

A portrait of John Calvin, a bearded man wearing a black cap and a dark robe with a white collar, is positioned in the upper center of the image. The background of the entire cover is a dramatic, cloudy sky with a church building visible on the right side. The church has a white steeple with a cross on top and a red door. The title text is overlaid on the sky and the church.

THE CALVINISM DEBATE

eBook Series:
Issues Facing the Churches

David Cloud

The Calvinism Debate

By David Cloud

The Calvinism Debate

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Fourth edition January 2012

ISBN: 1-58318-093-1



Published by *Way of Life Literature*

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Printed in Canada by

Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

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Introduction

Calvinism is a theology that was developed by John Calvin (1509-64) in the sixteenth century. He presented this theology in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, which subsequently became the cornerstone of *Presbyterian* and *Reformed* theology. It is also called TULIP theology. Calvin himself did not use the term TULIP to describe his theology, but it is an accurate, though simplified, representation of his views, and every standard point of TULIP theology can be found in Calvin's *Institutes*.

Calvinistic theology was summarized into five points during the debate over the teachings of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius studied under Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, but he rejected Calvinism and taught his non-Calvinist theology in Holland. Arminius' followers arranged his teaching under the following five points and began to distribute this theology among the Dutch churches in 1610: (1) Free will, or human ability, (2) Conditional election, (3) Universal Redemption, or General Atonement, (4) Resistible Grace, and (5) Insecure Faith. These points were rejected at the state-church Synod of Dort in Holland in 1618-1619 (attended as well by representatives from France, Germany, Switzerland, and Britain), and this Synod formulated the "five points of Calvinism" in resistance to Arminianism. Arminius' followers were thereafter put out of their churches and persecuted by their Calvinist brethren.

In the late 18th century, the five points of Calvinism were rearranged under the acronym TULIP as a memory aid.

A Summary of TULIP Theology

Total Depravity

Man is totally corrupt and dead in his sin so that he cannot even respond to the gospel unless God sovereignly enables him, which only happens if he is one of the elect. God not only must enable the dead sinner, but must sovereignly regenerate him and give him the gift of faith. In the words of the Westminster Confession Total Depravity is defined as follows: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

The Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity does not mean merely that the sinner has no righteousness of his own or that his heart is depraved. It means also that his will is in bondage to sin in such a fashion that he is unable to believe the gospel. Further, it means that he must therefore be born again before he can believe. Arthur Pink states this doctrine as follows: “Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. ... Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead--‘dead in trespasses and sins’--then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 73).

Unconditional Election

God unconditionally and “sovereignly” elects who will be saved and this election has nothing to do with anything the sinner does, including exercising faith in the gospel. Consider the words of the Westminster Confession: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. ... The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.” John Calvin expressed the doctrine of unconditional election in these words: “Predestination we call the decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny: but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 21). Calvin emphasized his belief in sovereign reprobation as follows: “[God] devotes to destruction whom he pleases ... they are predestinated to eternal death without any demerit of their own, merely by his sovereign will. ... he orders all things by his counsel and decree in such a manner, that some men are born devoted from the womb to certain death, that his name be

glorified in their destruction. ... God chooses whom he will as his children ... while he rejects and reprobates others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 23).

Limited Atonement

The death of Christ was only for those God has sovereignly elected. Calvin denounced the universal offer of the Gospel. “When it appears that when the doctrine of salvation is offered to all for their effectual benefit, it is a corrupt prostitution of that which is declared to be reserved particularly for the children of the church” (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22).

Irresistible Grace

God’s call to the elect is effectual and cannot be resisted. The dead sinner is sovereignly regenerated and granted the “gift of faith.” “That some, in time, have faith given them by God, and others have it not given, proceeds from his eternal decree; for ‘known unto God are all his works from the beginning,’ etc. (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). According to which decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however hard, and he bends them to believe; but the non-elect he leaves, in his judgment, to their own perversity and hardness” (summary derived from the Synod of Dort). The Westminster Confession adds the following: “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace

offered and conveyed in it. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved...”

Perseverance of the Saints

Those who are sovereignly elected and regenerated will continue in the faith. “Those whom God hath accepted in the Beloved, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere to the end; and though they may fall through neglect and temptation, into sin, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, bring reproach on the Church, and temporal judgments on themselves, yet they shall be renewed again unto repentance, and be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (*Abstract of Principles*, 1858).

Introductory Points

1. I HAVE STUDIED CALVINISM FROM “THE HORSE’S MOUTH.”

In order to gain a proper understanding of Calvinism, I have studied the writings of many influential Calvinists, both contemporary and past. I have examined Calvinism many times during the 36 years since I was saved. The first time was shortly after I was converted, when I was in Bible College, and Calvinism was one of the many topics that were strenuously discussed by the students. I had never heard of Calvinism before that and I didn’t know what to think of it, so I read Arthur Pink’s *The Sovereignty of God* and a couple of other titles on the subject with a desire to understand it and to know whether it was scriptural or not. Some of the students became Calvinists, but I concluded that though Calvinism makes some good points about the sovereignty of God and though I personally like the way it exalts God above man and though I agree with its teaching that salvation is 100% of God and though I despise and reject the shallow, manipulative, man-centered soul winning scheme that is so common among independent Baptists and though it does seem to be supported by a few Scriptures, the bottom line to me is that it ends up contradicting far too many plain Scriptures.

In the year 2000 I was invited to preach at a conference on Calvinism at Heritage Baptist University in Greenwood, Indiana, which was subsequently held in April 2001. The conference was opposed to Calvinism; and I agreed to speak, because I have been in sympathy

with such a position ever since I first examined the subject in Bible College. Before I put together a message for the conference, though, I wanted to re-examine Calvinism in a more thorough manner. I contacted Dr. Peter Masters in London, England, and discussed the subject of Calvinism with him. I told him that I love and respect him in Christ and I also love and respect his predecessor, Charles Spurgeon, though I do not agree with either of them on Calvinism (or on some other issues, in fact). I told Dr. Masters that I wanted him to tell me what books he would recommend so that I could properly understand what he believes on the subject (knowing that there are many varieties of Calvinism). I did not want to misrepresent anything. Among other things, Dr. Masters recommended that I read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and Iain Murray's *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper-Calvinists*, which I did.

In the last couple of years I have re-investigated Calvinism from both sides. I read Dave Hunt's "*What Love Is This?*" and "*A Calvinist's Honest Doubts Resolved by Reason and God's Amazing Grace.*" I read "*Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*" by Dave Hunt and James White. I carefully re-read Arthur Pink's "*The Sovereignty of God*" as well as the "*Westminster Confession of Faith.*" I have also studied about 100 pages of materials published in defense of Calvinism by the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore. This is a Bible Presbyterian school.

As best as I know how, I have studied these materials with the sole desire to know the truth and with a willingness to follow the truth wherever it leads.

Thus, while I have not read every book on this subject that could be recommended by my readers, I have made a considerable effort to understand Calvinism properly and not to misrepresent it (though I have learned that a non-Calvinist will ALWAYS be charged with misrepresentation).

2. BAPTISTS MUST FACE THE ISSUE OF CALVINISM.

It is a divisive subject, but it must be faced because it touches some of the most important points of biblical truth and affects how Christians perceive of the gospel and the very person of God. It is interesting to observe that there have always been divisions among Baptists on the issue of Calvinism. The early Baptists in England were divided into the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists, referring to how they viewed Christ's atonement, as to whether it was for all men (general) or only for the elect (particular). Adam Taylor's *History of the General Baptists of England* (1818) deals with the history of the non-Calvinist Baptists in Great Britain, and there were a large number of them. To my knowledge, Taylor is the only 19th-century British Baptist historian who was not a Calvinist. It is certain that the vast majority of Baptist histories are written by Calvinists and they typically neglect and sometimes misreport the history and beliefs of the non-Calvinist Baptists. Be that as it may, the fact remains that Baptists have always been divided on this issue and it is not wise to draw back from dealing with it today, even though divisions are certainly the result.

3. FEW THINGS HAVE HINDERED BIBLICAL EVANGELISM MORE THAN CALVINISM.

It almost killed the evangelistic zeal of the Baptist churches of England in the 18th century and well into the 19th. Among Calvinists, evangelism is done IN SPITE OF Calvinism, not because of it. Baptist historian Thomas Armitage wrote: “William Carey’s ‘Inquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use means for the Conversion of the Heathen’ was published in 1792, but found few readers and produced little effect. To most of the Baptists his views were visionary and even wild, in open conflict with God’s sovereignty. At a meeting of ministers, where the senior Ryland presided, Carey proposed that at the next meeting they discuss the duty of attempting to spread the Gospel amongst the heathen. ... Ryland, shocked, sprang to his feet and ordered Carey to sit down, saying: ‘When God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid or mine!’”

Things were not much better when Spurgeon took his first pastorate in 1854. This situation is described in *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper Calvinists* by Iain Murray. Many Calvinists opposed Spurgeon and denounced his broad, indiscriminate invitations for sinners to come to Christ. For example, one Calvinist publication warned in Spurgeon’s day, “...to preach that it is man’s duty to believe savingly in Christ is ABSURD” (*Earthen Vessel*, 1857).

4. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT CALVINISM IS AN UNSETTLED THEOLOGY.

Calvinists are seriously divided among themselves and always have been. There is Supralapsarianism vs. Sublapsarianism vs. Infralapsarianism. “The Supralapsarians hold that God decreed the fall of Adam; the Sublapsarians, that he permitted it” (McClintock & Strong). The Calvinists at the Synod of Dort were divided on many issues, including lapsarianism. The Swiss Calvinists who wrote the Helvetic Consensus Formula in 1675 were in conflict with the French Calvinists of the School of Saumur. There are Strict Calvinists and Moderate Calvinists, Hyper and non-Hyper (differing especially on reprobation and the extent of the atonement and whether God loves all men), 5 pointers, 4 pointers, 3 pointers, 2 pointers. In America Calvinists were divided into Old School and the New School. As we have seen, the Calvinists of England were divided in the 19th century.

Whenever, therefore, one tries to state TULIP theology and then refute it, there are Calvinists who will argue with you that you are misrepresenting Calvinism. It is not so much that you are misrepresenting Calvinism, though. You might be quoting directly from various Calvinists or even from Calvin himself. The problem is that you are misrepresenting *THEIR* Calvinism! There are Calvin Calvinists and Andrew Fuller Calvinists and Arthur W. Pink Calvinists and Presbyterian Calvinists and Baptist Calvinists and many other sorts of Calvinists. Many Calvinists have never read Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion* for themselves. They are merely following someone who follows someone who allegedly follows Calvin (who, by his own admission, followed Augustine).

Calvinists believe that they have the right to reject or modify some parts of, or conclusions of Calvin. I agree with them 100%, and I say, further, that *we also have the right to reject the entire thing* if we are convinced that it is not supported by Scripture!

5. IT IS NOT WISE TO FOLLOW JOHN CALVIN; HE WAS UNSOUND AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH.

Calvin never gave a testimony of the new birth; rather he identified with his Catholic infant baptism. Note the following quotes from his Institutes:

“At whatever time we are baptized, we are washed and purified once for the whole of life” (Institutes, IV).

“By baptism we are ingrafted into the body of Christ ... infants are to be baptized ... children of Christians, as they are immediately on their birth received by God as heirs of the covenant, are also to be admitted to baptism” (Institutes, IV).

Calvin was vicious toward his enemies, acting more like a devouring wolf than a harmless sheep. Historian William Jones observed that “that most hateful feature of popery adhered to Calvin through life, the spirit of persecution.” Note how he described his theological opponents: “...all that filth and villainy...mad dogs who vomit their filth against the majesty of God and want to pervert all religion. Must they be spared?” (Oct. 16, 1555). Calvin hated the Anabaptists, though they were miles closer to the Scriptural pattern for the New Testament church than he was. He called them “henchmen of Satan.” Four men who disagreed with Calvin on who should be admitted to the Lord’s Supper

were beheaded, quartered, and their body parts hung in strategic locations in Geneva as a warning to others. He burned Michael Servetus (for rejecting infant baptism and for denying Christ's deity). Calvin wrote about Servetus, "One should not be content with simply killing such people, but should burn them cruelly."

6. GOD DOES NOT REQUIRE HIS PEOPLE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN CALVINISM AND ARMINIANISM!

I am convinced that John Calvin has caused great and unnecessary divisions among God's people because of dogmatizing his philosophy about God's sovereignty and election. If men were left simply to believe the Bible's own statements on these matters and if men were not forced to decide between the man-made theologies called "Calvinism" and "Arminianism," the Christian world would be much better off and many artificial and unnecessary divisions would not have resulted.

The Bible says "prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). The Bible itself is the test of truth, not some man's systematic theology. I have the right and responsibility to test every theology by the Bible, and I am free before the Lord to reject any part of it or all of it. I do not have to make a choice between human theologies. I can stand strictly and exclusively upon the Bible itself, the SOLE authority for faith and practice. Many Calvinists won't allow that, though. James White, author of "The Truth about the King James Bible Controversy" and "The Potter's Freedom" and several other books, wrote to me in about the year 1999 and

challenged me to a public debate. He urged me to “defend Arminianism.” That is a strange notion, because I don’t follow Arminianism and I don’t care anything about Arminianism. I have studied the theology of James Arminius some and I find errors in it just as I have found errors in John Calvin’s theology. Though I do believe that Arminius was closer to the truth than Calvin, this does not mean that I have any intention to “defend Arminianism.” White has the idea that is so typical among Calvinists that if a man is not a Calvinist, he is surely an Arminian.

This idea actually began with Calvin. He treated those who disagreed with his position on election as enemies of God and of the gospel and would not admit that men can reject Calvinism and still believe God’s Word! From the time that I was saved by God’s marvelous and free grace 36 years ago until this very day, I have wanted to understand the will of and to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ through God’s preserved Word, the Scriptures. As best as I know how, I have made that my sole authority. I enjoy systematic theology; I have taught courses in Bible doctrine and have published a book on Bible Theology, but I test all of the various theologies with the Scriptures alone, and I have never agreed completely with any man’s *systematic* theology.

I praise God that I am not under divine obligation to follow either Calvinism or Arminianism.

7. CALVINISM IS ESTABLISHED ON PROOF TEXTS RATHER THAN ON THE WHOLE TENOR OF SCRIPTURE.

If isolated and interpreted through Calvinistic lenses, there are verses that seem to teach Calvinism, but when Scripture is taken as a whole it crumbles.

Central Errors of Calvinism

1. CALVINISM TURNS THEOLOGY INTO PHILOSOPHY.

Calvinism goes beyond biblical statements in an attempt to systematize the mysteries of God. John Calvin was a philosopher by training; his *Institutes* are extremely philosophical. It was first written when Calvin was young and only new converted to Protestantism, when his mind was still filled with the philosophy that he had studied as a Catholic priest.

True theology is simply believing and rightly interpreting the Bible, but God warns against philosophy and about leaving the simplicity of Christ (Col. 2:8; 2 Cor. 11:3).

Philosophy is to use the human intellect and logic in an attempt to come to the truth apart from divine revelation. In the case of Calvinism, the problem is that he goes beyond the actual statements of Scripture and creates doctrine by human reasoning.

For example, Arthur Pink states, “If then God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass then He must have decreed that vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved to suffer eternally in the Lake of Fire. Admitting the general premise, is not the specific conclusion inevitable?” (p. 84).

The answer is that Pink’s premise is wrong and so, therefore, is the conclusion. To say that God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass, is to go beyond

what the Bible teaches. The Bible says He “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11), but that is not the same as actually foreordaining everything. And to build on this faulty platform by claiming that God must have decreed that vast numbers of human beings should pass out of this world unsaved, is to allow human logic to assume the place of divine revelation.

Again, Pink says, “Now if God had willed their salvation, would He not have vouchsafed them the means of salvation? Would He not have given them all things necessary to that end? But it is an undeniable matter of fact that He did not” (p. 83).

This is all human reasoning. But what saith the Word of God? It says that God did will the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:3-6; 2 Pet. 3:9) and did provide for it (1 Jn. 2:2), but He also gave man a choice to believe or disbelieve (Jn. 3:16).

Here is another example of the philosophical approach of Calvinism. Pink says, “Now all will acknowledge that from the foundation of the world God certainly fore-knew and fore-saw who would and who would not receive Christ as their Saviour, therefore in giving being and birth to those He knew would reject Christ, He necessarily created them unto damnation” (p. 82).

The authority for this statement is not the plain teaching of Scripture but the author’s human reasoning. Pink confuses foreknowledge with forewilling. A parent gives his children many choices and greater liberty as they grow older and he knows that they will make mistakes and he knows the consequences of those mistakes

beforehand, but when the children do wrong that is not to say that the parent forewilled it.

In this context it is important to observe that Calvinism is not simple; it is very complicated. James White often makes the claim that Dave Hunt, who has debated him in print on this subject, doesn't understand Calvinism, even though he is intelligent and has studied the issue diligently. This highlights the complexity and philosophical nature of Calvinism. It results in an elitist mentality. Consider some of the terms that James White uses in his debate with Dave Hunt: compatibalism, monergism versus synergism, electing grace vs. irresistible grace, effectual calling vs. general calling, effective atonement vs. hypothetical atonement, libertarian free will vs. the bondage of the will. Other Calvinists speak of objective grace and subjective grace, natural ability and moral ability, mediate vs. immediate imputation of Adam's sin, supralapsarianism, sublapsarianism, infralapsarianism, desiderative vs. decretive will, and antecedent hypothetical will.

I believe that Calvinism is more akin to philosophy than to sound Bible theology and that it has left the simplicity that is in Christ.

