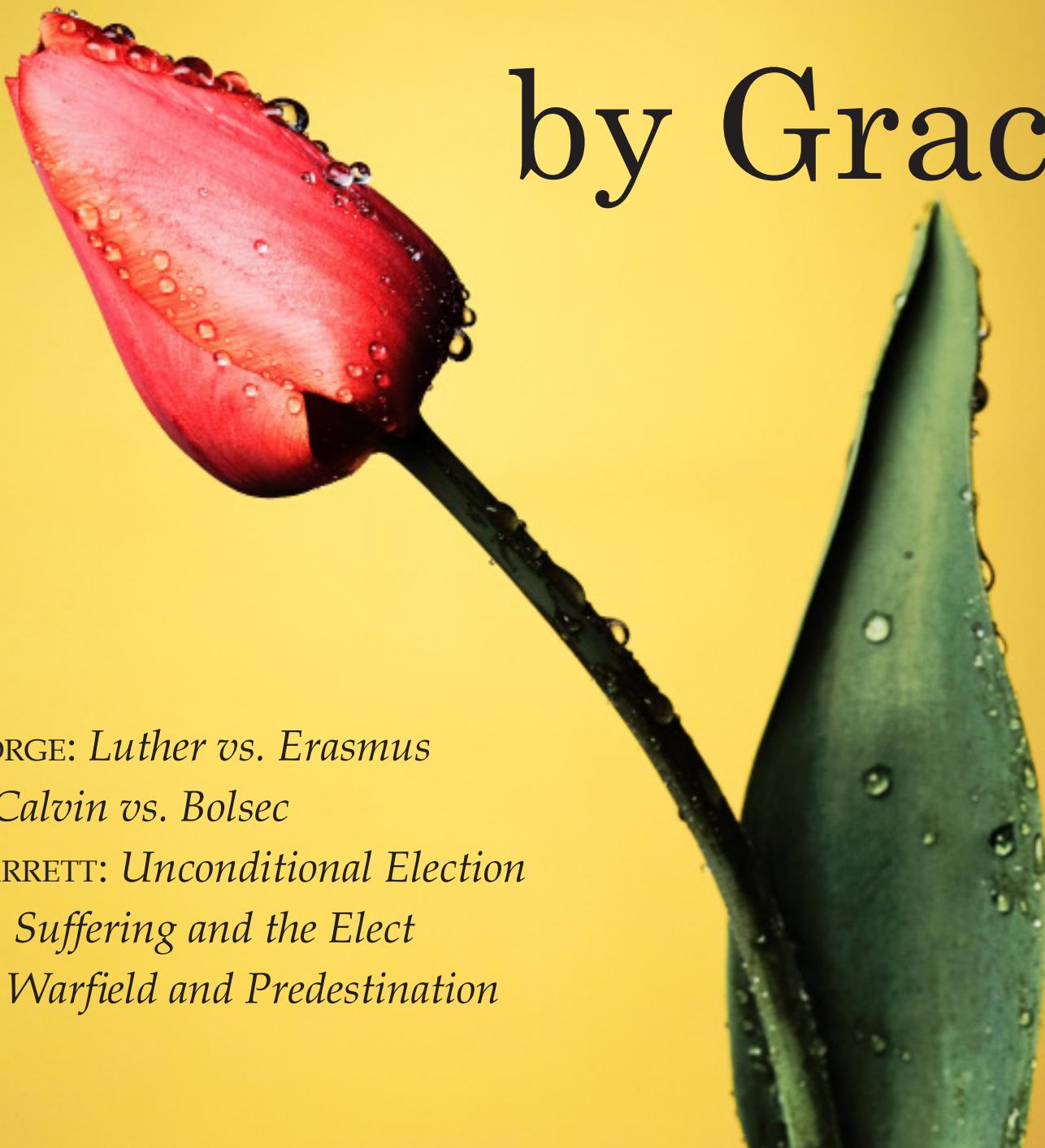


# CREDO

Vol. 2, Issue 3 - May 2012

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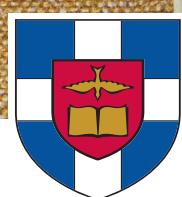
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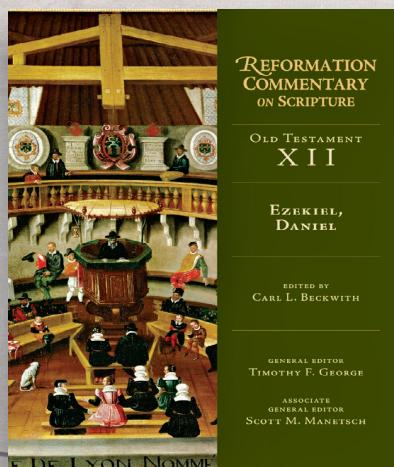
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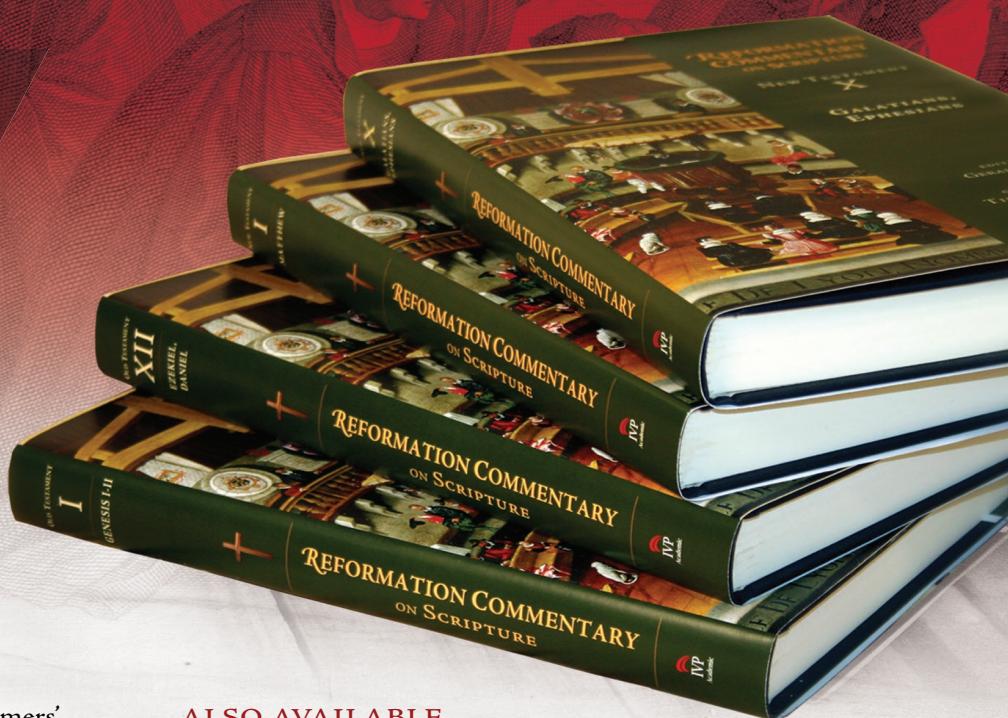


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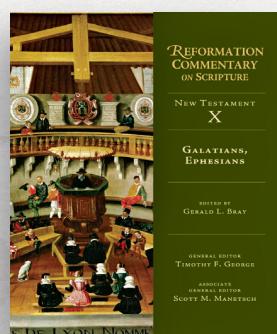
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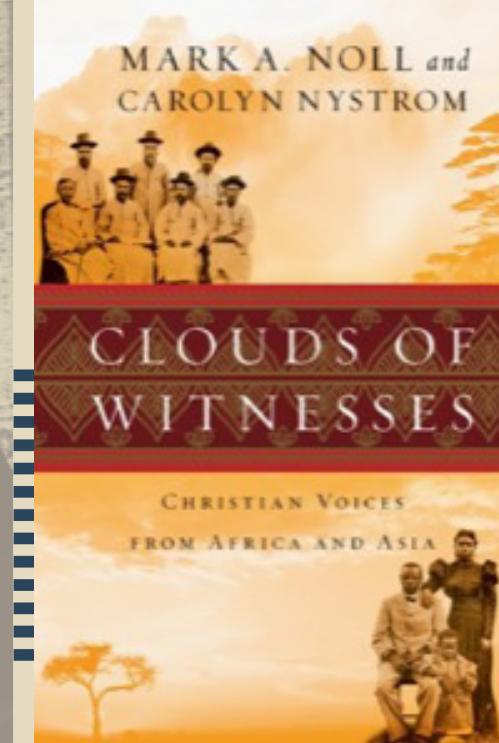
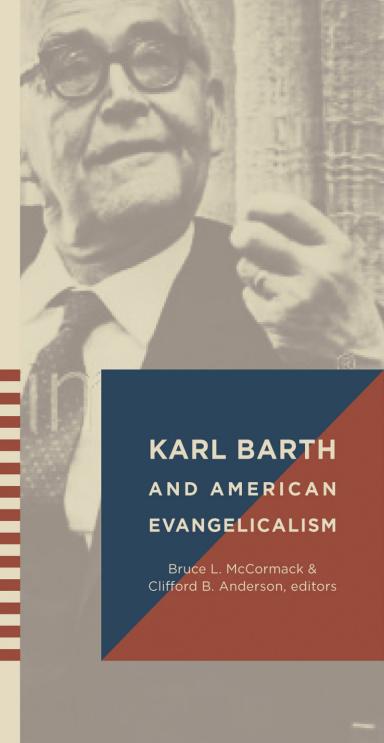
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# *Chosen by Grace*

T

he biblical doctrine of election is offensive. It collides with our demand for human autonomy. It removes our will from the throne. And it exposes our nakedness, revealing us to be the sinners that we truly are, undeserving of divine grace and mercy.

But when our eyes are opened to its glory, we begin to see that the doctrine of election leads us to worship, praise, and give thanks

to our Sovereign Lord. We recognize that we, as sinners, deserve nothing less than eternal condemnation. And yet, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world! In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, not on the basis of anything we have done, but purely according to the purpose of his will (Eph 1:3-5). It is this doctrine of election that Paul says is to lead us to praise the glorious grace of God (Eph 1:6). Therefore, the title of this May's issue of Credo Magazine is "Chosen by Grace."

Timothy George starts us off by taking us into the mind of the colossal reformer Martin Luther, exploring how he understood the doctrine of predestination, particularly in light of his famous debate on the bondage of the will with Erasmus. Then, Paul Helm navigates new territory, investigating the contours of Calvin's first controversy on predestination with Bolsec. Next, I look at three Pauline passages that support the unconditional nature of election, demonstrating that God's choice is not made on the basis of anything within the sinner, including faith. Bruce Ware follows with a piercing article on the relationship between election and suffering, showing that suffering is a means ordained by God to spread the gospel for the salvation of his elect. And finally, Fred Zaspel concludes by introducing us to B. B. Warfield's understanding of predestination and providence, and the relationship between the two.



Matthew Barrett  
Executive Editor

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# 10 Questions

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Pastor and author **Greg Gilbert** discusses the gospel, American politics, and expositional preaching.

---

**H**ave you always wanted to be a pastor? Was there anything else you considered doing?

No, growing up I wanted to do lots of things—professional baseball, airline pilot, fireman. By the time I left for college, I had settled on law and politics, and intended to be governor of Texas by the time I turned 35. That dream finally failed completely this past March! It was actually at a week-long summer camp between my freshman and sophomore years that the Lord called me to ministry. The call, I think, happened very quickly—over the span of just a couple of days—but it took me about a year to sift through the fallout of it, figure out what those new desires meant, and finally decide I would pursue ministry.

**You recently preached through Ezekiel. Many pastors find it difficult to preach through the Old Testament. Do you have any advice?**

Yea, there are a couple of things. First of all, get a good handle on the structure of the book. Most Christians tend to think about Old Testament books—especially the prophets—as just a mash-up of

various images and poems that aren't really going anywhere or doing anything as a whole. It's like a bowl of judgment spaghetti with a few Messianic meatballs thrown in here and there! But that's a wholly inaccurate view of them. The prophetic books are more like swords than spaghetti. They have



a weight, a shape, a point, and a thrust. They're doing something, and they all have a tight—and sometimes brilliant!—structure to them. Spend the time necessary to drill that structure into your mind,

and you'll have a much better time studying and teaching them because you'll know where you are in the “argument” or “story” of the book. Second, look for the Messiah! He's there in every book and in every passage, sometimes even in places you don't expect him. If you keep in mind the whole story of the Bible and how it all moves like a river toward Jesus, you won't be so prone to get lost in moralism.

**How have the doctrines of grace informed not only your theology but pastoral ministry?**

The fact of God's sovereignty in salvation is *huge* in my ministry. It keeps me from panicking in the short run, and it focuses me on the long game. I trust God deeply to use the message of the gospel to break through human blindness and sin, and regenerate hearts. That's how he has said he will save people, and so my job is to preach that message. My job is not to do other things that I imagine may be more effective in persuading people to accept Jesus. And not only that, but I think the doctrines of grace, once understood, tend massively toward gratitude in a Christian's heart and therefore

# preach

[Theology Meets Practice]

Mark Dever Greg Gilbert

a desire to live for the honor of Christ. As Paul says all over his New Testament letters, there's just no room for boasting or self-regard when you've been brought from death to life.

## Who have been your biggest heroes, dead and alive and why?

There are a few. My dad is probably my biggest hero. I've never known a more faithful and sincere Christian man, and I want to be like him when I grow up. My mentor in the ministry is Mark Dever. 90% of everything I know about the church and preaching, I learned from him. Really more than anyone else, Mark taught me to be a pastor, and I'm still learning from him to this day. As far as dead heroes, I think Jonathan Edwards has had the most personal impact on my

life. Right after I decided to pursue the ministry, a professor introduced me to Edwards, and I was struck immediately by the power of his intellect being applied to spiritual things. It really taught me a lot about the necessity of education. Edwards was also big in my struggle to embrace the doctrines of grace.

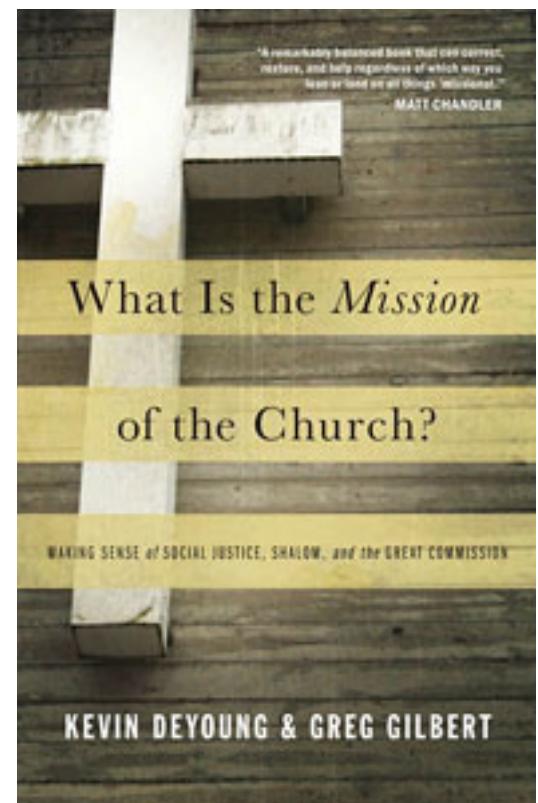
## In a nutshell, what is the mission of the church?

In a nutshell, it's to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. If I can take a slightly larger nutshell (a walnut, maybe), here's how Kevin DeYoung and I put it in our book: "The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship the Lord and obey his commands now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father."

## In light of the presidential election around the corner, how do you think the church should be involved or not be involved in the political sphere?

I'd say a pastor should preach the Word, and if the Word says things about certain issues that have become "political," so be it. The pastor has to say what Scripture says. Long before abortion became "political," Psalm 139 was saying that God lovingly and painstakingly knits every human being together

in his/her mother's womb. Just because a political party or two decides to put something about that issue in their platforms, doesn't mean we have to shy away from it. So we preach what the Bible speaks about. Beyond that, part of being a faithful Christian is being a faithful citizen of the nation God has placed you in. Here in the United States, the most basic job of a citizen is to think hard about and vote carefully for those who will make and execute our laws. Do things get complicated there sometimes? Are candidates or parties usually right about some things and wrong about others? Absolutely. Yet still, each of us has an obligation as a Christian to wield the societal authority God has granted to each of us (our vote) faithfully and carefully.



## **Is the church's involvement different from that of the individual Christian's?**

Yes. The local church is an organization that was instituted by its Lord for a particular purpose. The local church was not instituted to do everything, nor even to do everything that is *good*. Like any organization, it has a specific mission—a thing or set of things that it exists to pursue or accomplish. Individuals are different from organizations. As individual Christians, we have many different obligations and responsibilities that press on us and demand our time and attention, one of which is to vote carefully and faithfully. That's a very different kind of involvement than what the local church should or can have.

## **Besides the gospel itself, what other doctrines do you see as “murky” in evangelicalism today?**

I think the Bible's teaching about sin is very unclear to a lot of Christians. Many people talk about the *effects* of sin as if they are the main problem we humans face. Our broken relationships, our sense of meaninglessness or purposelessness, our thwarted need for belonging, our sense of alienation—all these are often presented as *The Problem* Jesus came to solve. But of course they're not. All those things are just symptoms of a much deeper problem—our willful and sinful rebellion against God. That

rebellion is what causes all the other problems, and if you don't face up to that, you won't even begin to understand the Bible or the Gospel or even Jesus himself.

## **What do you think is keeping most Christians from having a clear grasp of the gospel?**

I don't know if I'd say that *most* Christians lack a clear grasp of the gospel. I would just say that a good number of us do, and perhaps that most of us would have a hard time articulating it or certainly defending it. Why is that? I imagine a number of things play into it. One of the main ones has to be a loss of confidence in the Word of God among the preachers of our age. Pastors just don't, in the main, preach expositorily to their congregations anymore. They don't open up books of the Bible and explain their point, whatever comes. Instead, pastors tend to preach from those parts of the Bible that are most famous or most easily applied. And they go there over and over and over again. I think there's something to be gained, though, from opening up Ezekiel at chapter 1 and preaching straight through it to chapter 48. Yea, you're going to have to go through 13 chapters in the middle about God judging the nations around Israel, and that may not be as easy to apply as some other passages in the Bible. But on the other hand, knowing that God is *determined* to judge sin and redeem his people is right at the center of the

good news of Jesus. At the end of the day (and no matter what they tell you), what your people need most is not advice on how to live well. It's a proclamation about what God has done for them in Christ in light of the fact that they *haven't* lived well, or even anywhere near it.

## ***What is the Gospel? . . . What is the Mission of the Church? . . . what is next?***

Mark Dever and I just co-authored a book with Broadman and Holman called *Preach: Theology Meets Practice*. It's the best case we can make for the priority of expositional preaching, and then a very practical look at how we think about, prepare, and deliver sermons. The last section of the book contains two sermon transcripts—one from me, and one from Mark—interspersed with the transcript of a conversation we had together as we listened to those sermons. We critique one another, encourage one another, make fun of one another, and just generally have a good time sharpening each other. Hopefully that will be a useful look at the kind of “review” and feedback we both find so helpful in our own preaching ministries. After that, who knows? *Who is Jesus*, maybe? We'll see.

*Greg Gilbert is senior pastor of Third Avenue Baptist Church.*



Photo by freefotouk

## [Calvinism] and the Joy of God

by Greg Forster

**[W]**e can get a fresh perspective on Calvinism if we consider it as a distinctive teaching about God's love. Calvinism teaches that God's saving love for sinners is personal, unconditional, irresistible and unbreakable. All other theological traditions – Arminian, Lutheran, Roman, etc. – teach that God's saving love for sinners is impersonal, conditional, resistible and breakable. One of the most important reasons for looking at Calvinism through this lens is that it explains why Calvinism leads so many people to a deeper experience of the joy of God.

The key thing to grasp about Calvinism is that it says God saves you because he loves you personally. We already know from daily experience that real love is personal love; anyone can *feel like* he loves others, but real love means doing real things for real people.

Calvinism unlocks a deeper joy of God because it teaches us to think of God's saving love in these personal terms. When Jesus created the universe; when Jesus guarded, guided and governed his chosen people for thousands of years; when Jesus "emptied himself" and became a man; when Jesus bore years and years of servitude; when Jesus suf-

fered under Pontius Pilate; when Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried; when Jesus descended into hell on the cross; when Jesus rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven; when Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, making intercession for us and advocating our cause – all this he did for you, personally. He was doing it for you so personally that it would not have been any more personal if he had actually announced your name at each step.

Most theological schools depersonalize God's love. They portray Jesus' saving work as grounded in his love for people in general, at large, in the

abstract. On this view, the work of the cross and the empty tomb does not save people, it only makes salvation available. It creates a “salvation system.” What actually saves people are the things they do to get plugged into the salvation system Jesus created.

They depersonalize God’s love in this way because they don’t want to accept the (admittedly very disturbing) idea that God personally chooses whom to save and whom not to save. Once you decide that, there really is no alternative to depersonalizing God’s love. Otherwise you end up with an impossible dilemma: God wants everyone to be saved, so either everyone is actually saved (which we know is not true) or God fails to get what he wants (which we also know is not true). They escape this dilemma by saying in various ways that God wants people to be saved, but doesn’t want to choose which ones. In other words, what God really values is not your salvation personally, but the impersonal abstraction of “saving people” in general.

This view gets God off the hook for choosing not to save people he could have saved. But it pays an enormous price. Creating a salvation system is fundamentally different from actually saving people. If we change our conception of Jesus from the person who saves us to the person who creates the salvation system, our esteem for his work must change as well. It is the difference between the man

who manufactures life vests and the man who pulls drowning people out of the water. Only Calvinism preserves in its purity the doctrine that Jesus’ work actually accomplishes salvation.

The Calvinist view that God’s saving love is personal implies that it is unconditional. The other theological schools teach, or at least imply, that the Father loves the created system of nature – human free will and the unfolding of natural events – more than he loves individual people. Thus God will save people, but only those whom he is able to save without excessively disrupting the system of nature. By contrast, Calvinism teaches that the Father loves his people more than anything in the universe and will smash through all obstacles, including anything and everything else in the created order, to save them.

Just as the personal character of God’s love implies that it is unconditional, its unconditional nature implies that it is miraculously irresistible. The primary obstacle that the Spirit is willing to smash through in order to save you – because he loves you so much – is your own sinful will rejecting him. So he works miracles in your heart to liberate you from your slavery to sin until you freely choose God. By contrast, in the non-Calvinist view, the autonomy of your will is the key element of nature that the Spirit loves more than you and is therefore not willing to smash through in order to save you.

I know that the term “irresistible” is controversial, and for good reasons. We should be careful to avoid creating the impression that the Spirit enters into combat with a resistant human will and overpowers, defeats, and enslaves it. God’s love is irresistible because he works transcendent miracles in our hearts.

Finally, the unbreakableness of God’s love follows from its personal, unconditional and irresistible character. If Jesus’ work saves you personally, you will in fact be saved. If the Father is unconditionally determined to save you, you will in fact be saved. If the Spirit is miraculously at work within you, you will in fact be saved. And the reverse also follows from rejecting the Calvinist view on the earlier points: if God doesn’t do it, you have to do it – and in your own strength.

The sum is that the Calvinist knows God loves him and values his salvation above all other things. He perseveres through trials and suffering in the knowledge that God is not gambling with his salvation; God can use suffering to refine his faith without risk of losing him eternally. And he looks forward to an eternity of blissful glorification of God that he knows with certainty he personally possesses and will inevitably attain.

*Greg Forster is the author of The Joy of Calvinism: Knowing God’s Personal, Unconditional, Irresistible, Unbreakable Love.*

# From the Horse's Mouth

## What books on Election



Thomas Schreiner

Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Author of *Still Sovereign; New Testament Theology*

I would select a book that is accessible to the ordinary person, and there are a number of good choices, but I would recommend *Chosen for Life: A Case for Divine Election* by Sam Storms. The book is biblical, clear, and shows why election matters.

