Calvinism Answered Verse by Verse and Subject by Subject

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Introduction

How do we reconcile the sovereignty of God with the free-will of man? Are God and man both free? Or, is God free, but not man? Or, is neither God nor man autonomous and libertarianly free? The complexity of this matter is essentially what the debate over Calvinism is really all about, and we, as Christians, must ultimately yield to the authority of Scripture. We do not yield to Councils, Creeds, Confessions or Synods. We yield only to the authority of Scripture.

The Bible is never read in a vacuum. In other words, we are not a blank slate. Before we ever read a single verse in the Bible, we already have our own worldviews and philosophies firmly in place. This is what it means to have "presuppositions." It's what we already suppose and assume to be true about God and the world around us. So, the critical task for the Bible-reader is (a) to desire the truth, above all else, and (b) to be willing to submit to the authority of Scripture, so that we allow Scripture to reset and *redefine* our already-existing presuppositions. A problem occurs whenever we erroneously instead attempt to redefine the Bible to match our presuppositions, that is, to get Scripture to meet our expectations and to align with what we already wish to be true, rather than to allow the Bible to redefine our presuppositions, and this is the root of the problem for many theological controversies. (Related to Calvinism, this is how we end up with nonsensical things like "world of the elect." It's a desperate attempt to redefine Scripture to avoid truth and meet the elevated authority of our own desires.)

Those unfamiliar with Calvinism may consider this controversy to be a matter of Christians causing unnecessary internal divisions, and thus resulting in a judgmental condemnation of both sides of the theological aisle for arguing. However, their ignorance is to their own shame, as these things really do matter, in as much as the Bible itself matters. Theology matters because life follows doctrine. I once wondered why God chose not to spell everything out in black and white. After all, look at the damage! Look at all of the cults! Look at all of the different denominations! However, God is like a wise parent, knowing and seeing things in a way that we, as children, cannot readily see. God chose to have Scripture written in exactly the way that it is, knowing that controversies would occur. Figuratively speaking, God has left enough ambiguity in Scripture to serve as a rope with which we may hang ourselves, if our heart is not right before Him.

God purposely left enemies in the land for Israel to meet in battle. Now why would God do that? Judges 3:1-2 states: "Now these are the

nations which the Lord left, **to test Israel** by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly)." Similarly, our theological discussions help us to dig into the Bible in order to seek and to find God. God didn't create Israel's enemies, nor is God the author of confusion in the Church. (1st Corinthians 14:33) However, God did leave enemies around for Israel, and did not have them entirely wiped out, presumably because God saw some advantage and opportunity for His enemies to indirectly yield some benefit to Israel. Similarly, God could have written His Word in such a way so as to tighten up all of the theological loose ends. However, God left room for His enemy, Satan, to abuse Scripture for the corruption of the Church, since God also foresaw some advantage and opportunity for His people to be indirectly helped, in being compelled to dig into Scripture, in order to seek and to learn about God. (This is how the scourge of false teaching actually indirectly helps the Church.) God certainly takes no joy whenever people get things wrong about the Bible. God would have it that we all seek and find Him. When we get things wrong, it is not because of God, but because of ourselves, meaning that errant theology results from our own internal defects. God is not at fault.

What do Calvinists believe?

Calvinist, John Piper, quotes an unnamed non-Calvinist as privately admitting his opinion that the Bible favors Calvinism: *"It is true, Calvinists have the exegesis behind them, but we have philosophy, and I think that libertarianism trumps exegesis, and must determine it. Arminians have philosophy on their side."*[1]

Our reply:

Scriptural authority is the anchor of the Christian faith, and so if it really was conceded that Calvinism was vindicated by Scripture, then there would be nothing left in "philosophy" worth discussing, and we would all do well to rush to the defense of Calvinism. In reality, though, Scripture is

[1] John Piper cited a personal email from an unnamed, "major evangelical philosopher." The Unnamed source states: "It is true, Calvinists have the exegesis behind them, but we have philosophy, and I think libertarianism [meaning free will understood as self-determination] trumps exegesis and must determine it." (*Exploring the Tension Between Calvinists and Arminians*, 4:53-5:17) John Piper replies: "So we have to bring our theology to the text?" (5:20-5:24) Unnamed source: "Yes. The ethical implications of Calvinism are too severe." (5:25-5:32) So far, John Piper has refused to identify the unnamed source. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykaL-dafIhI

not a compelling reason to convert to Calvinism, given how often the Bible actually contradicts it. In many cases, what tilts the scales in favor of Calvinism is simple peer pressure, in which an aggressive Calvinist mentors someone into the Reformed fraternity, afterwards resulting in a convert's incredulous sense of post hoc justification and rationalization of their new worldview. For example, Calvinistic scholar, R.C. Sproul stated:

> *"When I teach the doctrine of predestination I am often frustrated by those who obstinately refuse to submit to it. I want to scream, 'Don't you realize you are resisting the Word of God?'"*[2]

Calvinists can become quite incredulous since "predestination," "election" and "foreknowledge" are indeed biblical terms. So, Calvinists feel a sense of *duty* to ensure that every Christian submits to those biblical terms, including the manner in which they understand them[3], despite their own Christian conscience telling them that something is not quite right. For example, R.C. Sproul recalls in his conversion to Calvinism:

> *"I no longer feared the demons of fatalism or the ugly thought that I was being reduced to a puppet. Now I rejoiced in a gracious Savior who alone was immortal, invisible, the only wise God."*[4]

Calvinistic pastor, John Piper, recalls being "tormented" for days by the claims of Calvinism before finally adopting the system[5], and which is a fairly common testimony from Calvinists. Though it is nice to hear that Calvinists have found peace and joy in their particular theology, if they are going to be so passionate in persuading others to submit to it, then they owe it, both to themselves and to other Christians, to ensure that what they are teaching is truly biblical, or else otherwise they could be deceiving themselves and misleading others. Calvinists cannot simply assume that their initial reservation against Calvinism is due solely to emotion and philosophy. In other words, could it be that what Calvinists are having to overcome is what they know of the biblical teaching concerning God's character of love, holiness, grace and goodness?

Given that Calvinists tend to distrust arguments based in emotion and philosophy, it is best, when conversing with Calvinists, to avoid

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[2] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 14.

[3] The real debate is not over predestination itself, which simply refers to all that God has planned to bring to pass. The real debate is whether God has predestined absolutely everything, including every sin ever committed. Non-Calvinists obviously disagree.

[4] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 14.

[5] John Piper, *Exploring the Tension Between Calvinists and Arminians*.

emotional, pragmatic and philosophical arguments. Instead, the best approach is to deal with Calvinism on its own turf, that is, by addressing a Calvinist's own proof-texts in Scripture, one at a time, exposing their own unrealized assumptions. The "unrealized assumptions" deals with the fact that Calvinism represents **Presuppositional Theology**. In other words, when Calvinists read the Bible, they already have the 5-Point system of Calvinism in place, which is held with *absolute assurance*. So, when they read Scripture, their underlying system of presuppositions become the lens through which all Scripture then gets filtered. The impact is that they may *read* one thing, but *see* another. This is also common with the Jehovah's Witnesses, in which their presupposition is in the absolute, unquestioned authority of the Watchtower Society. So, when Jehovah's Witnesses *read* one thing in Scripture, they'll *see* whatever the Watchtower Society tells them it means. While Calvinists do not have a Watchtower Society to fall back upon for authority, they do have a network of respected "Reformed" theologians. This is why Calvinists will often promote well-known Calvinist theologians to non-Calvinists, in order to demonstrate their own source of authority, including the "Reformed Tradition" of Calvinist scholars over the centuries. The challenge, therefore, when discussing the Bible with Calvinists is to get them to examine the Bible without their presuppositional baggage. The problem with presuppositions is that it actively *resists* one's own reading comprehension skills. That's why even intellectuals can fall for Calvinism since *presuppositions* can deafen one's own education and skills. Our own internal, screaming alert sign says to beware of our own *assumptions*, and yet that is exactly what TULIP is all about—a systematized set of conclusions firmly assumed without question and governing the interpretation of every text in the Bible.

So, let us now go verse by verse to take a closer look at some of the most pertinent biblical passages dealing with the controversy at hand.

Section 1: Subject by Subject

ACCOUNTABILITY

The reason that a person is held accountable and responsible for their choices is because they are actually able to respond to God when they make their choices. However, Calvinism *holds* humanity accountable for whether they accept the gospel or not, even though Calvinists don't believe humanity has the autonomous, libertarian free-will to freely accept it. (Calvinists believe that only those who are given an Irresistible Grace can believe in the gospel.) In other words, Calvinists do not necessarily correlate accountability with ability. However, without such free-will, how could humanity *reasonably* be held accountable? However, on the basis of Romans 9:19-21, Calvinists don't believe we are *allowed* to ask that question.

> **Romans 9:19-21:** "**You will say** to me then, '**Why does He still find fault?** For who resists His will?' On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

However, Calvinists proof-text that particular passage without proper consideration of Jewish context, in which Paul was anticipating the reaction of the judicially hardened, unbelieving Jew upon hearing that God carried out His threat to harden them for unrepentance, according to Jeremiah 18:1-13. Calvinists simply reject the Jewish context and insist that it is speaking about all humanity.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...since God judges on the basis of the intentions of the heart, there is in fact a ground for morality and justice."*[6]

Our reply:

Agreed, but if God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," as per Calvinism, then that would have God causing the very thing He is judging, as Dave Hunt pointed out:

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[6] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2004), 320.

> *"Yes, God judges 'the intentions of the heart,' but Calvinism falsely says that He causes the intentions He judges."*[7]

To demonstrate how mankind could be guilty, despite doing only and precisely what God decreed for them to do, one Calvinist cites an analogy of a man who drank a bottle of whiskey so as to drum up the courage to effectually carry out an act of murder.[8] Calvinists imagine that a judge might find such a person guilty (even though the determinate influence of alcohol rendered their choice certain), on the basis that in spite of their incapacitation, they did what they *wanted* to do. In this way, Calvinists argue that mankind is guilty of what God determined since we *participate* in wanting to do it. However, the problem with teaching that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass" is that every single sin always comes back to God—which would actually be fine if God merely permitted it, that is, to allow someone else to *independently* exercise their own will, as non-Calvinists affirm that God created the *fact* of freedom, though not necessarily all *acts* of freedom. So, God accepts responsibility for creating free creatures who exercise their own will (Job 2:3), but Calvinism takes it a step further by teaching that God decreed all *acts* of freedom, in so much as having decreed whatsoever comes to pass, and that is how Calvinism would necessarily invalidate human accountability.

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[7] Ibid., 327.

[8] *Sovereignty and Free Will: Ezekiel 36:22-28*, 30:16-32:22, http://www.st-helens.org.uk/resources/media-library/src/talk/54749/title/3-sovereignty-and-free-will.

ARBITRARY

Calvinistic scholars often insist that God is not arbitrary ("without reason") in His judgments (or His selection of those who will or will not be saved), but insist God has secret reasons that are simply unknown to us. Nevertheless, the Calvinist maintains that while we cannot know what the reasons are, we can know that it has absolutely nothing to do with mankind's choices or behavior. In other words, on Calvinism, God elects or rejects (reprobates) each individual based on reasons that have nothing to do with those individuals. Yet, somehow they feel this belief does not make God out to be arbitrary.

This perspective is largely resting on the Calvinist's interpretation of Romans 9:11, which says,

> "…for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls."

Calvinists insist this passage proves that God had unconditionally elected to effectually save some individuals and pass by all the rest without any regard to their future choices or behaviors. Alternate interpretations of this passage are offered elsewhere in this book, but one glaring problem of the Calvinistic interpretation must be highlighted at this point. If God ultimately determines the good and bad behavior of these twins (as most Calvinists insist), then what point is there in mentioning that the twins were not chosen based on the good or bad behavior that God determined for them to do?

Even Calvinists acknowledge that everyone who is saved will believe and practice good works by God's sovereign decree, so is Paul's point that the choice to save one over another somehow ignores what He has determined for them to do (i.e. like respond in faith to the gospel)?

Clearly, Paul is speaking of God's choice of the weaker, younger brother through which to bring about the promise of the Messiah rather than the more obvious choice of the elder, stronger brother.[9] God has often chosen the weak and seemingly less qualified through which to accomplish

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[9] Although the Messiah isn't specifically referenced at Romans 9:11, it remains a fact that the Messiah would come through the line of Jacob and not Esau. The larger point, though, is that one is chosen over the other to be the bearer of the covenant nation. The issue here is of Jews and Gentiles: God can choose who He wants to be His agents in His plan of salvation (it was the Jews, but now the Gentiles who are being allowed that privilege, specifically to drive the Jews to jealousy for their ultimate restoration).

