE FIVE
STEPS TO PERSONAL SALVATION.**

JUDGEMENT PREPARED

FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five States of the Soul:

- **EXEMPTION:**
- Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3
- **CONDEMNATION:**
- Galatians 3: 22
- **JUSTIFICATION:**
- Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2
- **DAMNATION:**
- Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16
- **GLORIFICATION:**
- Romans 8: 17, 30; II Thess. 1: 7 - 12

JUDGEMENT PREPARED
FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- **Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27**
- **BELIEVING:**
- **Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16**
- **REPENTING:**
- **Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3**
- **CONFESSING:**
- **Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37**
- **BAPTISM:**
- **Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 - 38**

APPENDIX: COURSE MATERIALS
 CLASS SESSIONS ON CALVINISM
 MEMORIAL CHURCH OF CHRIST
 TAUGHT BY DR. KEN PEPPER.

Lesson Number	Topic
1	Overview and Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasons for Our Study of Modern Doctrines (Importance and Justification) • The Nature of God’s Word and Our Attitude Toward It
2	An Introduction to Calvinism: The Sovereignty of God and the Five Basic Tenants of Calvinism
3	T – Total Hereditary Depravity The Doctrine of “Original Sin” or “Inherited Guilt”
4	U – Unconditional Election The Doctrine of “Predestination” or “Foreordination”
5	L – Limited Atonement
6	I – Irresistible Grace
7	P - Perseverance of the Saints The Doctrine of “Once Saved Always Saved”
8	Salvation by Faith Only (Part 1)
9	Salvation by Faith Only (Part 2)
10	Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Part 1)
11	Indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Part 2)

Original Sin & Total Hereditary Depravity: Free Moral Agency and Inherited Guilt

Are babies born guilty of original sin and total hereditary (inherited) depravity? Or does the Bible teach free moral agency and individual responsibility and accountability? Calvinism teaches the imputation of the sins of Adam and Eve, so that each person is born guilty of total corruption and a corrupt sinful nature. This doctrine is often used to justify infant baptism, but what does the gospel of Jesus Christ teach?

Introduction:

"Original sin" refers to the first sin committed by Adam and Eve, and the consequences of that sin to future generations. All Bible students agree that serious consequences came to mankind from that sin. But the term generally refers to a particular doctrinal concept about sin as taught by most Protestant and Catholic churches.

The purpose of this study is to examine the doctrine of "original sin" and the related doctrine of "total hereditary (inherited) inherited depravity" according to the Bible. Does the gospel of Jesus Christ teach inherited guilt or free moral agency and individual accountability and responsibility?

Statement of the Doctrine:

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from the Westminster Confession of Faith in the *Presbyterian Book of Confessions*. All emphasis has been added.

"Our first parents ... sinned ... By this sin they fell from their original righteousness, and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and *wholly defiled* in all the faculties and parts of soul and body. They, being the root of all mankind, the *guilt* of this sin was *imputed*, and the *same death in sin and corrupted nature* conveyed to *all their posterity*...From this original corruption, whereby we are *utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions*" - Chap. VI, sec. 1-4.

"Every sin, both *original* and actual ... doth, in its own nature, bring *guilt* upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and *eternal*" - Chap. VI, sec. 6.

So, all people inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. Regardless of our own conduct or choice, we are born guilty of sin and held accountable for the guilt of what Adam did and doomed to eternal punishment.

We also inherit from Adam a sinful nature, so that our whole being is evil in every aspect. We are so thoroughly evil that we are incapable of doing anything really good. All specific acts of sins are committed because of this inherited corruption of our nature.

Consequences and Related Doctrines:

All the points of Calvinism follow from original sin:

"Total Inability"

Since man is incapable of doing anything good, he is powerless to respond to God's effort to save him. Nothing we can do, say, or think, can in any way influence our chance of salvation. [See Chap. IX, sec. 3]

"Unconditional election"

Since we can do nothing toward our salvation, everything is up to God. He *unconditionally* elects or chooses certain individuals to be saved. This choice has nothing whatever to do with our character, choice, conduct, attitude, or will, either now or in the future. Those whom God does not so elect to save, will be doomed to eternal torment and there is nothing they can do about that. God does this "without any foresight of faith or good works, ... or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto..." (Chap. III, sec. 3-7). It is of God's "...grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein" (Chap. X, sec. 2).

"Irresistible grace"

Since man can do nothing to respond to God's will, God sends the Holy Spirit to act directly and irresistibly on the hearts of the elect to enable them to believe and obey. (Chap. X, sec. 2)

Other related doctrines of Calvinism are: "Limited atonement" (Jesus died only for those who are unconditionally elected, not for all mankind), and "Perseverance of the saints" (those who are God's elect, once saved, can never so sin as to be eternally lost - Chap. XVII, sec. 1,2). The first letters of these doctrines spell TULIP.

Infant baptism

If babies are born guilty of Adam's sin, then it is reasoned that they must be baptized for remission of sins. This is the origin of infant baptism (though some no longer practice it for this reason).

Though there are various forms of the doctrine, the above description provides the basic concept. Calvin, Luther, and other reformers believed it, but the Catholic Church taught it long before the Protestant Reformation. Few members of many modern denominations care about this or any other doctrine, but it is still in their official creed books.

Consider what the Bible teaches:

I. Men Do Not Inherit Guilt, Nor Are They Accountable for Other People's Sins.

If we can inherit Adam's guilt, why not inherit the guilt of *all* our ancestors? And why can't we inherit *righteousness* too? If our parents were Christians who have been cleansed from all sin (1 John 1:7,9; Heb. 7:25), then there would be no sin to inherit, so we would be born pure!

See **Ezekiel 18 Below** (particularly, vs. 20) - None of Adam's descendants bear the guilt of his sin. No one's guilt can come to us through our parents. Adam's sin is upon Adam alone. If you or I are guilty of sin, it is because of what *we* have done (note verse 24).

Ezekiel 18

1 The word of the Lord came to me again: **2** “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? **3** As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. **4** Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins shall die.

5 “If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right – **6** if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife or approach a woman in her time of impurity, **7** does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtor his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, **8** does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, **9** walks in my statutes, and is careful to observe my ordinances - he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God.

10 “If he begets a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, **11** who does none of these duties, but eats upon the mountains, defiles his neighbor’s wife, **12** oppresses the poor and needy, commits robbery, does not restore the pledge, lifts up his eyes to the idols, commits abomination, **13** lends at interest, and takes increase; shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominable things; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon himself.

14 “But if this man begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and fears, and does not do likewise, **15** who does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbor’s wife, **16** does not wrong any one, exacts no pledge, commits no robbery, but gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, **17** withholds his hand from iniquity, takes no interest or increase, observes my ordinances, and walks in my statutes; he shall not die for his father’s iniquity; he shall surely live. **18** As for his father, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity.

19 “Yet you say, ‘Why should not the son suffer for the iniquity of the father?’ When the son has done what is lawful and right, and has been careful to observe all my statutes, he shall surely live. **20** The soul that sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

21 “But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. **22** None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness which he has done he shall live. **23** Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, says the

Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? **24** But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does the same abominable things that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds which he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, he shall die.

25 “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? **26** When a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall die for it; for the iniquity which he has committed he shall die. **27** Again, when a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is lawful and right, he shall save his life. **28** Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die. **29** Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

30 “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. **31** Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? **32** For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so turn, and live.”

Did Jesus Inherit the Guilt of Adam's Sin?

Hebrews 2:14,17 - He shared in flesh and blood, made in *all things* like us.

Luke 3:38; Galatians 4:4 - He was a descendant of Adam, born of woman.

2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:22 - Yet Jesus knew no sin. In Him is no sin, because He did no sin [**Hebrews 4:15; 7:26**]

If we inherit sin from Adam, then Jesus must have inherited it since he was a descendant of Adam and was like us in all things. But He did not inherit it, therefore we do not inherit it. Guilt is not inherited.

II. Each Person Is Individually Accountable and Will Be Judged for What He Personally Does.

A. A Person Becomes Guilty of Sin Because of His Own Personal Conduct.

Sin is what people *do* (in word, deed, or thought) that is not in harmony with God's will. When the Bible says people are "in sin," "slaves of sin," or under the "law of sin," it refers to the condition of guilt and other consequences a person experiences because of his own sinful conduct.

All the following passages say a person becomes guilty of sin when he himself commits or practices wrong. Contrast each passage to original sin, which says man is a sinner by inheritance before he does anything himself.

1 John 3:4 - Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. Sin is defined as something a person "commits" ("transgression" - KJV), not what he inherits. [cf. v6,8]

Mark 7:20-23 - A man is defiled (made guilty) by things (such as those listed) which a person does because of decisions in his heart. Contrast this to original sin.

Romans 3:9-18,23 - We are all "under sin" (v9) because we "have sinned" (v23). We have "turned aside" (v12), we do not "do good" (v12), etc. [cf. Psa. 14:1-4]

Romans 6:16,19 - People become servants of sin because they present themselves, their own members, as servants of sin and uncleanness. When we obey sin, we become servants of sin. Compare to original sin.

James 1:14,15 - A man becomes worthy of death when he responds to temptation by sinning (note "then ... when"). Sin and spiritual death are results of what *he* does. Note "*each man*" - it is an individual matter, and it is true of each of us.

James 2:10,11 - A person *becomes* guilty and a transgressor when he disobeys the law (stumbles).

John 8:34 - A person becomes enslaved to sin because of what he himself "commits."

1 Timothy 6:10 - Love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Original sin says the love of money has another root - inherited depravity - a "root" to the "root." The Bible says the root is the man's attitude, not Adam's sin.

1 Peter 2:22 - Jesus was not a sinner because he *did* no sin. If original sin is true, He would have been a sinner whether He did anything sinful or not.

Where is the passage that teaches that anyone is guilty of sin because he inherited guilt from Adam or is counted guilty *before* he himself commits sin?

Additional verses regarding sin and personal conduct...	
Exodus 32:32-33	32 But now, if thou wilt forgive their sin - and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." 33 But the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.
Isaiah 59:1-2	1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear.
John 3:19-21	19 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. 21 But he who does what

	is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.
John 7:7	The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.
Romans 3:25	whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins;
2 Corinthians 12:21	I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality, and licentiousness which they have practiced.
Colossians 1:21	And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,
James 4:17	Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
3 John 11	Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. He who does good is of God; he who does evil has not seen God.

B. Each Person Will Be Judged and His Eternal Destiny Determined by What He Himself Does.

Eternal destiny is determined by our conduct (not by what we inherit), and it is determined individually. Each person is held accountable for what he did, not for what his ancestors did.

2 Corinthians 5:10 - For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.

Each will be judged for what *he did* in the body. This is true of *all*. Only Adam will be judged for what Adam did. The rest of us will be judged for what we did.

Matthew 7:21-23 – 21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ **23** And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’”

We enter the kingdom of heaven or are rejected based on what we *do*. Sin is something people *work* or practice (verse 23).

Romans 1:32 - Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them.

People are worthy of death because of what they *practice*. Original sin says they are worthy of death because they are born guilty of sin before they ever practice anything.

Romans 2:6-10 – 6 For he will render to every man according to his works: **7** to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; **8** but

for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. **9** There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, **10** but glory and honor and peace for every one who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek.

At judgment, *every* man will be rewarded according to *his works* (not Adam's works). Tribulation and anguish will be for those who *work* evil and don't *obey* the truth but *obey* unrighteousness.

Romans 14:12 - So then *each* of us shall give account of *himself* to God.

Only Adam will give account for what he did. *Each* of the rest of us will give account for what *we* did. Where is the passage that says a person will be judged or eternally condemned because of guilt he inherited from Adam?

Original sin says every person is *passive* in becoming a sinner and *passive* in being saved from sin. He is a sinner before he *does* anything and saved without *doing* anything. The Bible says man is *active* both in sin and in salvation. He becomes a sinner because of what he *does*, and we will see that he must choose to *act* in order to receive God's offer of salvation.

Additional verses regarding personal accountability...	
Matthew 16:27	For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done.
John 5:29	and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.
1 Peter 1:17	And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.
1 Peter 3:10-12	10 For "He that would love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile; 11 let him turn away from evil and do right; let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those that do evil."
Jude 15	to execute judgment on all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against him."
Revelation 20:12-13	12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done.

Revelation 22:12	“Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.
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III. Babies Are Innocent, Not Guilty.

If original sin is true, then babies are born guilty of sin, totally depraved, destined for eternal punishment. All passages already studied disprove this. Now note specifically:

Psalm 106:37,38; Jeremiah 19:4,5 - In sacrificing babies to idols, people shed the blood of *innocent* people. But if the babies inherited Adam's sin, they would be guilty and worthy of death. [cf. Jer. 32:35]

Romans 7:9 - Paul (representative of people in general) was *alive* before sin came, but then he *died*. How, if people are totally depraved since birth? (cf. v11)

Hebrews 12:9; Zechariah 12:1; Ecclesiastes 12:7 - Our fleshly nature comes from our earthly fathers (like Adam). But God is the Father of our spirits. God gives the spirit and forms it within man.

Total depravity says man is "wholly defiled in ...*soul* and body." Does the sinless Father in heaven give us wholly defiled, totally depraved spirits? If the spirit comes from God, not from earthly parents, how can we inherit sin from our parents?

Matthew 19:14; 18:3 - The kingdom of God belongs to those who are converted and become like little children. But if little children are totally depraved, why should we become like them? Does conversion make us totally depraved?

Jesus prayed for children and blessed them (**Mark 10:14-16**), but He did not baptize them. They did not need baptism, because they were acceptable just as they were. But how could this be if they were born totally depraved?

The Bible teaches that sinners must be baptized to be saved (**Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 3:6,4; Galatians 3:26,27**). The consequence of original sin is that babies who die without baptism are all lost eternally. But the Bible teaches that babies are innocent and need no baptism. So, original sin must not be true.

IV. Man Is Not Totally Corrupt, But Is Capable of Choosing Between Good and Evil.

Total depravity says that man is so corrupt that he cannot choose between good and evil, and he cannot choose whether or not to obey the conditions of the gospel. Hence, he must be "passive" in determining his own salvation. Note the Bible teaching:

A. God Has Made Salvation Available to Everybody.

2 Peter 3:9 – The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

1 Timothy 2:4 - who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:6 - who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.

Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all.

Hebrews 2:9 - But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

Jesus tasted death for everyone.

Titus 2:11 – for the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men,

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men.

1 John 2:2 - Jesus is the propitiation, not for our sins only, but also for the whole world.

John 3:16 - God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34,35 - God is no respecter of persons.

Since God has made salvation available to all and wants all to be saved, if man has no control in the matter, then everyone would have to be saved. But we know many people will not be saved (**Matthew 7:13,14**), so it follows that man has the power to determine whether he will or will not accept salvation. Salvation is conditional.

Either: (1) Salvation is conditioned on the choices man makes, or (2) all people will be saved, or (3) God is a respecter of persons and did not really extend salvation to all. But points #2 and 3 are false, so man must have the power to choose whether he will or will not accept the salvation God offers.

Any doctrine which teaches that salvation is NOT conditioned on man's choice, must conclude either that all people will be saved or that God is a respecter of persons and did not really make salvation available to all.

[1 Timothy 4:10; John 1:29; 4:42; 10:9; 12:32,33,47; 6:51; Matthew 11:28-30; 5:43-48; Lamentations 3:33; Rom. 10:8-18; 11:32; 5:18; Acts 3:25,26; Luke 9:23,24; 15:7,10; Ezekiel 18:23,32; 33:11; 1 John 4:14; 2 Corinthians 5:14,15,19; Revelations 3:20; Isaiah 45:21f; Colossians 1:28]

B. Man Is Capable of Choosing between Good and Evil, and therefore Salvation Is Conditional.

Note the following passages which show that men do have the power to choose whether we will or will not obey God's instructions.

People are not totally depraved but can choose to become better or worse.

Acts 10:2,22 - Before his conversion (11:14), Cornelius was devout and feared God. How could this be if he was totally depraved and incapable of choosing good or evil? [Luke 7:2-10]

Luke 8:15 - Some people obey God's word when they hear it because they have a "good and honest heart." How is this possible if they are totally depraved?

2 Timothy 3:13 - Other men grow worse and worse. Again, if they are already totally depraved and cannot choose good or evil, how can they get any worse?

People are free moral agents like Adam and Jesus.

Calvinism admits Adam and Eve and Jesus were free moral agents and had the power to choose between good and evil, but it says we have inherited total depravity so we do not have that power. Consider these verses:

1 Corinthians 10:13 - With every temptation there is a way of escape so we do not have to give in and sin. We are like Adam and Eve in that, with each temptation we face, we can choose to overcome the temptation by taking the way of escape or we can choose not to.

Hebrews 4:15 - Jesus was tempted in all points like we are. He was a free moral agent but did not sin because He always chose to do right. Either we have the same power to choose or else Jesus was not tempted "in *all* points" like we are. If we have a totally depraved nature so we can never choose to do right, but He did not have that nature, then His temptation was not at all like ours!

[Other passages showing that man is able to resist sin: James 4:7; John 5:14; 8:11; 1 John 2:1; 1 Corinthians 15:34; 2 Corinthians 13:7; Ephesians 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22; 2 Timothy 2:19]

Many verses say people are able to choose to obey God or disobey Him.

Joshua 24:15 - "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

1 Kings 18:21 - Elijah said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." The people had the power to choose.

Revelation 22:17 - The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. God invites people to come to Him. Whoever desires (or "will" - KJV) can do so. The choice is ours.

Psalms 119:30 - I have chosen the way of truth. How, if we cannot choose good or evil?

Hebrews 11:25 - Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than the pleasures of sin.

Acts 17:11,12 - Even before they believed, the Bereans were noble-minded and had a ready mind to search the Scriptures and learn the truth.

Isaiah 1:18-20 - God reasoned with the people offering to make their sins white as snow. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; But if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword". Their will determined the outcome.

Matthew 23:37 - Jesus wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem together, but they were not willing! The will of the people determined how they responded to Jesus' will.

Proverbs 1:29 - Some people do not choose the fear of the LORD.

Matthew 21:29 - Asked to do His father's will, a son said, "I will not." Later he repented and went. This illustrates our relationship to God. We have the power to determine whether or not we obey Him.

[John 7:17; Psa. 119:173; Isa. 56:4; Luke 10:42; 7:38; 1 Chron. 28:9; Matt. 5:6; 13:14,15; 16:24; 19:17,21; 26:41; Acts 17:11,27; James 4:4,8; Heb. 2:17; Prov. 3:31; 4:23]

Salvation is conditioned on the response we choose to give to God's commands.

Mark 16:15,16 - Those who believe and are baptized will be saved, but those who disbelieve will be condemned. These alternatives are to be preached to all people, but why bother if we have no power to choose anyway?

Every passage that gives some instruction for men to follow to be saved, is necessarily implying that man has the power to choose whether or not to respond. We have seen in numerous passages that man does have that power. [Cf. Acts 2:38-40; Phil. 2:12]

We do not deny that much of mankind is depraved. We do deny that all of mankind are depraved (those in Christ and little children are innocent). We deny that depravity is inherited unconditionally. And we deny depravity is total such that man is incapable of choosing between good and evil.

Calvinism says, in effect, that man is a robot. We have no choice in anything. We became sinners because someone else sinned, before we had anything at all to say or do about it. Then we are saved or lost unconditionally, and there is nothing we can say or do about that either! The doctrine totally eliminates man's free moral agency, power to choose, and individual moral responsibility!

V. Answers to Defenses of Original Sin and Total Depravity.

Psalms 51:5

Psalms 51:5 - Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me. Does this mean he was born guilty of sin, totally depraved?