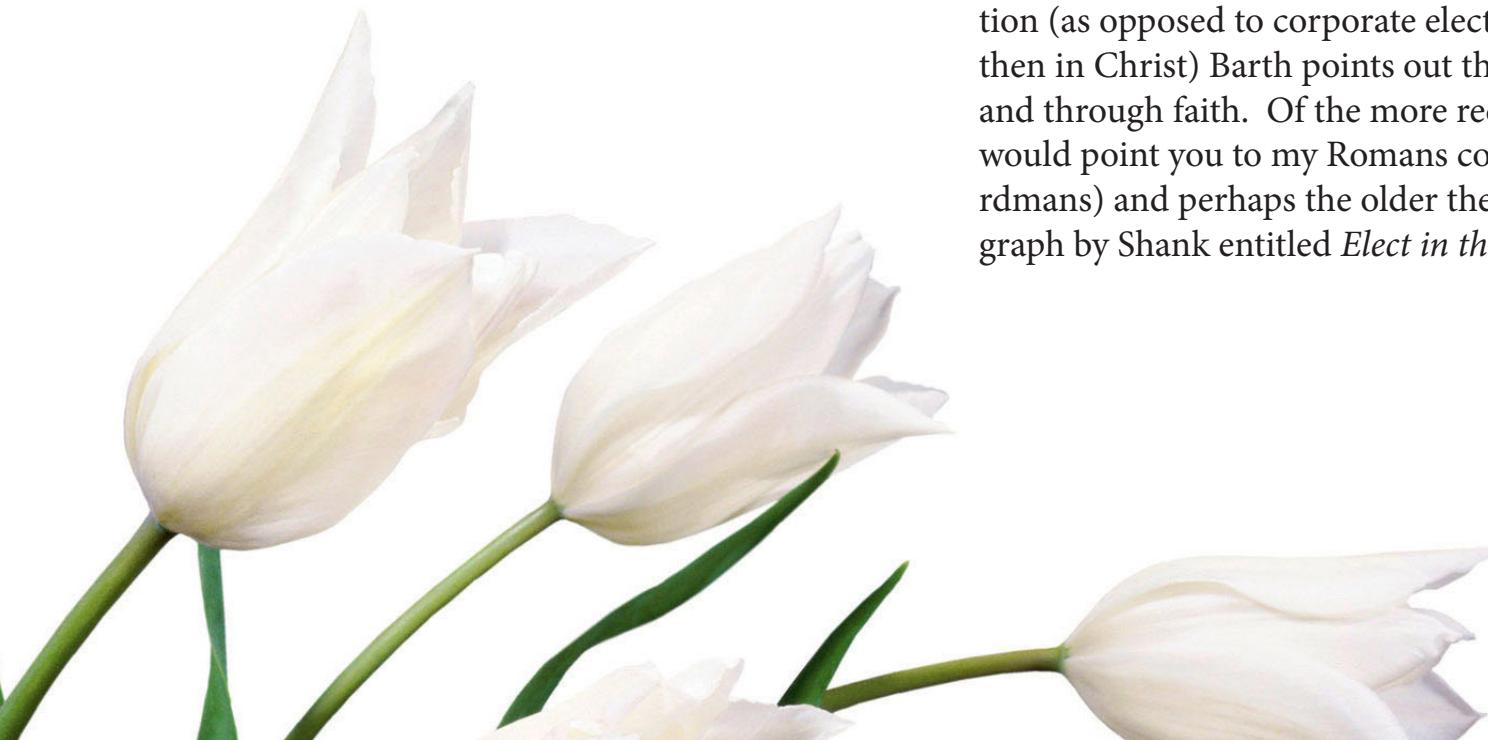


Ben Witherington

Professor of New Testament, Asbury Theological Seminary

Author of *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*

**O**f the older books, I would commend M. Barth's majestic commentary on Ephesians in which he makes clear that Calvin was wrong in his reading of texts like Ephesians 1. Paul is talking about Christ the elect one and election is not the same thing as salvation. Christ did not need to be saved. As for the means of salvation (as opposed to corporate election in Israel and then in Christ) Barth points out that it is by grace and through faith. Of the more recent treatments I would point you to my Romans commentary (Eerdmans) and perhaps the older theological monograph by Shank entitled *Elect in the Son*.



# would you recommend and why?



David Murray

Professor of Old Testament and Practical Theology at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary



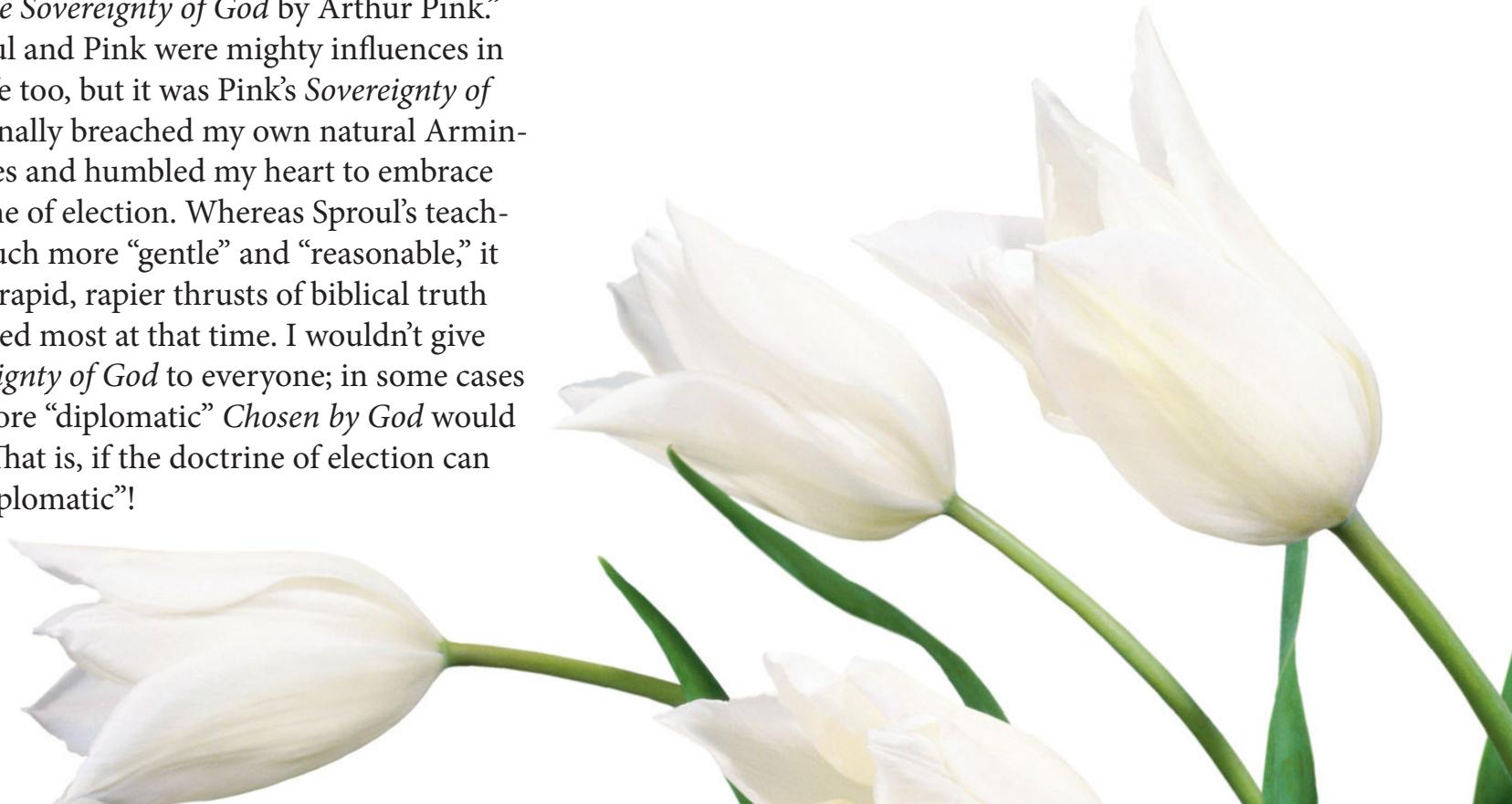
Graham Cole

Anglican Professor of Divinity, Beeson Divinity School

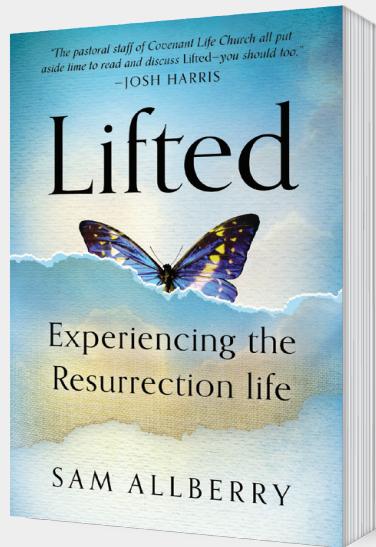
Author of *He Who Gives Life; God the Peacemaker*

Wherever I ask people how they came to embrace the Reformed faith, if the answer is not “through the teaching ministry of R C Sproul,” then it’s usually, “through reading *The Sovereignty of God* by Arthur Pink.” Both Sproul and Pink were mighty influences in my own life too, but it was Pink’s *Sovereignty of God* that finally breached my own natural Arminian defenses and humbled my heart to embrace the doctrine of election. Whereas Sproul’s teaching was much more “gentle” and “reasonable,” it was Pink’s rapid, rapier thrusts of biblical truth that I needed most at that time. I wouldn’t give *The Sovereignty of God* to everyone; in some cases Sproul’s more “diplomatic” *Chosen by God* would be better. That is, if the doctrine of election can ever be “diplomatic”!

Robert A. Peterson, *Election and Free Will: God’s Gracious Choice and Our Responsibility* (P&R, 2007). This book is biblically faithful, pastorally helpful and theologically insightful.



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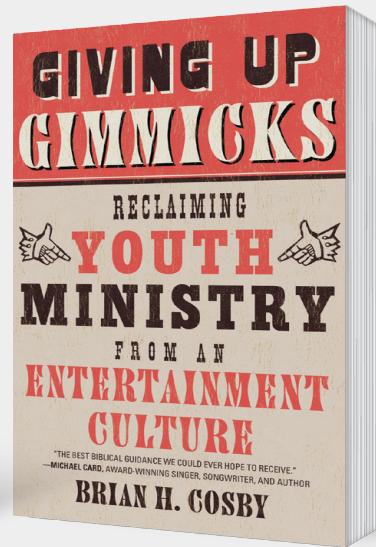


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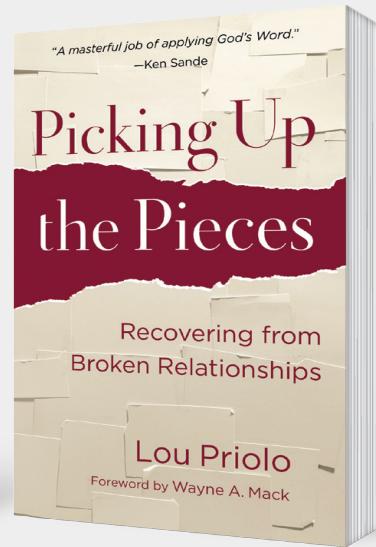


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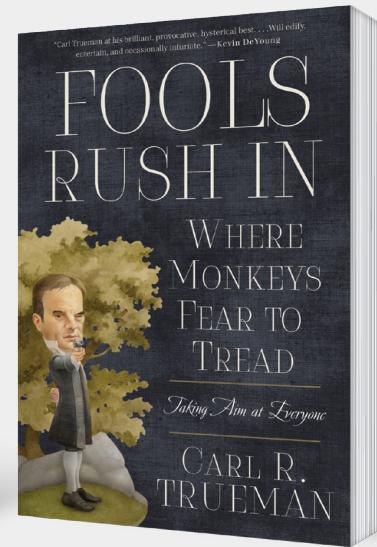


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# The Centrality of the Doctrines of Grace

## An Interview with Thomas J. Nettles

By Matthew Barrett

### When did you first come to embrace the doctrines of grace?

God saved me after my first year in seminary at Southwestern. The circumstances of the experience following six years of deep spiritual struggle led to an intense study of the issue of salvation. This led to my full persuasion of the truth of the doctrines of grace within a two month period. By September 1969, I saw the gospel with increasing clarity in theocentric terms rather than anthropocentric terms and that amounted to a massive paradigm shift.

### When you were a young scholar, what Calvinists did you look up to the most and why?

I was influenced very early in this pilgrimage by J. I Packer, particularly *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Unintended results of a course in systematic theology led me into a study of Dagg's *Manual of Theology* and Boyce's *Abstract of Systematic Theology*. I ran across a couple of books on Baptist confessions of faith and saw that the Confessional history that most influenced the

doctrine of Baptists in the South was Calvinistic in soteriology. There were very few men of that persuasion among the Baptists of my acquaintance in those days and only later did I come to know others that were preaching these



truths. One teacher and eventual colleague at SWBTS was helpful and encouraging in this pilgrimage, Curtis Vaughn. After I began to teach at SWBTS in 1976, a Florida pastor named Ernie Reisinger became a close friend.

### How have the doctrines of grace been central in your teaching ministry through the years?

The history of Christianity offers abundant opportunity to discuss these issues at several points along the way. I have felt that giving the students a full acquaintance with how such doctrines have been discussed is an important stewardship of the deposit of truth. By including confessional history and theological development in the teaching of Baptist history, one does not have to transgress the legitimate parameters of the course to expose students to fervent expositions and defenses of the doctrines of grace. These ideas were dealt with lightly, or negatively, in my theological education and I was, and am, convinced that they are worthy of a more positive presentation in the history of doctrine.

### Some hear about Calvinism for the first time and negatively respond, "Well, I am a Southern Baptist." How would you respond?

I would resist the temptation to burst out into a hearty laugh. That victory being courageously accomplished,

I would point to the early preachers and educators among Southern Baptists to show historically that the nomenclature, “Southern Baptist,” is not an antonym to “Calvinism.”

“Baptist” is a statement about regenerate church membership; “Southern Baptist” denotes a specific way of achieving cooperation among autonomous Baptist churches for missions, evangelism, and education. The “doctrines of grace” or “Calvinism,” indicates a specific option in understanding how God saves sinners, that is, what is the true nature of saving grace. Hopefully, I would have the presence of mind and the transparent conviction to show that these doctrines are biblical.

**You have been teaching and proclaiming the sovereignty of God for decades. What advice can you give to today’s younger generation of Calvinists?**

1. Be kind and gentle to all; These are not your truths, they are God’s, he has revealed them, and the issue of their unchangeable veracity is settled forever.

2. Be clear in your presentation of them as matters of biblical revelation not to be suppressed for the sake of delicate psyches. Again, they are not your truths, they are God’s. One does not negotiate with truth; saturate its presentation with patience but do not becloud it with political strategy.

## THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE MUST COME FROM BIBLICAL EXEGESIS FOR THEY ARE MATTERS, NOT OF HUMAN PERCEPTION OR PHILOSOPHY, BUT OF DIVINE REVELATION.

3. Make sure that they are maintained in the framework of the entirety of revealed truth, handled symmetrically and integrated appropriately with the reality of human evil, sin, and responsibility, the doctrine of the Trinity, the Person of Christ, substitutionary atonement, justification by faith, etc.

4. Treat them as matters of amazing wonder, that God’s nature is so filled with benevolence and so overflowing with joy that he condescends to include creatures, sinful ones, in his great eternal festival of love, and beauty and delight. Point out that inhabitants of heaven, even when viewing the power and extremity of divine wrath, cry out “Holy,” and “Worthy, and “true and just.”

**You have written a large biography on James P. Boyce. Did Boyce and the founders of institutions like The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary embrace the doctrines of grace and how did their beliefs shape theological education?**

Boyce cut his theological teeth in First Baptist Church of Charleston, SC, under the preaching of Basil Manly, Sr., a historic confessional Calvinist influenced by Jonathan

Edwards in his application of those mighty truths. This position was reinforced by his journey to Princeton to receive his theological education, where his most influential teacher was Charles Hodge. The Calvinism that saturated the theological position of Boyce’s teachers did not in any sense move him out of step with the Southern Baptists of his day. Rather, one of the confessional issues insisted on by others along with him in developing a confession for SBTS was that it should have a clear presentation of the doctrines of grace.

**How should the doctrines of grace inform pastoral ministry in the local church?**

If a person recognizes that he has been dealt with by God in the sphere of pure mercy, without any merits, in spite of smothering demerits, then he will learn to walk humbly with God, to love mercy, and to do justly. The pastor should act toward his people as a forgiven and justified man, one that has no personal righteousness but has been accepted in the beloved, drawn in spite of his deadness by the enlivening effectual work of the Spirit, and points to Christ’s humiliation for the sake of sinners and to fulfill the will of the

Father as the motive for ministry. “Freely you have received, freely give.”

**What would be your advice to younger pastors in churches that are not sympathetic with the doctrines of grace?**

Come to understand what Paul meant when he said by grace are ye saved through faith. Do some vigorous transparent exegesis of

specific texts will suffice to implant these truths in the mind of an earnest seeker after truth; they must come from biblical exegesis for they are matters, not of human perception or philosophy, but of divine revelation. Once these ideas began to take on shape, one begins to find that they are a guiding energy in connecting the dots for the entire NT focus on God’s demonstration of his glory in the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:12- 5:5).

**Some assume that the doctrines of grace undermine missions and evangelism. Is this true?**

This objection does not bear up under the weight of exegesis, theology, or history. The pervasive biblical reality of the divine

superintendence of history through the use of means is too obvious to need extensive defense. Some of these are hidden and circuitous (Joseph and his brothers and the rise of the nation of Israel, etc.), and some revealed and appointed (Paul in Corinth, Acts 18:9, 10). God’s ends are accomplished by God’s means. Election does not render the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ unnecessary but determines their necessity and their success. Even so the preaching of the gospel was determined as an effectual and primary mean for manifesting the reality of the eternal

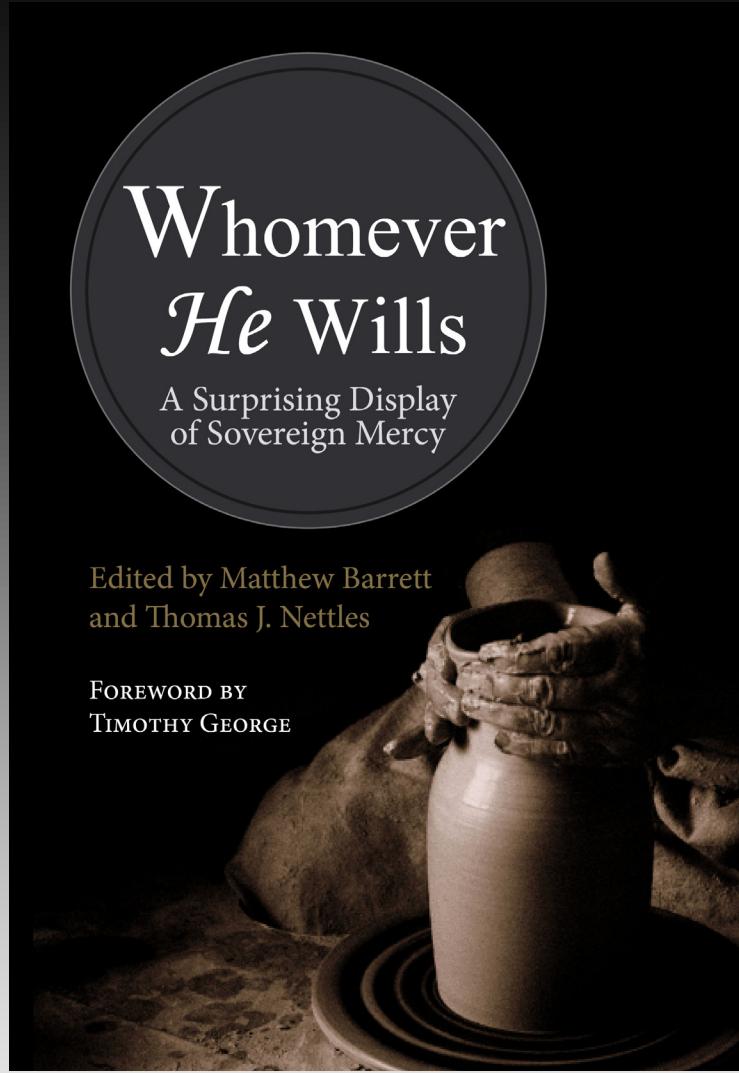
covenant of redemption (Titus 1:1-3). The missionary labors of William Carey and scores that followed him from the Baptist Missionary Society show the powerful motivation and the enduring work that arises from a serious engagement with the doctrines of grace. The same can be said of Adoniram Judson, his wife Ann Hasseltine Judson, Luther Rice and the founders of the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention such as C. D. Mallary. Presently, the doctrines of grace are fueling a surge in church planting and a commitment to missions in tough places. Many who have been unable to fit the doctrines of grace into their framework of gospel proclamation are also involved in sacrificial labors for the sake of Christ’s glory, but I mention the motivational power of the doctrines of grace to disarm the objection that it hinders compassionate evangelism. The gospel is a message of grace, and the doctrines of grace can hardly be un-evangelistic.

*Thomas J. Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is widely regarded as one of the foremost Baptist historians in America. Nettles is the author of By His Grace and For His Glory; Baptists and the Bible; and his forthcoming book is titled, Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Grace, co-edited with Matthew Barrett.*



such passages as John 6:37 and John 17:2 (paying attention to the full context of each chapter); Ephesians 1:1-14; Romans 8:26-30; Titus 1:1-3; Jude 1, 24; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 2:13-16; 5:23, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-17; 2 Timothy 1:8-14; 1 Peter 1:1-5; 2 Peter 1:1-11. These passages are merely representative of an entire structure of Scripture that finds its cohesion in the sovereign pleasure of God and his holy purposes toward a people that he designed to be a reflection of his glory. After all, no amount of theological argument disconnected from a vital acquaintance with

# Summer 2012



“This book represents a serious engagement by a team of thoughtful Baptist pastors and theologians to come to grips with a major tension inherent in the Christian Gospel itself. As such, it deserves to be read, discussed, and responded too.”

— **TIMOTHY GEORGE**, Dean, Beeson Divinity School; author of *Theology of the Reformers*

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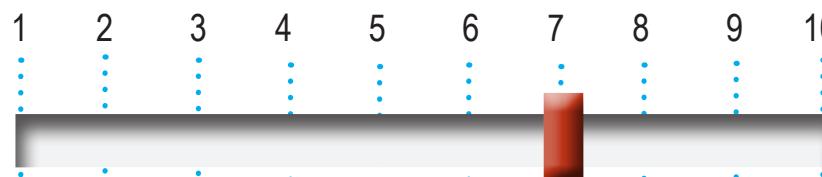
# A Scale from 1 to 10

How important are the **Doctrines of Grace** for healthy local church ministry?

## 7 | Joe Thorn

Lead Pastor of Redeemer Fellowship (Acts 29)

While non-Reformed congregations can be genuinely gospel centered and truly healthy, I believe a right understanding and experience of the doctrines of grace is an important component to healthy church ministry.



## 9-9.9 | Steven Lawson

Christ Fellowship Baptist Church

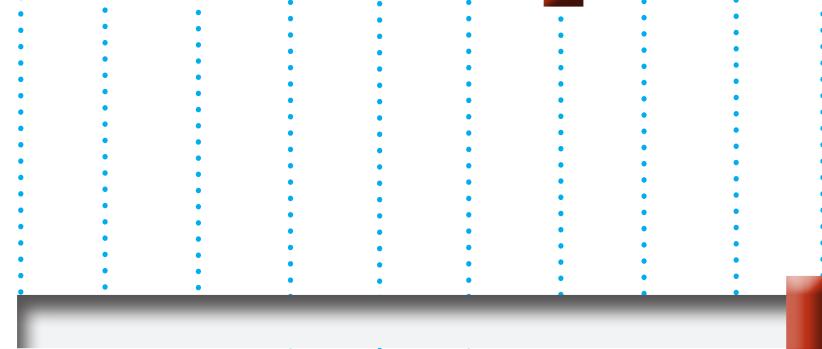
The doctrines of grace are the loftiest peak of theology, the unchanging high ground for the church.

From this towering vantage point, one can most fully behold the supreme beauty of God's sovereign and saving grace with greatest clarity. Nothing will so intensify one's worship, walk, and witness as these transcendent truths.