His redemptive plan so as to demonstrate His power (see Gideon's army or the choice of David as king). Jacob was not chosen because he was more worthy, qualified or moral than his elder brother. But, he also was not chosen for effectual salvation without any apparent reason (arbitrarily).

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"That God chooses according to the good pleasure of his will does not mean that his choices are capricious or arbitrary. An arbitrary choice is one made for no reason at all. Though Reformed theology insists that God's election is based on nothing foreseen in the individuals' lives, this does not mean that he makes the choice for no reason at all. It simply means that the reason is not something God finds in us. In his inscrutable, mysterious will, God chooses for reasons known only to himself. He chooses according to his own pleasure, which is his divine right."*[10]

Our reply:

Assuming Calvinism for the moment, if the choice to elect one person over another to become a believer is not "arbitrary," such that God has a definite reason, in terms of God's specific plan for that particular individual, then why would God engage in Favoritism by being pleased to favor one person over another?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"Why he selected me, I will never know. I'm no better than anyone else. I'm worse than many. But He chose me."*[11]

Our reply:

Deferring Unconditional Election to *mystery* while insisting it is not arbitrary is like saying: "I don't know what it is, but I know it's not *that*." But, how do you know for sure if it is a mystery to you?

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[10] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 147.
[11] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

What do Calvinists believe?

> D. James Kennedy: *"Again and again we see that people are predestined (elected) to salvation--but nowhere do we see that anyone is ever predestined to condemnation of Hell. When we think of God as unfairly, arbitrarily electing people to Heaven or Hell, it is as if we have a mental picture of a row of people sitting on a fence, and God passes down the line and points at each one, 'It's Hell for you, Heaven for you, Hell, Hell, Hell, Heaven, Hell...' Now, that would be unfair--and absolutely capricious! But that's not the kind of God we love and serve."*[12]

Our reply:

That's a confusing statement coming from a Calvinist. After all, what is named as "absolutely capricious" appears to be exactly what the Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Election is all about.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"There are some, too, who allege that God is greatly dishonored if such arbitrary power is bestowed on Him. But does their distaste make them better theologians than Paul, who has laid it down as the rule of humility for the believers, that they should look up to the sovereignty of God and not evaluate it by their own judgment?"*[13]

Our reply:

So, even John Calvin admits that Unconditional Election involves "arbitrary power," and thus to charge Calvinism with being arbitrary is clearly not a misrepresentation. Choosing between two things, in which the choice is not based on anything about either of those things, is the very definition of "arbitrary." In the Calvinist perspective, though, the decision to choose "arbitrarily" between two individuals is not an arbitrary method, but a purposeful method, for the purpose of magnifying God's power over the individuals themselves who are meaningless to that choice. Picking arbitrarily, truly arbitrarily, is the meaning and purpose, in and of itself, all

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[12] *Solving Bible Mysteries* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 29.
[13] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 209-210.

to glorify God's power *over the individuals*. That said, could we say that Calvinism's elect had gotten "lucky," and perhaps are the result of good fortune? "But no," says the Calvinists, who believe that luck or good fortune never had anything to do with it, but that they were only and always ever going to be "elect."

Consider the following analogy. Assuming that I am a good pet owner, imagine if I wanted a kitten, and a friend offered me two, but I only wanted one. Imagine if the two kittens were absolutely identical in every conceivable detail. Imagine if I blindfolded myself and simply pointed to the owner that whichever one was placed on the right side, I'll take. My choice, then, would be completely arbitrary concerning the kittens themselves, as I don't really care which one I choose, but only that I choose just one. Imagine that I am later informed that the other kitten didn't find a home and ultimately had to be euthanized. So, could it be said that the kitten that I chose was lucky and fortunate? A reasonable person might indeed conclude that. The fact is, though, that when compared to God under the Calvinist doctrine of an Unconditional Election, this analogy is flawed in many ways because in God's case, He is neither blindfolded, nor picking based upon someone else's random ordering, nor unaware of the consequences of His choices. **Therefore, it seems that it is impossible for God to pick anything, truly arbitrarily**. God has to have a reason to pick one thing over another, *as He controls all of the variables*. So, Calvinists can claim that they don't know why God chose them, but they would ultimately have to concede that God, with eyes like a hawk, knew what He was doing in picking them over someone else. So, if Unconditional Election is ultimately not about anything that is "arbitrary," or lucky, or fortunate, *then under Calvinism they would have more grounds to boast than anything in the Arminian or Traditionalist system*. In fact, if there was never any possibility of Calvinism's elect in being anything other than elect, then the question arises as to how that might meaningfully distinguish them from appearing as demi-gods. Obviously, one could boast in a type of racial pride of being created as a demi-god. Contrast that with non-Calvinism. In non-Calvinism, everyone is on the same level. No one has the scales tilted in their favor. Everyone is fallen, and the only way anyone is redeemed from the fallen state is by turning to Christ, which anyone (freed by God's grace) can and should do. So, for that reason, the non-Calvinist is simply boasting in what Jesus did for them, and what anyone else can do as well if they similarly turn to Jesus.[14] Now, one might say, "What if you boasted that you were smarter and wiser than others for trusting in Jesus?" Here is what God says about that: "Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am

[14] Also see the discussion on *Merit*.

the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things.” (Jeremiah 9:24) In that type of boasting, you are not boasting of your own greatness, but rather boasting in the greatness of *someone else*, namely God, that you are placing your trust in. In other words, saying that you are trusting in someone else, doesn’t make you great, but instead makes the person you are trusting in to be the one who is great.

ARMINIANISM

John Calvin (1509-1564) popularized Augustine's (354-430) doctrine of "Augustinian Predestination" which has come to be known as "Calvinism," just as Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) popularized the opposing theology to Calvinism now known as "Arminianism." Calvinists seem to have the belief that all opposition to Calvinism may be categorized under the broad definition of "Arminianism" because all non-Calvinist camps share a belief in the rejection of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Faith is a necessary condition for salvation, but not for election. The prescient view makes faith a condition of election; Reformed Theology sees faith as the result of election. This is the fundamental difference between conditional election and unconditional election, between all forms of semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism, between Arminianism and Calvinism."*[15]
>
> R.C. Sproul: *"Arminians and semi-Pelagians ultimately rest their view of election on the one who wills and not on the sovereign grace of God."*[16]
>
> R.C. Sproul: *"Semi-Pelagianism salutes the necessity of grace, but under close scrutiny one wonders if the difference between Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism is a distinction without a difference. The problem is this: If grace is necessary but not effectual, what makes it work? Obviously it is the positive response of the sinner, who is still in the flesh. Why does one sinner respond to the offer of grace positively and the other negatively?"*[17]

Our reply:

To the last point, Calvinists simply assume an external cause rather than an internal cause through a person's own volition. [18]

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[15] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 145.
[16] Ibid., 149.
[17] Ibid., 187.
[18] See the topic on *Why do you differ?* to find more discussion on that question.

Nevertheless, Calvinists essentially combine all groups of non-Calvinists in the same class, given the rejection of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Arminianism is the name most often associated with the belief that a saved person can eventually be lost. Yet Arminius himself did not teach this doctrine explicitly. He simply said that it was an open question."*[19]

Our reply:

Arminians do predominantly believe in a doctrine of Conditional Security, in contrast to the doctrine of Eternal Security as predominantly held by Traditionalists or Provisionists. Arminians often challenge the Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Election through the doctrine of Conditional Security, because if salvation can be lost, then the doctrine of Unconditional Election is automatically negated.

Calvinists believe that it is inconsistent for Traditionalists or Provisionists to hold to a doctrine of Eternal Security, on the grounds that if free-will can allow a person to receive Christ, then the same free-will can also allow a person to walk away from Christ. Of course, that ignores the change in nature that occurs whenever believers in Christ receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, meaning that Traditionalists or Provisionists could still hold to the doctrine of Eternal Security, believing that the Holy Spirit would ultimately preserve the faith of unbelievers.

[19] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 226.

ASSURANCE

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

One must understand that your assurance ultimately rests on your firm belief in these three main factors:

1. The Sincerity of your Commitment.
2. The Genuineness of your Experiences.
3. The Trustworthiness of your God.

If any one of these factors is missing then assurance is not possible—not really. You must believe that your commitment to the Lord was sincere. Sure, you may have been relatively ignorant of doctrine, or confused about all the nuances of what it means to be a disciple, but you must believe that you were sincere when you committed your life to following Jesus. If deep down you know you said a prayer, walked an aisle or got baptized for some reason other than a sincere commitment to Christ, then you will never find the assurance you long for. Your sincere faith must rest on Christ and his righteousness alone for your salvation.

Secondly, you cannot have lasting assurance if all you have to base your relationship on is the first experience. Imagine the wedding ceremony being the only experience on which to base the assurance of your relationship with your spouse. Proof of the relationship is better established by the hundreds of intimate experiences in life since that ceremony, not the ceremony itself. The same must be true in a relationship with your Savior. It's not just about what happened when you made that first confession, but it is about all that God has done in your life since that time.

Finally, and most importantly, you must believe that the One in whom you have placed your faith is trustworthy. Will He keep His promises? If the last of these factors is undermined, then the other two crumble apart as well. After all, what good is a commitment to someone you cannot trust? And how can you believe the experiences are genuine if the person with whom you are sharing those experiences proves to be disingenuous? For instance, if a wife found out her husband had many other wives throughout his life that he used and discarded for his own good pleasure, how could she possibly be assured of his genuine love for her? She could hope that their love was genuine, but knowing that he was not a trustworthy man would inevitably bring serious doubts.

Faith is very different from feelings. Faith reflects the deepest aspect of your human psychology. Feelings, by contrast, reflects the most shallow aspect of your human psychology. Therefore, where is your

assurance? Is it in your faith or in your feelings? Do you feel like God is trustworthy or do you have faith in God that He is trustworthy? Feelings can change on a whim but faith—which is tested—will endure. For instance, in times of moral failure, sometimes Calvinists no longer *feel* like they are "elect" (in the Calvinist sense) and then are vulnerable to falling away. Also, having *faith* in being one of Calvinism's elect is precarious since God never promised anyone "special election to salvation." Instead, God promised eternal life to whoever believes in His Son. (John 3:16) So, Calvinists are in jeopardy if they are trusting in their feelings to be "elect" (based upon whatever "works" that make them *feel* elect) and also in jeopardy if they are taking it on *faith* that God promised them an unconditional election since God never promised anyone any such thing. In conclusion, a much stronger basis for assurance is simply having faith in God to keep His word according to John 3:16, based upon all the times in Scripture that we have seen God keep His word.

What do Calvinists believe?

Coming to the Doctrines of Grace is akin to a salvation within salvation.

Our reply:

The reason why Calvinists call coming to the "Doctrines of Grace" as akin to a salvation within salvation is because they deem conversion to Calvinism as a telltale sign for evidence of "regeneration."

> Warren McGrew: *"It's designed to indoctrinate the adherent into believing the only way they can know if they're regenerated is if they can understand Calvinism. ... It puts a question over the potential follower of Christ and says, 'You don't even know if you are regenerated, but here's a way you can know. If you can understand this doctrine and affirm it as true—because it's a spiritual truth and you can't understand spiritual truth unless you've been regenerated and if you can understand that—then you've been regenerated.'"*[20]

[20] *Debate Review with Warren McGrew*, 49:55-50:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEJtBu18K4s&t=4409s

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"And so we said that the great, undergirding foundational truth that secures our future is God's decree in eternity past. It is the fact that we are chosen for final salvation that makes our salvation secure."*[21]

Our reply:

Actually, Calvinism cannot logically bring assurance to those who are *consistent* within its systematic, since even Calvinists affirm that there are people who sincerely believe they will be saved, but in reality are self-deceived. For instance, consider the following quote:

> John Piper: *"You can embrace a system of theology and not even be born again."*[22]

In a worldview where God determines whatsoever comes to pass, as the Calvinistic scholars affirm, it must be said that those who are *self-deceived are such ultimately because God has so determined it*. If you happen to be one of the individuals whom God has destined to remain in self-deception—falsely believing that you are saved when in actuality you are not—then *you could not know this fact until after Judgment Day*.

Because the Calvinistic system affirms that God is perfectly willing to unchangeably decree to use self-deceived individuals to be objects of divine wrath in order to bring more glory to Himself, it is impossible for any consistent Calvinist to know for certain that he or she is not one of those who are chosen for this ignoble purpose.

