

# Calvinism — Augustine to Reformed Theology

By Rev. Phillip D. Mosher

**He [God] made from one man every nation<sup>1</sup> 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)<sup>2</sup> Note the purpose behind God's actions.

**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 favoritism<sup>3</sup> with God.** Romans 2:11<sup>4</sup> (HCSB<sup>5</sup>)

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

## Introduction

While in Brazil in the mid-1990s, my wife and I decided to take a break and to travel 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 sponsors<sup>6</sup> brought in two pastors from the United States to teach those national leaders. One of the two speakers was specifically chosen to teach Calvinism—not a pre-announced theme. During those three days this American pastor forcefully taught five-point Calvinism as biblical. True to form, his first message was on the total depravity of man. I have read several books by Calvinists and over the years have debated these doctrines with strong Calvinists, so I was not surprised when this speaker painted man so desperately wicked that it would make one afraid of almost everyone and much more so to meet anyone in a dark alley. Could I even trust my wife? Needless to say, there was little that speaker presented that I found to be biblically sound. All was philosophical theories based on half-truths and distortions. He forced his belief system on the Bible rather than letting the Bible stand independently. I felt badly for those national pastors who were being indoctrinated by an

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<sup>1</sup> Greek: ἔθνος [*ethnos*] = generally designates a non-Jewish nation, peoples, multitude, race

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes have been taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

<sup>3</sup> 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)

<sup>4</sup> See also: Deut. 16:19; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chr. 19:7; Job 34:19; Prov. 24:23; Matt. 22:16; Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25; 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> Scripture quotes marked HCSB have been taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

<sup>6</sup> Fiel, a Christian publisher in Brazil

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.<sup>7</sup>

Today some form of Calvinism can be found in most protestant and many Baptist churches, though it is associated with the churches that emerged from the Reformation.<sup>8</sup> The name given to this doctrinal system comes from a French theologian, John Calvin (Jean Calvin or Jehan Cauvin, born in France, July 10, 1509, died at Geneva, May 27, 1564.), who was a lawyer, not an ordained priest or monk of the Roman Catholic Church, who after leaving the Catholic Church founded a state church in Geneva, Switzerland. To assign Calvin’s name to this system of theology, however, is an injustice, because what is commonly referred to as Calvinism comes from the Catholic Church and that church’s primary theologian, Augustine of Hippo (354-430). It would have been more fitting to have titled this belief system “Augustinianism”.<sup>9</sup> The theology that we are calling “Calvinism” today comes from Augustine of Hippo and from him into the belief system of the Catholic Church, and over a millennium later from Catholicism through the Reformers (Protestants) to become the belief system of the Reformed Churches. In 1646, after the Counsel of Dort, it was put into writing where it is preserved in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

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 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:2; but Calvin’s commentary does not support this view on his belief about the extent of the atonement.<sup>10</sup> John Calvin did believe in a limitation on the extent of the benefit from the death of the Son of God to humanity, that is to say that he believed the Messiah’s death was only for those whom God had pre-chosen (elected) to salvation. 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. (To be covered later.)

One of the Baptist Distinctives<sup>11</sup> 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 have failed to grasp the true significance thereof. The theological system that Augustine brought into the Catholic Church is founded upon Platonic philosophy. Philosophy’s objective is to discover what is good and just through the powers of human reason. For example, major philosophers, without the Scriptures but through the powers of reason, have concluded that there is a God and that nature and the human soul teach us to revere Him and to love our fellow man.<sup>12</sup> Since reason as well as the Scriptures

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<sup>7</sup> James 3:1 “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.”

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> Because this system of belief is commonly referred to as “Calvinism,” that title is used herein.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin on: 1<sup>st</sup> 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.)

<sup>11</sup> See “Baptist Distinctives” (page 148) in the chapter titled “Doctrine of the Church”.

<sup>12</sup> 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

(and Augustine) reveal the truths that God is eternal and all knowing, the eternal “I AM” Who knows all things, past, present, and future, the conclusion then must be 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 all must transpire according to that foreknowledge. In other words, to foreknow means to ordain or decree. This line of philosophical reasoning is foundational to Calvinism. This is platonic thought expressed through Augustine; and it has impacted Catholic theology and how those in the Reformed camp have interpreted Bible passages up until today. Humanity is bound to time, space, and the material. For us mere mortals to grasp eternity and truly understand the God who is all knowing would take far more brain capacity than the Creator has imparted unto man, who is prisoner to a material world, space, and time. It is important to always remember that the Bible is an accommodation of divine truth to the human mind. Therein the eternal Spirit is communicating with mortal man at his level. In this study, we will do our best at interpreting the biblical text and to present what It declares to the sons of Adam, who were created in the image of God and live within the disciplines of time, space, and matter. We will avoid philosophizing to determine truth.

Experience has taught me that five-point Calvinists, those holding strongly to the TULIP (to be explained), are not easily dissuaded from their views. In writing on this subject, the objective is to assist the seeker of truth, not to convert the ardent followers of Augustinianism, Catholicism, Reformism, and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

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.<sup>13</sup> In this study, a biblical definition of *predestination* will be presented; and we will attempt 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 brought Augustinianism to the forefront in the church.

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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.

<sup>13</sup> 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<sup>14</sup> and 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.