## 6 | Sandy Grant

Senior Minister, St Michael's Anglican Cathedral, Australia

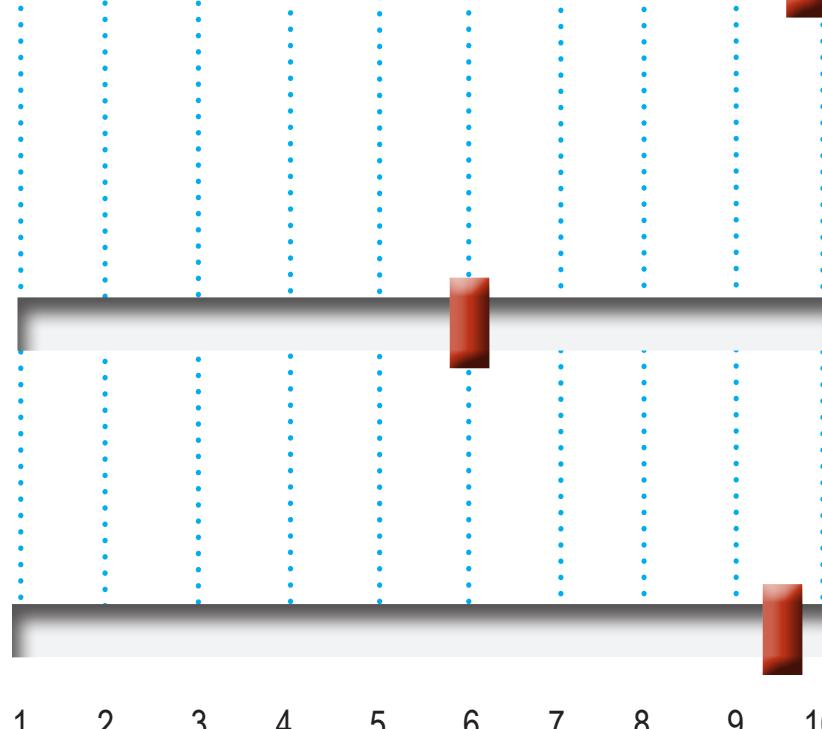
I am a 5 pointer, but we do systematic exposition, rather than preach a system. So we seek to share the gospel of God's grace in Christ for lost sinners, wherever the flow of the particular Scriptures in front of us leads. That said, God's sovereignty in all things often emerges as both pastorally important and challenging.



## 9.5 | Joel R. Beeke

Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation

The doctrines of grace are not quite synonymous with the gospel, which alone deserves a 10. But they are the golden prongs that hold the diamond of the gospel on the ring of our faith.



# Let God be God

Martin Luther  
*on*  
Predestination

*By Timothy George*

The problem of predestination is posed by the particularity of the Judeo-Christian tradition: the fact that God revealed himself uniquely in one people, Israel, and supremely in one man, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus as well as Paul spoke of “the elect ones” and “the chosen few.” The tension between God’s free election and genuine human response is present already in the New Testament documents. However, Augustine, in his classic struggle with Pelagius, first developed a full-blown doctrine of predestination.

## AUGUSTINE VS. PELAGIUS

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**F**or Pelagius salvation was a reward, the result of good works freely performed by human beings.

Grace was not something other than, above, and beyond nature; grace was present within nature itself. In other words, grace was simply the natural capacity, which everyone has, to do the right thing, to obey the Commandments, and thus to earn salvation. Augustine, on the other hand, saw a great gulf between nature, in its fallen state, and grace. Keenly aware of the radical impotence of his own will to choose rightly, Augustine viewed salvation as the free and surprising gift of God: “Unto thy grace and mercy do I ascribe, for thy hast dissolved my sins as it were ice.”<sup>1</sup> If, however, the source of our turning to God lies not in ourselves but solely in God’s good pleasure, why is it that some respond to the gospel while others spurn it? This question drove Augustine to Paul’s discussion of election in Romans 9-11. Here he found the basis for his own “harsh” doctrine of predestination: Out of the mass of fallen humanity God chooses some for eternal life and passes over others who are thus doomed for destruction, and this decision is made irrespective of human works or merits.

## THE DRIFT OF MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY

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**I**n the thousand years between Augustine and Luther, the main drift of medieval theology was devoted to watering down Augustine’s stringent predestinarianism. True, Pelagius had been condemned at the Council of Ephesus (431), and semi-Pelagianism, the view that at least the beginning of faith, one’s first turning to God, was the result of free will, was rejected by the Second Council of Orange (529). Nonetheless, most theologians tried to modify Augustine’s doctrine by qualifying the basis of predestination. Alexander of Hales appealed to the principle of divine equality: “God relates on an equal basis to all.”<sup>2</sup> Others held that predestination was subordinate to foreknowledge, that is, God elects those whom he knows in advance will earn merits of their own free will. None of these theories of salvation was “purely”

Pelagian, for all of them required the assistance of divine grace. Still, the crucial factor remained the human decision to respond to God rather than God’s free, unfettered decision to choose whom He wills.

## PREDESTINATION: THE HINGE ON WHICH ALL TURNS

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**M**artin Luther’s doctrine of justification broke decisively with the Augustinian model of a progressive impartation of grace. We are justified not because God is gradually making us righteous, but because we are declared righteous on the basis of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. However, on the prior principle of *sola gratia*, Luther—and Zwingli and Calvin after him—stands foursquare with Augustine against the latter-day “Pelagians” who exalt human free will at the expense of God’s free grace. In this respect, the mainline Protestant Reformation can be viewed as an “acute Augustinianization of Christianity.”<sup>3</sup> Some historians have regarded Luther’s doctrine of predestination as an aberration from his major themes or, at best, as a “merely auxiliary thought.”<sup>4</sup> But Luther saw the matter differently. In responding to Erasmus’s attack on this doctrine, Luther praised the humanist for not bothering him with extraneous issues such as the papacy, purgatory, or indulgences. “You alone,” he said, “have attacked the real thing, that is, the essential issue.... You alone have seen the hinge on which all turns, and aimed for the vital spot.”<sup>5</sup>

## THE PIG-THEOLOGIANS!

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**O**ne of Luther’s complaints against the “pig-theologians” was their thesis that the human will of its own volition could actually love God above all things, or, that by doing one’s best even apart from grace one could earn a certain standing before God. To this optimistic appraisal of human potential Luther opposed a stark contrast between nature and grace. “Grace puts God in the place of everything else it sees, and

# LUTHER REFUSED TO SUBJECT GOD TO THE BAR OF HUMAN JUSTICE, AS THOUGH THE “MAJESTY THAT IS THE CREATOR OF ALL THINGS MUST BOW TO ONE OF THE DREGS OF HIS CREATION.” “LET GOD BE GOOD,” CRIED ERASMUS THE MORALIST. “LET GOD BE GOD,” REPLIED LUTHER THE THEOLOGIAN.

prefers him to itself, but nature puts itself in the place of everything, and even in the place of God, and seeks only its own and not what is God’s.”<sup>6</sup> By “nature” Luther did not mean simply the created realm, but rather the fallen, created realm, and particularly the fallen human will which is “curved in on itself” (*incurvatus in se*), “enslaved,” and tainted with evil in all of its actions.<sup>7</sup> At the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518, Luther defended the thesis: “Free will after the Fall exists only in name, and as long as one ‘does what in one lies,’ one is committing mortal sin.”<sup>8</sup> This formulation was included in the bull *Exsurge Domine* by which Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther in 1520.

## THE “DEVIL’S WHORE”

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Was Luther, then, a thoroughgoing determinist? Erasmus and certain modern scholars have thought so.<sup>9</sup> Luther did come perilously close to necessitarian language. Yet he never denied that free will retains its power in matters which do not concern salvation. Thus Luther said to Erasmus: “You are no doubt right in assigning to man a will of some sort, but to credit him with a will that is free in the things of God is too much.”<sup>10</sup> Luther freely granted that even the enslaved will is “not a nothing,” that with respect to those things which are “inferior” to it, the will retains its full powers. It is only with respect to that which is “superior” to it that the will is held captive in sins and

cannot choose the good according to God.<sup>11</sup> Here we find a parallel to Luther’s disdain of reason. In its legitimate sphere reason is the highest gift of God, but the moment it transgresses into theology it becomes the “Devil’s Whore.” So too with free will. Understood as the God-given capacity to make ordinary decisions, to carry out one’s responsibilities in the world, free will remains intact. What it cannot do is effect its own salvation. On this score free will is totally vitiated by sin and in bondage to Satan.

Luther described the nature of this bondage in terms of a struggle between God and Satan:

So the will is like a beast standing between two riders. If God rides, it wills and goes where God wills.... If Satan rides, it wills and goes where Satan wills; nor can it choose to run to either of the two riders or to seek him out, but the riders themselves contend for the possession and control of it.<sup>12</sup>

Although some scholars have found a nuance of Manichaean dualism in this metaphor, Luther was merely developing an image originally drawn by Jesus: “Every one who commits sin is a slave of sin” and “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:34, 44, RSV). There is a further point Luther developed with regard to the enslaved will. Although our eternal destiny is, in a sense, determined by God, we are not therefore compelled to sin. We sin spontaneously and voluntarily. We go on willing and desiring to do evil in spite of the fact that in our own strength we can do nothing to alter this condition. Herein is the tragedy of human existence apart from grace: We are so curved in upon ourselves that, thinking ourselves free, we indulge in those very things which only reinforce our bondage.

## VERY STRONG WINE

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The purpose of grace is to release us from the illusion of freedom, which is really slavery, and to lead us into the “glorious liberty of the children of God.” Only when the will has received grace, or to use

his other metaphor, only when Satan has been overcome by a stronger rider, “does the power of decision really become free, at all events in respect to salvation.”<sup>13</sup> The true intention behind Luther’s emphasis on the enslaved will now becomes obvious. God desires that we should be truly free in our love toward Him, yet this is not a possibility until we have been freed from our captivity to Satan and self. The answering echo to The Bondage of the Will is The Freedom of the Christian.

Since apart from grace the human possesses neither sound reason nor a good will, “the only infallible preparation for grace...is the eternal election and predestination of God.”<sup>14</sup> Luther did not shrink from a doctrine of absolute, double predestination, although he admitted that “this is very strong wine, and solid food for the strong.”<sup>15</sup> He even restricted the scope of the atonement to the elect: “Christ did not die for all absolutely.”<sup>16</sup> Against the objection that such a view turns God into an arbitrary ogre, Luther answered—with Paul—“God wills it so, and because he wills it so, it is not wicked.” The “prudence of the flesh” says that “it is cruel and miserable of God that he seeks his glory in my wretchedness. Listen to the voice of the flesh! ‘My, my,’ it says! Take away this ‘my’ and say instead: ‘Glory be to thee, O Lord!’ and you will be saved.”<sup>17</sup> The posture of natural reason is always one of egocentricity. God is just as “unjust,” strictly speaking, in justifying the ungodly apart from their merits as He is in rejecting others apart from their demerits. Yet no one complains of the former “injustice” because self-interest is involved!<sup>18</sup> In both cases God is unjust by human standards, but just and true by His own. Luther refused to subject God to the bar of human justice, as though the “Majesty that is the creator of all things must bow to one of the dregs of his creation.”<sup>19</sup> “Let God be good,” cried Erasmus the moralist. “Let God be God,” replied Luther the theologian.

## THE HIDDEN GOD

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**A**lthough Luther never softened his doctrine of predestination (as did later Lutherans), he did try to set the mystery in the context of eternity.

**THE HIGHEST OF ALL GOD’S COMMANDS IS THIS, THAT WE HOLD UP BEFORE OUR EYES THE IMAGE OF HIS DEAR SON, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. EVERY DAY HE SHOULD BE OUR EXCELLENT MIRROR WHEREIN WE BEHOLD HOW MUCH GOD LOVES US AND HOW WELL, IN HIS INFINITE GOODNESS, HE HAS CARED FOR US IN THAT HE GAVE HIS DEAR SON FOR US.**

He never admitted that God’s inscrutable judgments were in fact unjust, only that we are unable to grasp how they are just. There are, he suggested, three lights—the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory. By the light of grace we are able to understand many problems which appeared insoluble by the light of nature. Even so, in the light of glory God’s righteous judgments—incomprehensible to us now even by the light of grace—will be openly manifested. Luther thus appealed to the eschatological vindication of God’s decision in election. The answer to the riddle of predestination lies in God’s hiddenness behind and beyond His revelation. Ultimately, when we shall have proceeded through the “lights” of nature and grace into the light of glory, the “hidden God” will be shown to be one with the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ and proclaimed in the gospel. In the meantime, Luther admonished, we can only believe this. Predestination like justification is also sola fide.<sup>20</sup>

**“THANK GOD FOR YOUR TORMENTS!”**

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**N**o one knew better than Luther the anguish which doubting one’s election could produce in a wavering soul. How should a pastor respond to someone who is plagued with this problem? Luther



gave two answers to this question, one for the strong Christian, the other for the weaker or newly converted Christian. The highest rank among the elect belongs to those who “resign themselves to hell if God wills this.”<sup>21</sup> Resignation to hell was a popular theme in the mystical tradition and signified complete passivity, an utter letting loose of oneself (Gelassenheit) before the abyss of God’s being. Luther said that God dispensed this gift to the elect briefly and sparingly, most often at the hour of

death.

More commonly, Luther was asked to counsel with ordinary Christians who were tormented by the question of election. Luther’s basic advice was, “Thank God for your torments!” It is characteristic of the elect, not of the reprobate, to tremble at the hidden counsel of God. Beyond this, he urged a flat refutation of the devil and a contemplation of Christ. Typical was his response to



Barbara Lisskirchen, who was distressed she was not among the elect:

When such thoughts assail you, you should learn to ask yourself, "If you please, in which Commandment is it written that I should think about and deal with this matter?" When it appears that there is no such Commandment, learn to say "Be gone, wretched devil! You are trying to make me worry about myself. But God declares every-

where that I should let him care for me...." The highest of all God's commands is this, that we hold up before our eyes the image of his dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Every day he should be our excellent mirror wherein we behold how much God loves us and how well, in his infinite goodness, he has cared for us in that he gave his dear Son for us. In this way, I say, and in no other, does one learn how to deal properly with the question

of predestination. It will be manifest that you believe in Christ. If you believe, then you are called. And if you are called, then you are most certainly predestinated. Do not let this mirror and throne of grace be torn away from before your eyes.... Contemplate Christ given for us. Then, God willing, you will feel better.<sup>22</sup>

Luther's doctrine of predestination was not motivated by speculative or metaphysical concerns. It was a window into the gracious will of God who freely bound Himself to humanity in Jesus Christ. Predestination, like the nature of God Himself, could only be approached through the cross, through the "wounds of Jesus" to which Stau-pitz had directed young Luther in his early struggles.

#### (Endnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, II, 7: "Gratiae tuae deputo et misericordiae tuae, quod peccata mea tamquam glaciem solvisti."

<sup>2</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica* (Quaracchi, 1924) L. 320: "Deus se aequaliter habet ad omnes."

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Professor George H. Williams for this apt phrase which is based on Harnack's description of gnosticism as an "acute Hellenization of Christianity."

<sup>4</sup> Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, Walter A. Hensen, trans. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962) I: 123.

<sup>5</sup> WA 18, p. 786. English quotations from De servo arbitrio are taken from E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds., *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> Rupp and Watson, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>8</sup> Atkinson, p. 287.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Linwood Urban, "Was Luther a Thoroughgoing Determinist?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971), pp. 113-139. The most helpful discussion of the whole question is Harry J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong? : an ecumenical-theological study of Luther's major work, The Bondage of the Will* (New York : Newman Press ; Minneapolis, Minn. : Augsburg Publishing House)1969. Cf. also Robert Shofner, "Luther on 'The Bondage of the Will': An Analytical-Critical Essay," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973), pp. 24-39.

<sup>10</sup> Rupp and Watson, p. 170.

<sup>11</sup> Pauck, Lectures on Romans, p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> Rupp and Watson, p. 140.

<sup>13</sup> Pauck, p. 252.

<sup>14</sup> Atkinson, p. 268.

<sup>15</sup> Pauck, p. 271.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>18</sup> Rupp and Watson, p. 259: "When therefore Reason praises God for saving the unworthy, but finds fault with him for damning the undeserving, she stands convicted of not praising God as God, but as serving her own interests."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

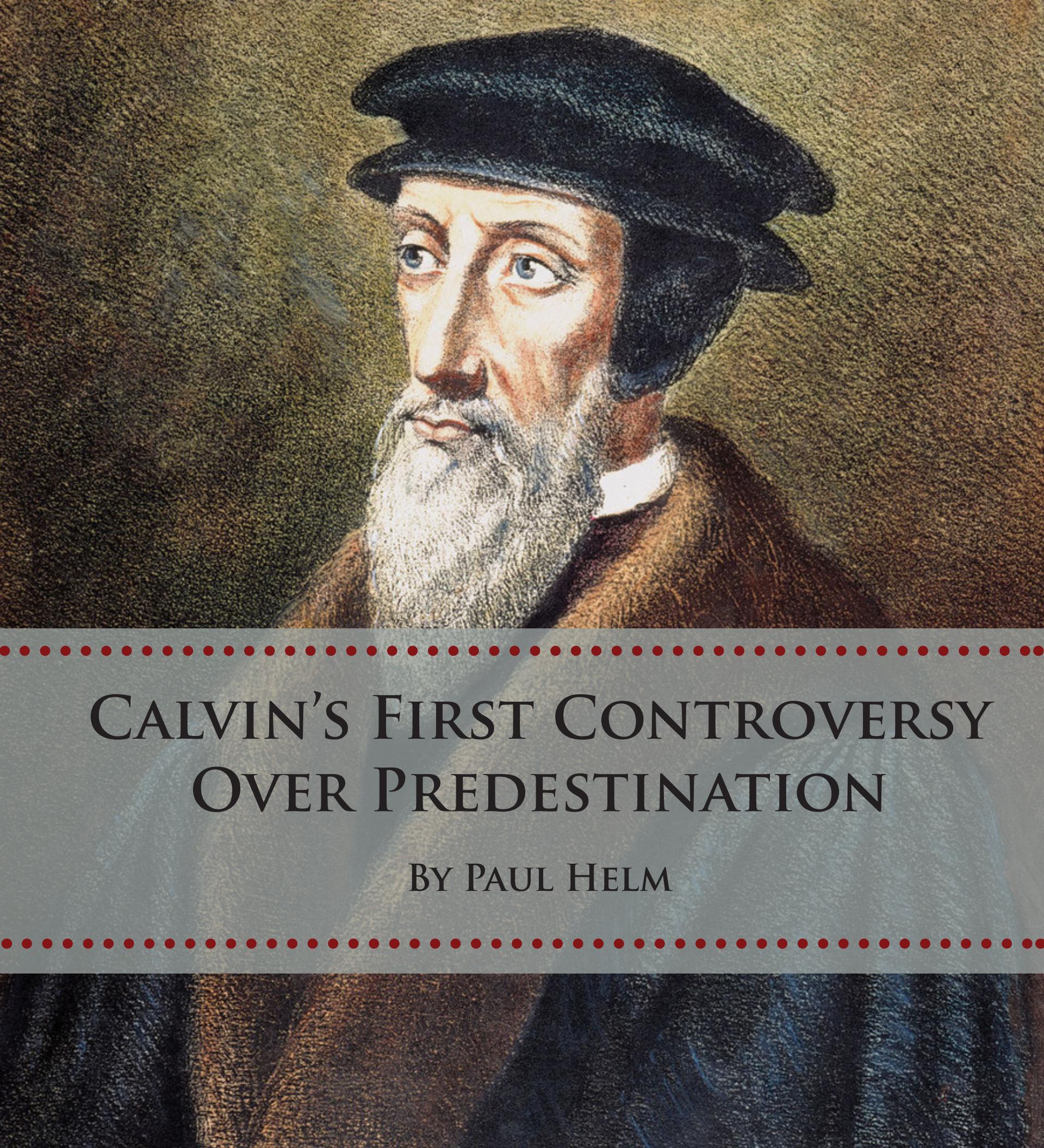
<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 331-332.

<sup>21</sup> Pauck, p. 255.

<sup>22</sup>T. G. Tappert, ed., *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 116.

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# CALVIN'S FIRST CONTROVERSY OVER PREDESTINATION

BY PAUL HELM

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**G**eneva March 1551. It is over ten years since Calvin, now 42, has returned from his enforced exile in Bucer's Strasbourg, no doubt having learned much from the way Bucer organised things in that city.

Calvin is bent on cementing the work of Reformation in the church and the society of Geneva. For him this involves the tricky and contentious matter of distinguishing the jurisdiction of the church, which had to do with spiritual matters, and of the magistrate, who is the 'minister' of the gospel in civil affairs, charged with upholding and defending the one true church. Where is the line between the jurisdiction of each to be drawn?

The issue was soon to be put to the test. Jerome Bolsec, an ex-Carmelite monk, now a physician, appears in the city. He holds 'certain mistaken opinions concerning free will and predestination,' and is reprimanded by the pastors of Geneva (exactly whom, we are not told). He is summoned before the Consistory three times. He openly kept up his opposition to Calvin's views. The story is that on the third of these occasions Calvin came into the meeting, slipping in unnoticed at the back. As soon as Bolsec had finished speaking Calvin stood up and offered a refutation, quoting passages from Augustine verbatim, which lasted for an hour! And then Bolsec was arrested. It appears that this was not what Calvin wanted, but rather that the matter be quietly dropped. Even in prison Bolsec kept up his opposition, slandering Calvin and the ministry more generally. The next we learn is of Bolsec's trial, in October of that year, on a charge of promoting civil disorder, disturbing the peace by spreading his views in the city.

## THE THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

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**B**olsec denied Calvin's teaching regarding eternal predestination, saying that the doctrine made God a tyrant. Instead he proposed that prede-

tination is based on foreseen faith (and reprobation on foreseen unbelief), and so neither was 'eternal', or 'absolute'. For on this understanding of the Word, God elects and predestines those whom he foresees will respond in faith to the gospel. In the views of the pastors of Geneva, headed by Calvin, such sentiments weakened the foundation of God's sovereignty in the gift of his grace and was contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Although Calvin had private discussions with Bolsec before his trial, the significance of which will emerge later, he does not appear to have published any rebuttal. But he offered a written defence of the Genevan view in the form of an explicit refutation of Bolsec's claims, provided in the trial as evidence of the likely disruptive effect of Bolsec's public disputations.

Calvin focuses on the charge that in eternal (or absolute) predestination God is the author of sin, because in such predestination he necessitates the sinner to sin. That is, Bolsec concentrates his attention not so much on predestination as on reprobation. Calvin responds,

To begin with, this terminology that God necessitates is not my language but the jargon of monks which I never use. But it is also malicious impudence to say that I have applied the term sin to God or to his will. What I have said is that the will of God, in that it is the supreme cause, is the necessity of all things; but time and again I have stated that God for His part disposes and controls all that He does with such equity and justice that even the most wicked are compelled to glorify Him, and that His will is neither a tyranny nor an irrational whim but is in fact the true rule of all good. Moreover I have particularly stated and affirmed that men are compelled to do neither good or evil, but that those who do good do so of a free will which God gives them by His Holy Spirit, and that those who do evil do so of their own natural will which is corrupted and rebellious. M

Jerome is thus shown at every point to be a slanderer who perverts good doctrine and the pure truth of God.

A number of things are noteworthy here. First, that Calvin himself is quite capable of drawing fine distinctions. Here, he draws the distinction between *God necessitating men to sin*, which he denies, and *the will of God being the supreme cause, and the necessity of all things*. What's the difference? The difference is that in sinning men act as men, of their own will. They have beliefs and desires of their own, and are able to act in accordance with them, whereas if God were to necessitate men to sin, this would obliterate their will. God necessitates all things—rocks, plants, non-human animals, human beings, angels—in accordance with their various natures. Also it is important to note that Calvin reserves the term ‘free will’ for the activities of the regenerated will, freed from the slavery of sin. Those who do evil do so of their own natural will, that is a will that is ‘natural’ yet ‘un-free’ because they are unregenerate, in bondage to sin. ‘Freedom’ as it applies to human action, is a moral and spiritual term for Calvin, as it was for his mentor Augustine. Only the Son can make a person free. But Bolsec denies the operation of such effectual grace. Calvin again writes,

He attempts, finally, to hide the wicked and disgraceful errors which are involved in his doctrine, such as his assertion that God gives to all a heart capable of obeying Him by faith, which implies that He does not give the will, but that man of his own free will accepts, if he so chooses, the grace of the Holy Spirit, so that our election and salvation are founded upon our merits. He asserts, in fact, that man has not lost his free will and that if he did not have free will, he would be a beast.....Again, the error of his assertion that the grace of God is equal for all and that men decide for themselves whether they are saved or damned, as though God does not elect by His free goodness that whom it is His will to have for his children, and having elected them does not reform their hearts and affections in order to bring them to



## SO PREDESTINATION WAS NOT AN OBSESSION FOR CALVIN, BUT A KEY COMPONENT IN THE DISPLAY AND DEPLOYMENT OF AN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S GRACE FOR SINNERS. IN DEFENDING IT HE WAS DEFENDING THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.