2. THE CALVINIST SYSTEM TRIES TO RECONCILE THINGS THAT CANNOT BE RECONCILED IN THIS WORLD.

Consider Acts 13:48 and Acts 13:46

Verse 48 is a pet Calvinist verse: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

The Calvinist says, “See, here is a plain statement that those who believe are those who are sovereignly ordained to believe.” The problem is that the word “sovereignly” is added to what this verse actually states and Calvinist doctrine is read into the verse to make it say, “...as many as were sovereignly and arbitrarily elected believed.” Any possibility that God’s foreknowledge could allow for the exercise of human will is entirely discounted, but there is nothing in the verse itself to require such an interpretation.

Also, in verse 46 we see a different story. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

Here we see that salvation is associated with man’s response to the gospel. According to the plain teaching of this verse, these Jews did not go to Hell because they were not part of the elect or because they were sovereignly elected to reprobation, but simply because they refused to believe. They reprobated themselves. Paul told them that God wanted to give them everlasting life and they rejected it.

Consider John 6:37 and John 6:40

Again, John 6:37 is a favorite Calvinist proof text. “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

The Calvinist finds his doctrines of Sovereign Election and Irresistible Grace here. The problem is that if “irresistible grace” is taught in this passage, it is for all who believe on Christ and not merely for a special few who were sovereignly pre-elected to be saved.

This verse does not say that God has sovereignly pre-chosen only some for salvation and that it is those pre-chosen ones that are given to Christ. One must read all of that into the verse. It simply says that all that the Father gives will come to Christ. The question is this: “Who is it that the Father gives to Jesus?”

That question is answered plainly in this passage only three verses later: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40). (Of course the Calvinist argues that it is only the elect who can “see the Son,” but one must read that into the verse.)

In verse 40 we see that the sovereign will of God is that each and every sinner that believes on Christ will be saved. Here the sovereign will of God is to allow men a choice in salvation, and a great many other verses agree.

Consider John 6:44 and John 12:32

John 6:44 is another Calvinist proof text. “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

The Calvinist finds sovereign election and irresistible grace here.

Yet John 12:32 says, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

Here we see that Jesus draws all men.

How can these seemingly contradictory things be reconciled? Calvinism doesn't have the answer, because its proposed solution ignores or twists too many clear Scriptures.

I don't believe these things can be properly reconciled in this present world. We should simply let them stand and not try to force them into a perfectly formed theological system. God truly elects and man truly chooses. God elects and yet every man is urged to be saved and every man *can* be saved. God elects and yet sent His Son to die for the whole world. God elects and yet does not want any sinner to perish.

All are equally true and Scriptural, so let them ALL stand and do not try to reconcile that which the Bible itself does not reconcile and which therefore cannot be reconciled into a neat theological package in this present world.

3. CALVINISM'S DOCTRINES ARE CONTRARY TO THE PLAIN TEACHING OF GOD'S WORD.

The Bible vs. the Calvinist Doctrine That Faith Is a Work

Calvinism says that grace means man cannot do anything, cannot even believe, because otherwise grace would not be grace and the sinner would have something to boast of.

First of all, this is unscriptural, because the Bible plainly says faith and believing are not works.

“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

It is not faith that is the gift of God; it is salvation that is the gift. Salvation is by grace but THROUGH faith. Faith is “the hand that reaches out and accepts the gift of God.” Faith is not a work.

“For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Rom. 4:2-5).

Here we see plainly that faith is the opposite of works. Therefore to require that a sinner believe the gospel is not to require the sinner to do some sort of works for salvation.

Furthermore, this doctrine that faith is a work is unreasonable. Salvation is likened in Scripture to receiving a gift. It can also be likened to accepting a pardon and taking a life preserver. If someone purchases an expensive gift for me and I accept it, do I have anything to boast of? If I am in prison on death row for my crimes and the governor mercifully offers me a pardon and I accept it, have I done anything that I could boast of? If I am drowning in the ocean and a boat pulls alongside and offers to rescue me and I allow them to do that, have I thereby had some part in my salvation from drowning? Have I done something I could boast of? Of course not! When the sinner hears that Christ loves him and died for him and rose from the dead and offers him eternal salvation and the sinner joyfully receives that great salvation, that is not works and the sinner has nothing to boast about.

The Bible vs. the Calvinist Doctrine That the New Birth Precedes Faith

Arthur Pink states this doctrine as follows:

“Faith is not the cause of the new birth, but the consequence of it. This ought not to need arguing. ... Faith is a spiritual grace, the fruit of the spiritual nature, and because the unregenerate are spiritually dead--‘dead in trespasses and sins’--then it follows that faith from them is impossible, for a dead man cannot believe anything. ‘So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God’ (Rom. 8:8)--but they could if it were possible for the flesh to believe. ... That the work of the Holy Spirit precedes our believing is unequivocally established by 2 Thess. 2:13--‘God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.’ Note that

‘sanctification of the Spirit’ comes before and makes possible ‘belief of the truth’” (p. 73).

The chief passage on the New Birth is John 3. In verses 1-8 Jesus teaches Nicodemus that he must be born again or he cannot see the kingdom of God. In verse 9, Nicodemus asks Jesus how this can be. In verses 10-21, Jesus answers this question and explains how a man is born again, and the answer is that he is born again by believing (Jn. 3:14-16)! This is exactly what the Calvinist says the sinner cannot do. How can a dead man believe, he reasons? Well, if we are going to take the “dead man” analogy literally, a dead man can’t sin either. When the Bible says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins it means that he is separated from God’s divine life because of sin. To take this analogy beyond the actual teaching of the Bible and to give it other meanings, such as to reason that since the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins he must not be able to believe, is to move from truth to heresy.

Ephesians 1:13 also gives the order of salvation. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” First the sinner believes and then he receives the Holy Spirit.

The order of salvation is made clear in Acts 16:30-31 in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Note that the jailer was not born again when he asked what he must do to be

saved, and Paul replied that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously Paul knew that the man could do exactly that and, that by believing he would be born again.

The order of salvation is also made clear in Ephesians 2:8-9--“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Faith is the means whereby we are saved; it is the hand that reaches out to accept God’s Gift.

What, then, does 2 Thessalonians 2:13 mean, when it says we are chosen to salvation “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth”? In light of the previous passages, it is obvious that this verse is not stating the exact order of things. We have already learned that belief of the truth precedes the new birth. At the same time, from God’s perspective the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth occur simultaneously. Though we are saved through faith, that faith is exercised in the context of the Spirit of God enlightening and drawing and convicting and finally regenerating and sanctifying. It would therefore be humanly impossible to separate the “belief of the truth” from the “sanctification of the Spirit.”

The Bible vs. the Calvinist Doctrine of the Total Depravity of Man

The Bible teaches that man is morally corrupt (Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18) and dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and spiritually blind (1 Cor. 2:14), but it nowhere teaches

that man cannot respond to the gospel. When I have challenged Calvinists to provide me with even one verse that says man is dead in trespasses and sins in SUCH A MANNER that he cannot even believe the gospel, they have never provided such a verse. One suggested Ephesians 2, but nowhere does Ephesians 2 teach such a thing. One has to read the Calvinist doctrine of “total depravity” into the Scripture.

The Bible teaches, rather, that God enables men to respond, giving them light (Jn. 1:9), drawing them (Jn. 12:32), convicting them (Jn. 16:8), calling them through the gospel (Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Thess. 2:14), and commanding them to repent (Acts 17:30) and believe on Christ (Acts 16:31).

The Bible vs. the Calvinist Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

CONSIDER CAIN. Genesis 4:6-7--“And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

God spoke to Cain and urged him not to act on the jealous anger that was burning in his heart, and yet Cain resisted God’s will and murdered his brother. God gave Cain a clear choice. There is not a hint in this passage that would make us conclude that God had predetermined that Cain be reprobate.

CONSIDER THE WORLD BEFORE THE FLOOD.

Genesis 6:3--“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”

God strove with men before the flood and had Noah preach to them for 120 years while the ark was being built, but they resisted God and rejected his warning.

CONSIDER ISRAEL OF OLD. Romans 10:21--“But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.”

We see that God wanted to save Israel and continually reached out to them, but God’s salvation was resisted and rejected.

CONSIDER ISRAEL OF CHRIST’S DAY. Matthew 23:37--“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” John 5:40 “And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.”

Here we see that the sovereign will of the Son of God, who desired to save Israel throughout her history and who often sent His prophets to her, was refused.

CONSIDER THE UNSAVED OF OUR DAY. 2 Corinthians 4:3-4--“But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the

light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”

Here we see that men are blinded because of their own unbelief and they are lost because they reject the gospel. It is God’s sovereign will to save every sinner (1 Tim. 2:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:9), but sinners can resist Him.

CONSIDER THE UNSAVED DURING THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST. 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12--“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Why will these sinners perish? The reason is stated plainly, and it is not because they are not among the elect and is not because they were sovereignly reprobated. It is because they resist the gospel and reject the truth.

The Bible vs. the Calvinist Doctrine of Limited Atonement

God loves all men (Jn. 3:16).

God has commanded that the gospel be preached to every person (Mark 16:15).

God wants to have mercy upon all men (Rom. 11:32).

God desires to reconcile all men to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19).

The promise of faith by Jesus is for all (Gal. 3:22).

Jesus was a ransom for all men (1 Tim. 2:6).

Jesus tasted death for all men (Heb. 2:9).

Jesus bought even unsaved false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1).
God desires all men to be saved (2 Pet. 3:9).
Jesus provided propitiation for all men (1 Jn. 2:2).
The iniquity of all men was laid on Jesus (Isaiah 53:6).

The Calvinist's doctrine of limited atonement is contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture.

4. CALVINISM INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE BY THEOLOGY RATHER THAN BY CONTEXT.

Its doctrines are not supported by the plain language of Scripture but are read into the Scripture. In Bible interpretation, the principle rule is to interpret according to the plain language of the text and according to the context.

Calvinism assigns preset definitions to theological terms instead of allowing the context to define them.

God's omnipotence means God's will cannot be resisted by man.

Election means man has no choice.

Total depravity means man is unable to respond to God and cannot even believe.

Let's consider the doctrine of Total Depravity more carefully. According to this doctrine, man is so dead in trespasses and sins in such a sense that he cannot even believe on Christ for salvation, that he cannot make any choice in regard to salvation. I have challenged Calvinists

to give me even one Scripture that teaches this, and I have examined books by Calvinists for such a proof text, but in vain. The Scriptures they quote do not teach their doctrine. They cite, for example, Ephesians 2:1-4, but that passage says nothing about the sinner not being able to believe. It says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sin, walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, is a child of disobedience, and is by nature the child of wrath. But that is not the same as the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity which goes beyond the actual words of Scripture and adds the business about the sinner not being able to believe. They also cite Genesis 6:5 and Jeremiah 17:9 and Isaiah 64:6-7 and Romans 3:10-18, but again there is nothing in these verses about the Calvinist doctrine that the sinner is unable to believe, that he cannot exercise his will in receiving or rejecting salvation.

After citing the previously mentioned Scriptures, Dr. Jeffrey Khoo of the Far Eastern Bible College concludes: “Man’s freedom of choice has been forfeited since the Fall. ... The Bible teaches human inability and total depravity” (*Arminianism Examined*, p. 4). Yes, the Bible definitely teaches that man is totally depraved in the sense that the sinner is corrupt and there is nothing good in him that would warrant or earn salvation, but Calvinism goes beyond this and adds its own unique twist that is not supported by Scripture.

Consider the doctrine of Limited Atonement, that Christ died only to save the elect and that He did not die for the non-elect.

“He died in order to procure and secure the salvation of the elect only. ... the atonement is limited or particular in its design and intention.”

Dr. Khoo quotes Augustine, who said that Christ’s death was “sufficient for all, efficient for the elect.” In other words, though Christ somehow made it possible for all sinners to be saved in this age, only the elect can actually be saved, because only they are effectively drawn and regenerated. There is not one Scripture to support this doctrine.

Dr. Khoo quotes Matt. 1:21, which says Jesus will “save His people from their sins,” but this does not say that Jesus died for the elect only. “His people” here refers to the Jews, and we know that Jesus did not die only for the Jews.

The Calvinist quotes Ephesians 5:25, that Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it, but this does not say that Christ died only for the elect. That Christ gave Himself for the church is not to say that Christ gave Himself ONLY for the church or any other such Calvinistic twist. The Calvinist quotes John 6:38-39, where Christ said, “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” Again, this does not support the Calvinist doctrine of Limited Atonement. In fact, it says nothing whatsoever about the extent of the atonement.

The Calvinist must support his doctrine, every point of it, from the Scripture alone interpreted properly by the plain meaning of the words and by context. This he cannot do.

If he is not allowed to read his doctrine into the Scripture, he is not able to support his doctrine from Scripture.

5. CALVINISM MISSTATES WHAT NON-CALVINISTS BELIEVE.

There are many straw man arguments that the Calvinist erects and defeats, but by defeating them he has only defeated a figment of his own imagination.

Calvinists claim, for example, that the non-Calvinist doesn't believe in God's sovereignty. I can't speak for others, but this non-Calvinist certainly believes in God's sovereignty. God is God and He can do whatsoever He pleases whensoever He pleases. As one man said, "Whatever the Bible says, I believe; the Bible says the whale swallowed Jonah, and I believe it; and if the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would believe that." If the Bible taught that God sovereignly selects some sinners to go to Heaven and sovereignly elects the rest to go to Hell or that He chooses only some to be saved and allows the rest to be destroyed, I would believe it, because I believe God is God and man cannot tell God what is right or wrong. But the Bible reveals, rather, that the sovereign God made man with a will and that the sinner can still exercise that will in receiving or rejecting Christ. This does not detract from God's sovereignty one *iota*.

They claim, further, that the non-Calvinist believes man is saved by his own will. I can't speak for others, but this

non-Calvinist does not believe that. No sinner can believe unless God enables him to do so. The Bible plainly states that Jesus enlightens (Jn. 1:9) and draws (Jn. 12:37) every man. Man is not saved by his will; he is saved by the grace of God in Christ and because of the blood of Christ. Jn. 1:12-13 leaves no doubt about this. *“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”* Verse 12 says as many as receive Jesus and believe on His name are born again, but verse 13 says this salvation by faith is not “the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Thus, believing on Christ is not some sort of “will salvation.”

They claim that the non-Calvinist doesn't believe that salvation is 100% of God, that by saying that the sinner can believe on Christ is to say that “he contributes to his salvation” and “thus, the work of salvation is not totally God's” (Jeffrey Khoo, *Arminianism Examined*, Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore, p. 2). Arthur Pink says that if the sinner could yield to or resist Christ, “then the Christian would have ground for boasting and self-glorying over his co-operation with the Spirit...” (p. 128). Again, while I can't speak for others, this non-Calvinist most definitely believes that salvation is 100% of God. It is God who enlightens (Jn. 1:9), convicts (Jn. 16:7-8), draws (Jn. 12:32), and saves. Man does nothing but receive a Gift and that is not a work and is not something to boast of! As with salvation, so with Christian living, it is all of God and man has nothing to boast of. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his

good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13); and, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). Salvation is all of Christ, from beginning to end. This idea that receiving a gift leaves the recipient in a position to boast is ridiculous. The recipient of a Priceless Gift does not boast of himself but of the Giver. The man who is rescued from the sea and escapes certain death does not brag about what he did for himself but about what the rescuer did, even though the drowning man perhaps took hold of a life preserver that was thrown to him or relaxed in the arms of the lifeguard.

They say that the teaching that man can believe on or reject Christ means that one believes that the sinner is not truly depraved and that man is a “free moral agent.” Arthur Pink says this in his chapter on “God’s Sovereignty and the Human Will.” He presents many straw men in this section. He says, “Does it lie within the province of man’s will to accept or reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour? ... The answer to this question defines our conception of human depravity. ... Man is a rational being and as such responsible and accountable to God, but to affirm that he is a free moral agent is to deny that he is totally depraved...” (p. 138). I certainly don’t believe that the sinner is a “free moral agent,” and I believe that man is totally without righteousness before God, dead in trespasses and sins, etc. I simply agree with what the Bible says about man believing the gospel. The Bible says that “whosoever believeth in him shall not perish” (Jn. 3:16). That teaches me that a sinner can believe on Christ, but to go beyond this simple concept

and to claim that such a position is to deny human depravity or is to make him into a “free moral agent” is nonsense. Romans 3:10-18 and Eph. 2:1-4 are key New Testament passages on the depravity of the sinner, but neither passage mentions man’s will or whether he can or cannot believe on Christ for salvation. The same is true for every passage in the Bible that deals with man’s depravity in Adam, such as Gen. 6:4; Psa. 51:5; 58:3; Prov. 22:15; Ecc. 9:3; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; and Mat. 15:9. Again, the Calvinist reads his own theology into these passages.

Pink and other Calvinists even liken the non-Calvinist’s position on so-called “free will” to that of the Roman Catholic Church. Pink quotes from the Council of Trent, which said, “If any one shall affirm, that man’s free-will, moved and excited by God, does not, by consenting, co-operate with God, the mover and exciter, so as to prepare and dispose itself for the attainment of justification; if moreover anyone shall say, that the human will cannot refuse complying, if it pleases; but that it is unactive, and merely passive; let such an one be accursed.” Pink then concludes: “Thus, those who today insist on the free-will of the natural man believe precisely what Rome teaches on the subject! ... the Roman Catholics and Arminians walk hand in hand...” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 139). This is libelous in the extreme. The Roman Catholic Church believes that man is not utterly unrighteous in his fallen state and that he can actually cooperate with God in his justification, that salvation is by faith plus works and sacraments rather than by faith alone. The non-Calvinist does not believe anything like this. He simply believes the Scripture when it says that “whosoever

believeth in him shall not perish” (Jn. 3:16) and he doesn’t try to bend such Scriptures to conform to the TULIP mold.