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 inspired Word. For Origen that spiritual sense, found through the allegorical method of Bible interpretation, 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 of the cave. Besides 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 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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).

<sup>15</sup> *A History of Christianity*, by Kenneth Scott Latourette, p146, © 1953, Harper & Row Pub.

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 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."<sup>16</sup> "Allegorical interpretation became a deep part of Philo's exegetical and hermeneutical understanding of the law of Moses."<sup>17</sup> In Philo, "we encounter the speculative cosmological idea that the world of tangible, earthly things was created as a copy of its prototype."<sup>18</sup> This approach comes 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 belief system.

Following in the traditions of Philo, in his 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 ideas of men.

Augustine was first a student, follower, and teacher of Platonic philosophy (called "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 (both Roman and Greek Orthodox) which continued through the centuries into the Reformation period, giving us what is often called "Calvinism" today. Augustine believed in divine "predestination" (meaning that God has predetermined

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<sup>16</sup> From an electronic edition of the *Holman Bible Handbook*, p. 535, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992)

<sup>17</sup> From an electronic edition of *The Works of Philo : Complete and Unabridged*, Charles Duke Yonge, (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996)

<sup>18</sup> From an electronic edition of the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, by Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 3, p375-76 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990)

everything), what I would call “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. Just as Neo-Platonism is warmed over Platonic philosophy, Reformed Theology is warmed over Catholic Theology.

Augustine had many conflicts with the Donatists, partners in the historical line of the Baptists, and sought to get Roman laws against them because of their disagreement with his teachings and practices—within this branch of Christianity a common trend.

Plato reasoned that the material world was a mere shadow or representation of the spiritual, the spiritual being much better and very beautiful. It is the place of light and of the enlightened.<sup>19</sup> Being totally submerged in Greek philosophy, Philo, a devout Jew, concluded that the Scriptures should be allegorized and thereby conform 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 and applying a spiritual sense to the Scriptures) became prominent in the Catholic Church and has remained dominant throughout the church since Augustine.<sup>20</sup> 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 though that of Calvin, those opposed to this belief system with its hermeneutics of allegorizing have been the victims of the wrath of mainline Christianity. 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 (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—“You’re an Arminian!”—they’ll say. 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 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:1-2,

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<sup>19</sup> 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 (simple, less educated group).

<sup>20</sup> 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)

making “world” mean “the saved” or “the elect” (e.g. see footnote # 10 above). These Calvinistic theologians are imposing a belief system upon Holy Writ that is rooted in Platonic philosophy and making the Word of God conform to philosophically derived conclusions.

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)

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. The church was soon to be immersed in the philosophically derived doctrines of men.

## **Calvinism, the belief system**

Reformed Theology is Catholic Theology with a different cover. 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 thing.

“Robust dialogue starts when people go in with open minds. They’re not trapped by preconceptions or armed with a private agenda.”<sup>21</sup> 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. May God protect us all from that fallacy 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); and may He give us the humility to admit that we do not understand some biblical texts or possess all knowledge.

There is a tendency to polarize and place theologians in camps. Calvinists label all who disagree with their theology as “Arminians.” Like Arminius, 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.<sup>22</sup> One has even told me that I was blaspheming.

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<sup>21</sup> Bossidy, Larry, and Charan, Ram, *Execution: the Discipline of Getting Things Done*, Crown Business, © 2002, pages 102-103

<sup>22</sup> 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

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."<sup>23</sup> 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,<sup>24</sup> 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 Reformed 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 *Institutes*, Calvin quotes extensively from Augustine and in my opinion treats his writings as equally authoritative with the Scriptures.

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 Platonism. This is why the Reformers continued to baptize infants,<sup>25</sup> administered the Sacraments,<sup>26</sup> established

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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. 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 at the close of this chapter.

<sup>23</sup> John Walvoord in *Amillennialism from Augustine to Modern Times*, in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 106, © 1949

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> Catholic theology teaches a form of baptismal regeneration. Augustine taught that baptism removes original sin. This is why he was for infant baptism. Baptism opens the doors of grace so the child can be saved.

<sup>26</sup> 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

churches with hierarchal governments,<sup>27</sup> held to an eschatology of substitution in which the church replaces Israel, commonly called “amillennialism,”<sup>28</sup> promoted covenant theology,<sup>29</sup> etc. The Reformers were Catholics to the core. Their area of strength was a return to the Scriptures as the sole authority (they did not leave the hermeneutics of the church and still allegorized), 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 received by grace through faith alone. For example, Martin Luther<sup>30</sup> 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, he had difficulty forsaking that 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 Lord is present with the elements—in his theology consubstantiation replaced his long-time held belief in transubstantiation.<sup>31</sup>

The theology of the Roman Catholic Church is fatalistic—“What will be, will be.” This has its foundation in Augustinian theology, and John Calvin carried those beliefs with him into his ministry and *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. His emphasis was on the sovereignty of God, and his 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 would be saved, He gives each person in the elect-group the faith and ability that is so essential for personally receiving the gift of God’s grace.<sup>32</sup> To Calvin total depravity meant that man

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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.

<sup>27</sup> 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).

<sup>28</sup> 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, the Pope being His vicar, the earthly representative of Jesus Christ. In this capacity, the Pope is infallible.