Jesus Christ, as though, having brought them to Christ, He does not establish them right to the end.

What is interesting about this is the way that Calvin displays the implications of the denial of eternal predestination. If Bolsec denies predestination in the way that Calvin and the Genevan pastors (and Augustine) understood it, then he has to say that God places all men, or some of all men, in a situation where his grace makes them salvable. God’s grace is thus merely enabling rather than efficacious. Men may by their wills freely cooperate with it, or they may freely decide not to do so. So, as Calvin puts it, in such thinking sinful man has not lost his free will, but may and must exercise it as a co-partner with God. And, contrary to Bolsec, Calvin states that those whom God elects in Christ he establishes ‘right to the end’. Election and predestination - the bondage of the will to sin - efficacious grace – renovation – perseverance to the end, form a web of ideas which stand or fall together.

So predestination was not an obsession for Calvin, but a key component in the display and deployment of an understanding of God’s grace for sinners. In defending it he was defending the gospel of grace. And the lines of the future controversy of the Calvinists with the Arminians were already beginning to be etched out, half a century before it erupted. The so-called ‘Five Points’ are not all here, and certainly they do not have the devel-

oped form they came to have later on, but they are well on their way.

One oddity is the way that critics of Calvinism such as Bolsec repeatedly attack the idea of predestination (as they still do) when, theologically, it is divine election that is the more basic. For predestination is the divine ensuring that those who are elected to grace and glory in Jesus Christ are brought first to grace, and then to glory. Election sets the goal, and predestination is God's achieving of it. Still odder is the idea that predestination was Calvin's invention, but of course it is scriptural terminology and is prominent in the theology of one of the great fathers of the church, St. Augustine, as well as others. Easier to understand is the close intertwining in Calvin's mind of predestination and divine providence, since it is through the workings of God's providence that predestination works as well.

Bolsec had requested that his views be to the Reformed churches in nearby cities for comment, for he seems to have thought that he would find allies there. They duly were circulated. The questions put to Bolsec, his answers to them, and the rejoinder of the ministers of Geneva, went out to Basle, Berne and Zurich. Calvin helped personally in preparing this circulation. His name was at the head of the sixteen signatories. The copy to Zurich, preserved there still, is in his hand.

Calvin had mixed feelings about the character of the responses of the churches, received in November. He thought that the response from Berne was too timid, while Zurich's pleased him. Support arrived in the form of an unsought letter from Neuchatel, where William Farel was a minister. Nevertheless, milder or stronger, all responses were unanimous in viewing Bolsec's teaching with disfavor. The reception of these letters in



effect brought the deliberations of the trial to a conclusion. The findings were relayed to the Congregation by Calvin on 18th December 1551. They were then ratified by the Council of Geneva.

‘On Thursday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of the month Maître Jerome was banished to the sound of the trumpet from the territory of Geneva.’

## THE BANISHMENT

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**A**s I mentioned at the outset, in the government of Geneva ecclesiastical and civil affairs were closely intertwined, in a way that made tension between the two inevitable. For the magistrate’s concern for civil affairs included the responsibility to curb disturbances of the peace. It was one thing to discuss

theological issues at a conference of the learned, or by private correspondence, or by the publication of books in Latin. It was judged altogether another thing to have unorthodox opinions visited upon the ministry, or on the people at large. When Jerome Bolsec arrived in Geneva he at once made himself into a public figure, though it has to be said that the public authorities let him alone for a while. It was only when, in Calvin’s words (in his letter to the ministers of Switzerland in October 1551), having debated with the ministers of Geneva, he was imprisoned after he had ‘been tumultuously haranguing the common people not to allow themselves to be deceived by us.’

So by this stage Bolsec had become not only theologically awkward to the ecclesiastical authorities, but a civil nuisance, not because he was threatening violence, but because he was determined to keep up his opposition in

Photo by Paulo Ribeiro

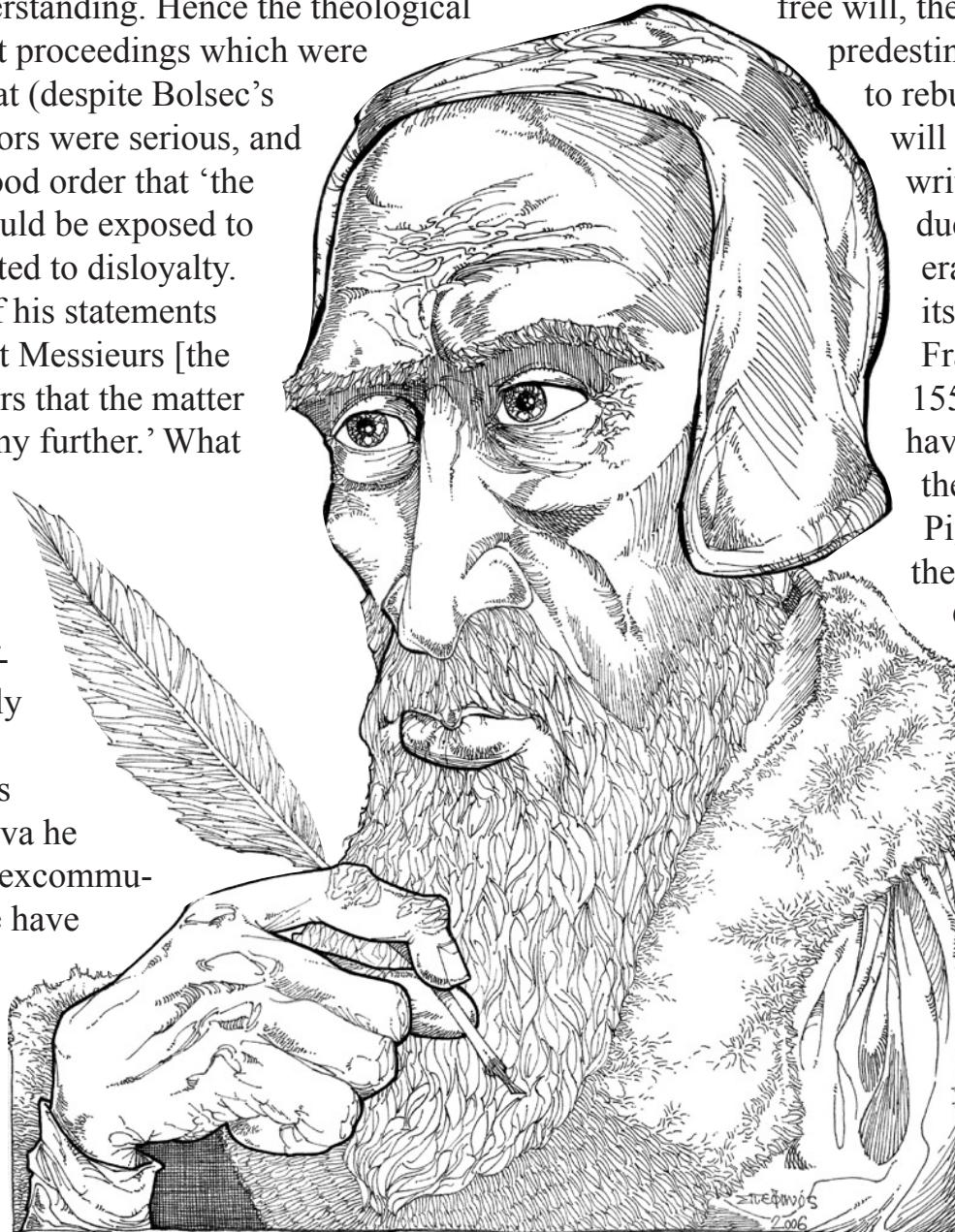


the most public way, haranguing ‘the common people.’ This in the eyes of the magistrates of Geneva was an issue of civil order, an aspect of which involved the maintenance of the good standing of the Christian faith in its Reformed understanding. Hence the theological character of the court proceedings which were designed to prove that (despite Bolsec’s protestations) his errors were serious, and that it was against good order that ‘the common people’ should be exposed to his teaching and incited to disloyalty. Calvin says in one of his statements that he ‘had besought Messieurs [the magistrates] with tears that the matter might not be taken any further.’ What this would have meant in practice is not made clear. Perhaps it was that Calvin wished the affair to remain a purely ecclesiastical matter, though as Bolsec was not a citizen of Geneva he could not have been excommunicated, nor could he have been banished from Geneva without the active support of the magistrate. The complications of church-city relations in Calvin’s Geneva are all too apparent.

## THE FIRST OF THREE CONTROVERSIES

**W**hile attending to Jerome Bolsec, Calvin was also reading a newly-published book by the Roman Catholic theologian Albertus Pighius

of Louvain, Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace, published in August 1542, before the onset of the Bolsec affair. In the book Pighius criticized the 1539 edition (the second) of Calvin’s Institutes, on free will, the bondage of the will, and predestination. Calvin was anxious to rebut Pighius’s errors on the will as speedily as possible, and writing in great haste he produced The Bondage and Liberation of the Will in time for its dissemination at the 1543 Frankfurt Book Fair. Later, in 1552 (Pighius in the mean time having died) Calvin published the other half of his rebuttal of Pighius’s views, Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God. This book has become the standard account of Calvin’s views on the topic, besides the treatment to be found in the 1559 Institutes. So while the Bolsec affair unfolded, Calvin was also giving more formal, scholarly attention to the topic. Perhaps he was spurred on by his concern over the public stir that Bolsec was trying to make. This was the second of his public debates on the subject.



Picture: Stephen Hesselman

The third controversy concerned a man whom Calvin had befriended, Sebastian Castellio, a skilled linguist. At one stage Calvin had found him a job, but Castellio later became disenchanted with his theology, and began speaking and publishing against him, not only on theological questions, but on how Calvin had behaved in the Servetus affair. Calvin’s *Brief Reply in Refutation of the*

*Calumnies of a Certain Worthless Person* was published in 1557. In that year, undeterred, Castellio anonymously circulated *Fourteen Articles* or ‘calumnies’ on Calvin’s views of providence and predestination, accompanied by a provocative letter. Beza persuaded Calvin to take up his pen again. The result was a fuller work against Castellio (though he is not mentioned by name), *A Defence of the Secret Providence of God* (1558), which despite its title was concerned with the theme of predestination as much as with providence. For in Calvin’s view the two were intertwined.

So predestination, though not for Calvin a theological axiom from which the main elements of the Christian faith can be deduced, plays a key role in understanding various important aspects of Calvin’s career. We might think of it in this way: Calvin came by a ‘sudden conversion’ to be captured and captivated by God’s sovereign grace to sinners through Jesus Christ. Predestination was woven into the fabric of this gospel. But predestination above all the themes of the Christian gospel, became an object of scorn and derision to various people, such as Bolsec and Castellio. Calvin defended it, often with an outspokenness which had the effect, if not the intention, of stoking up opposition to it still further. In this way the idea came to have a prominence that Calvin never intended it to have. We must bear this in mind the next time we are tempted to associate him with this one single idea. Nevertheless, studying his responses to critiques of it provides one window into his mind and heart, as well as revealing the uneasy alliance between church and magistrate in Geneva, and offering an introduction to some of the most significant of Calvin’s publications.

## SOURCES

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The chief source of information regarding the Bolsec affair is *The Register of the Company of Pastors in Geneva*, ed. and trans. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids Mich., Eerdmans, 1966), from which most of the information about the response



CALVIN CAME BY A ‘SUDDEN CONVERSION’ TO BE CAPTURED AND CAPTIVATED BY GOD’S SOVEREIGN GRACE TO SINNERS THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. PREDESTINATION WAS WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC OF THIS GOSPEL.



to Bolsec has been taken. This gives full documentary evidence of the trial. See also the *Letters of Calvin*, ed. Bonnet for 1551. Calvin’s work on predestination against Albertus Pighius (1552) is translated into English by J.K.S. Reid as *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London, James Clarke, 1961). The latest translation of Calvin’s early work of Castellio is contained in *Calvin: Theological Treatises*, trans. by J.K.S. Reid (London, Library of Christian Classics, XXII, SCM Press, 1954). The most recent English translation of his main work against Castellio is *A Defense of the Secret Providence of God* (1558), which includes the text of the *Fourteen Articles*. See Keith Goad and Paul Helm, *The Secret Providence of God* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2010).

*Paul Helm was appointed J.I. Packer Chair of Philosophical Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, in 2001. Among his many books are Calvin and the Calvinists, The Providence of God, Eternal God, The Secret Providence of God, John Calvin’s Ideas, Calvin at the Centre, and Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed.*

# 5 Minutes with R. Scott Clark

by Timothy Raymond

## [W]hat theologians in church history do you recommend reading to better understand the doctrine of election?

Among the Fathers, Augustine's *On the Predestination of the Saints* is essential. Gottschalk's little treatise, *On Predestination* witnesses to the vitality of doctrine in the early middle ages. Thomas' discussion in *Summa Theologica* 1a 23.1 is masterful. My favorites, however, are Calvin's exegetical treatment in his commentary on Romans (1539, 1551) chapter 9 because of its strong commitment to understanding the passage in its redemptive-historical context and his doctrinal treatment in the 1559 *Institutes* (3.21-24) because there he helps us address it a posteriori by asking not, 'Am I elect?' but rather, 'Do I believe?' Herman Witsius' 1677

treatment of election relative to the covenant of grace (*Economy of the Covenants* 3.4.) is encouraging as he points to the spiritual benefits the doctrine brings to the believer.

## [H]ow might a Reformed understanding of the doctrine of election help the Christian who struggles with issues of assurance of salvation?

One of the more unfortunate facts in the history of Protestant piety is that the doctrines of election, and reprobation (predestination) have sometimes become a source of doubt and spiritual uncertainty. It is unfortunate and perverse because, understood properly, the doctrine of predestination should be a source of comfort and encouragement.



Perhaps the single greatest reason that Christians have found the doctrine of predestination spiritually troubling is that they have often asked the wrong question: "Am I elect?" This is the wrong question first because it is not a question that Scripture ever encourages us to ask. It is the wrong question because it seeks to know things in a way that has not been revealed to us. We might call this the medieval question. One result of asking the question this way is that one could never know with certainty if one is elect and any claim to know, with certainty, that one is elect, would be regarded as presumption.

# “AM I ELECT?” THIS IS THE WRONG QUESTION . . . THE QUESTION THAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH US TO ASK IS QUITE DIFFERENT: “DO I BELIEVE?” LET US CALL THIS THE PROTESTANT QUESTION. IT IS A QUESTION THAT WE CAN ANSWER, AND BY DOING SO, FIND COMFORT AND CERTAINTY.

The question that the Scriptures teach us to ask is quite different: “Do I believe?” Let us call this the Protestant question. It is a question that we can answer, and by doing so, find comfort and certainty.

The Apostle Paul used the doctrine of election to encourage the Ephesian church. Writing to them on the basis of their profession of faith in Christ, he explained that the Father has “blessed us in Christ” and “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” and that “in love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... (Eph 1:3–6).

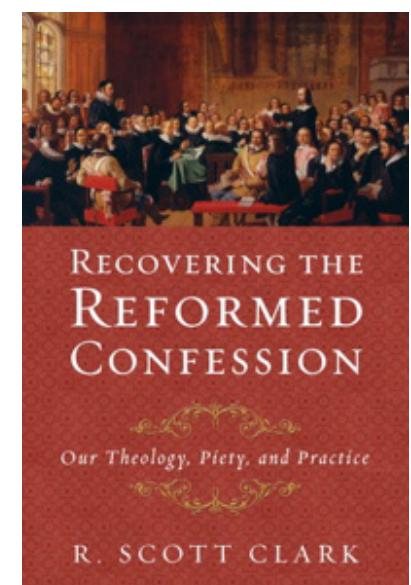
Paul’s point was to remind helpless sinners, whose state, outside of Christ, he described as “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1), of God’s free, unconditional favor in Christ. His reasoning works this way: After the fall, under Adam’s headship (Rom 5:12–21), we are spiritually corrupt and at war with God. We have no inclination to believe. If we believe, it is because “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him...” (Eph 2:4–6). In other words, God’s free election of his people to spiritual life, true faith, and union with Christ means that salvation and righteousness are his free gifts to his people. They were given unconditionally and they are received, through faith alone (Eph 2:8). If you believe, it is because God loved you, in Christ, and willed from all eternity to bring you to life, to give you the gift of faith and through it all of Christ’s benefits. This way of thinking about God’s election gives us firm, unshakeable ground on which to stand. It means that believers belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to their faithful Savior Jesus and that no one can snatch us out of

his hand (John 6:40, 10:28; Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 1).

It is not only medieval Christians who have asked the wrong question. Since the Reformation evangelical Christians have often been tempted to ask the medieval question and have reached the same troubling conclusion. As a result they have made uncertainty of the essence of faith. We see none of this, however, in Paul. Even when he thinks about his struggle with sin in the Christian life (Romans 7) he finds certainty on the basis of God’s free, electing grace and promises in Christ (Rom 8–10). Let us follow Paul, and his followers, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and countless other evangelical Protestants before us and do the same.

Believers are what they are by God’s grace and his promise is as sure as God is immovable and faithful. We should not ask whether we are good enough (we are not) or whether we might fall (we shall) but whether God is faithful (he is) and whether he has sealed his promises with Christ’s obedient life, bloody death, and resurrection (he has), and whether we believe: by God’s grace we do.

*R. Scott Clark teaches church history and historical theology at Westminster Seminary California, where he has taught since 1997. He hosts the Office Hours broadcast. He is also the author of Recovering the Reformed Confessions.*



# Chosen [by] Grace Alone

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By Matthew Barrett

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**F**or those hearing it for the very first time, the doctrine of election can be shocking and offensive. Sometimes, even Christians who have read their Bible for years have never meditated on God's sovereign choice to elect certain individuals to salvation in eternity past. Many times when a believer hears the words "predestination" or "election" for the first time they immediately object, "That is not in the Bible!" Such an initial reaction

is telling, exposing our natural allergy to divine sovereignty. But the truth is simple, predestination is everywhere taught in the Bible and without embarrassment (Acts 13:48; Rom 8:28-30; 9:11-13; Eph 1:4-12; 1 Thess 1:4-5; 2 Thes 2:13; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:1; 2:9; Rev 13:7-18; 17:8). To take just one example, Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the



heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved" (Eph 1:3-6).

In light of passages like Ephesians 1:3-6, it cannot be denied that election is a biblical doctrine. Even Christians who strongly disagree with one another on the exact meaning of election have acknowledged this much. Where the debate comes into play, however, is in how exactly Scripture defines election. Does God, before the foundation of the world, elect certain persons to salvation on the basis of the faith or merit he foresees in them or does God elect certain persons to salvation according to his sovereign good pleasure alone? In other words, is election conditional or unconditional? In this brief article we will see that Scripture is clear, God elects certain individual persons to salvation unconditionally.

## ROMANS 8:28-30

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The apostle Paul spells out the meaning of divine election perhaps more than any other biblical author. Consider Romans 8:28-30, one of his most powerful passages describing the order of salvation,

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Reformed theologians have often titled Romans 8:28-30 the "golden chain of salvation." And for good reason

too, for as we will see in the following five points, each step or link in Paul's mind leads to the next without fail. First, Paul is clearly speaking of salvation. Foreknew, predestination, calling, justification, and glorification all refer to salvation—past, present, and future. Therefore, it will not suffice to argue that Paul is merely speaking of temporal blessings in the life of a believer.<sup>1</sup>

Second, Paul's chain of salvation is referring to the same group of people throughout and such a chain of salvation is unbreakable. Those whom God foreknew he also predestined. And those whom he predestined he called. Those whom he called he justified. And those whom he justified he will glorify. Those foreknown and predestined are the same ones God calls, justifies, and glorifies. Certainly Scripture never teaches that God justifies and glorifies everyone. Therefore, it must be the case that God does not foreknow and predestine everyone, but only some. Additionally, do not miss the unbreakable nature of Paul's chain of salvation. Those predestined *will* be called, justified, and glorified. Paul does not say that God seeks to predestine, call, and justify everyone but unfortunately not all choose to believe. To the contrary, Paul has in mind only the elect. If he did not then Paul could not say that all those who are predestined, called, and justified are also glorified. Therefore, this order of salvation is effectual. God's election results in an effectual call. And God's effectual call always results in justification. And those whom God justifies he will indeed glorify. There is no conditionality in these verses. God works salvation all the way through, from beginning to end.

Third, the believer's hope in suffering is grounded in predestination. As Paul says in verse 28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." What an incredible assurance this promise is for the Christian undergoing suffering in this life. God promises that for those who have been effectually called, all things (yes, even evil things) will work together for good. However, the question must be asked, "How is it that the Christian can know that God

## CHRISTIANS CAN REST ASSURED THAT GOD WILL WORK ALL THINGS FOR GOOD SINCE GOD HAS ALREADY PREDESTINED THEM FOR ETERNAL LIFE BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD!

will work all things together for good? Paul's answer: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom 8:28-30). Christians can rest assured that God will work all things for good since God has already predestined them for eternal life before the foundation of the world! As Peterson and Williams explain, "Christians are assured that God will work all for their good because he has accomplished the greatest good for them—he planned and brought about their salvation from beginning to end."<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, predestination in Romans 8:29-30 is unconditional. Arminians argue that when Paul refers to those whom God "foreknew" Paul is referring to divine foreknowledge. In other words, Paul is referring to God's factual knowledge ahead of time as to who would and who would not believe. It is on the basis of this foreknowledge, argues the Arminian, that God then predestines. For example, Jack Cottrell affirms, "Through his foreknowledge God sees who will believe upon Jesus Christ . . . then even before the creation of the world he predestines these believers to share the glory of the risen Christ."<sup>23</sup> It is evident that in the Arminian view, the ultimate basis upon which a person is saved is to be found within the person himself, for God's election is finally determined on whether or not he will believe. However, such an interpretation is faulty. To begin with, the Arminian view turns election into mere confirmation. We make the final decision and God simply sees ahead of time and confirms our choice.

Additionally, the Arminian has read his view of foreknowledge into Paul's use of "foreknew." As S. M.

Baugh has demonstrated, while foreknew can at times mean knowing facts ahead of time, in Romans 8:29 and in a host of other passages it does not. While it is always true that God knows all things ahead of time, foreknew in Romans 8:29 refers to God foreloving certain persons in a saving way.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Paul speaks of God foreknowing *persons*, not facts. Before the foundation of the world, God set his saving love on us, and thought of us in relationship to him.

Consider other texts where "foreknew" is used. Paul writes to the Corinthians, "But if anyone loves God, he is known by God" (1 Cor 8:3). Paul is not referring to God knowing facts about us, but rather God knowing us personally, in a saving way. Or consider Galatians 4:8-9, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?" Paul is not speaking of knowing facts about God, but of coming to know God, as a person, in a saving way. John 10:14-15 also proves the point, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." Jesus knowing his elect is compared to the Father knowing the Son and the Son knowing the Father. Jesus is not referring to his factual knowledge of the Father, but of knowing the Father as a person. Similarly, when he speaks of knowing his elect he is referring to knowing them in a saving, personal relationship. Finally, the same point is reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23. Jesus says that not everyone who calls him 'Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of the Father. Though they may even prophesy, cast out demons, and do many



Luca Giordano, 1690

mighty works in the name of Jesus, he will declare to them, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” Again, Jesus is not speaking of his factual knowledge, but of not knowing these people in a saving relationship.

Fifth, nowhere in Romans 8:28-30 do we get the impression that Paul is only speaking of predestination of groups or classes of people rather than specific individuals. Paul has in mind individuals, “those who love God,” “those who are called according to his purpose,” etc. These same individuals have the Spirit who “helps us in our weakness,” “intercedes for us,” and “searches hearts” (Rom 8:26-27).

#### ROMANS 9:6-24

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**B**esides Romans 8:28-30, one of the most powerful texts supporting unconditional election is Romans 9:6-24. The context of Romans 9 concerns the salvation of Israel. Paul explains that he has “great sorrow and unceasing anguish” in his heart, wishing himself accursed and cut off from Christ if it meant the salvation of his brothers, “my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). Israel had it all: “the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises” as well as “the patriarchs” and from their race “Christ who is God over all” (Rom 9:5-6). In light

of Israel's disobedience and even rejection of Christ, the question naturally arises, "Has God's Word failed?" Paul answers with an emphatic No. Why? "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rom 9:6b). Being a physical offspring of Abraham did not make one a true child of Abraham, for it is not the "children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring" (Rom 9:8).

