

From Augustine to Reformed Theology

By Rev. Phillip D. Mosher

Every word of God is pure, A shield to those who take refuge in Him. Do not add to His words, Lest He indict you and you be proved a liar. Proverbs 30:5–6 (Tanakh)¹

He [God] made from one man every nation² of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us, for in Him we live and move and exist . . . (Acts 17:26-28a NASB³) Note God's purpose behind His involvements in human history.

For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. Deuteronomy 10:17

There is no favoritism⁴ with God. Romans 2:11⁵ (HCSB⁶)

Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is no other. (Isaiah 45:22)

MY BACKGROUND

At age 12, in a Baptist church in Orlando, I walked the aisle, confessed my sinful state, and appropriated the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ for my soul's eternal salvation. At that moment I was born again by God's Spirit, and God's Son became my Savior and Lord. Shortly thereafter, as a testimony of my faith, I was baptized by immersed. As an ordained Baptist

¹ TANAKH (תנ"ך), *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY, Philadelphia • Jerusalem, Copyright © 1985 by The Jewish Publication Society

² Greek: ἔθνος [*ethnos*] = generally designates a non-Jewish nation, peoples, multitude, race

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes have been taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright © 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

⁴ Προσωποληψία [*prosōpolēpsia*], (an idiom, literally 'to accept a face'): to make unjust distinctions between people by treating one person better than another—'to show favoritism, to be partial, partiality'. From: Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, electronic ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996)

⁵ See also: Deut. 16:19; 2nd Chr. 19:7; Job 34:19; Prov. 24:23; Matt. 22:16; Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1st Pet. 1:17; Jam. 2:1; all teaching that God is impartial, does not play favorites. Five point Calvinism does, making God one who distinguishes between persons.

⁶ Scripture quotes marked HCSB have been taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Copyright © 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

minister of the Gospel and missionary, I have been honored to administer believer's baptism by immersion to many new believers in Jesus.

My mother was saved as a child through the radio ministry of Theodore Epp. Mom was an extrovert and stood strong in her beliefs in the authority of God's written Word, in the difference between Israel and the Church, and in the pretribulational and premillennial return of our Lord. I was raised on the *Scofield Reference Bible*, which Mom used.

Ruth and I met in a home Bible study group and were members at First Baptist. After our marriage we moved to Phoenix where I graduated from a Conservative Baptist College with a degree in Bible. At that time, Baptist history and distinctives were required courses. I thank God for that education with the Baptist emphasis. All of my life I've been a Baptist, and in Brazil we established Baptist churches. Baptists are a kind of Christian, being distinctively different from mainline Christianity throughout the centuries of Church history. (See Baptists Distinctives, at the close of the chapter on the Doctrine of the Church.)

After Pentecost, the Lord's followers spread out across the then known world preaching the Gospel and uniting the saved into local assemblies which were small autonomous bodies of the Lord's followers who believed baptism was a testimony of one's faith, not something to be administered to infants and unbelievers, and it was not done as a means of grace or something one does like circumcision to be part of a covenant.⁷ Those early Baptist churches believe that the only authoritative rule for faith and practice is the Bible, leaving no room for the traditions and doctrines of men. It was their conviction that local churches were to be autonomous bodies patterned after the synagogues with elders and deacons, and that churches were not to have a hierarchical structure nor be a part of binding ecclesiastical ties. Et cetera.

During the Reformation, those autonomous bodies, usually referred to as "Anabaptists" (a nickname), were present throughout Europe and were not part of the Protestant movement. *Baptists are not Protestants.* They existed before the Protestants who rebelled against the Catholic Church, and they never cooperated with that State Church and were not a part of the Reformation. Those believing and living the Baptist principles of faith were persecuted for their faith and practices by those who had formed the Catholic Church, by the Catholic Church, and by the Protestant reformers. Even in some states in America, the Baptists were mistreated and not allowed to form churches before the adoption of the First Amendment. During the Reformation they were expelled from their lands, imprisoned, killed by the sword and fire, and drowned because they would not baptize their babies and cooperate with the Reformers in their beliefs on salvation and the local church. Following the teachings of Augustine,⁸ Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther all persecuted our Baptist ancestors. Today, many Baptists are not studying our

⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chp VII, Par VI; Chp XXVII; Chp XXVIII

⁸ Augustine: "It is, indeed, better that men should be brought to serve God by instruction than by fear of punishment, or by pain. But because the former means are better, the latter must not therefore be neglected. Many must often be brought back to their Lord, like wicked servants, by the rod of temporal suffering, before they attain the highest grade of religious development." Quoted by David Cloud in *Protestant Persecution of Baptists*, page 19.

history, are not standing for the Baptist fundamentals of faith and practice, but are adopting the doctrines of men.

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, *who was of the evil one and slew his brother.* 1 John 3:10–12a

After briefly stating my background, biases, and concerns, I address Calvinism in hopes the reader will understand those concerns, the faith of the Calvinists, and biblical truth.

Introduction

While in Brazil in the mid-1990s, my wife and I decided to take a break and traveled to the interior of São Paulo State to attend a conference designed for national pastors, though a small percentage of American missionaries were present. The sponsors⁹ brought in two pastors from the United States to teach those national leaders—quite a calling card. One of the two speakers was specifically chosen to teach Calvinism—not a pre-announced topic. During those three days that American pastor forcefully taught five-point Calvinism as biblical. True to form, his first message was on the total depravity of man. Having read several books by Calvinists and over the years having debated these doctrines with strong Calvinists, his approach to the assigned topic came as no surprise. This speaker painted man so desperately wicked that it would have made anyone who had fully ingested that sermon afraid of almost everyone and much more so to meet a person in a dark alley. Coming to my mind was the question, “Could I even trust my wife?” That American authority had to make the situation look so bad because his job was to convince the audience that Calvinism was indisputably right. This means that man is totally unable to decide for the Savior without being an elected child of privilege into whom God would place that faith he so desperately needs. Needless to say, there was little that speaker presented that I found to be biblically sound. All were philosophical theories based on half-truths and distortions. He forced his belief system on the Bible rather than letting the Bible speak independently of theological biases. I felt badly for those national pastors who were being indoctrinated by an American “authority” in the five points of Calvinism and were being told that if one desires the Lord’s blessing in his ministry, he must be teaching and practicing Calvinism—a *lie*.¹⁰

Though it is associated with the churches that emerged from the Reformation, today Calvinism is growing in acceptance and some form of Calvinism can be found in most protestant churches and in many Baptist churches.¹¹ The name given to this doctrinal system comes from

⁹ Fiel, a Christian publisher in Brazil

¹⁰ James 3:1 “Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.” And, Proverbs 30:5-6.

¹¹ I do know about the *Baptist Confession of Faith* of 1689, produced in London, that is similar to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. Those who produced this were not traditional Baptists; and it appears this was done in an effort to disassociate themselves from the Anna-Baptists who were harshly persecuted by the Protestants.

a French theologian, John Calvin,¹² who was a lawyer, not an ordained priest or monk of the Roman Catholic Church. After leaving the Catholic Church, Calvin founded a state church in Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin ran Geneva and his church, from which came Presbyterianism, much like a Pope. Everyone in that area was required to attend church services and to practice his form of Christianity. He imprisoned “heretics” and burned some at the stake. Many of those martyrs were the ancestors of the Baptists.

To assign Calvin’s name to this system of theology is an injustice, because what is commonly referred to as Calvinism comes from Augustine of Hippo (354-430) and the Catholic Church whose theology and practices he heavily impacted. Calvin’s Institutes quote extensively from Augustine, often giving to his words the authority of Scripture. All of the Reformers studied and liked Augustine. It would have been more fitting to have titled this theological system “Augustinianism”.¹³

The theology that is called “Calvinism” today entered the belief system of the state church through her primary theologian, Augustine. Over a millennium later the Protestants, who had grown up in Catholicism, carried those beliefs and the hermeneutics that supports them into the Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and other protestant churches they founded. In 1646, after the Counsel of Dort, Calvinism was put into writing, being preserved in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which continues to be the statement of faith for the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Lutheranism and Anglicanism are similar. It boils down to a system of fatalism versus one of free moral agents who are able to make choices for which they are personally accountable to their Creator. It is a theology with a god who manages everything through decrees, versus one with a God *Who can set angels and men free and still accomplish His purposes*.

I have heard it said that one of the five points of Calvinism—limited atonement—was not believed or taught by John Calvin. Reference was made to his understanding of 1st John 2:2; but Calvin’s commentary does not support this view on his belief about the extent of the atonement.¹⁴ John Calvin did believe in a limitation on the extent of the benefit from the death of the Son of God for humanity, that is to say that he believed the Messiah’s death was only for those whom God had pre-chosen (elected) to privilege. It was Calvin who opposed Jacobus Arminius and his followers, the Remonstrants; and it was Calvin’s followers who were the force behind the council at Dort where the TULIP was officially adopted (covered later) and the Remonstrant pastors were expelled from the pulpits.

One of the Baptist Distinctives¹⁵ is that ***the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice***. Some claiming to be Baptists have overlooked the historical reason behind this distinctive and

¹² Jean Calvin or Jehan Cauvin, born in France, July 10, 1509, and died at Geneva, May 27, 1564

¹³ Because this system of belief is commonly referred to as “Calvinism,” that title is used herein.

¹⁴ Calvin on: 1st John 2:2: “Here a question may be raised, how have the sins of the whole world been expiated? I pass by the dotages of the fanatics, who under this pretense extend salvation to all the reprobate, and therefore to Satan himself. Such a monstrous thing deserves no refutation. . . . the design of John was no other than to make this benefit common to the whole Church.” (He avoids the true issue, exaggerates the teaching of his opponents, and distorts the teaching of the word “world” by saying that it refers to the church.)

¹⁵ In *This We Believe*, see “Baptist Distinctives” (page 148) in the chapter titled “Doctrine of the Church”.

have failed to grasp the true significance thereof to their personal lives, beliefs, and teachings. The theological system that Augustine brought into the Church is not rooted in the Scriptures but in Platonic philosophy and Gnosticism, which he participated in for nine years before he was baptized by Ambrose. It was Platonic philosophy that softened his soul toward Christianity, though he never shed the influences of both systems as he grew in his own doctrines of the faith, grew to become a Bishop in Hypo, and grew into becoming an influential teacher and writer. Gnosticism gave him a dualistic and fatalistic view of life and the Platonic approach to the material and spiritual caused him to believe that there is a deeper, more spiritual meaning to Scripture that goes beyond the historical sense of the black on white text. This caused him to hold to a hermeneutics that permits the spiritualizing and allegorizing of the Scriptures so that the understanding of the text would fit his opinions as to what that deeper and more spiritual sense is.

Philosophy's objective is to discover through the powers of human reason what is good, true, and just. For example, major philosophers, without the Scriptures but through the powers of reason, concluded that there is a God and that nature and the human soul teach us to revere Him and to love our fellow man.¹⁶ Since reason as well as the Scriptures reveal the truths that God is eternal and all knowing—the eternal “I AM” Who knows all things, past, present, and future—the Calvinists reasons that all things are ordered by Him and there is no such thing as “free will” on the part of the created. Since God “foreknew”, then Calvinism concludes that all must transpire according to that foreknowledge. In other words, to the Reformed mind, foreknowledge is equal to foreordination, meaning God ordains and decrees all things.¹⁷ This method of philosophical reasoning is foundational to Calvinism. The gnostic and platonic thought process was transported into the Church primarily through Augustine. Because of this form of reasoning, the Catholic Church forbade the laity from having a copy of the Bible. The commoner could not be trusted to arrive at the proper “spiritual” sense. That job was for the piety. The adoption of a hermeneutics that centers on allegorizing the Scriptures impacted Catholic theology and later the Reformed movement. The Reformers had not shed their years of being trained in Catholic doctrines and practices. Had they been ambitious about being literalists¹⁸ and in establishing what the New Testament, the Apostles, and the early church fathers taught about local churches, then they would have befriended the Anabaptist instead of persecuting and killing them.

Within Catholic and Reformed theological belief systems, the Augustinian approach has mandated how the Bible is to be interpreted even until today. Dr. Godet, in his commentary on Romans, written in the nineteenth century, expressed his surprise that this has continued as long as it has within Protestantism, and we are over 100 years past Godet.

¹⁶ For example, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), with no Scriptural background, concluded the same truths that Jesus proclaimed in Matthew 22:35–40. Anselm of Canterbury (Saint Anselm 1033-1109), was ordained by the church and yet he wrote to show that one did not need the Scriptures or Augustine to prove the existence of God and natural laws, but only human reason.

¹⁷ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Cpt III.

¹⁸ “Sola Scriptura”, though they said those words, in reality they never fully practiced this.

Humanity lives within the constraints of time, space, and the material. For us mere mortals to grasp eternity and the spiritual and to truly understand the God who is all knowing and omnipresent would take far more brain capacity than the Creator has imparted unto mankind. It is important to always remember that the Bible is an accommodation of divine truth to the human mind. The eternal Spirit has not revealed all things to us; but when he does share, He has communicated with mortal man at his level. In this study, we will do our best at interpreting the biblical text inductively¹⁹ and to present what It declares to the sons of Adam, who were created in the image of God but live within limitations. God speaks to us where we are and in terms we can understand, and we should avoid philosophizing to determine truth and then forcing the Bible into agreement with those “spiritual” conclusions. The Bible was written in the commonly spoken language of the people, not the language of the highly educated elite. Though the Bible uses many literary styles, never is God communicating in riddles and mysteries. God wants us to understand.

Experience has taught me that five-point Calvinists, those holding strongly to the TULIP (to be explained), are not easily dissuaded from their views. It is easier to reason with an atheist than a Calvinist. In writing on this subject, the objective is to assist the seeker of truth, not to convert the ardent followers of Augustinianism.

It is my objective to show that nowhere do we find the Holy Scriptures teaching that God, before He created man, chose some persons and angels to be saved into eternal bliss while condemning others to damnation in an eternal hell of fire and torment, as taught by Calvinism.²⁰ In this study, a biblical definition of *predestination* will be presented and one for *election*. Biblically these two words are not synonyms, though those in the Reformed camp treat them as such. We will look at the famous TULIP and at passages that are commonly quoted by Calvinists as proof texts. To begin, we need to go back in time some 350 years before the Savior’s birth to fully understand what impacted Augustine whose hermeneutics and beliefs were incorporated into the beliefs and practices of the state church.

¹⁹ Inductive approach to interpreting a biblical text begins with the passage in the forming of a conclusion about what is being communicated. This is the inside-out approach. Deductive approach brings to the passage assumptions drawn from outside of the text to develop and interpretation. This is the outside-in approach. We truly believe in “sola Scriptura” and that we’ve not properly interpreted and understood the text until we place our feet into the sandals of those who received it though divine inspiration. Interpretation should be based upon common language usage and the linguistic culture at the time of writing. We recognize that to avoid biases is difficult, but biases have no place in this endeavor.

²⁰ Calvin, John: “God by his secret counsel chooses whom he will while he rejects others.” *Calvin’s Institutes*, book III, chapter 21, section 7; and “But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are naturally liable to sentence of death, of what injustice, pray, do they complain? Should all the sons of Adam come to dispute and contend with their Creator, because by his eternal providence they were before their birth doomed to perpetual destruction, when God comes to reckon with them, what will they be able to mutter against this defense? If all are taken from a corrupt mass, it is not strange that all are subject to condemnation. Let them not, therefore, charge God with injustice.” Book III, chapter 23, section 3.

Canons of Dort: Art. IX: “. . . men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith.”

Westminster Confession: Cp. III, Pr. III: “By the decree of God, . . . some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death.”

Philosophical Entanglements

Alexandria was one of the chief cities of the Roman world. Founded by Alexander the Great, it became a major Mediterranean city with a large Jewish population. This large metropolis was the seat of Hellenism.²¹ It was where the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament) was produced, a translation used in the days of Jesus and the Apostles. In the first century it became a strong center for Christianity. Being a Greek city, it was a center for Greek and Oriental philosophies. Neo-Platonism was born in Alexandria.²² Neo-Platonism is a modern term used to define a form of Platonism with a religious flavor developed by Platonists in the third century AD. Augustine was a Neo-Platonist. His writings are in a chiasm and the center volume cover Platonism. This communicates how important Neo-Platonism was to him in the forming of his theological beliefs.

At the close of the chapter on Hermeneutics, there is a Map of the History of Hermeneutics (pp 17 & 18). On the first page, "Philo" (20 BC to 59 AD) is found on the Allegorical time-line. He was a dedicated and devout Jew living in Alexandria and a student of philosophy. Philo sought to reconcile the Old Testament with Platonic philosophy. To accomplish this, he spiritualized the Scriptures (treated the Laws of Moses allegorically), making them agree with the works of men. Also on that Map is Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD). Titus Flavius Clement became the head of a school of Christian instruction in Alexandria. He believed in the divine origin of Greek philosophy and openly supported the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, continuing in the traditions of Philo. After him on the Map is Origen. He is known for producing a parallel Bible in six languages, one being Latin. He too was a follower of Philo and Greek philosophy. He believed that the Bible was a material book and that behind its text of stories, poems, laws, etc. there is a deeper, more spiritual sense, and that it was the job of the interpreter to discover it. The literal sense was merely a shadow or symbol of the spiritual and was not the important sense of God's communication with man through the inspired Word. For Origen that spiritual sense was derived through the allegorical method of Bible interpretation. He believed and taught that deeper, more spiritual sense was the true meaning and intent of the Word of God.

To understand this approach to the Holy Scriptures, one must go back in history to the Greek philosopher, Plato (427-347 BC). A good way to understand Platonism is through his *Allegory of the Cave*. In writing this allegory, Plato has assisted us non-philosophers in understanding his belief system and teachings. Briefly stated, this allegory is about a cave where people are chained and can see a wall. Behind them is a flame, and on the wall they can see moving shadows. In the allegory, this cave with the people chained therein represents the material world. One day, one of the prisoners was able to escape from his chain. He found a hole and climbed out of the cave into a very different world. Outside the light was so bright that at first he could not see, but eventually he was able to adjust to life outside the cave. After adjusting to the brightness of the light, he could see trees, animals, mountains, the moon, stars, and even the sun. There was so much light and everything was so beautiful. The escapee's

²¹ Here meaning the assimilation of Jews into the Greek language and culture, starting around the fourth century BC. The influence of these Jews goes through the first century AD (see Acts 6:1; 9:29; 11:20).

²² *A History of Christianity*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette, p146, © 1953, Harper & Row Pub.

experiences outside of the cave symbolize the spiritual world that common man is unable to observe because he is a prisoner to the material world. One day this escapee decided to return to the cave to help those living in chains in a world of moving shadows. Once inside, he had trouble seeing and getting around in the darkness; but he was able to find those chained and attempted to convince them of the beautiful world he had discovered, a better place, one with an abundance of light. He had found a life beyond the material world that was in every way so much better. However, they would not believe him or follow him.