These are only a few examples of how the Calvinist tends to misstate and misrepresent what the non-Calvinist believes.

6. CALVINISM CONFUSES THE CHURCH WITH ISRAEL AND NATIONAL ELECTION WITH PERSONAL (Rom. 9:9-24).

John Calvin’s major argument for unconditional election and reprobation is based on God’s dealings with Israel. This is described in Calvin’s *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter 21, “Eternal Election.”

Romans 9:9-24

9:9 For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son.

10 And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac;

11 (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)

12 It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger.

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

This is doubtless the Calvinist's favorite proof text for sovereign election. Does Romans 9 teach that God arbitrarily or sovereignly chooses some sinners to be saved and the rest to be lost? Let's consider eight important facts about this passage:

1. The example of Esau and Jacob does not refer to election pertaining to personal salvation but to election pertaining to nations in God's overall program.

Verse 12 makes this clear. "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." The promise of God to Rebecca was about the elder son serving the younger, not about their personal salvation. Esau could have gotten saved. He could have believed in God and been in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. This passage does not teach that Esau was sovereignly predestined to be reprobate. It teaches that God sovereignly chose Christ's lineage.

2. As for Pharaoh, the Bible says that he rejected God's Word in Exodus 5:2 before God hardened his heart in Exodus 7:3.

"Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). Also the Bible twice says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. "But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said" (Ex. 8:15). See also Exodus 9:34. This is not a case of sovereign reprobation. The Scripture teaches that it is always God's will for men to serve Him, but when they reject Him He rejects them and judges them and makes examples of them. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12--"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED. And for this cause God shall

send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: THAT THEY ALL MIGHT BE DAMNED WHO BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” These sinners will be damned but not because they are not sovereignly elected and not because they are sovereignly reprobate but because of their personal decision in regard to the truth. Words could not be plainer. God did make an example of Pharaoh and God did harden his heart for this purpose, but to go beyond what the Bible says and to claim that God chose to create Pharaoh for the purpose of reprobating him is a great error and is to malign the name of the loving God.

3. Romans 9:22-23 does not say that God sovereignly fits some sinners to destruction and some to glory.

The phrase “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” allows for a variant voice; according to the *PC Study Bible*, it can be both the passive and middle voice in Greek; middle means to fit oneself. In the middle voice the subject acts in relation to him/herself. Consider this note from Vincent Word Studies: “NOT FITTED BY GOD FOR DESTRUCTION, but in an adjectival sense, ready, ripe for destruction, the participle denoting a present state previously formed, BUT GIVING NO HINT OF HOW IT HAD BEEN FORMED. That the objects of final wrath had themselves a hand in the matter may be seen from 1 Thess. 2:15-16.” By allowing the Bible to speak for itself through the plain meaning of the words and by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that the sinner fits himself for destruction by his rejection of the truth. Even those who have never heard the gospel, have the light of creation and conscience and are responsible to

respond to the light that they have that they might be given more light (Acts 17:26-27).

4. Romans 9:23-24 does not mean that God calls only a certain pre-chosen elect group to salvation.

“And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” One has to read that into the language of the verses. The Calvinist claims that verse 24 refers to “effectual calling,” which is a term that describes the “irresistible calling of the elect,” but this is adding to God’s Word, which is a great error. The Bible plainly states that God has called all who will come to Christ. God calls through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) and the gospel is to be preached to every creature (Mk. 16:15). God calls “whosoever will” (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17). God calls every one that believes on Christ. “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40).

5. God’s salvation even of the Jews was not a matter of “sovereign” election but was based on an individual’s faith in His Word. “But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and

whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom. 9:31-33).

6. Romans 10 leaves no doubt about this; the promise of salvation proves that it is not God’s arbitrary or “sovereign” choice (Rom. 10:8-13). Note the words “whosoever” and “all.” Would God mock sinners by promising them salvation if they believe in Christ and then only enable those who were sovereignly elected to actually exercise such faith?

7. God’s sovereignty does not mean that His will is always accomplished in man. “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). See also Matt. 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” God has made man in His image. Man is not a robot. He can exercise his will in saying no to God, and man has said no to God and has resisted God from Genesis to Revelation. If God’s sovereignty means that His will is always done, this world would make no sense! It is God’s will, for example, for every believer to “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16), but we know all too well that this is not always the case and is never the case perfectly.

8. God’s blinding of Israel was not a matter of sovereign election but it was because they first hardened their own hearts. Consider Ezek. 12:2; Mat. 13:15 and Acts 28:25-27:

Ezekiel 12:2 - “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.”

Ezekiel says the cause for Israel’s blindness is her own rebellion.

Matthew 13:15--“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Matthew says Israel closed her own eyes and that is the reason they were not converted. There is no sovereign reprobation here.

Acts 28:25-27--“And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Again, Acts says Israel closed her own eyes lest she be converted. There is no support for the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign reprobation here.

7. CALVINISM GOES BACK TO THE “CHURCH FATHERS” FOR AUTHORITY INSTEAD OF STRICTLY TO THE NEW TESTAMENT APOSTLES AND PROPHETS.

Calvin freely acknowledged that his authority was Augustine. Consider the following quotes:

“If I were inclined to compile a whole volume from Augustine, I could easily show my readers, that I need no words but his” (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22).

“Let Augustine answer for me...” (Ibid.).

“[Augustine is the one] we quote most frequently as being the best and most faithful witness of all antiquity” (*Institutes*, Book IV, chap. 14).

“Augustine is so wholly with me, that if I wished to write a confession of my faith, I could do so ... out of his writings” (Calvin, “A Treatise on the Eternal Predestination of God,” trans. by Henry Cole, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1987, p. 38; cited in Laurence Vance, *The Other Side of Calvinism*, 1999, p. 38).

WHO WAS AUGUSTINE? He was so polluted with heresy that the Roman Catholic Church has claimed him as one of its “doctors.”

Augustine was a persecutor and the father of the doctrine of persecution in the Catholic Church. The historian Neander observed that Augustine’s teaching “contains the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism,

intolerance, and persecution, even to the court of the Inquisition.” He instigated bitter persecutions against the Bible-believing Donatists who were striving to maintain pure churches after the apostolic faith.

Augustine was the father of amillennialism, interpreting Bible prophecy allegorically; teaching that the Catholic Church is the kingdom of God.

Augustine taught that Mary did not commit sin.

Augustine believed in purgatory.

Augustine was one of the fathers of the heresy of infant baptism, claiming that unbaptized infants were lost, and calling all who rejected infant baptism “infidels” and “cursed.”

Augustine exalted church tradition above the Bible and said, “I should not believe the gospel unless I were moved to do so by the authority of the Catholic Church.”

8. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN CHRIST’S WARNINGS AND HIS JUDGMENTS.

Repeatedly, Christ warned sinners that except they repent and believe on Him they would perish (e.g., Lk. 13:3, 5; Jn. 8:24). Christ also issued judgments upon sinners because they did not believe.

Luke 10:12-16--“But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the

mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to Hell. He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.”

In light of Calvinism’s definition of sovereign election and the irresistible drawing and regeneration of the elect, Christ’s warnings and judgments make no sense. Why would He warn sinners to repent and believe or perish and pronounce severe judgment upon sinners for not believing if He knows that only those who are sovereignly elected can do such a thing?

Calvinists have made pathetic attempts to answer this, but in my estimation the fact of Christ’s warnings simply and plainly refute their doctrine.

9. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN THE APOSTLE PAUL.

Paul attempted to win the more. “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Cor. 9:19). How can I win more if the number of the elect has been settled from eternity?

Paul’s goal was to “save some.” “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some: (1 Cor.

9:22). Isn't the election of the saved already assured without Paul's help? How could anything he did in his life and ministry have any affect upon the elect?

Paul sacrificed so that men would be saved. "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33). If election is sovereignly predetermined and irresistible, Paul's statement makes no sense.

Paul persuaded men. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences" (2 Cor. 5:11). If Paul were a Calvinist, he would know that the elect don't need persuading and the non-elect can't be persuaded!

Paul was willing to go to Hell for the unsaved Jews. "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). How could a mere man care more about the destiny of the unsaved than God? We are convinced that the cry of Paul's heart here is merely a mirror of the cry of God's own heart for all lost sinners.

10. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS.

The book of Hebrews refutes the Calvinist or TULIP doctrines of unconditional and "sovereign" election and irresistible grace, that God sovereignly and arbitrarily chooses who will be saved and irresistibly and absolutely draws them so that on one hand it is impossible for the

non-elect to be saved and on the other hand it is impossible for the elect not to be saved. If this were true, the Holy Spirit would not give such dire warnings and exhortations to professing believers about the possibility of apostasy, because if they are elected they could not possibly perish and if they are not elected, nothing they could do would change their status. Consider, for example, the following passages:

Consider Hebrews 2:3: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

This exhortation makes no sense in light of Calvinist doctrines. If election is as the Calvinist teaches, how could the elect neglect salvation and how could the non-elect do anything other than neglect salvation?

Consider Hebrews 3:12-14: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.”

If the elect are predetermined “sovereignly” and if election has nothing whatsoever to do with the sinner himself and if he is irresistibly drawn, what could this exhortation possibly mean? How could a sovereignly elected, irresistibly drawn believer depart from God, and

how could the non-elect do anything other than depart from God?

Consider Hebrews 4:9-11: “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”

How could this exhortation possibly apply to TULIP type election? This passage says the rest of salvation is something that every person must seek to enter into and all are urged to do so, but the doctrine of “sovereign” election teaches us that those elected to God’s rest are predetermined solely by God and they have no choice in the matter and will assuredly enter into that rest.

Consider Hebrews 6:4-6: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”

If TULIP theology is true, why the exhortation? How could the elect fall away? And how could the non-elect do anything but fall away?

Consider Hebrews 10:26-29: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful

looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Again, if TULIP theology is true, why would such an exhortation be given to professing believers? If they are sovereignly elected, they will surely persevere and if they aren't they surely won't. According to Calvinist doctrine, it has nothing to do with them or what they do.

If election is "sovereign" and "unconditional" in a Calvinist sense and the believer has no choice whatsoever in the matter of salvation, these passages don't make any sense.

If, on the other hand, election involves an element of foreknowledge (1 Pet. 1:2) and involves a personal choice on the part of the sinner ("whosoever believeth," Jn. 3:15, 16; 12:46; Acts 10:43; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 John 5:1; Rev. 22:17; etc.), the exhortations and warnings in Hebrews make perfect sense. Because if this is true, and we know that it is because the Bible everywhere teaches it, then the sinner, being given light from Christ (Jn. 1:9) and being drawn by Christ (Jn. 12:32) and being convicted and enlightened by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:8) can, because of this gracious divine enablement, either believe on Christ or not and it is also possible for a sinner to come close to salvation without actually possessing it.

Therefore he needs to be exhorted to believe on Jesus Christ truly and sincerely and not to turn away before he has been genuinely born again and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and adopted into God's family.

11. CALVINISM CANNOT EXPLAIN PRAYER.

Arthur Pink says, "God's will is immutable, and cannot be altered by our cryings" (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 173).

In fact, God's will can be altered by our prayers.

Prayer can never demand that God do something. Prayer is not demanding but asking. Prayer must always be in accordance with "the will of God" (Rom. 1:10). 'If we ask anything according to his will he heareth us' (1 Jn. 5:14). But that is not to say that prayer is merely a robotic response to that which God has eternally predetermined. God has given man the responsibility to pray and has pledged Himself to answer, as long as the prayer is in accordance with His will. That means that it is up to man whether to pray or not to pray, how much to pray, and how earnestly. And those prayers change things in the world!

Prayer can even change God's mind. Consider the following amazing scene that occurred on Mt. Sinai:

"And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: NOW THEREFORE LET ME ALONE, THAT MY WRATH MAY WAX HOT AGAINST THEM, AND THAT I MAY CONSUME THEM: AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION. And Moses besought the LORD his

God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit it for ever. AND THE LORD REPENTED OF THE EVIL WHICH HE THOUGHT TO DO UNTO HIS PEOPLE" (Ex. 32:9-14).

God told Moses that He would consume Israel and make a great nation of Moses, but Moses pleaded with Him and the Bible says that God repented. Where does this fit into Calvinism's emphasis upon God's *absolute* sovereignty? Here we see God interacting with man, and His mind literally being changed by man's pleas.

Someone will ask at this point about Numbers 23:19, which says, "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?"

There is no contradiction between Num. 23:19 and Ex. 32:14. In Numbers 23 Balaam is speaking about God's eternal plan for Israel, and in that He will not repent. "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29). But within the context of God's overall plan for the ages, He does repent or change His mind in relation to man's actions in many ways, and that is the mystery of prayer.

What about 1 Sam. 15:29, which says, “And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent”? This statement was made by Samuel after God had rejected Saul and chosen David as the new king. Saul was pleading with Samuel to change his mind about that decision, and Samuel replied that God’s decisions in such matters are unchangeable.

There are times in which God’s mind can be changed and there are times when it cannot. At one point, God told two of the prophets not to pray for Israel (Jer. 7:16; Ezek. 14:4), but that was after Israel had gone too far in rebellion and God had determined to judge them. After other times, prayer, such as that of Moses in Exodus 32, drove back God’s wrath and gave Israel more time.

Neither Num. 23:19 nor 1 Sam. 15:29 change the fact that God repented of His plan to destroy Israel in Exodus 32 in response to Moses’ earnest intercession.

The fact is that man is an amazing creation. He is made in God’s image, and he is not a robot or a puppet. God is still God, but God has ordained that man has a will and can say yes or no to Him. Men can even change God’s mind through earnest entreaties! That is the wondrous power of prayer.

Consider another prayer scene in Scripture. In Isaiah 38 we read that King Hezekiah was sick unto death and God told the prophet Isaiah to go to him and say, “Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live” (Isa. 38:1). Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and wept and

“prayed unto the Lord.” The Bible says that after this, God sent Isaiah back to the king to say, “Thus said the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years” (Isa. 38:5).

In response to earnest prayer God gave him 15 more years of life on earth. Prayer changes things!

“What takes the greater power (omnipotence): to create beings who have no ability to choose--who are mere pawns on God’s cosmic chessboard--or to create beings who have the freedom to accept or reject God’s salvation? I submit, the latter. ... Would a God who ordained the existence of immortal beings without making any provision for them to escape eternal torment be a cruel being? What kind of God would call on mankind to ‘believe and be saved’ when He knows they cannot [and] what kind of relationship is there between God and people who could never choose Him--but are ‘irresistibly’ called...? For these and other reasons I question the idea that individual unconditional election and five-point Calvinism best reflect the attributes of God. A God who sovereignly offers salvation to all through His elect Saviour reflects both power and love.” (Philip F. Cogdon, “Soteriological Implications of Five-Point Calvinism,” *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Autumn 1995; cited from Dave Hunt, *A Calvinist’s Honest Doubts Resolved*, p. 76).

Not all Calvinists the Same

It is important to understand that there is a great variety of doctrine and practice among Calvinists, and by no means do I consider a man to be an enemy of the truth just because he accepts some of the Calvinist theology. The book *Spurgeon vs. Hyper Calvinists: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* by Iain Murray (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1995) does an excellent job of describing some of the differences among Calvinists. There are soul winning Calvinists, Calvinists with great evangelistic and missionary zeal; and there are Calvinists who condemn these things. Some interpret Calvinism in such a way that they do not believe in offering salvation to or preaching the gospel to all sinners; they do not even believe that God loves all men. According to Murray's definition, these are "hyper Calvinists."

Charles Spurgeon refused to try to reconcile every seeming contradiction in the Bible, and he was wise enough to know that he could not understand every mystery of God. He said:

"That God predestines, and that man is responsible, are two things that few can see. They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not. It is just the fault of our weak judgment. Two truths cannot be contradictory to each other. If, then, I find taught in one place that everything is fore-ordained, that is true; and if I find in another place that man is responsible for all his actions, that is true; and it is my folly that leads me to imagine that two truths can ever contradict each other. These two truths, I do not believe, can ever be welded into one upon any human anvil, but one they shall be in eternity: they are two lines that are so nearly parallel, that the mind that shall pursue them farthest, will never discover that they converge; but they do converge, and

they will meet somewhere in eternity, close to the throne of God, whence all truth doth spring” (C.H. Spurgeon, *New Park Street Pulpit*, Vol. 4, 1858, p. 337).

Spurgeon warned about creating theologies that attempt to reconcile every biblical difficulty:

“Men who are morbidly anxious to possess a self-consistent creed, a creed which will put together and form a square like a Chinese puzzle,—are very apt to narrow their souls. Those who will only believe what they can reconcile will necessarily disbelieve much of divine revelation. Those who receive by faith anything which they find in the Bible will receive two things, twenty things, ay, or twenty thousand things, though they cannot construct a theory which harmonises them all” (C.H. Spurgeon, “Faith,” *Sword and Trowel*, 1872).

In these matters, Charles Spurgeon was a Calvinist but he was much more than a Calvinist; he was a Biblicist. It has been said of Spurgeon, that if you pricked him, even his blood was “bibline.” He loved theology and studied theology earnestly, but the bottom line was that he had childlike faith in everything the Bible says.