On what basis can Paul make such a shocking assertion? Paul turns to the story of Abraham and Sarah, through whom God promised a son, Isaac. It was through Isaac and Rebecca that God brought forth Jacob and Esau. Notice, however, what Paul says concerning the birth of these two sons,

And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom 9:10-13).

God chose Jacob and rejected Esau. God loved Jacob and hated Esau. Why is this choice so surprising? It is surprising for several reasons. First, Esau was the oldest, the firstborn, not Jacob. But God chose the second born, Jacob, to fulfill his "purpose in election" (Rom 9:11). As the text says, "The older will serve the younger." Second, God's choice is not based on anything foreseen in Jacob or Esau. Nothing at all! Rather, God's choice is according to his good purpose. God's choice was made before Jacob and Esau were born and "had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls." In other words, God's choice was not based on any work by Jacob or Esau but was purely due to God who calls. Should God's choice be conditioned on Jacob and Esau, his purpose in election would not stand.

Arminians will protest at this point, arguing that this is unfair and arbitrary. How can God be just if he chooses one for salvation and rejects the other for damnation not based on anything within them but purely because of the purpose of his will? Ironically, such an objection is the same one Paul encountered and sought to answer in the very next verse. "What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion'" (Rom 9:14-15). Paul does not entertain such an objection. God is sovereign and there is no injustice on his part. He can choose whomever he wills. Surely, if the Arminian view was correct, there would be no better place for Paul to clarify the meaning of election. If it was true that election is based on God foreseeing our human response, Paul would have quickly qualified himself. But notice, Paul's reaction is the opposite, arguing that God is not unjust. This is exactly the response one would expect if election is unconditional. In other words, rather than backpedaling, qualifying that election is based on man's faith, Paul instead reinforces divine sovereignty ("I will have mercy on whom I have mercy") and defends God's determination of who will be saved without consideration of anything they have done, good or bad.

The verses that follow are astounding, in every way exalting the sovereign choice of God rather than man's free will.

What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills (Rom 9:14-18).

There can be no way around it: God, not man, is the determining agent in salvation. God is free to elect whomever he wills, and such a choice is not based on man's will or choice, but on God's. To make such a point, Paul turns to the story of Pharaoh. In order to put on full display his sovereignty, power, glory, and supremacy in delivering his chosen people, God raises up Pharaoh in order to harden his heart. Just as God was free to love Jacob and hate Esau—not based on anything in them but before they were born and had done anything good or bad—so also is God free to harden the heart of Pharaoh in order to display his glory in saving Israel. As Paul says, “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills” (Rom 9:16, 18).

But the Arminian will object, “Foul! God is unfair! How can he still hold sinners responsible if he has decided before hand that they will or will not be saved?” Once again, however, Paul anticipated the same objection, which is what you would expect if he is expounding the unconditional nature of election.

You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom 9:19-24).

Peterson and Williams helpfully explain how Paul would have responded if the Arminian view was biblical. “He [Paul] does not tone down his emphasis on

sovereignty and say, ‘God is not absolutely in control, as your protest misunderstands me to teach. Instead, God grants us free will and makes his choice based upon our response to the gospel.’<sup>5</sup> But Paul does not respond this way. Instead, he confronts us in our arrogance, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” Using the imagery of a potter and his clay, Paul argues that God is like the potter, having complete control and freedom to use his clay however he pleases. The clay never has the right to question the potter (“Why have you made me like this?”). After all, the clay is clay. On the other hand, God is the potter. He is perfectly just “to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use.” In doing the former he displays his mercy and glory. In doing the latter, he displays his wrath and power. In other words, God, desiring to show his wrath and make known his power, has endured with much patience “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.” Why? In order “to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.” God determines the fate of every single individual. He is the potter, making out of the same lump of clay some vessels for glory and others for destruction.

So far we have seen that in no way is election in Romans 9 conditional. However, some will also object that Paul has in mind not individual election but corporate election. In other words, Paul is not referring to the eternal destiny of individual persons, but merely to classes or groups (Jew and Gentile). In response, Paul cannot be identifying “objects of his wrath” and “objects of his mercy” as two classes, Jews and Gentiles. Notice, Paul argues that “objects of his mercy” includes both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it is unnecessary to choose between individual and corporate categories. God chooses individuals to salvation (e.g., Jacob and Esau), but these individuals are part of and make up God’s people, the church. Jews and Gentiles are elected to be part of God’s chosen people (Rom 9:24-29). He has a remnant that will be saved (Rom 9:27).<sup>7</sup>

**EPHESIANS 1:4-5, 11**

A third passage in Pauline literature that supports the doctrine of unconditional election is Ephesians 1:3-6, 11,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. . . . In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

Before the “foundation of the world” God chose or predestined certain persons to salvation. Like Romans 9, in Ephesians 1 Paul teaches that God’s choice occurs before anyone is born, before anyone has done anything good or bad (cf. Rom 9:11). Does Paul, in Ephesians 1, condition election on something in us? Absolutely not. Paul is forthright: God chose us and predestined us not only before the foundation of the world but “according to the purpose of his will.” God’s sovereign will is the determining factor in our election, not our will. Paul reiterates such a point in verse 11, “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.” God is in control of all things, causing everything to work according to his sovereign determination. Election is included in “all things.” Again, God predestines and brings us to salvation not according to anything in us, but according to the counsel of his will.

Furthermore, it is often objected that such a God who

**SALVATION IS OF THE LORD. OUR ELECTION IS HIS DOING, NOT OURS. THE REASON WE ARE NOT SPENDING AN ETERNITY IN HELL IS BECAUSE GOD WAS GRACIOUS AND MERCIFUL, PREDESTINING US FOR GLORY THOUGH WE DESERVED OTHERWISE. THEREFORE, WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO GIVE THANKS.**

chooses some and not others cannot be a God of love. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Ephesians 1:4-5 we read that God chose us out of *love* (“In love he predestined us”). Love is behind God’s electing choice. Moreover, Paul’s mention of divine love once again highlights the unconditional nature of election. Paul teaches that election is not because of something in us (e.g., faith), but purely because of the purpose of his divine love for us. So not only is the basis of election God’s sovereign will, but it is also God’s gracious love.

Additionally, in verse 6 we read that not only has God predestined us out of his love for us, but he has done so “to the praise of his glorious grace.” In other words, it is not man’s will or choice that is the basis, purpose, or *telos* of election, but it is God’s glorious grace. Should we condition election on man’s willful choice (something foreign to Ephesians 1), then God would be robbed of his glorious grace! Peterson and Williams summarize Paul’s message well, “predestination finally rests on God’s sovereign mercy, free grace, loving choice, gracious will.”<sup>8</sup>

It is essential to observe that the election spoken of by Paul effectually results in salvation. We are chosen before the foundation of the world so that “we should be holy and blameless before him” (Eph 1:4). Out of love God predestined us “for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5). Therefore, in Christ we have obtained an inheritance, “having been predestined

according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:11-12).<sup>9</sup> It is no wonder Paul can say, God has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). What Ephesians 1 demonstrates so well is that predestination is a fountain, out of which gush forth all the blessings of salvation, blessings that are guaranteed ahead of time. In other words, when God elects sinners, not on the basis of anything in them but only according to the good pleasure of his will, he guarantees that this election will result in salvation. Therefore, it is unbiblical to argue as some do that election must refer to service and not salvation. Paul is referring to spiritual matters of eternal significance. Hence, Paul can say that predestination results in spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3), redemption through the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7), the forgiveness of our trespasses (Eph 1:7), an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11, 14), and the gospel of our salvation (Eph 1:13). Ephesians 1 shows us that our redemption, adoption, sanctification, and reception of eternal life are all the result of election.

Furthermore, that election is to salvation and not service is evident in the fact that we are predestined in Christ (Eph 1:3-5, 11). Paul is referring to union with Christ when he says God chose us “in him” (Eph 1:4, 11). We are chosen in Christ before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4). Therefore, while our actual union with Christ awaits our existence in history when we are effectual called, before time God had already planned our union with Christ, which means that God not only elected us, but his election of us included the means by which we would be saved.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

**W**hile many other biblical passages could be examined in support of unconditional election, it is crucial to recognize the purpose of the doctrine of election for the Christian life.<sup>10</sup> First and foremost, the doctrine of election is meant to bring us to our knees in worship and praise of our sovereign, merciful, and gracious God. As Paul explains in Ephesians 1:5-6, God predestined us according to the purpose of his will “to the praise of his glorious grace.” We have been predestined so that we might live “for the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:12). Election gives us every reason to give thanks. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, “We give thanks to God always for all of you . . . For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you” (1 Thess 1:2, 4). And again Paul writes in his second letter to the Thessalonians, “But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13). Salva-

tion is of the Lord. Our election is his doing, not ours. The reason we are not spending an eternity in hell is because God was gracious and merciful, predestining us for glory though we deserved otherwise. Therefore, we have every reason to give thanks.

Not only should election lead us to worship and praise God, but it should motivate us to evangelize the lost. Arminians often object that if we affirm unconditional election then we will undercut any motive to reach the lost. But such an objection is unbiblical. We must not forget that right after Paul exalts God’s sovereign choice in Romans 9, he turns in Romans 10 to exhort

believers to take the gospel to those who have not heard. And in Acts 18:10, right after many Corinthians heard the gospel from Paul and believed, God tells Paul, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” But shouldn’t Paul pack up his bags and return home to relax in safety since God already has elected many in this city? To the contrary, God says quite the opposite: I have many in this city who are my people. Therefore, keep preaching the gospel! Paul knew this truth well and that is why he says in 2 Timothy 2:10, “Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). As believers, we are privileged to be the means by which the gospel goes to the nations. What great confidence we have in knowing that God has his elect and when they hear the gospel they will believe. Wayne Grudem uses a helpful analogy, “It is as if someone invited us to come fishing and said, ‘I guarantee that you will catch some fish — they are hungry and waiting.’”<sup>11</sup>

Finally, election is a doctrine that is meant to give us great assurance and comfort. Paul says that for those who love God, the elect, “all things work together for good” (Rom 8:28). How do we know this is true? Paul explains, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Rom 8:29). Because God has predestined us we will be conformed to the image of Christ. Though trials and tribulation will come, God promises that he will work all things (including evil things) for our good. What he has begun before the foundation of the world, he will bring to completion. How soothing it is to know that God always has our eternal good in mind and our salvation is secure in Christ.

#### (Endnotes)

1 Contra J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MI: Beacon Hill, 1994), 250, who argues Paul is speaking of temporal predestination.

- 2 Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 54.
  - 3 Jack W. Cottrell, “Conditional Election,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 62.
  - 4 S. M. Baugh, “The Meaning of Foreknowledge,” in *Still Sovereign*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 194.
  - 5 Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 62.
  - 6 Ibid., 63.
  - 7 Neither can it be objected that Romans 9 has in view an election for temporal service rather than eternal salvation. For consider the language Paul uses: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated”; “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy”; “one vessel for honored use and another for dishonorable use”; “God, desiring to show his wrath”; “vessels of wrath prepared for destruction”; “prepared beforehand for glory.”
  - 8 Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 57.
  - 9 It might be objected that in Ephesians 1:11 the plural is used, rather than the singular, therefore demonstrating that election refers to classes of people rather than individual persons. However, Ephesians was written to the church, so of course Paul will use plural pronouns. As noted with Romans 9, it is a false dichotomy to choose between election being individual or corporate. It is both. God elects individuals, but these individuals make up his church (Eph. 1:12-13). See Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 59.
  - 10 Other passages include: Gen 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:7; 25:23; 28:15; Deut 4:37; 7:6-8; 10:14-15; 14:2; Josh 24:2-3; Mark 13:20-27; John 6:35-45; 10:26-30; 15:14-19; 17:2-24; Acts 13:48; 18:9-10.
  - 11 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 674.
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# **Suffering for the Gospel and the Certainty of the Salvation of the Elect**

By Bruce A. Ware

**T**s it true, as some claim, that if God has chosen some to be saved, and because the electing God is fully sovereign they cannot fail to be saved, that evangelism and missions, then, are rendered superfluous, unnecessary, and devoid of all purpose and meaning? After all, they reason, if the elect must be saved, and if the non-elect cannot be saved, then there is no point to evangelism.

What this line of reasoning fails to comprehend is this: while God has ordained the ends of the certain salvation of the elect, he also has ordained, by his grace and kindness, the means that are necessary in accomplishing these ends — means that involve the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth, even at the cost of opposition and affliction, so that

the elect who must be saved, will be saved only as they hear the gospel, turn from their sin, and believe in Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and their only hope for eternal life.

Is this not the conviction held by the Apostle Paul as intimated in 2 Timothy 2:8-10? He writes:

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.

Notice with me two observations from this text. First, in vv. 8-9 Paul suffers hardships as the expression of his commitment that the gospel must be known for people to be saved. In other words, Paul is committed to spreading the gospel, so committed that he even faces and endures the hardships that come in order to persevere in the spread of the gospel. Why? The answer surely is this: Paul believes that the gospel must be known for people to be saved, and because of this he accepts even these hardships in light of the necessity of the spread of the gospel. We hear in this text, then, an echo of Paul's logic and conviction from Romans 10:13-15: "For 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.' 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!'"

Second, in v. 10 Paul suffers hardships as the expression of his commitment particularly that the elect must hear and believe the gospel in order to be saved. Paul knows that God has elected certain people to be saved, and he knows that they cannot fail to be saved. Recall but one text here: Ephesians 1:4, "He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him." God elects his own before he has yet created the world, and the salvation of the elect is certain — He will make them holy and blameless before Him. So yes, Paul knows that God has elected certain people to be saved, and he knows that they can-

not fail to be saved. Yet, he also knows that they are not saved until they hear and believe the gospel. Did you notice the "so that" in v. 10? Paul says that he endures all these hardships for the sake of the elect, "so that" (i.e., *hina* in Greek, for this purpose) they may obtain their salvation in Christ. Only when the elect hear and believe will that for which they have been elected actually take place. Therefore, in a particular sense, Paul's suffering in the spread of the gospel has this goal in view — that among those who hear the gospel, those who have been chosen by God to be saved will hear the good news of the gospel, and upon hearing, they will believe and be saved.

Putting these two observations together, we summarize as follows: Paul's confidence in his spreading of the gospel, even through hardships, is found, then, in this dual conviction: (1) that people are only saved when they hear and believe the gospel, and (2) when the elect hear the gospel, they will in fact obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. More simply, Paul's dual conviction is this: (1) people must hear the gospel to be saved, and (2) when the elect hear the gospel (but only when they hear the gospel) they will be saved.

For Paul, then, there is no conflict between the doctrine of election and the necessity of proclaiming the gospel. Even though the elect cannot fail to be saved, yet God has designed that the spread of the gospel is the God-ordained means by which these elect are in fact saved. As Paul states his conviction in another place, he says, "But we must always thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God has chosen you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth" (2 Thess 2:13).

In a sermon he preached on 2 Timothy 2:10 ("For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory"), Calvin comments as follows:

[One might imagine] that it is superfluous that Paul

# DIVINE ELECTION IS NOT BASED UPON OR CONDITIONED BY THE “FORESEEN FAITH” OF THOSE WHO WILL, IN TIME, BELIEVE IN CHRIST. SO, WHILE DIVINE ELECTION IS CONDITIONED UPON THE GOOD PLEASURE, WISDOM, PURPOSES, PLANS AND WILL OF GOD, IT IS NOT BASED ON ANYTHING ABOUT US AS PERSONS AND IS IN THIS SENSE, THEN, UNCONDITIONAL.

should ‘endure for the elect.’ ‘Cannot God save those whom he elected and adopted before the creation of the world, without the assistance of men? Has the immutable decree of God any need of human help, or of creatures? Why then does Paul say that he endures on account of the elect?’ Now, it is true that God will transport his people to the inheritance which is prepared for them; but yet he is pleased to make use of the labor of men. Not that he is under an obligation of borrowing anything from us, but he confers on us this honor by his undeserved goodness, and wishes that we should be instruments of his power. Thus Paul does not boast that the salvation of the children of God depends on his steadfastness or on the afflictions which he had to endure; but he only means that God wishes to save his people by means of the word, and that he employs men whom he has chosen for that purpose, as for his own work, and makes them instruments of the power of his Holy Spirit. — John Calvin, *Sermons on the two Epistles to Timothy*.

In what follows, I wish to ask and answer four questions that might come to one’s mind upon hearing this proposal that gospel proclamation, involving at times opposition and suffering, is the necessary means God has appointed for his elect to be saved.<sup>1</sup> But my goal in addressing these questions is not only greater clarity in our understandings of just what Scripture commends us to believe, but also greater fervor and passion for the glory of God through the salvation of the elect that God designs to take place through, and not apart from, the spread of the gospel.

Our four questions here are these:

1. What is your understanding of divine election in this discussion?
2. What kind of “necessity” is involved in the claim that not only are the ends that God has ordained necessary (the salvation of the elect), but also that the means for accomplishing those ends are also necessary (preaching of the gospel)?
3. Why did God ordain these particular means to bring about the salvation of the elect?
4. Why are suffering, persecution, opposition, and affliction sometimes involved in the employment of the means of the spread of the gospel?

## 1. WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF DIVINE ELECTION?

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**D**ivine election to salvation or unconditional election may be defined as God’s gracious choice, made in eternity past solely by God, of those whom he would save by faith through the atoning death of his Son. Further, this choice of God is not based upon anything that those so chosen would do, or any choice that they would make, or on how good or bad they might be, or on anything else specifically true about them (i.e., their qualities, characters, decisions, or actions) in contrast to others. Rather this choice of God of whom he will save is based solely upon God’s own good pleasure and will. In particular, and in light of the long-standing debate over this doctrine between those in the Reformed tradition and various streams of the Arminian tradition, unconditional election specifically denies that God elects persons based upon his advanced knowledge,



in eternity past, of their future decision of whether to receive Christ or not when presented the gospel. That is, divine election is not based upon or conditioned by the “foreseen faith” of those who will, in time, believe in Christ. So, while divine election is conditioned upon the good pleasure, wisdom, purposes, plans and will of God, it is not based on anything about us as persons and is in this sense, then, unconditional.

Many teachings from Scripture support this understanding of divine election. Here, let me state just one: Ephesians 1:3-6. Paul begins this letter commanding praise to God the Father for the many rich and wondrous blessings he has granted us in his Son (Eph 1:3). And so as not to leave us wondering just what these blessings are that he has in mind, he proceeds to enumerate them in the verses that follow (Eph 1:4-14). Where does he begin his recitation of God’s wondrous blessings? What blessing tops the list? Of all things, the very first blessing he extols, the one that, in the apostle’s mind, constitutes the basis for the rest of the blessings that follow, is the truth that God “chose us in Him [Christ], before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight” (Eph 1:4). And rather than leaving this notion quickly (as one would drop an unexpectedly hot pan picked up from the stove), he adds to this opening thought, marveling now that in love, God “predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself according to His favor and will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He favored us with in the Beloved” (Eph 1:5-6). Let’s not miss the significance here. When Paul thinks of why God is worthy of being praised, of what God has done for his people that should elicit from them deep, passionate, and wondrous worship, to the glory of his name, for the riches of his grace (Eph 1:6), the very first thing that comes to his mind, and flows from his pen, is this truth: God chose us! God predestined us!

And consider two things: (1) the only understanding of election that can make sense of why this doctrine is so very significant to the Apostle Paul is that of unconditional election. If election is ultimately our choosing God that he merely sees and accepts, there is little if anything about which to praise God! But, if his choos-

ing us is the basis for all else that we receive, there is great reason for praising him. (2) Isn’t Paul’s reference to God’s choice of us “before the foundation of the world” meant to disabuse us of any sense in which we had some role to play in the reality of our being the elect? Indeed, this is God’s work, pure and simple, a choosing of those whom he would save, on the basis of which the certainty of their eventual salvation and full glorification depends.

## 2. WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY DIVINE NECESSITY?

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**S**tated otherwise, what kind of “necessity” is involved in the claim that not only are the ends that God has ordained necessary (the salvation of the elect), but also that the means for accomplishing those ends are also necessary (preaching of the gospel)? There are two kinds of necessity of which we must be clear: absolute necessity and contingent necessity. For example: breathing oxygen to live is absolutely necessary for each of you; but breathing the oxygen in this particular room is contingently necessary for you, contingent upon your being in this room at this time. Were you in another room, or walking to your car, or hiking in the mountains, you would breathe different oxygen than you now are. So, breathing this oxygen is contingently necessary just now, but breathing some oxygen any place you go is absolutely necessary for you to live.

What, then, do we say of the “necessity” in our dual claims that 1) the ends that God has ordained, viz., the salvation of the elect, are necessary, and 2) the means God has ordained, viz., our spreading of the gospel, are necessary for the elect to be saved?

Amazingly, the answer in each case is this: the necessity of the *ends* of the salvation of the elect is a *contingent* necessity, and the necessity of the *means* of our spreading the gospel for the elect to be saved is, likewise, a *contingent* necessity. Let’s consider one at a time.

First, the necessity of the *ends* of the salvation of the elect is a *contingent* necessity — but contingent upon

what? Answer: contingent upon God's free and gracious decision to save any at all, and to save these in particular. As Romans 9:15 says, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Second, the necessity of the *means* of our spreading the gospel for the elect to be saved is a *contingent* necessity — but contingent upon what? Answer: contingent upon God's kind and gracious purpose to involve us as participants in the accomplishing of his work of saving sinners.

God is self-sufficient, omnipotent, and omnipresent — He doesn't need any of us to "help" him accomplish this or any other work that God designs to do. If he so chose, he could at this moment speak the gospel in perfect dialect to every person.

But we often think very differently in our churches. Consider the call often given to consider missions. In far too many cases, Christians are appealed to in a way such as this: "God wants to do this wonderful and glorious work, but he needs you to step up and volunteer. If you don't do it, how will it get done? God needs laborers to be willing to go into the harvest, and if you refuse to heed the call of God on your life, to go and to serve, God's work will remain unfinished."

How tragic this is. How self-promoting and God-beglittling is our view of God and of ourselves. But God will have none of it. "My glory I will not share with another," he declares in Isa 42:8. No, the necessity by which the gospel must be spread in order for people to be saved is no absolute necessity; it is a contingent necessity that is based on the free, sovereign, and gracious will of God. But then our second question naturally comes next:

### **3. WHY DID GOD ORDAIN THESE PARTICULAR MEANS TO BRING ABOUT THE SALVATION OF THE ELECT?**

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**W**hy, then, did he choose to make our spreading of the gospel necessary — albeit contingently necessary — for sinners to be saved?

**GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT, OMNIPOTENT, AND OMNIPRESENT — HE DOESN'T NEED ANY OF US TO "HELP" HIM ACCOMPLISH THIS OR ANY OTHER WORK THAT GOD DESIGNS TO DO.**

Answer: God's lavish kindness, mercy, love, grace, and longing to share the bounty of his joy with us, by sharing his work — the greatest work in all of the universe — with us.

God's call to service is so gracious and generous because it is a call to participate in the work that is *his own*. Since God is fully sovereign, he could carry out everything he wanted without enlisting our participation. Unlike the missionary calls in some of our churches, God doesn't need me or anyone to respond for his work to be done. Recall the rebuke that John the Baptist gave to the Pharisees who prided themselves on their Jewish lineage. He said to the crowd and to them, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (Luke 3:8).

But, while it is true that God doesn't need our service, it is nonetheless astonishing that he wants and commands and enlists and uses our service, in participation with him, in the work that is his alone. I am amazed here at the generosity of God to share the doing of his work with people like you and me. My own temperament borders on being somewhat perfectionistic, and so I tend to care about how my work is done. If others help me, whether I say so or not, I care whether they do it "my way" (which translates, in my mind, to "the right way"). On things that matter to me, I would often rather do it myself. Astonishingly, God is not so stingy. Rather, for this work that is his alone, and work that he cares about so very, very much, how incredibly generous of God to share the privilege and participation of this work with

us. He could have set things up so that all we did was watch from afar, but instead he devised a plan of called and invited participation. How grateful we should be for the service God calls us to, and for the lavish generosity of God's heart that shares so bountifully with us.