Believing that you have committed yourself to Christ and have had experiences with him in a relationship means nothing if He is not trustworthy and loving toward humanity in general. And because He is proven (on Calvinism) to be able and willing to decree for others to sincerely believe they are saved when they really are not, there can be no assurance He is not doing the same with you. There is no way for a consistent Calvinist to know if he has been chosen for self-deception or true salvation, whereas the non-Calvinist can have at least as much assurance in salvation as he or she has in a marriage with a trustworthy spouse.

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[21] John MacArthur, *Doctrine Of Election part 1*, 1:33 - 1:57. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFJFKFz2uYw

[22] John Piper, *Why are Calvinists so Negative?* [Interview with John Piper; accessed online at: http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-are-calvinists-so-negative

As such, Calvinism offers very little assurance of salvation if it is relegated to an eternal secret election, which is why Calvinists have also historically fretted over whether or not they have been secretly chosen.

> Walls and Dongell: *"This dreadful possibility is what haunts Calvinists who struggle with the assurance and certainty of salvation. Times of moral failure and depression can easily be construed as evidence that one is not chosen after all and that God is hardening one's heart for not responding more faithfully to his grace."*[23]

> Steven Hitchcock: *"A common characteristic of this dark period among initial converts to Calvinism is the personal questioning of one's own salvation. This is because the emphasis shifts from personal faith in Jesus to a view of God holding the keys to our personal salvation in His secret counsels of eternity. The obvious implication of Calvinism for the individual is whether or not he or she is one of the elect. Did God choose me in eternity past to be one of His elect? The whole experience is like crossing a river in which you cannot feel the bottom until you are over on the other side."*[24]

Some Calvinists have even turned away from the Christian faith because they perceived no evidence of being elected.[25] Yet, Calvinists assure us that you can be confident in a presumed election:

What do Calvinists believe?

> D. James Kennedy: *"Do you know that you are elect of God, chosen of God, predestined to adoption as a child of God before the beginning of time? You can know for certain."*[26]

> John Calvin: *"If Pighius asks <u>how I know I am elect</u>, I answer that Christ is more than a thousand testimonies to me."*[27]

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[23] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 202.
[24] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), xxv-xxvi.
[25] "I even began doubting my election in the sovereign grace of Christ, having no real proof for it with which I could satisfy myself…." Byron Curtis Smith, *Why I Doubt Christianity* (Internet blog post, February 10, 2011).
[26] *Solving Bible Mysteries* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 27.
[27] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 130, emphasis mine.

> John Calvin: *"...before the beginning of the world we were both ordained to faith and also elected to the inheritance of heavenly life. Hence arises impregnable security. The Father who gave us to the Son as His peculiar possession is stronger than all, and will not suffer us to be plucked out of His hand."*[28]
>
> John Calvin: *"Men preposterously ask how they can be certain of a salvation which lies in the hidden counsel of God. I have replied with the truth. Since the certainty of salvation is set forth to us in Christ, it is wrong and injurious to Christ to pass over this proffered fountain of life from which supplies are available, and to toil to draw life out of the hidden recesses of God."*[29]
>
> John Calvin: *"Paul clearly declares that it is only when the salvation of a remnant is ascribed to gratuitous election, we arrive at the knowledge that God saves whom he wills of his mere good pleasure, and does not pay a debt, a debt which never can be due. Those who preclude access, and would not have any one to obtain a taste of this doctrine, are equally unjust to God and men, there being no other means of humbling us as we ought, or making us feel how much we are bound to him. Nor, indeed, have we elsewhere any sure ground of confidence."*[30]

Our reply:

Yet, it is Calvinists themselves who admit to struggling over this very matter, as Calvinist, Charles Spurgeon wrote:

> *"I frequently meet with poor souls, who are fretting and worrying themselves about this thought—'How, if I should not be elect!' 'Oh, sir,' they say, 'I know I put my trust in Jesus; I know I believe in his name and trust in his blood; but how if I should not be elect?' Poor dear creature! you do not know much about the gospel, or you would never talk so, for he that believes is elect. Those who are elect, are elect unto sanctification and unto faith; and if you have faith you are one of God's elect; you may know it and ought to know it, for it is an absolute certainty. If you, as a*

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[28] Ibid., 57, emphasis mine.
[29] Ibid., 126, emphasis mine.
[30] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 21, Section 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 767, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

> *sinner, look to Jesus Christ this morning, and say—'Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to thy cross I cling,' you are elect. I am not afraid of election frightening poor saints or sinners."*[31]

So, here you have people who claim to trust in Jesus, but yet—because of the unique theological issues associated with Calvinism—do not know whether they are saved since, perhaps, they might not be "elect." The advice given by Spurgeon: "Have faith you are one of God's elect." The problem with Calvinism is that it encourages people to place their faith in something they must *suppose*, such as supposing oneself to be elect, rather than in placing one's faith in something they can *know*, such as knowing that God will keep His promise to save whosoever believes in Him. Thankfully, Spurgeon concluded with the correct basis for true assurance: "Let your hope rest on the cross of Christ. Think not on election but on Christ Jesus. Rest on Jesus—Jesus first, midst, and without end."[32] Indeed. Assurance must not rest on the *presumption* to a secret election, but instead, assurance must rest on the *promise* of God to keep His Word for all who believe in His Son. So, as a non-Calvinist, I don't need to guess or suppose whether God wishes to save me, personally, since if Jesus died for *all*, then I can know for certain that He died for *me*, because I am a *part* of the *all* for whom He died. In other words, I can know that God wants to save me, personally, because He provided the means for the salvation of everyone through the Cross, so that anyone in the world who believes in Him will be saved.

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[31] Charles Spurgeon, *Election*, September 2, 1855, emphasis mine.
[32] Ibid.

ATHEISM

"Atheism" affirms the belief that there is no God, while "Agnosticism" reflects uncertainty about the existence of God. The problem for non-Calvinists is that Atheists often assail Christianity from the perspective that Calvinism represents Christianity, and so non-Calvinists must therefore clarify that some of the Atheist's objections are not necessarily applicable.

Sometimes, Calvinists will cite Atheists to non-Calvinists as a neutral, independent party to corroborate the accuracy of Calvinism as the most accurate representation of Christianity. However, Atheists do not claim that Calvinism is the most *exegetically* faithful representation of the Bible, but rather that Calvinism is the more *philosophically* accurate representation of Christianity. In other words, Atheists are not necessarily agreeing to a Calvinist's unique biblical interpretations on key Bible "proof-texts," but instead are agreeing with Calvinists from a purely philosophical standpoint. This is unsurprising since both Calvinists and Atheists reject the concept of "free-will." In other words, while Calvinists believe in *divine* determinism, Atheists believe in *biological* determinism, meaning that both camps do not believe that humans have autonomous, libertarian free-will with autonomy of reason. We are a product of our *genes*, claims the Atheist, while we are a product of God's *decree*, claims the Calvinist. So, for that reason, it is quite unfair for Calvinists to cite an Atheist's perspective to non-Calvinists in order to corroborate Calvinism.

Most Atheistic objections to Christianity involve the perception of *God's* responsibilities in creation, in terms of what the Bible says that God causes or allows. The non-Calvinist's response is to ask the Atheist about their own personal responsibilities and accountability to God. However, since Atheists do not believe that they possess free-will, they don't believe that they could rightly have any such responsibility or accountability. Nonetheless, if a non-Calvinist's perspective on Christianity is correct, in contradiction to Calvinism, then the Atheist has a *choice*, and thus non-Calvinists can invoke their human responsibility and accountability by pointing to their free-will choices that have contributed to the present condition of this world. Non-Calvinists believe that God can say to an Atheist that they *made* their choice, against God's wishes for them.

One particular danger involving Calvinistic vulnerability to Atheism deals with an assumed election, in which such an *assumption* can lead to doubt in times of moral failure. In other words, while non-Calvinists believe that Jesus died for everyone so that anyone who believes in Him can receive the *promise* of eternal life, Calvinists don't believe that Jesus loved and died for everyone but only for a secret, select few, in which Calvinists *assume* that they are one of those secret few. So, when

Calvinists lose faith in their *assumption*, doubting their election can result in doubting Christianity altogether, as one former Calvinist (now Atheist) testifies: "I even began doubting my election in the sovereign grace of Christ, having no real proof for it with which I could satisfy myself (and I had been given several times the spiritual tests given by Peter to see how one's personal spiritual growth lined up with the expectation and assurance of the Scriptures, and probably other passages which I cannot remember right now). ... Richard Coords, thank you for dropping by my little ole blog in the middle of nowhere. Heh, back when I was a Calvinist, people like you were 'the enemy' lol.'"[33] By embracing a new belief-system, the deconverted-Atheist can come to think that they are now more open-minded and willing to embrace reason and logic, when yet the opposite is most likely true. They actually instead become very closed-minded to Christianity and avoid wisdom altogether in favor of arguments exclusively against Christianity in order to engage in self-justification.

[33] Byron Smith, *Why I Doubt Christianity*, February 10, 2011.

ATONEMENT

The reason why Jesus Christ is the only way to God, as per John 14:6, as it relates to the New Covenant, is the fact that there is no solution to human sin apart from the atoning death of Christ. Therefore, an atonement which is limited in scope, such as limiting the number of people who are allowed to *participate* (i.e. Limited Atonement), limits the number of people who are able to become *saved*, and so if God were indeed to limit the number of people who are allowed to become saved, then it could not be truthfully said that God has a universal salvific will, in terms of desiring that every person come to know Him (or that He truly conquered death). Again, the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement makes a divine universal salvific will impossible.

The following outline is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

Here we provide an outline which contrasts the 5-Point Calvinist's view of **Limited Atonement** and the traditional perspective of **Provisional Atonement**.

I. Where We All Should Agree:

a. **The gospel appeal is for all**: The gospel is for every man, woman, boy and girl. We should all agree (unless you affirm Hyper-Calvinism) that all are to be the recipients of the gospel offer.

b. **The atonement is sufficient to save all:** Christ's death is sufficient for all. Everyone should agree that the value of Christ's atoning work is sufficient to cover the sins of every man, woman, boy and girl.

c. **The atonement only benefits those who believe**: Christ's death is only efficacious for those who believe. Every Christian should agree that the saving benefit (efficacy) of the atoning work of Christ is limited to those who believe (regardless of how you think the lost come to believe).

II. Where There Is Disagreement: What is God's intention in the atoning sacrifice of His Son?

a. God's intention is to certainly save people by His Son's death.

i. Held to by **5-Point Calvinists** who conclude His intention is only to effectually save the elect, therefore God's intention for the atonement was limited. (**Limited Atonement**)

ii. Held to by **Universalists** who conclude His intention is to effectually save all, therefore God's intention for the atonement was unlimited and universal. (Not for the purpose of this outline.)

b. God's intention is to provide a payment for all people which is only effective when the individual savingly believes.

i. Held to by **Arminians**, Southern Baptist **Traditionalists** and all other non-Calvinistic believers. (**Provisional Atonement**)

ii. Held to by **Amyraldians** (4-point Calvinists, such as Bruce Ware.[34] -- Not for the purpose of this outline.)

III. Two Positions On The Atonement With Key Biblical Arguments:

a. Limited Atonement (5-Point Calvinism): Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving people from their sin, but since not all are in fact saved, it requires then that he only died for and saved a certain people (i.e. "the elect").

i. **John 10:11, 15:** – Christ laid down his life for his own sheep.

ii. **Acts 20:28** – the church of God which Christ purchased with his own blood.

iii. **Romans 8:31-39** – Christ was delivered up for "us all", which clearly is the elect.