1. It says nothing about Adam, Adam's sin, or that David inherited guilt of Adam's sin.
2. The verse does not state that David was born guilty. It describes the guilt of his *mother*. His mother is the one who was guilty of sin and iniquity when she conceived him and brought him forth. (The first part of the verse is, in Hebrew parallelism, explained by the last part of the verse.)
3. Consider parallel language in Acts 2:8. People were born in a native language or tongue. Did they inherit the language? Was it part of their inherent nature? No, but the people around them spoke it, so they soon learned it.
4. So David's point is, not that he was guilty of sin from birth nor inherited it, but he was born into the midst of a sinful *environment* and sinful *influences*. His mother was guilty and so were all around him, so he soon learned it, like one learns a language.

Ephesians 2:1-3

Some say you were "by nature children of wrath" means inherited depravity, and "dead in sin" means powerless to do anything about your condition like a dead body.

1. But it nowhere mentions Adam, Adam's sin, nor inheriting guilty of Adam's sin.
2. They were dead because of "sins" (plural, not singular, as Adam's sin) "in which you once *walked*" (verse 2), and *conducted* themselves in the lusts of the flesh (verse 3). This contradicts inherited depravity and proves our position, that people are in sin because of their own conduct, not Adam's conduct.
3. "Nature" here refers to a person's character which comes as a result of *repeated practice*, not necessarily by inheritance. Romans 2:14 says some people *by nature obey* God's will, but total depravity says that is impossible.

4. "Death" refers to spiritual separation from God - see v11-13. As the body is dead when the spirit separates from it (James 2:26), so our sins separate us from God (Isa. 59:2) and we become spiritually dead in sin.
5. Luke 15:24 - The prodigal son had been "dead," yet in that condition was able to decide to turn from sin and return to His father (v17-20).

Sins of the Fathers Visited on the Children

Gen. 3:15-19,22-24; Ex. 20:5; 34:6,7; Josh. 7:24f; 1 Sam. 15:2f; 2 Sam. 21:1-9 speak of the sins of the fathers being visited on the sons. We are told this is how Adam's sin comes upon us.

1. Gen. 3 shows that we suffer *consequences* in this life for Adam's sin, but this does not prove we are considered to be *guilty* of his sin or will suffer eternal punishment after this life for it. The children of a gambler or drunkard may suffer in this life because of his sin, but that does not mean they are considered *guilty* of it or will suffer eternally because they inherit guilt.
2. Ex. 20:5; etc., do not mention Adam or Adam's sin. They do not say we inherit sin from Adam. Ex. 20:5 says the sins of the parents are visited on the third or fourth generation. We are much further from Adam than that.
3. These verses also could refer to physical consequences of sin in this life, rather than guilt and eternal consequences. "Iniquity" (Heb. AVON) is elsewhere translated "punishment" in ten instances. "Visiting" (Ex. 20:5) is translated "punishing" in NIV and in NKJV footnote. The specific examples cited are all examples of consequences in this life.
4. Note "third and fourth generation of those who *hate* me" (Ex. 20:5). God is discussing those who continue to hate Him! Most likely this is an expression of God's long-suffering (see the context of Ex. 34:6,7). If one generation hated God (idolatry - see context), He would rebuke but not destroy the nation. If a future generation repented, he would spare the nation. But if three or four generations in a row hated God, He would destroy the nation. So, this is suffering in this life, and it comes on the children only if they too are guilty of the sin.

Romans 7:14-25

It is argued that this passage describes the total depravity of nature inherited from Adam.

1. Again, the passage nowhere mentions Adam or Adam's sin, nor does it say anyone inherited sin or depravity. The passage does describe depravity, but it is the consequence of sin the man himself practices (verses 15-20).
2. The passage actually contradicts *total* depravity. The spirit "delights" in God's law (verse 22), and man "wills" to do good (verses 18,19,21). But this is impossible according to total depravity, for it says man is *wholly* defiled in all parts of *soul* and body, opposite to all good, wholly inclined to all evil, and has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good. Total depravity has serious problems in this passage.

3. The context in verse 9 teaches the innocence of children (as discussed previously). Surely verses 14-25 do not contradict verse 9.
4. The passage describes the condition of men in sin, outside Christ, before conversion (especially Jews under the law, like Paul was before conversion). Paul uses first person and present tense, but he sometimes does this to show how he identifies with the people in the condition, especially if he himself has experienced the problem (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:6; Romans 13:11-13).

Yet it cannot be that Paul still had the problem he describes. He describes one who is "carnal, sold under sin" (v14), but 8:8,9 condemns those who are carnal, and 7:5 shows it is a past condition for Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:1ff). He says sin dwells in him and he is captured under the law of sin (v17,23), yet he elsewhere shows that Christians must not let sin reign in their members - 6:11-19; Gal. 5:16-24; Eph. 4:17ff; Col. 3:5-14. He says he is "wretched" (verse 24), but that is not the state of one in Christ (Phil. 4:4ff). He says Jesus delivers people from this wretched state (verses 24 - 25).

So, Paul is using the historical present tense, just as we might do to tell a story that already happened. Paul used it to express understanding of the condition of those in sin, and because he once had that condition (imagine him on the Damascus road after he knew he was wrong but had not yet been told what to do about it).

5. Why can't the passage be describing the depraved and hopeless case of one who is guilty of sin as a consequence of his own practice, before he is forgiven (like we discussed in Eph. 2)? Man has physical urges and natural instincts that are neither good nor bad, moral or immoral, in and of themselves. God's law reveals proper ways to satisfy these urges, but sometimes our natural body sees ways to satisfy these urges which are improper, but it does not know the difference so it still desires it.

As a result, we all eventually sin and become a slave of sin. We do not have God's promise to answer our prayers, nor do we have other blessings in Christ to strengthen us. We know we are guilty and not forgiven, so we despair and are wretched. We have little motivation to do good because doing good of itself will not remove our past guilt. We know we are wrong, wish to be right, but can see no solution to our wretchedness.

The solution, as Paul finally states, is forgiveness in Christ. As Christians we still sin occasionally, but sin does not *reign* in our lives as before, and we have a means of forgiveness when we do sin (cf. chap. 6,8).

Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:22

We are told "in Adam all die" means that all inherit the guilt of Adam's sin, thereby being born totally depraved.

1. 1 Corinthians 15:22 is discussing *physical* death, which all men do suffer unconditionally as a consequence of Adam's sin, but it is not saying we all unconditionally suffer spiritual death and total depravity as a consequence of his sin. This is clear by the contrast to Christ who unconditionally will make all alive, referring to the *resurrection* from physical death, which has been discussed throughout the context (verses 3-8,12-21). This will happen "at Christ's coming" (verse 23), when the "end" comes (verse 24).
2. Romans 5:12-19 is, I believe, discussing spiritual death, but it does not teach the key points of original sin and total depravity. It does not say people receive the guilt of Adam's sin by unconditional inheritance, nor does it say people as a result become *totally* depraved, unable to do good, etc.
3. Adam is compared and contrasted to Christ (verse 14). They are alike in some ways, different in other ways. The key point is this: *Whatever people lost through Adam, the same people gain through Christ!* Note the chart:

Verse	BY ADAM One man's offense	BY JESUS The gift by grace
15	many died	much more the grace... abounded to many
16	resulted in condemnation	resulted in justification
17	death reigned	much more ... righteousness will reign in life
18	AS through one man's offense judgment came to ALL men resulting in condemnation	EVEN SO through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to ALL men resulting in justification of life
19	For AS by one man's disobedience many were made sinners	SO ALSO by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous

4. If this means through Adam's sin all men *unconditionally* received guilt and condemnation imputed to them, then it must mean that through Jesus' death those same *all men unconditionally* received justification of life! Whatever problem Adam caused and for whatever people he caused it, Jesus solved the problem for those same people. *If everybody was unconditionally lost through Adam, then everybody is unconditionally saved through Jesus!*

Again, consistency would require advocates of original sin to believe in universal salvation. But this contradicts the Bible, so it must not be that people unconditionally inherit the guilt of Adam's sin.

5. What the passage really teaches is what we have said all along. The consequences of both what Adam did and what Christ did are made available to all men *conditionally* on our conduct. Whether or not we actually receive the consequences of their deeds depends on what we do.

"How can people receive condemnation *conditionally* through what Adam did?" *even as* people receive justification conditionally through what Jesus did! We have proved by many

passages that Jesus' death brought salvation into the world, making it available to all men, giving us the opportunity to be justified. But whether or not we actually receive that justification depends on our conduct based on the choices we make.

Likewise, Adam's sin *brought sin into the world* (verse 12), creating an environment of sin that tempts and influences us all toward sin. But we actually become sinners and are held guilty for sin only when we decide to participate in conduct that is sinful. We become sinners by our own conduct, as we have also proved by many passages.

This is clearly stated in the passage. Verse 12 - "death spread to all men, *because all sinned.*" We become guilty of sin when we commit sin, not before. Adam brought sin into the world and we all sooner or later follow his example. All the consequences of sin listed in v15-19 come upon us conditionally when we practice sin, and all the blessings of forgiveness come upon us conditionally when we obey Jesus.

Illustrations: "Through the knowledge of the math teacher, all the class became good mathematicians." "Through the talents of the music teacher, all her students became good musicians." Were the consequences inherited unconditionally? No, but the teachers made the knowledge or skill available, so when the students responded properly, they received what the teacher had to offer.

Psalm 58:1-6

The wicked are estranged from the womb (verse 3), so we are told this means we are guilty of sin and totally deprived from birth.

1. Again, it does not mention Adam, Adam's sin, nor that men inherit the guilt of Adam's sin.
2. What makes these people sinners? In their hearts, they *work* wickedness (verse 2), and they have violent hands (verse 2). They are sinners because of their *own conduct*, exactly as we have taught. This proves our position, not inherited guilt.
3. "Estranged from the womb" is explained to mean "they *go astray* as soon as they are born" (verse 3). How can one *go astray* into sin if he was in sin from the start? If you are already in sin and you "go astray," where do you go?
4. How did they "go astray" and become "estranged"? By "*speaking* lies" (verse 3). Again, it is the conduct of the individual that makes him a sinner. But can babies literally speak lies at the moment of birth? No. So, the verse itself forces us to conclude that the phrase "as soon as they are born" is not literal but figurative. It is a hyperbole - a poetic exaggeration to emphasize a point. (Compare the following verses where many illustrations are used to describe these same people.)
5. V6 says they have teeth. Again, this is not describing people at the moment of birth.

Nothing here teaches that people are born guilty of Adam's sin. Clearly the passage confirms what we have taught: people are not born guilty of sin, but become sinners later when they go astray by their own conduct.

Conclusion

The Bible nowhere teaches the Calvinistic concept that man inherits sin or is born totally depraved, incapable of doing good or evil. Rather, little babies are born innocent and not accountable for their conduct. As they grow up in a sinful world, they reach the age when they are capable of understanding God's will for their lives. He then holds them accountable for their conduct, and they are counted sinners when they themselves choose to practice that which is a violation of God's will.

The Sovereignty of God

Since God is the absolute, all-powerful ruler of the Universe, it is argued that He must absolutely govern everything that happens on earth (see quotes from Westminster Confession). This means He must personally choose whether or not each individual will be saved. The decision must be completely His, and no one else can determine the outcome. To say that man has a choice is to deny the absolute sovereignty of God.

The following passages are used as proof text in the argument for God's sovereignty as it is used in Calvinist doctrine:

- **Ephesians 1:11**
11 In him, according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.
- **Romans 8:28**
28 We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.
- **Romans 11:36**
36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.
- **1 Chronicles 29:11**
11 Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.
- **1 Timothy 6:15**
15 and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
- **Psalms 115:3**
3 Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.
- **Isaiah 46:10**
10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

Response: There is no doubt that God has the sovereign right to do whatever He wills to do. The question is: *What is it that God has willed to do?* Has God chosen to unconditionally determine the eternal destiny of each individual, or has He chosen to offer salvation to all men and give each man the choice whether or not to accept based on conditions? *If God is truly sovereign, then if He wishes, He has the right to give man the power to choose!*

A. Has God Ever Granted Anyone the Right to Choose Anything?

If God has ever granted anyone the right to choose anything, then it would not violate His sovereignty to give man the right to choose salvation.

Calvinists admit that Adam had the right to choose whether or not to obey God. If so, then God's sovereignty is not violated simply because He gives man the power to choose. Why then would it violate His sovereignty to give us also the right to choose?

If man never has the right to choose about anything, then God must have decided to make man (and Satan) sinners!

If God's sovereignty means He has decreed everything about men, and we have no choice about anything, then He must have decreed that Adam and all men must commit sin. This means God is responsible for the fact men commit sin and suffer the consequences. Man had no choice. We are all sinners because God chose for us all to become sinners.

Yet God hates sin and commands men not to sin:

Proverbs 15:9 The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but he loves him who pursues righteousness.;

Proverbs 6:16,17 16 There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to him: **17** haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood,

So, the consequence of Calvinism is that God decreed that man must do the very thing God hates and commands men not to do. God is therefore divided against Himself:

Matthew 12:25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand;

1 Corinthians 1:13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

1 Corinthians 14:33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints,

How can they avoid the charge that their view makes God hypocritical?

Illustration: Calvinism makes God like a father who commands his son not to go in the street, and if he goes, the father will spank him. Then the father carries the son into the street and spansks him for going there!

B. There Is a Difference Between What God Unconditionally Decrees and What He Chooses to Permit.

God is the absolute ruler of the Universe. But this does not deny His right to give men the power to choose.

God unconditionally decrees that some things must come to pass.

In this case, His decree must come to pass, and no one can change it.

1 Chronicles 29:11	Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.
1 Timothy 6:15	and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
Psalms 115:3	our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.
Psalms 33:11	The counsel of the Lord stands for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.
Job 23:13	But he is unchangeable and who can turn him? What he desires, that he does.
Isaiah 14:27	For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?
Isaiah 46:9-10	9 remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, 10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'
Proverbs 21:30	No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, can avail against the Lord.

Yet the Scriptures teach that God has decreed to allow men (and Satan) to have the power to choose and make some decisions.

Consider some examples:

- God does not tempt man to sin:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one;

Yet man faces temptation. Why? Because God permits Satan (within limits) to tempt man:

Job 1

2 Corinthians 4:4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out;

- God hates sin and commands men not to practice it (see above). Yet sin exists. God is not the source of it, else He is not righteous but contradicts Himself and forces men to do what He Himself hates!

The truth is that God gave man the power to choose to obey or disobey, having warned them of the consequences. Having decreed that man has the power to choose, God respects His own decree and permits His creatures to choose, even when those choices displease God.

In the same way, God has decreed (as shown in the Scriptures already studied) that man has the power to choose whether or not to obey His conditions of forgiveness and thereby become one of His elect.

No, man is not free to do absolutely anything we want (can we destroy God?). God has placed limits on us, but one thing He has granted us is the power to obey Him or not. This is not a violation of God's sovereignty, nor is it weakness on His part, for He is the one who decreed that man has this power!

Do you deny that a sovereign God could give man the power to choose?

If God is truly sovereign, then He can decree whatever He chooses. If so, then He can decree that man has the power to choose! If you deny this, then it is *you*, not us, who deny the sovereignty of God!

The question is not whether or not God is sovereign. The question is: What did the sovereign God decide to do? The Bible says God decreed to give man the power to choose whether or not to obey. This is what it means for "all things" to work according to His purpose.

C. God's Sovereign Government Is Controlled by His Will and Character.

God must act in harmony with His own will.

Man can never limit God, but God can and often does limit what He does according to His will. He may choose not to exercise certain powers He possesses in order to accomplish some higher purpose.

The consequence of Calvinism is that God acts in ways that are contrary to His own revealed will. He says that man can choose whether to obey or disobey Him and that salvation is for all and that there are conditions everyone can meet to be saved (as shown in preceding Scriptures). However, Calvinism says none of this is true, we have no choice, etc.

God must act according to His character

There are some things God cannot do because they would violate His character.

Things God Cannot Do...		
Lie	Titus 1:2	in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago
Sin	2 Chronicles 19:7	Now then, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed what you do, for there is no perversion of justice with the Lord our God, or partiality, or taking bribes.”
Deny Himself	2 Timothy 2:13	if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.
Change	Hebrews 13:8	Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

The consequence of Calvinism is that God continually acts contrary to His character. He hates evil, yet He decrees that men practice evil. He cannot lie, yet He says things in the Bible that are not true, etc.

Election, Predestination and Foreordination: Conditional or Unconditional

Calvinism teaches that each individual was unconditionally predestined or foreordained by God's sovereign decree before the world began. This predestination or foreordination is unconditional, having nothing to do with the will, choice, obedience, or character of the individual. Those who are saved and destined to eternal life are said to be "elect." The alternative to Calvin's view of unconditional election would be free will or free moral agency - the doctrine that salvation is conditional and each individual has a choice whether or not to meet the conditions of forgiveness. Which view does the Bible teach?

Introduction:

One of the fundamental doctrines of Calvinism is "unconditional election," also known as predestination or foreordination.

Consider these quotes from the *Westminster Confession*:

"God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: ... By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed: and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto ... The rest of mankind God was pleased ... to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin ..." - Chap. III, p 1-7.

"All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ ... This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein ... Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, ... yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved ..." - Chap. X, p. 1-4.

Hence, God unalterably decreed certain individuals to go to heaven and others to go to hell, without in any way considering the character, conduct, obedience, choice, attitudes, or desires of the individual. This denies that man has free will or free moral agency.

The purpose of this study is to examine the Bible teaching about election, predestination, and foreordination to see whether they are conditional or unconditional.

The Bible definitely teaches that the elect have been predestined by God to eternal life (Ephesians 1:3-14). [Cf. Rom. 8:28-33; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1; 2:9; 2 Thess. 2:13.]

The question is: How is it determined whether or not any specific individual is among the elect? Is this determined by an unconditional, unchangeable decree of God? Or does God offer salvation to all men, and then give each individual the power to choose for himself whether to accept or reject that offer?

Part 1: Evidence that Salvation of Individuals Is Conditional

I. Salvation Is Offered by God to All Men.

Calvinism says that the decision whether or not a particular individual will be saved is entirely up to God, and man cannot influence that decision. If we can prove that God offers salvation to all men, then it must follow from Calvinism that *all people will be saved!* But that conclusion is clearly false. Hence, the Calvinistic concept of unconditional election must be false.

A. God Desires All Men to Be Saved.

1 Timothy 2:4 - God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. [Note: This is the same "all men" for whom we should pray - v1.]

2 Peter 3:9 - The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

If God sincerely wants *all* people to be saved and wants none to perish, and if the decision is entirely up to Him (man has no choice), then all people will be saved and none will be lost! The logical conclusion of unconditional election must be universalism!

Yet we know only a few will be saved and most lost (Matt. 7:13,14) [22:14]. Hence, either God does not sincerely want everyone saved, or else man does have a choice!

B. God's Grace Is Extended to All Men.

Because God wants all to be saved, He has shown all men mercy and favor by offering them salvation.

Titus 2:11 - For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Note that what God's grace brings to all is "salvation."

C. Jesus Died to Offer Salvation to All Men.

1 Timothy 2:6 - Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all (the same "all" that God wants to be saved - v4).

Hebrews 2:9 - By the grace of God Jesus tasted death for everyone. This "everyone" refers to those who are subject to the fear of death (v15), which is every human.

John 3:16 - God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Note that the ones Jesus died to save are all those in the world whom God loves. Yet He loves even His enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Romans 5:18,19 - Justification came unto "all men" by Jesus' righteous act (His death). This was the same "all men" on whom condemnation came as a result of Adam's sin. So, however many people are condemned by sin, that is how many can receive the benefit of Jesus' death.