<sup>29</sup> 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 the section on philosophy above.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> We believe that the Lord’s Table is a memorial of our Lord’s 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.”

<sup>32</sup> 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

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; therefore he is unable to resist believing.

It is difficult to understand why John Calvin and his system of theology are praised when so much of what he taught and did <sup>33</sup> is scripturally incorrect, revealing improper hermeneutics and religious intolerance. 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 the five-points of Calvinism (TULIP)? As a Baptist, I have even more difficulty understanding why some Baptist pastors, groups, and schools embrace and teach as biblical the TULIP. Calvin, Knox, Zwingli, and Luther all persecuted the Baptists, martyring those they could, burning many at the stake. John 16:2<sup>34</sup> 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 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), a pastor in Holland who had studied under Calvin but rejected his teachings. Arminius was a humble Biblicist. The Dutch Reformed Church in Holland maintained a very strong influence over the state and was supported by government taxes. In 1618 through 1619 the church leaders 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

<b>The Five Articles of the Remonstrants</b>	<b>The Five Articles of the Synod of Dort</b>
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 by forbidding the Remonstrants from teaching. Their pastors were removed from their pulpits, and some were expelled from the land while others fled. Some were martyred.

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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.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> “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.”

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 work on their behalf. For the Calvinist, faith is a gift from God. The elect cannot resist His call. 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 for 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.<sup>35</sup>)

These five tenets are philosophical—not truly biblical. They 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. When one truly comes to an understanding of Calvinism, he knows that this is an unacceptable position. A true Calvinist must believe 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 with their belief in the total depravity of man—as they define it. They teach that since man is totally depraved—*totally unable* to make good choices and *totally unable* to perform good deeds—it becomes obvious that he cannot do anything to merit God’s favor or even to seek the truth, much less believe it. This is *total inability*. Therefore, in an act of merciful love, God elected some to receive His favor. This is called “grace”; and it finds its foundation in their belief in an imagined covenant of grace that they maintain was in vogue before God created man. Because God elected the redeemed—predetermined who would be saved—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, God gives the faith necessary for salvation to those He has chosen to be saved. The elected ones have no choice in the matter. For the Calvinist, free-will does not exist and is not biblical. I have had Calvinists tell me that to invite someone to repent and believe is “heresy” and

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<sup>35</sup> 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.

“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 glorifying Him.<sup>36</sup>

Though I believe man is a depraved sinner, I do not accept the Calvinists’ definition of total depravity, meaning *total inability*. Rather than beginning with man, a good theology starts with God, His love,<sup>37</sup> and His forgiveness.

After the Synod of Dort the *Westminster Confession of Faith* was produced by the Reformists. This is the official doctrinal statement of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. In Chapter III “Of God’s Eternal Decree,”<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup>
- 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.<sup>40</sup>
- III. By the decree of God, <sup>41</sup> for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated<sup>42</sup> unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.
- 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,<sup>43</sup> 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

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<sup>36</sup> 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 humble heart, not one that is forced to bow the knee. The Bible presents a God of love who 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 to bring many 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.*

<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> Obtained from the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics at <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html>. This quote is unaltered.

<sup>39</sup> Though this statement does not attribute sin to God, some Calvinists do make God the author of sin.

<sup>40</sup> As shall be noted later, Calvinists do not believe that God “foresaw” but that he “foreordained.”

<sup>41</sup> Though Calvinists say that God “decreed,” they offer no Scriptural support for these decrees.

<sup>42</sup> Calvinist use the terms: predestine, foreordain, and elect interchangeably. Their usage of these terms has no foundation in Scripture.

<sup>43</sup> Compare this statement with Ezekiel 18:23 & 32, 33:11; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:4; and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9.

the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.<sup>44</sup>

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 of works and of grace that would at first seem 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 from the philosophical reasoning of men. The followers of Augustine have constructed a theology upon an unscriptural foundation that distorts biblical doctrine and the very nature of God.

## Hermeneutics <sup>45</sup>

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 accommodation <sup>46</sup> 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 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.

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<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> *Hermeneutics* is the science of Bible interpretation. What is presented here is an abbreviated version of the chapter at the beginning of this book.

<sup>46</sup> 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.

**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

As quoted above in Article VIII of the *Westminster Confession*, Calvinists refer to their doctrine of divine election as "predestination." In the Bible, predestination and election are *not* synonyms. Predestination is a New Testament doctrine. The word does 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.<sup>47</sup>

The verb "predestine" is a translation of the Greek word προορίζω (*proorizo*). It occurs six times in five New Testament passages.<sup>48</sup> 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;

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<sup>47</sup> See point III in the 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.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 4:28; Romans 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 1:5, 11, and πρόγνωσις (*prognosis*) is used in 1 Peter 1:2 and Acts 2:23.

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”<sup>49</sup> is a translation of προγινώσκω (*proginōskō*)<sup>50</sup> in the Greek. It occurs five times in four New Testament passages,<sup>51</sup> and 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 the believer in Jesus. He predetermined that true believers in His power to save would be forever blessed along with God’s Son.<sup>52</sup> Based on what the New Testament teaches, I propose the following definition:

***Predestination*** is a gracious and loving act of God, Who in eternity past determined that the redeemed, those He foreknew would repent of their sins and appropriate the salvation-offer, would be transformed into the image of His Son, the Messiah Jesus, that they would be made blameless before Him and would become sons of God and eternal heirs with all the privileges of sons.