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[34] Portions adapted from "*Extent of the Atonement: Outline of The Issue, Positions, Key Texts, and the Key Theological Arguments*" by Bruce A. Ware, accessed here: http://www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/Extent_of_the_Atonement_by_Bruce_Ware.pdf

iv. **2nd Corinthians 5:15** – He died for "all" that they who live, likely indicating that the "all" for whom he died is the same group as those who believe.

v. **Ephesians 5:25** – Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her.

vi. **Titus 2:14** – Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us from every lawless deed.
[**Rebuttal**: The 5-Pointer must invoke "the negative inference fallacy" in order to appeal to these last 6 passages as proof of their position. "The proof of a position does not prove its converse." One cannot prove that Christ did not die for the whole by showing that He did die for a part of that whole. For instance, in Gal. 2:20, Paul says that Christ died for him, but no one would infer from that statement that Christ only died for Paul. Yes, some passages say Christ died for His own, His sheep, His church, but no passage says He died only for these. His death can be provided for all people while only those who believe are actually saved by His death. His death for His own, then, is part of the larger whole in which He died also for the world.]

b. Provisional Atonement (Traditionalism, Arminianism, Non-Calvinism): Christ died for the purpose of providing payment for the sin of all people making it possible for any and all to be saved. God loves all and wants all to be saved. In His love for all, He sent Christ to provide payment for the sin of all. Belief in Christ is necessary, however, to receive the benefits of Christ's death and be saved. The gospel should be preached to all, and, upon hearing the gospel, any can come because Christ died for the sins of all people in the world.

i. 1st Timothy 4:10 – God is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. So, there is a sense in which Christ is the Savior of unbelievers (i.e., He died for their sin, though they reject His payment on their behalf), yet a special sense in which He is the Savior of believers (by faith, they receive Christ's payment for their own sin).

ii. **2nd Peter 2:1** – refers clearly to unregenerate people as "denying the Master who bought (aor. act. prtc. of agoradzo, "to redeem") them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

iii. **1st John 2:2; 4:14** – Christ is the propitiation for our sins, and not ours only, but also for the "whole world;" and He is "savior of the world." Notice that "world" occurs 28 times in 1 John, 26 of which are used either in a comprehensive sense (e.g., 2:17; 3:17; 4:1, 9) or more narrowly as the world of the unsaved (e.g., 2:15-16; 3:1, 13; 5:19). This makes doubtful that 2:2 and 4:14 refer to a world of the elect.

iv. **1st Timothy 2:6** – Christ gave himself a ransom (antilutron, "a payment") for all.

v. **2nd Corinthians 5:14-15, 19** – One died for all. He died for all that they who live . . . . This indicates that while Christ died for all, only some will live through him. In some sense, the whole world is reconciled through Christ.

vi. **John 3:16; Romans 5:6-8** – indicate God's love for the entire world and that Christ came to save sinners generally.

vii. **1st Timothy 2:4, 2nd Peter 3:9 and Ezekiel 18:30-31** show that God wants all to be saved.

viii. **Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-47; John 6:35, 40; Rom. 10:13** – texts which stress the necessity of the proclamation of the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of the world.

ix. **John 3:18; 12:48** – texts which indicate that rejecting Christ is a further basis for judgment. They can only rightly be held accountable for rejecting what was offered them if a real offer had been made to them.

x. **Romans 8:20-23; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Eph. 1:9-10; Phil. 3:21; Col. 1:19-20** – texts which indicate a far broader cosmic extent of the atoning work of Christ**.**

IV. Two Positions On The Atonement With Key Theological Arguments:

a. Limited Atonement (5-Point Calvinism)

i. **Efficacy Argument:** Scripture teaches Christ came to save His own (Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:14), not merely provide a payment that may or may not succeed in saving people. Therefore, Christ died to actually save, not potentially save.

[**Rebuttal**: See the actual point of disagreement under point II. We disagree over what God's intention was in sending Christ. If God's intent was to actually save people (apart from any condition – like faith) then this argument would be valid. As it is, however, we know that only believers (regardless of the effectuality of the means by which they come to faith) will actually be saved. Therefore, we too can claim that Christ died to actually save those who believe.]

ii. **Sovereignty Argument:** If Christ died for all, and by this paid for the sins of all, then, because God is sovereign and His will cannot be thwarted, all would be saved. Since all are not saved, it must be the case that Christ died for those who are saved (i.e. the elect).

[Rebuttal: Calvinists wrongly define the concept of divine sovereignty as meaning "meticulous deterministic control over everything, including the evil intentions of creatures." The scriptures simply never teach this concept. Instead, divine sovereignty is reflected in God's ability to do whatever He is pleased to do (Ps. 115:3) even if that may include giving the world over to creature's free dominion (Ps. 115:16). God sovereignly decreed not which choice man would

make, but that he would be free to make it. A God less than Sovereign would be afraid to bestow genuine freedom to His creatures (see AW Tozer)[35].]

iii. **Double-Jeopardy Argument:** It would be ethically wrong for God to hold people accountable for paying for their own sin through their eternal punishment if Christ has already paid fully for their sin.

[Rebuttal: See the actual point of contention under point II. This is not a problem for those who hold to the provisional nature of the atonement. Just as the serpent lifted on the pole in the desert was provided for all, it only benefitted the ones who look to it for healing. No one would argue the serpent did not sufficiently provide the means for healing to all simply because some may have refused to look to the provision for healing. This argument requires its adherents to hold to a relatively obscure view called "equivalentism." The argument goes like this: "If Christ's death was substitutionary then He died for particular sins of particular people. And if He died for particular sins then He didn't die for other sins than those." The adherents of equivalentism seem to see a one for one equivalence between our sins and the price of their atonement which ultimately denies the sufficiency of the atonement to save anyone except those for whom it was designed to save. This notion that Christ suffered just so much, a finite amount, in relation to the sins of the elect is

[35]AW Tozer, "God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so," A.W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1961), 110-111.

a position that stands in opposition to the Synod of Dordt and to most of mainstream historic Calvinism (see Phil Johnson and Charles Hodge.[36])]

iv. **Comprehensive payment argument:** If Christ paid for all the sin of all people, then He paid for their sin of unbelief (among other sins). If their sin of unbelief is paid for, then God cannot hold them accountable for their unbelief. But He does, so only the sin of the elect is paid for in Christ's death.

[Rebuttal: Again, this is not a problem for those who hold to the provisional view of the atonement. The provision of payment is made for all but the benefit is not applied until one believes. This argument would be like saying, "If the serpent lifted on the pole provided the means of healing for all, then it provided healing for those who refuse to look at the serpent for healing," which would not make any sense given the conditional nature of the provision. The same is true of Christ's provision on Calvary. Whoever looks to the provision in faith will be healed because the means of healing is provided for all through those given means.]

b. Provisional Atonement (Traditionalism, Arminianism, Non-Calvinism)

i. **Universal Divine Love Argument:** If God truly loves all equally and impartially, and if He truly wants all to be saved, then it is inconceivable and impossible that He would offer Christ to pay for the sin of only some. Universal love of God requires a universal payment.

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[36] *The Nature of the Atonement: Why and for Whom did Christ die?*, accessed here: http://www.biblebb.com/files/MAC/SC03-1027.htm. Charles Hodge taught, "It is a gross misrepresentation of the Augustinian doctrine to say that it teaches that Christ suffered so much for so many; that He would have suffered more had more been included in the purpose of salvation. This is not the doctrine of any Church on earth, and never has been." Accessed here: http://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/for-whom-did-christ-die-by-dr-charles-hodge/

ii. **Universal Gospel Offer Argument:** Since the offer of salvation is clearly to go to all people (e.g., Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), there must be a payment made on behalf of those to whom the gospel offer is extended, otherwise, the offer is disingenuous. If no payment has been made for everyone, then we cannot sincerely say that God offers salvation to everyone. Since we are commanded to preach the gospel to all people as "Christ's ambassadors" (i.e. 2 Cor. 5:20; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8), the unlimited atoning sacrifice of Christ renders this offer of salvation fully and uncompromisingly genuine (e.g., John 6:35, 40; Rom 10:13).

iii. **Limitless Scope Argument:** Christ died for the purpose of providing payment for the penalty of all sinners making it possible for all who believe to be saved (e.g., 1 Tim 4:10; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:14-15). Belief in Christ is necessary, however, to receive the benefits of Christ's death and be saved. The limited atonement position appears to strain the natural and intended meaning of texts.

iv. **Just Condemnation Argument:** Those who hear and reject the gospel that has been genuinely provided and then offered to them are justly condemned for their rejection of that offer. Christ's death for the sins of those who reject him and are condemned (e.g., 2 Pet 2:1) ensures that their judgment for rejecting Christ (which is only part of the full basis for their judgment) is just, because they reject a real gift that is genuine, free and graciously provided and offered to them (John 3:18b).

v. **Cosmic Triumph Argument:** Christ died for the purpose of reconciling all things to the Father. Were Christ to die for the sin of the elect only (or for any partial amount of the totality of sin), this would leave sin that stands outside of His atoning work and hence outside of His victorious triumph over sin. Since sin is not only a penalty that must be paid (which payment is only efficacious by faith) but also a power

that rebels against God's rightful authority and reign, sin's penalty must be paid (so that believers may be saved) but its power must be defeated that all might be conquered and laid at the feet of the Father (Romans 8:20-23; 1 Cor. 15:24-28; Col. 1:19-20). Colossians 1:20 is especially important because it shows two things clearly: 1) the universal scope of the reconciliation wrought by Christ ("all things," "things in earth and things in heaven"), and 2) that this reconciliation is accomplished by the atoning death of Christ ("through the blood of his cross"). That this does not entail universalism is clear because in the very context Paul warns that these believers will one day be holy and blameless only if they continue in the faith (1:23). So, the reconciliation of Col. 1:20 is one in which the rebellion is over, yet God's conquered foes do not share in His glory.

vi. **Part-To-Whole Argument:** Yes, some passages say Christ died for His own, His sheep, His church, but no passage says He died only for the elect, while many others do explicitly say He died for all. His death can be for all people while only those who believe are actually saved by his death. His death for those who believe, then, is part of the larger whole in which He died also for the world.

vii. **Necessity of Saving Faith Argument:** If, as limited atonement proponents say, Christ died actually and certainly to save people (i.e., the elect) and not merely provide the means for their salvation, then it follows that nothing else is needed for the elect to be saved. They are saved because of the full, perfect and finished work of Christ which actually and certainly saved the elect. But is it not true that the elect are born into this world under the condemnation of God, dead in their sin, and facing the impending wrath of God (e.g., Eph. 2:1-3)? Is not saving faith required for the elect to be saved? If so, how can it be said of the death of Christ in itself that by His death alone He saved those for whom He died? As long as one believes that all people (including the elect) are born into this world with the sin of Adam so that until

> anyone savingly believes in Christ he or she remains unsaved and under God's wrath, then we cannot speak correctly of Christ's death as actually and certainly saving the elect. No, even here, the payment made by His death on behalf of whosoever believes renders their salvation possible while that salvation becomes actual only upon their exercising saving faith. If Christ's death, then, is a payment for sin that makes possible the salvation of people, which salvation actually occurs only when they savingly believe, then there is no problem saying Christ's death provided payment for the penalty of all the people in the whole world, because until any believes, he or she is not saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Christ's substitutionary death in behalf of His people is a real and finished work: It is **not dependent upon the human act of faith for success or failure**. When the time comes in God's sovereign providence to bring to spiritual life each of those for whom Christ died, the Spirit of God will not only effectively accomplish that work of regeneration but that new creature in Christ will, unfailingly, believe in Jesus Christ ('all that the Father gives Me will come to Me'). Hence, we are **not saved 'without' faith, but at the same time**, Christ's atonement is not rendered useless and vain without the addition of libertarian free will."*[37]

Our reply:

Phrases like "not dependent" and "but at the same time" is a very cagey response, demonstrating an inherent contradiction in one's attempt at an explanation. By contrast, a clear explanation of a non-Calvinist's understanding of Christ's atonement is made by applying the dichotomy between *available* vs. *applied*.

In the ***available*** vs. ***applied*** dichotomy, advocates for an Unlimited Atonement, including 4-Point Calvinists (a.k.a. "Amyraldism"), explain that the provision of Christ's atonement was accepted by God and made universally *available* to all, but is only individually *applied* when a

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[37] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 191, emphasis added.

given person places their trust in Christ. Until such time, the atonement remains available and unclaimed. Upon death, the availability of the atonement expires. So, if an unbeliever dies in unbelief, then the atonement never ends up getting *applied* to them (i.e. no Double Jeopardy) and they would perish in eternal judgment, despite what otherwise would have saved them, had they received Christ.

By contrast, in Calvinism's doctrine of Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption, the atonement is both available *and* applied (key distinction) to the "particular" elect person, limited to only such elect individuals, apart from having first met any precondition such as faith in Christ. For that reason, 5-Point Calvinists cannot consistently maintain in their system that the atonement is either *available* or *offered* to a non-elect person who has been specifically excluded from such a Limited or Particular Atonement.

Calvinist objection:

What *works* can you possibly perform that can *add* to the perfect atoning work Christ Jesus has finished?

Our reply:

No one can "add" anything to Christ's atonement, but we must meet God's stated *condition* for receiving it, namely, faith in Christ. For instance, when offered a free gift, we do not necessarily add to their gift—rather we simply receive it. God designed for the perfect atoning work of Christ not to become efficacious to any individual ***until*** it is personally received. How do we know this? Simply compare John 3:14-15 with Numbers 21:6-9, in which Jesus provides an Old Testament illustration to explain His eventual atonement. A standard was raised for the healing of all those who were snake-bitten, which was fully operating, but intentionally designed not to save anyone until they looked upon it. Calvinists would call the faith to look upon it as a "work" (apart from Irresistible Grace) but the Bible repudiates the notion of faith constituting a work, particularly at Romans 4:5: "But to the one who **does not work, but believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness…."