Plato's allegory is a story of himself. He believed that through his reasoning powers, he had discovered truth; but people would not accept his testimony. The story is an allegory designed to communicate a presumed "deep truth". Through this allegory Plato presented his belief system: The material world is a mere shadow and representation of the spiritual, that we humans are prisoners to the material, and that there is a better world beyond the material, one that is very beautiful and much more meaningful—the realm of the spiritual. This spiritual world is one that our natural eyes cannot see, though it is true reality. The material world that holds us prisoners is a mere shadow that represents the spiritual, true, and better world. We need to go beyond the material and discover the spiritual, which Plato believed he had done.

Philo was the first to apply Plato's philosophy to the interpretation of the Old Testament. He saw the Scriptures and their literal sense as material—words in ink on parchment. "Philo was born into one of the leading families in Alexandria, and his writings defend and interpret Judaism by interpreting Jewish thought in terms of Greek philosophy."²³ "Allegorical interpretation became a deep part of Philo's exegetical and hermeneutical understanding of the Law of Moses."²⁴ In Philo, "we encounter the speculative cosmological idea that the world of tangible, earthly things was created as a copy of its prototype."²⁵ This approach came from his full acceptance of Platonic philosophy. By allegorizing the Word of God, Philo was looking beyond its material or literal meaning to what he believed to be a better, truer sense—the spiritual and true interpretation. Out of this was born the allegorical school of Bible interpretation, a system that seeks a deeper, more spiritual meaning which lies hidden behind the written words. Once this step is taken, one can make the Bible say anything he wants in order to support a deduced belief system.

Following in the traditions of Philo, in their application of Platonism to the interpretation of the Bible, are Clements, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. Though there were others, these were the major players in the second through the fifth centuries of church history. These men attempted to reconcile Christian doctrine with the classical philosophies of the Greek and Roman intellectuals. These theological leaders allegorized or spiritualized the Word of God in order to bring it into alignment with human reasoning—the doctrinal ideas of men.

²³ From an electronic edition of the *Holman Bible Handbook*, p. 535, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992)

²⁴ From an electronic edition of *The Works of Philo : Complete and Unabridged*, Charles Duke Yonge, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996)

²⁵ From an electronic edition of the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, by Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 3, p375-376 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990)

Augustine had been in Gnosticism for nine years. He was a student, follower, and teacher of Platonic philosophy (Neo-Platonism). He never shed his belief in Platonic philosophy after he became a follower of Jesus, sought baptism from Ambrose, became an elder, and later a bishop of the church in Hippo (northern Africa in the area of Libya today). In his writings, his adherence to Neo-Platonism is central (the center of the chiasm, indicating its importance and impact on all else in his belief system). Augustine is the father of the hermeneutics and theology of the Catholic Church which has continued through the centuries.

The very people from whom Catholicism withheld the Bible are the ones who interpreted the Word of God as one would any other literary work. In some areas the reformers did, but not always. Their beliefs on the Church, baptism, and eschatology were in line with their educational backgrounds and were supported by a hermeneutics that permits the allegorizing and spiritualizing of the text. A literal interpretation will not support a belief that babies must be baptized, that baptism is essential to salvation, and that the church replaces Israel. Unless one accepts the hermeneutics of the Protestants, where can it be shown that the Bible supports an ecclesiastical theology that has laity and piety with a hierarchy of bishops, etc., and with controls over the local churches? In the days of the reformers, they even controlled the cities and countries where they were. In many ways, they were no different than the Catholic Church that they were protesting.

The reformers were born and raised Catholic. Proverbs 22:6²⁶ describes those Protestants. Their plan was not to leave Catholicism. Their goal was to change a few of the practices of the Catholic Church. They were not seeking to take the state church back to original Christianity. Had that been their goal, then why did they oppose the Baptists who were already in their areas? They would have strongly embraced them; but history reveals that they expelled them from their properties, put some in torturous prisons, and executed others. Those Protestants carried with them their Catholic theologies into the new church denominations they founded, giving us what is often called today “Calvinism.” Augustine believed that baptism removed original sin, was like circumcision and made the person a part of the “covenant”. He believed in divine “predestination” (meaning that God has predetermined everything), what in reality is “fatalism”, and that it is solely by a divine work of grace that men can believe and follow God (irresistible grace). The doctrines that later became known as the five points of Calvinism (TULIP) come from Augustine through Catholicism and into the Reformed Churches. Just as Neo-Platonism is warmed over platonic philosophy, Reformed Theology is warmed over Augustinian and Catholic Theology.

The Donatists, in the historical line of the Baptists, strongly disagreed with Augustine and his fatalistic views and his denial of the free-will of man. Because of these conflicts, Augustine sought to get Roman laws against them. Throughout church history we see this as a common trend—persecute, kill, and burn the writings those who disagree with you.

²⁶ Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Plato reasoned that the material world was a mere shadow representation of the spiritual, the spiritual being much better and very beautiful. It is the place of light and of the enlightened.²⁷ Being totally submerged in Greek philosophy, Philo, a devout Jew, concluded that the Scriptures should be allegorized, and thereby he conformed Their meaning to the conclusions of Greek philosophy. This same method was adopted by some of the leaders and scholarship in Christianity during the church's formative years, such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, starting as early as 100 years after Messiah's death and His giving the Great Commission. Through Augustine, a system of hermeneutics that relied heavily on allegorizing (searching for a spiritual sense to the Scriptures) became prominent in the Catholic Church and has remained dominant throughout main line Christendom since Augustine.²⁸ Those who did not go along with these teachings and practices, like the Donatists in the days of Augustine and the Remonstrants in the days of John Calvin, were persecuted and often eliminated, along with their writings. It is interesting and significant in church history that from the time of Augustine on through that of Calvin, those opposed to this belief system with its hermeneutics of allegorizing have been the victims of the wrath of the mainline Church. Throughout history there has been an elitist attitude among the "enlightened" that has accompanied those avid proponents of current day "Calvinism." You see, they believe they have escaped the chains of the material world, stepped into the bright light of the spiritual, and believe that they have discovered the true meaning behind the material, which includes the Bible printed on material paper with material ink, with words that are human, stories that are human, and thus of the material world. They have climbed to a higher plane, one where the light is bright. If we, the simple thinking commoners, are too difficult to convert, then they shame us by saying, "You're an Arminian!" or "You blaspheme." History records that they killed our ancestors in the faith and burned their writings. What a shameful history for the Church of Jesus Christ to have.

This brief history shows the impact of Greek philosophy upon Christianity from the early years of her history. Paul knew what was out there and warned the church, telling its leaders to avoid the teachings and practices of philosophy. Through Augustine, Greek philosophy strongly affected the Catholic Church and later the Reformers. Knowing about the philosophical influences on hermeneutics and theology helps one understand how a strict Calvinist can change the meaning of verses like John 3:16-18 and 1st John 2:1-2, by making "world" mean "the saved" or "the elect" (e.g. see footnote # 10 above). These Calvinistic theologians are imposing a belief system upon Holy Writ²⁹ that is rooted in Platonic philosophy and making the Word of God conform to philosophically derived theology.

²⁷ Grasping this fact is very important. This is why he influenced the Catholic Church into having a "piety" of bishops and priests who became the sole guardians of the Scriptures, with the "laity" who were forbidden to have the Bible and from interpreting it. Augustine's beliefs created the elite hierarchy (the in the know group) of the church and the laity (the simple, less educated).

²⁸ Catholic history boasts of many great philosophers—to name a few: Boethius, Albert the Great, Johannes Scotus Eriugena, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, Peter Abelard who taught that, "Christian doctrine must be elucidated and defined in accordance with philosophy." (quoted from Dr. Thomas Williams in *Reason and Faith*, a course on philosophy)

²⁹ To illustrate, consider Michael Marlowe @ <http://www.bible-researcher.com/confessional.html>, who believes one should interpret and teach the Bible with a statement of faith in hand, the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

In the following passages, the Apostle Paul is admonishing the church to be careful of “philosophy” and self-made wisdom:

See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Colossians 2:23)

and

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly *and* empty chatter *and* the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge”. (1 Timothy 6:20)

Paul was a very well educated man. He knew what Hellenism and philosophy were. He spoke in Athens, the major philosophical center of the world where Plato founded his school some 350 years before. But, Paul’s words of warnings have gone unheeded by the Church. It took a few hundred years for it to become immersed in philosophically derived doctrines of men. And over the centuries, those of this opinion have vehemently hated anyone disagreeing with their hermeneutics and doctrines.

Calvinism, the belief system

Reformed Theology is Catholic Theology in a different package. This understanding came to me while a missionary in Brazil, a Catholic country at that time. Dr. Aníbal Pereira dos Reis was a converted Catholic priest and a Baptist. He wrote several books, and I read them all. It was those books, the Portuguese Catholic Bible with notes, and my experiences in Brazil that helped me understand Catholicism more than any other book or training I had experienced. Aníbal learned the truth through the testimonies of Baptists. After he came to truth faith in the Savior, the church kidnapped him and tortured him in an effort to get him to denounce his faith. The Baptists learned where he was and took him from his persecutors to safety. Had this not happened, Aníbal would have been killed (deny or die).

“Robust dialogue starts when people go in with open minds. They’re not trapped by preconceptions or armed with a private agenda.”³⁰ Experience has taught me that often one’s background influences the present so strongly that it becomes difficult to faithfully interpret and properly apply the Word of God. Some diehard Calvinists think that of me. May God protect us all from the fallacy of being gridlocked and guide us in our search for truth (Deuteronomy 4:23; Proverbs 30:6; Matthew 15:6; James 3:1-2; Hebrews 12:28-29; and Revelation 22:18-19). May the Lord give us the humility to admit that we do not understand some Bible passages, and the courage to admit that we do not possess all knowledge.

³⁰ Bossidy, Larry, and Charan, Ram, *Execution: the Discipline of Getting Things Done*, Crown Business, © 2002, pages 102-103

There is a tendency to polarize and place theologians in camps. Calvinists label all who disagree with their theology as “Arminian.” Like Arminius, who was a pastor of a Reformed Church in Holland and a professor in theological college, my desire is to be biblical. Over the years, Calvinists have pasted their labels on me too and say that I do not believe in God’s sovereignty.³¹ One has told me I am blaspheming when I give an open invitation to appropriate salvation, inviting people to be saved.

Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian, attended Calvin’s school and disagreed with his teachings on predestination (unconditional election), irresistible grace, and limited atonement. In his ministries, Arminius emphasized the love of God who gave His Son to die for all, human responsibility, and the free will of man. Arminius was a godly, peace loving man who taught the Bible and rejected the traditions and teachings of the Catholic Church and John Calvin. Though today Calvinists maintain that Arminius taught that a believer could lose his salvation, through my research I have not discovered evidences to support that conclusion. It is my understanding that it was John Wesley who believed one could lose his salvation and who introduced the holiness doctrine, not Arminius and his followers, known as the Remonstrants.

As has been pointed out, Calvinism is truly Augustinianism. Dr. Walvoord wrote that “Augustine is . . . the first theologian of solid influence who adopted amillennialism.”³² No one person in the course of church history has impacted Christian theology and the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures more than this one man. Through Augustine’s teachings and writings during the formative years of the Catholic Church,³³ he became the father of Catholic theology. In that branch of Christendom, no person is more revered than he. The Reformers, but especially Martin Luther and John Calvin, were avid students of Augustine’s writings, not just as Catholics but as leaders in the Protestant movement.

In the center volume of Augustine’s *Confessions*, he covers his belief in Platonic philosophy. Following the principles of the chiasmic arrangement in writing, this placement tells us that Platonism was central to his hermeneutics and resulting theology. The writings and beliefs of the great fifth century theologian of the Catholic Church were studied and used by the Reformers. As mentioned above, John Calvin was strongly influenced by his writings. In his

³¹ Nowhere in the Scriptures are we told that God is “sovereign.” This is an implied truth as with the Trinity. A sovereign king does not control all that transpires under his reign, though he is the head of a sovereign nation and all are accountable to him. Sovereign means to be a supreme authority, the supreme governor, and to be a self-governing state without outside authority over it. God is the sovereign Ruler over His creation, and His reign will not be destroyed by an outside authority, even Satan. Calvinists misuse the word as they apply it in their doctrine of God. No sovereign king has had total control over his kingdom (USA rebelled and won). To say God is “sovereign” is to say, “God is the supreme ruler but without total control.” God is more than that. There are translations like the *New International Version* that use the word, but it is not in the original. This illustrates how Bible translators can and often do impose their beliefs on the translation. Dr. C. Gordon Olson has written a very well done chapter on the Calvinists’ unbiblical concept of God’s sovereignty in *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, chapter 3. This book is recommended.

³² John Walvoord in *Amillennialism from Augustine to Modern Times*, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 106, © 1949 (Amillennialists hold to substitution theology: the church replaces Israel.)

³³ The Catholic Church began as Roman through Constantine, who opened the doors to permitting Christianity as an accepted religion among Rome’s many pagan religions. She was first centered in Alexandria and later moved to Rome.

Institutes, Calvin quotes extensively from Augustine and in my opinion treats his writings as equally authoritative with the Holy Scriptures.

It is important to recognize that the intention of the Reformers was to change the Church of Rome, not to leave her. When their efforts were despised and forcefully rejected, causing them to flee for their lives, they carried their minds with them, which had been well programmed by an Augustinian based theology—a belief system that had its roots in Gnosticism and Platonism. This is why the Reformers continued to baptize infants,³⁴ to administer the Sacraments,³⁵ to establish churches with hierarchal governments,³⁶ to hold to an eschatology of substitution in which the church replaces Israel, commonly called “amillennialism,”³⁷ to promote covenant theology,³⁸ etc. The Reformers were Catholics to the core. They did not leave the hermeneutics of the church but still allegorize, and retained many beliefs and practices. Their area of strength was a return to the Scriptures as the sole authority for salvation, with a focus on the truth that salvation is not through a system of works, as practiced and taught by the Catholic Church. Salvation was a work of God’s love and grace that was received through faith alone. As an example of their ties to their original beliefs, Martin Luther³⁹ had a very difficult time with the significance of the elements of the Lord’s Table. Throughout all of his years as a Catholic priest and seminary professor, he had taught that the bread and wine were transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus. As a Protestant Reformer who had been a professor in a Catholic Seminary, he had difficulty recognizing his error in interpretation. He never accepted the fact that the Lord’s Table is a memorial meal, though late in life he came to the conclusion that the

³⁴ Catholic theology teaches a form of baptismal regeneration. Augustine taught that baptism removes original sin and that without it, one cannot be saved. This is why he was for infant baptism. Baptism opens the doors of grace so the child can be saved.

³⁵ A Sacrament is a work of grace, something one does to receive divine favor. To illustrate, I recently attended a United Presbyterian Church when the “Sacrament” of the Lord’s Table was administered. When the Pastor held up the bread he declared “the body of Christ” and then the wine declaring “the blood of Christ”. A good Baptist would make it clear that this is a memorial meal, not a Sacrament, and that the elements are symbols.

³⁶ In Geneva John Calvin instituted a Catholic system of church government, and his church controlled the civil government, just as the Roman Catholic Church had done all over Europe before the Reformation. In that community, all citizens were obligated to attend church services. His “reformed” teaching had a major influence upon all of Europe and the early American colonies. Later, our founding fathers saw the error and gave us the First Amendment, forbidding the government’s support of a particular church denomination (religion).

³⁷ There was a replacement or substitution theology commonly called “amillennialism.” They believed that the focus of God’s promises to Israel changed after the cross and that the “church” replaces Israel. Therefore, there would never be an earthly reign of the Messiah, sitting on the throne of David over Israel, as had been promised by the prophets. They believed that Christ’s kingdom is spiritual and that God reigns over and through the Church. Within the Roman Catholic system, the Lord Jesus rules over the church and the Pope is His vicar, the earthly representative of Jesus Christ. In this capacity, the Pope is infallible.

³⁸ A belief that before He created man, God had two active covenants: one of works and the other of grace (see Westminster Confession Chpt. VII). To the covenant theologian, these are fundamental and all of the following covenants are related to and subservient to them. Thus, God’s promise to Abraham, which we believe is unconditional (depends only upon God), becomes conditional because of this unbiblical, pre-existing covenant of works. There is no Scriptural support for Covenant Theology. Refer to in the section on philosophy above.

³⁹ As a teacher in a Catholic seminary in Wittenberg, Germany, one of Martin Luther’s duties was to teach the book of Romans. He was saved through Romans 1:17.

Lord is present with the elements—in his theology consubstantiation replaced his long-time held belief in transubstantiation.⁴⁰

The theology of the Roman Catholic Church is fatalistic—“What will be, will be.” This foundational doctrine is from Augustinian. John Calvin carried those beliefs with him into his ministry and in his *Institutes*. John Calvin believed that man is saved through the grace of God and that in eternity past God chose those who would be saved and who would go to perdition.⁴¹ His emphasis was on the “sovereignty” of a god who rules through decrees, “for the praise of His glory.” This distorted understanding and emphasis caused Calvin to teach that God predetermined every event in history—good and evil—past, present, future. Calvin’s conclusion was that because of God’s selection of those who were elected to a position of privilege, he believed that God gives each person in the elect-group the faith and ability that is so essential for personally receiving the gift of God’s grace.⁴² To Calvin total depravity meant that man was entirely unable to believe—Total Inability. Because of total-inability, to be saved, a person must first receive the gift of faith from God. This faith comes through the new birth (John 3), through which the Holy Spirit gives to the “elect” the saving faith, and that person is unable to resist and will believe—Irritable Grace. For them, God has no grace for the non-elect.

It is difficult to understand why John Calvin and his system of theology are praised when so much of what he taught and did⁴³ is scripturally incorrect, revealing improper hermeneutics and religious intolerance toward the Anabaptists and others who disagreed with him. When the Bible says that we will “know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-20 with James 3:17-18), how can we trust this man’s teachings, known as 5-points of Calvinism (TULIP)? As a Baptist, I have even more difficulty understanding why some Baptist pastors, groups, and schools embrace and teach the TULIP as biblical. Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and Luther all persecuted the Baptists, expelling them from their lands, imprisoning others, burning some at the stake, and drowning others. John 16:2⁴⁴ is so true of their approach toward those disagreeing with them. Calvin did all he could to woo Jacob Arminius back into Geneva so that he could try him for heresy and then burn him at the stake.