And while Spurgeon was a Calvinist, he was at the same time a great evangelist and believed in offering the gospel to all men and urging all men to be saved. Spurgeon believed that more sinners could be saved if the gospel was preached to them, and he did not try to reconcile such a view with God’s election. He believed his responsibility was to preach the gospel to as many sinners as possible. He believed that tools such as prayer could result in a greater harvest of souls. He had prayer meetings before the preaching services and every Monday night and on other occasions. Sometimes when the auditorium of the Metropolitan Tabernacle was full, a

group would remain in the downstairs prayer hall and pray during the preaching (as per an e-mail from Mrs. Hannah Wyncoll, Administrative Assistant, Metropolitan Tabernacle, June 2, 2000). Spurgeon loved soul winning and taught his people to be soul winners. His famous book *The Soul Winner* is still in print. There were some in Spurgeon's church who "made it their special work to 'watch for souls' in our great congregation, and to seek to bring to immediate decision those who appeared to be impressed under the preaching of the Word. [Bro. Cloud: Note the word 'decision' in Spurgeon's description of this soul winner!] One brother has earned for himself the title of my hunting dog, for he is always ready to pick up the wounded birds. One Monday night, at the prayer-meeting, he was sitting near me on the platform; all at once I missed him, and presently I saw him right at the other end of the building. After the meeting, I asked why he went off so suddenly, and he said that the gas just shone on the face of a woman in the congregation, and she looked so sad that he walked round, and sat near her, in readiness to speak to her about the Saviour after the service" (C.H. Spurgeon, *The Full Harvest*, p. 76). Thus we see that Charles Spurgeon was a man who was very zealous for the winning of souls, and his Calvinism and his convictions about the sovereignty of God in no wise hindered that.

On the other hand, many Calvinists of that day opposed Spurgeon vehemently from their pulpits and in their magazines and denounced his practice of giving invitations for sinners to come to Christ. (He did not have the people actually come forward during the church service as is commonly practiced today, but he invited

them to come to Christ all the same; and he believed that a sinner was saved in every seat in the Metropolitan Tabernacle's massive auditorium of that day.)

For example, one popular Calvinist paper of Spurgeon's day was the *Earthen Vessel*. In one of its issues in 1857, it boldly stated that "to preach that it is man's duty to believe savingly in Christ is ABSURD." Well, that was exactly what Spurgeon preached, so to a great many Calvinists of his day, Spurgeon was an absurd fellow!

This reminds us that there are different kinds of Calvinists and it is not wise to lump them all into the same mold.

I have had the privilege of knowing, and communicating at a distance with, many godly soul winning Calvinists. Though I am in strong disagreement with such men on the subject of Calvinist theology, I do not consider them enemies.

At the same time, I believe that our differences in theology are great enough to disallow us to minister together or to be members together of the same church.

Beware of Quick Prayerism

A danger that is at least as damaging to evangelism as Calvinism is the “Easy Believism” or “Quick Prayerism” that is so prevalent among fundamental Baptists and many other groups. I prefer to call it “Quick Prayerism” rather than “Easy Believism” because the fact is that salvation is by believing (John 3:16) and it is not difficult. Those who practice Quick Prayerism are characterized as follows:

1. They are quick to “lead people to Christ” even when the gospel presentation has been shallow and insufficient.

Consider the following statement on “What is Salvation?” from Saddleback Church pastored by Rick Warren of Purpose Driven Church fame: “Our disobedient nature has eternally separated us from our Creator. No matter how hard we try, we can never earn our way back into God’s presence. Our only hope is to trust Jesus as God’s provision for our disobedience.” This statement is so shallow and insufficient that it is difficult to know where to begin, but briefly, salvation is much more than a vague, undefined decision “to trust Jesus as God’s provision for our disobedience.” There is no mention of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, even though this is how Paul defined the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. There is no mention of the blood. No mention of repentance. The Saddleback paraphrase of the gospel is no gospel at all, and to lead a person in a sinner’s prayer when this is all of the “gospel” they understand is a crime and a disgrace to the cause of

Christ. The shallowness of this type of evangelism is why I could sit next to a church member at Saddleback last year and have him tell me that he has always been a Christian. This was in response to my question, “When were you born again?”

(2) They are quick to lead people in a prayer even when there is no evidence of conviction or regeneration, in contrast to the Apostle Paul who, like John the Baptist, required evidence of repentance.

“But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

3. They are quick to ignore repentance or redefine repentance to have nothing to do with sin or a change of life.

The typical soul-winning plan doesn’t even hint at repentance, that there is going to be a change of direction, a submission to God.

Many have rejected traditional definitions of repentance as “a change of mind that results in a change of life” and have re-defined repentance, instead, as merely “a change from unbelief to belief.” If a large percentage of their “converts” show no sign of a change of life, it does not greatly concern them, because they do not believe that repentance always results in a change of life.

4. They are quick to give people assurance even if there is no evidence of salvation.

Biblical security is only for those who are genuinely born again and those who are such will give clear evidence of it (2 Cor. 5:17). To give assurance to someone, especially a complete stranger, merely because he has prayed a sinner's prayer or has walked down an aisle and professed Christ to a church worker is very dangerous, because it tends to give false hope to large numbers of unregenerate people.

5. They are quick to count numbers regardless of how empty.

Those who practice Quick Prayerism typically report large numbers of "salvations" even though a significant percentage of their professions give no evidence of salvation. In my experience, it is not uncommon that 90% of the professions produced under such ministries are fruitless. It is dishonest to give such reports. It is one thing to say that "20 men prayed to receive Christ in the prison last night" or "500 people prayed the sinner's prayer through the ministry of our church last year." It is quite another thing to say "20 men got saved in the prison last night" or "500 people got saved through the ministry of our church last year." This is especially true when the one giving the report knows by experience that most of his "converts" don't pan out and that most of the professions produced in his ministry are as empty as a homeless man's refrigerator.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am not saying that there are forms of Calvinism that are Scriptural and that it is only some types of more extreme Calvinism that are unscriptural. Spurgeon said that we need to go back to the Calvinism of John Calvin. As much as I respect Charles Haddon Spurgeon (knowing, too, that he was only a man), I must disagree with that grand old warrior in this matter. I say we need to go far beyond that. Calvin himself went back as far as Augustine, but that, too, is not nearly far enough. In fact, depending on the very undependable Augustine was one of Calvin's chief errors. We don't need to go back to Calvin or Augustine. We need to go all the way back to "the faith once delivered to the saints" as it is perfectly and sufficiently recorded in the Scriptures! That is where our systematic theology must start *AND END*.

Calvin's Camels

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel" (Matthew 23:24).

Having read John Calvin's *Institutes* and having studied the writings of many Calvinists both ancient and contemporary, I am convinced that Calvin was guilty of straining at gnats and swallowing camels. To accept Calvinism (in any of its forms) is to deny the plain teaching of dozens of Scriptures.

I have examined Calvinism many times during the 36 years since I was saved. The first time was shortly after I was converted, when I was in Bible College, and Calvinism was one of the many topics that were strenuously discussed by the students. I had never heard of Calvinism before that and I didn't know what to think of it, so I read Arthur Pink's *The Sovereignty of God* and a couple of other titles on the subject with a desire to understand it and to know whether it was scriptural or not. Some of the students became Calvinists, but I concluded that though Calvinism makes some good points about the sovereignty of God and though I personally like the way it exalts God above man and though I agree with its teaching that salvation is 100% of God and though I despise and reject the shallow, manipulative, man-centered soul winning scheme that is so common among independent Baptists and though it does seem to be supported by a few Scriptures, the bottom line to me is that it ends up contradicting far too many plain Scriptures.

In the year 2000 I was invited to preach at a conference on Calvinism at Heritage Baptist University in Greenwood, Indiana, which was subsequently held in April 2001. The conference was opposed to Calvinism; and I agreed to speak, because I have been in sympathy with such a position ever since I first examined the subject in Bible College. Before I put together a message for the conference, though, I wanted to re-examine Calvinism in a more thorough manner. I contacted Dr. Peter Masters in London, England, and discussed the subject of Calvinism with him. I told him that I love and respect him in Christ and I also love and respect his predecessor, Charles Spurgeon, though I do not agree with either of them on Calvinism (or on some issues, in fact). I told Dr. Masters that I wanted him to tell me what books he would recommend so that I could properly understand what he believes on the subject (knowing that there are many varieties of Calvinism). I did not want to misrepresent anything. Among other things, Dr. Masters recommended that I read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and Iain Murray's *Spurgeon vs. the Hyper-Calvinists*, which I did.

In the last couple of years I have again re-investigated Calvinism from both sides. I read Dave Hunt's "*What Love Is This?*" and "*A Calvinist's Honest Doubts Resolved by Reason and God's Amazing Grace.*" I read "*Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*" by Dave Hunt and James White. I carefully re-read Arthur Pink's "*The Sovereignty of God*" as well as the "*Westminster Confession of Faith.*" I have also studied about 100 pages of materials published in defense of Calvinism by the Far

Eastern Bible College in Singapore. This is a Bible Presbyterian school.

As best as I know how, I have studied these materials with the sole desire to know the truth and with a willingness to follow the truth wherever it leads.

Thus, while I have not read every book on this subject that could be recommended by my readers, I have made a considerable effort to understand Calvinism properly and not to misrepresent it (though I have learned that a non-Calvinist will ALWAYS be charged with misrepresentation).

The Calvinist will doubtless argue that I simply don't understand Calvinism properly, and to this I reply that if Calvinism is that complicated it can't be the truth. If a reasonably intelligent preacher who has studied and taught the Bible diligently for 32 years and has published a Bible encyclopedia and many other Bible study books can study Calvinism with a desire to understand it properly and still not understand it, then it is far too complicated to be the truth! The apostle Paul warned that it is the devil that makes theology that complicated. "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Of course, Calvinism is not simple by any means and this is one reason why it produces an elitist mentality. To understand Calvinism one must deal with compatibalism, monergism versus synergism, electing grace vs. irresistible grace, effectual calling vs. general calling, effective atonement vs. hypothetical atonement,

libertarian free will vs. the bondage of the will, objective grace and subjective grace, natural ability and moral ability, mediate vs. immediate imputation of Adam's sin, supralapsarianism, sublapsarianism, infralapsarianism, desiderative vs. decretive will, and antecedent hypothetical will, to name a few!

The Calvinist will further argue that the reason I have studied Calvinism and rejected it is because I think man should be equal to God. Calvinists invariably claim that the non-Calvinist doesn't believe in God's sovereignty. I can't speak for others, but this non-Calvinist certainly believes in God's sovereignty. God is God and He can do whatsoever He pleases whensoever He pleases. As one man said, "Whatever the Bible says, I believe; the Bible says the whale swallowed Jonah, and I believe it; and if the Bible said that Jonah swallowed the whale, I would believe that!" If the Bible taught that God sovereignly selects some sinners to go to Heaven and sovereignly elects the rest to go to Hell or that He chooses only some to be saved and allows the rest to be destroyed, I would believe it, because I believe God is God and man cannot tell God what is right or wrong.

The fact is that every time I have studied Calvinism I have come away convinced that it simply contradicts too many Scriptures, that it is built more upon human logic and philosophy than upon the plain teaching of God's Word. Whatever divine election means, and it is certainly an important and oft-taught doctrine of the Word of God, it cannot mean what Calvinism concludes, because to accept that position requires one to strain at gnats and swallow camels. The gnats are Calvinist extra-scriptural

arguments and reasoning and the camels are Scriptures understood plainly by their context.

Consider some gnats that Calvinists strain at. The Calvinist reasons that if God is sovereign then man can't have a will and cannot resist Him. The Calvinist reasons that if the sinner is dead then he obviously can't respond to the gospel and if he cannot respond to the gospel and if faith itself is a sovereignly bestowed gift (based on an erroneous exegesis of Eph. 2:8-9) then the elect must be born again before he can exercise faith. The Calvinist reasons that since God works all things after His own will then if He truly willed for all men to be saved, He would save all men. The Calvinist argues that since God predestinated some to eternal salvation then He must have predestined others to eternal damnation.

In each of these cases, the Calvinist applies human logic to the issue rather than a clear statement from Scripture and the Scriptures he uses to support his doctrine do no such thing. He thus strains at gnats while swallowing hundreds of clear Scriptures that overthrow his doctrine.

Some of the Camels

Following are just a few of the camels that John Calvin swallowed when he followed Augustine, that "Doctor of the Roman Catholic Church," into the error of "sovereign election" and when he reasoned that God would not be sovereign if man could reject Him and if salvation could be accepted or rejected by the sinner.

I realize that a staunch Calvinist has an answer for everything. He can flee immediately into his stronghold of making clever and intricate man-made distinctions between electing grace and common grace, between degrees of the love of God, between desiderative vs. decretive will and antecedent hypothetical will, you name it. I am not writing this report for such a person. I am writing it for the simple believer who loves God's Word and who has not been overawed by intellectual brilliance and brainwashed by man-made theology.

GOD CAN BE LIMITED--“Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psalm 78:41).

According to Calvinism, if man can resist God or thwart His purposes then God is no longer a Sovereign God and man must be Sovereign. Thus they claim that it is impossible that man could accept or reject God's salvation. But the fact is that the Bible says man does resist and reject God on every hand, and this has been going on since the earliest days of his history. Adam rejected God's Word. Cain rejected it. Noah's generation rejected it. The men gathered at the Tower of Babel rejected it. When the Psalmist recounts the experience of Israel in the wilderness, he emphasizes the fact that Israel did *not* do God's will. He describes them as “a stubborn and rebellious generation” (Psa. 78:8) who “refused to walk in his law” (Psa. 78:10). He then makes this amazing statement: “they limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psa. 78:41). According to Calvinist thinking, this is not possible and if it were possible it would mean that God is not sovereign, but it is obvious that Calvinism is

wrong on both counts. For God to make man in His own image with a will and an ability to make real choices and for God to allow man to exercise his will even in the matter of receiving salvation does not make God any less sovereign than had He created a robot. And it will not do to allow that man can resist God in some things but not in the matter salvation. If man can resist and reject and limit God in any way and God can still be God, then God can still be God if He offers salvation to all and some receive it and some reject it, as the Bible so plainly says. “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

JESUS WOULD BUT ISRAEL WOULD NOT--“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matthew 23:37).

Here we see that it was the will and desire of the Son of God to save Israel throughout her history and He sent His prophets to her, but He was refused. Christ would; Israel would not. Knowing that Christ is God, this teaches us that God’s will can be thwarted by man’s will.

Arthur Pink says, “But did those tears make manifest a disappointed God? Nay, verily. Instead, they displayed a perfect Man” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 199).

Thus, according to the Calvinist, Jesus’ statement in Matt. 23:37 does not teach that God’s will was ever thwarted by man’s will but merely expresses the human

side of Jesus' compassionate nature. According to Calvin, God cannot be disappointed, because that would mean He is not sovereign (according to Calvin's own predetermined definition), but this flies in the face of the Scriptures in literally thousands of places.

To say that Jesus was speaking in Matthew 23:37 as man but not as God is both ridiculous and heretical. Jesus told His disciples, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9). In Matt. 23:37 Jesus is speaking as the eternal Son of God, yea, as Jehovah God, as the very same God who had sent the prophets to Israel throughout her rebellious career and who had desired to give her peace, but THEY WOULD NOT.

GOD STRETCHED FORTH HIS HANDS TO ISRAEL BUT ISRAEL REJECTED HIM--"But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Romans 10:21). "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts" (Isaiah 65:2).

Here is the same type of statement that Jesus Himself made in Matt. 23:37. We see that God wanted to save Israel and continually reached out to them, but God's message and salvation were resisted and rejected.

THE JEWS RESISTED THE HOLY SPIRIT -- "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).

Stephen charged his Jewish persecutors with resisting the Holy Spirit. Here again we see that the Holy Spirit strives with men and that they can willfully resist Him. The Calvinist answers this by claiming that the “bondage of the will” works only one way, meaning that the unsaved can reject the truth but they cannot, on the other hand, receive the truth. According to this doctrine, only the elect are given the ability to believe the gospel while the non-elect are left in their Totally Depraved condition with their will in bondage and unable to believe. The Bible nowhere teaches this. Instead, from the beginning to the end of the Bible, from Cain to those who follow the antichrist, men are called by God and are expected to respond and obviously are able to respond and are condemned when they do not. That some do and some do not respond to the light that God gives is not because only some are pre-ordained to respond.

THE JEWS BROUGHT THE WRATH OF GOD UPON THEMSELVES--“For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16).

According to this passage, the Jews that killed the Lord Jesus and persecuted the early believers were not

sovereignly reprobated to that evil work. They filled up their sins and brought God's wrath upon them by their own actions.

Note, too, that Paul says the Jews forbade the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles "that they might be saved." Thus we see that the Gentiles to whom the gospel would otherwise have been preached could have been saved through that preaching.

THOSE WHO ARE SANCTIFIED BY THE BLOOD CAN COUNT IT AN UNHOLY THING AND DESPISE THE SPIRIT OF GOD--"Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" (Hebrews 10:29).

Either this verse means that a saved person can lose his salvation, or it means that a person can come close to being saved without actually being regenerated and can then turn away finally from salvation by rejecting the efficacy of the blood and the gospel of grace. We believe that it teaches the latter. In our church planting ministry we have seen many Hindus and Buddhists attend church services and purchase Bibles and look eagerly into the things of Christ and even desire to be baptized and publicly testify that they believed the gospel only to finally turn away and to return to human religion and idolatry and to renounce the blood of Christ and salvation by grace. These were not sanctified in the sense of

salvation but they were sanctified in the sense of having been enlightened and convicted by the Spirit and in the sense of having professed to believe in the covenant or gospel of grace.

This verse contradicts the Calvinist doctrines of Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace. At the least, this verse teaches that the blood of Christ was available to them for salvation but that they rejected it.

JESUS REBUKED THE CITIES OF ISRAEL BECAUSE THEY DID NOT REPENT--“Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matthew 11:20-24).