Calvinist objection:

If the Atonement is unlimited, then did Jesus pay for the sin of unbelief?

Our reply:

See **IV. a. iv.** above for the Comprehensive payment argument.

Calvinist objection:

In an Unlimited Atonement, isn't it true that Christ didn't actually pay for the sin of *anyone* when He died?

Our reply:

No, because Christ's atonement is not applied to unbelievers, meaning that it does not save without faith. While it is true that Jesus died for everyone, making the atonement *available* to all men, it does not automatically save anyone, since it is not *applied* to any unbeliever. One must believe in Christ in order for it to be applied to them. Calvinists frequently conflate the *extent* of the atonement with the *application* of the atonement. In the Provisionist perspective, Christ's atonement is:

(a) **accepted** by God as a finished work,
(b) **available** indiscriminately to all men,
(c) **applied** individually only by faith.

The provision of Christ's atonement is fully **accepted** by God, and thus *finished* in that respect, just as the serpent on a standard of Numbers 21:6-9 was a *finished work of God* for all who were snake-bitten to come and receive their healing. The atonement is made **available** to all men, so that anyone can come and receive God's free offer of forgiveness. The atonement is **applied** individually only when someone places their faith in Christ. By contrast, in Calvinism's doctrine of Particular Redemption, or Limited Atonement, Christ's atonement is both available *and* applied (key distinction) exclusively only to Calvinism's elect "X" (apart from any precondition, such as believing in Christ). Hence, there is no basis for advocates of a Limited Atonement to meaningfully say that the gospel can be *offered* to Calvinism's non-elect "Y" since they are specifically excluded. Calvinists will retort that it was never owed to them in the first place, but the point remains that it could never be meaningfully *offered* to those for whom it is *excluded* and that's the key point concerning the ramifications of Limited Atonement.

Calvinist objection:

If Jesus had not died to secure the salvation of His people, but instead only died to make salvation *possible*, then there is at least the theoretical possibility that when Jesus was on the Cross, He could have died in vain, if no one had ever chosen to believe in the gospel.

Our reply:

No, because when Jesus was on the Cross, He already had disciples, including the multitudes who believed in Him, not to mention His own mother and His cousin, John the Baptist (who by that time would have been in Abraham's Bosom, described at Luke 16:19-31), together with all of the Old Testament Saints. So, no, the Calvinist objection has no basis in reality.

Calvinist objection:

> John MacArthur: *"The atonement is limited because people go to Hell. … And if you believe in a Universal Atonement—to be logically consistent—then there's no Hell, and no one will be in Hell, and everyone will be in Heaven. If you're going to affirm an Unlimited Atonement, then you really are going to end up as a Universalist, because if He actually died for the whole world, then the whole world is saved."*[38]

Our reply:

Once again, that conflates the universal *availability* of the Atonement with the specific *application* of the Atonement being only for believers. Non-Calvinist "Provisionists" affirm both the existence of Hell and the necessity of the gospel. So, if Jesus died for the sins of those in Hell, *why* are they there? In other words, if Christ died for all, why isn't there universal salvation? The answer is because God set a *condition* for a personal *application* of the Cross, just like with the serpent on a standard at Numbers 21:6-9, in which the standard was made for everyone bitten, though in which a personal application was explicitly *only* for those who met God's stated condition of actually looking upon it. A *provision* was

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[38] John MacArthur, *How is limited atonement true when Scripture teaches that Christ died for the whole world?*, 0:09 – 0:54. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35poj19FXEg&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR1iG7hfbd74yfH4BGSO7IhNLITx9KwGo3riKNe0nNPiD0coD9FBozQ0H54

made and a *condition* was set. So, those in Hell simply failed to meet God's condition of believing in Jesus in order to access His provision for the forgiveness of their sins. The upshot is that those who perish in Hell *didn't have to be there*. They will experience the instant regret of knowing that they could have believed in Jesus and have gone to Heaven, instead. They perish out of "neglect" of "so great a salvation." (Hebrews 2:3-4)

Jesus died for everyone so that no one has to spend eternity separated from the love of God, but people end up there anyway whenever they die in a state of never having accepted Jesus' payment for their sin, and hence the urgency of the gospel message, which is to tell all people about the availability of their salvation. Jesus said, "'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'" (Luke 10:2)

Calvinist objection:

> Loraine Boettner: *"**The Arminian limits the atonement as certainly as does the Calvinist**. **The Calvinist limits the extent** of it in that he says it does not apply to all persons...while the **Arminian limits the power** of it, for he says that in itself it does not actually save anybody. The **Calvinist limits it quantitatively**, but not qualitatively; the **Arminian limits it qualitatively**, but not quantitatively. For the Calvinist it is like a narrow bridge that goes all the way across the stream; for the Arminian it is like a great wide bridge that goes only half-way across."*[39]

Our reply:

Calvinists limit both the *availability* and *application* of the Atonement to only Calvinism's elect, whereas Provisionists only limit the *application* of the Atonement to just believers, though it's *available* to all.

Calvinist objection:

> Why would Jesus die for the non-elect?

Our reply:

That question presupposes that there is such a thing as "non-elect" people, whom God either eternally passed by for grace (i.e. Preterition) or

[39] *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Dallas, Texas: Gideon House Books, 2017), 153, emphasis mine.

predestinated for Hell (i.e. Unconditional Reprobation). Secondly, Jesus likened the atonement of Calvary to Numbers 21:6-9, in which the serpent on the standard was made for all Israel, in order to heal everyone who was bitten. That provision didn't single anyone out, and for that matter, nor does Calvary single anyone out. Calvary is a provision for every person effected by sin, just as the serpent on a standard was a provision for every person bitten by the fiery serpents.

Calvinist objection:

But how can Jesus' death alone give an Arminian *confidence* that you are saved if His death didn't secure the salvation of anyone?

Our reply:

First of all, if Jesus died for *everyone*, then I can know for certain that He also died for *me* in particular, since I am part of the "everyone" that He died for, and thus I can know that He means well for me. I also know that God has established a *condition* for receiving the benefits of His atonement, which is to believe in Jesus. This way, I can know that God *provided* an atonement for me, and also established a way for me to *access* that atonement, simply by His stated condition of believing in His Son. Conversely, if Jesus hadn't died for all, then I could only speculate about His intentions for me and whether or not I would be included in His atonement. Secondly, as for "confidence" in Christ's death, the sight of the serpent on a standard of Numbers 21:6-9 likely gave the snake-bitten people of Israel a great deal of confidence, even though the instructions still required that they look upon it, in order to be healed.

Calvinist objection:

If Jesus died for every individual, then His death was insufficient to save.

Our reply:

Christ's atonement certainly is *sufficient* to save. He simply attached a condition to it, which is clearly stated in John 3:16: "'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him** shall not perish, but have eternal life.'" His condition on *access* does not negate the atonement's underlying sufficiency for those who meet His condition on access, especially since He indiscriminately opens access to "whoever."

The fact is this: Christ's Atonement provides the foundation on which God can forgive a single sin, and for the Atonement to be *unlimited* shows that it is for all people. Otherwise, if Jesus had not died for all, then at most I could only presume or suppose that He died for me in particular. The conclusion, then, is that Calvinists are Christians by *presumption*, presuming to be among the secret elect who Jesus alone had died for, while non-Calvinists are Christians by *promise*, trusting in God's promise to keep His Word to save whoever believes in His Son.

A closing word is needed to address the prerequisite foundation of the Atonement itself since some religions believe that a "ceremonial cleansing" is sufficient to establish peace with God. The fact is, though, that repentance is required, but even that is only meaningful when there is already a prerequisite foundation in place for forgiveness. As revealed in the Old Testament scriptures, the blood of animal sacrifices was a necessary platform, from which repentance could then convey peace with God. Hebrews 9:22 states: "And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." So how would a "ceremonial cleansing" substitute a necessary blood sacrifice? Therefore, some religions turn to martyrdom, as an automatic means of restoration to God. However, martyrdom would only have significance with God if there was already a foundation for forgiveness, as their own shed blood would not be worthy enough to forgive the own sins.

While the platform for forgiveness in the Old Covenant was the shed blood of animals, in the New Covenant, the platform for forgiveness was one particular sacrifice made once and for all. Hebrews 10:10 states: "By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." No additional sacrifices were needed to replace that platform. Jesus became the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Jesus was not a man who became God, but God who became a man. When He raised the dead, opened the eyes of the blind, made the paralyzed to walk and cleansed the lepers, He did so as God who was also a man, and when He endured the sufferings of the Cross, including the punishment which led up to that, He did so likewise as God who was also a man, given that He could have stopped the whole thing at any moment, but chose not to, so that every person could have a platform for salvation, through which, repentance would convey the spiritual properties inherent to His blood sacrifice. 1st John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So, whether it is a matter of ceremonial cleansing, martyrdom, the reservation of certain days for the worship of God, or any other personal dedication toward God, they would only contain meaning if it was something in addition to the already

established foundation of the Cross, and not for the purpose of obtaining salvation or restoration to God, but for the purpose of earthly and heavenly rewards, as they are never a substitute for the atonement of Calvary. Calvary never needs a substitute. Calvary is the substitution which replaces everything that precedes it.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"To be sure, Christ's propitiation on the cross is unlimited in its sufficiency or value. In this sense Christ makes an atonement for the whole world. But the efficacy of this atonement does not apply to the whole world, nor does its ultimate design."*[40]

Our reply:

This reflects the Calvinist maxim that Christ's atonement is "*sufficient* for all, but *efficient* only for the elect." By contrast, non-Calvinists teach that Christ's atonement is *available* for all, but *applied* only to believers. That's a big difference. Saying that the atonement is "available for all" means that anyone *can* be saved, and saying that it is "applied only to believers" means that only believers *will* be saved. As for the Calvinist expression, for Calvinists to say that Christ's atonement is "sufficient for all" is rendered completely meaningless since they also teach that God never intended Calvinism's "non-elect" class to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. In other words, what is the point of saying that the atonement is *sufficient* for all if it was never *intended* for all? It merely comes across as window-dressing for an otherwise dubious doctrine of Limited Atonement.

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[40] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 177, emphasis mine.

AUTHOR OF SIN

This charge first appeared in the *affirmative* by the Gnostic, Florinus (c. 180), which was immediately attacked by Irenaeus (130-200) a church father, who published a discourse entitled: "God, not the Author of Sin." Florinus' doctrine reappeared in another form later in Manichaeism, of which Augustine, was initially a member for nearly a decade before converting to Catholicism.

Calvinists make a lot of denials about the logical implications of their theology, and can become quite indignant whenever non-Calvinists refuse to accept those blanket denials. However, logical implications are part of the reason why many non-Calvinists reject Calvinism, and therefore, baseless denials and appeals to mystery simply won't do.

What does Calvinism teach that draws the charge of implicating God as the Author of Sin? It is the teaching that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass,"[41] including every act of immorality ever perpetrated. The existence of moral evil in our world, therefore, obliges Calvinists to explain how sin could be compatible with the works of a holy God. John Calvin himself wrestled with the matter when he wrote:

> John Calvin: *"…how foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be, not by His will but by His permission…It is a quite frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing, but the author of them…Who does not tremble at these judgments with which God works in the hearts of even the wicked whatever He will, rewarding them nonetheless according to desert? Again it is quite clear from the evidence of Scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as he will, whether to good for His mercy's sake, or to evil according to their merits."*[42]

> John Calvin: *"But the objection is not yet resolved, that if all things are done by the will of God, and men contrive nothing except by His will and ordination, then God is the author of all evils."*[43]

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[41] Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 3, *On God's Eternal Decree*, I.
[42] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 176, emphasis added.
[43] Ibid., 179.

> John Calvin: *"We learn that nothing happens but what seems good to God. How then is God to be exempted from the blame to which Satan with his instruments is liable?"*[44]

> John Calvin: *"Certain shameless and illiberal people charge us with calumny by maintaining that God is made the author of sin, if His will is made first cause of all that happens. For what man wickedly perpetrates, incited by ambition or avarice or lust or some other depraved motive, since God does it by his hand with a righteous though perhaps hidden purpose--this cannot be equated with the term sin."*[45]

Calvinists, who brush back against the accusation that Calvinism necessarily makes God into the author of sin, respond in a number of ways, such as by accusing non-Calvinists of: **(1)** denying God's sovereignty, **(2)** denying that sin has a purpose, **(3)** denying the mystery of transcendence, and **(4)** asserting that non-Calvinists are essentially rationalists. Finally, Calvinists ultimately rest their argument on Circular Logic:

(1) Calvinists allege that unless God sovereignly determines all sin, the world is simply spinning out of control. However, if God requires being the architect and orchestrator of all sin in order to maintain divine sovereignty, then that is a subtle implication that God is neither all-wise nor all-powerful.