The intent of Jesus' death was to offer salvation to all men. If these passages are true, then either all men will be saved (which cannot be), or else there is something each man must do to determine whether or not he will receive the benefit of Jesus' death.

D. God's Offer of Salvation Is Preached in the Gospel to All Men.

2 Thessalonians 2:14 - Men are called to glory by the gospel. To whom is this call extended?

Mark 16:15,16 - The gospel should be preached to every creature in the whole world. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. [Matt. 28:19]

Acts 2:38,39 - The promise of remission and the gift of the Holy Spirit is for ALL, as many as God calls. But the call is sent to everyone in the world!

Calvinists respond to these points by saying that the gospel should be preached to all, however no one can respond to that call unless the Holy Spirit unconditionally works directly on their heart to empower them to respond. But this makes the preaching of the gospel simply a pretense. If the Holy Spirit makes the choice unconditionally, why not doesn't the Spirit just lead the person to salvation and forget the preaching?

Acts 2:39 says the promise of the Spirit is to *all* that are called, and we have shown that all humans should be called by the gospel, Jesus died for all, etc.

II. God Has Decreed Conditions of Salvation which All Men Can Meet.

Calvinism says there is nothing in man that acts as a condition that moves God to choose any certain man to save him. Man is "altogether passive." However, notice the following conditions that the Bible lists as necessary for salvation, and note further that the Bible says everyone can meet these conditions.

A. Men Must Believe in Christ.

Mark 16:15,16 - The gospel is for the whole world. Those who believe and are baptized shall be saved.

John 3:14-16 - Jesus died for the whole world, and *whosoever* believes should not perish but have everlasting life.

The Scriptures clearly teach that faith is a condition to salvation, and anyone in the world may meet that condition.

B. Men Must Repent of Sin.

Acts 17:30,31 - God commands *all* men *everywhere* to repent. This refers to all the people who will be judged by Jesus, which means everyone in the whole world.

2 Peter 3:9 - God does not want any to perish but *all* to repent.

Note that all who will be judged must repent (Acts 17:30,31). But those who need to repent are the ones God does not want to see perish. Hence, God does not want anyone in the world to perish. He wants them all to repent.

The Scriptures clearly teach that repentance is a condition of salvation, and everyone on earth must meet that condition.

C. Men Must Confess Christ and Be Baptized.

Matthew 10:32 - *Whoever* confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

Mark 16:16 - The message preached to everyone in the world is that he who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Acts 2:38,39 - The message to *all*, whoever God calls by the gospel, is that *everyone* must repent and be baptized for remission of sins.

Summary

Romans 10:13,14,17 - *Whoever* calls on the Lord will be saved, but to call one must believe, and to believe one must hear the gospel. The gospel is to be preached to all, and of those who hear it, whoever calls on the Lord will be saved.

The Scriptures clearly teach that salvation is conditional, and that every person is able to meet those conditions.

Calvinists respond to these points by saying that the only people who can truly meet these conditions are the people whom the Holy Spirit unconditionally chose and empowered to do so. But again, this turns the preaching of these conditions to all people a farce. If salvation is not conditional, why did God state conditions? If not everyone can meet the conditions, why did God insist that they be preached to everyone?

The above passages clearly teach that everyone can obey the conditions, but Calvinism flatly contradicts this and denies that everyone can obey.

III. God Grants to Each Person the Power to Accept or Reject Salvation.

If as Calvinism teaches, no conditions man can meet will affect whether or not God saves him, then man has absolutely no choice regarding his salvation. If God chooses the man, he will be saved regardless of the man's choice. If God does not choose the man, he will be lost regardless of his choice. Hence, man's choice is irrelevant to his salvation.

However, the Bible teaches man does have a choice in whether or not He will please God and be saved.

A. Each Person Is Able to Choose Whether or not He Will Meet the Conditions of Salvation.

Consider the following passages. Why would God say these things if people have no power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions necessary to be pleasing to Him?

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 - God promised blessings to Israel if they would obey Him (28:1-14) and curses if they would disobey Him (28:15-68) [cf. chap. 29,30]. Then He urged them to *choose* life.

Joshua 24:15 - Likewise, Joshua exhorted Israel to *choose* what god they would serve. [Cf. Exodus 32:26; 1 Kings 18:21]

Hebrews 11:24,25 - Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, but *chose* to share ill treatment with God's people, rather than to enjoy sin. [Luke 10:42]

Isaiah 1:18-20 - God reasons with man, He does not compel them against their will. If men were *willing* to be obedient, God would bless them. If they refused and rebelled, He would punish them.

Matthew 23:37 - Jesus *wanted* to gather Jerusalem under His wings, but they *were not willing*!
Note: Jesus preferred one choice, but the people rejected it because it was not according to their choice.

Clearly God does not choose men unconditionally and then compel men to accept His choice. He wants them all saved and invites them to accept His will, but He allows them to choose how they will respond to His invitation.

Matthew 13:14,15 - Certain people would not turn ("be converted" - KJV) and be (spiritually) healed by Jesus, because *they* closed their eyes and did not accept His teachings. Clearly Jesus was willing to heal these people if they were converted, but they resisted His teaching by their own choice.

Revelation 22:17 - *Whosoever will*(KJV) may freely take of the water of life. It is a matter of man's *will*, and each person may determine his own will.

B. Each Person Has a Role in Determining His Own Destiny.

According to Calvinism, there is nothing in man's conduct or choice that influences one way or another whether or not God will save that person. Hence, nothing a man does will in any way affect his salvation. Yet note these passages that show that what man does definitely will affect His eternal destiny.

1 Peter 1:22 - *You* have purified *your* souls in *your* obedience to the truth.

Romans 6:13,16-18 - Present *yourself* to God and your members as instruments of righteousness. To whom you present *yourself* as a servant to obey, that is your master - either sin or obedience. They were freed from sin because they became *obedient* to the teaching delivered to them.

2 Corinthians 8:5 - The Macedonians gave *their own selves* to the Lord.

Philippians 2:12 - Work out *your own* salvation with fear and trembling.

1 Timothy 4:16 - Take heed to *yourself* and to the doctrine ... for in doing this you will *save* both *yourself* and those who hear you.

Acts 2:40 - Be saved (*save yourselves* - KJV) from this perverse generation.

2 Corinthians 5:20 - God was pleading with men, through His ambassadors, to BE reconciled to God. Clearly God wants men to come to Him. But He does not compel, He pleads. Men must then take the step that determines the final outcome.

Based on these Scriptures, how can it be concluded that man is "totally passive" in salvation? How can it be that taught that nothing in man is a condition that influences whether or not God chooses to save him?

Clearly all these passages show that man does have the power to choose and that what we do will determine whether or not God chooses to give us eternal life.

C. God Is No Respector of Persons.

Romans 2:6-11 - If God chooses to save some but not others, either the choice must be based on the conduct of the people (hence, conditional) or else God is a respector of persons. [Cf. Acts 10:34,35]

Calvinists respond that this simply means God will save people of all nations. But that is not all the passage says. It says He is not a respector of persons because His choice of who to save or condemn is based on *man's conduct!* He gives eternal life to those who continue doing good, and gives tribulation to those who are disobedient.

For God to grant eternal life to those who do not choose to meet the conditions, or for Him to punish those who do meet the conditions, would constitute respect of persons. Calvinism is a system inherently based on partiality, favoritism, and injustice! Worse yet, it makes God guilty of all of these!

IV. One Who Is Chosen May Later Become Lost.

If salvation is unconditional and nothing one does will affect his salvation, then a person decreed to be among the elect would be saved no matter how he later acted. He could not possibly so act as to be lost because the choice was unconditional.

So, if we can show that people, once saved, later so acted as to be lost, then we have proved salvation must be conditional, and Calvinism is wrong.

An example - 2 Peter 2:1

Men who have been bought by Jesus can yet deny Him and be destroyed. Clearly the choice of man's destiny is not unconditional. It does depend on man's conduct.

The solution - 2 Peter 1:10

To "make our calling and *election* sure" we must add the listed qualities to our faith. Then we will not stumble but will enter the eternal kingdom. It is conditional!

There are numerous other passages showing a child of God can so sin as to be lost. That is another whole subject. But every such passage proves that salvation is conditional and disproves Calvinistic election.

[For further information, see our article on "Once Saved, Always Saved"]

Conclusion to Part I

Calvinism compared to a king

Calvinism's doctrine of election pictures God like a king who has thousands of people imprisoned in his dungeon (for another man's crime - the sin of Adam). He declares to them:

- 1) I want all of you to be set free.
- 2) I have genuine mercy and love for all of you, so I extend my pardon to all of you.
- 3) So much do I love you that my son has paid the penalty so everyone of you can go free.
- 4) Therefore, whichever ones of you choose to do so may leave your cells and go free!
- 5) However, your cells are still locked and I am the only one who has the key.
- 6) So regardless of what you say, do, or want, I will unconditionally open a few doors and let some of you go. The rest of you, regardless of what you say, do, or want, I will unconditionally leave your cells locked, and you will stay imprisoned forever!

Did the king really want all the prisoners set free? Did he really have love and mercy for all, extend pardon to all, and have his son pay the penalty for all? If so, and if freedom was unconditional, why were not all prisoners set free?

Did the prisoners really have a choice about whether or not to be set free? If they did, why did the king free only certain ones regardless of their choice? If they had no choice, why did the king say they did have a choice?

Calvinism makes God unloving, unjust, untruthful, insincere, and a respecter of persons. If Calvinism is true, we may as well throw our Bibles away, because they surely do not mean what they say!

The proper conduct of such a king.

How would a king act if he really believed what this king said? First, he would not have imprisoned anyone except for their own crimes.

Then he might pardon all the prisoners, but that would treat the truly penitent the same as the hardened criminal.

He could be true to his will by offering *conditions* of pardon to all the prisoners (such as they must confess their crime, ask for pardon, and pledge loyalty to the king and do works of service for him, etc.). Then each prisoner would have the right to choose whether or not to meet the conditions. He would free those who would meet them, but not the rest.

This would act in harmony with the king's wish that everyone be free (because he really hopes everyone will meet the conditions). Pardon would still be an act of mercy. But the king is still just if he keeps in prison those who refuse to meet the conditions.

This is exactly the course God has chosen.

Part 2: Answers to Defenses of Unconditional Election

I. Bible References to Election and Predestination

The New Testament unquestionably refers to "election" and "predestination."

Calvinists often quote these passages as though the mere mention of the words proves their brand of predestination.

But we all agree that God has "chosen" (elected) certain people, and that the elect have been foreordained to eternal life. The question is: *How is it determined whether or not any particular individual is or is not among the elect*, and is that determined unconditionally or conditionally.

The Bible doctrine of predestination is that God chose a body or group of people to be saved, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to be in that body.

To illustrate, consider a country with voluntary military service. The president chooses the Marines for a mission. The General calls the Marines an "elect" body because the President chose them (rather than the Navy, Army, etc.). But the President did not choose each individual. He chose the body, but each individual decides whether or not to be in that body.

Another illustration: An elite company chooses to place its product for sale in a certain store. The store owner then refers to his employees as an elect or chosen group of people. But they were chosen as a group, not individually. Each individual employee enters that company only by meeting certain conditions.

God's "elect" is just another name for the faithful members of the church. God predestined the faithful to be saved, but each individual decides whether or not he will be among the faithful. Hence, the saved are the elect, but this is conditional (not unconditional) and they do have a choice. Consider the evidence:

A. People Are "Elect" According to the Will of God.

Ephesians 1:5,11 - We are predestined according to His will, according to His purpose. [Rom. 8:28; 2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 2:7]

Calvinists assume God wills to choose each individual unconditionally. But where do these passages say this?

The will of God regarding man's salvation is revealed in the Scriptures. We have already proved by Scripture that it is God's will to offer salvation to ALL, then to let each individual CHOOSE whether or not he will respond.

B. People Are Elect "in Christ."

Ephesians 1:4 - God chose us "*in Him*" (Christ). [Cf. v6 - in the beloved; v7 - in whom; v10,11 - in Him; V3,10,13; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:10]

Note other passages about those in Christ.

Consider their circumstances in Christ:

- * Made nigh unto God (Eph. 2:12-17)
- * New creatures (born again) (2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:3,4)
- * No condemnation (Rom. 8:1)
- * Grace (2 Tim. 2:1)
- * Salvation (2 Tim. 2:10)
- * Eternal life (1 John 5:11,12)
- * All spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3)

Clearly those "in Christ" are the elect, destined to salvation.

But how does an individual come into Christ?

Galatians 3:26,27; Romans 6:3,4 - We are *baptized* into Christ, after hearing, believing, etc. This makes us members of God's family the church, saved from our sins.

Again, salvation is conditional. It is offered to all, but each individual has the power to choose whether or not to meet the conditions. This does not contradict the Bible doctrine of predestination but is part of it.

C. People Are Elect in Christ's Spiritual Body, the Church.

Passages

Ephesians 1:3-14 - Paul is addressing the elect in Christ. But the rest of the book refers to them as the church, the body of Christ - this is the theme of the book.

1:22,23 - Jesus is head of the church, His body.

2:13,16 - To be reconciled "in Christ" is to be reconciled in His body or household (v19), the temple of the Lord (v21,22).

3:10,11 - We are predestined according to God's purpose (1:11), but His eternal purpose is revealed in the church.

5:22-33 - Jesus is Head and Savior of the body, having loved it and gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse it. Note that it is a *body* or group that is destined to be saved. [Cf. 3:21; 4:4,16]

1 Peter 2:9,10 - The ones "chosen" or elected are a race, a nation, a priesthood, a people. We are chosen as a body, a group, the church.

Note the circumstances of those in the church.

Acts 20:28 - Jesus purchased the church with His blood.

Acts 2:47 - All the saved are added to the body (church) by the Lord.

Clearly the church is the elect, those destined to be saved. [Matt. 16:18]

But how does one enter the church?

1 Peter 1:22,23 - The elect (1:1,2; 2:9) are those who "purified your souls" in **obedience** to the truth and so were born again - born into God's family, the church (1 Tim. 3:15)

1 Corinthians 12:13 - We are baptized into the one body.

Acts 2:38,41,47 - When we repent and are baptized, we receive remission and are added by the Lord to the church.

So, from eternity, God knew there would be people willing to obey Him. He purposed to establish the church (Eph. 3:10,11) as the body that would contain all saved people (5:23,25). These would be His special people, the elect (1:3-14). This body He decreed to be destined for eternal glory (1:3-14).

However, each individual has been given by God the power to choose to meet the conditions to enter that body or not enter. Once in the body, each has the power to continue faithful and receive the reward or to fall away and be lost (these will be removed from the body before it enters glory - Matt. 13:41-43; Rev. 17:14; 2 Peter 1:10).

II. The Sovereignty of God

Since God is the absolute, all-powerful ruler of the Universe, it is argued that He must absolutely govern everything that happens on earth (see quotes from Westminster Confession). This means He must personally choose whether or not each individual will be saved. The decision must be completely His, and no one else can determine the outcome. To say that man has a choice is to deny the absolute sovereignty of God. [Eph. 1:11; Rom. 8:28; 11:36; 1 Chron. 29:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10]

Response: There is no doubt that God has the sovereign right to do whatever He wills to do. The question is: ***What is it that God has willed to do?*** Has God chosen to unconditionally determine the eternal destiny of each individual, or has He chosen to offer salvation to all men and give each man the choice whether or not to accept based on conditions? ***If God is truly sovereign, then if He wishes, He has the right to give man the power to choose!***

A. Has God Ever Granted Anyone the Right to Choose Anything?

If God has ever granted anyone the right to choose anything, then it would not violate His sovereignty to give man the right to choose salvation.

Calvinists admit that Adam had the right to choose whether or not to obey God. If so, then God's sovereignty is not violated simply because He gives man the power to choose. Why then would it violate His sovereignty to give us also the right to choose?

If man never has the right to choose about anything, then God must have decided to make man (and Satan) sinners!

If God's sovereignty means He has decreed everything about men, and we have no choice about anything, then He must have decreed that Adam and all men must commit sin. This means God is responsible for the fact men commit sin and suffer the consequences. Man had no choice. We are all sinners because God chose for us all to become sinners.

Yet God hates sin and commands men not to sin (Prov. 15:9; 6:16,17; etc.). So the consequence of Calvinism is that God decreed that man must do the very thing God hates and commands men not to do. God is therefore divided against Himself (Matt. 12:25; 1 Cor. 1:13; 14:33). How can they avoid the charge that their view makes God hypocritical?

Illustration: Calvinism makes God like a father who commands his son not to go in the street, and if he goes, the father will spank him. Then the father carries the son into the street and spansks him for going there!

B. There Is a Difference Between What God Unconditionally Decrees and What He Chooses to Permit.

God is the absolute ruler of the Universe. But this does not deny His right to give men the power to choose.

God unconditionally decrees that some things must come to pass.

In this case, His decree must come to pass, and no one can change it. [1 Chron. 29:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Psa 115:3; 33:11; Job 23:13; Isaiah 14:27; 46:9,10; Prov. 21:30]

Yet the Scriptures teach that God has decreed to allow men (and Satan) to have the power to choose and make some decisions.

Consider some examples:

* God does not tempt man to sin (James 1:13). Yet man faces temptation. Why? Because God permits Satan (within limits) to tempt man (Job 1). [Note 2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31]

* God hates sin and commands men not to practice it (see above). Yet sin exists. God is not the source of it, else He is not righteous but contradicts Himself and forces men to do what He Himself hates!

The truth is that God gave man the power to choose to obey or disobey, having warned them of the consequences. Having decreed that man has the power to choose, God respects His own decree and permits His creatures to choose, even when those choices displease God.

* In the same way, God has decreed (as shown in the Scriptures already studied) that man has the power to choose whether or not to obey His conditions of forgiveness and thereby become one of His elect.

No, man is not free to do absolutely anything we want (can we destroy God?). God has placed limits on us, but one thing He has granted us is the power to obey Him or not. This is not a violation of God's sovereignty, nor is it weakness on His part, for He is the one who decreed that man has this power!

Do you deny that a sovereign God could give man the power to choose?

If God is truly sovereign, then He can decree whatever He chooses. If so, then He can decree that man has the power to choose! If you deny this, then it is **you**, not us, who deny the sovereignty of God!

The question is not whether or not God is sovereign. The question is: What did the sovereign God decide to do? The Bible says God decreed to give man the power to choose whether or not to obey. This is what it means for "all things" to work according to His purpose.

C. God's Sovereign Government Is Controlled by His Will and Character.

God must act in harmony with His own will.

Man can never limit God, but God can and often does limit what He does according to His will. He may choose not to exercise certain powers He possesses in order to accomplish some higher purpose.

The consequence of Calvinism is that God acts in ways that are contrary to His own revealed will. He says that man can choose whether to obey or disobey Him and that salvation is for all and that there are conditions everyone can meet to be saved (as shown in preceding Scriptures). However, Calvinism says none of this is true, we have no choice, etc.

God must act according to His character

There are some things God cannot do because they would violate His character.

- * God cannot lie - Titus 1:2
- * God cannot sin (He is always righteous) - 2 Chron. 19:7
- * God cannot deny Himself - 2 Tim. 2:13
- * God cannot change - Hebrews 13:8

The consequence of Calvinism is that God continually acts contrary to His character. He hates evil, yet He decrees that men practice evil. He cannot lie, yet He says things in the Bible that are not true, etc.

III. Romans 9:6-24

Several statements in this passage "sound like" Calvinistic predestination:

V11-13 - God chose Jacob even before he and Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. He hated Esau and loved Jacob.

V15-18 - God has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills. This is determined by God, not by the person who "wills" to receive His mercy.

V19-24 - God forms men for destruction or glory like a potter with clay. This is the main proof text on which Calvinistic predestination rests. They argue that this means God chooses to eternally save or condemn men unconditionally, entirely according to God's whim.