Jesus did not deal with men on the basis of sovereign election and sovereign reprobation. He dealt with them on the basis of human responsibility to respond to the divine call of repentance. Christ teaches here that men not only are responsible to repent but they can repent if they will. If they could not have repented, why are they

upbraided as if they could have repented? If some men cannot repent, why are all men commanded to repent (Acts 17:30)?

JESUS TAUGHT US TO PRAY THAT GOD’S WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN--“And he said unto them, When ye pray, say, Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth” (Luke 11:2).

This means, of course, that God’s will is not currently done on earth as it is in Heaven, which means that God’s sovereignty does not mean that His will is always done. Man can thwart God’s will--not ultimately as far as His eternal plan goes, but in many ways and in many times.

GOD INVITES ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH TO BE SAVED--“Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isaiah 45:22).

If words mean anything, this universal divine invitation means that God earnestly desires to save all men and all men can be saved, and this was written during the Old Testament dispensation before the coming of Christ.

GOD INVITES ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY TO COME AND DRINK FREELY--“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not

bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:1-3).

As in all other places where a general invitation is given to men to be saved, the Calvinist attempts to limit this passage to the elect, but it is impossible to do so. This particular invitation is to “every one that thirsteth.” The invitation is extended not merely by the God of Israel but by the God of the universe, the God that “made the earth, and created man upon it” (Isa. 45:12), the same God who said in a previous verse, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:22).

God promises to make an everlasting covenant with those who come to Him and promises to give such a one “the sure mercies of David.” That does not limit the invitation to Israel only. God’s covenant with David is fulfilled in his greater Son, the Messiah, and all who are saved participate in that covenant in one way or the other (Acts 13:34-38).

GOD LOVES THE WORLD AND GAVE HIS SON SO THAT WHOSOEVER WILL MIGHT BE SAVED--“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that

WHOSOEVER believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:14-18).

Arthur Pink is typical in claiming that the world in this passage “does not mean the whole human family” but that is “is used in a general way” and it “must, in the final analysis, refer to the world of God’s people” (*The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 203, 204).

To the contrary, we know that the “world” in John 3:16 here means all men.

First, the universality of this passage is clear from the term “whosoever,” which is used twice in the context. If the term “world” is made to mean anything other than the whole world of men, the term “whosoever” becomes meaningless. If “whosoever” does not mean “whosoever,” Bible words have no certain meaning and everything is thrown into confusion. The Calvinist says that only those who are sovereignly elected will believe, but the Bible says whosoever believes will be saved and is therefore elected.

Second, the universality of the “world” in this passage is clear from the typology that is used. The brass serpent that was raised up by Moses in the wilderness was sufficient for the salvation of all of the Jews who had

been bitten by the snakes, but only those who looked upon it in faith were saved. Likewise, the salvation that Jesus purchased on Calvary is sufficient to save every sinner, but only those who believe are saved.

WHOSOEVER WILL IS INVITED TO COME--“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

If this verse means what it says, it refutes three of Calvin’s doctrines: that salvation is only for those sovereignly pre-elected, that God does not effectually offer salvation to all, and that the sinner cannot receive salvation.

GOD WILL SAVE ALL THAT CALL UPON HIM--“But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, WHOSOEVER believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto ALL that call upon him. For WHOSOEVER shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:8-13).

This is another passage that plainly teaches that salvation is for all and whosoever shall call. The Calvinist protests that sinners who are Totally Depraved cannot call upon the Lord and therefore only those who are sovereignly elected and called and given “the gift of faith” will call upon the Lord. This is to read one’s theology into the Scripture. If the Calvinist doctrines of sovereign election and the bondage of the will and sovereign calling are correct, this passage doesn’t actually mean what it says, and a blessed and glorious universal invitation of salvation to sinners is turned into something that is reserved solely for a pre-selected group of sinners.

As for faith, this passage says that it is nigh to every sinner. Sinners can believe in their hearts upon Christ. They can confess Christ with their mouths. Though they are totally unrighteous and dead in trespasses and sins, this does not mean that they cannot believe the gospel.

WHOSOEVER BELIEVES ON CHRIST OR CALLS UPON HIS NAME SHALL BE SAVED--

“I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness” (John 12:46).

“And it shall come to pass, that WHOSOEVER shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

The Bible repeatedly says that salvation is for “whosoever” and a typical Bible-believing non-theologian would conclude from this that any and every sinner today is both invited to come to Christ, and by God’s grace CAN come to Christ. To treat the

“whosoever shall” of the New Testament as Calvin did, though, is to render them of no effect. According to Calvin, “whosoever” does not really mean whosoever; it means “whosoever of the elect.” Even when Calvin claims, out of one side of his mouth (such as in his commentary on John 3:16), that he agrees that salvation is actually offered to “whosoever will,” he negates it out of the other side by claiming that it is obvious that the non-elect “will not,” so we in a practical sense are back to the “whosoever of the elect.”

JESUS INVITED ALL WHO ARE THIRSTY TO COME AND DRINK--“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If ANY MAN thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

This is the same type of invitation that we have seen in many other passages. It is a “whosoever” invitation. Jesus graciously invites all sinners who recognize their need for salvation to come to Him for satisfaction. Further, the Holy Spirit has come into the world to show men their need of Christ (Jn. 16:8). The only requirement that Jesus states is that one be thirsty for the living water that only God can provide and that he come to Jesus alone for that water and not to any other. Salvation is likened to drinking water. What a simple thing that is!

JESUS INVITED ALL THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN TO COME TO HIM FOR REST--“Come unto me, ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke

upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

A broader invitation to salvation could not be given. Any person that labours and is heavy laden is invited to come to Jesus for rest. This is not an invitation that can somehow be limited to a select number of individuals that were sovereignly predetermined. Jesus’ compassion extends to all sinners and it is truly His heart’s desire to save all of them.

AS MANY AS RECEIVE JESUS BECOME SONS OF GOD--“He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:10-13).

Jesus was rejected by His own people, the Jewish nation. This fact alone demonstrates that God can be rejected by men. But as many as receive Jesus by believing on His name are given power to become the sons of God. No limitation is given. Salvation is a matter of “AS MANY AS” and “WHOSOEVER.” Notice that faith precedes and is the cause of becoming a son of God. It is not that men are born again to faith, as Calvin taught, but that through faith men are born again. Note, too, that receiving Christ by believing on Him cannot be defined

as “the will of man.” The Calvinist argues that if the sinner could believe on Christ it would mean that salvation is of the will of man, but this passage refutes such human logic. We are told plainly in John 1:13 that the new birth is not “of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man,” but are told just as plainly that the new birth is by receiving Christ through faith in the previous verses. What verse 13 means is that the new birth is not a product of the human will. Man cannot work up the new birth; he cannot will it to happen. It is a miracle of grace that Christ works in the life of the sinner that believes.

GOD HAS ORDAINED THAT THE GOSPEL BE PREACHED TO EVERY INDIVIDUAL AND THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE BE SAVED--“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16).

If only the elect can be saved, why does God command that the gospel of “whosoever will” salvation be preached to every sinner? Is God mocking the non-elect by proclaiming to them that He gave His only begotten Son that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish” and that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but that he that believeth not shall be damned”? Some Calvinists divide themselves into two broad categories called “hyper” and “non-hyper” (though the “hyper” do not admit to being hyper but consider themselves to be the genuine Calvinists). The non-hyper-Calvinist claims that God does truly love all men and that the “all” of John 3:16 is truly “all,” which sounds encouraging except that

out of the other side of the mouth he says that God only saves the elect and that there is no possibility for the non-elect to be saved and that God's "love" for the non-elect is admittedly different than His love for the elect. Surely the non-elect, hearing such an argument, would be forced to say, "What kind of strange love is this? Is God mocking me? Is God playing with me as a cat with a mouse? The Bible promises that 'whosoever will should not perish,' but the Calvinist tells me that only if I am of the elect will I be sovereignly regenerated and given 'the gift of faith' and if I am not of the elect I am so dead in my trespasses and sins that there is nothing I can do to be saved, that I cannot even believe on Christ, and that any illumination that God gives me is not effective for salvation. What love is this?"

Of course, the Calvinist will instantly reply, "Who art thou that repliest against God! God is God and He can do as He pretty well pleases." Of course He can do as He pleases, but this issue of whether God genuinely wants all men to be saved and whether it is possible for them to be saved has the most serious and eternal consequences, and to ask the question as to what constitutes God's love is neither unreasonable nor unscriptural.

GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH--"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Why does the Lord wait to establish His kingdom; why has Christ not returned? This verse teaches us that God is waiting for men to be saved, because it is not His sovereign will that any should perish. Since many will perish and since all will not come to repentance, as we know from other Scriptures, then it is obvious that God's will can be resisted and thwarted and rejected by man. It is obvious that the sovereign God created man in such a way that this could be possible, but of course this does not mean that God has ceased to be God. It is Calvinism that defines divine sovereignty as irresistibility. The Bible upholds no such definition.

The Calvinist interprets this verse to mean that God is not willing that any of the elect perish. Arthur Pink says, "The 'any' that God is not willing should perish, are the 'usward' to whom God is 'longsuffering', the 'beloved' of the previous verses" (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 207).

Our reply to this is, first of all, if this were the only verse that said that God is not willing that any should perish, we would be able to accept the Calvinist interpretation, but it is not. Isa. 45:22 and Matt. 11:28 and John 3:16 and John 6:40 and Rom. 11:23 and 1 Tim. 1:15-16 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4 and Rev. 22:17 are just some of the Scriptures that say that God wants to save all men.

Thus it is reasonable and Scriptural to believe that the "usward" in 2 Pet. 3:9 is mankind in general as opposed to "the elect" only.

Further, if 2 Peter 3:9 means merely that God is not willing that any of the elect should perish it uses strange

language in light of the Calvinist doctrines of sovereign election and irresistible calling. To say that God is not willing that any should perish is to assume that some can perish.

GOD WILL HAVE ALL MEN TO BE SAVED--“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

What does this verse mean? There is no reason to believe that it means anything other than exactly what it says. It is God’s sovereign will and desire that all men be saved. Obviously, then, God’s will is not always done and God has ordained that man can thwart His will, because it is clear from other Scriptures that not all men will be saved. Of course, the Calvinist has all sorts of means by which he reasons away the clear teaching of 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4, but only a committed Calvinist would interpret Scripture in such a manner. For example, some Calvinists claim that God has two types of wills, “desiderative and decretive.” Though He does desire all men to be saved, He has only decreed that the elect be saved. Thus, when 2 Pet. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 2:3-4 say that God is not willing that any should perish and that He will have all men to be saved, this is merely His “desiderative” will, whereas only those elect sinners who fall under the category of His “decretive” will can actually be saved because they are the only ones who are sovereignly regenerated and given the “gift of faith.” When I told one Calvinist professor that this is “mumbo jumbo,” he was very offended, but I don’t see what else it

can rightly be called. Of course, this stalwart attempt to reconcile 1 Tim. 3:3-4 and 2 Pet. 3:9 with Calvinism actually creates more problems than it solves, because it admits that God's desiderative will is not accomplished. Thus, God's will can indeed be thwarted by man--not His decretive will, mind you, but His desiderative will--which would mean that God has a will that is not sovereign.

JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS--“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

Calvinism can be read into this passage, as it can be read into any passage (so that “sinners” can become the elect only), but if we take the words of these verses at face value they mean that Jesus came to save sinners in general as opposed to just a pre-selected group and that God's salvation of Paul, the chief of sinners, is an encouragement to any sinner to come to Him for salvation. Any sinner can find encouragement from this passage that he can believe on Christ for salvation, because if God would save Paul He will save anyone.

GOD WOULD HAVE MERCY UPON ALL--“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all” (Romans 11:32).

If the “all” of the first half of this verse means all men, as it obviously does, then it is impossible to interpret the latter half of the verse in any other sense. The same God who has concluded all men in unbelief desires to have mercy upon all men through Jesus Christ. That is His sovereign and express will.

JESUS MADE PROPITIATION NOT FOR BELIEVERS ONLY BUT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD--“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).

This passage is addressed to “my little children” and those who “have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). Obviously it is addressed, then, to the saved or to those who elsewhere are called “the elect” (Col. 2:12; 2 Tim. 2:10). Therefore, when 1 John 2:2 says Christ “is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world,” the Bible is obviously and plainly stating that Christ did not die to make satisfaction for the sins of the elect only. The “whole world” means the whole world!

JESUS GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL--“Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (1 Timothy 2:6).

The “all” must be defined in context, and in the context it refers to all men. See 1 Timothy 2:3-5--“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the

knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” That Jesus gave Himself a ransom for all men demonstrates clearly that His atonement was not limited to the elect and that all men can be saved.

CHRIST RECONCILED THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF AND HAS COMMITTED TO BELIEVERS THE WORD OF RECONCILIATION--“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

These verses encapsulate the doctrine of atonement as it relates to the world. In verse 18 we see that believers are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, but in verse 19 we see that God intends for the reconciliation process to extend to the entire world. The fact that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” is an obvious teaching of Scripture, but it does not mean, as the Calvinist argues, that all men are automatically saved. (Arthur Pink in *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 62, argues from human logic after this fashion: “If it was offered for all mankind then the debt incurred by every man has been cancelled.”). The universality of Christ’s atonement does not mean that all men are automatically saved but that all men CAN be saved because the work of Christ on the cross is sufficient to save them, but they must receive the word of

reconciliation, which, of course, is the gospel. We see in this passage also that the believers are God's instruments for preaching the "word of reconciliation" to the world. When one sinner believes on Christ he, in turn, is to preach the gospel of reconciliation to others. Since the gospel is to be preached to every person and God is not willing that any should perish, it is obvious that every person has the possibility to be saved through believing it (Mk. 16:15-16; 2 Pet. 3:9).

JESUS BOUGHT THE UNSAVED FALSE TEACHERS WHO TEACH DAMNABLE DOCTRINES AND DENY CHRIST--"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Peter 2:1).

If the Lord bought these unsaved false teachers, and the Bible plainly says that He did, then the Calvinist doctrine of limited atonement falls to the ground.

JESUS TASTED DEATH FOR EVERY MAN--"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

Again, it is clear in this Scripture that Jesus died to make atonement for every man and not just for the elect.

GOD ELECTS ACCORDING TO HIS FOREKNOWLEDGE--“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Peter 1:2).

The standard Calvinist position on foreknowledge is basically to do away with it by making it the same as fore will, doing away completely with the possibility that God’s election could have anything to do with what He foresees. But the word that Peter uses for “foreknowledge” is a word that means simply that God foreknew what would happen. It is the Greek word “prognosis,” which is a word still used commonly in English. When a doctor gives the prognosis of a disease, he describes the normal progression of the disease. He basically is able to tell the future because he knows beforehand what will happen. The doctrine of “foreknowledge,” if not redefined by Calvinism, goes a long way, though not all of the way, toward explaining the mystery of how God could elect but man could choose. There is more to election than foreknowledge, but the fact remains that God’s Word teaches us that foreknowledge is involved and it cannot be redefined to mean “foreordination.”

In his attempt to redefine “foreknowledge” and to mold it into “foreordination,” the Calvinist uses Acts 2:23, which says that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” The Calvinist claims that determinate counsel and foreknowledge is the same thing, but it is evident that these are, in fact, two different

things. The Calvinist points out that “determinate counsel” precedes “foreknowledge,” but what he fails to observe is the “and.” Acts 2:23 does not say that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel which is the foreknowledge of God”; it says that Jesus was crucified “by the determinate counsel AND foreknowledge of God.” That God elects according to His foreknowledge does not mean that He elects solely according to His determinate counsel, and this fact does not make God any less God.

JESUS WARNED MEN TO HEAR HIS WORD PROPERLY OR BE JUDGED--“Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have” (Luke 8:18).

Jesus put the responsibility for hearing His Word upon the shoulders of His listeners. If they would hear and make the effort to seek God and understand, they would be given more. If they would not, they would be judged. There is no sovereign election here.

JESUS TOLD THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS THAT THEY WOULD NOT COME TO HIM THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE LIFE--“And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40).

He did not say they could not come because of their “total depravity”; He said they would not come. It was a matter of their own wills. He did not say they were not sovereignly elected or that they were foreordained to

condemnation. He rebuked them because they were given light and had rejected it. This verse and countless others teach that the sinner has a will that he can exercise contrary to God, that God's will is not "sovereign" in the sense that it cannot be opposed.

FAITH COMES FROM MAN'S HEART--"Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:11-15).

The Parable of the Sower teaches us that faith is something that sinners can exercise and that the difference between men's hearts and response to the gospel is not that of sovereign election but is a matter of their own wills. The Lord Jesus tell us that the Word of God falls upon four different types of human hearts. All men are sinners, but all sinners do not respond to the Word of God in the same manner.

The first type of sinner hears the Word of God but the devil comes and takes it out of the heart "lest they should

believe and be saved.” This is explained in Matthew 13:19--“When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, AND UNDERSTANDETH IT NOT, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” The reason why the first type of person does not believe is because he doesn’t make the effort to understand the gospel and thus the devil is able to snatch the Word of God away. This happens on every hand. The gospel is preached to sinners indiscriminately and many of them take no notice of it and have no interest even in hearing more about Jesus Christ. They are not interested enough even to read a gospel pamphlet or to attend a gospel service or an evangelistic Bible study. Thus the devil comes “immediately and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts” (Mk. 4:15).

The second type of sinner hears the Word of God with joy but falls away “in time of temptation” because the Word of God was not received deeply into the heart and life and therefore is easily plucked out. Many sinners fall into this category. They express interest in the gospel; they want to learn more; they are excited about the things of Jesus Christ. But their understanding and “faith” is shallow. They don’t make the effort to come to full and proper understanding of the gospel and they are not truly regenerated and soon they fall away because of trouble that they experience from friends and relatives or they become offended at something with which they do not agree. Again, this is not said to be the result of sovereign reprobation but is something that is the responsibility of the sinner himself.