(2) Calvinists allege that sin must have a purpose, or else the world would be filled with purposeless sin. However, Calvinists are theologically committed to saying this, or else they would have a purposeless decree. So the fact that Calvinism teaches that God has decreed everything necessitates a belief that everything must have a divine purpose, or else the decree is unintelligent.

(3) Calvinists admit that they do not know, or cannot explain, the mystery behind omni-causation in relation to human freedom in a way that does not implicate God as Chief Sinner and resolve to attribute the solution to divine transcendence. This is also known as Special Pleading.

(4) Calvinists allege that non-Calvinists are rationalists, who hypocritically demand neat and logical answers to their opponent's problems while being perfectly willing to live with their own logical inconsistencies. This is essentially a

[44] Ibid., 180.
[45] Ibid., 181.

> "You Too" fallacy, which alleges that the other side has similar problems, though which is not necessarily the case.

So, the following question emerges from deterministic Calvinism: If "holy" means set apart, in what sense, then, is God set apart from the sin that He allegedly, meticulously decrees for a "purpose"? In response, Calvinism applies the following syllogism: (1) The Bible shows that God is morally good and completely holy; (2) theistic, absolute determinism is biblical; (3) therefore theistic, absolute determinism cannot be cited as a basis to assert that God is morally evil or unholy. The obvious flaw (resulting in Circular Logic) is (2), which is the assumption of the biblical nature of theistic, absolute determinism.

While non-Calvinists agree with Calvinists that God *uses* sin in His plan, disagreement occurs over the suggestion that God *causes what He uses*, since otherwise if God causes what He uses, then He is merely using His *own* moral evil, rather than using someone else's moral evil.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"To be sure, God uses the evil inclinations and evil intentions of fallen men to bring about his own redemptive purposes. Without Judas there is no Cross. Without the cross there is no redemption. But this is not a case of God coercing evil. Rather it is a glorious case of God's redemptive triumph over evil. The evil desires of man's hearts cannot thwart God's sovereignty. Indeed they are subject to it."*[46]

Our reply:

In other words, despite the hideous nature of the suffering of the Cross, Calvary is altogether beautiful in how it accomplishes redemption. In other words, everything comes from God, both good and bad, but since God is good, everything must also be in some way altogether good. The central premise is that everything comes from God, both good and bad, but like most Calvinist arguments, that is simply assumed. God, for His activities, is observably good. It is wrong to simply presume that God is pulling the strings of evil people when yet He may simply be permitting evil people to make their own choices, and then God redeems good from the evil of others. Instead of permitting evil, Calvinism makes God into the mastermind of all evil.

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[46] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 147.

Dave Hunt: *"Would God not be culpable, at least as a partner in crime, for causing man to sin? No, says the Calvinist, because we can't apply our standards to God."*[47]

What do Calvinists believe?

John Calvin: *"What I have maintained about the diversity of causes must not be forgotten: the proximate cause is one thing, the remote cause another."*[48]

Our reply:

Calvinists assert that a proper understanding of divine sovereignty in relation to human freedom requires an understanding of first and second causes, in which God executes sin through *secondary* agents. However, this view suffers from a biblical weakness. For instance, King David had ordered the death of his servant, Uriah, as a first cause, while the act itself was carried out by second causes, such as his general, Joab, and the Philistines, and yet God did not grant David any special defense, but instead directly charged David with murder.

> **2nd Samuel 11:27:** "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD."

> **2nd Samuel 12:9:** "'You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the sons of Ammon.'"

So if God did the same thing with His own decree, by conceiving and decreeing all sin through *second* causes, how would God avoid using the same measuring stick that He also used to charge David with sin? Think of all of the remote causes that David could have invoked: "I didn't kill him! I merely wrote a letter to Joab. The enemy archers are the ones who killed him!" The Calvinist answer is that God can do things that men are forbidden from doing. However, that seems like a weak answer because God not only sets moral standards, but keeps them as well, to serve as a living example of who we are to be and what we are to be like.

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[47] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 312.
[48] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 181.

What do Calvinists believe?

Whoever *commits* a sin must be punished. God never commits a sin. God may *cause* a sin but He never *commits* a sin. There is a difference between what is caused and what is committed.

Our reply:

Calvinists must resort to semantics, by contrasting the concepts of commits vs. causes, all for the purpose of protecting the morality of their theology. In other words, if God, according to Calvinism, decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," and rendered it certain, then it is difficult to envision any meaningful difference between commits vs. causes, because God (according to Calvinism) would be the sole actor in causing whatever is committed. By contrast, if there is autonomous, libertarian free-will, and if God is *interacting* with the self-determined causation of independent agents, then commits vs. causes takes on real meaning, because now God is no longer acting as a solitary determining force.

What do Calvinists believe?

Hypothetically speaking, what is wrong with God being the author of sin? Not that we believe that but what law or what aspect of His nature would God have violated that would make Him *not good* if He had, in fact, actively determined all things, including sin, in a deterministic framework?

Our reply:

John 1:1 states: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That is the law being requested. For God to abandon His own Word is to defy Himself. And for God to defy Himself is to forsake His own divinity. And for God to forsake His own divinity would be to lower Himself to a level unsuitable to be a judge over anyone and on any matter of morality. God must be true to Himself. So if God was to say that He is "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow" (James 1:17) and "in Him there is no darkness at all" (1st John 1:5) such that "He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13), then for God to tempt people, as a factor of having determined all things, either directly or indirectly, by first causes or by second causes, necessarily would make God into His own opposer, and a Satan to Himself.

BOASTING

Calvinism teaches that if you freely chose to believe in Christ, while others did not, then you'd have something to boast about before God. In other words, you could claim to be better and smarter than others who foolishly ignored the gospel message. The irony, though, is that God actually encourages *some* boasting:

> **Jeremiah 9:23-24:** "Thus says the Lord, 'Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but **let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me**, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD."

We are *not* to boast of our efforts to save ourselves through our performance under the Law, which we are powerless to keep anyway, but we *can* boast of our relationship with God who saves us by grace, simply at the asking. Romans 3:27 states: "Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith." So, boasting is excluded by a Law of Faith, in which God saves those who admit that they cannot save themselves but, instead, through faith alone, rely on the grace of God to save them. The problem with Calvinism, though, is that boasting can only be excluded by one thing—a Law of Irresistible Grace. For the Calvinist, Irresistible Grace alone is what mitigates boasting. The problem with that perspective, though, is that it is an extra-biblical argument, meaning that no apostle ever raised that point. Calvinists, therefore, are arguing from a conviction that is entirely absent of a documented biblical foundation.

Our surrender to God in faith, by humbly confessing our sins and admitting our guilt before Him, does not merit the forgiveness of sins. Instead, it is purely from the grace of God that takes the guilt that would otherwise freely condemn us, and instead uses that admission and plea for forgiveness as the basis to determine for Himself to extend the grace of pardon, merited by the shed blood of Christ at Calvary.

As an illustration, consider the "prodigal son" of Luke 15:11-32. After returning home in his humiliation, and being received by that warm welcome of his father, running to him and embracing him and giving him the golden ring and killing the fatted calf and having the party and hanging out in the corner of the party and bragging to his friends, 'Well, you know, I did come home, after all. You know. I just want to brag about me coming home out of my pigsty. Look how great I am.' It's just silliness. It was

totally and completely the choice of the father to run to him, to embrace him. He didn't owe his son that, on the basis that he came home. He chose to do that because he is a gracious father, and that alone is what saved the son. He deserved to be stoned upon his return, probably, because of what he did to his father. But he was received in grace because the father is gracious.[49]

Calvinists accuse non-Calvinists of boasting of their wisdom and intelligence, in having chosen Christ while others refused, but I don't know of any non-Calvinist who promotes such a thing. Non-Calvinists, instead, often speak of being a sinner saved by grace. Obviously, that is not Irresistible Grace, but rather the grace of God provided at Calvary which provided the means of salvation for the whole world. The irony, of course, is that Calvinists refer to themselves as "elect," not in terms of being a Christian, but "elect" as someone chosen ahead of others.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"We are chosen unto salvation. We are chosen to belong to Him. When you look at your salvation, then thank God. Thank God! Because you are a Christian because He chose you. I don't understand the mystery of that. That's just what the word of God teaches. That is the most humbling doctrine in all of Scripture. I take no credit, not even credit for my faith. It all came from Him. He chose me. He selected people to be made holy in order to be with Him forever. Why he selected me, I will never know. I'm no better than anyone else. I'm worse than many. But He chose me."*[50]

> John MacArthur: *"To whom do you owe your salvation? You owe it to the God who chose you. You owe it to the God who predestined you. You owe it to the God who redeemed you, the God who forgave you, the God who wanted you to be His own because He wanted you to be His own. It doesn't give any other reason, even though we are so unworthy, so unworthy."*[51]

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[49] *Dr. Michael Brown with Leighton Flowers on Soteriology101*, 43:04-43:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVuT2FkxE1w

[50] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

[51] Ibid., emphasis mine.

Our reply:

From the Calvinist perspective, Irresistible Grace is the only thing that mitigates against boasting in ourselves because Irresistible Grace is administered *without human consent*. So, in place of the gospel of coming to salvation through faith in Christ is this romantic notion of God having secretly picked certain people from eternity to believe. The problem is that this type of thinking ultimately *systematizes* pride. It doesn't remove it, but rather builds it up and justifies it, which is then masked in false humility.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Dustin Benge: *"I hear people say, 'I am a Christian, because I made a decision for Christ.' The Bible never directs us to base our assurance on a decision, but on the finished work of Christ on the cross. Never rob God of glory because you want to take credit for making a decision."*[52]

Our reply:

Salvation requires more than the "finished work of Christ" alone because the atonement is *not applied to unbelievers*, or else if it was, then people would be automatically saved before they ever heard and believed in the gospel. John 3:16 explicitly sets a *condition* for eternal life. If one does not meet the condition, they don't get saved, and the condition involves a decision, and the decision involves believing in Jesus Christ as savior. Moreover, your *decision alone* doesn't save you, any more than the *atonement alone* saves you. Both are necessary, and Jesus said: "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For **by your words** you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." (Matthew 12:36-37) Additionally, it is never a matter of "robbing God" to say that you made a decision to trust in *someone else* to save you. By proclaiming that someone else saved you, you are deferring credit and glory *to them*.

[52] Twitter post, Dustin Benge@DustinBenge, 9/7/2020.

BORN AGAIN

This is one of the most famous terms in all of the Bible. Preachers often echo this divine imperative during evangelism: "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. You must be born again." What does it mean and why do we need it? It means new life from God, eternal life, and we need it in order to live a holy life as God intended.

> **John 3:3-8:** "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born again** he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit** he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is **born of the Spirit** is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, "**You must be born again**." The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is **born of the Spirit**.'"
>
> **1st Peter 1:3-5:** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be **born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."
>
> **1st Peter 1:22-23:** "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been **born again** not of **seed** which is perishable but **imperishable**, that is, **through the living and enduring word of God**."

The relevance to Calvinism is that Calvinists teach that due to the Fall of man (i.e. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden), no one is able to believe in or accept the gospel (i.e. the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity or Total Inability) unless they are first made Born Again—secretly, without their conscious knowledge of it—with the result that the reborn convert (pre-selected through Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election) will now not only be *able* to receive the gospel, but will be remade to *irresistibly* want it (i.e. the Calvinist doctrine of

Irresistible Grace). This is also how the doctrines of TULIP Calvinism are linked together. The key question, though, is not whether it is logically connected but whether it is biblically correct.

Non-Calvinists *agree* with Calvinists on the absolute imperative of being made "Born Again," and also on the fact that we cannot make ourselves Born Again, since that is something that only God can do, but where we *disagree* is over the question of whether there is a *requirement* made by God that we must fulfill before He will make us Born Again. The requirement is receiving His Son. God will give no spiritual blessings apart from it. (Ephesians 1:3) Jesus said, "I am the way" and He is. (John 14:6)

> Doug Sayers: *"Whatever it means to be born again, both sides of our debate would agree that we couldn't make ourselves born again. It is not in our power and we are never commanded to make ourselves born again. Thus, the real question before us is whether there is a requirement, which we must meet before God will make us born again. The Calvinistic answer to this question is 'No. There is no requirement'. We saw the same in their view of reprobation. In their system, there is nothing that anyone can (or should) do to be born again, and there is nothing that anyone can (or should) do to be reprobate. The Calvinist insists that there is absolutely nothing, which God requires of sinners before He makes them born again. They only need to be chosen for it…based on nothing in themselves. Again, God would be making people born again against their present will. Once again, I trust you can see why they have been called fatalists for centuries. They've earned their reputation."*[53]

What do Calvinists believe?