In the later 1500s and early 1600s a strong theological debate had developed between the Remonstrants and the Reformed Theologians throughout Europe. The Remonstrants were followers of Jacob Arminius (dead at this time), who had a pastor in Holland and had studied under Calvin but rejected his teachings. Arminius was a humble Biblicist. The Dutch Reformed

⁴⁰ We believe that the Lord’s Table is a memorial of our Lord’s incarnation and death, that the elements are not supernaturally transformed (transubstantiation), and that they do not transmit a special grace to the partaker, which the Catholic Church teaches, as indicated by the term “Sacrament”, something one does to merit grace.

⁴¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chpt III

⁴² The Reformers believe that man is so bad that he is unable to believe, that depravity equals inability. The Calvinist’s position is that one is born again by an act of God so that he can believe and be saved. In other words, John 3 is before salvation not the fruit of believing faith that brings the Holy Spirit to the believer and makes him/her a new creation in Christ Jesus.

⁴³ Calvin was a dictator, acting much like many of the Popes. He forced his beliefs upon the community and martyred those who disagreed with him. Unlike Arminius, whom Calvin wanted dead, he was not a humble, peace-loving man, but one who was very harsh and cruel.

⁴⁴ “They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.” John 16:2

Church in Holland maintained a very strong influence over the state and was supported by government taxes. In 1618 through 1619, church leaders (not Baptists) met in Dort, Holland, supposedly to resolve their differences. This council was both a civil and a religious gathering. The acronym “TULIP” was developed at the Synod of Dort to define the Reformed position in contrast to that of the Remonstrants.

The T U L I P

The Five Articles of the Remonstrants	The Five Articles of the Synod of Dort
1. Human Ability (able to repent and believe)	1. Total Depravity (total inability to repent and believe)
2. Conditional Election	2. Unconditional Election
3. Universal Atonement	3. Limited Atonement
4. Resistible Grace	4. Irresistible Grace
5. Perseverance, the Uncertainty of	5. Perseverance, the Certainty of

The deck was stacked against the Remonstrants and the Reformers won the debate. The civil authorities, who were controlled by the church, supported the conclusion of the Synod which removed the Remonstrant pastors from their pulpits and ministries and forbid them from teaching. Some were expelled from the land while others fled for their lives. Some were martyred.

The five points of Calvinism, commonly referred to as the **T-U-L-I-P**, are:

- 1) Total Depravity:** Man is totally depraved, so much so that he is unable to do what is right and is definitely unable to appropriate the salvation offered through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) Unmerited Favor** (also called “unconditional election”): The favor of God to save the elect is unmerited. God, through His sovereign decrees, decided who should receive His favor and who should not.
- 3) Limited Atonement:** The scope of the death of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, was limited to the elect. Jesus died only for those whom God, in eternity past, had previously chosen for salvation.
- 4) Irresistible Grace:** The grace of God to save the elect is irresistible. God gives the elect the power to respond to His call and the faith necessary for salvation. For the Calvinist, faith is a gift from God, and the elect cannot resist the Spirit’s work. For the Calvinist, God’s work on the behalf of the elect will not be thwarted and wasted. God works against the will of those He elected, forcing them to receive His gift of salvation through His Son.

5) Perseverance of the Saints: Those whom God elected unto salvation will persevere in their divine calling. (This is not to be confused with the doctrine of eternal security, see chapter “Doctrine of Salvation” and the footnote below.⁴⁵)

These five tenets are philosophical deductions. They are not inductively obtained from the Bible. By this is meant that they come from human reasoning, not from properly exegeted passages of the Bible. The points of the TULIP are progressive, each building on the previous point. Today, some call themselves a “four-point Calvinists” or a “moderate Calvinists,” because they cannot accept limited atonement as biblical—very difficult to prove biblically. When one truly comes to an understanding of Calvinism, comparing it with the Bible properly interpreted, he knows that this is an unacceptable theology. A true Calvinist must believe and firmly hold onto all five points, because they are tied together, each depending on the previous point. Throw one out, and the house of cards will collapse.

Calvinists begin their theology and the doctrine of salvation with a strong belief in the total depravity of man. We have no problem with that until we realized that their view on the depravity of man is the *totally inability to believe and be saved*. By this he means that fallen man is unable to make good choices and is unable to perform good deeds related to seeking, believing, and obeying God. Calvinists take the doctrine of Total Depravity beyond what the Bible teaches, what the Apostles taught the early churches, and what the church fathers taught, to the point where they dogmatically teach *Total Inability*. In their understanding and teaching, since man can’t believe the gospel, God, in an act of merciful love, elected some of the sons of Adam to a position of privilege. This they call “grace”, say it gives God pleasure (even electing people to hell does); and teach it brings God glory. This belief system finds its foundational stone in their belief in an imagined covenant of grace that they maintain was in vogue before God created man. This is referred to as “Covenant Theology.” Because God elected those to be redeemed—predetermined who would be lifted up to a position of privilege—then it would only be necessary for Jesus Christ to shed His blood and taste death for those in the “elect” group. Since man is totally incapable of believing the truth and choosing the right, the Spirit of God gives the faith necessary for salvation to those He has chosen to be saved. As is the case with all humans, the elected ones have no choice in the matter. This “grace” the elect cannot resist. For the Calvinist, free-will does not exist and is not biblical.⁴⁶ I have had Calvinists tell me that to invite someone

⁴⁵ In all truthfulness, the committed Calvinist has no more assurance of his salvation than does a Catholic. Dr. C. Gordon Olson in *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive Mediate Theology of Salvation* (pub. Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Knolls, NJ, © 2002 by Olson), covers this quite thoroughly; see chapter 14. Having severed the Lord as a church planter in Brazil, I personally observed that even Catholic priests and bishops have no personal assurance of their salvation. They consider the doctrine of Eternal Security to be “heresy.” Pastor Aníbal Pereira dos Reis, a converted priest and prolific writer, wrote of his experiences administering Last Rights to Brazilian priests and bishops who on their death beds were afraid to die because they believed that hell was their destiny. Aníbal became a Catholic priest in hopes of finding salvation. As a priest, he never obtained the assurance of the salvation he so yearned to possess. He learned the truth through Baptist believers and became a true Christian.

⁴⁶ Mathetes, in the *Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, wrote around 130AD: “As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Saviour He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us; for violence has no place in the character of God.” The church fathers believed in the free-will of man and angels and opposed the Gnostics on this. Irenaeus (130 to 202 AD, trained by John) wrote: **“Men are possessed of free will, and endowed with the faculty of making a choice. It is not true, therefore,**

to repent and believe in Jesus is “heresy” and “blasphemy.” The elect will fulfill God’s purposes and persevere to the end. Calvinists believe that this is done by God’s “most wise counsel” and for “His glory,” making the purposes of God all revolve around a pleasure seeking God who wants to be glorified.⁴⁷

Though I believe man is a depraved sinner, I do not accept the Calvinists’ definition of total depravity, which is *total inability*. Rather than beginning with the depravity of man, a good theology should start with God, His love,⁴⁸ His purposes as presented in the Bible, and His forgiveness.

Romans 3:23 tells us that man is depraved. By this is meant that he is unable to measure up to the love toward God that the Law and nature require. In other words, man can’t get to heaven no matter how hard he tries. This passage and others do not state that man is totally unable to believe. To say or even imply such is to add to the Word of God.

After the Synod of Dort the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was produced by the Protestant reformists. It is the official doctrinal statement of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. In Chapter III “Of God’s Eternal Decree,”⁴⁹ it declares:

- I. 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.⁵⁰
- II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.⁵¹
- III. By the decree of God,⁵² for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated⁵³ unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

that some are by nature good, and others bad. This expression [of our Lord], ‘How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldest not,’ set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests (*ad utendum sententia*) of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God.”

⁴⁷ The way Calvinists present this, it appears that God is self-centered—always acting to bring glory to Himself. Glory and honor should come from a willing beneficiary or observer, from a willing, humble heart, not one that is forced to bow the knee. The Bible presents a God of love who is other centered and gave fully of Himself to redeem the lost. This is not self-glory but self-sacrifice without any thought of personal gain or reward. Calvinism teaches that God created man for His glory. The Bible teaches that God created man for fellowship and sent His Son to bring many willing sons into glory (meaning a glorified place we call “heaven”). Yes, we the created and redeemed glorify God, but this was not why He created us. It is what the redeemed do because of what God has done on their behalf. *Praise God for the great things He has done.*

⁴⁸ John MacArthur, Jr., a Calvinist, has written *The Love of God* (Word Publishing, 1996), in which he states that this is God’s most important attribute.

⁴⁹ Obtained from the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>. This quote is unaltered.

⁵⁰ Though this statement tries to not attribute sin to God, some Calvinists do make God the author of sin. This statement contradicts itself. If God ordained all that will come to pass, then He ordained Satan’s rebellion and the fall of man and all of the sinful acts each one of us commit.

⁵¹ As shall be noted later, Calvinists do not believe that God “foresaw” but that he “foreordained.”

⁵² Though Calvinists say that God “decreed,” they offer no Scriptural support for these decrees.

⁵³ Calvinist use the terms: predestine, foreordain, and elect interchangeably. Their usage of these terms has no foundation in Scripture.

- IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.
- V. 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,⁵⁴ has 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; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.⁵⁵
- VI. As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.
- VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, as He pleases, 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.
- VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.

Like the two covenants, one of works and the other of grace, which would appear to be logical (see *Westminster Confession*, Chpt VII), the fact that God in eternity past “decreed” would at first glance seem logical. The Reformed theologian’s belief in these so-called covenants and decrees is not taken from the Scriptures, but they are derived from their philosophical reasoning. The followers of Augustine have constructed a theology upon an unscriptural foundation that distorts doctrine and the very nature of God.

Hermeneutics⁵⁶

Because the method one uses to interpret the Bible determines the outcome, and because hermeneutics is so important to the subject under discussion, before entering our study of Calvinism, a review of the following fundamental principles of hermeneutics is emphasized:

Rule-1: The Bible is an accommodation⁵⁷ of divine truths to the human mind. . . . To reveal Himself and communicate His truths, God used human languages, cultures, experiences, and material objects. God chose to give us the Scriptures through select

⁵⁴ Compare this statement with Ezekiel 18:23 & 32, 33:11; 1st Timothy 2:4; and 2nd Peter 3:9.

⁵⁵ As shall be shown, Calvinists believe that God imposes believing faith on the “elect” so that they are saved. See also article VI of the *Westminster Confession* above.

⁵⁶ *Hermeneutics* is the science of Bible interpretation. What is presented here is an abbreviated version of the chapter at the beginning of this book.

⁵⁷ There is a limit in what can be revealed to finite man by an infinite God. “Accommodation” is a willingness to adjust or modify one’s actions in response to others. Because of the needs of the created, our Creator God, who is pure Spirit, bent down to communicate on the level of man in order to help him to understand his Creator.

persons from His chosen people, Israel (Romans 9:4). . . . The culture is of the Middle East and primarily that of the Hebrew people.

Rule-2: The Bible is a divinely inspired revelation that is progressive in nature, becoming clearer as it reaches completion.

Rule-3: The Bible is harmonious, containing no contradictions.

Rule-4: The context must be kept in view when interpreting a specific text/passage.

Rule-5: To arrive at an accurate interpretation, the interpreter must consider the original languages, the culture of the people at the time of writing, and the historical setting of the passage.

Rule-6: When dealing with obscure and difficult passages, give preference to the interpretation that is obvious and that agrees with other texts on the subject. Choose the majority meaning over one in the minority. Ignorance as to the meaning of some passages must be admitted.

Rule-7: Interpretation is one; applications can be many.

Rule-8: Hermeneutics is a science. A good, healthy science is one that seeks truth and allows the evidence to speak for itself. A bad science is one that distorts truth. The practitioner of bad science imposes his prejudices upon the facts to present a half-truth or lie. Allow the Scriptures to speak. Avoid approaching them with preconceived ideas. When interpreting the Bible, admit that one's cultural background, upbringing, past beliefs, and experiences do influence one's interpretation of the Bible. Each person must strive to set aside the conditioning received through the myriad of life's experiences and training. One must study the Bible with an open mind.

Rule-9: The Bible is literature, the best ever produced. The various literary devices used in communication must be recognized and understood as one reads, studies, and interprets the Word of God.

Rule-10: All that is necessary for faith and practice has been clearly revealed.

Predestination

Quoted above, Chapter III, Article VIII of the *Westminster Confession*, refers to the Reformed doctrine of divine election as "predestination." In the Bible, predestination and election are *not* synonyms. Predestination is a New Testament doctrine. The word and doctrine do not appear in the Old Testament. Nowhere in the Bible does one find the Augustinian-Catholic-Calvinist-Reformed teaching that predestination is an act of God, who in eternity past decreed that certain persons would be saved from their sins and given eternal bliss in heaven and that others would be lost and condemned in a hell of eternal sufferings.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See point III in the above quote from the *Westminster Confession*. Luther stated, "All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned." And, Luther's friend, Melancthon, wrote, "All things turn out according to divine predestination, not only the works we do outwardly, but even the thoughts we think inwardly." Quoted in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, by Loraine Boettner, © 1975, page 15.

The English verb “predestine” is used to translate the Greek word προορίζω (*proorizo*), which occurs six times in five New Testament passages.⁵⁹ This Greek word means to predetermine, to decide or choose beforehand. The following verses give the motive, focus, and outcome of predestination:

Romans 8:29-30 reads:

For those whom he foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Ephesians 1:4-12 reads:

He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. . . . In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory.

Romans 8:29 tells us that the action of predestination is upon “those whom He foreknew.” The word “foreknew”⁶⁰ is a translation of προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*)⁶¹ in the Greek. It occurs five times in four New Testament passages,⁶² and it means to have previous knowledge, to know beforehand, to foreknow.

God is omniscient, sees the end from the beginning, and knows the decisions, actions, thoughts, and intentions of people before they actually do anything. These two passages state that based on God’s ability to foreknow man’s decisions and actions, He instituted a plan that firmly guarantees eternal benefits for those who trust in Jesus. He predetermined that true

⁵⁹ Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5, 11, and πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*, pre-knowledge) is used in 1 Peter 1:2 and Acts 2:23.

⁶⁰ Calvinists do not believe in “foreknowledge,” because they place degrees before foreknowledge and in their way of thinking, God predetermined everything. Their reasoning tells them that God knows what will happen because He planned it. Because of their theological prejudice and poor biblical exegesis, they conclude that this word, when used of God, means to *foreordain* and not to foreknow. One can know the theology of a Bible translator by how he translates this word (*proginōskō*). In Acts 2:23 Peter said that Jesus was delivered over to His accusers by the “predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.” God’s plan was in place before the fall of man. Also God, because He is God, knew beforehand what rebellious man would do with His Son—foreknowledge. God knew that Satan and man, being free agents, would carry out His plan. The Scriptures teach the divine and the human side and a God who is all knowing. If we only see one side, our theology will become distorted.

⁶¹ The English word “prognosis” comes from this Greek word. A prognosis is a doctor’s prediction based on certain known facts.

⁶² Acts 26:5; Romans 8:29; 11:2; 1st Peter 1:20; and 2nd Peter 3:17

believers in His power to save would be forever blessed along with God's Son.⁶³ Based on what the New Testament teaches, I propose the following definition:

Predestination is the gracious and loving act of God, Who in eternity past determined (1) that His Son would die for the sins of the human race and be glorified, and (2) that those He foreknew would repent of their sins and appropriate the salvation-offer, would be transformed into the image of His Son, the incarnate God and promised Messiah, would be made blameless before Him, would become sons of God and eternal heirs with all the privileges of sons, and would share in His glory.

To suggest that the above quoted passages teach that God predetermined who would be saved would be to apply a meaning to that Greek word and the verses that simply is not there. One who teaches that in eternity past God predestined some to heaven and others to hell are in conflict with the plain teaching of the whole of Scripture, are painting a false picture of God, and are in violation hermeneutical principles number 6, 8, and 3.

The followers of Augustine consider predestination and election to be the as same — synonyms. Because we are examining Calvinism, we will look biblically at “election.”

Election⁶⁴

This word is found in both Testaments. In the sense in which we are covering the significance of this word here, in the Scriptures this word always refers to a group: Israel, church, disciples,⁶⁵ etc. Exceptions would be in reference to the Christ,⁶⁶ where it is used to describe a special relationship with God and His commissioning to the role of being the Redeemer; in reference to Paul (Acts 9:15) where the word should be translated “chosen instrument” (as in HCSB) or even better “commissioned one”; and of Rufus (Rom. 16:13) where the sense would be “a jewel of a man”.

“There is never any reference to a singular ‘elect’ individual.”⁶⁷ A study of the uses of this word in the Bible reveals that it has never been used of an individual or in the way that Calvinists are: that the “elect” are those whom God pre-chose to be blessed with salvation.

⁶³ Though not the purpose of this chapter, it should be pointed out that God could have decided to elevate those who believe back into man's original state of innocence in the Garden or even to a place in heaven; but He has promised far more. The saved will be transformed into the image of His Son and made co-heirs with Him for eternity. Romans 8:17; Galatians 4:7; Ephesians 3:6; Titus 3:7; Revelation 21:7—Hallelujah! What a Savior.

⁶⁴ Dr. C. Gordon Olson in his book *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* (© 2002, pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar, NJ) does a superb job on this word and this doctrine in chapter 8. He gives evidences to show that in most cases this word should be translated “choice one.” He has also written a very good article covering this Greek word: *Astounding New Greek Discoveries about 'Election'*, available at: http://www.mediatetheology.org/uploads/Astounding_Discoveries_on_Election.pdf

⁶⁵ Before our Lord chose the 12 disciples, Jesus prayed all night. However, within that chosen group there existed a deceiver, unbeliever, and traitor. Being in an “elect” group is no guarantee of eternal salvation and blessing with God throughout eternity.

⁶⁶ Luke 9:35 (“My choice one”); 1st Peter 2:4 (choice, precious) & 6 (a choice, a precious cornerstone)

⁶⁷ Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, © 2002, pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar, NJ, page 179

The Hebrew word for “elect” is from **בָּחַר** (*bachar*), which occurs 177 times in the Old Testament.⁶⁸ This Old Testament verb in its various forms means: to choose, select, elect with the idea of being commissioned to perform a specific task. Whether an adjective or noun, this word denotes the “choice-ones”, the “commissioned-ones”. In the Old Testament, *bachar* refers primarily to Israel, where that nation or ethnic group was called God’s *chosen* people, *chosen* ones, or better rendered God’s “commissioned-ones”. Deuteronomy 10:15 reads, “Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them . . .” This choosing was for them to perform a specific task, that was to be a nation of priests to the rest of humanity (Exodus 19:6), not a choosing that would elevate them to a place of special favor before God or one that would guarantee the salvation of individual Israelites.