The third type of sinner hears the Word of God but it is choked out of his heart and life by the “cares and riches and pleasures of this life.” Mark’s Gospel adds it is “the lusts of other things entering in” that choke the word so that it is unfruitful (Mk. 4:23). This happens often when the gospel is preached. Many sinners who show an interest in the gospel and who attend church services and even profess faith in Christ fall away because they are not serious enough about spiritual matters and they allow many other things to choke the Word of God out of their hearts and lives. Again, there is not even a hint here that this is the product of sovereign reprobation. It is said to be something that occurs because of the sinner’s own response and actions to the gospel.

The fourth type of sinner hears the Word of God and believes it and keeps it and brings forth fruit with patience. This is the only one of the four types of sinners that truly gets saved.

JESUS WAS AMAZED AT THE CENTURION’S FAITH--“When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Luke 7:9).

Calvinism claims that faith is given to men sovereignly by God as part of the package of sovereign grace in sovereign election. Apparently the Lord Jesus did not hold to this doctrine, because He marvelled at the centurion’s faith and commended this faith to the Jews. If faith is the gift of God, what is there to marvel at? Why

would Jesus praise the man's "great faith" if it were merely something that God had sovereignly given him?

FAITH IS NOT A WORK--"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This verse teaches that, contrary to Calvinism, faith is not a work. Faith is the means whereby the sinner receives the free gift of salvation that was purchased for him by Christ. Faith is the "hand which reaches out to accept God's gift." Contrary to Calvinist reasoning, to accept a gift is not a work and is nothing to glory in. A gift is 100% from the one who purchases and offers it. The recipient has nothing to glory in by receiving it.

MEN PERISH BECAUSE THEY DO NOT RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH--"And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

These sinners who follow the antichrist will be damned but not because they are not sovereignly elected and not because they are sovereignly reprobate but because of their personal decision in regard to the truth. They could receive the truth and be saved but they reject it. Words could not be plainer.

THE BELIEVER MUST MAKE HIS CALLING AND ELECTION SURE--“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

Regardless of whether this verse is interpreted as applying to the saved or to the almost saved, the question for the Calvinist is, “How can sovereign calling and election be made sure by man?” Calvinism teaches that election for salvation is determined solely by God and that He imparts it irresistibly to the sinner through sovereign regeneration and “the gift of faith.” What, then, does this verse mean?

THE PREACHER CAN GAIN MORE SOULS FOR CHRIST BY HOW HE CONDUCTS HIS LIFE AND MINISTRY--“For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. ... To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 22).

Paul sacrificed and went to great efforts so that more men would be saved. If election is sovereignly fore-determined and irresistibly given, this makes no sense. How could Paul’s actions “gain more”? How could his actions “save some”?

PAUL PERSUADED MEN--“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are

made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Corinthians 5:11).

If Paul were a Calvinist, he would not have written this because he would know that the elect don't need persuading and the non-elect can't be persuaded! The sinner is so dead in his sins that apart from regeneration and “the gift of faith” he couldn't possibly understand and respond to human persuasion.

SALVATION CAN BE NEGLECTED--“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Hebrews 2:3).

This exhortation makes no sense in light of Calvinist doctrine. If election is as the Calvinist teaches and it is a matter of an individual being sovereignly chosen by God, how could the elect neglect salvation and how could the non-elect do anything other than neglect salvation?

PROFESSING CHRISTIANS ARE EXHORTED NOT TO HAVE AN EVIL HEART OF UNBELIEF AND NOT TO DEPART FROM THE LIVING GOD--“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end” (Hebrews 3:12-14).

If the elect are predetermined “sovereignly” and if election has nothing whatsoever to do with the sinner himself as to accepting or rejecting, believing or disbelieving, and if he is irresistibly drawn and sovereignly kept so that he surely perseveres, what could this exhortation possibly mean? How could the sovereignly elected, irresistibly drawn elect depart from God, and how could the non-elect do anything other than depart from God?

WE MUST LABOUR TO ENTER INTO GOD’S REST--“There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Hebrews 4:9-11).

How could this exhortation possibly apply to TULIP type election? This passage says the rest of salvation is something that every person must seek to enter into and all are urged to do so, but the doctrine of “sovereign” election teaches us that those elected to God’s rest are predetermined solely by God and they have no choice in the matter and will assuredly enter into His rest.

JESUS ENLIGHTENS EVERY MAN THAT COMES INTO THE WORLD--“That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9).

The Bible teaches that men are in darkness, dead in trespasses and sins, but the Bible plainly teaches that God

gives light to every single man that comes into the world. There is no other way to understand the meaning of these words. There is no way to apply this only to the elect. The fact is that God draws men to the light and if they respond He gives them more light. That is what we see in the case of Cornelius in Acts 10. The Bible does not say here that the light that God gives to some is more effectual than that which He gives to others. It simply says that He enlightens every single man.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL CONVICT THE WORLD--“And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).

The Calvinist claims that “it is not the present mission of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin” and that “the Holy Spirit is sovereign in His operations and His mission is confined to God’s elect” (Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, pp. 75, 77). In fact, the Lord Jesus plainly and unequivocally teaches in John 16 that the Holy Spirit will indeed convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. The Holy Spirit has a special work in this age both toward the unbeliever and toward the believer. There is no good reason to believe that “the world” in this passage is “the elect.” Consider what would happen if we were to change “the world” to “the elect.” The passage would then read: “And when he is come, he will reprove the elect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because the elect

believe not on me...” But, of course, the elect do believe on Jesus. Further, the Calvinist teaches that the elect are saved by regeneration rather than by conviction. The truth of the matter is that this important passage describes how the unsaved, which are spiritually dead and blind, are brought to repentance and faith. It is by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. That not all believe is not because only some are pre-elected to believe but because God made man with the ability to resist him and according to the Scripture he has been exercising that ability since the Garden of Eden.

JESUS WILL DRAW ALL MEN UNTO HIM--“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die” (John 12:32-33).

Here the Lord Jesus promised through His crucifixion to draw all men unto Him. Thus we see that He died to make it possible for all men to be saved and that He actively draws all men to Himself toward that end. That all men are not saved is not the fault of Jesus nor is it His intention. All are enlightened and all are drawn. What Jesus said about Israel is true for all men: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, HOW OFTEN WOULD I HAVE GATHERED thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and YE WOULD NOT!” (Mat. 23:37).

These are only a few of Calvin’s camels.

My friends, don't swallow these great camels of God's Word. Scriptures are not there to be swallowed or forced into a preconceived theological mold but to be accepted and believed. Whatever divine election means, and it is certainly an important and oft-taught doctrine of the Word of God, it cannot mean what Calvinism concludes because to accept that position requires one to strain at gnats and swallow camels and Jesus forcefully condemned this practice.

Calvinism's Proof Texts Examined

In this section of “The Calvinism Debate” we will analyze the chief proof texts used to support the doctrines of TULIP Calvinism: *Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints*. We have decided not to deal with the last point of TULIP theology because it is defined in several different ways and because if it means simply that the saved cannot be lost, then we agree with it.

I know by experience that a man who is staunchly committed to “sovereign grace” theology will not accept my interpretation of the following passages. I have dialogued with many committed Calvinists and I have learned that they have an answer for everything and they always, always, always complain that the non-Calvinist does not understand Calvinism. One can study Calvinism deeply, can even read Calvin's *Institutes of Religion* and can quote directly from their own writings, but if such a one remains a non-Calvinist he will always be charged with misunderstanding and misrepresenting Calvinism.

I wrote this article for the many believers today who are being newly subjected to Calvinism. This is occurring widely in fundamental Baptist circles. Many churches that were established as non-Calvinist assemblies and that have non-Calvinist doctrinal statements are being infiltrated by and in some cases taken over by Calvinists.

My only request is that the Christian reader exercise his God-given right to “private interpretation.” That means

that the believer has the indwelling Holy Spirit as his spiritual Guide and he can know the truth. “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 Jn. 2:27). Thus, we must “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21) and search “the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

“If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (Jn. 7:17).

Verses Used to Support the Calvinist Definition of God’s Sovereignty

The foundational error of Calvinism is to assign a definition to divine “sovereignty” (a word that nowhere appears in Scripture but that is used in reference to God’s Kingly omnipotence) that makes it impossible for man to have a choice in salvation, even though the Bible says that he does, and then building upon that faulty foundation.

Arthur Pink begins his book “The Sovereignty of God” with three chapters on “God’s Sovereignty.” After citing the following key verses such as Eph. 1:11, which says that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, he concludes with these words: “The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. ... No revolving world, no shining of star, no storm, no creature moves, no actions of men,

no errands can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed” (p. 46).

In fact, the verses that Pink cites to prove this conclusion do no such thing, and that is what the child of God must be careful about when examining theology. Proper Bible interpretation allows the words of Scripture to speak for themselves rather than forcing one’s theology into them.

To say that God overrules the will of devils and sinners so that His overarching divine will and program is always ultimately accomplished is not the same as saying that devils and sinners have no effective will and that God actually purposes everything that they do. For God to allow something evil and something contrary to His will and then to work that thing into His overall program for the ages so that “all things work together for good” is not the same as purposing it.

Let’s examine Calvinism’s chief proof texts on God’s “sovereignty”:

Ephesians 1:11--“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”

This is a marvelous verse and tells us how great God is, but it says nothing about whether God has given man a will and to what extent he can exercise that will. It says nothing about whether a sinner can believe on Christ savingly. To say that God worketh all things after the counsel of his own will is not contrary to the doctrine that

God created man with a will and with the ability to respond to God or to reject God. It is the Calvinist that creates this alleged “problem” and then answers it by his own logic rather than by the plain teaching of Scripture.

Daniel 4:35--“And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”

This statement was made by king Nebuchadnezzar after he was punished by God and his reason had returned to him and he had repented of his pride. This verse is stating simply that God is God and He rules ultimately over the affairs of men. The verse says nothing about whether or not man can accept or reject the gospel, about whether God’s grace is resistible. It says nothing about whether God sovereignly chooses some men to election and some to reprobation. For a sinner to refuse to repent is not to “stay God’s hand,” because God’s eternal program rolls right on regardless of what individual men do in these or any other matters.

Psalms 115:3--“But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

We definitely believe that God does whatsoever pleases, and we bless His name that what He pleases is always righteous and good. Further, God has revealed His pleasure in the Scriptures, and the Scriptures tell us that it was His pleasure to send Jesus to die so that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish.”

Isaiah 14:27--“For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”

The context of this verse is God’s determination to judge the nations. “This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth: and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations” (verse 26). Indeed, when God purposes something His will cannot be thwarted. But this verse says nothing about Sovereign Election or Sovereign Reprobation or Irresistible Grace or any of the points of TULIP theology.

Acts 15:18--“Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

This verse simply says that God knows all of His works and has always known them. It says nothing one way or the other about any of the points of TULIP. That God knows all of His works from the beginning of the world is not to say that men are sovereignly elected to salvation or reprobation. It is not to say that God preordains everything that happens.

Proverbs 16:9--“A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.”

This verse does not support Calvinism, because it says that man’s heart deviseth his way. Thus it teaches that man has a will that he can exercise. The fact that God overrules man’s decisions and has the final say in all

matters is not contrary to the doctrine that man has a will whereby he can accept or reject God's dealings with him.

Proverbs 19:21--“There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.”

Again, this verse does not support Calvinism, because it says man wills things in his heart. The fact that God's counsel overrules man's will is not a defense for Calvinism. Those that the Calvinist calls (usually falsely) “Arminians” believe this, as well.

Proverbs 21:1--“The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

The fact that the Lord overrules the king's heart does not prove Calvinism's doctrine of the sovereign predestination of all things nor does it prove Calvinism's doctrine that man cannot accept or reject God's offer of salvation. These Proverbs teach the simple and important doctrine that though man has a will that he exercises within the sphere of freedom that God assigns to him, it is God who ultimately determines whether man is allowed to act out his will or not.

Proverbs 21:30--“There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD.”

This verse means that there is no ultimate counsel against the Lord and that He always has the final say. We know from other Scriptures that the devil and sinners have

made many counsels against the Lord, but that counsel cannot stand. It does not follow that man has no will that he can exercise either for or against the Lord. He can definitely exercise such a will and he does and by so doing he hangs himself with his own rope, because God always has the final say, and He has said that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

Psalm 33:11--“The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.”

That the counsel of the Lord stands forever, and we know that it does, does not mean that God could not have sovereignly determined to create man with a will that he can exercise and with the ability even to go so far as to believe in God or not to believe in God.

Isaiah 14:27--“For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?”

Nothing that God purposes can be disannulled, but this does not mean that God foreordains everything that happens, even the decisions and actions of men and devils. God has purposed that “whosoever believeth” in Jesus Christ “should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That Almighty God has given sinners a choice in the matter does nothing to overthrow His sovereignty or power.

Isaiah 46:9-10--“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and

there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

That God’s counsel shall stand and He will do all of His pleasure is not to say that “no actions of men, no errands can come to pass otherwise than God has eternally purposed” (Pink). For God to allow something and ultimately to work that thing into His overall program for the ages is not the same as purposing it. God’s counsel is revealed in Scripture, and there we learn that God has given man a will that he can exercise against God. We see this in the Garden of Eden, and in the case of Adam and Eve’s firstborn Cain, and in the case of the world before the Flood, and in the case of the Tower of Babel, and in the case of Israel before the coming of Christ, and in the case of Israel during the earthly days of Christ, and in the case of sinners today, and throughout history.

Verses Used to Support the Calvinist Doctrine of Total Depravity

According to the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity, man is not only unrighteous and dead in trespasses and sins, he is this *in such a sense* that he cannot even believe on Christ for salvation, in such a sense that he cannot make any choice in regard to salvation. Ever since the fall, man’s will has been in bondage so that he cannot even respond to God’s offer of grace.

In the words of the Westminster Confession Total Depravity is defined as follows: “Man, by his fall into a

state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.”

As we have said, the Calvinistic doctrine of Total Depravity does not end simply with man in a totally unrighteous condition, with a fallen and corrupt nature and heart and unable to save himself by his works. This doctrine also involves something that is called the “bondage of the will.”

Dr. Jeffrey Khoo, a Presbyterian who heads up the Far Eastern Bible College in Singapore (a staunch defender of the faith and a man for whom I have a high regard in spite of our differences), writes: “Man’s freedom of choice has been forfeited since the Fall. ... The Bible teaches human inability and total depravity” (*Arminianism Examined*, p. 4).

When Dr. Khoo speaks of “human inability,” he means not only that the sinner is unable to save himself by his deeds but also that the sinner is unable to respond in faith to God’s offer of salvation.

I have challenged Calvinists to give me even one Scripture that teaches this, and I have examined books by Calvinists for such a proof text, but in vain. As we will see, the following Scriptures that they put forth as proof texts do not teach their doctrine in regard to man’s will and inability to exercise faith.

We agree fully that the Bible teaches that man is totally depraved in the sense that the sinner is corrupt and unrighteous and that there is no good in him that is acceptable before God and that it is impossible for him to earn salvation through his own works. BUT CALVINISM GOES BEYOND THIS AND ADDS ITS OWN UNIQUE TWIST THAT IS NOT SUPPORTED BY SCRIPTURE, THAT THE SINNER IS UNABLE EVEN TO BELIEVE AND THAT HIS WILL IS SO MUCH IN BONDAGE TO SIN THAT HE CANNOT ACCEPT OR REJECT THE GOSPEL.

Following are key passages that are used by Calvinists to support the doctrine of Total Depravity:

Ephesians 2:1-3--“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

This passage says nothing about the sinner not being able to believe and nothing about the condition of his will in regard to the accepting or rejecting the gospel. It says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sin, walks according to the course of this world and according to the prince of the power of the air, is a child of disobedience, and is by nature the child of wrath.

But this is not the same as the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity which goes beyond the actual words of Scripture, such as those we find in this important passage, and adds the business about the sinner's will and him not being able to believe.

Isaiah 64:6-7--“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. And there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities.”

Again, though this verse teaches us that fallen man has no righteousness that is acceptable before God and that even his alleged righteousnesses are as filthy rags before a thrice-holy God, the verse says nothing about man's will or his ability or inability to respond to God's grace.

That there is none that calls upon the name of the Lord or stirs himself up to take hold of God does not mean that the sinner is unable to respond to God's grace and does not mean that he cannot believe the gospel. Left to himself, the sinner does not seek God nor call upon His name, but sinners are not left to themselves. They are given light (Jn. 1:9), convicted (Jn. 16:8), and drawn to Christ (Jn. 12:32). God has commanded that the gospel be preached to every sinner and that those who believe will be saved (Mk. 16:15-16), and there is nothing in Isaiah 64:6-7 that says the sinner cannot believe in response to God's work of enlightenment, conviction, and drawing.

Romans 3:10-18--“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

This passage is a forthright condemnation of fallen man. He is not righteous. He does not understand nor seek after God. He is gone out of the way and become unprofitable. He does not do good. His mouth is full of deceit and cursing and bitterness. He has no fear of God.

Consider, though, that this passage says nothing about man's will or his ability or inability to receive the gospel or to exercise faith. That no sinner naturally seeks after God is not to say that he cannot believe the gospel when it is offered to him in the context of God's enlightenment (Jn. 1:9), conviction (Jn. 16:8), and drawing (Jn. 12:32).

Genesis 6:5--“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”

Again, there is nothing in this verse about man's will and whether or not he can believe in God and accept His offer of grace.