A. Such a View of Romans 9 Contradicts Other Scriptures.

This view contradicts all the other passages showing God wants all to be saved, gives them the power to choose, etc.

See previous material. The Bible does not contradict itself. Yet this view would surely make the Bible self-contradictory. We must search for a view which harmonizes with all the Scriptures.

This view contradicts the overall teaching of the book of Romans.

1:16 - The gospel is God's power to save *everyone* who believes (it is conditional, and everyone can meet the conditions).

2:6-11 - God is *no respecter of persons*. For each individual, eternal life or condemnation is determined by what he *does*, good or bad.

5:18,19 - Justification by Jesus' death comes to *all* men - the same all men who receive condemnation as a result of Adam's sin.

6:13,16-18 - Man must yield his own members to God to be made free from sin.

This view contradicts the immediate context of Romans 9-11.

All three of these chapters discuss God's dealing with the nation of Israel.

9:1-3; 10:1 - Paul hopes and prays for the salvation of Israel. Why so if he believed that some would be damned by God's unchangeable decree?

10:13 - *Whosoever* calls on the Lord will be saved.

10:21 - God spread His hands to Israel (inviting them), but they refused.

11:7-14 - "The rest" of Israel were not elect, but were hardened. Nevertheless, Paul was trying "by any means" to save some of them! Why so? Calvinism says if they were non-elect and were hardened, they cannot be saved.

11:19-24 - Non-elect Israelites were "cut off" because of unbelief, and Gentiles were grafted in. But those Israelites could be grafted in again and Gentiles could be cut off again, depended on their belief or unbelief. Salvation is conditional; non-elect people can change and be accepted.

11:32 - God offers mercy to *all*. This must include the non-elect Israelites being discussed. And since God is no respecter of persons, it much also include all Gentiles.

Romans 9, the main Calvinist proof text, creates insurmountable difficulties and contradictions, if it is explained as Calvinists do.

B. What Does Romans 9:6-24 Mean?

The context: the theme of Romans 9-11 is the condition of Israel as a nation.

9:4,5 - Paul discussed the exalted position (blessings and privileges) God formerly gave the nation of Israel under the Old Testament. They received these simply because they were members of the nation, but this did not prove they would or would not be saved eternally.

9:6-23 - Paul defended God's sovereign right to use the nation of Israel as He chose. In particular, God was not obligated, as some seemed to think, to give an exalted position to every person who physically descended from Abraham.

9:24-11:32 - Paul discussed the blessings available to Israel under the gospel and how they could receive those blessings.

9:6-13 - God's promise to Abraham did not require Him to give an exalted position to every physical descendant of Abraham.

The Old Testament itself shows that God chose the descendants of Isaac (not of Ishmael) and then chose those of Jacob (not of Esau).

The context discusses a promise about Abraham's seed or children (v7,8).

This was not a promise to *save* any of them eternally. It was a promise to make them a great nation, give them Canaan, and make them the ancestors of the Messiah. (See Gen. 12:1-3; 22:16-18; Deut. 4:37,38; 9:4f; Gal. 3:16.)

Hence, the "election" or choice (v11) does not refer to the election to eternal life, but to the ones through whom these promises to Abraham would be fulfilled. This is the election that was made before Jacob or Esau were born or had done anything good or bad. It was an election in which

"the elder would serve the younger" (v12), not an election to eternal life! (God often spoke of Israel as His elect or chosen nation, but that had to do with this promise to Abraham, not eternal life.)

The statement "the elder will serve the younger" refers to two *nations* - the nations that would descend from Jacob and Esau - not to the two men themselves!

Genesis 25:22,23 - The original passage quoted in Romans 9:12 expressly says that the statement refers to two nations. If this meant all Israelites would go to heaven and all Edomites be doomed, that would indeed be respect of persons.

"Loving Jacob and hating Esau" likewise has no reference to eternal destinies.

This statement was made long after both men had died, not before their birth - Malachi 1:2,3. The only one of the statements made before their birth was "the elder will serve the younger." This statement also refers to the nations that would descend from the men, not to the men themselves (see the context of Mal. 1).

"Hate" means a lesser love, like Christians must hate their families and their own lives (Luke 14:26). It has no reference whatever to salvation! (Must we wish our families to be eternally damned?)

These statements merely prove that the promise of God to Abraham did not obligate him to give an exalted position to every physical descendant of Abraham. Old Testament history shows, in fulfilling this promise, God repeatedly made choices between individuals regarding whose descendants He would use in fulfilling the promise.

No application whatever is made here to eternal destinies. Later, however, Paul did discuss salvation, and there he showed that God is not obligated to save all Israelites but only a "remnant" (11:1-5).

9:14-18 - God shows mercy according to His own will.

The decision as to who will receive mercy is a decision made by the one who shows the mercy, not by the one who receives it (v15,16,18).

Mercy is a favor shown to one who does not deserve it. It follows that the one who wants mercy (the one who "wills" or "runs" - Israel) cannot set the conditions under which it will be given. This is determined by the one who extends the mercy.

The application to Israel is that they could not insist (as they apparently thought they could do) that God must continue to give them a favorable position, just because He once did so. They had received a favorable position by God's mercy, but He could withdraw it anytime He so chose.

The key word here is the word "will."

God gives mercy to whom He "will." Calvinists assume (without proof) this means that God wills to unconditionally send some folks to heaven and others to hell. Now God can do whatever He wills to do; but does the context here say that is what He wills to do? If so, where? This passage is not talking about eternal destinies.

Now salvation is a matter of mercy, so God can show mercy on whom He wills - men cannot dictate the terms of salvation. But God's will regarding salvation is revealed in the Bible, and on that subject we have seen that His will is to offer salvation to all conditionally and let men choose whether or not to comply. That will is stated later and elsewhere. But it is not even under discussion here.

This passage is describing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (v17).

Whereas God used Israel in a favorable way in fulfilling His promise to Abraham, He also used Pharaoh in an unfavorable way. Pharaoh was the ruler of Egypt when Israel became a great nation and when they left to go to the promised Canaan.

The Old Testament account shows that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but only after Pharaoh had already several times hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12; 10:1,20,27; Cf. Psalm 95:8; Heb. 3:8)

God used Pharaoh, but for what purpose? V17 - He used him that God might show His power and that His name might be declared to the whole earth (by the plagues and crossing the Red Sea). This is not talking about anyone's eternal salvation but about an act by which God brought honor to Himself.

Nothing here says God unconditionally caused anyone to do evil or to be lost without choice. Pharaoh was already (by his own choice) a wicked man, so God used him to accomplish His purpose and bring glory to Himself.

In fulfilling His promise to Abraham, God showed mercy to Israel and hardened their enemy, Pharaoh. He used men and nations to accomplish His purpose. But this is not talking about their salvation. He never violated any man's right to choose to obey Him or disobey Him.

God gave Israel an exalted status as a nation to use them for His purposes in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. Having done this, He had the right to withdraw that exalted status, for it never did have anything to do with what they deserved. And above all, nothing here says anything about how God decides whom He will or will not save eternally.

9:19-24 - The potter and the clay

God here affirms His right to deal with men however He pleases. Man has no right to object.

The application in context is to the nation of Israel.

In particular, God can make of the same lump (Israel) vessels to honor and vessels to dishonor. God had exalted Israel in the past to accomplish His will in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. That promise had been completely fulfilled when Jesus died on the cross. If God then chose to withdraw Israel's "most-favored-nation" status, they had no right to object (as some apparently were doing).

To affirm a person has power to do whatever He chooses, does not of itself tell you what He has chosen!

1 Corinthians 9:1-18 - Paul argued that preachers have the right to marry or to be supported financially. In fact, however, he refused to exercise neither of those rights.

Matthew 26:39,53,54 - God had the sovereign power to save Jesus from death, but it was not His will to save Him.

You may affirm that you have the power to slug me with your fist, but you have not chosen to do so (not yet).

So God here affirms His right to make choices however He pleases, but that does not of itself tell us what His choice will be. It surely does not tell us how He decides who will be saved, since that is not even being discussed here.

This passage does not apply to man's eternal destinies but to God's right to withdraw Israel's privileged status as a nation.

God's choice here pertained to how He used the nation of Israel in fulfilling the promise to Abraham. He used them for many years in a way that exalted Him. When the promises had been fulfilled (because Jesus died), there was no longer any reason to continue their exalted status. So God withdrew it. That was His right, just like a potter could make whatever He chose from a lump of clay.

Nevertheless, regarding salvation God does have the right to do whatever He chooses (consistent with His character). But nothing here says anything about what He has chosen or how He will determine who will be saved or lost.

Later, in 9:24-11:32, Paul does discuss God's choice regarding who will or will not be saved. There he shows that God offers mercy to all (11:32). Those who believe and obey will be saved (10:13-17). This is exactly what we learned to be true in multitudes of other passages.

God has the right to do whatever He wills with man. He used Israel for His purpose, then ceased to use them. He is not here discussing salvation, yet God can save us or not save us according to any standard that He chooses. The standard that He chose was to offer salvation to all on the basis of conditions and let each man decide whether or not to meet the conditions.

IV. People Whom God Foreknew

Before they did good or evil, God foreknew that certain people would be sinners, prophets, etc.

Examples:

Judas - John 13:21-26; 6:70f; Matthew 26:20-25,50; Acts 1:16-20,25

Pharaoh - Exodus 4:21; 14:17,18

Prophets - Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15

Calvinists argue that, since God knows everything, He must know all about a person's life, even before he is born. Once God knows a thing, then it is decreed and cannot be avoided. Therefore, one's eternal destiny is decreed before his is born. He has no choice.

A. God Does Not Force People against Their Will to Be Good or Bad, but He Can Foreknow What Choices They Will Make.

Judas was already evil before He betrayed Jesus - John 12:6. This evil was nowhere predicted. Pharaoh was also evil before God hardened his heart - Exodus 8:15,32; 9:12.

God did not make these men evil. He simply foreknew what choice they would make, then He used them accordingly. If foreknowing and prophesying a thing means that God *decreed* it, so men have no choice, then since the men sinned, it must be that God *decreed them to commit sin!* This violates His righteous character, as already discussed.

Jesus' death was also foreknown and prophesied - Isaiah 53; John 3:14; 12:27; Matthew 16:21. Nevertheless, Matt. 26:53 shows that Jesus had the power to stop it. He had a choice despite the fact the matter had been prophesied.

God foreordained that Jesus would die (1 Peter 1:20; Acts 2:23; 4:28; Luke 22:22). This involved a sin committed by those who killed Him. If this means it was decreed, so men had no choice, then again God decreed that men must commit sin!

B. Though God Foreknew What Some Men Did, That Does Not Prove He Foreknows All the Acts of All Men.

God is both all-powerful and all-knowing. His power to know is just a part of His overall power. He has the power to do anything He chooses to do. But does He do everything He has the power to do? Obviously, there are many things God could do that he chooses not to do. To claim that God is all-powerful is not to say that he will actually do everything He has the power to do. Since His power to know is part of His overall power, does it not follow that, just as He may choose not to exercise His power to do some things, so He may not exercise His power not to know some things about the future? As with all His other powers, can He not choose to know only those things that suit His purposes? If we really believe that God is all-powerful, then wouldn't that include the power to choose not to know some things about the future, if He wills to not know them?

Consider some examples that appear to indicate that God did not know certain things before they happened. But then He deliberately chose to exercise His power to know them.

Genesis 11:5 At the tower of Babel, God "came down to see" what the people were doing.

Genesis 18:20,21 God went to see what Sodom and Gomorrah were doing.

Genesis 22:12 After Abraham had proved he was willing to offer Isaac, God said, "**Now** I know that you fear God ..." Did He not know beforehand?

I know that God chooses to know everything that has happened in the past, because the Bible says so. He will bring every work into judgment with every hidden thing -- Ecc. 12:14; etc.

God can do whatever He chooses to do. But we only know what He chooses to do by what He says in the Bible. I know He chooses to know everything in the past because the Bible says so. I also know that He has the power to know anything in the future that He chooses to know, and I know that He has exercised His power to know *some* in the future, because the Bible says so. The question is: Where does the Bible say that God has chosen to know *everything* will happen in the future in the life of *every* individual? The passages above appear to me to indicate that God chose not to know certain things *before* happened.

In any case, by whatever means one explains it, it cannot be denied that God's power to foreknow the actions of people does not invalidate man's power to choose. The Bible clearly says that God allows men to choose to do good or evil

Conclusion

Calvinist arguments must fail because they make God a violator of His own will and of His own righteous character.

Salvation is offered to all men, so any one can receive it. But each individual must choose for himself whether or not to respond, and each one is capable of so choosing.

Does this mean that salvation is by the power of men, not of God's power? Not at all.

Illustration: Suppose a man is drowning, but a sailor throws him a life preserver attached to a rope. The drowning man by himself was powerless to be saved. The sailor was his savior. But the man still had to choose to take hold and continuing holding on until he was in the boat.

So God is the source and provider of salvation. Salvation is by God's grace. But He has decreed that each individual must choose for Himself whether or not to accept the salvation offered.

Let us consider some of the consequences of the position of personal and individual pre-selection:

The concept of individual pre-election violates free moral agency. God has given humans the right and ability to choose salvation. God invites men to obtain salvation, but the "water of life" is reserved only for those who "desire" and "take" it (Revelation 22:17). Jesus lamented that though he had offered eternal life to members of the Jewish nation, they "would not" take it

(Matthew 23:37; John 5:40). Salvation is a matter of choice: “IF anyone wills to do his will... IF anyone abides in my word...” (John 7:17; 8:31). The little word “if” represents huge possibilities. It suggests the right and ability of humans to make their own moral and spiritual choices.

The concept of individual pre-election makes God a respecter of persons. The Bible depicts God as being fair and faithful. It would be unfair for God to arbitrarily select some individuals to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. Proponents of individual pre-election will say that we should not question these so-called “methods” of God. I agree that God’s methods must never be questioned by his creatures (Rom. 9:20, 21). But what is really being questioned? Is this really God’s method, or has it actually been assigned to God by misguided men? I affirm that it is the latter. The Bible repeatedly affirms that “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25). What should not be questioned is God’s own impartial nature. False versions of “predestination” misrepresent God’s very nature.

The concept of individual pre-election violates the conditional nature of salvation. If God arbitrarily pre-selects some people to eternal life and some to eternal damnation, then he does so on some other basis than the choices and actions of these people. This is an unbiblical view of salvation. The Bible teaches that salvation is available to people who meet God-given conditions. The Hebrew writer said, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). One must believe in, and seek God if he wants to be saved. To go to heaven one must “do the will” of the Father who “is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). One must be “born again” (John 3:3-5, 1 Peter 1:22, 23). To be forgiven of sin one must **hear** (Romans 10:17), **believe** (John 8:24; Acts 2:41), **repent** (Luke 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30), **confess** (Romans 10:9,10) and **be baptized** (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Acts 2:38). To continue in salvation one must **continue in Christ’s word** (John 8:31, 32; 2 John 9).

The Logic of Calvinism:

1. Since man is totally hereditarily depraved and can do nothing on his own but evil, unconditional election is required to save him.
2. God must then call him in an irresistible way to salvation.
3. Therefore, since he needs to do nothing to be saved, he needs to do nothing to remain saved.
4. Anything he would do in any way that would affect his salvation would negate the miraculous work of God in saving him.

Eternal Security & Apostasy: Can a Child of God Fall from Grace and Be Lost?

One of the major points of Calvinism is "the eternal security of the believer" or the "perseverance of the saints." It is also called "impossibility of apostasy," or simply "once saved, always saved." The doctrine teaches that it is impossible for a child of God to so sin as to fall from grace and be eternally lost. It is based on the belief that salvation is unconditional, so there is nothing a person can do to be saved; and once he is saved there is nothing he can do to be lost. What does the Bible teach about falling from grace?

Introduction:

Many people believe that, when a person becomes a child of God, afterward it is impossible for him to so sin as to fall from grace and be eternally lost.

This doctrine is one of the five major points of Calvinism. It is often called "the eternal security of the believer," "perseverance of the saints," "impossibility of apostasy," or simply "once saved, always saved." Several major denominations officially believe the doctrine, though some do not emphasize it and as a result the members may not be aware of it.

The *Westminster Confession* adopted by most Presbyterian churches, states:

"They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved ... Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan ... fall into grievous sins..." (*Book of Confessions of the United Presbyterian Church*, 1967 Ed., Sec. 6.086-6.088).

The *Philadelphia Confession*, adopted by many Baptist churches, is almost identical to the above.

Sam Morris, "Pastor" of the First Baptist Church, Stamford, Texas, expressed the doctrine in its most extreme form as follows:

"We take the position that a Christian's sins do not damn his soul! The way a Christian lives, what he says, his character, his conduct, or his attitude toward other people have nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul ... All the prayers a man may pray, all the Bibles he may read, all the churches he may belong to, all the services he may attend, all the sermons he may practice, all the debts he may pay, all the ordinances he may observe, all the laws he may keep, all the benevolent acts he may perform will not make his soul one whit safer; and all the sins he may commit from idolatry to murder will not make his soul in any more danger ... The way a man lives has nothing whatever to do with the salvation of his soul." (Morris, *A Discussion Which Involves a Subject Pertinent to All Men*, pp. 1,2; via *Handbook of Religious Quotations*, p. 24)

The purpose of this study is to examine what the Bible says about falling from grace.

It would be very comforting if this doctrine were true. However, if it is not true, then it would be a very dangerous doctrine because it would give people a false sense of security. People would not be on their guard against sin, and may not see any need to repent of sins, if they thought they would still be saved eternally despite their sins. If however they will be lost for sins they do not repent of, then such people are in grave danger. Surely it is important for us to know what the Bible teaches.

We can all agree that there is security *for those who serve God faithfully*. If we study God's word diligently and honestly, if we strive to overcome sin in our lives, and if we diligently

repent and ask forgiveness for our sins, then we definitely have assurance and security regarding our eternal destiny. The question, however, is whether it is possible for a child of God to cease being faithful, to become disobedient, fail to repent, and so be lost.

Part 1: Evidence that a Child of God Can Sin and Be Lost

A. Passages Warning Christians about the Danger of Sin

The Bible teaches that there are conditions a person must meet in order to receive forgiveness and become a child of God. Likewise there are conditions one must meet to continue faithful after becoming a child of God. Many passages warn us to be careful to meet these conditions else we will not receive eternal life. In each case we will note first that the passage is addressed to children of God. Then we will note that we are warned to avoid sin or we will be lost.

John 15:1-6 - We must bear fruit or be cast off.

Disciples are described as branches "in Christ" (v2,5, etc.) who have been cleansed by His word (v3).

But if they don't bear fruit and abide in Christ (v2,4-6), they will be taken away (v2), cast into the fire and burned (v6). (Abiding in Jesus and bearing fruit requires obedience - I John 3:6,24; John 15:10; Gal. 5:19ff; etc.)

Romans 8:12-17 - We must live according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

This is addressed to children of God (v16).

We are warned not to live according to the deeds of the flesh but be led by the Spirit. If we live according to the flesh, we will **die** (v13). This cannot be physical death since we all die physically regardless of how we live. This death is the opposite of the life we receive if we follow the Spirit.

To be heirs of Christ, we must be led of the Spirit (v14) and suffer with Christ (v17). It is conditional and depends on our life.

Galatians 6:7-9 - We must sow to the Spirit, not the flesh.

This is addressed to members of the church (1:2), sons of God by faith (3:26). [Cf. 4:6]

We will reap as we sow. If we sow to the spirit (i.e., if we produce the fruit of the Spirit - 5:22-25), we will reap eternal life (v8). If we sow to the flesh (do the works of the flesh - 5:19-21), we reap corruption (6:8), which is the opposite of eternal life. In this case, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God (5:21).