So, does God need these particular means to bring about the salvation of the elect? No, but in his kindness and lavish goodness, he has chosen to use us as the necessary means — albeit a contingent necessity — to bring about the necessary ends of the salvation of the elect.

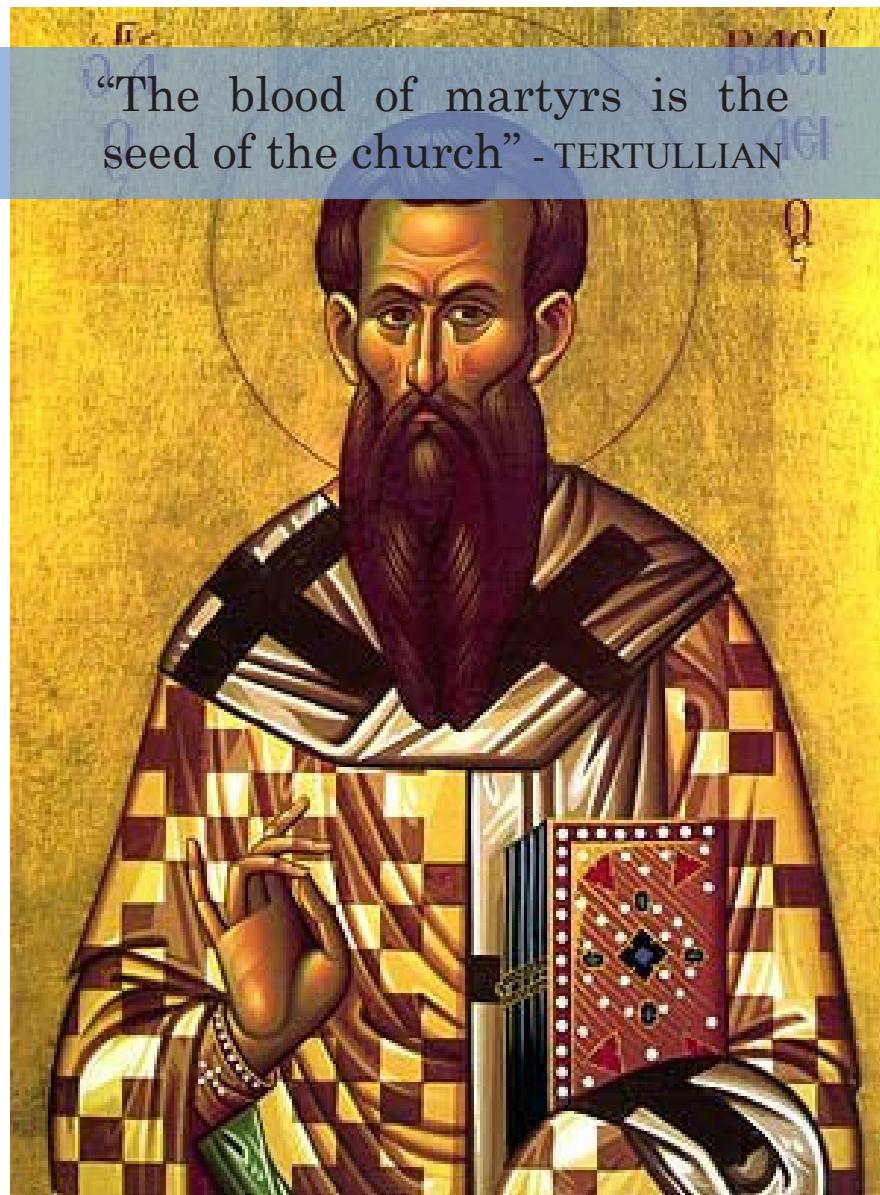
#### 4. WHY IS SUFFERING A MEANS TO SPREADING THE GOSPEL?

Why are suffering, persecution, opposition, and affliction sometimes involved in the employment of the means of the Spread fo the Gospel? There are a number of answers to this question, which when taken together show the wisdom of God in ordaining the spread of the gospel through suffering. First, extending the ministry of the suffering Christ unfolds through the sufferings of his messengers. We read in Colossians 1:24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions." As Christ won the victory through human weaknesses of suffering, affliction, opposition, and death on the cross,

so the victory is extended through this same expression of human weaknesses — of suffering, affliction, opposition, and death. Clearly Paul does not and cannot mean that somehow the cross was deficient in what it accomplished. Rather, he points to the reality that the sufferings of Christ in accomplishing our full salvation are now extended through the sufferings of his followers who bring the message of salvation to the lost. Extending the ministry of Christ by suffering, then, is one reason why this witness goes forth at times in affliction and is not spared it.

Second, identification with the person and message of Christ before others will result in the world treating Christ's messengers as they treated Christ. John 15:18-21 says, "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its

own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me." Identification with the person and message of Christ is, then, another reason why the gospel goes forth in affliction, opposition and suffering. Because we go in Jesus name, bearing his message, and



## IT IS, THEREFORE, PRECISELY BECAUSE OF ELECTION, BECAUSE GOD WILL SAVE HIS ELECT THROUGH THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL, THAT WE CAN EMBRACE THE SUFFERING THAT MIGHT BE INVOLVED

displaying his character, we should expect the same reception by the world that he received. The force of this point is seen, in part, in what some who call themselves Christians do to avoid such persecution. They go, but not in his name; they bear witness, but not of his message; they put forth themselves, but not the character of Christ. When gospel witness is carried out with integrity and biblical fidelity it risks the same treatment Jesus received. Indeed, a slave is not greater than his master. As Jesus said, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20).

Third, suffering for the gospel is a consequence of proclaiming a message that the world despises, denounces, ridicules and dismisses as folly. Consider 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-25, “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” Recall the words of John 3 that light has come into the world, but men loved the darkness rather than the light; they would not go to the light lest their evil deeds be exposed (Jn 3:19-20). The problem with sinners is fundamentally moral, not intellectual; fundamentally of the heart, not of the head. To put it differently, the foolishness they attribute to their understanding of the gospel is a consequence of the moral revulsion they have to the gospel’s claim of human sin and divine sovereignty. Oh, they can know what the gospel claims — indeed, apart from this how can we account for them thinking it foolish? But they do not love what they know it to be. Rather they hate what they know it to be. Again, sometimes we seek to solve this problem by making the intellectual content of the gospel acceptable to their minds. But with no change of heart, such acceptance inevitably means the gospel has been desecrated. No, the prob-

lem is moral — they hate the light. They see the light, they know the difference between darkness and light, and they hate the light. Proclaiming the gospel in this world, then, faces the witness of Christ with the reality that suffering may well occur simply because fallen men and women find this gospel sheer folly. To borrow the imagery of 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, the fragrance that is to us one of peace and joy and life, is to them the stench of decay and rottenness and death.

Fourth, suffering and affliction are sometimes involved in the spread of the gospel precisely because evil men, deceivers, and false teachers stand against the truth and oppose the true meaning of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:10-13, “Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Not only does the unsaved world as a whole find the word of the cross foolish, there is a special kind of disdain for the truth of the gospel found in those elite and learned despisers of the true Christian faith. Persecution from the world is more understandable. This, however, is persecution from those who wear sheep’s clothing — they have spoken our language and dressed in the garb of our Christian culture — yet within they are ravenous wolves. If the world finds the gospel foolishness, these despisers of all things truly Christian find the gospel fully repulsive.

Fifth, suffering and affliction are sometimes involved

in the spread of the gospel in order to display that the converting and transforming power of the gospel is not of us but of God. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 states, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” Recall the principle of 2 Corinthians 12:10 — “when I am weak, then I am strong.” How counter-intuitive this is, but how right. When the gospel succeeds not because of my evident strength, but despite my weakness; when it triumphs not due to my talent and ability, but in reliance on the Spirit’s work; when the gospel accomplishes its converting and transforming work in a way that shows “the gospel is the power of God for salvation, of the Jew first and also of the Greek” — when this happens, God is glorified not only in the ends being accomplished — the elect saved — but also in the means by which the ends are accomplished — in our humble recognition that this work is fully of God and not of ourselves. Opposition, persecution, suffering — these then are means God uses to help us know that gospel work is His work. When we are weak, and when the gospel succeeds, we know He has been strong.

## CONCLUSION

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**A**lthough Paul is imprisoned as he pens 2 Timothy, yet the Word of God is not imprisoned. No one can lock up its power or restrain its effectiveness. Because it is the gospel that alone has power to save, and because God has determined to save those whom he has chosen from before the foundation of the world, Paul is determined to endure whatever is needed to see to it that the gospel goes forth. Remember Paul’s two-fold conviction? 1) People must hear the gospel to

be saved, and 2) when the elect hear the gospel (but only when they hear the gospel) they will be saved.

Shall we not adopt or embrace afresh this same two-fold conviction and set aside as false the view that the doctrine of election makes evangelism unnecessary. Indeed, as we have seen, the opposite is the case. It is, therefore, precisely because of election, because God will save his elect through the preaching of the gospel, that we can embrace the suffering that might be involved knowing that through this means, and through this means alone, will his elect be saved. May God grant us grace to think, re-think, feel, cherish, and live as Paul did — for the advancement of the gospel, for the salvation of those whom God has chosen, for the glory of God in Christ.

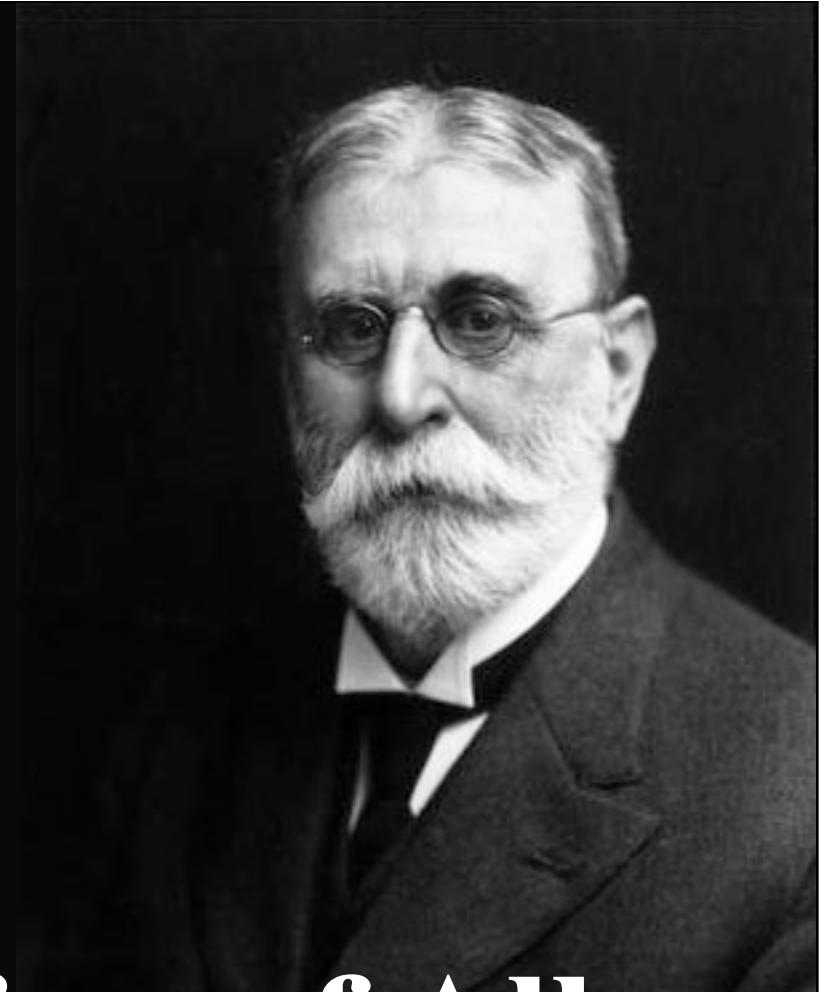
### (Endnotes)

1 Surely other questions can rightly be raised, and I’ve tried to deal with a number of these in Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006) 1-58.

*Bruce Ware is professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ware has co-edited with Thomas Schreiner Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace. He also has authored God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism; God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance.*

## B.B. Warfield on Divine Predestination and Providence

by Fred G. Zaspel



# The Solution of All Earthly Troubles

In a world gone so very wrong there is one factor that can make sense of it all and provide a soft pillow for the believer's head. In the doctrine of divine providence we learn that "all is well with the world," that however evil may seem for now to prevail and however relentless may be the assault of pain and death and however confused we may be as a result of it, here we learn that God has not lost his grip. Nor has he been left scrambling for Plan B. Here in the doctrine of God's sovereign, unchanging decree we may rest safely in the certainty that all things work together

to accomplish the good purpose of the God who stands behind it all.

And so the Christian life is one of trust. We come to God trusting in his Son to be for us all that God requires of us. We trust him for our salvation. We trust him to accomplish in us all the virtues and graces he has called us to manifest in our lives. We trust him for our eternity. The whole of our salvation lies in his hands, and we gladly trust him for it. So also in our daily lives.

Is it true that we can trust the eternal welfare of our souls to God and cannot trust to Him the temporal welfare of our bodies? Is it true that He has provided salvation for us at the tremendous cost of the death of His Son, and will not provide food for us to eat and clothes for us to wear at the cost of the directive word that speaks and it is done? Is it true that we can stand by the bedside of our dying friend and send him forth into eternity in good confidence in God, and cannot send that same friend forth into the world with any confidence that God will keep him there?<sup>1</sup>

This is the value of the doctrine of divine providence for the Christian. It provides us with a sure reference point. It assures us that God is God over all and that nothing will ever come that does not serve the will of our good God and his purpose for his beloved children. And this “devotional use” of the doctrine B. B. Warfield loved to impress often on the minds and hearts of his hearers and readers. “A firm faith in the universal providence of God is the solution of all earthly troubles.”

## **THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS**

**B**enjamin Breckinridge Warfield (1851-1921) lived in an era marked by supreme human confidence, even self-sufficiency. By the dawn of the twentieth century historical and scientific learning and technological advance had brought dramatic changes to virtually every dimension of life. In many ways Charles Darwin stood as the symbol of the age, an age that had learned to

explain even creation itself without God. And if God was not so involved in creation, then what of providence? Inspiration and the giving of Scripture? We now know so much and can explain so much without God, just what is his involvement in human affairs? How much do we really need him? Can we realistically be expected after bounding with self-confidence all week to bow on Sunday in deep humility as utterly dependent creatures? It was a day in which concepts of humanity and human potential had swelled and concepts of God had been seriously undermined. In such an atmosphere there is little place for robust concepts of divine sovereignty, an all-embracing decree, and universal providence.

Warfield himself, however, was deeply persuaded of the thorough-going supernaturalness of Christianity. And he was equally persuaded of the absolute authority and complete reliability of Scripture. Thus, he was convinced of both the truth and the value of this Biblical doctrine of sovereign providence. And because of its value, and in the face of its increasing denial, he directed his famous energies to its exposition and defense.

Warfield insisted that the doctrines of the divine decree and providence arise necessarily from Scripture’s presentation of God himself. Given that God is a personal being, he acts always according to purpose. He does what he intends to do. The choices he makes are choices he intended to make. He does nothing merely mechanically, as though he could be driven by considerations outside himself. And he never acts by uncontrolled whim. In all that he does, God acts always according to purpose. And that purpose is his own.

This, in turn, highlights the close relation of providence

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and predestination. Predestination is God's purpose, his intention. And providence is simply the carrying out of that intention. "Providence is but Predestination in its execution; Predestination is but Providence in its intention."<sup>2</sup>

All this is foundational to Warfield's understanding of the doctrines of predestination and providence. He often emphasizes that God is neither the god of the deist nor that of the liberal. The deist God is so transcendent that he is far removed from the affairs of this life. He created the world, but he has left it to operate according to its own laws and motions. The liberal God, by contrast, is so identified with the created order as to lose the distinction and lapse into virtual pantheism. But Christian theism recognizes that God is both transcendent, distinct from and above the created order, and immanent, ever present within his creation.

He is a conscious, personal Spirit who acts sovereignly and according to purpose.

He ordinarily works by means of second (created or "natural") causes, but he remains free always to intrude, whether miraculously or via second causes, to do the extraordinary. He is exalted over his creation, yet always working through it to his own purpose and glory.

Moreover, as the almighty Creator who is God over all, God necessarily stands behind all that is, ordering all things according to his own eternal, wise, and good purpose. The world's history with all its complexity of events is not the result of accident or chance happenings, nor of blind fate or merely human designs. Everything that exists is but the orderly outworking of the purpose of God. To say "God," Warfield argues, is to say "predestination." God as a personal being always acts to purpose, and that is predestination. This is of

the essence of theism, the very basis of prayer, and the whole foundation of order in the universe. In all things God acts with his own purpose in view.

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

**W**arfield traces this conception of God throughout the biblical narrative in a vivid and compelling way. He mentions the vocabulary of predestination, predetermination, decree, providence, God as the "almighty maker" and "irresistible ruler" of all that he has made, and so on. But at length he demonstrates how this conception of God had so thoroughly shaped the thinking of the biblical writers and of the biblical characters themselves that it colored their understanding of all events. In even the most mundane of occurrences, the inspired writers maintain such a vivid sense of dependence upon God that they rarely speak abstractly, for example, of the rain or of famines and such: it is rather God who sends the rain, God who sends the famine, God who sends the wind and has his way in it, God who hurls the lightning to strike its intended mark, God who opens the womb, God who gives prosperity or calamity, God who directs the feet of men and even creates the thoughts and intents of the soul—and it is God who opens the heart and God who hardens hearts. Even the seemingly chance happening—the occasional "it happened that" (e.g., Ruth 2:3)—is not conceived as apart from God's direction and provision. Indeed, even the lot was understood to be at his disposal (Josh. 7:16; Prov. 16:33). All of heaven and earth are seen as the instruments of his hands working out his irresistible purpose. Nations, nature, individual experiences, all alike are the disposition of his will. There is nothing in all of creation that escapes his sovereign

EVEN THE SEEMINGLY CHANCE HAPPENING—THE OCCASIONAL “IT HAPPENED THAT” (E.G., RUTH 2:3)—IS NOT CONCEIVED AS APART FROM GOD’S DIRECTION AND PROVISION.

direction.

Indeed, so pervasive and so specific is this kind of language about God throughout the Scriptures that it might appear at times that God works in all things to the exclusion of secondary causes. That is not the case, as Warfield explains at length. Men are everywhere recognized as authors of their own actions and are therefore held accountable for those actions. But the language of God working in all things is so pervasive and constant that his use of secondary causes can sometimes be missed. God is at work in and by means of all that is, directing all things to accomplish his all-inclusive and perfect plan. It is evident on the very face of the pages of the Old Testament that this is the world in which the biblical writers lived and thought.

This conscious awareness of God's all-inclusive rule, in turn, prompted in the biblical writers an instinctive sense of absolute dependence upon God. God is God over all, and we are therefore utterly dependent upon him for all things. And this sense of dependence upon the all-governing God, in turn, renders faith—trust—the keynote of piety. We have no hope but in this God who rules over all things and directs the affairs of the world to his own ends. And this God who rules over all has made gracious promises to his people, promises with which, precisely because he rules over all, nothing could possibly interfere.

Warfield emphasizes further that the New Testament presentation of the doctrine of predestination follows in the same vein. With the additional emphasis on God's fatherhood, God is "the great king" (Matt. 5:35) and "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11:25) who does all his pleasure. He rules and directs the rain, the flowers of the field, the birds of the air, the falling sparrow, and even the very hairs of our heads. In the minutest details of the course of the world's history God is directing all things toward his appointed goal in the world to come.

Against this larger backdrop the doctrine of election becomes very obvious. It is the God who works "all

things" according to his own will who chose to save us (Eph. 1:1–12). Our salvation is due only to a divine, gracious choice. Our salvation, and all of life with it, lies in the hands of our heavenly Father, the God who rules over all things. In several places in his writings Warfield makes the point that throughout the centuries this understanding of God has produced a distinctive piety: a firm understanding that God rules over all, that he has chosen to save us, that he is the source of every blessing, and that because he rules over all, his promises are unchangeably sure. This fosters a keen sense of dependence, trust, and devotion—a deep sense of grateful and worshipful dependence on our all-sovereign God.

## DEVOTIONAL APPLICATIONS

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The shaping influence these truths are intended to have on our lives is obvious. First, it is basic to our worship to acknowledge that our salvation is due only to God's sovereign initiative. "We have not made the first step in knowledge of the salvation of God until we have learned, and made the very center of our thought of it, this great fact: that it is by the pure grace of God, by that and that alone, that we are saved." This is of the very heart of the gospel, that our salvation is his doing and his choice. And meditation on God's eternal election produces blessed fruits in our hearts and lives. "That God has saved me, even me, sunk in my sin and misery, by the marvels of his grace, can only fill me with adoring praise. . . . This is the foundation of all my comfort, the assurance of all my hope."<sup>3</sup>

Further, a knowledge of this doctrine is basic to a life of trust. It is the distinct duty and comfort of every Christian to acknowledge that God rules over all and that our entire earthly sojourn is the outworking of his gracious plan for us. Christianity is not stoicism or a mere surrender to blind fate. It is a life of faith. It is a life of trust in the God who loves us and out of his all-inclusive providence cares and provides for us. As we become more acquainted with God in his Word, we are increasingly impressed with his all-embracing rule over

all things. And with that we are increasingly impressed with the fact that our lives are at his disposal, that this God who has committed himself to us is the one in whose hands lie all the affairs of heaven and earth. Indeed, our comfort comes as we acknowledge that there is no more secure place for us to rest than where we are—at his disposal and in his care. In happy and sad times alike, we confidently trust the God who is God over all.

For Warfield this doctrine is no mere party flag, no mere denominational distinctive to be held as a matter of mere pride. For him, to know that “we cannot be robbed of God’s providence” is the stuff of Christian living.

“We cannot be robbed of God’s providence.” This was one of the sayings current in the household of Thomas Carlyle, apparently much on the lips of that brilliant woman, Jane Welsh Carlyle. In it, the plummet is let down to the bottom of the Christian’s confidence and hope. It is because we cannot be robbed of God’s providence that we know, amid whatever encircling gloom, that all things shall work together for good to those that love him. It is because we cannot be robbed of God’s providence that we know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ – not tribulation, nor anguish, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword. . . . Were not God’s providence over all, could trouble come without his sending, were Christians the possible prey of this or the other fiendish enemy, when perchance God was musing, or gone aside, or on a journey, or sleeping, what certainty of hope could be ours? “Does God send trouble?” Surely, surely. He and he only. To the sinner in punishment, to his children in chastisement. To suggest that it does not always come from his hands is to take away all our comfort. . . . The world may

be black to us; there may no longer be hope in man; anguish and trouble may be our daily portion; but there is this light that shines through all the darkness: “We cannot be robbed of God’s providence.” So long as the soul keeps firm hold of this great truth it will be able to breast all storms.

That is to say, in this doctrine we learn with grateful adoration that our eternal salvation depends absolutely on “the infinite love and undeserved favor of God.” And here we learn that every good thing we enjoy comes to us from the hand of the God who appoints all things according to his own will. And here we come to worship God aright. Contemplation of this doctrine enhances our conception of God and strengthens our fundamental confession, *soli Deo gloria*. A deep realization of this truth drives us to a firm dependence upon divine mercy and to that highest and purest expression of religion—prayer. Here is the very ground of the Christian’s confidence and hope. “It is because we cannot be robbed of God’s providence that we know, amid whatever encircling gloom, that all things shall work together for good to those that love him.” Here, in a word, is “the solution of all earthly troubles.”<sup>4</sup>

#### (Endnotes)

1. *Faith & Life*, 45-46.
2. *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:106.
3. *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:298.
4. *Selected Shorter Writings*, 1:110-111.

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## [Patrick Hues Mell]

by Jeff Robinson

### Pastor-Theologian of Grace

**S**o influential was Patrick Hues Mell (1814-1888), an entire region surrounding Greensboro, Georgia, was for decades known as “Mell’s Kingdom” for his ministry to three in the area. Mell was perhaps the quintessential pastor/theologian/denominational statesman. He was first of all a pastor to God’s flock, serving Greensboro Church for ten years, Antioch Church for twenty-eight years, and Bairdstown Church for thirty-three years.