Jeremiah 17:9--“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”

This verse addresses the sinner's heart but not his will. It tells us plainly that the sinner's heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, and no one can properly understand mankind today unless they understand and believe this teaching; but it does not tell us that the sinner cannot believe the gospel. It says nothing about the condition of the sinner's will in regard to exercising faith.

1 Corinthians 2:14--“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

This verse teaches that the unsaved man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God and has no natural ability to discern spiritual things. Yet it says nothing about the condition of the unsaved man's will or whether he can believe the gospel or not. To say that the sinner does not naturally receive the things of the Spirit of God is not to say that he cannot. Apart from divine enlightenment, conviction, and drawing, no sinner would respond to the Gospel, but this enlightenment, conviction, and drawing is extended to every sinner (Jn. 1:9; 16:8; 12:32). “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9).

2 Thessalonians 2:13--“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

Arthur Pink uses this verse as proof for the Calvinist doctrine that the new birth precedes faith.

In light of the following passages, it is obvious that 2 Thess. 2:13 is not stating the exact order of things.

The chief passage on the New Birth is John 3. In verse 1-8 Jesus instructs Nicodemus that he must be born again or he cannot see the kingdom of God. In verse 9, Nicodemus asks Jesus how this can be. In verse 10-21, Jesus answers this question and explains how a man is born again, and the answer is that he is born again by believing (Jn. 3:14-16)! This is exactly what the Calvinist says the sinner cannot do. How can a dead man believe, he reasons? Well, if we are going to take the “dead man” analogy literally, a dead man can’t sin either. A dead man, if taken literally, cannot reject the gospel any more than he can accept the gospel, but the Calvinist claims that while the dead sinner CAN reject the gospel but he cannot accept it. When the Bible says the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins it means that he is separated from God’s divine life because of sin. To take this analogy beyond the actual teaching of the Bible and to give it other meanings, such as to reason that since the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins he must not be able to believe, is to move from truth to heresy.

Ephesians 1:13 also gives the order of salvation. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” First the sinner believes and then he receives the Holy Spirit.

The order of salvation is also made clear in Acts 16:30-31 in the case of the Philippian jailer. “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Note that the jailer was not born again when he asked what he must do to be saved, and Paul replied that he must believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Obviously Paul knew that the unsaved sinner could do exactly that, and that by believing he would be born again.

The order of salvation is also made clear in Ephesians 2:8-9 -- “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Here we find that faith is the means whereby we are saved; it is the “hand that reaches out to accept God’s Gift.”

It is obvious from the previous verses that faith precedes and results in salvation.

At the same time, it is important to observe that from God’s perspective the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth occur simultaneously. Though we are saved through faith, that faith is exercised in the context of the Spirit of God enlightening and drawing and

convicting and finally regenerating and sanctifying. It would therefore be humanly impossible to separate the “belief of the truth” from the “sanctification of the Spirit.”

Verses Used to Support the Calvinist Doctrine of Unconditional Election and Sovereign Reprobation

According to this doctrine, God unconditionally and “sovereignly” elects who will be saved and who will not be saved and this election has nothing to do with anything the sinner does, including exercising faith in the gospel. Consider the words of the Westminster Confession: “By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life and others foreordained to everlasting death. These angels and men, thus predestinated and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished. ... The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of his own will, whereby he extendeth or withholdeth mercy as he pleaseth, for the glory of his sovereign power over his creatures, to pass by, and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice.”

John Calvin expressed the doctrine of unconditional election in these words: “Predestination we call the decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar

destiny: but eternal life is foreordained for some, and eternal damnation for others” (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 21).

Note that sovereign election is accompanied by the twin doctrine of sovereign reprobation of the non-elect. Calvin emphasized this as follows. “[God] devotes to destruction whom he pleases ... they are predestinated to eternal death without any demerit of their own, merely by his sovereign will. ... he orders all things by his counsel and decree in such a manner, that some men are born devoted from the womb to certain death, that his name be glorified in their destruction. ... God chooses whom he will as his children ... while he rejects and reprobates others” (*Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book III, chap. 23).

Following are chief proof texts that are put forth in support of Sovereign Election:

John 1:11-13--“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

The words in verse 13 are used by Calvinists to prove their doctrine that the new birth is a matter of sovereign election and irresistible drawing. Does the verse not say that we are not born of the will of man, but of God? Indeed, it does, but the context itself says that men are saved by receiving Christ and believing on His name. To

believe and receive is an act of the will. What John 1:13 means is that the new birth is not a matter of man saving himself by his own will and works. Salvation is a miracle of God's power. See 1 Peter 1:3. It is not something that man can work up and perform by his own will. It is God who shines light into the soul and gives life unto the dead and imparts the Holy Spirit. That salvation is not by man's will but by God's does not mean that man cannot believe in Christ until he is irresistibly drawn and converted. In fact, this passage refutes Calvinism by teaching that salvation is given to those who believe on Christ.

1 Peter 1:2--“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”

This verse says God's election is based on His foreknowledge. The standard Calvinist position on foreknowledge is basically to do away with it by making it the same as forewill, doing away completely with the possibility that God's election could have anything to do with what He foresees. But the word that Peter uses for “foreknowledge” is a word that means simply that God foreknew what would happen. It is the Greek word “prognosis,” which is a word still used commonly in English. When a doctor gives the prognosis of a disease, he describes the normal progression of the disease. He basically is able to tell the future because he knows beforehand what will happen. The doctrine of “foreknowledge,” if not redefined by Calvinism, goes a long way, though not all of the way, toward explaining

the mystery of how God could elect, but man could choose. There is doubtless more to election than foreknowledge and we do not claim to be able to explain these things fully, but the fact remains that God's Word teaches us that foreknowledge is involved and it cannot be redefined to mean "foreordination."

In his attempt to redefine "foreknowledge" and to mold it into "foreordination," the Calvinist commonly uses Acts 2:23, which says that Jesus was crucified "by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." The Calvinist claims that determinate counsel and foreknowledge is the same thing, but it is evident that these are, in fact, two different things. The Calvinist points out that "determinate counsel" precedes "foreknowledge," but what he fails to observe is the "and." Acts 2:23 does not say that Jesus was crucified "by the determinate counsel which is the foreknowledge of God"; it says that Jesus was crucified "by the determinate counsel AND foreknowledge of God." That God elects according to His foreknowledge does not mean that He elects solely according to His determinate counsel, and this fact does not make God any less God.

2 Timothy 1:9--"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

Though this verse says that God did not call us by our works but by His grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, it does not say that the saved are "sovereignly" chosen and that their election has

nothing to do with their faith and with God's foreknowledge. For a sinner to believe on Christ is not a work (Eph. 2:8-9).

2 Thessalonians 2:13--“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.”

This verse does not say that election to salvation has nothing to do with belief of the truth. One must read that doctrine into it. In fact, taking its words by their face value, the verse says that belief of the truth is part of our election and it does not say that election has nothing to do with God foreseeing the sinner's faith.

Ephesians 1:3-5--“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

This important passage says the believer is chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world but it doesn't tell us the basis for this election. It says it was the good pleasure of Christ to predestinate the believer to be adopted as a child of God. But it doesn't say anything one way or the other about foreknowledge and its role in

election. It doesn't say anything about election being the "sovereign" choice of God irrespective of man's faith.

The good pleasure of God's will refers to what God has determined for the believer, which is adoption of children by Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:11--"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will."

There are two teachings in this verse that are relevant to Calvinism. First it says the believer is predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. It does not follow, though, that predestination has nothing to do with foreknowledge and that man has no choice in the matter.

Secondly, the verse says God works all things after the counsel of His own will, yet again Calvinism's definition of this does not automatically follow. If God willed to make man in His own image and determined to give man the ability to reject God, not only in the Garden of Eden but throughout man's history until this day, that would not contradict anything that is taught in this verse. It would still mean that God works all things after the counsel of His own will. God is still "sovereign."

1 Corinthians 1:26-29--"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to

confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

This passage does not say that God saves only a pre-selected group of people. The calling discussed in this passage pertains to HOW God calls not WHO He calls. This is clear in the previous verses:

“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:21-24).

God determined to call or save men through the gospel rather than through intellectualism or philosophy or miracles or some other means. God calls men through the gospel. “Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 2:14). And since the gospel is to be preached to “every creature” it is clear that God offers salvation to every sinner. But only those who come through this one appointed means are saved, and when we look at Bible believing churches through the age we see that those who come are usually of the lower rungs of society. That is God’s plan. Those of the “humbler class” are the ones

who more readily acknowledge that they need salvation. By this means, God has confounded the proud.

Romans 8:29-33--“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.”

We see that the foreknowledge of God is a crucial part of His plan of election. Those He foreknew he also predestinated and called and justified. The key, then, is to understand what foreknowledge means. If, as the Calvinist teaches, it is the same as predestination then this passage can be understood to teach “sovereign election.” But if foreknowledge is not the same as predestination, it cannot be understood in this way.

The word “foreknow” is from the Greek “proginosko,” which simply means “to know beforehand, i.e. foresee” (Strong). It is the same basic Greek word that is translated “foreknowledge” in 1 Pet. 1:2, which says the believer is “elect according to the foreknowledge of God.”

To say that “foreknow” is the same as predestination is to ignore the meaning of the word and is also to ignore the fact that foreknow and predestinate are two separate steps in the process described in Romans 8:29-33.

In light of this passage and 1 Pet. 1:2, it is scriptural to say that God foresaw who would believe on Christ and predestinated those to salvation. There is doubtless more to election than this; there are things about divine election that we don’t understand at this time; but foreknowledge is definitely a part of it, because the Bible says so.

Romans 9:13-33

13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.

15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

16 So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

17 For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.

18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?

20 Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?

21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:

23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

24 Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?

25 As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.

26 And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

27 Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved:

28 For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

29 And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrha.

30 What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

31 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

32 Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone;

33 As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

This is doubtless the Calvinist's favorite proof text for sovereign election. Does Romans 9 teach that God arbitrarily or sovereignly chooses some sinners to be saved and the rest to be lost? Let's consider eight important facts about this passage:

1. The example of Esau and Jacob does not refer to election pertaining to personal salvation but to election pertaining to nations in God's overall program.

Verse 12 makes this clear. "It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger." The promise of God to Rebecca was about the elder son serving the younger, not about their personal salvation. Esau could have gotten saved. He could have believed in God and been in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. This passage does not teach that Esau was sovereignly predestined to be reprobate. It teaches that God sovereignly chose Christ's lineage.

2. As for Pharaoh, the Bible says that he rejected God's Word in Exodus 5:2 before God hardened his heart in Exodus 7:3.

“Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go” (Ex. 5:2). Also the Bible twice says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. “But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said” (Ex. 8:15). See also Exodus 9:34. This is not a case of sovereign reprobation. The Scripture teaches that it is always God's will for men to serve Him, but when they reject Him He rejects them and judges them and makes examples of them. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12--“And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: THAT THEY ALL MIGHT BE DAMNED WHO BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” These sinners will be damned but not because they are not sovereignly elected and not because they are sovereignly reprobate but because of their personal decision in regard to the truth. Words could not be plainer. God did make an example of Pharaoh and God did harden his heart for this purpose, but to go beyond what the Bible says and to claim that God chose to create Pharaoh for the purpose of reprobating him is a great error and is to malign the name of the loving God.

3. Romans 9:22-23 does not say that God sovereignly fits some sinners to destruction and some to glory.

The phrase “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” allows for a variant voice; according to the *PC Study Bible*, it can be both the passive and middle voice in Greek; middle means to fit oneself. In the middle voice the subject acts in relation to him/herself. Consider this note from Vincent Word Studies: “NOT FITTED BY GOD FOR DESTRUCTION, but in an adjectival sense, ready, ripe for destruction, the participle denoting a present state previously formed, BUT GIVING NO HINT OF HOW IT HAD BEEN FORMED. That the objects of final wrath had themselves a hand in the matter may be seen from 1 Thess. 2:15-16.” By allowing the Bible to speak for itself through the plain meaning of the words and by comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that the sinner fits himself for destruction by his rejection of the truth. Even those who have never heard the gospel, have the light of creation and conscience and are responsible to respond to the light that they have that they might be given more light (Acts 17:26-27).

4. Romans 9:23-24 does not mean that God calls only a certain pre-chosen elect group to salvation.

“And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” One has to read that into the language of the verses. The Calvinist claims that verse 24 refers to “effectual calling,” which is a term that describes the “irresistible calling of the elect,” but this is

adding to God's Word, which is a great error. The Bible plainly states that God has called all who will come to Christ. God calls through the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14) and the gospel is to be preached to every creature (Mk. 16:15). God calls "whosoever will" (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17). God calls every one that believes on Christ. "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:40).

5. God's salvation even of the Jews was not a matter of "sovereign" election but was based on an individual's faith in His Word. "But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 9:31-33).

6. Romans 10 leaves no doubt about this; the promise of salvation proves that it is not God's arbitrary or "sovereign" choice (Rom. 10:8-13). Note the words "whosoever" and "all." Would God mock sinners by promising them salvation if they believe in Christ and then only enable those who were sovereignly elected to actually exercise such faith?

7. God's sovereignty does not mean that His will is always accomplished in man. "But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a

disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom. 10:21). See also Matt. 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” God has made man in His image. Man is not a robot. He can exercise his will in saying no to God, and man has said no to God and has resisted God from Genesis to Revelation. If God’s sovereignty means that His will is always done, this world would make no sense! It is God’s will, for example, for every believer to “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet. 1:16), but we know all too well that this is not always the case and is never the case perfectly.

8. God’s blinding of Israel was not a matter of sovereign election but it was because they first hardened their own hearts. Consider Ezek. 12:2; Mat. 13:15 and Acts 28:25-27:

Ezekiel 12:2 - “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.”

Ezekiel says the cause for Israel’s blindness is her own rebellion.

Matthew 13:15--“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should

understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Matthew says Israel closed her own eyes and that is the reason they were not converted. There is no sovereign reprobation here.

Acts 28:25-27--“And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Again, Acts says Israel closed her own eyes lest she be converted. There is no support for the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign reprobation here.

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understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

Again, Acts says Israel closed her own eyes lest she be converted. There is no support for the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign reprobation here.

Romans 11:2-7--“God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”

Though this verse is used by Arthur Pink and other Calvinists in support of the doctrine of sovereign election, the verse simply says that election is by grace and not by works. The Calvinist claims that faith is a work; therefore, if salvation were a matter of the sinner believing in Christ it would be a works salvation, but that is not supported by this verse or by any other verse, and it is plainly refuted by Eph. 2:8-9. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

Here we see that faith is not works. We see the same thing in Romans 4:5--“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Here, again, believing is the opposite of works. According to this passage, election is a matter of God offering grace to those who will receive it.

Though the Calvinist would say that God sovereignly elected 7,000 in Israel during the days of Elijah, this verse says nothing about sovereign election. It simply says that God reserved 7,000 that had not bowed their knees to Baal. It does not say that they refused to bow the knee because God foreordained it. One has to read all of that into the account.

The “election of grace” is explained more clearly in Romans 11:7--“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” This not about some being foreordained to salvation and others not being so foreordained but about the gospel of grace vs. works. Israel sought God by the law rather than by grace. This was made clear in chapter 9. “What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock

of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed” (Rom. 9:30-33).

Ephesians 1:5--“Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

If this verse stood on its own in Scripture it would be possible for it to carry the Calvinist interpretation of “Sovereign Election” and Irresistible Calling, but it does not stand alone. In Romans 8:29-33 we find that the act of predestination begins with God’s foreknowledge. See the comment on that passage.

Acts 13:48--“And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

If this verse stood alone in the book of Acts, the Calvinist interpretation (that God sovereignly pre-determines that some will be saved and then irresistibly saves them) would be acceptable, but the verse does not stand alone.

The context, in fact, refutes Calvinist theology:

In Acts 13:43 we see that sinners can be persuaded to continue in the gospel. “Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.” Thus there is more to salvation than Sovereign Election and Sovereign Calling. The will of man is involved in the issue and the effort of soul winners has an effect upon the

outcome. This is why Paul said, “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, THAT I MIGHT BY ALL MEANS SAVE SOME” (1 Cor. 9:22), and, “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, THAT I MIGHT GAIN THE MORE” (1 Cor. 9:19).

In Acts 13:46 we see that the gospel is offered to sinners and they can reject it. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” These Jews were not sovereignly chosen to reprobation. God offered them salvation and would have saved them, but they, by an exercise of their wills, put it away.

In Acts 13:47 we see that the gospel is intended for all men. “For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” This cannot be limited merely to some pre-elected group of men. The gospel is to be preached to every creature (Mk. 16:15) and God would have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

What, then, does Acts 13:48 mean? “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

It means simply that as many whose hearts were predisposed to accept the gospel, as many as were willing to call upon the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13), believed.

The Greek word translated “ordained” here is “tasso” and it means “to arrange in an orderly manner, i.e. assign or dispose” (Strong). It is used eight times in the New Testament. Twice it is translated “ordain” (Acts 13:48; Rom. 13:1). Elsewhere it is translated “addict” (1 Cor. 16:15), “appoint” (Mat. 28:16; Acts 22:10; 28:23), “determine” (Acts 15:2), and “set” (Lk. 7:8).

There are two questions that must be answered here. First, how many sinners are ordained to eternal life? Second, why are men ordained to eternal life?

The answer to the first question is that God would have all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3-4). The Calvinist answer, that God has only sovereignly elected a few to be saved, is not Scriptural.