We don't come to Christ that we may *become* Born Again. We are made Born Again *first* so that we can come to Christ.

Our reply:

Non-Calvinists *disagree*. If a person comes to Jesus, then and only then (and certainly not before) will they be given: (a) salvation, (b) eternal life, (c) the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and yes, also (d) the right and privilege of becoming a reborn child of God with reblown life inside them.

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[53] *Chosen or Not? A Layman's Study of Biblical Election & Assurance* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 300-301.

> **Genesis 2:7:** "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the **breath of life**; and man became a living being."
>
> **John 20:22:** "And when He had said this, **He breathed on them** and said to them, '**Receive the Holy Spirit**.'"

Those who are spiritually dead, cut off and separated from God, can come to Christ and receive new life from Him, in order to be able to walk with Christ, so that they may be able to live as God intended.

Calvinism teaches that there is no human requirement for becoming Born Again, but only that one must be secretly chosen for it.

Question: *So, then, what must a man do to become saved?*

Calvinist Answer: Believe in Christ.

Question: *And how is one able to believe in Christ?*

Calvinist Answer: By first being made Born Again.

Question: *And how is one able to become Born Again?*

Calvinist Answer: Nothing. You must be secretly chosen for it.

So, then, if there is nothing a person can do to become Born Again, except to wait until activation—and becoming Born Again is necessary to believe in Christ—then it follows that there is nothing that a person can do to believe in Christ and become saved, unless they are first activated by forces completely beyond their control. Think about how that might impact evangelism. Calvinists insist that it shouldn't, because evangelism is a command, and moreover your audience might be seeded with Calvinism's elect. For non-Calvinists, though, thinking Calvinisticly would significantly impact their evangelism, and not in a positive way. We already know that Calvinists and non-Calvinists strongly disagree on matters pertaining to evangelism—Calvinists reject what is commonly known as an "Invitation" or the "Altar Call." So, even though Calvinists insist that their theology should not impact evangelism, it evidently does.

CAGE STAGE

There is a certain amount of pride in theology, in terms of a personal interest in getting things correct. Sometimes, this has resulted in a phenomena whereby new converts to Calvinism become aggressive toward non-Calvinist Christians. This phenomena is called a "Cage Stage," in which it would be better if the new convert to Calvinism was locked in a cage than to be released upon the general public, because they are prone to be nasty to others in their new-found, *systemized* pride.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"I've seen it many times. The Cage Stage. A believer's eyes are opened to the majesty of God as the sovereign King of the universe, and their entire life is turned upside down. And for a while, they have more zeal than they have knowledge. We call it the "cage stage." That period in the experience of the new Calvinist where they would be better off kept in a cage until they can gain enough maturity to handle these vitally important topics aright. That time when they are more likely to hurt themselves, and others! You know, when they are all running around smacking someone upside the head with Pink's The Sovereignty of God?"*[54]

Our reply:

One would think that if Calvinism was a transition to greater spirituality that it would be reflected in one's spiritual fruits. Jesus states: "'Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for **the tree is known by its fruit**.'" (Matthew 12:33) Perhaps the "Cage Stage" is a telltale sign of something being terribly wrong.

Sometimes, Calvinists will attribute the "Cage Stage" phenomena to a simple lack of consistency within the mind of a newly converted Calvinist, since if conversion to Calvinism requires divine enlightenment, then the failure of others to similarly convert, should be seen as a factor of the fallen nature, and thus one should be patient with objectors, while they await having their own eyes similarly, divinely opened.

The biggest challenge in correcting errant theology is the hurdle of what people "like, a lot." Two sides may find what they both like, and one side may be right while the other is wrong, but correcting the errant side

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[54] James White, *How to Avoid Cage-Stage-itis*. http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php/2007/09/13/how-to-avoid-cage-stage-itis/

can be extremely difficult if you are working against someone's personal feelings. What can make one side extremely entrenched is if what they "like" is combined with an ounce of biblical truth. The result is that they can become extremely defensive. Calvinism definitely has appeal. It gives its adherents a sense of comfort and confidence. The fact that the Bible can be used to defend Calvinism, can fill the adherent with a sense of righteous indignation as a soldier in the midst of spiritual warfare. Nonetheless, a tree is always known by its fruit. The very fact of "Stage Cage Calvinism" is very telling. The accusations that Calvinists sometimes end up acting like cultists is telling. The charge of "jerky Calvinists" is telling. The fact that John Calvin (a famous promoter of a theology that today bears his name) was himself a murderer, is very telling. The fact that sometimes it is said that the best evidence against Calvinism are Calvinists themselves, is very telling. Again, a tree is always known by its fruit.

CALLING

The Bible refers to "the called of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:6) and "the chosen of God" (Titus 1:1), perhaps to emphasize that, as Christians, we each have a divine purpose, relative to our unique gift from the Holy Spirit and our appointed vocation within the body of Christ.

- Non-Calvinism: The "called" refers to Christians.

- Calvinism: The "called" refers to Calvinism's elect-unbelievers who are irresistibly given/drawn to become believers.

So, what does the Bible tell us about the identity of "the called"?

> **Romans 8:28:** "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to **those who love God**, to those who are **called according to His purpose**."
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> **1st Corinthians 1:18, 23-24:** "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God. …but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to **those who are the called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."
>
> **Ephesians 4:1-3:** "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to **walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called**, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
>
> **1st Thessalonians 5:24:** "**Faithful is He who calls you**, and He also will bring it to pass."
>
> **2nd Timothy 1:9:** "Who has saved us and **called us with a holy calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."
>
> **2nd Peter 1:10:** "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to **make certain about His calling and choosing you**; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble."

> Robert Shank: *"We have observed that the Gospel call is to all men alike, and that those who answer affirmatively become in a particular sense 'the called."*[55]
>
> Stephen Hitchcock: *"The call of God on our lives has not saved us, but our answer to that call by faith has. This is a huge difference. Consequently, the Calvinistic doctrines of grace are enemies to the doctrines of faith. This is because Calvinistic doctrine places the emphasis on Effectual Call as the singular determinate, in our subjective experience, in which a person becomes saved -- not their personal faith in Jesus."*[56]

What do Calvinists believe?

All men are called by a **General Call** of the gospel, but only the elect receive an **Effectual Call** which overcomes the sinful fallen condition and guarantees salvation.

Our reply:

(See the discussion on Matthew 22:14, which is a text Calvinists often cite as a basis for their teaching on Two Callings.) In Calvinism, the purpose of an "Effectual Call" serves as an Irresistible Grace in order to secure the conversion of Calvinism's elect-unbelievers. However, Calvinism's "General Call" for its "non-elect" is a little more confusing. For instance, what is its purpose, if it is not to save? Is it simply to condemn or torment? Recall that God, according to Calvinism, does not intend the salvation of its non-elect, nor for that matter does its non-elect have access to Christ's Atonement. So, again, what is its purpose, if none of Calvinism's non-elect will ever be saved by it?[57]

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[55] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 208.
[56] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 131.
[57] See the discussion at 2nd Corinthians 2:15.

CALVINISM

The term "Calvinism" is based upon the systematic soteriology of a man named John Calvin. (1509-1564) Ironically, though, he attributes his theology from another man named Augustine. (354-430)

> John Calvin: "*Further, Augustine is so much at one with me that, if I wished to write a confession of my faith, it would abundantly satisfy me to quote wholesale from his writings. But, not to be too prolix on the present occasion, I shall be content with three or four passages by which it will be established that not even in a single point does he differ from me. From the whole course of the work, it could be established even more fully how solidly he agrees with me in every particular."*[58]

So, why isn't "Calvinism" called "Augustinianism"? Perhaps it is because John Calvin *popularized* Augustine's view, just as Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) popularized the opposition view, which had come to be called "Arminianism," even though opposition to Augustinian Predestination long preceded him, particularly when the early Church fathers (that preceded Augustine) had vigorously defended the biblical concept of "free-will" against the Gnostics who rejected free-will.

"Calvinism" is a teaching that God unconditionally elected and predestined that only certain pre-selected individuals called "the elect" would become believers and be saved. The rest of humanity are termed the "non-elect." Due to the fall of man in the Garden of Eden—which Calvinism teaches was designed by God to happen as part of a "total plan" of all things—effectively keeps the elect and non-elect in their predestined roles. To get only the elect saved—and not the non-elect who were never intended to spend eternity with God in Heaven—the elect are given an Irresistible Grace and a Persevering Grace which overcomes their fallen condition so that they can believe in the gospel, and then remain saved so that they can never fall away. Some Calvinists—not all—teach that Jesus only died for the predetermined elect, rather than dying for all humanity.

The doctrines of Calvinism are referred to as "TULIP" which is an acrostic representing the following:

T: Total Depravity (Total Inability)
U: Unconditional Election (Elective & Adoptive Grace)
L: Limited Atonement (Particular Redemption, Atoning Grace)

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[58] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 63.

I: Irresistible Grace (Regenerative Grace)
P: Perseverance of the Saints (Eternal Security, Persevering Grace)

Total Depravity

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Thus the doctrine of total depravity leads directly to that of unconditional election—a dead man cannot respond to the gospel's appeal."*[59]

This is a teaching whereby unbelievers are incapable of simply believing in the gospel message about Jesus, because all men are born haters of God and enemies of God, which cannot be overcome unless the Holy Spirit first regenerates his nature and makes him preemptively and unconsciously Born Again in order to believe in the gospel.

Unconditional Election

> John Calvin: *"Christ says that the elect always belonged to God. God therefore distinguishes them from the reprobate, not by faith, nor by any merit, but by pure grace; for while they are far away from him, he regards them in secret as his own."*[60]

> John Calvin: *"This way of speaking, however, may seem to be different from many passages of Scripture which attribute to Christ the first foundation of God's love for us and show that outside Christ we are detested by God. But we ought to remember, as I have already said, that the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us is the first love given to us."*[61]

This is the idea that God chooses His sheep. According to Calvinism, God does not want everyone, and those whom He does not want are created fallen so they will never want Him, but those whom He does want are irresistibly made to want Him, and He preserves them in a state that keeps them wanting Him. He only died for the ones He wants.

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[59] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 181.
[60] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 393.
[61] Ibid., 76.

Limited Atonement

> Erwin Lutzer: *"This simply means that Christ did not die for all men in general but gave himself only for the church, the elect."*[62]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"If God from all eternity purposed to save one portion of the human race and not another, the purpose of the cross would be to redeem these chosen ones to himself. We can know whether we belong to that number."*[63]

However, it does not appear that John Calvin actually believed in the doctrine of a Limited Atonement:

> John Calvin: *"That Christ, the redeemer of the whole world, commands the Gospel to be preached promiscuously to all does not seem congruent with special Election. ... But the solution of the difficulty lies in seeing how the doctrine of the Gospel offers salvation to all. That it is salvific for all I do not deny. But the question is whether the Lord in His counsel here destines salvation equally for all."*[64]

> John Calvin: *"Therefore Christ intends that the benefit of his death should extend to everyone; so people who exclude anyone from that hope of salvation are doing Christ a disservice."*[65]

> John Calvin: *"It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world."*[66]

Irresistible Grace

> John Calvin: *"Hence it follows, first, that faith is not produced by us but is the fruit of spiritual new birth. For the evangelist says that no one can believe except he who is born of God. Therefore faith is a heavenly gift. Moreover, faith is not cold and bare*

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[62] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 183.
[63] Ibid., 187.
[64] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 102, 103.
[65] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 40.
[66] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 148.

knowledge, for no one can believe unless he is born again by the Spirit of God."[67]

Perseverance of the Saints

Erwin Lutzer: *"Historic Calvinism stresses the 'perseverance of the saints,' namely that true believers never fall away, and if they do, it is not for long. If a person fails to continue in the faith, he is giving proof that he was never saved."*[68]

[67] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 24.
[68] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 231.

CAUSATION (FIRST AND SECOND CAUSES)

If your question to Calvinists includes, "Did God decree (insert real situation)", then the answer is "Yes," but which Calvinists wish for you to consider from the perspective of **First Causes** and **Second Causes**, which Calvinists believe would ultimately exonerate God from culpability.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."*[69]
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> John Calvin: *"First, it must be observed that the will of God is the cause of all things that happen in the world; and yet God is not the author of evil."*[70]
>
> John Calvin: *"For myself, I take another principle: Whatever things are done wrongly and unjustly by man, these very things are the right and just works of God. This **may seem paradoxical at first sight** to some...."*[71]
>
> John Calvin: *"Further what I said before is to be remembered, that since God manifests His power **through means and inferior causes**, it is not to be separated from them."*[72]
>
> John Calvin: *"But where it is a matter of men's counsels, wills, endeavours, and exertions, there is greater difficulty in seeing how the providence of God rules here too, so that nothing happens but by His assent and that men can deliberately do nothing unless He inspire it."*[73]

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[69] Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter III - *Of God's Eternal Decree*.
[70] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 169.
[71] Ibid., 169, emphasis mine.
[72] Ibid., 170, emphasis mine.
[73] Ibid., 171-172.