Mell’s son recalled that his father was above all a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ: “His piercing eyes glowed or melted in tender pathos as his mind grasped the glorious truths of the gospel; he held his hearers spellbound many times a full hour, and, if the theme was

unusually grand, and far-reaching in its fuller development, he stood for an hour and a half, yet his people never thought he preached long ... (he) clothed his ideas in language so plain, so simple, so strong, so beautiful, that the truth was fixed in the minds of his listeners.”<sup>1</sup>

Mell was a theologian; he served as professor of ancient languages at Mercer College and in 1860 served as vice chancellor at the University of Georgia and served as chancellor there over the final ten years of his life. Mell was one of the great denominational statesmen in SBC history. All told, he served as president of the SBC three different terms, serving for one year in 1863, from 1866 to 1871 and 1880 to 1886. He also served for decades as moderator of the Georgia Association and

as president of the Georgia Baptist Convention. Mell stands as one of the unquestioned granite cornerstones during the critical early years of the SBC.

And Mell was a Calvinist, whose commitment to the doctrines of grace undergirded his preaching with pathos and vigor, a reality that characterized Southern Baptists and Georgia Baptists of his day. When Baptist preachers skirted the doctrines of grace in their preaching, Mell lamented their neglect with significant sorrow: “Some have even preached doctrines not consistent with (the doctrines of grace), and some have openly derided and denounced them.”<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Mell resolved “to counteract, as far as I was able, the ten-

dencies to Arminianism.” One such effort that provides a clear example of his commitment to evangelical Calvinism was his written response Russell Reneau, a fellow pastor in Georgia who publicly challenged the truth of Calvinism. Mell’s response is a tour-de-force in defense of the biblical veracity and logical power of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Mell showed the biblical inconsistency of the Arminian view of foreknowledge, arguing that God’s knowledge of an event still makes certain that it will come to pass; Arminian attempts at getting God off a perceived hook do not square with Scripture and are unnecessary.

Now, God’s decree is synonymous with God’s will. Substitute, therefore, in the extract taken from Calvin, the word ‘willed’ for the word ‘decreed’, and the Calvinistic idea of foreknowledge will stand thus: “God therefore foreknows all things that will come to pass, because He has willed that they shall come to pass.” Or it may be stated in two propositions, thus: 1<sup>st</sup>. Nothing can come to pass in time except what God wills shall come to pass; 2<sup>nd</sup>. God foreknows that certain things will come to pass, because He wills they shall come to pass.<sup>3</sup>

Mell spent much of the remainder of the work exposing the logical fallacies of the Arminian doctrine of foreknowledge as it relates to election and predestination. Later,

Mell asserts that the implicit in the doctrine of predestination is the even more controversial and pride-killing truth of reprobation. Mell argues from Romans 9:22-23 that God passes over those who are not among his elect.

In reference to men, predestination is divided into two parts: first, as it relates to the elect, and second, as it relates to the non-elect. Having decreed to create a world, and to people it with beings who would voluntarily sin against him, he determined from eternity to save some, and to leave others to perish in their sins. ‘Willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known,’ He ‘endured with much longsuffering’ these as ‘the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction;’ and that he might make known the riches of his glory on those as ‘the vessels of mercy which he had afore prepared unto glory.’ Romans 9:22, 23. ‘To carry out his purpose of grace, he chose some to holiness and eternal life, entered for their sake, into the Covenant of Redemption with the Son and the Holy Ghost, appointed his Son as their substitute, to suffer in their stead, and having died to rise again, and appear as their advocate before his throne, appointed all the intermediate means necessary and, by an infallible decree, made their salvation sure. Those, ‘whose names

are not written in the book of life’ (Rev. 20:15), who were ‘appointed to wrath’ (1 Thess. 5:9), who were ‘before of old ordained to condemnation’ (Jude 4) who would ‘stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed’ (1 Peter 2:8), he determined to leave in their sins, and to endure them with much longsuffering as vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.<sup>4</sup>

Mell was a convinced Calvinist whose ministry was built upon the foundation of the doctrines of grace. In Mell’s day, Baptist churches in Georgia were overwhelmingly Reformed and Calvinism was not a controversial matter among Southern Baptists.

#### (Endnotes)

1 P. H. Mell, Jr., *Life of Patrick Hues Mell* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1895), 64-65.

2 Patrick Hues Mell, “Predestination and the Saints Perseverance, Stated and Defended from the objections of Arminians, in a review of two sermons, published by Rev. Russell Reneau,” in *A Southern Baptist Looks at Predestination* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1995), 6.

3 Ibid., 53.

4 P. H. Mell, “Predestination and the Saints Perseverance Stated and Defended,” in Robert B. Selph, *Southern Baptists and the Doctrine of Election* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1988), 54-55.

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# For Calvinism and Against Calvinism

By Michael Horton. By Roger Olson.  
Zondervan, 2011.

At the end of 2011, Zondervan published two companion works on the subject of Calvinism. Church historian and outspoken Arminian, Roger Olson, writes *Against Calvinism*, while Reformed theologian, Michael Horton, author of a recent systematic theology (*The Christian Faith*), writes *For Calvinism*. Like InterVarsity's 2004 release of *Why I am Not a Calvinist* (Walls and Dongell) and *Why I am not an Arminian* (Peterson and Williams), *For Calvinism* (FC) and *Against Calvinism* (AC) address the doctrines of grace and their attendant controversies.

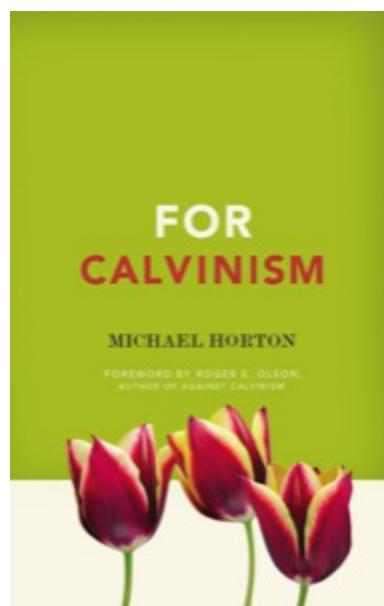
Yet, what makes these more recent publications unique is the way they engage the development of Neo-Calvinism. Since 2000, the fires of Calvinism have spread abroad. This has warmed the hearts of some and stirred up the embers of others. In these two popular-level works, Horton and Olson have provided definitive arguments for the two sides of the longstanding debate. In this review, we will consider these books together, looking at how they set the debate in historical context, how they make their respective cases for and against Calvinism, and how they might serve those who read them.

## Historical Considerations

Olson writes with the express desire of presenting an alternative to the young, restless, and Reformed crowd (AC, 16-22). As a historian, he goes back to the Reformers to argue that Reformed theology is far less monolithic than supposed. This background is helpful, but the truth question remains: What does the Bible

actually teach?

To make his case, Olson cites a plethora of historical and contemporary advocates of Calvinism. Then, he rejects their views based on appeals to reason and general theological ideals. Accordingly, the strength of Olson's work is that it clearly illustrates how Arminians respond to Calvinist doctrines. (In history, the Synod of Dort actually responded to the Arminian Remonstrants, but in *Against Calvinism*, Olson primarily responds to the tenets of Calvinism). He raises a number of worthwhile questions, but often he does not listen to how Calvinists have answered these objections.



Like Olson, Horton situates the doctrines of grace in history. Unpacking the "Essence of Calvinism," Horton cites the origin of the pejorative term (FC, 23); he deciphers the way the catholic church (lower case 'c'), evangelicalism, and Reformed theology relate (27); and he demonstrates how "Calvinism" fits into the larger movement of Protestantism. In this, Horton observes that "Calvin was not the first Calvinist... Calvin was not the only shaper of the Reformed tradition... [and] Calvin never identified predestination or election as a central doctrine" (28-29).

Horton observes the differences between Calvinism and the various forms of Arminianism. This is a helpful taxonomy—one that Olson must appreciate because it follows his own distinctions. There are among non-Calvinists, "evangelical Arminians" and "liberal Arminians" (34). This is a distinction that is often lacking among Calvinists, and it is an important category to consider in debating the doctrines of grace. Between them, these two volumes help supply the reader with historical understanding for the current debate.

## Theological Method

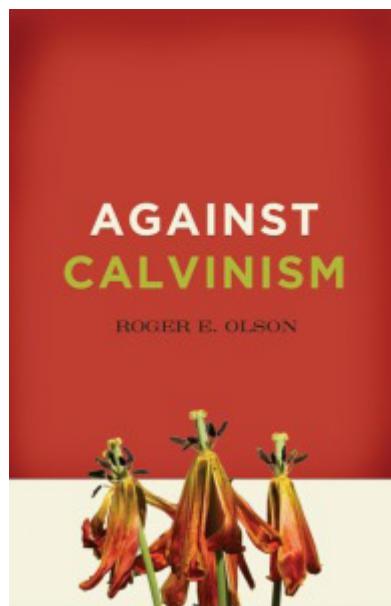
Olson and Horton argue their position in very different ways. In the introduction to his book, Olson "puts all

his cards on the table.” He self-consciously employs the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral,” where Scripture functions as the “primary source and norm of theology,” but one that is accompanied and supported by “tradition,” “reason,” and “experience” (*AC*, 24). Yet, in observing his arguments, one might suspect that these other epistemic criteria overshadow Scripture. Most of his arguments are rooted in history or philosophy, and when he does appeal to Scripture, he lets others do the exegetical heavy lifting (128-35).

For instance, in his chapter on God’s sovereignty, appeals to Scripture are sparse. Olson begins with multiple illustrations that suggest that the God of Calvinism is the perpetrator of evil, suffering, and death. Next, he examines the statements of Zwingli, Calvin, Edwards, Sproul, Boettner, Helm, and Piper. Based on these men’s articulations of God’s divine determinism—a pejorative term that fails to express all that Calvinism believes about God’s activity in the world—Olson concludes that the God of Reformed theology is a “moral monster” (85). Unfortunately, Olson never explains the Scripture that speak of God giving and taking life (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6; Job 1:21); nor does he wrestle with the Reformed doctrine of compatibilism.

Or, compare the way the Olson and Horton handle the doctrine of election. Horton begins by examining what Scripture says. With the space allotted, he considers numerous passages from both testaments. Next, he asks three questions: “Is Election Unconditional?” “Is Election Individual or Corporate?” And “Is Election Fair?” (*FC*, 58-63). To each, Horton goes back to the Bible to find an answer. Last, he wrestles with the problems of election and human responsibility, as well as, Calvinism’s ability to give personal assurance. In the end, he rightly appeals to mystery, to retain God’s position as the inscrutable God whose ways are greater than our own.

By contrast, Olson begins with Calvin, Boettner, Palmer, and Sproul—not the Bible. In quoting these men, he posits a view of election *and* reprobation that a minority of Calvinists hold. Instead of wrestling with the texts (Deut 7:7-9; Ps 65:4; Jn 10:26-30; Rom 9-11; Eph 1), Olson sets up Calvinists whom he in turn knocks down. When he does appeal to the Bible, he does not deal directly with the texts on election. Instead, he points to passages that affirm God’s universal love and intent to save. He concludes *by way of logical inference* that the doctrine of election is untenable. Such theological maneuvering suggests that “Olson’s Quadrilateral” puts too much weight on reason, tradition, and experience, and not enough on Scripture.



Olson’s methodology may be acceptable to some, but not to most of the “Piper cubs” he is trying to court. While he intends to reach out to this group with an alternative theological system, he is going to have to do so with greater exegetical arguments. Most neo-Calvinists are persuaded that Scripture is first order and determinative for doctrine. Thus, of these two theological presentations, Horton’s is more compelling because of his insistence on grounding the doctrines in the text *and then* answering questions of logic and philosophy.

### Implications and Impact

Written together, with each author providing the forward to the other book, *For Calvinism* and *Against Calvinism* model the way in which serious-minded scholars debate these issues. Both Olson and Horton explain their intent to take an irenic posture in this heated debate. Both express appreciation for the other, and both try to understand what the other is saying. Or at least, that is the aim. From the vantage point of this reviewer, Horton does a better job listening to the other side and offering biblical critiques. Following Olson’s own presentation of Arminian theology, Horton discerns that the debate with non-Calvinists is not against a twenty-first century

Pelagianism or semi-Pelagianism, as young Calvinists often charge. Rather, in this debate, Reformed theology contests the synergistic view of salvation held by “evangelical Arminians,” who argue that men, empowered by universal preventer grace—are cobelligerents in the work of salvation. Monergism and synergism are the points at issue.

Alternatively, Olson misses the nuance with which Calvinists have articulated the doctrines of grace. For instance, Olson critiques Calvinists as if they have no place in their ‘system’ for the free actions of sinful men. Yet, those who strongly affirm God’s monergism do retain a place for the real responsibility of humans and angels. What is unfortunate is that for someone new to the debate, Olson does not give a true picture of what Calvinists believe. But that is why these books must be read together.

Horton, after providing a winsome, biblical defense of Reformed soteriology, concludes his book describing the way Calvinism leads to a transformed life and sacrificial missions. Indeed, spiritual life and missions are the legacy of Calvinism as evidenced among the Reformers, Puritans, historic Baptists, and twenty-first century Reformed evangelicals. Someone reading *Against Calvinism* would never see such fruit, but *For Calvinism* strongly asserts not only the biblical but also the practical benefits of Calvinism.

In the end, *For Calvinism* and *Against Calvinism* are readable and engage with the most important arguments. In this way, they serve as a good introduction. Yet, it must be mentioned that the researcher looking for a Scripture or subject index to find what these men say about a given text or topic will be disappointed because neither book comes furnished with any indices. Still, the works of Olson and Horton are a good pair to read to better know the lines of the historic debate.

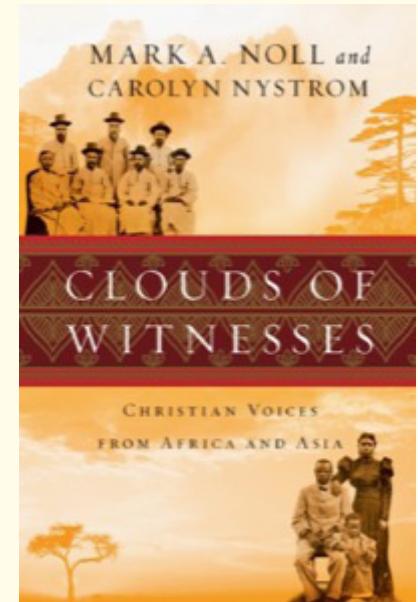
*David Schrock  
Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church (Seymour, IN)*

## *Clouds of Witnesses: Christian Voices from Asia and Africa*

By Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom.  
InterVarsity Press, 2011. 286 pp.

Clouds of Witnesses is a collection of short biographies of 17 Asian and African Christians who lived between the 1880s and the 1980s.

I do not usually underline while I’m reading, but the many moving passages in this book compelled me to get out my pencil. Even though the subjects of Clouds of Witnesses lived in very different times and places from most of the book’s readers, the authors make the lives they cover intensely relevant. The book is well-written, the subjects are well-chosen, and the research is thorough and sound. Each chapter includes a lengthy list of sources, along with commentary on the reliability of each source. One of Mark Noll’s greatest strengths has always been his ability to produce impeccable scholarship without dismissing the supernatural. The account of Bernard Mizeki of Zimbabwe is a good example. After he angered tribal leaders by cutting down a “sacred” grove of trees, Mizeki was attacked at his home in the middle of the night and mortally wounded with a spear. The authors quote eyewitnesses who saw a terrific flash of lightning and the sound of wings, after which the wounded Mizeki disappeared and was never seen again. Noll and Nystrom relate this remarkable incident without succumbing to the temptation to explain what these



witnesses saw.

Not all of the book's subjects are heroes. The story of Yao-Tsung Wu is a story of compromise. Entranced by Protestant Liberalism and the social gospel after studying at Union Theological Seminary in the 1920s, Y. T. Wu returned to his native China and embraced communism. He became the leader of the communist Three Self Church and sacrificed many biblical principles for the sake of political expediency. The authors' assessment of Y. T. Wu is helpful in that it does not simply portray him as a product of his time, but points to weaknesses in his Christology that made him vulnerable to both liberalism and communism.

The book's chapters are grouped by geography rather than chronology. I found it difficult to keep from confusing the characters, but resolved this challenge when I stopped reading through an entire geographical section and instead alternated between different countries.

I highly recommend this book to other Christians, both for the knowledge that they will glean from it as well as the doxology that will result from it!

*Betsy Childs*

*Web and Publication Editor, Beeson Divinity School*

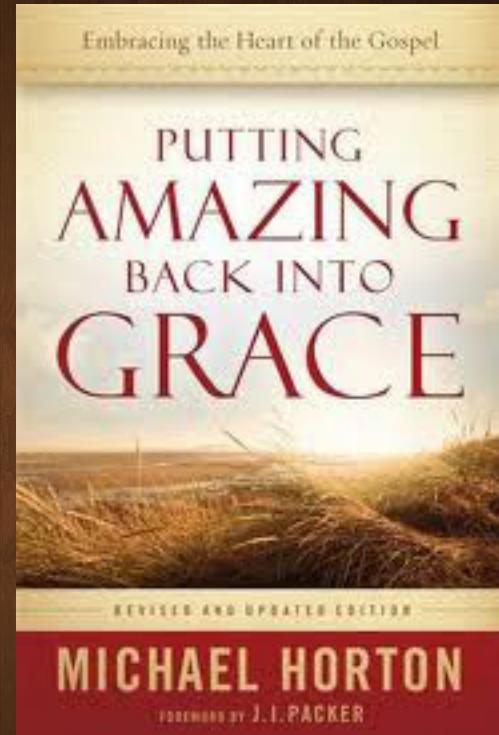
## Putting Amazing Back Into Grace

*By Michael Horton*

Michael Horton has been amazed by the sovereign grace of God since he first encountered it as a young man. Such amazement inspired him to write his first book at the age of fifteen—a book that eventually came to be called *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*. Over three decades later, Horton is still amazed at God's saving grace and he is still sharing his excitement through a revised and updated version of this now classic work.

Other than a fresh cover design, an added Preface and Afterword, and two companion teaching DVD's, there is nothing distinctively new about this volume. But the profoundly simple words Horton wrote as a young man ring just as true today as when they were first written. This is not surprising since the doctrines of sovereign grace represent *timeless* truths and have intrinsic relevance for every generation. It is especially fitting that Horton's book has been reproduced for the young, restless, and Reformed generation since it is likely that his book was among the first to lay the groundwork for this movement even before it came of age.

Perhaps the most compelling thing about *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* is its simplicity. While Horton is more than capable of wading in the deep waters of theology, he recognizes the wisdom in revisiting the shallow end regularly. The balance Horton maintains between profundity and simplicity is remarkable, but I have come to discover that the two are often indistinguishable in his writings. What Horton does is give accessibility to the grand scheme of redemption. God's purposes are traced from eternity past to eternity future, highlighting His absolute prerogative in all that occurs in time. In a word, Horton shows that salvation is *all* of grace—from start to finish. Only when grace is viewed from the vantage point of divine sovereignty is it really amazing.

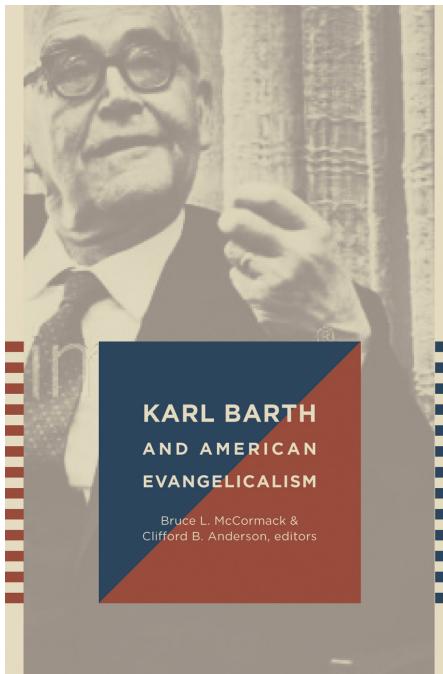


# Karl Barth and American Evangelicalism

Ed. by Bruce L. McCormack and Clifford B. Anderson. Eerdmans, 2011. 395pp.

Since Cornelius Van Til first sounded the alarm on Karl Barth's project, American evangelicals have been suspicious about Barth. While evangelical reception of Barth varied in the ensuing years, many evangelicals today narrowly focus on Barth's doctrine of Scripture or his incipient universalism if they do not reject his theology *in toto*. There are significant exceptions to this portrait but too many conservative evangelicals in America are content with surface-level engagement and critique of Barth that miss some of the more fundamental issues at stake.

The learning curve for Barth is steep and the discussions surrounding his theology are among the least accessible in modern theology, so perhaps it is understandable that many evangelicals sidestep Barth. But as complex as Barth's theology may be, evangelicals can afford to ignore him and his interpreters only at the expense of our own vitality. It is roughly to this situation that the essays in this volume, originating from a 2007 conference at Princeton Theological Seminary, are directed. At once it represents a positive contribution to our understanding of Van Til's critique and an example of evangelical (in a broad sense) interaction with Barth's theology. Part I is most helpful in understanding the background and context of Van Til's reaction to Barth. George Harinck reveals Van Til's indebtedness to the Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder's reception of Barth and argues Van Til extracted Schilder's engagement from its post-war European context, effectively losing sight of how Schilder shared many concerns with Barth. Harinck suggests this



played into Van Til's misguided critique of Barth's "transcendentalism," among other things. D. G. Hart also gives us a very fascinating essay on Van Til's context as a conservative Presbyterian in the midst of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, which saw the formation of Westminster Theological Seminary and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Hart persuasively argues that Van Til's heated criticism of Barth arose from his correlation of the Presbyterian disputes with the influence of Barth's theology and concludes with some poignant remarks on evangelicalism and orthodoxy. Part II focuses on various loci of theology, evaluating how Barth's theology intersects with evangelical interests or concerns and Part III concludes with several hit or miss essays on contemporary trajectories of evangelical engagement with Barth.

Perhaps the volume's chief contribution is how the reader is repeatedly drawn to Christology as the seat of the real issues in Barth's theology, such that Bruce McCormack concludes the volume by locating Christology as the primary difference between Van Til and Barth (372). The two essays by Michael Horton and Adam Neder address the issue directly, evaluating Barth's "historicized" Christology from different perspectives. Reading Neder's essay first will serve the student well, as will reading all of

Part 3 of McCormack's *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. The issues surrounding Barth's Christology are bound up within a larger debate concerning the relationship between Barth's doctrine of election and the Trinity, so the essays do reward some familiarity with the secondary literature. The infamous McCormack line of interpretation, taken up by several of these essayists but not without significant critics elsewhere, reads Barth as positing that Jesus Christ was the eternal object of election, thereby a) erasing any distinction between the historical God-man Jesus and the eternal Word and b) making the *ad extra* work of election

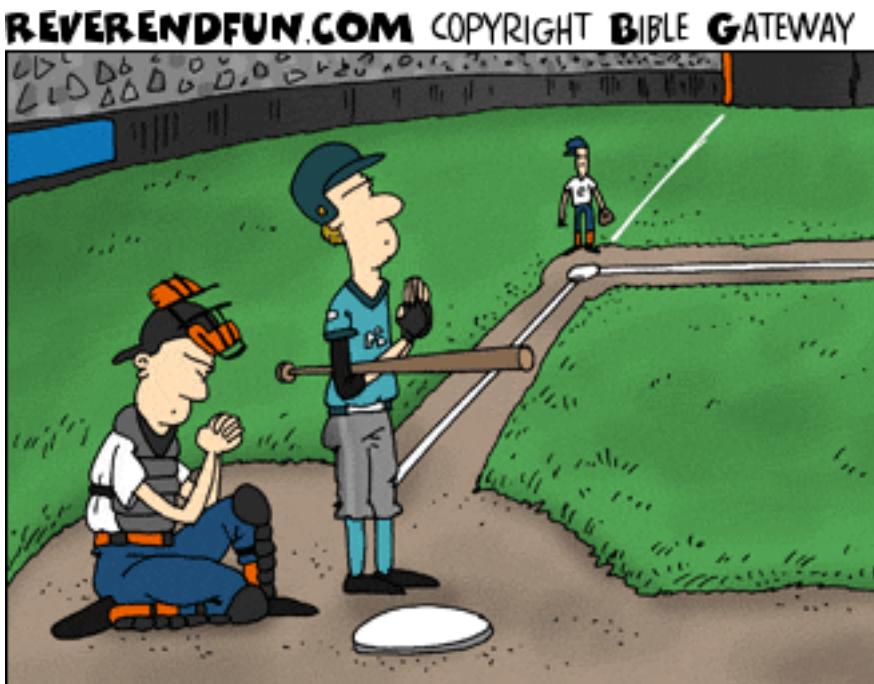
the ground of God's *ad intra* processions. Barth's modified supralapsarianism results: there was never a *logos asarkos* (the unincarnate Word) who was not already the *logos incarnandus* (the Word to-be-incarnate). No doubt these are deep waters. Suffice to say that Neder's essay is a clear explanation of Barth's historicized Christology and Horton's is as fine a representative summary critique, in the vein of Berkouwer/Brunner/von Balthasar, as exists. Neder notably points out how Barth's equation of the Son's being with the Son's history grounds Barth's claims of the Son's eternal obedience to the Father (155-56), a point where evangelicals have traditionally enlisted Barth – perhaps unaware of his ontological baggage – to support similar views. But Neder's essay also highlights some significant difficulties for Barth's Christology, though not on the scale of Horton's claim that for Barth Christ's history tends to swallow creaturely history and action (138-39). The importance of these issues for the correct interpretation of Barth cannot be overstated and evangelicals will need to engage this aspect of Barth's theology in any future constructive Christological proposals.