The answer to the second question is that men are ordained to eternal life by believing the gospel and calling upon the name of Christ (Mk. 16:16; Lk. 8:50; Jn. 1:12; 3:13-18; 3:36; 5:24; 6:35; 6:40; 6:47; 8:24; 11:25; 12:36; 12:46; 20:31; Acts 8:36-37; 10:43; 13:39; 16:31; Rom. 1:16; 3:22; 4:5; 10:18-13; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 3:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Jn. 5:13). This is the order that is given consistently throughout the New Testament--believe and be saved.

“The Jews here had voluntarily rejected the word of God. On the other side were those Gentiles who gladly

accepted what the Jews had rejected, not all the Gentiles. Why these Gentiles here ranged themselves on God's side as opposed to the Jews Luke does not tell us. This verse does not solve the vexed problem of divine sovereignty and human free agency. There is no evidence that Luke had in mind an *absolutum decretum* of personal salvation. Paul had shown that God's plan extended to and included Gentiles. Certainly the Spirit of God does move upon the human heart to which some respond, as here, while others push him away" (Robertson's *Word Pictures*).

Titus 1:1--"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness."

This verse mentions God's elect but it does not say anything about "sovereign election."

1 Thessalonians 1:3-5--"Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."

Again, this verse says the brethren in the church at Thessalonica were elected of God but it does not say anything about "sovereign election." One has to read that into the passage.

1 Thessalonians 5:9--“For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Arthur Pink says, “To say that God ‘hath not appointed us to wrath’, clearly implies that there are some whom He has ‘appointed to wrath’...” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 98).

This “interpretation” is made by reading things into the verse that aren’t there. That God has not appointed us to wrath does not mean that He has appointed some to wrath. This is simply a promise that the believer will not be subject to the wrath that will be poured out in the Great Tribulation (1 Thess. 5:1-3). This is the wrath that is in view. There is not a hint in this passage that God has sovereignly chosen some sinners to reprobation and judgment.

2 Peter 2:12--“But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.”

Arthur Pink says, “Clearly, it is that ‘these’ men as brute beasts, are the ones who, like animals, are ‘made to be taken and destroyed’...” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 99).

The verse, though, does not say that the unsaved false teachers were made by God to be destroyed, that they were sovereignly chosen to be reprobated. It says simply that the false teachers are like the beasts that have no

understanding and that perish. It is the beasts that are created to be destroyed, not the false teachers.

In fact, the previous verse says that the Lord bought these wicked men, meaning that He died to make it possible for them to be saved, and that they *BRING UPON THEMSELVES* the destruction. “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

Jude 4--“For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation; ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Arthur Pink finds further support for the doctrine of sovereign reprobation in this verse, saying, “...whichever alternative be selected there can be no evading the fact that certain men are ‘before of old’ marked out by God ‘unto condemnation’” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 99).

The simple meaning of this verse is that the false teachers in this dispensation that deny the doctrine of Christ are judged after the same fashion as the men who were condemned in the Old Testament--as the sinners of Noah’s day, as the men of Sodom, etc. “The meaning clearly is, that the punishment which befell the unbelieving Israelites, (Jude 1:5) the rebel angels, (Jude 1:6) the inhabitants of Sodom, (Jude 1:7) and of which

Enoch prophesied, (Jude 1:15) awaited those persons” (Albert Barnes).

Note that Jude does not say that these false teachers were ordained to condemnation from eternity but from “before of old.” He is referring to the Scriptures and the constant warnings that are given against sin and apostasy and the specific reference in some places to the last days. Later in his epistle Jude specifically refers to the ancient prophet Enoch, saying that Enoch prophesied of these last days.

One must read sovereign reprobation into this verse. The plain meaning of the words does not support it.

The warning of Matthew Henry applies here. He says ordinary Christians need not be “troubled with dark, doubtful, and perplexing thoughts about reprobation, which the strongest heads cannot enter far into, can indeed bear but little of, without much loss and damage” and concludes in regard to Jude 4: “Is it not enough that early notice was given by inspired writers that such seducers and wicked men should arise in later times, and that every one, being forewarned of, should be forearmed against them?” (Matthew Henry).

Sinners are indeed foreordained to condemnation, because God has decreed that “the wages of sin is death.” He has also graciously given His son and decreed further that “whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (Jn. 3:16).

Revelation 13:8--“And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the

book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

This verse does not say anything about the basis for having one’s name added to or not added to the book of life. It does not say that those who worship the antichrist were sovereignly reprobated or that they worship the antichrist because they were not sovereignly elected to be saved. The verse simply says that it is the unsaved, those whose names are not written in the book of life, who will worship the antichrist as opposed to those who are saved.

2 Timothy 1:9--“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.”

This verse simply says that God’s calling of believers is not of works but is of grace and it says that this purpose and grace was given us in Christ before the world began.

By the way, the Bible teaches that faith is not works (Eph. 2:8-9). Thus the Calvinist argument that for a sinner to believe in Christ would amount to a works salvation falls to the ground.

The verse does not say that God has sovereignly elected a certain group of sinners to be saved. That must be read into it.

Verses That Are Used to Support the Calvinist Doctrine of Limited Atonement

According to this doctrine, the death of Christ was only for those that God sovereignly elected. Calvin denounced the universal offer of the Gospel. “When it appears that when the doctrine of salvation is offered to all for their effectual benefit, it is a corrupt prostitution of that which is declared to be reserved particularly for the children of the church” (*Institutes*, Book III, chap. 22).

Following are the chief proof texts that are put forth in support of the doctrine of Limited Atonement:

Isaiah 53:8--“He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

This verse is used by Calvinists to support the doctrine that Christ died only for the elect, but the “people” for whom he was stricken, according to this verse, is the people of Israel and we know that not all of the Israelites will be saved.

Further, even if the “my people” of Isa. 53:8 referred to the “elect,” it would not follow that Christ died ONLY for the elect. That would be reading something into the verse that is not there. That would also contradict the teaching of many plain Scriptures, such as Isaiah 53:6, which says the iniquity of all men was laid on Jesus, and Rom. 11:32, which says God wants to have mercy upon all, and 2 Cor. 5:19, which says God desires to reconcile all men to Himself, and 1 Tim. 2:6, which says Jesus was a ransom for all men, and Heb. 2:9, which says Jesus tasted death for all men, and 2 Pet. 2:1, which says Jesus bought

even unsaved false teachers, and 1 John 2:2, which says that provided propitiation for all men.

Matthew 1:21--“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”

This verse does not refer to the question of whether Jesus died to make it possible for all men to be saved. The people referred to in this verse are the Jews. Jesus will indeed save the Jews from their sins, but we also know that not all Jews will be saved. But even if “his people” in this verse refers to “the elect,” that does not mean that Christ died ONLY for the elect.

Matthew 20:28--“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

That Jesus gave His life a ransom for many does not mean that He gave His life a ransom only for the elect. This would contradict 1 Tim. 2:6 and 1 John 2:2 and many other Scriptures.

John 10:11--“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”

Again, that Jesus gave His life for the sheep is not to say that He did not also give His life to make it possible for all men to be saved.

Acts 20:28--“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath

made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

Again, that God purchased the church with his own blood is not to say that the atonement was limited to those who would be saved. The Calvinist Limited Atonement doctrine must be read into these verses.

John 11:49-52--“And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”

Arthur Pink says that he would be willing to rest his doctrine of Limited Atonement upon this passage “more than any other” (*The Sovereignty of God*, p. 66).

But John 11:49-52 says nothing about the extent of Christ’s atonement. To say that Jesus died for those who will be saved is not to say that He died ONLY for those who would be saved.

Verses That Are Used to Support the Calvinist Doctrine of Irresistible Grace

According to this Calvinist doctrine, God’s call to the elect is effectual and cannot be resisted. The dead sinner

is sovereignly regenerated and granted the “gift of faith.” “That some, in time, have faith given them by God, and others have it not given, proceeds from his eternal decree; for ‘known unto God are all his works from the beginning,’ etc. (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). According to which decree he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however hard, and he bends them to believe; but the non-elect he leaves, in his judgment, to their own perversity and hardness” (summary derived from the Synod of Dort). The Westminster Confession adds the following: “This effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it. Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved...”

Following are proof texts that are put forth in support of the doctrine of Irresistible Grace:

John 3:8--“The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

This verse does not say anything about divine election and does not say anything one way or the other about the doctrine that those who are sovereignly elected are irresistibly called. It simply states that the Spirit of God is

like the wind in that you cannot see the Spirit but you can see His influence in the lives of those who are born again.

John 6:37--“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”

If “irresistible grace” is taught in this passage, it is for all who believe on Christ and not merely for a special few who were sovereignly pre-elected to be saved.

This verse does not say that God has sovereignly pre-chosen only some for salvation and that it is those pre-chosen ones that are given to Christ. One must read all of that into the verse. It simply says that all that the Father gives will come to Christ. The question is this: “Who is it that the Father gives to Jesus?”

That question is answered plainly in this passage only three verses later: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (Jn. 6:40). (Of course the Calvinist argues that it is only the elect who can “see the Son,” but one must read that into the verse.)

Thus, all those who believe on Christ are given by the Father and they are received and are not cast out.

John 6:39--“And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

We have explained this under John 6:37. Verse 40 says that those that are given by the Father are those who believe on Christ.

John 6:44--“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.”

This is an important statement and it teaches that men cannot be saved apart from divine drawing. Sinners do not seek God on their own (Rom. 3:11). If John 6:44 stood alone, apart from the rest of the Scripture, it would be possible to see Calvinist Irresistible Grace in its language, but it does not. The Lord Jesus plainly taught that ALL men are drawn. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (Jn. 12:32). Not only that, but He also said that ALL men are given light. “That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (Jn. 1:9). Further, the Holy Spirit has come to “reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (Jn. 16:8).

John 17:1-2, 6--

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

6 I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

God has given Jesus some men, but who are they? Are they those who are sovereignly elected or are they all who believe the gospel? John 6:40 says, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” John 1:12 and 3:14-16 and many other passages teach the same thing.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14--“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This passage says the believers at Thessalonica were chosen by God to salvation. What it does not say, though, is the basis for this choosing. The passage does not say that the basis for the choosing was God’s sovereign will apart from anything He foresaw. John 6:40 says, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.” According to this verse, the basis for God’s election is man’s faith.

The passage says the believers at Thessalonica were chosen “through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.” The Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace claims that this means the Spirit of God sovereignly and irresistibly drew these believers to faith, but one must

read that into the passage. It is simpler and more scriptural to say that it is the Holy Spirit who enlightens (Jn. 1:9), convicts (Jn. 16:8), and draws (Jn. 12:32) sinners and that those who believe the truth are saved.

2 Thess. 2:13-14 also says the believers at Thessalonica were called, but this calling is not said to have been sovereign and irresistible. It says, rather, that they were called by the gospel. This is the same thing that we see in Mark 16:15-16. The gospel is to be preached to all men and those who believe are saved.

The Calvinist doctrines of Sovereign Election and Irresistible Grace are refuted earlier in this same passage. Verses 8-12 describe the coming of the Lord to destroy the antichrist and to judge those who believe on him.

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in THEM THAT PERISH; BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT THEY MIGHT BE SAVED. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they ALL MIGHT BE DAMNED WHO BELIEVED NOT THE TRUTH, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

Here we see that men can receive the truth and be saved but they can also reject it and therefore perish. They do

not perish because they are sovereignly elected to perish but because they do not believe the truth.

Acts 16:14--“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

No person can be saved unless the Lord opens his or her heart. This is not a Calvinist doctrine but a doctrine that all Bible believers understand and believe.

To say that God opened Lydia’s heart so that she attended unto the things of Christ is not to say that God has pre-selected only a certain number of sinners to be saved. It is also not to say that God does not attempt to save the non-elect. It is also not to say that Lydia was Irresistibly Called or that she was sovereignly regenerated and then given faith. All of this Calvinist doctrine must be read into the passage.

What about Hyper-Calvinism?

Hyper-Calvinism is a label that some Calvinists have put upon other Calvinists. For example, in “Hyper-Calvinism Examined,” Dr. Jeffrey Khoo, a Presbyterian Calvinist and a staunch defender of the Greek Received Text and the King James Bible and a man that I hold in high esteem, analyzes a position that he labels “hyper.” He says:

“Calvinism is that system of doctrine derived from the great French theologian--John Calvin. ... What then is Hyper-Calvinism? The prefix ‘hyper’ (Gk: hyper) means ‘above’ or ‘beyond.’ Hyper-Calvinism is a twisted form of Calvinism that goes beyond what Calvin in accordance to Scriptures had taught.”

Dr. Khoo presents two characteristics of Hyper-Calvinism: “(1) denial of common grace, and (2) denial of the free offer of the gospel.”

Common Grace vs. Saving Grace, Degrees of Love

Dr. Khoo claims that Calvin taught that there is both a common grace and a saving grace, and that failure to distinguish between the two is a mark of Hyper-Calvinism. Saving grace is “the Holy Spirit’s regenerative work on the sinner through the Gospel,” whereas common grace is “God’s favourable bestowal upon all of mankind of those things necessary for creaturely existence on this sin-plagued earth.”

Dr. Khoo says that Hyper-Calvinists reject the doctrine of common grace and that according to them, God hates all non-elect and works all things towards their destruction, whereas John Calvin taught that God does not hate the non-elect and that this is evident because He bestows upon them “common grace.”

Calvin taught that not only does God bestow common grace upon the reprobate, He also loves them to some degree. Expositing on Mark 10:21, which says Jesus loved the rich young ruler, Calvin said: “... God loves all His creatures without exception. It is therefore important to distinguish degrees of love. ... sometimes God is said to love those whom He neither approves nor justifies.”

What do we say about this? If I were the non-elect, I would wonder what kind of grace God has given me and what kind of love God has bestowed upon me, seeing that it is impossible for me to be saved and escape Hell! “Common grace” and a degree of love might sound pleasant to ear of the Calvinist theologian, but it won’t get the “reprobate” into Heaven.

The Free Universal Offer of the Gospel

Dr. Khoo says that the second mark of Hyper-Calvinism is to reject the doctrine that the gospel should be preached to all men indiscriminately and that God sincerely invites everyone, elect and reprobate, to repentance and salvation in Christ; whereas Calvin Calvinists believe these things.

Dr.Khoo quotes John Calvin's comments on John 3:16 and similar passages to prove that he believed that God "invites indiscriminately all to share in life" and "shows He is favourable to the whole world when He calls all without exception to the faith of Christ" and "no man is excluded from calling upon God" and "the gate of salvation is set open to all."

When reading these quotes, one thinks for a moment that perhaps Calvin truly believed that all men can be saved through the gospel, but this is not at all what he means! While saying that the gospel is universally offered out of one side of his mouth, Calvin rendered the universal aspect of the gospel meaningless in any practical sense with his doctrine of sovereign election, because they are the only ones who are drawn effectively and regenerated and given the "gift of faith."

Calvin went on to say: "God does not work effectually in all men, but only when the Spirit shines in our hearts as the inward teacher. ... The Gospel is indeed offered to all for their salvation, its power is not universally manifest." Commenting on 2 Peter 3:9, Calvin asks the following important question: "It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish?" The non-Calvinist Bible believer would reply that so many perish because God has decreed that man not be a robot but that he be given a choice in the matter of the gospel. But John Calvin must fall back upon his doctrine of sovereign election: "My reply is that no mention is made here of the secret decree of God by which the wicked are doomed to their own ruin ... GOD STRETCHES OUT HIS HAND TO ALL ALIKE, BUT

HE ONLY GRASPS THOSE (IN SUCH A WAY AS TO LEAD TO HIMSELF) WHOM HE HAS CHOSEN BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.”

Desiderative vs. Decretive Will

According to Khoo, the Hyper-Calvinist’s problem in not being able to “see how God can be willing to save all when He has already willed that only the elect would be saved” is solved by the simple solution of understanding that God has both a “decretive” and a “desiderative” (from “desire”) will.

God’s decretive will is His sovereign election of some sinners to eternal salvation, whereas His desiderative will is His general concern for all sinners. According to the decretive vs. desiderative idea, salvation is offered to all mankind but given only to the elect. In the words of Augustine, Christ’s death was “sufficient for all, efficient for the elect.”

My friend, if you think this is some sort of “mumbo jumbo” or “gobbly gook,” you are not alone!

The Hyper-Calvinist would open shop and offer the Gift of Salvation only to the elect, while the “Calvin Calvinist” would open shop and offer the Gift of Salvation to whosoever will but only give it to the elect!

Do you see any significant difference between these two views?

Conclusion

It appears to me that Calvin believed that God plays a cruel joke upon the non-elect or “the reprobate,” as he calls them. He “sincerely” invites “whosoever will” to come and to believe on Christ and to be saved, but He knows that only the elect can do any of that. Thus, the non-elect can do nothing in regard to the “universal offer of salvation,” but to confirm his unbelief and his reprobate condition.

In my estimation, Hyper-Calvinism vs. Calvin Calvinism is more of a game of semantics than anything else. The “Calvin Calvinist” wants to think that he believes what 1 Timothy 2 and 2 Peter 3 says about God desiring that all men be saved and not being willing that any should perish and with the “whosoever will” calls of the gospel, but when his position is analyzed carefully, he believes no such thing in any practical sense. The elect are still sovereignly elect and the only sinners who can be saved, and the reprobate are still sovereignly reprobate, unable to be saved and eternally locked out of Heaven.

The “Calvin Calvinist” is no more faithful to the Scripture than the Hyper-Calvinist. Both twist the Scripture to fit their theology and read their theology into the plain words of Scripture.

The Calvinism Debate

Copyright 2006 by David W. Cloud

Fourth edition December 2011

ISBN: 1-58318-093-1

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DISTRIBUTION IN EBOOK FORMAT**

Published by *Way of Life Literature*

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Printed in Canada by

Bethel Baptist Print Ministry

eBook version e4.01