To suggest that the above quoted passages teach that God predetermined who would be saved would be to apply a meaning to this Greek word and these verses that simply is not

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<sup>49</sup> 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 say 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. 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.

<sup>50</sup> The English word “prognosis” comes from this Greek word. A prognosis is a doctor’s prediction based on certain known facts.

<sup>51</sup> Acts 26:5; Romans 8:29; 11:2; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:20; and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:17

<sup>52</sup> 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!

there and one that would conflict with the plain teaching of the whole of Scripture—violating hermeneutical principles number 6, 8, and 3.

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

## Election<sup>53</sup>

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,<sup>54</sup> etc. Exceptions would be in reference to the Christ,<sup>55</sup> 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.”<sup>56</sup> A study of the uses of this word in the Bible reveals that it has never been used of an individual in the way that Calvinists are: that the elect are those whom God pre-chose to be blessed with salvation.

The Hebrew word for “elect” is from **בָּחַר** (*bachar*), which occurs 177 times in the Old Testament.<sup>57</sup> 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* primarily refers 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 of being a nation of priests to the rest of humanity, not a choosing to a place of special favor before God that guarantees them salvation.

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**

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<sup>53</sup> 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.mediatheology.org/uploads/Astounding\\_Discoveries\\_on\\_Election.pdf](http://www.mediatheology.org/uploads/Astounding_Discoveries_on_Election.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> 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.

<sup>55</sup> Luke 9:35 (“My choice one”); 1st Peter 2:4 (choice, precious) & 6 (a choice, a precious cornerstone)

<sup>56</sup> Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, © 2002, pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar, NJ, page 179

<sup>57</sup> Examples: Deuteronomy 4:37; 2 Samuel 21:6; 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 16:13; Psalm 105:6 & 43; 106:5 & 23; Isaiah 42:1; 43:20; 45:4; 65:9, 15 & 22

**constitutes the basic relationship between God and his people**, but to denote that which results from this basic relationship. (Bold done by Olson.)<sup>58</sup>

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.<sup>59</sup> 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), never guaranteed an individual Israelite an eternal position of favor, forgiveness of sins and salvation, and eternal blessing with God.<sup>60</sup> 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* starting on page 196 and from Calvinists.)

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; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:4; 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5:21; 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:1; 2:4, 6, 9; 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:10; and 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 obedience on the part of each individual is always a requirement for the obtaining of God’s eternal favor.

In his thorough study on these Hebrew and Greek words, C. 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

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<sup>58</sup> 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

<sup>59</sup> Psalm 95:8-11 & Hebrews 3:16-19

<sup>60</sup> 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*.

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.<sup>61</sup>

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].”<sup>62</sup>

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 blessing. This word indicates *an appointment to a responsibility* and never to a position of favor.

In the Old Testament, Israel is called God’s “chosen” (“choice-ones”<sup>63</sup>, really His commissioned-ones). God’s purpose was for that group of people, the Israelites, to be a kingdom of priests to all nations.<sup>64</sup> 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 individuals

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<sup>61</sup> 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/>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, © 2002, pub. Global Gospel Ministries, Cedar, NJ, see footnote # 53 above.

<sup>64</sup> 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.

are “elected” to salvation as Calvinism maintains. (In this chapter I have quoted from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and from Calvinists providing ample evidence to this system of belief.)

Calvinism’s doctrine of “unconditional election” does not come from the Bible. It comes from philosophical reasoning. They are analyzing truths about God who is pure Spirit, eternal, all knowing, all powerful, etc., and through their reasoning abilities are making the Bible’s message, which is written to humanity within the confines of space, time, and matter, 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 a divine 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 are agreeing 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, to cause him to repent, and to bring him to faith, obedience, and salvation in the Savior. This was the conclusion of the Apostle Paul as stated in his sermon in Athens.<sup>65</sup> Often man is unwilling to yield to God and seems blind in his disobedience and inadequacies. We believe that the Bible teaches that the Creator has given man the right, responsibility, and ability to choose 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 a saving faith in Him. The Lord used Pharaoh, a man with a very hard heart toward God,<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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; but through the captives from Israel, God was made known to the Babylonians.

The fact that God elected<sup>68</sup> is clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Out of a pagan, idolatrous world the Lord called forth Abram<sup>69</sup> to be the father of His chosen/commissioned people.<sup>70</sup> 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 (2<sup>nd</sup> 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

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<sup>65</sup> 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.

<sup>66</sup> Exodus 3:19, God often uses the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm. 76:10).

<sup>67</sup> 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.”

<sup>68</sup> Used as defined above.

<sup>69</sup> Genesis 12:1-3, compared with Joshua 24:2-3

<sup>70</sup> 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.

eternal purpose in view. The Lord's intervening processes always have the ultimate goal of bringing salvation to the lost the world over.<sup>71</sup> 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.<sup>72</sup>

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?<sup>73</sup> In other words, God decided that His favor would be extended to just a small number<sup>74</sup> 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?<sup>75</sup> 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:

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<sup>71</sup> 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!

<sup>72</sup> This truth will be developed later.

<sup>73</sup> 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.

<sup>74</sup> 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 a desire to follow and obey His will.