The two essays on Barth's apparent universalism will also be of immediate interest to evangelicals. Here too Barth's Christology is front and center. McCormack carefully explains how Barth's rebuilt doctrine of election entailed that Christ is not only the elect man but also the reprobate man and that in his life Jesus Christ *actualizes* election and reprobation. Many have therefore interpreted Barth to affirm universalism since on this account reprobation is something exhausted in the life of Jesus. However, because Barth understood the nature of theology to be only a "witness to the truth, not the thing itself" (248), Barth ultimately deferred to the freedom of God in the eschaton and demurred from a full affirmation of universalism. This is a very helpful point since it vindicates both Barth's critics who see his theology as leading inevitably to universalism and Barth himself when he stops short of affirming universalism. McCormack also offers what he considers to be a "plausible" reading of Romans 11 and other passages to demonstrate how Christians should live in between the

tension of definite atonement and universal salvation, though only the choir will be convinced by his exegesis. Suzanne McDonald's essay also deserves mention because she puts Barth into conversation with John Owen, the greatest English-speaking theologian of all time. This juxtaposition reveals tensions between Barth's Christological doctrine of election and the Pneumatological dimension of union with Christ. The real issue for McDonald is not so much Barth's apparent universalism as it is with the coherence and proportionality of Barth's Pneumatology. The third article of the Creed surely deserves much more attention from evangelicals, especially those indebted to Reformed Orthodoxy, as they engage Barth and constructive dogmatics more generally.

Most of the essays in this impressive volume are brilliant explorations into the heart of Barth's theology and its intersection with contemporary American evangelicalism, making it helpful both to latecomers and those more initiated into the depths of Barth's rabbit hole. While quibbles inevitably crop up here and there, there can be no doubt that the conversation has taken a healthy step forward.

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05-04-2011

THE PRAYER STANDOFF LINGERED ON

# *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*

By Heath Lambert.  
Crossway, 2011. 224 pp.

Regardless of what movement a counselor may adhere themselves to, all agree that counseling is the art of helping people. But how to go about this art is where the disagreement begins. On one end of the spectrum, secular psychologists may follow a sort of Rogerian theory claiming that counseling is to be person centered. On the other end of the spectrum is the Biblical Counseling Movement. The Biblical Counseling Movement like other movements in counseling is about helping people, but the way those in this movement do so is fundamentally different from those of other movements. Heath Lambert quotes Wayne Mack as saying, biblical counseling “is about discovering the causes of [people’s] problems and then applying biblical principles to those causes.” Now there is some confusion about what it means to be a biblical counselor, but in his book *The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams*, Heath Lambert clarifies much confusion through explaining the origins of the biblical counseling movement, its progression and areas in need of further improvement.

Lambert starts by giving four stages that define the biblical counseling movement and place it where it is today. He begins by pointing to the ministry of the puritans and their efforts to apply scripture to the lives of Christians who were struggling with life’s problems. But sadly enough, after their refection on counseling, it was more than a hundred years later before any sort of improvement or advance was brought to biblical counseling. This was until Jay Adams began the recovery

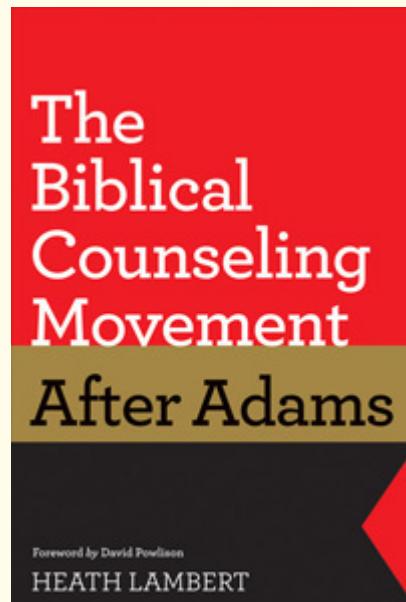
with his landmark book titled *Competent to Counsel*. Throughout the rest of this book, Lambert builds upon the work of Adams through discussing his work as a counselor followed by the advancements made by the second generation of biblical counseling.

The movement begun by Adams, again is foundational for the way that biblical counselors think about counseling, but as Adams will acknowledge there is still much area for improvement. Two of those areas are: the relationship between sin and suffering and the area of motivation. When it comes to counseling, Adams is very clear on the fundamental problem in people’s lives: sin. Adams, in his book *Competent to Counsel* grounds his view of sin in the ministry of the apostle Paul by say-

ing, “Paul thought of bringing God’s Word to bear upon people’s lives in order to expose sinful patterns, to correct what is wrong and to establish new ways of life of which God approves (50).” What Adams has neglected is how suffering affects the lives of those he counsels. Lambert explains that this is where the second generation of biblical counseling has sought to fill the void. Then, concerning the area of motivation, again Adams believes that the primary reason people do what they do is sin. The problem that Adams avoids though is the “why” behind the various sin issues. Lambert here points to David Powlison’s answer to the question of

“why.” Powlison writes, “human beings are worshiping beings whose actions are motivated by the true God or idols (76).”

The second area of advancement comes in how biblical counselors do counseling. There are many areas of similarity when it comes to comparing the first generation with the second generation of counseling. But despite these similarities there is still room for advancement. One area is how the counselor is viewed. Lambert explains that Adams’s attempt to restore authority to counseling, lost through Rogerian methods, placed a high



priority on professionalism. But what this led to was a model that was insensitive and lacking in compassion. The way towards advancement is then built upon the biblical concept of counseling being a form of discipleship. This does not neglect authority since the counselor counsels from the word of God, but it now allows him to counsel as a fellow sinner who has been saved by the same grace that he seeks to apply.

The third area of advancement comes in how biblical counselors talk about counseling. When Jay Adams first began conversing with others from different approaches to counseling, he appeared to be on the move to convert his listeners to his viewpoint. He was mainly concerned with talking with those he agreed and appeared somewhat callous and rude to those with whom he disagreed. To his credit, his approach changed through the upcoming years, but it was really the second generation of biblical counseling that urged those within the movement to “cultivate other audiences. . . to edify others with what God has given us (111).” Lambert again leaning heavily upon Powlison, quotes his thoughts on two ways to accomplish this objective. That is through the academy and the pastorate.

Lastly as a sort of conclusion to his summation of the biblical counseling movement, Lambert gives his thoughts on the need of further advancement. Picking up with the advancements made by the second generation concerning a focus on the heart in counseling, Lambert seeks to take one more step by looking behind merely what the heart focuses on to what the heart motivations are. He praises the examination by counselors when it comes to looking for idols of the heart, but he claims that there must be an effort to go deeper. Simply looking for idols will leave a counselor on an unending hunt to rid the heart of secondary matters. What ought to be the focus is the motivation of the heart. This begins with looking at the fall of Adam and Eve when tempted by the serpent in the garden. Their motivations were to “be like God.” Lambert continues by saying, ever since the fall, man’s motivations have been to set himself on the throne of his heart for self worship. Idols

are merely the means to accomplish this goal.

The Biblical Counseling Movement After Adams is not merely a timeline explaining events that correspond with biblical counseling, but it is an explanation of what biblical counseling is. Definitions of biblical counseling are often proposed and many of them sum up the movement in one sentence, but to see an entire book devoted to explaining biblical counseling is invaluable. This reading about The Biblical Counseling Movement’s founder and the progression from the first generation to the second and beyond creates an appreciation for the movement as a whole and excitement to see where it is heading.

*Michael Nelson*

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## 2 Minutes with Michael A.G. Haykin

*Is there a quote or two from church history that you especially cherish?*

Two quotes from Oliver Hart (1723–95), the first Baptist theologian of the South, that deeply resonate with me:

“Grant, O Lord!... [w]hen I go to thy house to speak for thee, may I always go full fraught with things divine, and be enabled faithfully and feelingly to dispense the word of life.... Teach me to study thy glory in all I do.” (Oliver Hart, Diary, entry for August 5, 1754)

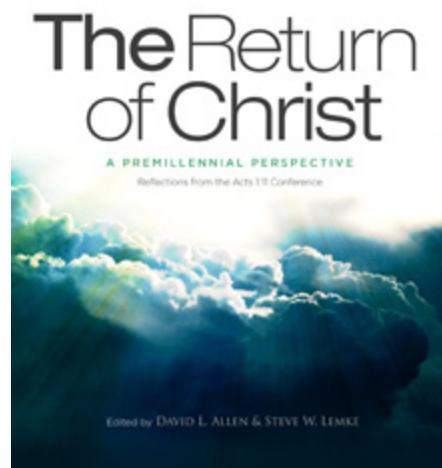
“If I had not been willing to endure the scoff of the world, I should never have made an open profession of the religion of Jesus; much less should I have become a preacher of his much-despised gospel.” (Oliver Hart, *Dancing Exploded* [1778])

# The Return of Christ: A Premillennial Perspective

Ed. David L. Allen & Steve W. Lemke.  
B&H, 2011. 304 pp.

The collection of twelve articles that comprise *The Return of Christ* spring from the Acts 1:11 Conference that was assembled by pastor Jerry Vines. In the introduction, the editors note that part of the motivation for the conference was to close the perceived gap or interest level that appears to exist on the subject of end-times prophecy and eschatology. Fewer seminary students and pulpits give prominence to this subject, whereas the selling of books such as the *Left Behind* series indicates that interest among the pews may be at one of its highest points (2). Furthermore, the book seeks to defend the premillennial eschatological position. It should be understood, however, that general premillennial or historic premillennial views are not the focus, for this book centers on the *dispensational* premillennial view, and all the contributors of this volume “support a premillennial position with a pretributional rapture” (6).

The topics of the rapture, tribulation, millennium, and final judgment receive specific attention in the presentations from the actual conference, which are combined to make up Part 1 of *The Return of Christ*. Chapters by Ergun Caner, Danny Akin, Paige Patterson, David Allen, and Richard Land focus directly on these topics and sermons by Jerry Vines and Junior Hill are also included. The additional reflections in part two of the book are broader in orientation as Stanton Norman writes about the doctrine of eschatology generally, Craig Blaising addresses the coming kingdom of Christ and the future millennium of Revelation 20, Lamar Cooper discusses the second



coming of the Messiah based upon OT texts, and Steven Cox and Michael Vlach round out the book by writing on the eschatology of the gospels and Pauline epistles, respectively.

Addressing the topic of eschatology and particularly the millennium is no easy task as interpretative challenges abound, not least of all in the handling of apocalyptic literature and drawing together a synthetic eschatological position that puts together all the teachings of the OT and NT on the subject. Given this complexity of the subject then, a significant degree of thoroughness is anticipated. Unfortunately, the overall treatment of end-times eschatology in this book falls far short of expectations. Before highlighting specific interpretative moves that needed more defense and argumentation, I want to briefly mention two general observations.

First, with the exception of Craig Blaising’s presentation, I found the chapters to lack scholarly and academic rigor. Much more interaction with the best of opposing viewpoints needed to be addressed or recognized in the chapters (or at least mentioned in the footnotes). The lack of scholarly excellence is also reflected in some of the caricatures of opposing views. Ergun Caner states that “Amillennialists approach the book of Revelation allegorically” (see his chapter “The Patience of Hope,” 35). Caner does not properly characterize the view as the few references on church

Fathers such as Jerome and Augustine does little to justify such a bold description of the amillennial view. His statement is misleading. One can disagree with the amillennial interpretation of Revelation, but dismissing the view as an allegorical take on Revelation will not do as many amillennialists offer exegetical arguments in line with the *sensus literalis* approach to apocalyptic literature. A more significant question is how we should interpret the apocalyptic genre and whether there are legitimate warrants for interpreting a variety of elements

in a more symbolic or figural way. Moreover, Akin's discussion of amillennialism lacks evenhandedness: "Obviously not all amillennialists are theological liberals, but almost all liberals are amillennial" ("A Rapture You Can't Miss," 47). Statements such as these are not helpful, especially when the arguments and views of amillennialists (e.g. G.K. Beale, Kim Riddlebarger) on the nature of the rapture are not dealt with and specifically countered. Rather than dismissing views, careful discussion of how opposing views arrive at wrong conclusions is necessary and would be far more winsome.

Secondly, Lemke and Allen rightly claim that "[b]iblical interpreters should put themselves under the authority of Scripture, rather than impose an external agenda or pattern on it" (5-6). This is an important statement, but unfortunately the principle was not actualized by most of the contributors of the book. In other words, the handling of biblical texts was typically fit within a grid that was already presupposed. The dispensational theological lens on the rapture, millennium, and end-times in general was already operative when passages of Scripture were selectively invoked. The move from biblical text to theological formulation, with sensitivity to the progress of revelation, was never substantially demonstrated in many of the chapters. Views such as the church having no reference in the book of Revelation following the third chapter (Akin, p. 56), the separation of the 69<sup>th</sup> and 70<sup>th</sup> week (Patterson, p. 70), and the relationship between the covenants (Allen, Norman, Vlach) were typically presupposed or assumed with little explanation or exegetical elaboration.

Space only permits a quick evaluation of some of the critical points that I think are subject to critique. First, many of the contributors presented the Davidic covenant as if it was still awaiting future fulfillment at Christ's second coming in relation to his millennial reign (Caner, p. 44-45; Allen, p. 76-77, 84-87; Norman, 125-27; Cooper, 174 n. 45; Vlach, 243-44, 260). This understanding is also tied to how one understands the kingdom as most of the contributors do not conceive of the kingdom as an already-not yet reality (save Blaising and Norman who do present or acknowledge inaugurated eschatology).

The accent is placed on the establishment of the kingdom in the future coming of Christ. However, that the kingdom of God has broken into this present evil age is clearly established in Scripture (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20, 17:20-21; Rom 14:17; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:21; Col 1:13 and a host of other passages) and has received scholarly consensus (see the works of George Eldon Ladd and sources cited in Thomas Schreiner's *New Testament Theology*). Furthermore, at Jesus' resurrection and ascension, he is installed as the exalted messianic king, an event which fulfills the Davidic covenant (see Heb 1:5; cf. Heb 5:5 and Acts 13:32-37). Peter's sermon in Acts 2:24-36 also indicates that Jesus has been made both Lord and Christ as the true Davidic king. Unfortunately the verses cited above receive scant or no treatment throughout *The Return of Christ*. Jesus is ruling and reigning on the Davidic throne now at the right hand of God (Heb 1:3; Heb 2:9) even as we await all things to be subjected under his feet (Heb 1:13; 10:12-13; cf. Heb 2:8).

A second feature also indicative of a dispensational eschatological reading is the view that a rebuilt temple will occur during the millennium (see Allen, p. 82-83; Cooper p. 174 n. 43; Vlach p. 251-52). Using Ezekiel 40-48 as a spring board, Allen writes that the future millennial temple will feature "memorial sacrifices being offered by priests under the lordship of Christ who are commemorating the atonement of Christ" (83). Such a move is to read Ezekiel 40-48 in an overly literalistic fashion and resurrects OT institutions – the physical temple and sacrificial system – into the future state when both the temple and sacrificial system have been fulfilled in Christ's first coming. The typological patterns and development of these themes across the canon are missed with such an interpretation (for example, see John 1:14, 2:19-22, 4:20-24; Heb 8:3-6, 9:11-28). Further, an overly literalistic reading of Ezekiel 40-48 would need to explain the fact that no vertical dimensions of the temple are described. How is the description of a two dimensional temple located on a mountain (Ezek 40:2) not a vision of a heavenly temple? Studies such as G.K. Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (esp. pp. 335-64), Paul Hoskin's *Jesus as the Ful-*

fillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John, and Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology edited by T.D. Alexander and Simon Gathercole are but some of the substantial works that have directly or indirectly dispelled the notions of a physically reconstructed temple during the millennium or end times.

Last, on the issue of the rapture, Akin's arguments and the brief discussions by Vlach (254) and Cox (226-27) are not developed thoroughly and are ultimately not persuasive. Interaction with posttribulational proposals, such as the one offered by Douglas Moo, "A Case for the Posttribulation Rapture" in *Three Views of the Rapture*, ed. Alan Hultberg (2010), would augment the discussion considerably and require much more analysis of passages like 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 and John 14:1-4. Blaising's chapter on the millennium with attention to Revelation 20 was helpful as he argued against amillennialists such as Kim Riddlebarger, G.K. Beale,

and Meredith Kline and marshaled exegetical insights for putting together Revelation 19 and 20. Even if one is not convinced with all of his arguments, Blaising does present a good case for premillennialism. His chapter is one of the few bright spots in this volume.

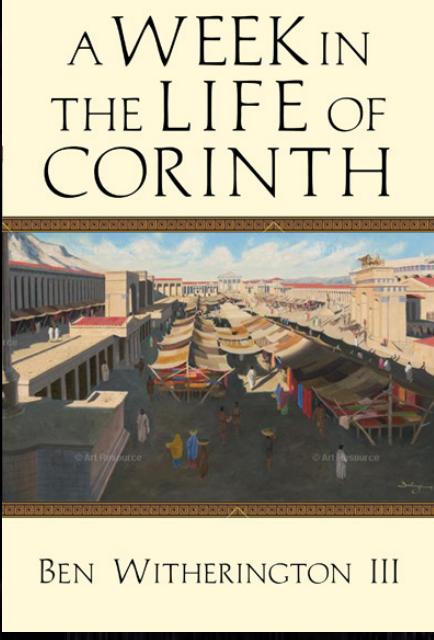
The second coming of Christ will continue to draw attention from Christians and those who long for his return. The exact details of the events surrounding his *parousia*, this side of glorification, will be the subject of ongoing debate. Unfortunately, *The Return of Christ* does not contribute significantly to this discussion for the reasons given above. Therefore, pastors, seminary students, and laypersons are encouraged to pursue other books and resources on the doctrine of eschatology.

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## A Week in the Life of Corinth

*By Ben Witherington, III*

When I finished reading this novella by the well-known New Testament scholar Ben Witherington III, the first thought I had was that this would be an ideal text for a course I teach on the Ancient Church in its Graeco-Roman context. In the space of 150 pages or so, Witherington deals with a host of social and cultural issues that are central to understanding the early Christian experience, ranging from the roads built by the Romans and their calendar to Roman jurisprudence and the ancient art of rhetoric. Twenty-four of these issues merit an explanatory sidebar in addition to their place in the story that Witherington weaves around a certain Nicanor, a former slave and now client of Erastus (whose life in the story is developed from the biblical reference in Romans 16:23). Even though I have taught courses in Graeco-Roman history and civilization for over twenty years, I found a number of Witherington's comments extremely illuminating. For instance, due to the use of the language of "friendship" (*amicitia*) as an euphemism for the patron-client relationships that were pervasive throughout the Empire, Witherington suggests that Paul deliberately avoids such terms (p.39). As for the story, it is well-told and an excellent introduction to what it was like for early Christians to live and move in the world of the first century. Only once did I feel the story contained a completely false note and that was the scene where Nicanor and his friend Krackus, both still uncommitted with regard to Christ, partake of the Lord's Supper in a service led by the Apostle Paul (p.146-147). A number of early Christian authors, from Justin Martyr to Cyprian, are clear that the early Church restricted the Lord's Supper to baptized believers. On the whole, though, I highly recommend this fresh approach to familiar territory: it will illuminate as well as entertain!



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—Reviewed by Michael A.G. Haykin

# My Pastor used the “C” Word!

by Matthew Claridge

**H**opefully, we can all utter a collective groan in this scenario: a couple in your church come to you and ask your view on election. Wisely, you respond with a follow-up question, “why do you ask?” They go on to explain that one of their good friends is part of a church that recently called a new, younger pastor. Things started out really well. However, within a year, the pastor began preaching “Calvinism.” He started talking incessantly about the “elect” and the “non-elect,” and emphasizing that no one has genuine “free will.” To their ears, this sounds like a denial of human responsibility, and for conservative, hard-working people, they just don’t take too kindly to a “passive” spirituality denying the American ideal that anyone can make it with enough grit and elbow-grease.

Obviously, this is all hearsay and I can’t vouch for what this pastor was actually preaching or teaching. For all I know, its been twisted out of all proportion. Nonetheless, the fact that the messenger even knew the word “Calvinism” gives me a good indication that there was a serious problem with its presentation at the church. We’ll come back to that in a second.

So, as a card-carrying Calvinist, how do you respond? If my own experience is of any value, here is one line you can take. First, assume the best. Operate with the principle that most pliable, genuine Christians are already Calvinists even if they don’t know it yet. This is usually obvious from how they pray and talk about their conversion. Second, crack your Bible and take them to Ephesians 1 or John 6.35ff. The Bible does teach “election,” the wording is everywhere. One need not complicate things by discussing whether this “election” is merely foreknown or also foreordained. The Scriptures can speak for themselves. In fact, the most helpful move to make next is, third, to explain to

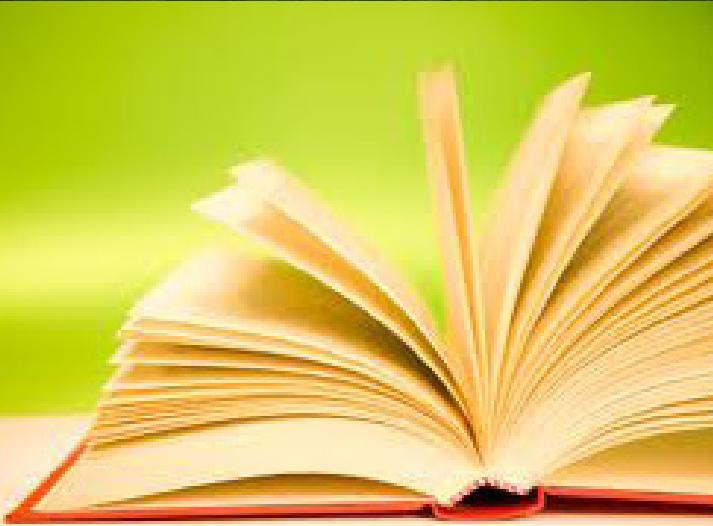
them that the larger question is not “what” Scripture teaches us about election but “why” Scripture teaches it. A failure to adequately answer this question is one thing that gets many a young hot-shot Calvinist into trouble. Ephesians 1-2 is perhaps the greatest one-stop-shop to unpack this question.

Ephesians 1 deeply impresses us with the fact that God really knows what He’s doing and that what He is doing is glorious, wise, and good. Election assures us that God is in total control of our seemingly out of control lives. Most Christians like the idea of “eternal security.” As Ephesians 1 demonstrates, that concept is tethered to only one anchor: divine election.

Ephesians 2 shows us the other side of the coin. Astoundingly, some turn “election” into a kind of badge-of-honor that inflates their pride and sense of theological acumen. If there’s anything the doctrine of election is supposed to do, it is meant to demolish all human pride. I mentioned that “Calvinism” suggests to some a denial of American equal opportunity. Well, you can turn that easily around. The doctrine of election is actually the great equalizer. We are all equally deserving of divine condemnation. It is only by sheer grace that “children of wrath” become “children of God.” And even then, on the other side of the Great Exchange, we remain simultaneously justified and sinful.

When we explain *why* the doctrine is revealed in Scripture, lights begin to turn on. All this can happen without even a whisper of the word “Calvinism.” That’s my last piece of advice, don’t talk about Calvinism. Calvin didn’t. “-isms,” without proper context, just suggest foreign, man-made systems imposed on the text of Scripture. Build the case organically through the Word, and they will come round.

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