On this Old Testament word, Dr. Olson quotes from C. Vriezen:

In the OT choice is always the action of God, of his grace, and **always contains a mission for man; and only out of the mission can man comprehend the choice of God.** . . . In any case, in the OT *bchr* is used **not to describe that which constitutes the basic relationship between God and his people**, but to denote that which results from this basic relationship. (bold text in original)⁶⁹

Israel was chosen from among the many tribes of the world to be a “kingdom of priests” to the nations. That choosing was for a purpose in that God commissioned them to a specific task. That nation was to reveal God to the world of peoples (much like the Great Commission for the Church). As stated, except for a few instances as pointed out above, in the Bible “election” is always of a group of people, and never of an individual. Though God “elected” (meaning commissioned) Israel, the inspired record reveals that a large portion of individual Israelites who belonged to that “elect” group were disobedient toward God and died outside of His favor.⁷⁰ In the Old Testament, God’s elective process was not “unconditional,” as Calvinists would define it. Being a member of God’s choice-ones, who were commissioned by God to perform a specified task (Exodus 19:6, priests), was never a guarantee of an individual Israelite being in an eternal position of favor with forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal blessings with God.⁷¹ Through a study of this word, the Calvinists would be hard pressed to find support for their doctrine of God’s “unconditional election” of an individual. (See above quotes from the *Westminster Confess* and from Calvinists.)

⁶⁸ Examples: Deuteronomy 4:37; 2 Samuel 21:6; 1st Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 105:6 & 43; 106:5 & 23; Isaiah 42:1; 43:20; 45:4; 65:9, 15 & 22

⁶⁹ C. Gordon Olson in *Astounding New Greek Discoveries about ‘Election’*, quoted from Horst Seebass in G. J. Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, II, page 87

⁷⁰ Psalm 95:8-11 & Hebrews 3:16-19

⁷¹ This is the argument of the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 through 11, his answer to the Jews who were saying that Paul’s gospel of righteousness through faith was wrong, because as God’s chosen they had a right to salvation without obedience and faith in the gospel. In these chapters Paul shows that personal faith and obedience are the determining factor, not a family tree and a divine process of election. Those who believe, appropriating God’s redemption and forgiveness, are the saved ones. True righteousness is imputed by God to obedient believers, *period*.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for what Calvinists refer to as “elect” is εκλογή (ekloge) [also *eklegomai*, *eklektos*, *eklogo*]. In its various forms, it appears 23 times. It is used in Matthew 22:14; 24:22; Luke 9:35; 23:35; Acts 9:15; Romans 8:33, 9:11, 11:5, 16:13; Colossians 3:12; 1st Thessalonians 1:4; 1st Timothy 5:21; 2nd Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1st Peter 1:1; 2:4, 6, 9; 2nd Peter 1:10; and 2nd John 1 & 13; Revelation 17:14. This Greek word was used by the translators of the Septuagint when translating the above Hebrew word (בְּחַר). As noted above, the use of this word does not imply that all individuals in the “elect” group are personally assured of God’s favor, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal blessing. Always in Scripture faith and obedience on the part of each individual is a requirement for God’s eternal favor.

From his thorough study on these Hebrew and Greek words, Dr. Gordon Olson writes:

It is surprising that the connotation of the adjective, “choice,” the noun, “the choice of the excellent,” and of the verb, “to appoint, to commission” found in the Hebrew and pre-New Testament Greek, is not adequately carried over into our New Testament translations. Although these words are of great theological significance, current lexicons and theological dictionaries are very defective in failing to bring out their precise meaning. An effective Greek word study must build its analysis of New Testament usage upon that of the classical, Septuagintal, and secular Greek and Jewish usage. Although Lothar Coenen, editor and author of the article in *NIDNTT* had done a fine job showing usage before the New Testament, he utterly failed to use that base in his defective approach to the New Testament data.⁷²

Dr. Olson has concluded that the Greek verb translated “elect” means “the appointment or commissioning of qualified people to an office or responsibility with an obligation to fulfill it well.” When used of our Lord Jesus, the Son of God, Olson translates Luke 9:35: “This is my Son, *My Chosen One* (*ho eklelegmenos*); listen to Him!” and Luke 23:25 “And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, ‘He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One [His choice/commissioned One].’”⁷³

Unlike predestination, there are no verses that define “election” for us. Seeing how this word is used in classical Greek adds to our understanding in its usage and meaning. An analysis of this Greek word’s usage in the literature of the day, in the Scriptures, and through an observance of God’s workings with man throughout history, causes me to conclude that:

Election is an act of God whereby He commissions peoples as His ambassadors to a lost world. In the case of the nation Israel, the disciples of Jesus, and the Church, this choosing has as its primary objective the witness of God and His goodness through those entities so that the lost see God through His people and come to faith and obedience toward their Creator.

Biblically, this word is never used to refer to a person being pre-chosen by God to be saved some day from sin and to be appointed to a place of eternal privilege and blessing. This word

⁷² Quoted from C. Gordon Olson in his study on this word in *Astounding New Greek Discoveries about ‘Election’*, available at on his website: <http://www.mediatetheology.org/>

⁷³ Ibid

indicates *an appointment to a responsibility* and never does it indicate that one is “elected” to a position of eternal favor.

In the Old Testament, Israel is called God’s “chosen” (“choice-ones”⁷⁴, really His commissioned-ones). God’s purpose was for that group of people, the Israelites, to be a kingdom of priests to all nations.⁷⁵ Through that nation the world was to learn the truth about God. Though in the New Testament *elect* or *chosen* is used to refer to the saved, it is a group of God’s people, the Church or local churches, never an individual (the few exceptions were addressed above). The New Testament agrees with the Old in that divine election is no guarantee of God’s personal blessings on an individual regardless of his belief/behavior. Nowhere does the Bible teach that God plays the favorites game (Deuteronomy 10:17 and Romans 2:11). As in the Old Testament with Israel, and in the New Testament with the Church, when election is used of the/a church, it is because that entity is God’s commissioned instrument to reveal the Lord and the Gospel to a lost world. Within that body there are believers and unbelievers and godly and ungodly entities (Matthew 13:24-30 and 36-43), just as there were in Israel. The Bible is clear that personal belief and obedience are the essential ingredients for inheriting God’s blessings of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal favor. There is no biblical evidence that some individuals were “elected” by God to salvation as Calvinism maintains. In this chapter I have quoted from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and from Calvinists providing ample evidence that this belief system exists. Such is false and very damaging doctrine.

Calvinism’s doctrine of “unconditional election” does not come from the Bible. It comes from philosophical reasoning that begins with a false assumption: “God from all eternity, did . . . ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”⁷⁶

Through their reasoning abilities, the proponents of this doctrine are analyzing truths about God who is pure Spirit, eternal, all knowing, all powerful, etc. They make the Bible’s message, which is written to be understood by humans where they are, conform to their philosophical conclusions. To us who live in a material world as slaves to space and time, *the truths of our eternal God are unfathomable*. The Bible is an accommodation of divine truth to the human mind. *We should take it at face value and not distort its message through a system of hermeneutics that allegorizes passages and words so that they agree with the teachings and philosophies of men.*

Some might say, “God chose Babylon to punish Israel, and that purpose was not to bring salvation.” If we were to translate this in accordance with contemporary usage at the time, we would say that God commissioned Babylon to punish Israel. From the day God created man, everything He has done in human history has been for the ultimate purpose of enlightening man of his need in an effort to cause him to repent, and to bring him to faith, obedience, and

⁷⁴ Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, © 2002, pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar, NJ, see footnote # 62 above.

⁷⁵ See my chapter on the “Doctrine of Israel” and Exodus 19:6. A priest is a person who represents God to the people and the people to God. Since Israel was commissioned (elected) by God as a set apart nation and kingdom of priests, the obvious conclusion is that they were to be a mediator between God and the rest of humanity.

⁷⁶ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chpt III, Art. 1

salvation in the Savior. This was the conclusion of the Apostle Paul as stated in his sermon in Athens.⁷⁷ Often man is unwilling to yield to God and seems blind in his own disobedience and inadequacies. We believe that the Bible teaches that the Creator has given man the right, responsibility, and ability of choice and that God does not violate that right. When God chose Abram, the father of the Jews and a great grandfather of Jesus Christ, the Lord did not violate Abram's free will. He picked a person who was responsive. God's purpose in choosing Abram was to have a testimony of His goodness through that patriarch and later through the nation of Israel to the world, so that all might learn about God and come to saving faith. The Lord used Pharaoh, a man with a very hard heart toward God,⁷⁸ to reveal Himself to Israel and the Egyptians so that they, and all the Gentile nations in the region, would seek, trust, and obey the Creator of the universe as their Savior.⁷⁹ God's interventions in history reveal His strong desire to save the lost. Never does the Bible teach differently! God chose Babylon to punish sinful Israel; and yet through those Israeli captives, God was made known to the Babylonians. God's workings and wonders are beyond our ability to comprehend. Let's accept what is revealed at face value and stop trying to dig deeper into areas not revealed to us.

The fact that God elected⁸⁰ is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Out of a pagan, idolatrous world the Lord called forth Abram⁸¹ to be the father of His chosen/commissioned people.⁸² Later God revealed that the promised Redeemer would come through Judah (Genesis 49:9-10). Continuing that progression to David, God promised that his son would be the King over Israel forever (2nd Samuel 7:4-16). Later God chose Mary to bear that promised seed (Genesis 3:15 & 12:1-3; Luke 1:26-27; Matthew 1:18-25). These are just some biblical examples that substantiate the truth that God intervenes in human history with an eternal purpose in view. The Lord's intervening processes always have the ultimate goal of bringing the way of salvation to the lost the world over.⁸³ God does not elect people to hell, as proclaimed in the *Westminster Confession*. Such an act would be contrary to the overall teaching of the Bible and would contradict the very nature of God.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ In Acts 17:26-27, cited at the beginning of this chapter, Paul stated that the purpose of God in everything He does in His workings with man is to cause people everywhere to seek Him.

⁷⁸ Exodus 3:19, God often uses the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm. 76:10).

⁷⁹ Exodus 9:16 "But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth."

⁸⁰ Used as defined above.

⁸¹ Genesis 12:1-3, compared with Joshua 24:2-3

⁸² The Hebrew (*bachar*) indicates a selection with a purpose, a responsibility (see Exodus 18:25; Deuteronomy 14:2). God chose them out of the whole of humanity to be a kingdom of priests to all nations (Exodus 19:6). God selected them to represent Him among the nations, all peoples.

⁸³ Genesis gives us only hints about the condition of things between the Fall and the Flood. During that time, God used the lives and testimonies of godly men to reveal Himself to the world. In Genesis 6 we learn about the deterioration of the line of Seth. Eventually the people became so wicked that God decided to destroy man, except for Noah and his family. One could say that God elected (commissioned) Noah to save the human race and many of the animals. Noah was not the only God-fearing person on earth at that time. After the Flood, man again turned his back on God, followed astrology, and disobeyed God by remaining in one place and building a tower. Because of the degradation of man, God chose Abram, a Hebrew pagan, to serve as God's means for giving us His Son, the Savior and Messiah. These acts of God all have as their ultimate goal the salvation of man. God's heart desire is that people be saved!

⁸⁴ This truth will be developed later.

In Ephesians 1:4-5, Paul states that, [God] has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we might 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.

This quote from Ephesians began with, “He chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world.” Need I point out that “us” is more than one, not an individual? Could it be that Paul, guided as he wrote by the Spirit of God, intended to communicate by way of this phrase that just the believers in Jesus Christ were chosen to salvation before the creation of Adam?⁸⁵ In other words, God decided that His favor would be extended to just a small number⁸⁶ of Adam’s descendants; and that according to the Calvinists and the *Westminster Confession*, God decreed to deny His favor to a huge majority of the human race whose fate is an eternal hell?⁸⁷ Can it be that only we who have believed were elected for salvation by God? The Calvinist would emphatically reply: “Yes.” In an effort to explain Paul’s words, I’d like to tell a story, based on our experiences in the Brazilian culture:

In a church in the interior of Brazil, there is a fine Christian couple who have worked hard and prospered. Though they are financially comfortable, they are humble and accepting of their fellow church members who are poor. Uncle José and Aunt Maria, as they are commonly called, are going to celebrate their fiftieth wedding anniversary. They and their five married children, all Christians, have been planning this for almost a year. They have reserved a Saturday night at a local club where they will provide a large meal prepared with various roasted meats, salads, and all the trimmings. There will be cake and ice cream for dessert, after special music and a message from the pastor. Because most of those in the church are poor, they have rented a bus that will arrive at the church at 6:30 to take those who have no other transportation to the club. From the pulpit a general invitation was given to all, each Sunday morning for three weeks and on the bulletin board. The family’s desire was for all to come, and they were even offering free transportation.

More than 150 heard the invitation. Saturday evening 38 entered the 44-seat bus, and 46 more arrived at the club by car. There was special music, plenty of good food with lots of

⁸⁵ This is the interpretation derived from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (electronic ed.) (III, xxii, 1). Garland, TX: electronic edition, Galaxie Software.

⁸⁶ It has been estimated that at any time in human history approximately five percent or less of the human race has demonstrated any interest in the Creator and desire to follow and obey His will.

⁸⁷ I am not denying that the Lord has a right to do this. My contention is that He did not and does not work in this manner. The Jews thought that because they were descendants of Abraham that they were elected to participate in God’s favor and that the Gentiles were not. They were saying to Paul, “Your gospel is wrong. For every circumcised Jew heaven is a guaranteed right.” The Apostle Paul deals with this attitude in Romans 9-11. In chapter 9 Paul declares that the almighty Creator has every right to create from one lump of clay a vessel to honor and another to dishonor. In that passage Paul is answering the Jewish question, and in chapter 9 he is dealing with their arrogance. I do not believe that Paul is stating that God acts in this manner (making vessels for evil), though as God He has every right to do so. In those three chapters Paul makes it very clear that salvation is a personal matter and that those national promises, which God will eventually fulfill, do not guarantee personal salvation to anyone, not even to Jews, God’s chosen people (as we have seen, they are His commissioned people). Paul’s writings are clear; each person is a morally responsible agent before his Creator.

meat and sodas. While everyone was enjoying the cake and ice cream, one humble couple approached Uncle José and Aunt Maria to say, “Thank you for inviting us and for providing the transportation.”

When that poor, humble couple expressed their appreciation and used the pronoun “us,” did they intend to communicate, “You chose *us* to the exclusion of *others*?” Obviously not, and neither did the Apostle Paul intend that interpretation. In Ephesians 1:5, he did not use that pronoun to communicate that God chose *us* for salvation and purposely excluded *others*. In fact, in 1st Timothy 2:1-4, Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, states that the Lord desires for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” How could this be true, if according to Calvinism the Apostle Paul in Ephesians was saying God chose *us* to salvation but not *them*? In 2 Thessalonians 2:10, Paul writes that people are lost, “because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” At no place in the Bible does one find the teaching that people are lost because God did not choose them for salvation. The Calvinist cannot present one proof text for his teaching. The inspired Word of God makes it very clear that the lack of human response is the only reason people are lost, not some historical process of God that decreed them to hell. Almost every page of the Bible stresses man’s personal responsibility to believe and obey God’s Word, thereby establishing a very strong precedent in our interpretation of Scripture (hermeneutical principle 6).

I would like to cite two more New Testament passages that speak of election:

Paul, a bond-servant of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness. (Titus 1:1)

And

. . . chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ . . . (1 Peter 1:1-2)

The words of Paul to Titus speak about the faith of the elect, a faith Paul preached (Romans 1:16-17). His ministry was to proclaim that faith (Acts 26:16-18). Paul was convinced that the desire of God was for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” (1 Timothy 2:4), and “that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him” (Acts 17:27). The verse in Titus does not state that God chose a few for salvation and the rest to damnation. The verse speaks of Paul’s ministry to teach the faith and knowledge that brings salvation to both Jew and Gentile. As I have shown with the quote from Timothy, later we will develop the truth that God desires for all to be saved, a truth the Calvinists deny and despise.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ In Acts 26:16-18, Paul writes about how he was called by God. As Paul expresses in Ephesians, God called him to preach the Gospel so that both Jews and Gentiles “may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me [Jesus].” When they open their eyes, turn from darkness to light and from Satan to God, they will be saved, not when God gives them the faith and forces them to believe because He so elected. Human responsibility is clearly taught throughout the Holy Scriptures.

When writing about election, Peter ties the Lord's elective action to the foreknowledge of the Creator.⁸⁹ The eternal, omniscient God knows the end from the beginning. These verses do not teach that God chose some to salvation and others "to everlasting death". Rather, they explain that because God is outside of space and time and knows everything, that His omniscience was a major element in the electing of the saints. The ones who believe, the one which God foresaw and knew from eternity past, are called His chosen ones (plural). Election is normally used of a group, not individuals; and its focus is that those people have been appointed to a task. This is not about individual being "elected" to a position of privilege. While in this material life, the "elected ones" are to love, obey, and serve God and be His witnesses. The eternal destiny of those saved persons is to realize a position of sons of God and a coheirship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17). The saved will share in the Savior's glory.

Through the centuries of church history, and especially those since the Reformation, scholars have hotly debated these matters. Because of the truth stated in hermeneutical principle 1 above, I believe that the depths of this doctrine are beyond the capacity of mortal man to fully grasp and understand. When meditating on the omniscience of God, David wrote: "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it" (Psalm 139:6). Calvinists reason that since the eternal God knows all, the end and the beginning all at the same time, there is no foreknowledge. Since He already knows, then it must come to be, so there are only eternal decrees. God is speaking to us where we live, in time. We will do best if we take the Scriptures at face value and not impose upon them philosophical conclusions that change the rules of linguistics, with the end result being a transformation of the meaning of word usage away from the black on white sense of the text. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* does not apply to biblical theology.

The Scriptures do not explain everything about God and His actions (hermeneutical principles 1 and 6). However, one thing is clear—the personal faith of each person is essential for his/her salvation (John 3:36; Hebrews 11:6). Man is a morally responsible agent. God gave him a very good brain and expects him to use it. Before He created, God knew what each individual would do while on Planet Earth. In order to complete His objectives, God does not need or want puppets. His complete knowledge of the past, present, and future gives Him a very high and strong advantage—an advantage that is beyond human understanding.