<sup>75</sup> I am not denying that our sovereign 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 sovereign 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), but that 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.

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 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. 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 1 Timothy 2:4, 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 same author in Ephesians wrote that 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, page 198).

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.<sup>76</sup>

When writing about election, Peter ties the Lord's elective action to the foreknowledge of the Creator.<sup>77</sup> 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, which God foresaw and knew from eternity past, are called His chosen ones. Election is normally used of a group, not individuals; and it involves an appointment to a task—not privilege. While in this material life, they are to love, obey, and serve God and to be His witnesses. The eternal destiny of those saved persons is to realize a position of sons and coheirship with the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

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 to 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.

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 responsible agent. Before He created, God knew what each individual would do while on Planet Earth. In order to complete His objectives, God does not need 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:

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<sup>76</sup> 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 in the Holy Scriptures.

<sup>77</sup> *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 any thing 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.

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 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.<sup>78</sup>

## 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 to be a paraphrase based on the Septuagint. Neither of the Old Testament texts contains the phrase: “no one seeks God” (ἐκζητέω--seek).

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] 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 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:10, we conclude that “Paul is not referring to an indifferent seeking, but a ‘diligent seeking’ for God.”<sup>79</sup> The original says that God looked to see if there might be “one who is wise”, meaning a person with sharpened mental tools, any who were making an effort 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?

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 from His observation of humankind. He is not making or stating a theological declaration, nor is Paul in quoting this passage to imply that man can’t. The 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 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, to seek a relationship with his Maker. From our

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> Olson, C. Gordon in *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism*, p 102

brief walk on Planet Earth, I believe we would 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 a *total inability* to seek the truth. 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.

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)

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 (Romans 3:23; Hebrews 11:6), but they are good. We see people every day making righteous, moral, humane decisions; 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, had painted a distorted view of humanity. The Bible teaches that man cannot measure up to the requirements of the law. He comes up short and is unable to save himself; but he can make good choices. The Calvinists' doctrine of total depravity is unscriptural and falls short of reality.

What about God seekers? Does man diligently seek God? I would have to say that experience has taught me that man does not seek God, but this is different from saying that "man cannot seek God." 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. (God's purposes are to stimulate man into the mode of seeking the Savior God.)

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 should cause him to seek. This passage indicates that he is able to make a move toward truth and the God of nature. See Psalm 19.)

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 uneducated and spiritually ignorant gentiles reveals that they possess an inner knowledge of good moral values and are able to act upon that knowledge. They were

performing better than some of the spiritually educated Jews, who were and are God's choice-ones and 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.

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.

2 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 for Bethel . . ."

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 place a heavy responsibility upon man's own 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 so 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 doing? If a parent were to command his ten-year-old son to fly, and if he did not fly, spank and lock him in a dark closet, we would call this "child abuse"; but for the Calvinist, God does the same thing to people all over the world and says it is for "God's Glory." The god of the Calvinist is cruel and their theology is uncompassionate nonsense. Though man is a sinner, he still retains the ability to perform just acts and to seek the truth and his Creator. God is not cruel but very patient and loving. He has promised to reward those who seek Him.

## Human Responsibility

While on furlough and at the University of Oklahoma in Norman in 1972, I spent the summer with at least five very dogmatic 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 the plan. They believed that God created sin; 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—all was predetermined. Yes, God is sovereign and can do as He pleases, but is that the kind of God that has revealed Himself in the Scriptures? Does the Bible teach that this is his method of working with the angels and man? It is my contention that the Bible does not support their philosophical/theological theory and does not present that kind of God.

As the Apostle Paul stated in 1<sup>st</sup> 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 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. 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 addressing God’s “elect”)

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)

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)

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)

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.”

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”, 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 pursue righteousness. To say that Cain killed his brother because that was in God’s plan 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 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, 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, and especially place his/her faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, without God giving him the faith and forcing him to believe.<sup>80</sup> 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.

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.<sup>81</sup>

The Bible teaches that every human being is morally responsible for his choices and actions, before God and before men. 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,<sup>82</sup> as Calvinists often interpret “world”. 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.

## Human Depravity

When presenting their beliefs, Calvinists start with the 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.<sup>83</sup> In using the phrase “Total Depravity,” though the expression clearly

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<sup>80</sup> 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*. The testimonies of C.S. Lewis and Josh MacDowell, men who disbelieved, after a “process of research” came to faith in the living God.

<sup>81</sup> Novak, Michael, *On Two Wings* (c) 2002, publisher Encounter Books, page 135

<sup>82</sup> “Elect” is used here as the Calvinist would in his belief system, not as defined above.

<sup>83</sup> 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

speaks of the sinfulness of man, man's ability to make decisions is not addressed. 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 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."<sup>84</sup> We would agree with the Calvinists that man is a depraved sinner, but not that man is *totally unable* to believe and to personally appropriate the 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/theological theory on the *inability* of man because the Scriptures teach just the opposite.

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 from God is available to all, but it must be opened by the willing heart. Look at 2 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 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. 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.***

Unlike the Calvinists' belief about 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 maintained, he could legally enter heaven (Leviticus 18:4-5 and Galatians 3:21 & 24).

Lorraine Boettner is wrong when he states that man can only choose between two evils (see footnote 80 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

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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."