We reap eternal life **if** we don't grow weary in doing good (v9). Note: "**Be not deceived.**" Yet "once saved, always saved" is a doctrine that deceives many into thinking they will still reap eternal life even if they sow to the flesh.

1 Corinthians 9:27 & 10:12 - We must control our bodies and avoid sinning like Israel did.

9:25-27 - Paul, who was an apostle and therefore a child of God, was striving to gain the imperishable crown (v25). He had to discipline his body and bring it into subjection lest he himself be disqualified (NKJV; "a castaway" - KJV; "rejected" - ASV). (KJV elsewhere translates this word "reprobate" - 2 Cor. 13:5; Rom. 1:28; 2 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 1:16).

10:1-12 - Israel is an example showing us the importance of avoiding sin. The people to whom this warning applies ("we," "us") include the church, sanctified saints (1:2; cf. 1:9), and the apostle Paul.

This is an example and admonition to us (v6,11). We should not lust after evil (v6), commit idolatry (v7), commit fornication (v8), etc. One who thinks he stands, must take heed lest he fall (v12). In context, this means he will not receive the crown Paul described (9:25-27). 6:9,10 show that people guilty of these sins won't receive the kingdom of God.

Note that a person who believes in "once saved, always saved" thinks he cannot fall. This passage is addressed to just such people and shows that they are the ones in the very greatest danger that they will fall!

Hebrews 3:6,11-14; 4:9,11 - We must avoid rebelling like Israel.

This is addressed to "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (v1).

Israel failed to enter God's rest because they lacked faith and obedience. We too must guard lest we have an evil heart of unbelief, departing from God (v12), and become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (v13).

To partake with Christ, we must hold fast our confidence (faith) firm to the end (3:6,14). If we do so depart, we will not enter the rest God has for us (4:9,11). Note that receiving the eternal reward is conditional on continued faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:26-31,39 - We must avoid willful sin.

This is speaking to those who know the truth (v26) and have been sanctified by the blood (v29). It is discussing the Lord's judgment on "His people" (v30).

We are warned not to sin willfully (v26). As long as we go on sinning willfully (NASB - v26), there is no sacrifice for sin. (This is not discussing what will happen if such people repent and change but what our condition is as long as this conduct continues.)

Such people are trodding underfoot God's Son (v29), doing despite to the Spirit of grace, counting the blood by which we were sanctified unholy (v29). Their only future is fierceness of fire (v27), sorer punishment than physical death under the law (v28f), vengeance from God (v30).

This is why we must not shrink back to perdition (v39).

2 Peter 1:8-11; 2:20-22 - We must grow in Christ instead of returning to the world.

1:8-11 - This is spoken to those who have obtained like precious faith (v1), escaped the corruption of the world (v4), and been purged from old sins (v9).

We must add to our lives the qualities listed (v5-7). If we do, we make our calling and election sure so we don't stumble (v10), but we receive the abundant entrance to the everlasting kingdom (v11). Note there is security for the believer, but it is conditional on growing and adding these qualities.

2:20-22 - This is still talking to people who have escaped the pollution of the world (v20), knowing the way of righteousness (v21). [cf. v1,15]

We are warned not to become entangled again in the world (v20), turning from the holy command (v21). If we do, we are worse off than we were before we knew the truth (v20). We are like a dog returning to vomit or a sow returning to mire (v22). [cf., v1,3]

But if "once saved, always saved," then this dog is much **better** off after returning to the vomit than he was before.

Romans 6:12-18 - We must not let sin reign in our bodies.

These were baptized into Christ (v3,4), set free from sin, and become servants of righteousness (v18).

They are warned not to let sin reign in their bodies nor present their members as instruments of sin (v12,13). The result of that would be death (v16). This must be spiritual again, since all die

physically. The wages of sin, even for those here addressed, is death, in contrast to eternal life (v23).

Hebrews 6:4-8 - We must avoid falling away.

This is addressed to those once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift and the good word of God and were partakers of the Holy Spirit (v4,5).

We are warned not to fall away (v6). If they continue in this pattern of life (implied), they cannot be restored. They are crucifying Jesus afresh and putting Him to an open shame (v6). Their destiny is to be burned like a field of thorns (v8).

Revelation 3:5; Exodus 32:30-33 - We must avoid having our names removed from the Book of Life.

Those whose names are in the book of Life will enter the eternal city, but those not in it are cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 21:27; 20:12-15). But people whose names are in the book, may be removed because of sin (Ex. 32:30-33). Those guilty of sin CANNOT enter the city (Rev. 21:27). But those who overcome will not be blotted out of the book (Rev. 3:5). [Cf. Rev. 22:18,19]

Why would God continually warn of the danger of sin and being lost if it cannot happen? Do human parents warn their children to be careful how they flap their wings lest they fly too high and crash into the moon? God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). Why waste time warning us about dangers that cannot happen anyway?

B. Bible Examples of Christians Who Sinned & Stood Condemned.

The Bible not only warns us to be on guard lest we fail to meet the conditions for remaining faithful, but it also mentions specific people who did fall. This is not just a theoretical possibility. It is a practical reality. In fact, it has happened to many people, and could happen to us if we are not diligent.

Genesis 3:1-6 - Adam and Eve

God said if they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they would *surely* die (2:16,17). 3:4 - Satan said if Eve ate, she would *not* die. She ate and we know the result. This event is used in 2 Cor. 11:3 as an example to us of the danger of falling into sin.

Satan was the first one to teach the doctrine of "impossibility of apostasy." God stated the consequence of sin, but Satan denied that the consequence would follow. Today God has stated the consequences of sin, and Satan uses preachers to deny the consequences. The doctrine of "once saved, always saved" was originated and first preached by Satan himself.

The nation of Israel

The Old Testament contains countless examples in which God's people sinned and fell from God's favor, both individually and collectively. (Lev. 26; Deut. 28-30; I Sam. 12:10; chaps. 10-16; 28:15,16; I Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:2; 24:20; Isa. 1:28; Jer. 2:19,32 cf. Ps. 9:17; Jer. 3:6-14; 8:4-13; 9:12-16; Hos. 9:10; cf. Acts 7:37-43; Rev. 21:8)

The fact these are in the Old Testament does not diminish the lesson for us. The New Testament expressly warns us that the same principle applies to us - I Cor. 10:1-12; Heb. chap. 3,4. With regard to the possibility of God's people sinning and being lost, the Old and New Testaments teach the same.

Christians who lost their faith

Hebrews 3:12 warned of the danger of developing an evil heart of *unbelief* like Israel. Many New Testament examples show people to whom this very thing happened:

2 Timothy 2:16-18 - Hymenaeus & Philetus strayed and *overthrew the faith* of some. (Faith cannot be overthrown in those who do not first possess it.)

1 Timothy 1:18-20 - Timothy should hold the faith and not be like Hymenaeus and Alexander, who made *shipwreck* concerning the faith and committed blasphemy.

1 Timothy 5:8 - Anyone (including a child of God) who doesn't care for his family has *denied the faith* and is *worse than an unbeliever*.

What happens to people who lose their faith? Faith is essential to salvation. Those who lose it are no better off than those who never had it.

Hebrews 11:6 - Without faith it is impossible to please God (the application in the context of this book is to those who had faith but turn from it - 3:12; 10:30).

Revelation 21:8 - Unbelievers will be in the lake of fire.

Acts 8:12-24 - Simon the Sorcerer

Simon believed and was baptized (v13). This is what Jesus said one must do to be saved (Mark 16:16). This is what the other Samaritans did (v12). Simon did "ALSO" the same things the others did. If they were saved, he was saved. If he was not saved, then none of the others were saved.

But Simon later sinned. His heart was not right (v21), he was guilty of wickedness (v22), and was in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity (v23). As a result, he would perish (v20) if he did not repent and pray (v22).

Galatians 5:1-4 - The Judaizers

These people were children of God (3:26; cf. 1:2-4; 4:6), who had been set free by Christ (5:1). They had to be in grace if they fell from it (5:4).

They sinned in that they desired to go back to the Old Testament yoke of bondage (5:1) and bound circumcision. As a result, Christ profited them nothing (v2), they were severed from Christ (v4), fallen from grace (v4). They were not obeying truth (v7).

These were children of God who were in God's grace but then fell from that grace so that Christ profited them nothing and they were severed from Christ. Can one receive eternal life if he is severed from Christ (Eph. 1:3-7) and fallen from the grace that saves (Eph. 2:8)?

"Once saved, always saved" is a tempting doctrine because it is comforting.

It tells people what they would like to hear. We would all like to think that, even if we or our loved ones fall into sin, they will still receive eternal life.

But it is a false doctrine because it clearly contradicts Scriptures in nearly every book of the Bible.

It is also a dangerous doctrine because it leads people to think they are safe even if they don't examine their lives, don't study the Bible, and don't repent of sin. Furthermore, it leads preachers to not warn sinners that they need to repent.

I have personally known people who told me of terrible sins they deliberately and knowingly committed, justifying themselves because they believed it would not affect their salvation. I have known teachers who justified those very people saying that they would not have lost their salvation even when committed those sins.

Suppose a child is about to cross a busy street. Shouldn't the parent warn the child to look carefully for traffic before they cross the street? People who advocate "once saved, always saved" are like a parent who not only does not warn the child, but worse yet tells him there is nothing to worry about because he can't get hit, and if he does get hit, he won't die!

Why should the child be warned? Because there is a very real danger. And the situation is most dangerous if the child is not on guard. The worst thing anyone can do to the child is to tell him there is no danger. Yet that is exactly what preachers do when they teach "once saved, always saved." And this has eternal consequences, because souls are at stake.

Nevertheless, if the child is careful, he can cross the street safely despite the danger. So the best favor anyone can do for the child is to warn him of the danger, so he can avoid it. That is exactly what we do when we preach the Bible passages that warn Christians to avoid sin. It is not that we believe Christians have no security, but we know people are only secure when they are aware of the dangers, so they can be on guard.

Part 2: Evidence Offered to Show that a Child of God Cannot So Sin as to Be Lost

Folks are sometimes confused by passages that are used to defend "once saved, always saved." We need to understand the arguments and how to answer them. Some of these passages do offer hope and security to believers, but they are *conditional* passages, and these conditions are often overlooked. If we study the verses in light of what we have already learned we will see that, while they do give security to those who are faithful, they do not teach unconditional "once saved, always saved."

John 10:28,29 - "They shall never perish ... no one shall snatch them out of my hand"

This is a wonderful promise. But is it, as the preacher said, so unconditional that a person's soul cannot be lost no matter how he lives?

The context gives conditions - v27,28.

Note the word "*and*" repeated. Receiving life and never perishing are tied to *hearing Jesus and following him*. These are conditions, exactly like we have been teaching.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus protects His sheep so no one can destroy them, *as long as* the sheep hear Jesus and follow Him. But what if they *cease* to hear and follow, as we have learned elsewhere they can do?

"Pluck" refers to an outside force.

"Pluck" (KJV) or "snatch" (NKJV, ASV) means "to seize, carry off by force" (Thayer), like the thief might do (v10,12). Neither Satan nor any outside force can steal you from the Lord, as long as you meet the conditions.

But we must "resist the devil," and then we have assurance he will flee from us (James 4:7).

What happens if, through negligence or willful rebellion, we wander away from the protection of Jesus' fold?

Sheep can stray from the shepherd's protection.

Luke 15:3-7 - 100 sheep belonged to the shepherd (v4,6), but one became *lost*.

Acts 20:28-30 - Wolves may enter among the flock, speak perverse things, and *draw away* the disciples. They cannot compel us to follow them and be lost. We may still choose to follow the Lord's voice. But false teachers can *lure* us, attract us, and tempt us.

I Peter 5:8,9 - Satan is a roaring lion seeking to devour us. If we do not withstand him, he can capture and destroy us. But we can withstand him if we have *faith and vigilance*. This is what Jesus promised in John 10. (John 17; 6:37-40; I Pet. 2:25).

If sheep cannot possibly stray, even of their own free will, then this would deny our free moral power to choose. We could not become lost even if we wanted to!

1 John 3:9 - One begotten of God "does not sin ... he cannot sin"

We must take all the Bible says on any subject (Matt. 4:6,7; Acts 3:22,23).

We have already shown many passages showing that it is *possible* for a child of God to sin. Many more verses, even in 1 John and addressed to these same people, show this is true:

1 John 1:8,10 - If we say we don't sin, we lie and truth is not in us. This is exactly the condition of some folks who argue for "once saved, always saved"!

1 John 2:1,2 - John wrote so we would avoid sin. Jesus is our propitiation if we do sin. If sin is impossible, why write, and why would we need propitiation?

1 John 2:15-17 - Love not the world. If we do, we don't love the Father (cf. I Cor. 16:22). Why warn us, if it is impossible to be guilty?

1 John 5:21 - Guard yourself from idols. Why, if it is impossible to be guilty of sin?

2 Peter 2:14 - Some children of God (v1,15) "*cannot cease* from sin"! If I John 3:9 means children of God cannot possibly commit sin, then this passage means these children of God cannot possibly quit sinning!

Clearly 1 John 3:9 does not mean sin is impossible, else we have contradictions in the Bible. In fact, many people who believe "once saved, always saved," will admit sin is possible (see quotes in introduction).

"Does not sin" refers to persisting in the practice of sin (see NASB).

A true child of God may occasionally commit acts of sin, but he must repent, confess, and be forgiven by Jesus' blood (1:9; 2:2). He must not *continue* in the practice of sin. Why not?

"God's seed abides" in the child of God.

The seed that begets us, so we become children of God, is the word of God:

1 Peter 1:23-25 - We are begotten again by the incorruptible seed which is the Word of God.

James 1:18 - We are begotten by the word of truth.

1 John 2:14,24 - The word of God, which we heard, abides in us. [Luke 8:11ff; I Cor. 4:15; I John 1:10; 2:5,7]

How does the this *seed* abide in us? Can it *cease* abiding in us?

1 John 1:10 - If we say we do not sin, His word is *not in us*. We may still know what it says, but we have rejected it.

John 5:38 - If we do not believe Jesus, God's word does not abide in us.

Acts 2:41 - Those who gladly received the word were baptized. Receiving the word requires believing and obeying it. Otherwise we are *rejecting* it. (I Thess. 2:13)

To have the word abiding in us means to have a receptive attitude toward it, believing and obeying it, applying it in our lives. If this is our attitude, 1 John 3:9 says we will not continue in the practice of sin. Of course not, because to do so would be to reject the word so it no longer abides in us!

Note Psalms 119:11 - Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!

This is exactly what 1 John 3:9 says.

But can we cease believing the word, studying it, and striving to live by it? We have shown that we can. If we do, the seed no longer abides in us, so we practice sin.

"He cannot sin"

Does this mean it is humanly impossible under any circumstances to transgress?

"Can" (Gk DUNAMAI) means: "to be able, have power, whether by virtue of one's own ability and resources, or of state of mind, or through favorable circumstances, or by permission of law and custom" (Thayer).

Examples elsewhere show it does not necessarily mean physical or human impossibility, but rather that law, state of mind, or circumstances do not allow it:

1 Corinthians 10:21 - You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons (it is not lawful).

Acts 4:20 - We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard (law and state of mind do not permit it).

Mark 2:19 - Sons of the bridechamber cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them (circumstances make it such that no one would do it).

Hence 1 John 3:9 means that, when one has accepted God's word into his heart and so becomes a child of God, his attitude and the principles of the word will not allow him to continue practicing sin. God's word (the seed) has become the guiding principle of his heart, and it would be inconsistent with this to continue practicing sin.

For example, suppose an employer asks a Christian employee to tell a lie. The Christian replies, "I can't do a thing like that." Is it physically impossible? No, but it is completely contrary to his nature as a child of God. As long as his attitude toward God's word is right, he will not do it.

The Body Sins, but the Spirit Does Not

We are told that we may physically do things that violate God's word, but He does not hold our spirit accountable for what the body does.

Those who teach this doctrine are obligated to produce Scripture to prove it.

It is not enough to make the claim. They must give Scripture.

Is the spirit responsible for the good deeds of the body? If so, why not also for the bad deeds? If they cite Rom. 7:25 & 8:1, note 7:23 and 8:6-17 which show the man is condemned for the sins of the body.

Many Scriptures show that God holds the spirit (inner man) accountable for the sins of the outer man.

1 Corinthians 6:9,10,13,15,18-20 - Fornicators will not inherit the kingdom of God. But this is a sin of the body. The body is a member of Christ, a temple of the Spirit, and belongs to God so it should be used for His glory (this shows the people addressed are children of God, bought with a price, etc.). [cf. 3:16,17]

Mark 7:20-23 - Evil (done by the body) proceeds from the *heart* and defiles a man. [Prov. 23:7; 4:23]

2 Corinthians 5:10 - We will be judged for deeds done in the *body*. Our spirits will be held accountable for what the body does.

Romans 6:12,16,23 - People who have been baptized into Christ (v3,4) and made free from sin (v18), must not let sin reign in their mortal bodies. If we do, we are servants of sin and must *die* (v16,23).

1 Corinthians 9:27 - Paul buffeted his *body* to bring it in subjection, let he be a castaway.

Romans 8:13 - We must put to death the deeds of the *body* in order to live. Otherwise, we will die.

[2 Cor. 7:1; Rom. 12:1,2; Gal. 5:19-24; Acts 8:20-22]

Passages that Say We Have Eternal Life

Numerous passages are cited which say we have eternal life: John 10:28; 17:3; 5:24; 3:36; 6:47; 3:16; I John 5:12,13. Some argue that, if we have it, and if it is eternal, then we cannot lose it. If we do, it wasn't eternal.

We have eternal life now only as a promise or hope.

1 John 2:25 - This is the *promise* He has promised us, even life eternal.

James 1:12 - The crown of life which the Lord *promised* to those who love Him.

Titus 1:2; 3:7 - The *hope* of eternal life, which God *promised*.

We receive eternal life, in the sense of a present possession, only after earthly life is over and then only if we endure faithfully till life is over.

Luke 18:30 - We receive eternal life "in the world to come."

Romans 2:5-7 - Eternal life will be given at the judgment IF we continue patiently in well doing. [This is the same time that the wicked will receive eternal punishment - Matt. 25:46.

Does this happen in this life?]

Revelation 2:10 - Be ***faithful until death*** and receive the crown of life.

In this life, we "have" eternal life in the sense of a promise or a hope based on faith. But we actually enter eternal life at the judgment if and only if we continue living faithfully till life is over. This is a ***conditional*** promise. We will be lost if we fail to meet the conditions.

The proof texts, used to defend "present possession" of eternal life, themselves state conditions to be met.

John 5:24 - He who ***hears and believes***. But we have shown that one can ***cease*** doing these.

John 6:47; 3:16,36 - He that ***believes***. But one can cease believing.

1 John 5:13 - V11,12 speak of those who ***believe*** on the Son, and life is IN the Son. But we can cease believing and fail to abide in Him (John 15:1-8).

John 10:27,28 - ***Hear*** Jesus' voice and ***follow*** Him.

John 17:3 - ***Know*** God. But one can forget God, turn from Him, and cease to know Him (I John 2:3-6; Jer. 3:21,22; Psa. 9:17; 106;12,21,24).

Note also that saving faith requires obedience, and to cease to obey is to cease to have a saving faith - James 2:14-26; Heb. 10:39; chap. 11; Gal. 5:6; etc.

The fact life is "eternal" does not prove we cannot lose it. "Eternal" describes the nature of the life. It has nothing to do with whether it can or cannot be lost.

Example: Suppose someone offers me a watch guaranteed to work for 50 years, but I must do some task in order to receive it. It is still a "50-year watch" regardless of whether or not I do the job and receive it.