To conclude this section I quote Michael Novak, a prominent writer, teacher, and political analyst, who gives a synopsis of the prevalent religious teaching during the American Revolution:

In the preaching of the time, Americans learned as follows: Providence does not mean that God works magically. Rather, from all time every detail of the tapestry is known to the one who weaves it. To the Eternal God, there is neither time nor sequence, but every detail of the tapestry is visible to Him as if in one simultaneous moment, each thing acting

⁸⁹ *Westminster Confession*, Cp. III, Pr. II, "Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future . . ." Calvinists reject foreknowledge as a factor in God's workings. For them everything was decreed, so foreknowledge is no more than what was preordained by God to happen.

independently and freely, but cohering as a whole, like characters in a well-wrought novel. Thus, the horseman bearing the secret order of battle takes a wrong turn in the darkness and is captured by those about to be attacked, just in time for them to thwart their more powerful foe. Nothing more common in the affairs of human beings than circumstance and chance, which surprises those who live through them in time and sequence but seems quite natural to later observers. The very sermon Witherspoon preached on behalf of Independence in April 1776 was a sermon on how Providence acts by contingent and indirect actions — not *foreseen*, because God does not “foresee” anything. He is *present* to everything, in the Jewish and Christian understanding. He is not *before* and *after*; He is present to all things at one time. In one creative vision, He sees the details of what He does, and how they all hook together, without forcing anybody’s liberty, without manipulating anything.⁹⁰

SEEK

Calvinists will quote Romans 3:10-11 where Paul says: “as it is written, “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD. . .” These words are based upon Psalms 14 and 53. Paul’s words are not a literal rendering of the Hebrew. It appears that he has paraphrased the passage as found in the Septuagint. Neither of the Old Testament texts contains the phrase: “no one seeks God” (ἐκζητέω--seek). I’ve walked on this planet for more than seven decades, and I will agree with Paul and the Psalmist’s observation. Though people are not seeking God, this does not mean they are unable to.

The *Holman Christian Standard Bible* renders Psalm 14:2-3 as follows:

The LORD looks down from heaven on the human race to see if there is one who is wise, one who seeks God. All have turned away; all alike have become corrupt. There is no one who does good, not even one.

From the usage of the Greek word ἐκζητέω [ekzeteo] which is translated “seek” in Romans 3:10, “required” in Luke 11:50, “seek” in Acts 15:17, “seek” in Hebrews 11:6, “sought” in Hebrews 12:17, and “inquired” in 1st Peter 1:10, we conclude that “Paul is not referring to an indifferent seeking, but a ‘diligent seeking’ for God.”⁹¹ The original says that God looked to see if there might be “one who is wise,” meaning a person who has developed skills with sharpened mental tools that are being used to seek God. The implied and underlying indication is that people are capable of using their brains to seek God; otherwise, why would God be looking to see if any were doing so? He observed that they aren’t, even though that ability is present within the human soul. Though each possesses the capacity, they turn away and go after corruption. This passage upholds the free-will of each individual, not total inability.

⁹⁰ Michael Novak, *On Two Wings*, (c) 2002, published by Encounter Books, pages 16-17. This secular writer shows a profound understanding, better than some holding doctorates in theology.

⁹¹ Olson, C. Gordon in *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, p 102

Calvinists read into this passage an absolute depravity that is so bad that man by nature is completely unable to seek God—Total Inability. I believe that the Psalmist is stating the Lord's conclusion after observing humankind. He is not making or stating a theological declaration of total inability, nor is Paul in quoting this passage implying that that is his belief. Calvinists might twist the Scriptures, not so with Paul. Paul's declaration comes in Romans 3:23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." He has observed that man is corrupt and willfully does bad deeds; and as has been pointed out, the very logic of the verse indicates that man is capable of using the brain God has given to him to search for God and to seek a relationship with his Maker; but in general he isn't. In Noah's day, from a possibly two or three billion people, eight entered the Arch. From our brief walk on Planet Earth, would we not all concur with the Lord's and Paul's observation? Paul, in his paraphrase, is saying that man does not make a diligent search for God. I believe he is speaking in general terms, not as the Calvinist applies the verse by making man an absolute non-seeker—one condemned to evil acts with the *total inability* to seek the truth. To use these verses to draw that conclusion is a deliberate act of twisting the Scriptures in an effort to make them agree with a pre-supposition. Man by nature misses the mark; but this does not indicate that he is incapable of using the brains God gave him in making an effort to seek God. The text does not say that! Calvinists do. It is dangerous to add to the Word of God. "Do not add to His words, Lest He indict you and you be proved a liar." (Proverbs 30:6 Tanakh)

Is man so bad that he can't do anything good? Luke records Jesus saying:

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him? (Luke 11:13) To ask is a free-will action.

Jesus recognized that sinful man can do good deeds, like give bread rather than a stone to a hungry child. A mediocre observer of humanity will agree that Jesus spoke the truth. There are a lot of morally good people out there who are working hard to help others. Their good deeds will not qualify them for salvation though they are noble (Romans 3:23; Hebrews 11:6). We see people every day making righteous, moral, humane decisions; and many of them are unsaved people. That experience I had in São Paulo State where the speaker described man as being so bad that I became afraid of everyone, even wondering if I could trust my wife. He had painted a distorted view of humanity, one that came from his theology that had a distorted view of God and man, not from the Bible. The Bible teaches that man cannot measure up to the requirements of the law. He comes up short and is unable to save himself through good deeds; but he can make good choices. The Calvinists' doctrine of human total inability is unscriptural and falls short of reality.

What about the God seekers? Does anyone diligently seek God? I would have to say that years of experience have taught me that generally speaking people do not seek God, but that is far different from saying that "man cannot seek God." We preach the gospel and send missionaries in hopes they will (Romans 10:14-15). Psalm 14:1-3 and Romans 3:10-11 are not saying they can't, though Calvinists do. Related to this I would like to cite some Scripture passages:

Acts 17:26-27, . . . and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

These verses from Paul's sermon to a group of philosophers clearly state that God is involved in the affairs of men; but note His purpose in doing so: His efforts within human history are designed to stimulate man into the seeking mode of the Savior God. God wants people saved.

Romans 1:18-20, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Lost man is fully responsible to seek God, and the revelation of God in nature that speaks (Psalm 19) should cause him to do so. This passage indicates that he is able to make a move toward truth and he will be held accountable by his Creator for his decisions at the final judgement.

Romans 2:14-15, "For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them."

The behavior of the Godless, uneducated, and spiritually ignorant gentiles reveals that they possess an inner knowledge of good moral values and are able to act upon that knowledge to the shame of the Jews. They were performing better than some of the spiritually educated Israelites, who were and are God's choice-ones (elect) as well as being the guardians of God's Word (Romans 9:4-5).

Deuteronomy 4:29, "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul."

1 Chronicles 16:11, "Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually."

Why would God command us to do somethings we are totally unable to do? Yet that's what Calvinists believe and teach, not the Bible. Man is a responsible moral being, and he can seek God and make life changing decisions.

1 Chronicles 22:19, "Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise, therefore, and build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that you may

bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy vessels of God into the house that is to be built for the name of the LORD.”

1 Chronicles 28:9, “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.”

2nd Chronicles 15:2, “. . . and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the LORD is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

Psalms 105:3-4, “Glory in His holy name; Let the heart of those who seek the LORD be glad. Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.”

Isaiah 55:6-7, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let him return to the LORD, And He will have compassion on him, And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.”

Jeremiah 29:12-13, “Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”

Hosea 5:15, “I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; In their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.”

Amos 5:4-6, “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel, ‘Seek Me that you may live. But do not resort to Bethel and do not come to Gilgal, nor cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal will certainly go into captivity and Bethel will come to trouble. Seek the Lord that you may live, Or He will break forth like a fire, O house of Joseph, and it will consume with none to quench it . . .”

Zephaniah 2:3, “Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord’s anger.”

Acts 15:17, “So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, And all the Gentiles who are called by My name.”

Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.”

These passages, and many more, place a heavy responsibility upon each person's shoulders. In many different ways God reveals Himself to humanity. There is ample evidence (Romans 1:20; Psalm 19), and man is called upon and obligated to seek the Creator of his soul. When he does, God is there to enlighten in the hope that each person will find the One who rewards the seeker. The logic of this is very clear and strong. If man were condemned to an *inability* to seek God, as Calvinists believe and declare, then why are there so many commands for man to seek the Lord? How can a just, good, loving, and righteous God command and expect man to do something he is absolutely incapable of processing and doing? If a parent were to command his ten-year-old son to fly; and if he did not fly, he would spank him and lock him in a dark closet. We would call him a "child abuser," and that parent would go to jail. And yet for the Calvinist, God does the same thing to people all over the world and says it is for "God's pleasure and Glory." How absurd. The god of the Calvinist is cruel and their theology is uncompassionate and fatalistic nonsense. Though man is a sinner, he still retains the ability to perform just acts and to seek the truth about his Creator. God is not cruel but is very patient and loving. He has promised to reward those who seek Him. The prodigal son came to his senses, ran back to his father in humble repentance, and there was daddy waiting with open arms. That's our God.

Human Responsibility

In 1972, while on furlough and studying at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, I spent the summer with at least five very dogmatic and strongly committed five-point Calvinists. We had many doctrinal discussions as we cleaned the kitchen each night and on walks between classes. Those men told me that they believed that before creation God had planned everything. In other words, God wrote the script and is now directing the drama of history according to that predetermined document to be sure all goes according to His pre-created plan. They believed that before time God planned and was responsible for the fall of man; that God decided who would go to heaven and who would go to hell; that every action of man was programmed by God before creation; and that man has no free-will—pure fatalism. Yes, God is God and can do as He pleases, but is that the kind of God revealed through nature and in the Holy Scriptures? Does the Bible teach that this is the Lord's method of working with the angels and man? It is my contention that the Bible does not support their philosophical theories that have formed their distorted theological. Nature and the Bible do not present God to be like the one the Calvinists worship.

As the Apostle Paul stated in 1st Timothy 2:14, Adam was not deceived. He was in the driver's seat and chose to disobey the Lord's command being fully knowledgeable of his action. This was sin of the first degree. Man was given a test of loyalty, and he failed miserably. God is NOT to blame for the failures of man or the blatant pride and sin of Lucifer—the beautiful cherub that watched over God's throne.

Throughout the Bible there exist numerous passages that teach us that God created man as a morally responsible agent with an obligation to believe and obey his Maker, to choose the right, and to avoid the wrong, etc. On almost every page of the Bible we read of man's responsibilities as a free moral agent. The following passages are cited to illustrate this fact:

Moses called the people to choose life: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

Moses was addressing God’s “elect”, not the pagan nations around Israel. Many in that “elect” group chose to follow their own ways and to worship other gods. Being in the “elect” group does not guarantee salvation to each individual in that group. Each possess the freedom of choice.

Joshua challenged Israel to follow the Lord and said: “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.” (Joshua 24:15)

In Isaiah the Lord speaks, “If only you had paid attention to My commandments! Then your well-being would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” (Isaiah 48:18)

God, speaking through Ezekiel said: “Say to them, ‘As I live!’ declares the Lord God, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezekiel 33:11b) God’s elect will die?

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* declares that God pre-determined all things and that He predestined some to heaven and other to hell, and that this was done for God’s glory and pleasure. Who is right, Calvinism or the Word of God? The Bible presents a God who wants people saved and is sad, broken hearted, and has no pleasure when anyone refuses.

Jesus said: “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) Does this sound like a God who finds pleasure in predestining people to hell, as the *Westminster Confession* states? Jesus is heartbroken because the Jews “*were unwilling*” to trust their lives to God’s care.

The Apostle John wrote: “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.” And, “He who believes in Him [God’s Son] is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 1:12 and 3:18)

On Mar’s Hill Paul proclaimed: “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness . . .” (Acts 17:30-31) If Total Inability is true, why make a statement like this?

The compassionate Savior-God and His Church call to all mankind: “The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one

who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.” (Revelation 22:17)

In Romans we read that “each one of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). Revelation 20 teaches that everyone will be judged for his/her deeds and choices, with a strong focus on what they do with Jesus. In Paul’s treatise, on the sinfulness and guilt of man in Romans 1:18 through 3:20, he declares that every human being is “without excuse” (Romans 1:20) before his Creator. When it comes to human responsibility, the Bible is crystal clear on this matter. Without exception, everyone is a responsible agent accountable to the Lord of all for his/her actions. No one can blame God and say, “You made me thus.” Man is a responsible, moral agent who was created with a brain, which he’s expected to use because God created him with a will—the freedom of choice.

After the fall of man, the following chapter tells the story of Cain and Abel. In Genesis 4:6-7 we read of God personally dealing with Cain and asking him: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?” If Cain was not pre-chosen by God unto salvation, but rather “foreordained to everlasting death,”⁹² then why did God go to so much trouble, as the recorded story indicates? It is apparent that God held Cain morally responsible for his actions, that Cain possessed the ability to do the right thing—repent—and that God desired for him to acknowledge his sin and to pursue righteousness. He even told Cain that at his door was a sin offering that he could dominate and uses. God went a long ways in dealing with that man in hopes he’d repent; but rather than do what was right, Cain killed his brother. To say that Cain killed his brother because that was in God’s plan⁹³ makes God the author of sin and violates all logic and any sense of justice. To the contrary, the Scriptures clearly reveal the Lord dealing with Cain and pleading for him to do what is right because He, the compassionate Creator of the universe, knew where Cain was heading; and being the loving and forgiving Father that He is, He desired for Cain, soon to be a murderer, to repent so that he could be forgiven and returned to a position of favor with his Creator and Redeemer.

When a biblical teaching is so clear and forceful, it is difficult for me to understand Calvinists, who teach that no person can do what is right (Total Inability), and especially place his/her faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, without God giving him the faith and forcing him to believe (Irritable Grace).⁹⁴ An interpretation such as this goes beyond normal reasoning, because God commands us to choose, to do, to believe, to repent, to seek, etc.; and He holds each person morally accountable for his decisions and actions.

⁹² *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Cptr III

⁹³ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Cptr III

⁹⁴ Loraine Boettner states: “[T]he person passes from a state of unbelief to one of saving faith, not by any process of research or argument, but of inward experience. And as we had nothing to do with our physical birth, but received it as a sovereign gift of God, we have nothing to do with our spiritual birth but receive it also as a sovereign gift. Each occurred without any exercise of our own power, and even without our consent being asked.” (pages 165-166) “The Divine saving act,” says Mozley, “is the bestowal of this irresistible grace. The subject of Divine predetermination is rescued by an act of absolute power from the dominion of sin, dragged from it, as it were, by force.” (page 168) from Loraine Boettner, in *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*.

During the forming of our nation, one of our founding fathers, William Livingston, made a name for himself among Calvinists by correcting those among his followers who interpreted predestination to imply dependence on “a superior and irresistible agency,” which reduced them to “mere machines, void of intelligence and free volition.” He insisted that Calvinists must be governors of their own lives, take hold of their capacities for moral direction, positively choosing against evil and for good.⁹⁵

The Bible teaches that every human being is morally responsible for his choices and actions both before God and man. In John 16:8-11, Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit in His place. One of the Spirit’s jobs is to “convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.” When John said that the Spirit of God would convict the *world* of sin, righteousness, and judgment, he was speaking of all persons living on Planet Earth, not just the “elect,”⁹⁶ as Calvinists often interpret the word “world”.⁹⁷ We believe that God the Holy Spirit convicts all because people are able to respond; and that no matter how bad they may be, Adam’s children possess the ability to choose right over wrong (Matthew 7:11). Yes, it is true, we usually don’t.

Human Depravity

When presenting their beliefs, Calvinists start with their doctrine of the depravity of man and teach that man is a slave to sin and totally *incapable* of doing any good and of making right choices.⁹⁸ In using the phrase “Total Depravity,” though the expression clearly speaks of the sinfulness of man, it does not address man’s ability to make good decisions. We would agree about man’s sinfulness; however, what Calvinists really want to stress is their belief in the *total inability* of man to do anything right and especially so when it comes to making a decision to seek, repent, and turn to God. The picture they paint of man does not agree with the Holy Scriptures and true-to-life experiences.

Yes, since the fall in the Garden of Eden, man has been totally depraved. After the flood God expressed His understanding of man by saying, “. . . the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”⁹⁹ We would agree with the Calvinists that man is a depraved sinner, but not that man is *totally unable* to seek, to repent, to believe, and to personally appropriate the

⁹⁵ Novak, Michael, *On Two Wings* (c) 2002, publisher Encounter Books, page 135

⁹⁶ “Elect” is used here as the Calvinist would in his belief system, not as defined above.

⁹⁷ In his Study Bible on 1 JN 2:2, John MacArthur wrote, “This is a generic term, referring not to every individual, but to mankind in general. Christ actually paid the penalty only for those who would repent and believe.” Calvin’s commentary on John 3:16 states that God’s “secret love” is of the elect, so “world” means those God pre-chose unto salvation or the Church.

⁹⁸ Boettner, Loraine, in his book *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, quotes Martin Luther: “Free-will is an empty term, whose reality is lost. And a lost liberty, according to my grammar, is no liberty at all.” Boettner continues by stating, “In matters pertaining to his salvation, the unregenerate man is not at liberty to choose between good and evil, but only to choose between greater and lesser evil, which is not properly free will.” (page 62) On the following page he states: “In other words, fallen man is so morally blind that he uniformly prefers and chooses evil instead of good, as do the fallen angels or demons.” On page 167 he writes, “The Scripture doctrine of the fall represents man as morally ruined, unable by nature to do any good thing.”

⁹⁹ Genesis 8:21; this verse (“intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth”) is an observation and speaks to the moral bent of man. It does not state that he cannot do anything good or right, that he cannot make correct choices.

salvation offered in Jesus. Nowhere in the Bible do we find the teaching that man is *unable* to choose the right, to do good deeds, to repent, to believe the Gospel, etc. The Calvinists cannot prove their philosophical based theological theory on the *inability* of man because the Scriptures teach just the opposite. The Bible describes man as still a possessor of the divine image¹⁰⁰ with a free-will, one who is capable of using the brain God gave him to make both good and bad decisions. Though a sinner by nature, he is capable of recognizing that and of seeking God's help.

Man's ability to choose does not make him a coworker with God in his salvation. The Cross of Christ was a work done one hundred percent by God. Man cannot and does not save himself, but he must appropriate the work of God for the salvation of his soul through faith. The gift of salvation from God is available to all, but it must be opened by the willing heart. Look at 2nd Chronicles 15:2: "Listen to me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you." Man is a morally responsible agent fully capable of making choices, both good and bad.

The Bible is clear. Since the Fall, man has had a strong bent toward sin, selfishness and disobedience toward God. Romans 3:23 states, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Man falls short of God's standard. He cannot reach the required mark of a perfectly righteous and obedient lifestyle and thereby save himself. Using the Calvinistic term, "Total Depravity," we believe that the Bible teaches that:

Total Depravity is the inability of man to measure up to the love and obedience toward God as required by the divine standard. Man misses the mark of perfection.

Unlike the Calvinists' belief of total depravity, stating that man is "unable" to do any good and to make proper choices, my definition does not indicate that man lacks the ability to make good choices and perform just deeds. The Bible teaches that man does not consistently do the right, that he falls short of the divine requirements, through which, if walked in them, he could legally enter heaven (Leviticus 18:4-5 and Galatians 3:21 & 24). All it takes is one sin to miss the mark (James 2:10).