<sup>84</sup> Genesis 8:21; this verse ("intent of man's heart is evil from his youth") 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.

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 this morally correct act is normal among all peoples of the world. Even in the 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.

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 choice. 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. Always a systematic theology should begin with and grow forth from a thorough, biblical 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.” Until we understand the Creator, we will never understand the man He created in His image.

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.)

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?’” (States God’s desire and man’s obligation)

Ezekiel 18:32: “For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the LORD God. ‘Therefore, repent and live.’” (God’s stated desire tied to man’s responsibility to repent.)

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.’” (God’s stated desire is tied to man’s responsibility to repent. I have heard this passage being interpreted as “physical death” not spiritual or soul death. I cannot find justification for that interpretation; but to say that God finds pleasure in any form of spiritual death would be a distortion of His character.)

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 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 is the world of the elect, 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 Gospels teach differently. A sinful world abused and killed the Savior. 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 destined them to unbelief and condemnation.)<sup>85</sup>

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.” (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, page 196). When it comes to this subject, the reformers were highly influenced by their Roman Catholic education, 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.<sup>86</sup> Calvinists would lead us to believe that God, before He created, chose to send the climax of His creation—humankind possessing the image of God—into the eternal trash heap of unceasing torment and separation from the Creator.

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). 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

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<sup>85</sup> This passage is covered again below.

<sup>86</sup> Genesis 9:6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man.”

own image, violating His own law as stated in Genesis 9:6. However, if man ends up in the 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.<sup>87</sup> The God of the Calvinist is not the God of the Bible, because their god has double standards and plays favorites.

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 many 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. 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 on philosophical assumptions is a very dangerous game to play.<sup>88</sup>

## The Extent of the Death of Jesus Christ

For whom did Christ die? The believers in the TULIP believe and teach that Jesus died only for those “elected”, those pre-chosen unto salvation 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.<sup>89</sup> 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, is a guarantee that the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, the 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 whether Jews or a Calvinistic group of unconditionally elected ones. 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

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<sup>87</sup> 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.”

<sup>88</sup> 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.

<sup>89</sup> 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.

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 type<sup>90</sup> 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 chapter five teaches that the father and head of the human race, Adam, 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"<sup>91</sup> refer to the same group and the same number of people, 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" and the "many." 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' elect-group, 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.

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<sup>90</sup> 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.

<sup>91</sup> 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 population been obedient followers of God and His Word. Experience tells us that actually very "few" are really saved, not many.

John 3:16-18 says: “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—a *kosmos* that crucified the Lord of Glory. 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 for privilege.

In John 1:29, John the Baptizer declared that Jesus came to take away the “sin of the world.” The Calvinist is twisting and turning to make his philosophical theology 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 speak for itself.

2 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 not just an elect-group for salvation 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 died for the false teachers who are heading for eternal destruction, even though they oppose God and His salvation, actions that the Lord foreknew.

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 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 all persons in Adam, to obtain salvation for all of humanity—not a privileged few. He died for every soul from Adam until the last person 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 that 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, but men and women with the capacity of choice.

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 Justice of God

One of the attributes of God is *justice*. God acts justly in everything He does. Even when there are things that we do not fully understand,<sup>92</sup> we know that God will do right because it is His nature to do so. Knowing our God is just brings comfort to the believer.

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 conscience. Because of this, he cannot fully trust it; but the light is there. A stable and reliable revelation is the Bible, the God-breathed Book.<sup>93</sup>

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 not, in eternity past long before He created. Adding to the Calvinistic belief that God elected some to salvation and some 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, according to 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? 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? Does It not say that He causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust? <sup>94</sup>

Man’s basic sense of justice is well expressed by Elihu in Job 34:10-12:

Therefore, listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to do wrong. For He pays a man according to his work, and makes him find it according to his way. Surely, God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will 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

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<sup>92</sup> Citing one example, “Where do babies go when they die?” Based on the law written in our hearts, Bible teachers say that they go to heaven. The Catholic faith created limbo. The Bible does not address the subject. We are confident that God will act justly in this matter.

<sup>93</sup> Having a habit of reading the Bible through will give one a growing knowledge of God.

<sup>94</sup> 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 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.

is based upon a decree through which God predetermined and unconditionally chose a few souls out of the human race for special privilege. It is estimated that no more than five percent of humanity ever seeks God and His 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 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,<sup>95</sup> 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.<sup>96</sup> He loves the world and desires for all peoples to be saved. Our God of love is just. Men are accountable for their decisions and actions and will stand before the just Lord without any excuse.<sup>97</sup> 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, or 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 from there build a 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

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<sup>95</sup> See Job 34:10-12 quoted previously.

<sup>96</sup> Deuteronomy 10:17; Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 1:17; 2 Peter 3:9

<sup>97</sup> Romans 1:20. In Romans 1:18-32 Paul bases his argument upon human conscience.

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, through Jerome, Origen, Augustine, the Catholic Church, and 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 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. The Bible must and does speak for itself.

### **Passages with Commentary**<sup>98</sup>

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 Scripture. This impacted his hermeneutics and Christian theology. This one man had a tremendous influence on Christianity and its expression through the Catholic Church, East and West. 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 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 a system that dominated the Christian world 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 these perversions. 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 truth.