These passages discuss the reward believers will receive as a result of their current state. But they are not discussing what would happen if they change their state.

The passages are not intended to discuss everything about what can happen to a child of God.

They are written to help us appreciate the blessings we have, or to encourage people to become children of God. But God does not put all His will in a single verse or passage. We are expected to study other Scripture. When we do, we learn that we ultimately receive the reward only if faithful. It is misusing these verses to teach from them something they do not necessarily mean and which contradicts other passages.

Consider the consequences if we used this reasoning on passages that describe the ***lost***. John 3:36 says ***unbelievers shall not see life***. Shall we conclude this too cannot change (like people argue on the first part of the verse)? If a person is lost, does this prove he can never change and be saved? "Once lost, always lost"? [Cf. John 5:24; Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26ff]

If we can see how unsaved people can change their state and become saved, despite such verses as this, then in the same way we can understand how saved people can change their state and become lost.

This same approach works with most other arguments for "once saved always saved."

Consistently applied to passages about lost people, the same arguments would prove "once lost, always lost."

Jesus' Blood Sacrifice Is Sufficient.

Some folks say that Jesus' death is all we need to be saved. If we argue that there are things we need to do to be saved, including living a faithful life, they say we are denying the power of Jesus' death.

We agree Jesus' blood has the power to cleanse all sin. But the question is whether it cleanses conditionally or unconditionally. We cannot earn salvation, but are there conditions we must meet to receive the forgiveness?

Jesus died for all people. If His death is all we need, and people need do nothing at all, then all would be saved.

1 Timothy 2:6 - Jesus gave His life a ransom for **all**.

Hebrews 2:9 - By the grace of God, Jesus tasted death for **all** men (the extent of this is shown in v15).

John 3:16 - God gave His Son for the **world** because of His love.

1 John 2:2 - Jesus is propitiation for the sins, not just of Christians, but for the whole **world**. [cf. 1 John 4:14]

Romans 5:18,19 - By Jesus' act of righteousness (His death - v8,9), justification came to **all men**.

If Jesus' death is "sufficient" and "all we need," then why aren't all men saved, since He died for all? But we know that not all will be saved (Matt. 7:13,14; etc.). So there must be something that distinguishes the saved from the unsaved. There are conditions we must meet.

God is no respecter of persons.

Romans 2:6-11 - God distinguishes the saved from the lost "without respect of persons" or partiality. If Jesus' death was all there was to it, then He must save everybody or else be a respecter of person. Instead, there is a distinction on the basis of **our conduct** - whether we work evil or continue in doing good.

Acts 10:34,35 - God is no respecter of persons, but those who fear Him and work righteousness are accepted. True, we cannot earn salvation. But there is a way God distinguishes between those who will be saved by His son's blood from those who will not - our faith and works.

When people claim that Jesus' death is all there is to it and people do not need to do anything to be saved, they unknowingly make God a respecter of persons.

If Jesus' blood saves by itself with no conditions to be met, then why is faith necessary?

In practice, everyone admits there are some conditions necessary to be saved by Jesus' blood.

Most people admit we must believe. Many agree we must repent and confess Christ. (See John 3:16; 8:24; 2 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 10:9,10; 6:3,4; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark. 16:16; etc.) But these are simply conditions we must meet to receive the benefit of Jesus' death. To admit this is to admit Jesus' death alone, without conditions people must meet, will not save.

But if we agree there are conditions people must meet to be saved, then why object when we point out from the Scriptures that these necessary conditions include baptism and a faithful life? These no more deny the power of Jesus' death than do faith, repentance, etc.

If you can recognize faith, etc., as necessary to salvation without denying the importance of Jesus' death, then in the same way we believe baptism and a faithful life are also necessary without denying the importance of Jesus' death.

The Bible expressly shows that there are conditions children of God must meet to be cleansed by Jesus' blood.

1 John 1:7-9 - Children of God do sin (v8,10). To be cleansed by Jesus' blood, we must "walk in the light" and "confess our sins." To deny this is to deny the clear teaching of Scripture.

Acts 8:22 - A child of God (v12,13) who sinned was clearly told that, to be cleansed of his sin, he must repent and pray. It is Jesus' blood that forgives. But just as there are conditions we must meet to be cleansed and become a child of God, so there are conditions we must meet to be cleansed after we are children of God.

Salvation by Faith Only or Alone vs. Believing plus Obedience, Works, and Baptism

The doctrine of salvation by faith only or faith alone teaches that a sinner receives forgiveness simply by belief in Jesus without obedience or works of any kind. In particular, water baptism is not a necessary condition to conversion or forgiveness of sin. What does the gospel of Jesus Christ teach? Are we saved just by believing or must we obey commands?

Introduction:

The Bible clearly affirms that the only power that can forgive man's sins is the **blood of Jesus**. His death paid the penalty for our sins (Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:6-9; Hebrews 9:14; 1 Peter 1:18,19; Rev. 1:5).

The purpose of this study is to consider how and when this cleansing blood is applied to specific individuals.

Consider a sinner who has never been cleansed by Jesus' blood. If he is to be pardoned, there must be some **point at which that cleansing power applies to him personally and forgives him**. Something must happen in his life as **an essential condition** (or conditions) in order for God to grant him forgiveness. We seek to determine what these conditions are and at what point this forgiveness comes.

In order to cleanse dirt, soap must be applied to that which is unclean. For an electric lamp to give light, it must contact the source of power. So for the sinner to be forgiven, he must contact Jesus' blood. How and when does this happen?

A common religious doctrine is salvation by "faith only" or "faith alone."

This doctrine can be stated as follows:

"Wherefore, that we are justified by faith, only, is a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort" - *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 1972 Edition, p. 55.

"Baptism is not essential to salvation...; but it is essential to obedience, since Christ has commanded it. It is also essential to a public confession of Christ before the world, and to membership in the church..." - *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* by Hiscox, p. 21 (via *Handbook of Religious Quotations*).

"...faith is the sole condition to experiencing the new birth ... Water baptism is ... administered only to those who have already been saved. ...faith alone, without the added step of baptism, assures the forgiveness of sin, the promise of the indwelling Holy Spirit and the gift of everlasting life ... [B]aptism ... has nothing to do with washing away sin or with a person's justification" - Sermon by an advocate of "faith only."

So sin is believed to be forgiven "the moment the sinner trusts Christ as his Savior," and faith is the **only** condition one must meet. Obedience is not required, especially not water baptism; baptism comes **after** one has been forgiven.

Is this doctrine true? What does the Bible say about the conditions for salvation, and what difference does it make?

I. Faith Is Essential to Salvation.

A. Many Passages Teach We Are Saved by Faith.

John 3:16 - Whoever believes on Jesus should have eternal life.

Romans 1:16 - The gospel is God's power to save all who believe.

Romans 5:1,2 - By faith we are justified and have access to grace.

Ephesians 2:8 - By grace are you saved through faith.

(See also Acts 16:31; 10:43; 15:9; 13:39; John 8:24; 3:36; 5:24; 6:40; 20:30,31; Romans 3:22-28; 4:3,16; etc.)

We conclude that faith is essential to salvation, and without faith no man can be saved.

B. But No Passage Says We Are Saved by Faith Alone.

We are told that verses like those above prove that faith is necessary but not baptism, since faith is mentioned but baptism is not. But which passage says we are saved by "faith only," or that faith is the **sole** condition for salvation, or that we are saved **without baptism or without obedience**? None of them so state. They teach we are saved by faith, but they do not teach we are saved by **faith alone without obedience**.

By the same reasoning, many verses mention faith but do not mention **repentance or confession**. Shall we conclude these too are unnecessary? Someone says, "It's just understood that, to have saving faith, you must repent and confess." Yes, but how do you understand this? We know repentance and confession are essential, because **other passages** say so. But if there are also other verses that say **baptism** is essential, should we not likewise recognize the necessity of baptism?

We will soon see that **many** things are essential to salvation. People misuse Scripture when they conclude some things are essential because some verses mention them, but they ignore other verses that say other things are essential.

C. Other Verses Show That, by Itself, Inward Faith Will Not Save.

John 12:42,43 - People "believed" in Jesus but would not confess Him, because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God. Were they saved? (Cf. Rom. 10:9,10; Matt. 10:32,33.)

James 2:19,20 - Even devils believe. Are they saved?

James 2:14,24 - Can faith save without obedience? No, that is a **dead** faith (v17,20,26). Man is **not justified by "faith only."** This is the only passage that mentions "faith only," and it says

we are not justified by it! Men say justification by faith only is a wholesome, comforting doctrine; but the Bible flatly says we are **not** justified by faith only!

Some say these people were unsaved because they have the **wrong kind** of faith: They have intellectual conviction, but they do not trust Jesus to save them. We are making progress! We now agree that faith is essential to salvation, but **there are different kinds of faith!** Faith is necessary, but there are kinds of faith that do not save, even when people believe in God and Jesus.

The issue then is: **What kind of faith saves, and what does that saving faith include?** Does it include repentance, confession, obedience to Divine commands, and even baptism? Before answering, let us add more information.

II. Many Things Are Essential to Salvation.

A. Some Things that are Essential to Salvation

God's grace (Ephesians 2:4-10; 1:7; Titus 2:11,12; Acts 15:11)

Jesus' death and resurrection (Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:6-10; 1 Peter 1:18,19; Revelation 1:5; 1 Corinthians 15:17; 1 Peter 3:21)

The gospel (Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 1:23-25; Acts 11:14; James 1:18,21; 1 Corinthians 15:1,2; John 8:31,32)

Learning God's will (Acts 11:14; John 6:44,45; Romans 10:17; 1:16; 1 Corinthians 1:21)

Faith (see the verses listed above)

Love (1 Corinthians 16:22; 13:1-3; Galatians 5:6; 1 John 4:7,8)

Hope (Romans 8:24)

Repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; Luke 13:3,5; 2 Peter 3:9)

Obedience (Hebrews 5:9; Romans 6:17,18; 1 Peter 1:22; Acts 10:34,35; 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; Galatians 5:6; James 2:14-26)

Confession of Christ (Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32)

Baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3-7; Galatians 3:26,27; Colossians 2:12,13)

Faithfulness (Matthew 10:22; Revelation 2:10; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Matthew 28:20; Titus 2:11,12; 1 John 2:1-6)

Church membership (Acts 2:47; 20:28; Ephesians 5:23,25)

Some of these are things God has done; others we must do. All are essential to our salvation. Later, we will study some of them further, but first this observation:

B. We Must Accept All that the Bible Requires.

Accepting some requirements, while ignoring others, leads to error and contradiction.

If a verse requires faith, that does not eliminate the other things that are required elsewhere. Likewise, many passages mention grace, blood, repentance, etc., but do not mention faith. Should

we conclude this proves faith is unneeded? No, but that would be as reasonable as concluding we can be saved without obedience or without baptism, just because these are not mentioned in some passages about faith.

Salvation by "faith only" (excluding baptism and obedience) is as unreasonable and unscriptural as salvation by repentance only, hearing only, or baptism only. **We are not saved by any one thing alone, to the exclusion of other things required elsewhere.**

Instead, we should accept everything the Bible requires.

Acts 3:22,23 - We must hear **all** Jesus says, or we will be destroyed.

Revelation 22:18,19 - If we take away part of God's word, He takes away our reward.

Matthew 4:4,7 - Live by **every** word God speaks, not just part of it.

We must never isolate a passage from the overall teaching of the Bible (see also Acts 20:20,27; James 2:10; Matthew 28:20.)

If we follow only one part of a set of instructions, we will not achieve the desired result. Suppose, for example, a driver's manual says, "To drive a car, you must have the key." If we get a key, but ignore the rest of the instructions, will we automatically be driving the car? No.

So faith is a "key" to salvation - it gives us power to become children of God (John 1:12). But we are not automatically and immediately God's children just because we have the key or the power to become such. We must consider **all** the requirements that God's word teaches.

III. Obedience Is Essential to Salvation.

The "faith only" doctrine says that faith is the **only** prerequisite to forgiveness. Acts of obedience all come **after** forgiveness, and none are essential to receive forgiveness. But consider:

A. Many Passages Say Obedience Is Necessary.

1 Peter 1:22,23 - We **purify our souls** in **obeying** the truth.

Romans 6:17,18 - Servants of sin must **obey** from the heart in order to be made **free from sin**.

Hebrews 5:9 - Jesus is the author of **eternal salvation** to all who **obey** Him.

James 2:24 - Man is **justified by works**, not by "faith only."

Acts 11:14; 10:34,35 - Peter told Cornelius words whereby he would be **saved**. But the first words He said were that, to be accepted by God, people must **work righteousness**. This is true for all people, for God shows no partiality!

Matthew 7:21-27; Luke 6:46 - To accept Jesus as Lord (ruler, master) and enter the kingdom of heaven, we must **do what He says**. We may believe and confess Him yet be rejected, because we did not obey.

2 Thessalonians 1:8,9; Romans 2:6-10 - Receiving eternal life requires us to **do good**. Those who do not obey will be destroyed.

1 John 5:3; John 14:15,21-24 - Loving God requires us to keep His commands. If we do not obey, we do not love Him. Can one be saved if he does not love God (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:22; Matthew 22:37-39)?

The doctrine of "faith only" denies the necessity for **all** obedience to commands. All the passages we have just studied show that such a view is false doctrine. (See also Rev. 20:12-15; John 5:28,29; 1 John 2:17.)

B. If Obedience Is Not Essential, Consider the Consequences.

Matthew 22:37-39 - **Love** is the greatest of all commands. If obeying commands is not necessary to salvation, then **love is not necessary!** Yet note 1 Corinthians 16:22.

Acts 17:30 - **Repentance** is a command. If keeping commands is not necessary, then **repentance is not necessary to salvation!** Yet note Acts 2:38; 3:19; Luke 13:3; 2 Peter 3:9.

Romans 10:9,10 - **Confession** with the mouth is a command. If obeying commands is not essential to salvation, then **confession is not essential!** Yet the Bible says it is essential. And it is not just an inner act; it is an outward act done with the mouth, in contrast to faith in the heart. Like baptism, here is an outward, physical action that is essential to salvation. (See also Matthew 10:32,33.)

1 John 3:23; John 6:28,29 - **Faith itself** is a command; it is a **work** God tells people to do. If works and obedience are not necessary, then faith itself is not necessary! But if faith is essential, then we must abandon the view that obedience and works are not essential!

Some claim that John 6:29 says faith is a work God does for us, not something **we** do. However: (1) 1 John 3:23 still says believing is a command to us (cf. Mark 16:15,16). (2) John 6:29 answers the question asked in v28: "What shall **we** do, that **we** might work the works of God?" So "works of God" here means works men do in obedience to God's commands. (3) 1 Corinthians 15:58 is parallel - the "work of the Lord" is work **we** abound in - our labor in the Lord (cf. "love of God" in 1 John 5:3). (4) If faith is entirely a work God does for us, then **God is responsible for unbelievers.** He causes some people to believe, but not others. This makes God a respecter of persons in contradiction to Acts 10:34,35 and Romans 2:11. Hence, John 6:29 says faith is something **we do**, which is essential to salvation.

Clearly, obedience is essential to forgiveness. So we must ask **what** commands we must obey, and is **baptism** one of them? But first, consider some objections.

C. The Bible Describes Different Kinds of Works.

But what about the passages where the Bible says we are not saved by works? Many passages say obedience is necessary, yet other verses say we are not saved by "works." Since God's word does not contradict itself, we must conclude that there are **different kind of works**, just as there are different kinds of faith. Faith saves, but there are kinds of faith that do not save. So obedience is essential, but there are kinds of works that do not save. Consider different kinds of works in the Bible:

1. Works of the flesh or of darkness

These are sins, which do not save but condemn. (See Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 13:12-14.)

2. Works of Old Testament law or of human righteousness by which one earns salvation

The Old Testament is not binding today (Gal. 3:23-25; Heb. 10:9,10; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14-17; Rom. 7:1-7). However, it never could save, because it provided no lasting forgiveness (Hebrews 10:3,4)

The only way to be justified by that law, or any similar law, would be to live ones whole life without ever sinning (Galatians 3:10; James 2:10; Romans 3:20,23). Then one could boast that he had saved himself without needing forgiveness. He would earn his righteousness as a matter of debt, not grace.

But such works will save no one, because we all sin (Romans 3:23; 1 John 1:8,10; 3:4). Therefore, we all need a system of grace, whereby we can be forgiven, though we do not deserve it. This is the point of Romans 4:4; 3:27; 11:6; Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; 2 Timothy 1:9; etc. (See also Galatians 2:16; 3:11 - cf. 4:21-25; 5:3; Acts 13:39.)

3. Works of obedience to meet conditions of forgiveness.

These works of obedience are essential to salvation, as we have studied. But they are not works of human righteousness, whereby we **earn** eternal life by a sinless life. Instead, we admit we are **sinner**s and come to God for forgiveness by His mercy and **grace**. Yet we must believe in Him enough to meet whatever conditions He lays down.

These conditions include faith, repentance, and confession. But baptism is not a work of human righteousness whereby we earn eternal life, any more than are these other acts. All are simply necessary conditions in order for God's grace to forgive unworthy sinners by Jesus' blood.

So when verses say we are not saved by "works," they are not referring to faith, repentance, confession, or baptism. These works are all included in the obedience that is essential to receive forgiveness.

Interestingly, even "faith only" advocates usually give people something to do, so they can identify a "point of contact" when they contact God's forgiving power. They say, "Pray the sinner's prayer," or "Put your hand on the radio," or "Tell Jesus that you are trusting Him to save you." In all these examples the sinner does something to receive forgiveness.

So even "faith only" advocates admit that one may do something to receive salvation yet not earn it. The problem is that they have **eliminated the activity that God commands and have substituted other activities of their own human invention**. This is clearly forbidden in Matthew 15:9; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9; Revelation 22:18,19.

IV. Saving Faith Requires Obedience.

We now know that saving faith includes repentance and confession, and we know that obedience is essential. We will now proceed to show that the reason saving faith includes repentance and

confession is that **saving faith includes obedience**. We are saved by faith when that faith leads us to obey God's required instructions - not before.

A. Hebrews 10:39 and Chapter 11

Hebrews 11 gives many examples of people who "by faith" pleased God and received His reward (11:6). But the purpose is to show us how to be among "them that believe to the saving of the soul" (10:39). Now, does the faith that God rewards include obedience? That is, was obedience **necessary** in order for God to reward the people, or did He reward them before they obeyed or even when they did not obey?

Noah (11:7) - By faith Noah prepared an ark to save his house and become heir of righteousness according to faith. Was he saved by faith **before** he obeyed, or did God save him from the flood only **after** he obeyed? Would he have been saved if he had **not** obeyed?

Abraham (11:8) - By faith he **obeyed God and went** to the place God eventually showed him. Did God reward him **before** he obeyed, or only **after** he obeyed?

Israel at Jericho (11:30) - By faith the walls of Jericho fell. Did they fall **before** the people **did** what God said, or **afterwards**? Would the walls have fallen had the people **not** obeyed? The verse says the walls fell "**after they were compassed about.**" (See also 11:4,17,24, etc.)

In every case, God rewarded people for **obedient** faith. They received the blessing "by faith," **not before** they obeyed or **without** obedience, but only **after** or as a **result** of their obedience. Yet when faith led to obedience, they received the reward "by faith."

Saving faith is faith that **obeys**. If your faith says that obedience is not necessary or that God will "save your soul" before you obey, then you have a faith that **will not save**. Consider this chart:

Blessings Received "by Faith"
<i>Noah built the ark then his house was saved</i>
<i>Abraham obeyed to go then received inheritance</i>
<i>Israel marched then the walls fell</i>
<i>We obey conditions then receive forgiveness</i>
Obedience comes first, then comes the blessing!