Loraine Boettner is wrong when he states that man can only choose between two evils (see footnote 94 above). From Genesis chapter 5 we learn that Enoch "walked with God; and He was not, for God took him." The life of Enoch refutes the Calvinists' belief on total depravity, because two times the inspired record declares that he "walked with God" and his righteous life exempted him from the experience of physical death. Even Jesus, when He said, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children . . ." (Luke 11:13), recognized that though man is by nature evil, he possesses the ability to love his family and care for the needs of his children. Loving and caring for one's family is not a choice between evils, as Boettner says, but a choice to do what is morally and scripturally correct. Experience teaches us that morally correct acts are normal among all peoples of the world. Even in the

¹⁰⁰ Genesis 5:3; 9:6

worst of cultures, abusive parents are in the minority. History is full of heroes and of people who have dedicated their lives to save others, and we cannot say that these people are all Christians. In fact, in Brazil I saw followers of spiritism, a religion one would class as satanic, who practiced acts of mercy and deeds of charity. Life clearly reveals that man can and often does make good choices. He is just not good enough to measure up to the divine standard, an act that if it were obtainable, would give man the legal right to walk into the presence of God as did Enoch. We miss the mark.

I am not denying the fact that man has a wicked, disobedient, selfish heart, nor am I overlooking his sinful nature brought about by the Fall; but we must not let this truth color our vision to the point that we cannot see that man is capable of making positive choices. The Bible teaches that man can make a decision to obey God and appropriate the salvation offered by his Creator and that his eternal destiny will be determined by his choices. The Bible does not teach that before creation, through the elective decrees of the Creator that some were chosen by Him for eternal salvation while others were picked to suffer in the fires of hell forever. Such a theory presents a false and unbiblical picture of man, and even worse, a very ugly and unbiblical picture of God.

The Will of God

I have heard Calvinists emphatically state that it is fundamentally essential that we begin with the doctrine of the depravity of man. Just as dogmatically, I have concluded that their approach begins on the wrong foundation: unsound hermeneutics, a distorted view of God, and an improper understanding of man. Always a systematic theology should begin with and grow forth from a hermeneutics that interprets the text as outlined above. Through nature and the Bible God has revealed Himself, and we are accountable for a proper interpretation of the truths they reveal (Romans 10:18 with Psalm 19; and Romans 1:18-20). Through much study and pray and with the right hermeneutics one can come to an appropriate understanding of God. From the earliest creeds of the church to the lengthiest works of theology today, all start with God under the heading of “theology proper.” A hermeneutics that allows the allegorizing of the biblical text permits one to form his personal opinion about God and then force the text to agree. Until we properly allow the Bible to speak to the issues, all else is conjecture and speculation. Until we develop a biblical understanding of the Creator, we will never understand the man He created in His image.

Reformed theology states that God ordained everything that will transpire including where angels and people will spend eternity, and that He reigns by decrees. They tell us that God does everything for His “good pleasure” and for His “glory.”¹⁰¹ Their doctrine of God does not come from revelations of Him in nature or the Bible, but from the philosophical reasoning powers of men. Their unbiblical and distorted views of God portray Him as a self-centered narcissist. It also impacts their view of man, who God created in His image. For example, Calvinists will insist that God can do as He pleases—He’s free. And yet, man is not free. He’s a robot, one hundred percent controlled by his creator.

¹⁰¹ See the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Cptr III

The Bible tells us much about God's will. Regarding that will, as it pertains to the human race and the final destiny of people, consider the following verses cited as examples from the whole of Scripture:

Jeremiah 36:6 and 7: Jeremiah tells his servant Baruch:

So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the Lord to the people in the Lord's house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities. Perhaps their supplication will come before the Lord, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people.

God desired repentance. King Jehoiakim would not heed and burned the scroll. Matthew 23:37 shows us the true heart of God and His desire: "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.*" (emphasis added) God's burning desire is for man, a free moral agent, to seek, repent, and obey Him. God wants people saved! Man's rebellion makes God very sad. If, according to Calvinism, God pre-programmed everything for His good pleasure and glory, is it fair to ask, "Why is God broken hearted?"

Ezekiel 18:23: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the LORD God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'"

Ezekiel 18:32: "'For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,' declares the LORD God. 'Therefore, repent and live.'"

Ezekiel 33:11: "'Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the LORD God, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.'"

These three passages and others state God's desire along with the obligation of each human being: God, Who created man in His image, wants him to "seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:27) I have heard these Ezekiel passages being interpreted as "physical death" not spiritual or soul death. There is no justification for that interpretation which forces the text to agree with a theology. For anyone to teach that God finds pleasure in any form the death of a human soul would be to distort the Word and God's character. It's a false teaching, *a lie!* I've also seen Calvinist state that "desire" is different from God's will and decrees. Their hermeneutics allows them to distort the clear reading so it fits their theology. God desires for people to be saved and in harmony with Him, not lost forever. God's heart cries because people reject Him and His ways.

John 3:16 and 17: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son . . . For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”

The Calvinists like to restrict the meaning of “world” to mean only the “elect.” However, their interpretation does not conform to hermeneutical principles 3, 4, 6, and 8. To be consistent in interpretation, if the Calvinists’ view that the word “world” in verse 16 really means those God previously chose for a position of privilege, then verse 17 states that God sent His Son into a world made up of only those elected ones, not a world comprised of all peoples, Jew, Gentile, slave, free, God fearing, and reprobate. The context of John’s Gospel and the other Gospels teach differently. A sinful world abused and killed the Messiah. The clear, normal understanding of the word “world,” within the context in which it is used, is that it is the entire human race. If persons in that world do not believe, they are “condemned” [verse 18], because they are responsible agents, not because God predestined them to unbelief and condemnation. *It is heresy to teach that God ordained people to hell and finds pleasure in doing so.* Such teachers have a distorted view of God and man, who was created in His image.

2 Peter 3:9: “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.”

Herein God’s heart is revealed, one of compassion, patience, and deep concern for the souls of the lost.

For the Calvinist, the “elect” have no choice. They are compelled by God’s irresistible grace to believe. This sampling of verses refutes their teaching (see hermeneutical rules 3, 4, and 6). All are responsible agents. God desires repentance and obedience from the sinner. It was never God’s desire that man go to an eternal hell, as the *Westminster Confession of Faith* teaches (quoted above). When it comes to this subject, the reformers were highly influenced by their Catholic education, founded in Augustinism, causing them to poorly interpret the Word of God and to misrepresent the character of God.

Genesis tells us that God created man, blew into him the breath of life, and made man in His image (Genesis 1:27). Though man has fallen into sin, he still possesses that image.¹⁰² Calvinists would lead us to believe that God, before He created, chose to send a very large number of the pinnacle of His creation—humankind possessing the image of God—into the eternal trash heap of unceasing torment and separation from the Creator. Please read, *What Love Is This?* by David Hunt.

God made man in His own image and loves him beyond our ability to comprehend. The Creator paid the ultimate price to save man. The purpose of God from before making man has always been to save the bearers of His image, not to destroy the possessors of that image. In truth, if a person murders another, God decreed the punishment of death for the murderer, because the committer of homicide has failed to respect the image of God in man (Genesis 9:6).

¹⁰² Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.”

Based on Calvinistic reasoning, God has a double standard. If, according to Calvinists, God in eternity-past decreed to send the greater portion of the human race to hell, then God is a murderer because He decreed the destruction of His own image, violating His own law as stated in Genesis 9:6. However, if man ends up in that place of eternal punishment because he deliberately disobeyed his Creator and willfully turns his back on God's forgiveness, then God, who created him in His image, is just, because He Himself is playing by the rules. The God of the Calvinist is above the rules, does not obey them, and shows partiality and unjust favoritism.¹⁰³ The god of the Calvinist is not the God of the Bible, because their god has double standards, plays favorites, and violates the rules.

In Genesis chapter 3, God is revealed as a Creator concerned about the salvation of fallen man. Though He is just, He is also compassionate and merciful. Rather than teaching that God elected a few to salvation and destined multitude to eternal perdition, the Bible reveals that the desire of God has always been *for people to be saved*. God created Hell for the devil and his angels, not man (Matthew 25:41). People are lost because they turn their backs toward God in rebellion and disobedience, not because the Savior does not love them and want them to seek, believe, repent, and be saved. *Nowhere* in Scripture can we find even an implication that God desires for men and women to suffer an eternity in the Lake of Fire. If Calvinism were correct, there should be several passages that clearly state their teaching—*there are none*. Building a theology based upon philosophical assumptions is a very dangerous game to play.¹⁰⁴

The Extent of the Death of Jesus Christ

For whom did Christ die?¹⁰⁵ The followers of the TULIP believe and teach that Jesus died only for the “elect,” those pre-chosen unto salvation, privilege, and eternal bliss by God. They conclude that it was not necessary for Jesus to shed His blood for the entire human race because that would be a needless loss to a sovereign God who is efficient, not wasteful.¹⁰⁶ None of this comes from the Bible—find the verse. What does the Word of God teach about the extent of our Lord's death?

In Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, “. . . in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” This covenant, backed by the character of God (see chapter 15), is a guarantee that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, the promised Redeemer-Messiah of the Old Testament, would be a Hebrew and that He would bring eternal blessing to all peoples, not just to the chosen like the Jewish nation or a Calvinistic group of unconditionally elected ones.

¹⁰³ Job 13:7-10 “Will you speak what is unjust for God, and speak what is deceitful for Him? Will you show partiality for Him? Will you contend for God? Will it be well when He examines you? Or will you deceive Him as one deceives a man? He will surely reprove you if you secretly show partiality.” And Numbers 15:15–16 14 “. . . there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns with you, a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the Lord. There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.”

¹⁰⁴ Deuteronomy 4:2 & 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18; it is dangerous to add to or take away from God's Word and to lead a soul away from the truth.

¹⁰⁵ *The Death Christ Died*, by Robert Lightner (© 1976), is an excellent treatise on this subject.

¹⁰⁶ This world is full of waste. In the normal reproductive processes of most of the living organisms, there is waste. In the end, all will be destroyed and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Revelation 7:9 confirms this when it states that “every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues” will be seen standing before the throne of the Lamb. I believe that the foundational revelations from God about the work of the Messiah-Redeemer on behalf of humanity are in the book of beginnings, Genesis 3:14-16 and 12:1-3. These passages may not be a strong argument for the belief that the death of the Lord Jesus included all in Adam, but the foundation is there. Moving through the Scriptures, the picture becomes clear.

In Romans 5:12-21, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type¹⁰⁷ of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. The gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned; for on the one hand the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous. The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This passage from Romans teaches that Adam, the father and head of the human race, through his disobedience produced a defect that is passed to all mankind known as the *sin nature* and *death*. This passed-on deficiency causes a deadly disease of disobedience and rebellion toward God and ends in spiritual death (separation from God). In this passage, the expressions “all men” and “many”¹⁰⁸ refer to the same group and the same number of people,

¹⁰⁷ A type is a picture that implies something else. Adam is a type of Jesus in that both are the heads of a very large family.

¹⁰⁸ Some Calvinists believe that this passage teaches that Jesus died for “many” but not all. That interpretation will not work because Adam’s disobedience made “the many” into sinners, using the same expression to designate the entire human race. Statisticians estimate that at no time in human history has more than five percent of the world’s

that being all of Adam's family. Everyone is born a sinner (Psalm 51:5), and through His death and resurrection the Lord Jesus purchased salvation and eternal life for the "all," meaning Adam's family, he being its head. First Corinthians 15:21-22 and 45-47 present Jesus Christ as the second Adam who brought liberty and life. Through His obedience, Jesus purchased life and right-standing before God for every descendant of Adam. If it were not for this fact, to pay the sin debt for just the Calvinists' elected ones, Jesus, rather than dying once for the whole, would have had to die many times, a separate death for each person in that elect-group (there is no federal head for this group). But, by dying for all in Adam, as Romans 5 teaches, Jesus as the second Adam and substitutional head of the human race died "*once for all*"—for the whole human race in Adam—as stated in Hebrews 7:27; 9:25-28; and 10:10.

In John 3:16-18 we read: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." In verse 16 the object of God's love is the "world" (*kosmos* in the Greek), which according to normal language usage and the context of this passage depicts the entire human race. Verse 17 supports this definition when it says: "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." It is very apparent that Jesus came into a world that constituted all persons, not to a world of just the Calvinists' elect-group. That *kosmos* crucified the Lord of Glory, not the "elect," as defined by Calvinism. Verse 19 continues to indicate that "world" is all of mankind: "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil." These verses clearly state that Jesus was sent by the Father to give His life to ransom the whole world—Adam's entire race—not a favored few chosen to receive special privilege.

In John 1:29, John the Baptizer declared that Jesus came to take away the "sin of the world." The Calvinist's hermeneutics allows him to twist and turn the black on white meaning of Scripture into a more spiritual interpretation, making the text comply with his theology rather than allowing the text to birth his theology. His philosophically derived theology will not hold water when he restricts the natural meaning of the word "world" by limiting its scope to a very small segment of humanity—their so-called elect-group. Calvinism imposes its philosophical reasoning upon the text rather than letting the Bible say what it says in the language of the common man. This elitist approach to the Scriptures is why Augustine taught and the Catholic Church practiced the withholding the Bible from the hands of the laity.

Second Peter 2:1 reads: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves." This passage affirms that Jesus' death bought salvation for the elect-group but also those who oppose the Lord and the truth and who are making every effort to guide people down the wrong road away from the truth so they will not be saved. Jesus

population been obedient followers of God and His Word. Experience tells us that actually very "few" are really saved, not many. In this chapter think "multitude" in the place of "many."

died for the false teachers who are heading for eternal destruction. Even though they oppose God and His salvation, actions that the Lord foreknew, He shed His blood for them.

First John 2:2 states that Jesus Himself is “the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” From the context, we know that John is writing to God’s children, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. A distinction is made between those on the inside, the saved, and those on the outside, the lost. John says that Jesus is the appeasement for the sins of both groups. Jesus’ death has purchased salvation for all of mankind, not just a small privileged group of people presumably to have been chosen out of the whole.

The teaching of the Scriptures is clear. Jesus Christ shed His blood on Calvary’s Tree to pay the sin debt of every soul in Adam—to obtain salvation for all of humanity and not a privileged few. He died for every person from Adam until the last one to be born. After studying these verses, some have come to believe in “universal salvation,” meaning that all are saved. Though Jesus died for all, all are not saved. Romans 5:17 states the gift is for those who “receive the abundance of grace.” As a responsible agent, through faith each individual must appropriate the salvation-offer. God did not create robots. He created man in His image, giving men and women the capacity to choose.

The Bible teaches that God’s desire is for people to be saved. Because of this, He chose Israel to be a testimony to the world, and after the cross He commissioned the Church to preach the Gospel to every person on Planet Earth.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” (Romans 10:14-15)

The doctrine of limited atonement does not come from the Bible. It is the invention of man and is false doctrine—heresy.

The Justice of God

One of the attributes of God is *justice*. God acts justly in everything He does. He is not self-centered; He does not play favorites; and He follows His own rules. Even when there are things that we do not fully understand,¹⁰⁹ we know that God will do what is right and just because it is His nature to do so. Knowing the Lord is a just God brings comfort to those who trust Him.

Man was created in God’s image, and I believe that one expression of that image is through the human heart that has written upon it some fundamental truths: 1) the truth of God’s existence, and 2) principles of right and wrong. Man has a tendency to excuse and deaden his

¹⁰⁹ Citing one example, “Where do babies go when they die?” The Bible does not address the subject. The Catholic faith invented limbo. Based on the law written in our hearts, Bible teachers usually will say that they go to heaven. We are confident that God will act justly in this matter because that’s His nature.

conscience. Because of this, we cannot fully trust it; but the light of righteousness is there. A stable and reliable revelation is the Bible, the God-breathed Book.¹¹⁰

Because of our consciences (law written on heart) and the truths we learn about God's justice from nature and the written Word, it is difficult to believe that a loving, merciful, and just God, who made man in His own image, would arbitrarily determine who would be saved and who would suffer eternal damnation, in eternity past long before He created. Adding to the Calvinistic belief that God elected some to salvation and the others to hell, the Calvinists teach that God imposes His choice upon the elect-group, forcing them to believe and obey the gospel against their natural will, while on the other hand He condemns the rest for not believing, when they are incapable of doing so in the first place, as taught in Augustinianism. Yes, God is God, and that position gives Him the right to do as He pleases; but is this method of behavior truly just and consistent with His character and His rules? Is this not a form of favoritism? Is this the Creator God that the human heart, nature, and the Scriptures reveal? And, even more importantly: Is this what the Bible teaches us about God and how He works with man? Doesn't It say that He causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust?¹¹¹

Man's basic sense of justice is well expressed by Elihu in Job 34:10-12 (HCSB):

Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding. It is impossible for God to do wrong, and for the Almighty to act unjustly. For He repays a person according to his deeds, and He brings his ways on him. Indeed, it is true that God does not act wickedly and the Almighty does not pervert justice.

Revelation 20:12 concludes by stating that everyone will be judged "according to their deeds," affirming the words of Elihu. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the final judgment is based upon a decree made before He created, through which God predetermined and unconditionally chose a few souls out of the human race for special privilege and foreordained the rest to hell. It is estimated that no more than five percent of humanity ever seeks God and salvation.

Many of the founding fathers of the United States were Christians. They believed they were right in opposing the King of England and that God was with them in the founding of a new nation. The foundation for their reasoning and actions was "the Laws of Nature" and of "Nature's God," meaning God's laws written on the human heart and in God's Book of Works. The Declaration of Independence puts their convictions in writing and states: "We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." The founding fathers declared that it was "self-evident" that God created all men equal and that our Creator gave each person liberties that no person or government has a right to limit or

¹¹⁰ Having a habit of reading the Bible through will give one a growing knowledge of God.

¹¹¹ Job 34:11 in the NIV reads: "He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves." These words were derived from the laws of nature and the human heart and were written down through divine inspiration. There was no Bible when the book of Job was penned. The Bible reveals that this is the true way our just God works. See also Genesis 10:25; Deuteronomy 32:4; Romans 9:14; Revelation 20:11-15.

withhold. I realize that the Declaration of Independence is not the Bible. These historical facts are cited to show that the beliefs of the founders of America illustrate the truth of this point—the human conscience and nature teach truths about justice—if *we would but listen*.