There are a few passages that if not properly interpreted tend to imply the Calvinistic belief in “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 (Hermeneutical Rule 6), and ignorance to the meaning of some verses must be admitted. 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 theory followed by an effort to properly interpret them. This is not an exhaustive list:

**Matthew 22:14:** “For many are called but few are chosen.”

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<sup>98</sup> 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.

The misuse of this passage goes back to Augustine, referenced by Calvin.<sup>99</sup> It is important to remember that Matthew's Gospel was written for a Jewish audience. Following the rules of hermeneutics, we interpret within the context—the immediate being verses 1-14. The servants were first ordered by their master to invite the king's privileged friends to the wedding feast. Some of these so-called friends of the king even 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. Verses 11 through 14 are the conclusion of the parable.

The man who entered with improper dress for the wedding feast was removed from the banquet hall into 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, 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 (the Jews refused to obey God but still expected acceptance). The guest 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;<sup>100</sup> 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, who have no free-will.

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<sup>99</sup> Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (III, xxiv, 8), electronic edition, Galaxie Software, Garland, TX

<sup>100</sup> 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 2:8:** “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; for they stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

This passage does not teach that God ordained people to be unbelievers. 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 portion of the verse is a quote 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 to the closest subject, in Greek there is no such rule. In the English translation the phrase “they were appointed” should be placed so that it modifies the phrase “stumble at the word,” not the phrase “being disobedient.”

Because the religious leaders in Jesus’ day were not persuadable and disobeyed the revealed truth about Jesus Christ, the consequence of their unbelief was their stumbling on a stone in the path (truths about Jesus). Anyone persisting in unbelief is destined to stumble, fall, and be hurt. The Greek scholar, Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest (a moderate Calvinist), in his *Word Studies on 1 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 1 Timothy 2:4, 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 you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The original Greek text does not support the Reformed interpretation of this passage, which began with Augustine, who taught that faith was a gift of grace and the elect are saved because God gives them the faith necessary for salvation (irresistible grace). Unlike English, Greek has gender—masculine, feminine, and neuter. The Greek words translated “grace” and “faith” are both feminine in gender. The Greek word translated “it” (the gift) is a demonstrative pronoun in the neuter gender. Grammatically, being neuter, the word “it” cannot modify or be tied in any way to either grace or faith, since those words are feminine in gender. Verses 8 through 10 are the conclusion of a paragraph about God’s love and what He did for the sinner. We believe that this neuter pronoun refers to a subject not found in this sentence—the saving work of God (see verse 5). Being consistent with the whole of Scripture, this passage teaches that God’s gift of salvation is appropriated by the sinner, a responsible moral agent, through the act of believing. Man cannot save himself. Our gracious God did everything necessary to save the sinner. Believing God is the required response (Romans 4:3) for receiving God’s forgiveness and salvation.

**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, and the Gospel of John, 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.

**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”<sup>101</sup> 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 gained 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 2 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” (1 Timothy 2:4). All are appointed unto eternal life, but only those who believe the Word receive that appointment.

**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 will assume:

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<sup>101</sup> Alford, Henry, *The Greek Testament*, volumes 1 and 2 combined, © 1958, Pub. Moody Press, page 153 in vol. 2, emphasis his.

- 1) That the “wise and intelligent” are those who maintain that they are wise and intelligent—the arrogant ones.
- 2) That the “infants” are those who are open-minded and have a childlike acceptance of the revealed truth—the humble ones.

This is not a literal meaning of these expressions, but one applied to them as metaphors from our understanding of the context and of other passages.

Previous to this recorded conversation of our Lord with His Father, Jesus had pronounced a very harsh condemnation. In essence He said that those who had witnessed His ministry and had rejected that evidence—one that gave clear testimony to the truth that He was and is the Son of God and the promised Messiah and King—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 evidences, plus had had the Spirit of God verifying those truths to their hearts and consciences (Matthew 12:31); 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 it 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 who will believe, the “elect,” as the Calvinists would say. 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 and had been rejected by them. In many ways God reveals Himself to the unsaved (Romans 1:18-20). They have a responsibility to respond to that revelation.

Verses 28 through 30 are an invitation. I believe that this invitation is to those “infants,” the ones that are of humble, open hearts as opposed to those who are high-minded, the know-it-alls (the wise). Jesus makes a special promise to those in this humble, receptive group. They will find rest. “Rest” had a historical significance to the Jews. Those unbelieving Jews in the desert 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 as Jesus spoke to them. 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** (not quoted because of length, please read)

This seems to be the Calvinists’ favorite biblical text. What is Paul saying? For this passage I recommend the *Commentary on the Epistle to the Roman*, by F. Godet.

Paul’s Letter to the Romans is his treatise on the gospel he preached of justification by faith. Romans is proclaimed by theologians of all 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 materials.

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, what he taught. Starting with 12:1, he begins his application of the doctrine of Justification by Faith to the Christian life—the practical side of true faith. 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 verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1). The doctrinal section can be divided 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 standard of the written and natural law (1:18 through 3:20), in 3:21 through 31, Paul declares 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 works. 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; and through that act He paid the sin debt of the human race and thereby purchased salvation for all—every one of Adam's descendants. Starting in chapter 6 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 and individual member of that family. 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; and this He had 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—personally appropriate salvation through faith. In chapter 11, he explains that at a future time God will fulfill pick up that lump of clay and, as He has promised, the nation of Israel represented by a remnant of obedient believers will be restored to favor.