B. James 2:14-26

Remembering that some kinds of faith do not save, we are here asked: Can we be **saved** by the kind of faith that does not have **works** (v14)? James does not discuss merely what we demonstrate before people, but whether or not we can be **saved** (v14) or **justified** (v24).

The answer is that faith that does not work is **dead**, like a body without a spirit (v17,20,26). We are **justified by works, not by "faith only"** (v24). Faith without works will not save, nor will works without faith. Both faith and works must operate **together**(v21-23). Only then do we have faith that saves!

Some say that Abraham pleased God before the event mentioned here (offering Isaac), but he also **obeyed** God long before this particular event. Hebrews 11:8-10,17-19 and James 2:21-23 make the same point: Abraham illustrates the kind of faith that God rewards. It is faith that **obeys**, and God rewards us only when we **have obeyed**. So both faith and works are needed in order to be **saved** (v14) or **justified** (v24).

The passage flatly denies that we can be saved or justified by a faith that does not obey. Such a faith is **dead**. Can a dead faith save us?

C. Galatians 5:6

In Jesus' view, the faith that **avails** is faith that **works** by love. So again, a **working** faith is required. (See also 2 Cor. 5:7; 1Thessalonians 1:3; Galatians 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; Romans 1:5; 16:26.)

Observations

Faith can have different meanings.

"Faith" sometimes has a **specific meaning**, referring to inward conviction and trust, as distinguished from the acts of obedience that follow (cf. Romans 10:9,10). This "faith" is essential, but it will not save by itself, without the obedience. "Faith" can also have a more **general** or **inclusive** sense, so it includes **all** a person does to be forgiven of sins - including repentance, confession, and (we will soon see) baptism.

The same is true of the term "love." "Love" sometimes refers specifically to an attitude of good will toward others, as distinguished from acts people do (1 Corinthians 13:1-3; Galatians 5:6). In other cases "love" is said to be or to include the obedience that it produces (1 John 5:3).

We do similar things in everyday speech. We tell sick people, "You could get better if you would go to the doctor." Now "go to the doctor" could refer to the specific act of transporting yourself to where the doctor is. But in our illustration, it is understood that we mean **all that is involved** in being cured by the doctor, including what **we** do in response to his instructions (get a prescription filled, take medicine, etc.) Likewise "faith" can be used specifically or inclusively.

We have seen that some people admit saving faith includes repentance and confession, but they deny it includes baptism. But if faith includes repentance and confession, then it must be true that faith **includes obedience**, since repentance and confession are acts of obedience. Confession is even an outward, physical act. So if "faith" can include these commands, then it could also include other commands such as baptism. So we need to determine whether or not there are other verses that say baptism is essential.

Some folks reply: "You're trusting your own works to save you, instead of trusting Jesus."

The truth is just the opposite. Noah was saved "by faith" when he obeyed God. Do you accuse him of trusting his own works instead of trusting God? When Abraham and Israel pleased God

by faithful obedience, did they trust their own works or God (Hebrews 11)? When people repent and confess to be forgiven, are they trusting in works or in Jesus?

Consider the bronze serpent Moses made to spare Israel from death. The people had to do something to be saved - they had to look at the serpent (Num. 21:9). Yet John 3:14-16 uses this to illustrate salvation by faith through Jesus. So even John 3:16 shows that saving faith includes obedience, it does not exclude it.

The truth is that saving faith leads people to obey Jesus because they trust Him, and they are not saved until their faith has produced the required obedience. When people think they can be saved without obeying what Jesus says, those are the ones who have a faith that will not save.

V. Salvation "by Faith" Includes Baptism.

"Faith only" advocates say we are saved by faith **before** baptism, so a person is baptized **after** he has already been saved. But we have learned that salvation by faith includes the conditions that are necessary to receive forgiveness. Is baptism one of the conditions one must meet to receive forgiveness, or does baptism come after forgiveness?

A. Acts 22:16

This is the conversion of Paul, that apostle who preached so much about "salvation by faith." Surely, he knew whether salvation by faith includes or excludes baptism. What about his own conversion? Was baptism essential to his forgiveness?

On the road to Damascus, he saw Jesus and believed in him (22:5-10). During the following three days, he was praying (9:11). If people are saved by "faith alone," then surely, he must have been saved. But was he?

Jesus instructed Paul that, in the city he would be told **all** things that he **must** do (22:10; 9:6). What was he told? Ananias said to arise and be **baptized and wash away his sins** (22:16). If salvation is by "faith alone" before baptism, then Paul would have had no sins at this point. But he did have sins, and he remained in sin till he was baptized.

The passage clearly places forgiveness, not **before** baptism, but as a **result** of it. Surely nothing Paul later taught should be taken to contradict what he himself did to be saved. He knew that salvation by faith **includes and requires** baptism; it does not exclude it.

B. Mark 16:15,16

He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Both faith and baptism are essential prerequisites to salvation. Salvation comes **after or as a result** of baptism, not before it. Just as $1+1=2$, take away either of the "ones" and you no longer have two. So if you take away either faith or baptism, you no longer have salvation.

"Faith only" says: He that believes is saved and may then be baptized. Jesus said: He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. See the difference? Note this comparison

Romans 10:9 - if you confess...and believe...you will be saved

Mark 16:16 - He who believes and is baptized shall be saved

Clearly Romans 10:9 means that one must both believe and confess before he can be saved. Why does not the parallel language in Mark 16:16 likewise mean that one must both believe **and be baptized** before he can be saved?

Someone says: "But it says, 'He who disbelieves shall be condemned.' It doesn't say he who disbelieves and is not baptized shall be condemned."

So, some conclude that only faith is essential. But we already agreed that baptism alone will not save. **Both** faith **and** baptism are required. A lack of faith is enough to condemn a person, whether he gets baptized or not. Baptizing such a person would accomplish nothing (cf. John 3:18).

Can you find a verse that says, "He who disbelieves and does not **confess** shall be condemned"? If not, does that prove confession is not essential? Faith is prerequisite to both confession and baptism; both are worthless without faith. But that does not prove we can be saved by faith alone without confession and baptism.

But look at the passage again. **What is it** that, if disbelieved, causes a person to be condemned? It is **the gospel** (v15; cf. Mark 1:15; Romans 1:16). What does the gospel say? It says right here (and elsewhere) that we must both believe and be baptized to be saved!

Now, do you believe people must be baptized to be saved? If not, you do not believe the true gospel! You do not believe what Jesus Himself says. What if you don't believe that gospel? Then, "He who disbelieves will be condemned"! You believe a **different** gospel, which leads one to be accursed (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9).

Someone says: "It's like saying 'He who gets on a plane and sits down will arrive at California.' Getting on is essential, but sitting down is not."

Try this illustration on Romans 10:9: "If you confess ... and believe ... you will be saved." Is this like, "If you get on the plane and sit down, you will arrive at California"? If so, then on Romans 10:9 the illustration proves that **faith** is not essential! Why does the illustration work on Mark 16:16, but not on the parallel language in Rom. 10:9?

A better illustration would be: "If you buy a ticket and get on the plane, you shall go to California." Buying the ticket parallels faith (it gives the **right** to become a child of God - John 1:12), and

getting on the plane parallels being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3). Both are essential to arrive at the destination.

Any way you look at it, baptism comes **before** salvation in Mark 16:16, but "faith only" puts baptism **after** salvation.

C. Acts 2:38

As a result of the first gospel sermon, sinners asked what to do about their sins. Peter said to **repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins."** Again forgiveness does not precede baptism, but follows as a result of it. In fact, receiving remission is the **purpose** of baptism: baptism is **for** the remission of sins.

When God institutes a practice and a purpose for it, then we must respect the purpose as part of the act.

Consider the Lord's Supper: we eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine (outer act) for the purpose of remembering Jesus' body and blood. Even if we do the right outer act, we are condemned if we do it for the wrong purpose (1 Corinthians 11:22ff).

Likewise, baptism is an action (immersion in water) and the purpose is "for the remission of sins." But if someone believes his sins were **already** remitted **before** baptism, then would he be baptized **for** remission? No, so such a baptism would be unscriptural in purpose. And since the purpose is to receive remission, if one does not do it for that purpose, then **he does not receive remission at all!** He may believe and be immersed, but since he does it for the wrong reasons, he **never does receive remission**. He is yet in sin! See why all this matters?

Someone says: "'For remission' means because you already have it - like a man receives a ticket 'for speeding.'"

However, **no reputable translation ever translates Acts 2:38 "because** of remission of sins." This is because, while the English "for" can look backward meaning "because of" a previous event, the Greek word used here (EIS) does not. Some translations show that the correct meaning is: "**unto** remission" (ASV), "so that your sins may be forgiven" (NIV), or "in order to have your sins forgiven" (Goodspeed).

Try the "because of" argument on these passages:

Matthew 26:28 - My **blood** ... is shed for many for (EIS) the remission of sins.

2 Corinthians 7:10 - **Repentance** to (EIS) salvation.

Romans 10:10 - ... **confession** is made to (EIS) salvation.

Hebrews 10:39 - ... **believe** to (EIS) the saving of the soul.

Do these verses mean that we should believe, repent, and confess - in fact, Jesus even died - **because we already have remission?!** Are all these things non-essential, coming **after** we have been forgiven? If not, then why should we believe that is what "for" means in Acts 2:38?

The arguments used against baptism, if consistently applied, would invariably prove that **confession is not essential to salvation**, and most of the arguments would prove faith and repentance are not essential! Surely such arguments are invalid.

To see what "for" in Acts 2:38 means, note the context.

Consider **who is being addressed**. These people had been convicted of sin (v23,36), and had just asked what to do as a result (v37). Peter told them to "**repent** and be baptized." Who needs to repent: people who have already been forgiven, or people who need to obtain it? Obviously people do not need to **repent**, unless they are in sin.

Clearly Peter is not telling saved people how to show they are saved. He is telling lost sinners how to receive remission. Therefore, baptism is necessary in **order to receive** remission of sins.

D. Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27

How many people are "in Christ"? Just as many as have been baptized into Him.

Consider the following blessings in Christ:

Grace - 2 Timothy 2:1

Salvation - 2 Timothy 2:10

Forgiveness - Ephesians 1:7

Eternal life - 1 John 5:11,12

Freedom from condemnation - Romans 8:1

Can a person be saved if he has not come "into Christ" where these blessings are found? Are people saved **outside** Christ? Surely we must be in Christ to be saved, but God's word expressly states that one must be **baptized into Christ**.

Likewise we are baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3).

As a result the body of sin is destroyed (v6) and we are free from sin (v7). Can we be saved without contacting Jesus' death? No. But there must be some point at which we contact that death, and that point is **baptism** (preceded by believing, repenting, and confessing).

To illustrate, a wedding ceremony puts a couple **into** the marriage relationship. Prior to the ceremony, they may take essential steps toward marriage, but they do not yet enjoy the privileges of being in marriage. Only after the ceremony are they actually in marriage.

Likewise baptism is the point at which one comes **into Christ, into His death**. Prior to baptism, one may take essential steps toward Christ (believing, repenting, confessing), but he is not yet **in** Christ and does not have the blessings in Christ. Only after baptism is one "in Christ" where these blessings are available.

Baptism is also essential to the new birth.

Suppose I say, "You **are** a citizen of this country, because you **have been** born into it." Which came first: birth or citizenship? Now note the verb tenses in Galatians 3:26,27:

"ye ARE all the children of God by faith"

"for" (Greek GAR = because)

"as many of you as HAVE BEEN baptized into Christ..."

According to the verb tenses, which came first: baptism or being a child of God? "Faith only" says one is first a child of God, then he is baptized. But the Scripture clearly says one is **first** baptized "into Christ," then he is a child of God.

Likewise, Romans 6:4 shows one has "newness of life" (new birth, born again) after he is raised from baptism, not before (cf. Colossians 2:12,13; John 3:5). And all this happens "by faith." Becoming a child of God "by faith" includes baptism; it does not **exclude** it.

Some people say Gal. 3:26,27; Rom. 6:3,4; and Col. 2:12 refer, not to water baptism, but to Holy Spirit baptism.

They claim this baptism occurs the moment one believes. However:

(1) Where do the **contexts** of these verses say they refer to a baptism in the Spirit? What **proof** is there?

(2) Holy Spirit baptism was a **promise** made to a **few** individuals for special purposes. There are only two recorded cases in the Bible. When it occurred, it was always accompanied by miraculous tongue-speaking, and apostles were always involved. (Read Acts 1:1-8,21,22; chap. 2; 10:44-11:18.) It was never **required** of **all** people in order to be saved (as in Gal. 3, Rom. 6, etc.). Holy Spirit baptism pertained to the age of miraculous revelation, which ceased when the written word was completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Jude 3; James 1:25).

(3) Folks say these verses refer to Spirit baptism, but they **also** practice **water** baptism. That makes **two** baptisms (cf. Matt. 3:11). But Ephesians 4:3-6 says there is only **one** baptism for today. You can no more have two baptisms (one essential and one not), than you can have two heavenly Fathers (one essential and one not).

(4) The baptism of Rom. 6:3,4 and Col. 2:12,13 involves a **burial** and a **resurrection** from the element, like Jesus. This fits water baptism. But if this is Spirit baptism, do people leave the Spirit after being immersed in Him? (Cf. Romans 8:9.)

(5) When arguing against sprinkling or pouring, "faith only" advocates often say Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12 refer to **water** baptism as an immersion. When arguing against the necessity of baptism, they say these verses refer to **Spirit** baptism. Which is it? It cannot be both ways!

Baptism in water is the baptism of the Great Commission. It is performed by human agents acting in the name of God, and is essential to salvation for all people (Mark 16:15,16; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:36-39; 10:47,48). It is necessary to come into Christ, into His death, and thereby become a child of God.

E. 1 Peter 3:20,21

Noah's salvation illustrates ours.

Noah was saved by water (v20). This is a figure showing that "baptism doth also now save us" (KJV).

Water, of itself, has no power to remove sin (like removing dirt from the body). Rather, we rely on Jesus' resurrection to save us, so we can have a good conscience - "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (NASB). (See on Colossians 2:12 below for more about baptism and Jesus' resurrection.)

Again, the case of Noah connects faith (Hebrews 11:7) and baptism (1 Peter 3:20,21), showing that salvation by faith **includes baptism**. The power to forgive is in Jesus' death and resurrection, but we reach that power in baptism, by faith. Hence, baptism also now saves us.

Another Old Testament parallel is Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-14).

Naaman was told to dip 7 times in Jordan to be healed of leprosy. Clearly, water of itself has no power to heal leprosy. But dipping in water was a condition Naaman must meet if he really trusted God. Then God's power would heal the leprosy.

At first Naaman was like many people today. He refused to dip, because he did not believe dipping could cure leprosy. But he learned that he had to obey God, then God's power would heal him. He was healed only when he had dipped. So it is in baptism.

But some say that Noah was never in the water, so water did not save him.

Yet the Bible expressly says he was **saved "by water"** (KJV). No illustration is identical in every respect to that which it illustrates (else it would be the same thing, not an illustration).

Noah was saved by water in that the water destroyed the evil that surrounded him, while it lifted Noah separating him from that evil. Likewise, baptism saves us from evil. Remember, God's own explanation of His illustration is that **"baptism doth also now save us."**

Or someone says "Baptism is just a figure or picture of salvation; it is not necessary in order to receive it."

This flatly contradicts the passage. This would make **baptism** an illustration of something else, leaving Noah's salvation completely out of the illustration. What the passage says is that Noah's salvation is the **figure**, and the thing that it illustrates is the fact that **"baptism doth also now save us."**

Read other translations: "...eight souls were saved by water. There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism..." (NKJV). "Antitype" means "something that is foreshadowed by a type or figure." So, baptism is not the figure or the type; it is the thing being illustrated - the antitype. "In it [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also..." (NIV).

Salvation by faith includes baptism; it does not exclude it.

F. Colossians 2:12,13 (Ephesians 2:4-9)

People dead in trespasses and sins, were buried in **baptism** and raised with Christ through **faith in God's working**. Then He made them alive, having forgiven their sins. Again, baptism is an act of faith in **God's power**, not an act of faith in our own merit. **Salvation by faith includes baptism**; it does not exclude it.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:4-9.

Eph. 2 says we are saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves; it is God's gift, not of works lest man should boast. Some say this proves baptism is not essential. But note the parallel between Colossians 2 and Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:4-9	Colossians 2:12,13
Dead in sin	Dead in sin
By God's grace	By God's operation
through faith	through faith
Made alive (quicken)	Made alive (quicken)
By being raised with Jesus	By being raised with Jesus
Not of self, not of works	IN baptism

Both passages describe "salvation by grace through faith." A person is dead through sin, but is made alive with Christ by being raised (spiritually) from the dead. But where Ephesians 2 says it is not of self, not of works, Colossians adds other information. "*Wherein*" are we raised with Christ through faith and made alive by being forgiven of sin? *In baptism!* (Compare Romans 6:3-7.)

So, while Ephesians 2 says works do not save, the parallel in Colossians 2 shows this was never intended to eliminate the need for baptism. On the contrary, it expressly **includes** baptism. Salvation by faith includes obedience. This is here shown to include baptism, and that in a passage that is clearly parallel to Eph. 2:8,9!

Gideon illustrates deliverance by grace through faith.

Gideon is an example of "faith" in Hebrews 11:32. God did not want Israel to boast that they had saved themselves (Judges 7:2). God said **He** delivered the people (v9,15). But the people still had to act (v3-7,16-25). Without obedience, they would never have been saved. But God designed their action so that it was clearly not sufficient to **earn or deserve** deliverance. The action was simply a test of their faith.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:8,9. In salvation from sin we cannot boast that we save ourselves or deserve salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. But this nowhere disproves the need for obedience, any more than in Gideon's case.

The fall of Jericho in Joshua is also similar.

This too was an example of "faith," but Israel had to act to receive the blessing (Hebrews 11:30). Yet God said He **gave** Jericho to Israel (Joshua 6:2). If a thing is a "gift," some say there is nothing to do to receive it. But God's gifts are often conditional. We must act, but our actions are inadequate to **earn or merit** the result.

Israel received Jericho as a gift from God "by faith," but they still had to obey to receive it. So, Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is a gift from God "by faith." This does not prove there is nothing to do. It just proves that our actions do not **earn** the gift, so we cannot boast.

Salvation by grace through faith does not exclude baptism. It requires it.

G. The Urgency of Baptism

In Bible examples, when people believed, repented, and understood baptism, they were always baptized on the same day or same hour, even in the middle of the night (Acts 2:41; 8:35-39; 16:25,33; 22:16). Instead, modern "faith only" churches usually tell candidates to wait for a baptismal service days or weeks in the future. Why don't they imitate the Biblical sense of urgency?

Clearly, they believe people are already saved before baptism, so they have no sense of urgency as in Bible cases. This further demonstrates how "faith only" doctrine conflicts with the Bible. Baptism in the Bible was urgent, because people are still in sin till they are baptized.

Salvation by faith includes baptism, just as it includes repentance and confession.

Conclusion

It is said that a man was once about to push a wheelbarrow across a tightrope over Niagara Falls. He asked the by-standers how many **believed** he could make it safely. Many raised their hands. Then he asked who believed enough to **ride in the wheelbarrow!** Do you trust God enough to obey Him, so He can carry you safely to salvation?

Salvation by "faith alone" is not the true gospel of Jesus. It is a perverted gospel of human invention (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Matthew 15:9; Revelation 22:18,19).

What should you do if you were baptized believing you were saved before baptism or believing baptism is not necessary? You should do like the men in Acts 19:2-6, when they learned their baptism was not Scriptural. You should be baptized Scripturally. Then refuse to be part of any church that teaches the false doctrine of "faith only" (2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:17f; Ephesians 5:11).