Later, in July 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was added to our Constitution. There were states that did not consider people of dark skin, African descent, as citizens, giving them no rights; and the courts were siding with those states. This amendment corrected that injustice and affirms the conviction of the founding fathers, that men are created equal and that all states, laws, courts, etc., must treat them so. We cannot favor one people group above another. Nature and Nature's God teach us that such behavior is wrong. The Apostle Paul, in Ephesians 6:9, declared, “. . . knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.” Though Reformed theology declares that God plays favorites, the truths learned from God's creation, the human conscience, and the Bible speak differently. Peter affirmed that “God is not one to show partiality” (Acts 10:34).

Elihu,¹¹² the founding fathers, and the United States federal and state governments in 1868 all based their convictions about human rights on the laws of nature. The Calvinists teach that God has a favored group that they call the “elect.” The Bible and nature teach us that God does not play favorites.¹¹³ He loves the world and desires for all peoples to be saved (1st TM 2:1-6). Our God of love is just. Men are accountable for their decisions and actions and will stand before the just Lord without any excuse.¹¹⁴ God loves them all and wants them saved—but so often men do not respond to God's revelations of Himself, seek Him, reach out for His help, and believe and obey Him, so that they might be saved.

Ignorance at times must be admitted, but the rationale of the Calvinist goes beyond all reason. As shown throughout this study, their teachings have no foundation in Scripture, in human conscience, and in nature. They bring their philosophical conclusions to the Bible, making it conform to their model, rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself, and upon that foundation build their theology. The Calvinistic doctrine of God does not agree with the human conscience, the laws of nature, and the teachings of Holy Writ. Calvinism borders on blasphemy because it teaches that God does unjust and unloving acts, and it declares that He plays favorites for “His good pleasure,” a selfish motive which makes God human. The fact that the God-incarnate died to save all sinners, reveals that God's acts of love can cause Him much pain. He acts out of justice, mercy, and love, not “pleasure.” *He is other-centered*, not self-centered. May those who teach otherwise be ashamed.

Calvinism is a mindset that influences the way its proponents interpret the Bible. In violation of sound hermeneutical principles that should lead one in his search for the true meaning of a text, they attribute one to It that has been deeply influenced by a historical background that goes back to Plato and Philo, through Jerome, Origen, Augustine, the Catholic Church, and into the reformed movement. The beliefs and teachings of these men have had a very strong impact on theology for some 1,500 years. The Reformers brought these improperly derived teachings with

¹¹² See Job 34:10-12 quoted previously.

¹¹³ Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; 2 Peter 3:9

¹¹⁴ Romans 1:20. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul bases his argument upon human conscience.

them into the Protestant movement. Theories like those of Augustine and John Calvin need to be expunged from the minds of the true seeker of biblical truth by immersing them in God's Word and sound hermeneutics. The Bible must and does speak for itself.

Passages with Commentary ¹¹⁵

Throughout this chapter I have emphasized sound hermeneutics. Experience from many years of personal study and teaching has led me to conclude that Jerome's Vulgate created translation habits that have been reproduced over the centuries, many becoming difficult to find, much less change. Augustine was more a student of philosophy than he was of the Scriptures. This impacted his hermeneutics and his theology. This one man has had a tremendous influence on Christianity and its expression through the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church's allowing superstitions to run freely without teaching the truth to the people, its treatment of traditions as authoritative, its keeping the people uneducated by holding back the Bible from the commoner, its creation of a class system that treated the "laity" as ignorant and the "piety" as the enlightened, and its destruction of the writings of those they disagreed with and deemed to be heretics (if one disagreed with the established church his life was in danger and his writing burned) was the system that dominated Christendom for more than a millennium. This historical background has made it difficult for the current seeker to find some of the details necessary in analyzing and forming of a conclusive interpretation of the Bible. However, the major doctrines were not lost through those perversions. There are even found in perverted translation. A lot of theology is clearly revealed and can be found by the seeker in most translations of the Bible. The essentials are not lost. God has preserved the truth.

There are a few passages that if not properly interpreted tend to imply the Calvinistic belief of "unconditional election." We want to emphasize that when a passage is difficult to understand or appears to teach something that is different from the clear, majority teaching of the Bible, that passage must yield to the clearer verses and overall teaching of the Scriptures and nature (Hermeneutical Rule 6). Ignorance as to the meaning of some verses must be admitted. Free-will and human responsibility, God's love and desire that all be saved, and the fact that the Lord Jesus died for the sins of all in Adam are truths that are clearly revealed in the Scripture, being found on almost every page.

The following are passages which I have observed Calvinists using when promoting their theories are followed by my effort to properly interpret them. This is not an exhaustive list:

Matthew 22:14: "For many are called but few are chosen."

The misuse of this passage goes back to Augustine who used a Latin translation without consulting culture or the original text, and is referenced by Calvin.¹¹⁶ It is important to remember that Matthew's Gospel was written to a Jewish audience. Following the rules of hermeneutics, we interpret within the context—the immediate being verses 1-14. The

¹¹⁵ My objective in this section is to show that the Calvinists' misinterpret the biblical passages, not to expound all passages on the subject and to answer every argument and question.

¹¹⁶ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (III, xxiv, 8), electronic edition, Galaxie Software, Garland, TX

servants were first ordered by their master to invite the king's privileged friends to the wedding feast. Knowing the focus of this Gospel, that would be the Israelites. Some of these so-called friends of the king abused the servants who delivered the invitations. When those invited would not come and because the master wanted the banquet room full, he ordered his servants to bring in anyone they could find. The assumption here would be Gentiles. Verses 11 through 14 present the conclusion of the parable.

The man who entered with improper dress for the wedding feast was removed from the banquet hall to utter darkness (hell). The logical interpretation is that the "few" who were "chosen" (the choice or commissioned ones) are those who responded positively to the "call" and entered the hall wearing proper attire as provided and required by the king. Though the "call" was very broad—to many, only a few responded by coming and then dressing in the provided wedding garment. The man who was thrown out had refused to dress in the proper clothing represents the Jews who refused to obey God but still expected acceptance. The guests did not have to buy or bring anything. All had been provided by the king.

Most parables have one objective—teach one main point. They should not be used to formulate doctrine but to illustrate it. The objective of this parable was not to teach about "divine election" to salvation, though that is what Augustine and present day Calvinists would do with verse 14. The parable builds on the truth that Israel, God's chosen people, was the first to be invited;¹¹⁷ when that nation refused the invitation, even abusing God's messengers, the prophets, and finally God's Son, the Lord extended the invitation to the Gentiles, though He in no way canceled His first invitation. Jesus gave this parable to communicate to the Jews that God, because of Israel's refusal to accept the invitation, was laying aside His plan for them and that God would be opening the door to bless and use the Gentiles as His vehicle for reaching the lost world. The nation of Israel was not rejected. Their fate was the consequence of their deliberate disobedience and rejection of God's "call," causing God to "call" others to fill their seats. God has one plan. He desires to save all, but proper attire is required to enter His courts, and that clothing can only come from the Master who has provided the proper dress, which each guest who responded properly to the "call" would put on. The invited guest, Israel, refused to wear the supplied garment. Many (like the "many" of Romans 5) were invited—called—but only those who accepted the invitation and dressed in the provided clothing, as required, were permitted to participate in the feast. This parable clearly teaches that those who qualify as God's choice-ones are the ones who have responded to the "call" and have dressed in the righteousness provided by God through faith in His Son. This parable actually refutes the Reformed teaching of decreed election because throughout it has emphasized each person's responsibility to accept the "call" of God and to dress himself in what has been provided by the King. It clarifies that in the end the "chosen" ones are those who have accepted and obeyed, not a pre-elected-group as Calvinism teaches, making man a puppet without free-will. This parable emphasized free-will.

¹¹⁷ God chose Israel to be a testimony to the world. His plan was to use that nation to reach the other nations with the truth.

1 Peter 2:7-8: “This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,” and, A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; for they stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

Calvinists believe that this passage teaches that God ordained people to be unbelievers and to stumble over the truth. On the surface it may seem that way, but again they have used poor hermeneutics and exegeses. The Greek grammar and general teaching of the Bible do not support the Reformed position on this passage—that God, before He created, elected people to unbelief and disobedience.

The first portions of the verse appear to be from Isaiah 8:14. The misunderstanding that leads one to a misinterpretation is from the final part of the verse: “whereunto also they were appointed.” This misunderstanding has been created by the translators who have maintained the clauses in their original order. Whereas in English we associate the adjectival phrase with the closest subject, in Greek there is no such rule. In the English translation the phrase “whereunto they were appointed” should be placed so that it modifies the phrase “stumble (trip and fall) at the word,” not the phrase “being disobedient.” Since they would not believe the word and accept that stone, they were appointed to trip and fall over the stone because they refused to recognize that it was a very high quality, God appointed stone—the Son of God.

Because the religious leaders in Jesus’ day were not receptive to the truth and disobeyed the multiple revelations that proved who Jesus was, the consequence of their unbelief was their stumbling on a stone in the path (truths about Jesus) and falling flat on their faces. Anyone persisting in unbelief is destined to stumble, fall, and be severely hurt. The Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest (a moderate Calvinist), in his *Word Studies on 1st Peter*, pages 55-57, affirms this interpretation. The Jewish leaders would not believe Jesus; and because they refused to obey the truth, they were destined to stumble on the Stone—the Lord Jesus Christ and His person, teaching, and ministry. To believe that God previously ordained that some people would be unbelieving and disobedient contradicts the revealed truth about God in the inspired Word as clearly stated in passages like 1st Timothy 2:1-4, where one reads that God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Dr. Wuest translates this passage:

. . . an obstacle stone against which one cuts, and a rock which trips one, even to those who because they are non-persuasible, stumble up against the Word, to which [action of stumbling] they were indeed appointed.
(Accurately copied)

Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace [*χάρις* *cháris*] you have been saved through faith [*πίστις* *pístis*]; and that [*τοῦτο* *τούτο*] not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

This passage, as with any, should be interpreted with the original text in view and within its context. Context means the verses before and after the passage, the book of Ephesians, and eventually the entire Bible. Interpretation would consider the culture and historical background, literary styles and customs, and rules of grammar and syntax. The original Greek text does not support the Reformed interpretation of these verses, which began with Augustine, who taught that faith was a gift of God's grace and the elect are saved because God "elected" them and gives them the faith necessary for salvation, known as the doctrines of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace. In the Greek behind the phrase "it is a gift of God," the words "it is" are supplied by the translator and are not in the original. Salvation is "not of yourselves" but rather a gift from God. Unlike English, Greek has gender: masculine, feminine, and neuter. In the original, the gender of the Greek words translated "grace" and "faith" is *feminine*. The Greek word translated "that" is a demonstrative pronoun, and its gender is *neuter*. Grammatically, since the word "that" is *neuter*, its antecedent cannot be either of the *feminine* words "grace" or "faith." Using these verses as proof texts to support the doctrine that says "faith" is a gift would be a violation of the rules for Greek grammar. The question before us is, "Since that (*touto*) is neuter in gender, then what is the gift of God, since it isn't *grace* (*cháris*) or *faith* (*pístis*)?" Verses 8 through 10 are the conclusion of a paragraph about God's love and what He did for the sinner—salvation. We believe that the neuter pronoun "that" refers back to the general topic of the opening verses which are about salvation (for example note verse 5). Being consistent with the whole of Scripture, this passage teaches that God has graciously supplied a way of salvation for lost humanity. God's gift of salvation is appropriated by the sinner through faith as opposed to works. Salvation is a gift of God's grace that is appropriated by the repentant, believing sinner through personal faith—a simple act of believing the truth. Man cannot save himself through works. Our gracious God did everything necessary to save the sinner. To believe the Gospel is the required response (Romans 4:3) for receiving God's forgiveness and His gift of salvation. There is no scriptural support for the belief that God gives saving faith to His elected ones.

John 6:36-40: But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.

Those of the Reformed position use this passage (verses 37 & 39) as a proof text for their belief that God elected some to salvation and that it is those who were chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world that God the Father gives to Jesus. All through this text, the chapter, the Gospel of John, and the Bible human responsibility is clearly taught and emphasized (v36 "believe," v37 "comes," v40 "beholds" and "believes"). It is apparent that

those given by the Father to the Son are the ones who *come, behold, and believe* the Lord Jesus Christ, His words, person, and works. This understanding of this passage is based on Hermeneutical principles 2, 3, 4, and 6.

Acts 13:48: “When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

About this verse the Greek scholar Dr. Henry Alford states: “to find *in this text* pre-ordination to life asserted, is to force both the word and the context to a meaning which they do not contain.” Alford writes that Calvin found “predestination in the strongest sense”¹¹⁸ in this passage. However, Alford, a Calvinist, disagrees. Since the Jews, who are God’s elect, rejected the Word and lost their divine appointment through their unbelief; it is evident that the Gentiles will gain it through their faith. To deny human responsibility, which this text points to, would be unbiblical doctrine. For me the question before us is, “Who does God want saved?” God tells us the answer in 2nd Peter 3:9 where He declares through the Apostle Peter that He desires “for not any to perish but for all to come to repentance,” and through the Apostle Paul who states that God desires for “all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1st Timothy 2:4). This truth is revealed in Genesis 3:15; and 12:1-3. It is the reason God called forth Israel with the responsibility of being a kingdom of priests to all peoples. God wants people saved. All are appointed unto eternal life, but only those who believe the Word receive that blessing.

Matthew 11:25-30:

At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

From this text, the question before us is, “What is hidden from the wise and revealed to the infants?” Using this passage, Calvinists like to say that God hides truth from the non-elect and reveals it to those the Lord elected to be saved.

I will not go into an extensive analysis on the two groups but believe:

- 1) That the “wise and intelligent” are those who maintain that they are wise and intelligent, the arrogant and stubborn religious leaders who, though very well educated in their faith, opposed and eventually killed their Messiah.

¹¹⁸ Alford, Henry, *The Greek Testament*, volumes 1 and 2 combined, © 1958, Pub. Moody Press, page 153 in vol. 2, emphasis his.

2) That the “infants” are those who are open-minded and have a childlike acceptance of the revealed truth—the humble ones—“Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 18:3)

This, my understanding, comes from the context and a study of other passages.

Previous to this recorded conversation of our Lord, He had pronounced a very harsh condemnation on the cities where He had taught and done miraculous works—signs that gave testimony person and mission. In essence He said that those who had witnessed His ministry and had rejected the evidences were in grave danger. Because of their rejection, He said that they would suffer more severely in the judgment than Sodom. Up to this point Matthew had presented evidences that Jesus was the long-awaited King of Israel who was rejected by the Jewish leadership. They had witnessed undeniable proofs, plus had had the Spirit of God verifying those truths to their hearts and consciences (Matthew 12:31); and yet they refused to believe and had declared that Jesus was working in partnership with Satan. Because of these facts, it is evident that Jesus was not praising His Father for hiding truth from the “wise and intelligent.” The truth had been revealed so strongly and in such a large volume that to deny the Spirit’s testimony through those signs was equal to blasphemy and was declared by the Lord to be an unpardonable sin.

Verse 27 states that Jesus reveals Himself to those He wills. In no way can this be interpreted to communicate that Jesus reveals Himself to just those that God has predetermined to be believers, the “elect,” as the Calvinists would like. Jesus had just condemned Tyre, Sidon, Capernaum, and others for their rejection of Him, the One who had lived among them, taught, and performed many infallible proofs in their midst. He had revealed Himself to lost men who knew the Scriptures, and they rejected the Messiah. In many ways God reveals Himself to the unsaved (Romans 1:18-20). They have a responsibility to respond to that revelation. God does not without truth and people are responsible to God for believing what He reveals (Romans 1:18-20).

Verses 28 through 30 are an invitation. I believe that this invitation is for all to come, and for those “infants,” the ones that are of humble and open hearts to receive the truth, He has promised rest. Those who are high-minded, the know-it-alls, will not know His rest.

“Rest” had a historical significance to the Jews. God had revealed Himself, His faithfulness, love, and power to Israel. However, no sooner had they pledged themselves to the Sinai covenant, they made and worship a golden calf. There was no excuse for their behavior then nor when the incarnate Son of God spoke for God and preformed many signs before the people. In the desert, those unbelieving Jews lost the privilege of “rest” (Psalm 95:8-11). God had promised Israel a rich land with producing fields, houses, towns that they did not build, protection from all forms of harm, a blessed and wealthy life, and an eternal kingdom with God as their King. They had rejected that “rest” and wandered for 40 years until they died in the desert. Because of their blatant disobedience and unbelief, the Jews were dispersed by the Chaldeans and Babylonians and were still suffering the consequences of their sins of

unbelief in the time of Jesus. In 70 AD, the Jews were expelled from their land by the Romans, and until today they remain without that promised “rest.”

I submit that God has hidden this “rest” from the high-minded ones and still reveals it to those who in simple faith, like infants, come to Jesus. God reveals truth, because he desires that “all come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). He surely does not hide salvation truth, as the Calvinists teach. He withholds blessing from those who reject Him, and that is why Jesus was praising His Father.

Romans 9:12-21 (because of length not fully quoted, please read)

¹² it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.” ¹³ Just as it is written, “JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.” ¹⁴ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, “I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION.” ¹⁶ So then it *does not depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.” ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?

This seems to be the Calvinists’ favorite Bible text. Being honest, this chapter presents a challenge to the non-Calvinist. But, proper exegeses changes things; and if this is the only passage they can use to build their theological opinions, they are in serious trouble. For this passage I recommend the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Roman*, by F. Godet, who does a thorough job. What is Paul saying?

Paul’s Letter to the Romans is his treatise on the gospel he preached—justification by faith (Romans 1:16-17). Romans has been proclaimed by theologians of all the ages to be one of the most, if not the most, important book in the New Testament. As we interpret this chapter, to interpret in context we must start with background.

When he wrote, the Apostle had not yet traveled to Rome (1:10-13), but he had evangelized Asia Minor and had been formulating plans to go to Rome on his way to Spain (15:23-24 & 28-29). Therefore, he had not gone to Jerusalem where he was later imprisoned, though that trip was on his itinerary (15:25). Since Paul was arrested in Jerusalem during Pentecost in the spring of 59 AD, it is calculated that he wrote this book in 57 or 58 AD, possibly while he was in Corinth.

Chapter 12 verse 1 is the pivotal point in this thesis. All before this verse is Paul's presentation of the doctrine of justification by faith—his Gospel. Starting with 12:1, he begins his application of the doctrine of Justification by Faith to the Christian life—the practical side of the Gospel. The introduction and theme statement are in chapter 1:1-17, and beginning with 1:18 and going through the end of chapter 11 is Paul's presentation of the gospel—justification by faith alone (see 1:16 and 17).¹¹⁹ The doctrinal section divides into two major parts:

(1) True righteousness is not obtained by human efforts, 1:18 through 3:20.

(2) God's righteousness is imputed to a person through faith, 3:21 through 11:36.