The Jews were indeed a privileged people (9:3-5). Though they were chosen 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 had been dispersed around 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 pedigreed Jew as a member of the elect-group, can presume upon God. Each and every individual is a responsible agent before his Creator. Paul proceeds with biblical facts to support his argument, citing Ishmael then Esau.<sup>102</sup> 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. It has everything to do with being commissioned unto service. God's mercy bestowed privileges upon them and their children, but it never was a guarantee of personal salvation for them or their descendants. Obedience and faith have been and remain to be essential ingredients for personal salvation. No person is privileged. 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.<sup>103</sup> 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/choosing 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,<sup>104</sup> 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 and selfish bent to show forth the power and grace of God.

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

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<sup>102</sup> 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 δουλεῦειν, *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.

<sup>103</sup> 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.

<sup>104</sup> 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).

strength; but, on the contrary, of a deliberate and intelligent employment of the matter at his disposal.<sup>105</sup>

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

<sup>5</sup> In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. <sup>6</sup> But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. <sup>7</sup> 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 taken with its context which is chapters 7 through 10 but especially chapters 9 and 10. Reading these one can see the conflict between the 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 responsibly and faith not a Calvinistic divine election where people are pre-chosen to eternal bliss or eternal damnation and programmed by God to believe.

To deal with every passage the Calvinists bend to conformity with their belief system would be a book in itself. I have sorted out the major ones that I have been presented from their debates with me or 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 active in human history, determining where people live and for how long, but Paul also states that the motive of the Creator in all of His involvement with mankind 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, loves all without respect of persons, and desires that all come to a knowledge of the truth, to true repentance, and to faith in His Son as Savior. The Creator

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<sup>105</sup> Godet, F., *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, page 358. He gives an excellent explanation of this chapter, one that a Calvinist avoids.

has done everything that He possibly can to save everyone—all of the sons and daughters of Adam. If the created does not respond positively to the call of his Creator in repentance from sin unto salvation, he will stand before his Maker on judgment day “without excuse”. Man is a morally responsible agent possessing the right to choose right from wrong.

Giving to man the freedom of choice does not diminish the sovereignty of God. On the contrary it strengthens it. The God of the Calvinists must be in full control in order to be sovereign.<sup>106</sup> 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.* That is true sovereignty; and it is beyond human understanding, as God is. A sovereign king does not control every action and person within his reign. All kingdoms have crooks, but that king is the supreme voice and his position of power gives him full and final authority. When caught, the crook will pay with his life. Many times the Lord uses the freedom of choice given to the created to accomplish His purposes. The cross is a prime example. Satan, who does not want people saved, through inspiring man to murder the Messiah, accomplished the very purpose of God in the redemption of lost humanity.

Some will declare that they are four or three-point Calvinists.<sup>107</sup> They have misunderstood Calvinism. A true Calvinist will affirm that the five points stand as one irreducible unit that cannot be separated. Though some of those points contain half-truths, their very foundation is corrupt. Calvinism is a philosophical system that is brought to the Bible for support. Its proponents distort the Scriptures to make them fit their theology. Calvinism is a deductive theology, not the product of inductive Bible interpretation.

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<sup>106</sup> The word “sovereign” 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. This is a human term used of nations and kings. It never implies the total control that the Calvinists apply to it.

<sup>107</sup> 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 expounded upon.

God’s Word clearly teaches that He is sovereign (in 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 the other. 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).

As with Philo, Clement, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine all believed that there is a deeper, spiritual meaning behind the literal sense of Scripture that must be uncovered by the interpreter. These men brought a hermeneutics of spiritualization to the table of Bible interpretation. They taught that only the educated, “spiritual” leadership of the church is qualified to interpret the Bible. This approach led to substitution theology (the church replacing Israel), covenant theology (based upon decrees the Bible never mentions), an elevated leadership or hierarchy in the church (laity versus piety), a belief that baptism removes original sin making the baptism of infants 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. 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 the allegorization of the divinely inspired Writings. This was and is the teaching of Catholicism, though its theologians may not spell it out in the same manner as the Reformers, though a close look will reveal that they are very close, even today.

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.<sup>108</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the Donatists were the early fathers of the Baptist movement. Since the Baptist movement never cooperated with the Catholic Church, its followers and churches were persecuted by both Catholics and Reformers. Knowing these things, I have difficulty understanding why Baptists are buying into Calvinism today.

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. 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 and His plan and purpose for man, whom He created in His image for fellowship—not for hell.

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<sup>108</sup> Olson, C. Gordon, *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism, An Inductive, Mediate Theology of Salvation*, Global Gospel Publishers, Cedar Knolls, NJ, © 2002, page 68

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## Recommendations:

The book by Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died, A case for Unlimited Atonement*, Regular Baptist Press, © 1967, is out of print but can be obtained used. 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.

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 theology and is one of the best I have seen on the treatment of Calvinism. Dr. Olson believes that extreme Calvinists and Arminians approach the Bible deductively when forming their theologies (I agree). 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 there are several proofs that Dr. John MacArthur, Jr. is not the best Bible expositor after all.