Salvation "by Faith" Includes Baptism.

"Faith only" advocates say we are saved by faith **before** baptism, so a person is baptized **after** he has already been saved. But we have learned that salvation by faith includes the conditions that are necessary to receive forgiveness. Is baptism one of the conditions one must meet to receive forgiveness, or does baptism come after forgiveness?

A. Acts 22:16

This is the conversion of Paul, that apostle who preached so much about "salvation by faith." Surely, he knew whether salvation by faith includes or excludes baptism. What about his own conversion? Was baptism essential to his forgiveness?

On the road to Damascus, he saw Jesus and believed in him (22:5-10). During the following three days, he was praying (9:11). If people are saved by "faith alone," then surely, he must have been saved. But was he?

Jesus instructed Paul that, in the city he would be told **all** things that he **must** do (22:10; 9:6). What was he told? Ananias said to arise and be **baptized and wash away his sins** (22:16). If salvation is by "faith alone" before baptism, then Paul would have had no sins at this point. But he did have sins, and he remained in sin till he was baptized.

The passage clearly places forgiveness, not **before** baptism, but as a **result** of it. Surely nothing Paul later taught should be taken to contradict what he himself did to be saved. He knew that salvation by faith **includes and requires** baptism; it does not exclude it.

B. Mark 16:15,16

He who believes and is baptized shall be saved.

Both faith and baptism are essential prerequisites to salvation. Salvation comes **after or as a result** of baptism, not before it. Just as $1+1=2$, take away either of the "ones" and you no longer have two. So, if you take away either faith or baptism, you no longer have salvation.

"Faith only" says: He that believes is saved and may then be baptized. Jesus said: He that believes and is baptized shall be saved. See the difference? Note this comparison

Romans 10:9 - if you confess...and believe...you will be saved

Mark 16:16 - He who believes and is baptized shall be saved

Clearly Romans 10:9 means that one must both believe and confess before he can be saved. Why does not the parallel language in Mark 16:16 likewise mean that one must both believe **and be baptized** before he can be saved?

Someone says: "But it says, 'He who disbelieves shall be condemned.' It doesn't say he who disbelieves and is not baptized shall be condemned."

So, some conclude that only faith is essential. But we have already seen that baptism alone will not save. **Both** faith **and** baptism are required. A lack of faith is enough to condemn a person, whether he gets baptized or not. Baptizing such a person would accomplish nothing (cf. John 3:18).

Can you find a verse that says, "He who disbelieves and does not **confess** shall be condemned"? If not, does that prove confession is not essential? Faith is prerequisite to both confession and baptism; both are worthless without faith. But that does not prove we can be saved by faith alone without confession and baptism.

But look at the passage again. **What is it** that, if disbelieved, causes a person to be condemned? It is **the gospel** (v15; cf. Mark 1:15; Romans 1:16). What does the gospel say? It says right here (and elsewhere) that we must both believe and be baptized to be saved!

Someone says: "It's like saying 'He who gets on a plane and sits down will arrive at California.' Getting on is essential, but sitting down is not."

Try this illustration on Romans 10:9: "If you confess ... and believe ... you will be saved." Is this like, "If you get on the plane and sit down, you will arrive at California"? If so, then on Romans 10:9 the illustration proves that **faith** is not essential! Why does the illustration work on Mark 16:16, but not on the parallel language in Rom. 10:9?

A better illustration would be: "If you buy a ticket and get on the plane, you shall go to California." Buying the ticket parallels faith (it gives the **right** to become a child of God - John 1:12), and getting on the plane parallels being baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3). Both are essential to arrive at the destination.

Any way you look at it, baptism comes **before** salvation in Mark 16:16, but "faith only" puts baptism **after** salvation.

C. Acts 2:38

As a result of the first gospel sermon, sinners asked what to do about their sins. Peter said to **repent and be baptized "for the remission of sins."** Again forgiveness does not precede baptism, but follows as a result of it. In fact, receiving remission is the **purpose** of baptism: baptism is **for** the remission of sins.

When God institutes a practice and a purpose for it, then we must respect the purpose as part of the act.

Consider the Lord's Supper: we eat the bread and drink the fruit of the vine (outer act) for the purpose of remembering Jesus' body and blood. Even if we do the right outer act, we are condemned if we do it for the wrong purpose (1 Corinthians 11:22ff).

Likewise, baptism is an action (immersion in water) and the purpose is "for the remission of sins." But if someone believes his sins were **already** remitted **before** baptism, then would he be baptized **for** remission? No, so such a baptism would be unscriptural in purpose. And since the purpose is to receive remission, if one does not do it for that purpose, then **he does not receive remission at all!** He may believe and be immersed, but since he does it for the wrong reasons, **he never does receive remission.** He is yet in sin! See why all this matters?

Someone says: "'For remission' means because you already have it - like a man receives a ticket 'for speeding.'"

However, **no reputable translation ever translates Acts 2:38 "because of remission of sins."** This is because, while the English "for" can look backward meaning "because of" a previous event, the Greek word used here (EIS) does not. Some translations show that the correct meaning is: "**unto** remission" (ASV), "so that your sins may be forgiven" (NIV), or "in order to have your sins forgiven" (Goodspeed).

Try the "because of" argument on these passages:

Matthew 26:28 - My **blood** ... is shed for many for (EIS) the remission of sins.

2 Corinthians 7:10 - **Repentance** to (EIS) salvation.

Romans 10:10 - ... **confession** is made to (EIS) salvation.

Hebrews 10:39 - ... **believe** to (EIS) the saving of the soul.

Do these verses mean that we should believe, repent, and confess - in fact, Jesus even died - **because we already have remission?!** Are all these things non-essential, coming **after** we have been forgiven? If not, then why should we believe that is what "for" means in Acts 2:38?

The arguments used against baptism, if consistently applied, would invariably prove that **confession is not essential to salvation**, and most of the arguments would prove faith and repentance are not essential! Surely such arguments are invalid.

To see what "for" in Acts 2:38 means, note the context.

Consider **who is being addressed.** These people had been convicted of sin (v23,36), and had just asked what to do as a result (v37). Peter told them to "**repent** and be baptized." Who needs to repent: people who have already been forgiven, or people who need to obtain it? Obviously people do not need to **repent**, unless they are in sin.

Clearly Peter is not telling saved people how to show they are saved. He is telling lost sinners how to receive remission. Therefore, baptism is necessary in **order to receive** remission of sins.

D. Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27

How many people are "in Christ"? Just as many as have been baptized into Him.

Consider the following blessings in Christ:

Grace - 2 Timothy 2:1

Salvation - 2 Timothy 2:10

Forgiveness - Ephesians 1:7

Eternal life - 1 John 5:11,12

Freedom from condemnation - Romans 8:1

Can a person be saved if he has not come "into Christ" where these blessings are found? Are people saved **outside** Christ? Surely we must be in Christ to be saved, but God's word expressly states that one must be **baptized into Christ**.

Likewise, we are baptized into Christ's death (Romans 6:3).

As a result the body of sin is destroyed (v6) and we are free from sin (v7). Can we be saved without contacting Jesus' death? No. But there must be some point at which we contact that death, and that point is **baptism** (preceded by believing, repenting, and confessing).

To illustrate, a wedding ceremony puts a couple **into** the marriage relationship. Prior to the ceremony, they may take essential steps toward marriage, but they do not yet enjoy the privileges of being in marriage. Only after the ceremony are they actually in marriage.

Likewise baptism is the point at which one comes **into Christ, into His death**. Prior to baptism, one may take essential steps toward Christ (believing, repenting, confessing), but he is not yet **in** Christ and does not have the blessings in Christ. Only after baptism is one "in Christ" where these blessings are available.

Baptism is also essential to the new birth.

Suppose I say, "You **are** a citizen of this country, because you **have been** born into it." Which came first: birth or citizenship? Now note the verb tenses in Galatians 3:26,27:

"ye ARE all the children of God by faith"

"for" (Greek GAR = because)

"as many of you as HAVE BEEN baptized into Christ..."

According to the verb tenses, which came first: baptism or being a child of God? "Faith only" says one is first a child of God, then he is baptized. But the Scripture clearly says one is **first** baptized "into Christ," then he is a child of God.

Likewise, Romans 6:4 shows one has "newness of life" (new birth, born again) after he is raised from baptism, not before (cf. Colossians 2:12,13; John 3:5). And all this happens "by faith." Becoming a child of God "by faith" includes baptism; it does not **exclude** it.

Some people say Gal. 3:26,27; Rom. 6:3,4; and Col. 2:12 refer, not to water baptism, but to Holy Spirit baptism.

They claim this baptism occurs the moment one believes. However:

(1) Where do the **contexts** of these verses say they refer to a baptism in the Spirit? What **proof** is there?

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11:18.) It was never **required** of **all** people in order to be saved (as in Gal. 3, Rom. 6, etc.). Holy Spirit baptism pertained to the age of miraculous revelation, which ceased when the written word was completed (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; Jude 3; James 1:25).

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Water, of itself, has no power to remove sin (like removing dirt from the body). Rather, we rely on Jesus' resurrection to save us, so we can have a good conscience - "an appeal to God for a good conscience" (NASB). (See on Colossians 2:12 below for more about baptism and Jesus' resurrection.)

Again, the case of Noah connects faith (Hebrews 11:7) and baptism (1 Peter 3:20,21), showing that salvation by faith **includes baptism**. The power to forgive is in Jesus' death and resurrection, but we reach that power in baptism, by faith. Hence, baptism also now saves us.

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Salvation by faith includes baptism; it does not exclude it.

F. Colossians 2:12,13 (Ephesians 2:4-9)

People dead in trespasses and sins, were buried in **baptism** and raised with Christ through **faith in God's working**. Then He made them alive, having forgiven their sins. Again, baptism is an act of faith in **God's power**, not an act of faith in our own merit. **Salvation by faith includes baptism**; it does not exclude it.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:4-9.

Eph. 2 says we are saved by grace through faith, not of ourselves; it is God's gift, not of works lest man should boast. Some say this proves baptism is not essential. But note the parallel between Colossians 2 and Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:4-9	Colossians 2:12,13
Dead in sin	Dead in sin
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Both passages describe "salvation by grace through faith." A person is dead through sin, but is made alive with Christ by being raised (spiritually) from the dead. But where Ephesians 2 says it is not of self, not of works, Colossians adds other information. "*Wherein*" are we raised with Christ through faith and made alive by being forgiven of sin? *In baptism!* (Compare Romans 6:3-7.)

So, while Ephesians 2 says works do not save, the parallel in Colossians 2 shows this was never intended to eliminate the need for baptism. On the contrary, it expressly **includes** baptism. Salvation by faith includes obedience. This is here shown to include baptism, and that in a passage that is clearly parallel to Eph. 2:8,9!

Gideon illustrates deliverance by grace through faith.

Gideon is an example of "faith" in Hebrews 11:32. God did not want Israel to boast that they had saved themselves (Judges 7:2). God said **He** delivered the people (v9,15). But the people still had to act (v3-7,16-25). Without obedience, they would never have been saved. But God designed their action so that it was clearly not sufficient to **earn or deserve** deliverance. The action was simply a test of their faith.

Note the parallel to Ephesians 2:8,9. In salvation from sin we cannot boast that we save ourselves or deserve salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. But this nowhere disproves the need for obedience, any more than in Gideon's case.

The fall of Jericho in Joshua is also similar.

This too was an example of "faith," but Israel had to act to receive the blessing (Hebrews 11:30). Yet God said He **gave** Jericho to Israel (Joshua 6:2). If a thing is a "gift," some say there is nothing to do to receive it. But God's gifts are often conditional. We must act, but our actions are inadequate to **earn or merit** the result.

Israel received Jericho as a gift from God "by faith," but they still had to obey to receive it. So, Ephesians 2:8-9 says salvation is a gift from God "by faith." This does not prove there is nothing to do. It just proves that our actions do not **earn** the gift, so we cannot boast.

Salvation by grace through faith does not exclude baptism. It requires it.

G. The Urgency of Baptism

In Bible examples, when people believed, repented, and understood baptism, they were always baptized on the same day or same hour, even in the middle of the night (Acts 2:41; 8:35-39; 16:25,33; 22:16). Instead, modern "faith only" churches usually tell candidates to wait for a baptismal service days or weeks in the future. Why don't they imitate the Biblical sense of urgency?

Clearly, they believe people are already saved before baptism, so they have no sense of urgency as in Bible cases. This further demonstrates how "faith only" doctrine conflicts with the Bible. Baptism in the Bible was urgent, because people are still in sin till they are baptized.

Salvation by faith includes baptism, just as it includes repentance and confession.

Conclusion

Please note the chart on the back of this booklet. It lists blessings that God's word says we receive when we are saved by faith. Then it shows that obedience to God's commands is necessary to receive these same blessings. This demonstrates again that saving faith includes obedience, particularly baptism. They go together, and cannot work apart from one another.

It is said that a man was once about to push a wheelbarrow across a tightrope over Niagara Falls. He asked the by-standers how many **believed** he could make it safely. Many raised their hands. Then he asked who believed enough to **ride in the wheelbarrow!** Do you trust God enough to obey Him, so He can carry you safely to salvation?

Salvation by "faith alone" is not the true gospel of Jesus. It is a perverted gospel of human invention (Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Matthew 15:9; Revelation 22:18,19).

What should you do if you were baptized believing you were saved before baptism or believing baptism is not necessary? You should do like the men in Acts 19:2-6, when they learned their baptism was not Scriptural. You should be baptized Scripturally. Then refuse to be part of any church that teaches the false doctrine of "faith only" (2 John 9-11; 2 Corinthians 6:17f; Ephesians 5:11).

Is salvation by faith only? You either believe that it is, or it isn't. Few people have no opinion regarding the matter. Many times, however, the opinions held are not based upon the Bible's clear revelation, but instead on outside factors. Such factors as what our parents or grandparents believed; what seems reasonable to us; what the preacher says; etc...

If you are inclined to believe that salvation is by faith only, then answer the following questions:

Q. Must one believe to be saved? (**Mark 16:16**)

He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

A. _____

Q. Can one be saved by works? (**Ephesians 2:8-10**)

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – **9** not because of works, lest any man should boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

A. _____

Observation: Note that this passage is saying that the provision of the means of salvation is by grace alone. Note the word through is used here. There is grace plus something. The statement is not made here that we are saved by grace alone. We will expand on this when we look at **James 2:24-26** below.

Q. Is believing a work? (**John 6:22-40**)

22 On the next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away alone. **23** However, boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. **24** So when the people saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus.

25 When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" **26** Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I tell you, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. **27** Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you; for on him God the Father set his seal." **28** Then they said to him, "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" **29** Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." **30** So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?" **31** Our fathers ate

the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" **32** Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." **34** They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always."

35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. **36** But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. **37** All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. **38** For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; **39** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. **40** For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise them up at the last day."

A. _____

Observation: When you see the word "belief" used in the Bible it does not imply a mere "mental acknowledgement" or "mental ascent". When we define words as they are used in the Bible, we must look to Gods word to define them. We should not resort to leaning on our own understanding of the word in today's common usage.

Q. Do Paul and Jesus seem to be at variance?

A. _____

All works are not the same. Name the various kinds below:

➤ **Galatians 2:15-16**

15 We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, **16** yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.

➤ **Ephesians 2:10**

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

➤ **Hebrews 6:1-2**

1 Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

2 with instruction about ablutions, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.

➤ **I John 3:8**

He who commits sin is of the Devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.

➤ **John 6:28**

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"

➤ **II Thessalonians 3:10**

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If any one will not work, let him not eat.

Is it reasonable, based on what Jesus said in John 6, and the fact that there are many kinds of works, to assume that Paul meant any and all kinds of works in Ephesians 2:9? No, it is obvious that we assume too much when we draw such a conclusion. Think about it this way. Paul said that salvation is by grace. "Grace" is the favor of God. The word grace simply refers to an attitude of mind; but here includes all that God did for our salvation. We know that He sent His Son to die, raised Him from the dead, seated Him at His right hand, etc... But all that is said is grace... We are not saved by "grace only" in the sense that God's attitude was all He exerted. The same is true of "faith". "Faith" is man's trust in God. The word faith simply refers to an attitude of mind; but here includes all that man does in obedience to God. Just as God did not save us by attitude alone, we are not saved by a mere mental outlook.

This would confine the word works in Ephesians 2:9 to a particular kind of works. What works might Paul refer to in which one might boast? It was common for the keepers of Moses' law to indulge in boasting. They tried to earn their salvation by perfect law-keeping. Paul wrote of this attitude in Galatians 2:16, calling them the "works of the law". The law under consideration is the law of Moses, or Old Testament law. Now note the observation of Paul in Ephesians 2:11. In that verse he refers to the work of the law of Moses called circumcision.

Now, please answer the following:

- Can one truly obey God without faith? (**Hebrews 11:6**)

And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

- Can one please God by faith only? (**James 2:14-26**)

14 What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but has not works? Can his faith save him? **15** If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? **17** So faith by itself, if it has not works, is dead. **18** But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. **19** You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe and - shudder. **20** Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? **21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? **22** You see that faith was active along with works, and faith was completed by works, **23** and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. **24** You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. **25** And in the same way was not also Rahab the Harlot justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? **26** For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.

Let us consider some observations regarding this text:

1. You see that man is justified by works and not by faith alone (vs. 24).
2. Belief only does not save a man. Otherwise, the demons would be saved (vs. 19).
3. From the above passage, we can safely conclude the following:
Works = Obedient Faith

- What did Paul tell the jailer to do? (**Acts 16:31**)

And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."

- What did the jailer do? (**Acts 16:33**)

And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family.

- What did Peter tell the multitude to do? (**Acts 2:38**)

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

- What did the Eunuch do? (**Acts 8:38**)

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

- What was Paul told to do to remove sins? (**Acts 22:16**)

And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." (**II Corinthians 5:17**)

How did you get into Christ?... Do you have a passage or two that instructed you in this?... If you prayed for the Lord Jesus to come into your heart and save you, do you have a passage for that? You won't find anyone in the New Testament ever doing that. You'll also never find anyone offering personal testimonies and the church voting on admission to fellowship.

There is only one way to get into Christ, and that is God's way. All spiritual blessings reside in the glorious relationship between Jesus and His saints (**Ephesians 1:3**). If one is not in Christ, then he is outside, and subject to condemnation. This would make the question of how you got into Christ an important one. Take it lightly at your own peril.

Now, please answer the following:

- How did the Romans get into Christ? (**Romans 6:3**)

- How did the Galatians get into Christ? (**Galatians 3:27**)

- What role does the blood of Jesus play in salvation? (**Romans 5:9**)

- When was Jesus' blood shed? (His life or death)

- How did God ordain that we reach that blood? (**Romans 6:4**)

- How do we die with Christ? (**Romans 6:3-8**)

- Shall we live with Him if we did not die with Him? (**Romans 6:8**)

It is easy to take passages that speak of faith's necessity without mention of other factors, and reason them to mean "faith only". But these do not deny the necessity of other factors (e.g. obedience). They merely emphasize the need for the proper attitude behind one's service. Without that attitude, any obedience would be useless. But with the proper faith, obedience will come without hesitation.

Conclusion...

Jesus became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (**Hebrews 5:9**). What God demands of us before salvation is granted is His business. Our only proper course is to obey Him. Even if it does not make sense to us, we must serve our God.

The scriptures do not teach that we are saved by "faith only". The one and only time that such a phrase is used, we find it denying such a doctrine (**James 2:24**). Are you denying the scriptures with your own doctrine of salvation? God's way is the only acceptable way. He revealed it for our understanding. "So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." (**Ephesians 5:17**)