This division would place chapters 9 through 11 in the second part of the doctrinal section. After showing the sinfulness of man and his inability to measure up to the righteous standards of the written and natural law (1:18 through 3:20), in 3:21 through 31, Paul declares the apex of his gospel—justification is totally of God and can only be obtained through faith. In chapter 4, he confirms the biblical soundness of this doctrine with an illustration from the life of Abraham, who was justified by believing God and not by personal behavior. Chapter 5 is the most profound chapter in the Bible. It explains what God did through His Son to obtain righteousness for a lost humanity: The first Adam, as the federal head of the human race, disobeyed God; and through that act he brought sin and death—separation from God—to every one of his descendants (in Adam all have sinned and all die). The Lord Jesus, the second Adam, died for the first as the second Adam or federal head of the human race; and through that act He paid the sin debt of humanity and thereby purchased salvation for each individual born in the family of Adam. Starting in chapter 6 on through 11, Paul answers objections to this doctrine of justification by faith. Picking up from the theme (verses 1:16-17) that states “to the Jew first,” in chapters 9 through 11 Paul answers the Jewish objection to his gospel of justification by faith.

Presumably the Jews were saying, “Paul, you are wrong. We are sons of Abraham. God is obligated to bless us eternally. We are His chosen (elect) people, and because of the covenants, He cannot reject us.” They were making what God promised the nation apply to every individual in that family and were assuming that salvation is guaranteed to all Jews. In his answer, Paul is careful to make a distinction between the nation, a group, and individual member of that group. In chapter 9:1-29, Paul refutes their argument by appealing to the Lord's sovereign right to do as He pleases. He has every right to set Israel aside, as the potter does the lump of clay; which God has done. He also points out that the Lord's choosing of the nation of Israel did not guarantee every individual Jew eternal blessing and salvation as a birthright. In verses 9:30 through chapter 10:21, Paul shows that every individual Jew is a responsible agent before God and each must believe, meaning personally appropriate salvation through faith. In chapter 11, he explains that at a future time God will fulfill His promises to the patriarchs and David, and will pick up that lump of clay that was set

¹¹⁹ Romans 1:16–17, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’”

aside as useless at the time, and restore Israel, represented by a remnant of obedient believers, to a place of favor and usefulness.

The Jews were indeed a privileged people (9:3-5). Though they were commissioned by God, and many times referred to as God's "elect" in the Old Testament, their past history clearly supports Paul's statement: "But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel" (v6). Because of unbelief, a whole generation of Jews died in the desert. Because of their unbelief and disobedience, the Jews were now dispersed throughout the world. As pointed out above, being in the elect-group has never been a guarantee of divine blessing, and this is exactly Paul's point in this section. No one, not even a pedigree Jew born within a family of the "elect," can presume upon God to overlook his lack of faith and obedience. Each and every individual is a responsible agent before the Creator. Paul proceeds with biblical facts to support his argument, citing Ishmael then Esau.¹²⁰ God's mercy chose Isaac, not Ishmael, and Jacob, not Esau. They were chosen to be in the messianic line and to be God's priest to the world; and this selection of God has nothing to do with individual salvation but a commission to serve God before the world. God's mercy bestowed privileges upon them and their children, but it never was a guarantee of personal salvation for them or any one of their descendants. Obedience and faith have been and remain to be essential ingredients for that personal "walk with God" and being awarded salvation. There are no exceptions. God's mercy guaranteed the Messiah-Savior, not the salvation of those who are disobedient. As Godet has pointed out, national blessing and not individual salvation is in view here.¹²¹ In the Old Testament times, individually there were saved and unsaved Gentiles though none of them are part of the elect-group, and there were saved and unsaved Jews who were born into the elect-group. What made the difference was personal faith and obedience, not a divine decree made in eternity past.

In this chapter Paul is showing his Jewish critics that God can do as He pleases, but the true purpose behind all of God's activities is to reveal his mercy (v23). He used Pharaoh, a man with a hard heart, like he did Samson,¹²² the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 20:4-5), Caiaphas (John 11:49-51), and Judas, to carry out His purposes. He did not make them disobedient but used their self-centered evil hearts to show forth His power and grace to individuals in hopes that they would seek and find God.

¹²⁰ F. Godet, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, page 350-351 writes: "As to Esau, let the three following facts be remarked in regard to the *hatred* of which he is the object: 1. In speaking of Jacob and Esau, either as men or nations, neither Genesis nor Malachi nor St. Paul have *eternal salvation* in view; the matter in question is the word δουλεῖν, *to serve*. 2. Esau, though deprived of the promise and an inheritance, nevertheless obtained a blessing and an inheritance for himself and his descendants. 3. The national character inherited from the father of the race is not so impressed on his descendants that they cannot escape it." I agree with Godet that nations are in view here, not individuals; "two nations" were in Rebekah, Genesis 25:23.

¹²¹ As an individual Jacob had a heart for the Lord. Esau gave no evidence to show that God was important to him. The Old Testament says a lot about Esau's descendants (Ezekiel 25:12, Amos 1:11, Obadiah). They hated and continue to hate Israel and want God's chosen people destroyed—a choice the greater portion of the descendants of Edom has made, not one God decreed and imposed upon them.

¹²² Samson is a classic example of how God uses a disobedient person to carry out His purposes (Judges 14:4; 16:1-3). Samson was a saved man (Hebrews 11:32).

Regarding the Potter and the clay, F. Godet wrote,

For the honor or dishonor to which God turns him in the execution of His work is not independent, as appears from this example, of the attitude taken by man in relation to God. The work of the skillful potter is not the emblem of an arbitrary use of strength; but, on the contrary, of a deliberate and intelligent employment of the matter at his disposal.¹²³

In Paul's illustration, the potter set aside a lump of clay that was not performing well and picked up another to shape it for His purpose. We believe that is the Church, the Body of Christ on earth. I'm familiar with clay. Leaving it soak a little longer will make it pliable. Later it will be useful in the hand of the Potter. Paul gave several examples of God setting aside decedents of Abraham. This does not mean they were not chosen by God to be saved. They were not appropriate for the Potter's plans and use. God has set Israel aside. He has not rejected the sons of Jacob. Because they were not useful, God has set them aside to soak a while. Soon He will again pick up that piece of clay and then it will do the Potter's will. That's how Paul closes this section (chapter 11).

In case anyone wishes to imply that this chapter from Paul is teaching that God, when laying out His plans for the human race, arbitrarily elected some to salvation and others to damnation, he/she is missing the point of the chapter and the truth of the book and the gospel it presents. In verses 9:30 through 33, all of chapter 10, and really throughout this treatise on justification by faith, Paul makes it very clear that man is a responsible agent with a free-will and that God saves those who believe and obey. Chapter 9, when properly interpreted, does not support Calvinism *but refutes it*.

Romans 11:5–7,

⁵ In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. ⁷ What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened;

I will not deal with this passage extensively. The gracious choice-ones are clearly those who believed and obeyed. Others had hard hearts and would not. In verse 7 the words "who were" are supplied by the translator. Israel was seeking salvation and acceptance through works, not like their father Abram—by faithful obedience. The "choice-ones" did, because they followed in his example.

John 10:29

My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

This verse must be understood within its context, which is chapters 7 through 10, but especially chapters 9 and 10. Reading the context one can see the conflict between the

¹²³ Godet, F., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, page 358. He gives an excellent explanation of this chapter, one that a Calvinist avoids. He is also good on chapter 5.

religious leaders and Jesus. Those leaders are the hired hands that have no concern for the sheep. They are elitists, interested in what will add to their positions and wealth. The context makes it clear that the true sheep of God are those who are not like those leaders, do not follow them or believe them. They follow Jesus and obey His words. These are those that God has given to Jesus. These chapters present personal responsibility and faith. They do not present the Calvinistic belief in divine election where people are pre-chosen to eternal bliss or eternal damnation and forced by God to believe.

To deal with every passage the Calvinists bend into conformity with their belief system would be a book in itself. I have sorted out the major ones that I have been presented during their debates with me or from their writings.

Conclusion

To deny the truth that God works in history would be unscriptural. Acts 17:26-28 makes it very clear that God is very active in human history, determining where people live and for how long; but Paul also states the motive of the Creator in all of His involvement with mankind: It is so that people everywhere “would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” God created man in His own image. That means that man is special, really the apex of His creation. God loves every person without respect of persons, and desires for all come to the knowledge of the truth, to true repentance, and to faith in His Son as Savior. The Creator displayed His love through the sacrifice of His Son and has done everything legally possible to bring salvation to every son and daughter of Adam. If the created does not respond positively to the call of his Creator in repentance from sin unto salvation through faith, he will stand before his Maker on judgment day “without excuse.” Man is a morally responsible agent possessing the right of choice—a free-will.

This is the foundational issue: Does man possess free-will? The Apostles taught it and the men they trained and those following them did—the church fathers. Nowhere in the early writings is fatalism upheld. These errors in doctrine were refuted by the Church Fathers.

Giving to man the freedom of choice does not diminish the power and authority of God. On the contrary it strengthens it. The God of the Calvinists must be in full control in order to be sovereign.¹²⁴ He rules by decrees. In reality, when the Creator gave the angels and man freedom of will this was no problem to God because He is all knowing and all powerful. *The God of the Bible is so powerful that He can set man and angels free and still accomplish His purposes.* This truth goes far beyond the English word “sovereign” and the Calvinistic theology about God. These truths about God go beyond our human ability to understand. A sovereign king does not control every action and person within his reign, but God does even while giving each individual the freedom of choice. Many times the Lord has used the freedom of choice given to the created to accomplish His purposes. The cross is a prime example. Satan, who

¹²⁴ The word “sovereign” as applied to God never appears in the original Scriptures. His sovereignty is implied through the fact that He is the Creator of all things and the King of the universe, but our English word is weak in describing the power and authority of God. This is a human term used of nations and kings, and it never implies total control as Calvinists seems to apply with that word.

does not want people saved, through inspiring man to murder the Messiah, accomplished the purpose of God in the redemption of lost humanity. True love allows freedom of choice. Puppet love isn't love but slavery. Calvinism doesn't understand love.

Some will declare that they are four or three-point Calvinists.¹²⁵ They have misunderstood Reformed theology. One who does understand Reformed Theology will affirm that the five points stand as one irreducible unit, and no point can be separated from the 5-pack. Calvinism is a philosophical system that is brought to the Bible in an effort to find support therein. After all wasn't one of their proclamations *Sola Scriptura*? With that banner one would never admit that he is teaching philosophical deductions. Its proponents distort the Scriptures to make them fit their beliefs. Calvinism is a deduced theology and not the product of inductive Bible interpretation. (Dr. Olson's point)

There was one common thread woven into hermeneutics of Philo, Clement, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine. They all believed that there is a deeper, more spiritual meaning behind the literal sense of the text of Scripture that must be uncovered by the interpreter, and that is the true message of the Bible. These men bought into and brought to the Church a hermeneutics of spiritualization as acceptable Bible interpretation. They taught that only the educated, "spiritual" leadership of the church is qualified to interpret the Bible. This approach led to covenant theology (based upon decrees the Bible never mentions), substitution theology (the church replaces Israel or amillennialism), an elevated leadership or hierarchy in the church (laity versus piety), a belief that baptism removes original sin and is a sign of the covenant causing the baptism of infants to replace believer's baptism, and the removal of the Bible from the hands of the common man enslaving the commoner to ignorance of what the Bible really teaches. Should not a biblical understand of Total Depravity automatically make such a practice wrong—a doctrine from hell? Thank God for men like Tyndale and Wycliffe.

Five-point Calvinism originated out of this background and became church dogma through the teachings and writings of Augustine and later those of John Calvin and other Reformers. Those Reformers carried Augustinianism with them into the protestant denominations they founded. This entire theological system has its foundation in platonic philosophy and a

¹²⁵ See *Chosen But Free* by Norman Geisler, © 1999-2001, Bethany Press

This is one of the better books on what its author rightly calls "extreme Calvinism." Dr. Geisler uses the word "extreme" because he believes that the five-point Calvinists go beyond Calvin's own teachings and beliefs. His outline of the subject is well organized and thorough, and his footnotes, which reference other chapters and appendixes, tie the work together. Some of the material in the appendixes I have not found in other works. However, I feel that Dr. Geisler ignores the context and proper exegesis of some passages that he either quotes or makes reference to and that by doing so he loses some strong support for his own arguments. Briefly stated, on page 18 and elsewhere Dr. Geisler cites 1 Peter 2:8. Elsewhere he cites passages like Ephesians 1:4 and 11. But, he fails to explain that these passages and similar Scriptures are speaking of those who have believed and are sons of God. In making these observations, I do not condemn the work, but I do feel that the work would have been strengthened had such verses been thoroughly expounded. God's Word clearly teaches that God is in full control, that He knows the end from the beginning, and that the angels and man were created as free moral agents, responsible before their Creator for their decisions and actions. I feel that we must admit that a justification of these three truths is beyond our ability and understanding as mortals. Dr. Geisler does a superb job in presenting them and in showing how both the extreme Calvinist and the Arminian have overemphasized one of these biblical truths to the detriment of others. In 1997 and 1998, Dr. Geisler spoke twice on this subject at Bayside Community Church, Tampa, FL. These are excellent. Please contact Phillip Mosher if you'd like CD copies (\$5 each plus S/H).

hermeneutics that permits the allegorizing of the Scriptures. This was and is the teaching of Catholicism, and close examination will reveal that Catholic theology and Reformed theology are very close to each other.

An ex-Calvinist, Dr. Olson has made the following observation:

When people ask me, “Why do Muslim extremists do the things they do, like terrorism, for example?” my response is that the root is in their defective view of the character of God. Indeed, foundational to our ethics is our concept of the character of God. How could the inquisitors in Spain torture people in the name of Christ? They justified the inquisition by quotation from Augustine’s writings in which God is portrayed as a coercive God. Such a concept of God encouraged Augustine to persecute the Donatists.¹²⁶

As mentioned earlier, the Donatists were among the early fathers of the Baptist movement. Augustine opposed them because they taught free-will, rejected sacramental theology, and a hierarchal church government. Since the Baptist movement never cooperated with the Catholic Church, its followers and churches were persecuted by both the Catholics and the Reformers. Such is rooted in their concept of God. Knowing these things, I have difficulty understanding why Baptists today are buying into Calvinism. Calvin, Zwingli, and Luther sanctioned the expulsion, torture, and killing of the Anabaptist. Though those reformers may have been saved, their works speak to their ignorance and biases. And yet, Baptists like Calvinism?

Calvinism is an unbiblical cancer. It is a deductive, philosophical belief system that is carried to the Bible, not drawn from it inductively. Calvinism presents a distorted view of God, His sovereignty, mercy, grace, justice, and love. Their god is a narcissistical egotist. Usually Calvinists are not evangelistic (for some 200 years the Reformed Churches were not interested in missions). By saying these things, it is not my intent to hint or imply that Calvinists are unsaved. They do not have a scripturally based theology when it comes to some of God’s attributes, His plan of salvation, and His purpose for man, whom He created in His image for fellowship—not for hell.

Back in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Protestant leaders had all been Catholics, trained Catholic dogma in their homes, culture, and schools. This theology and bias they carried with them when the “mother church” rejected them and placed death sentences upon their heads. The Reformers did the same to those with whom they disagreed—the various groups of Anabaptists in their regions. The Reformers expelled them from their communities, tortured them, burned them at the stake, drowned them, etc.

Have we forgotten that Baptists are not Protestants? Their history goes back to Pentecost with roots in the synagogue system—autonomous Jewish houses of education and worship with two officers: elders and deacons. History reveals that we Baptists have suffered persecution throughout most of church history. Baptists were persecuted by those who formed the Catholic Church, then by the Catholic Church, and later by the Reformers.

¹²⁶ Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation*, Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Knolls, NJ, © 2002, page 68.

Briefly I have pointed out doctrinal error and biblical and historical truth. I am not calling those who practice and teach these errors “heretics,” though Augustinianism is not biblical. It was not taught by the Church Fathers or accepted by those churches we’d class as the ancestors of the Baptists. Over the past four or so hundred years, there are some who call themselves “Baptists”, who are practicing 5-point Calvinists — such are not of the traditional Baptist faith. By embracing Reformed doctrines, those 5-point Baptists are spitting in the faces of the historical Baptists who died for their faith rather than compromise. Those ancestors to true Baptists ¹²⁷ were willing to die for the truth, many at the hands of the Reformers. With those Baptists I will take my stand.

Recommendations:

The book by Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died, A case for Unlimited Atonement*, Regular Baptist Press, © 1967. It all starts with God. Strong Calvinists will declare that all five points are tied together, that there is no such thing as a four or three-point Calvinist. Once one gets a good grasp of the extent of Christ’s death, as taught in the Bible, all of the other points of Calvinism crumble.

The book by Laurence M. Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, Vance Publishing, © 1991, 1999, is a very thorough treatment of Calvinism—highly recommended.

Books by C. Gordon Olson: *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation*, Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Knolls, NJ, © 2002. Dr. Olson was a missionary in Pakistan and was once a 5-point Calvinist. Dr. Olson uses very sound hermeneutics and exegesis. This book promotes the inductive approach to the Bible as one would form his theology. Dr. Olson believes that extreme Calvinists and Arminians approach the Bible deductively when forming their theologies. The author does an excellent job on the sovereignty of God in chapter 3, which deserves every Bible student’s attention.

And, *Getting the Gospel Right, a Balanced view of Salvation*, Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Knolls, NJ, © 2005. This book is a revised paperback edition of the above.

The book by Dave Hunt, *What Love Is This? Calvinism’s Misrepresentation of God*, was printed in 2002, long after I wrote the original text on this topic in Brazilian Portuguese. Mr. Hunt has done an excellent job, and I highly recommend his book. Though quite negative in tone, it will strengthen this brief treatment of Calvinism, giving the reader much historical background and sound biblical teaching.

The book by George Bryson, *The Dark Side of Calvinism, The Calvinist Caste System*, © 2004, published by Calvary Chapel Publishing. The title tells it all. This is a very thorough work with extensive quotes, and therein are proofs that Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. is not always the best Bible expositor.

¹²⁷ E.g. Montanists, Donatists, Ana-Baptists, Arnoldists, Waldenes, Lollards, Mennonites, Huguenots, etc.; for church history, *A History of Christianity*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette, is recommended.

An excellent book on Church history is *A History of Christianity*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette, © 1953 by Harper & Row, out of print but available used.

Philip Schaff's works on the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* contains many of the writings of the Church Fathers and is important to this subject. Can be obtained in PDF.

The Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, by Frederick L. Godet, written and translated in the late 1800s and published by Zondervan in their Classic Commentary Library in 1956, is a critical commentary on Romans that deals with the original Greek and syntax. Can be obtained in PDF.