John Calvin: *"Indeed, the ungodly pride themselves on being competent to effect their wishes. But the facts show in the end that by them, unconsciously and unwillingly, what was divinely ordained is implemented."*[74]

John Calvin: *"Does God work in the hearts of men, directing their plans and moving their wills this way and that, so that they do nothing but what He has ordained?"*[75]

John Calvin: *"But it is quite frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing but the author of them."*[76]

John Calvin: *"For the man who honestly and soberly reflects on these things, there can be no doubt that* ***the will of God is the chief and principal cause of all things****."*[77]

John Calvin: *"But of all the things which happen, the first cause is to be understood to be His will, because He so governs the natures created by Him, as to determine all the counsels and the actions of men to the end decreed by Him."*[78]

John Calvin: *"But the objection is not yet resolved, that if all things are done by the will of God, and men contrive nothing except by His will and ordination, then God is the author of all evils."*[79]

John Calvin: *"Thinking that the difficulty here may be resolved by a single word, some are foolish enough serenely to overlook what occasions the greatest ambiguity; namely, how God may be free of guilt in doing the very thing that He condemns in Satan and the reprobate and which is to be condemned by men."*[80]

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[74] Ibid., 173.
[75] Ibid., 174.
[76] Ibid., 176.
[77] Ibid., 177, emphasis mine.
[78] Ibid., 178.
[79] Ibid., 179.
[80] Ibid., 179.

John Calvin: *"We learn that nothing happens but what seems good to God. How then is God to be exempted from the blame to which Satan with his instruments is liable?"*[81]

John Calvin: *"What I have maintained about the diversity of causes must not be forgotten: the **proximate cause** is one thing, the **remote cause** another."*[82]

John Calvin: *"Certain shameless and illiberal people charge us with calumny by maintaining that God is made the author of sin, if His will is made **first cause of all that happens**. For what man wickedly perpetrates, incited by ambition or avarice or lust or some other depraved motive, since God does it by his hand with a righteous though perhaps hidden purpose--this cannot be equated with the term sin."*[83]

John Calvin: *"Must we then impute the guilt of sin to God, or invent a double will for Him so that He falls out with Himself? I have shown that He wills the same as the criminal and the wicked, but in a different way. So now it is to be maintained that there is diversity of kinds while He wills in the same way, so that out of the variety which perplexes us a harmony may be beautifully contrived."*[84]

Our reply:

A **First Cause** involves an *active* agent while a **Second Cause** involves a *passive* agent, such as permission. It is useful to consider the examples involving the Book of Job, King David and also the Prodigal Son according to Luke 15:11-32:

Job 2:3: "The Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although **you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause**.'"

[81] Ibid., 180.
[82] Ibid., 181, emphasis mine.
[83] Ibid., 181, emphasis mine.
[84] Ibid., 184.

God permitted Satan to enter Heaven and blaspheme God and Job, and also to harm Job and his family. God is only the **Second Cause** because He is merely inactively permitting things to continue, within certain defined parameters, until the end of the book when God intervenes. Sure, God could have stopped Satan from entering Heaven, but that alone did not cause Satan's actions. Satan is the **First Cause** of entering Heaven, motivated by his own jealousy of God's protection of Job, and then of blaspheming both God and Job, and finally of harming Job and his family. Satan is the **First Cause** of all of his own thoughts, and God is merely the **Second Cause** of allowing Satan to think for himself and to devise his own evil plans.

In Calvinism, though, it's the reverse. Recall that Calvinists tell us that the answer is "Yes" to all questions to Calvinists, regarding whether, "Did God decree (insert real situation)." So, if we were to ask Calvinists, "Did God decree (every *thought and intention* that the devil and the demons will ever think, for all eternity)," we are told that the answer from Calvinists is "Yes." So, then, according to Calvinism, God exhaustively and unchangeably causes all of Satan's thoughts and intentions, as the true secret mastermind behind all of Satan's evil actions recorded the Book of Job, scripting everything to occur precisely as it unfolded. Such would hardly exonerate God from moral guilt. However, God *would* be absolved of moral guilt if He was simply passively allowing an independently party, namely Satan, to think and act according to his own will and intentions.

As an analogy, imagine if I created an evil robot who thinks only the thoughts that I program for it to think. The evil Terminator robot then goes around killing people. Who do you suppose people will hold *most* responsible? Is it me, or the robot I made that unfailingly executes my program? The answer is that it would be me. A Hit-Man analogy also applies. If I were to hire a Hit-Man to shoot and kill my wife, who would the courts hold *most* responsible? The answer is the person who hired the Hit-Man. So, Calvinism's conception of First and Second Causes does not achieve its intended goal of exonerating God from being the "Author of Sin," in light of having allegedly decreed all sin.

> **2nd Samuel 11:14-15:** "Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter, saying, '**Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die**.'"

> **2nd Samuel 11:24-25:** "The messenger said to David, 'The men prevailed against us and came out against us in the field, but we pressed them as far as the entrance of the gate. Moreover, the

> archers shot at your servants from the wall; so some of the king's servants are dead, and your servant Uriah the Hittite is also dead. Then David said to the messenger, 'Thus you shall say to Joab, "**Do not let this thing displease you, for the sword devours one as well as another**; make your battle against the city stronger and overthrow it'; and so encourage him."'"

The Bible is honest about biblical heroes. Their lives are to teach us and be examples of what to do and not to do. In this case, the death of Uriah was planned and premeditated, though the evil Philistines, not David, were the ones that were designed to be the **Second Cause**. So, would Calvinists be willing to say that David did not sin, after all, since he was merely the **First Cause**, using a **Second Cause** to carry out the act of murder? God certainly felt that it was a sin, and instructed the prophet, Nathan, to tell him exactly that. (2nd Samuel 12:1-15)

Next consider the example of the father of the Prodigal Son, we find that the father allows his son to leave with his demanded share of the inheritance:

> **Luke 15:11-13:** "And He said, 'A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.'"

So, the **First Cause** of leaving is with the son. The father is the passive agent in his son's departure. The father is the **Second Cause** because he could have put a stop to it. In other words, if the son uses his father's money to do evil things, then the father is somewhat responsible, since he gave him the money, but the father is morally innocent because he is not causing his son's evil spending. That is an extremely important point. Notice the comparison to Job 2:3, in which God similarly took responsibility for allowing Satan's demands to proceed, but God was nonetheless morally innocent because He wasn't causing Satan's evil thoughts and intentions. Similarly, in the case of the Prodigal Son, it is the son who is the **First Cause** of all of his own debauchery since the father didn't cause him to desire any of that, nor to even leave in the first place, and his father was certainly glad to see his repentant son return home. This is the true way in which God's sovereignty and holiness are both reasonably preserved. Calvinism cannot say the same.

> **Ezekiel 28:15-17:** "'**You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was *found* in you**. By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings, that they may see you.'"

In terms of God's preserved holiness in non-Calvinism, realize that while God created the angel, Lucifer, it was Lucifer who killed and created Satan in his place, "from a certain point of view." God didn't create Satan. God created Lucifer as an autonomous, libertarianly free being. Lucifer then used his God-given freedom to rebel and worship himself over God, thus becoming Satan. **Therefore, iniquity was "found" (not placed) in him.** God-given freedom grants created-beings the ability to be self-determiners. As self-determiners, we bear the responsibility for that which we cause. God is no more responsible for our sins, than a father who chooses to have a son, is responsible for that son's own sins.

What do Calvinists believe?

When we speak of God's decrees concerning humanity, we speak of how God and man relate to sin. Therefore, texts such as the one involving David's arrangement for Uriah is not applicable since it involves dealings between two men.

Our reply:

So, we cannot use the Bible as a guide? The human experience does not properly equip us to be able to relate God? Is that saying that God does not live up to the standards that He declares for humanity? It would seem that Calvinism sets up God to be hypocritical. In non-Calvinism, however, God lives what He preaches, and is the ultimate guide and example for those who would follow Him. We are made in God's image; hence, He is who we should strive to be like and who wants us to reason together with Him.

Calvinists use the same logic when defending against the charge raised from Luke 10:30-37. When pointing out that Calvinism's doctrine of "pass by" Preterition is akin to the "pass by" cold indifference of the priest and the Levite, rather than like the compassion of the good Samaritan, Calvinists point out, essentially, that God's will does not

operate on the same level as ours. In other words, we cannot make that comparison. However, God doesn't shun the example of the good Samaritan for Himself; He lives it. Jesus lives out His words, rather than living in defiance of what He commands us to do. Therefore, it seems that Calvinism's **Second Causes** explanation is untenable, when used to defend against the charge that Calvinism renders God as the Author of Sin.

CHOICE PRINCIPLES

If there was a decree by which every thought, word and deed for all humanity was predetermined, then all of our choices would not be independently our own, and without independent choices, you could have genuine love or human responsibility. Ultimately, in Calvinism our choices are seemingly unimportant to God, since we make no independent choices. Conversely, in the Bible, our choices matter a great deal to God. The angels had a choice, and their respective choices determined their eternal destination. Adam and Eve had a choice, and a poor choice led to the fall of humanity. God is a God who searches the heart, which would be because God created us with intelligence, creativity and imagination. Otherwise, what would be the point of God searching our hearts if He already determined what He searches, as per Calvinistic determinism?

> Adrian Rogers: *"God is a God who gives us the choice. Now I want to give you some Choice Principles. You are free to choose God. God says, 'I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.' Here you're in the Valley of Decision. There's a mountain of misery and a mountain of mercy. You can choose. You are free to choose. Now, I am a Calvinist to the degree that I believe that God is sovereign. But I am not a Calvinist to the degree that I believe that God does not enable anybody to choose, or that God chooses for anybody. God gives you the choice. You must choose. And God says to all of us, 'Choose you this day.'"*[85]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Your responsibility is your response to His ability. ... Now you must choose. Listen, you can't do it without Him; He will not do it without you. You must yield. ... When temptation comes, you must yield, and you will yield. That much is settled. The only question is, which way you will yield? Will you yield to Satan, or will you yield to Christ?"*[86]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Jesus came to deliver you. Jesus came to set you free. He came to give you peace and power, forgiveness of sin and a home in heaven, but He will not force it upon you. The same God that gave to Lucifer the power of choice, gives to you the power of choice. 'Choose you this day whom you will serve.'"*[87]

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[85] *Choices Made in the Valley of Decision: Joshua 8:1*, 1996.
[86] *Abounding Victory Thru Amazing Grace: Romans 6:6-7*, 1994.
[87] *From the Palace to the Pit: Ezekiel 28:8*, 2004.

Calvinist objection:

So do you think you are good enough to choose God?

Our reply:

Yes, because if we couldn't, then we would be utterly evil and demonic. Even lost people sometimes choose good things. An alcoholic, for instance, entering AA is capable of admitting that they have an addiction and need help. Moreover, choosing God is indeed a *moral* choice, between choosing good over evil, and Jesus will one day say of the redeemed: "Well done, **good and faithful slave**. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21)

Notice how the Bible contrasts a *voluntary* choice versus an *involuntary* forced-choice involving a stewardship, in which by contrast, free-will volunteerism results in a "reward" or "award" in the form of a crown of righteousness:

> **1st Corinthians 9:17:** "For **if I do this voluntarily**, I have a **reward**; but **if against my will, I have a stewardship** entrusted to me."

> **2nd Timothy 4:8:** "In the future there is laid up for me the **crown of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will **award** to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

The meaning of "voluntary" would be invalidated if humanity did not possesses an independent will to form self-determined choices, and with that, the concept of a reward/award would be lost as well.

Calvinist objection:

Who has the final say in salvation? Who makes the decisive choice? God or man? A God-centered theology rests the choice with God, while a man-centered theology rests the choice with man.

Our reply:

God determined that salvation would be given to those who believe in His Son, while mankind determines whether to act on God's free gift. When Calvinists conflate those two choices, that is, man's choice and

God's choice, as if they were one and the same, it leads to confusion and misrepresentation, as if God was not only choosing the condition of eternal life, but also choosing who will and won't meet it. Such thinking is the product of skepticism, producing an outlook of fatalism, resulting in a concept of inevitability, as if all things are as they are by design, such that whatever will be, will be. Calvinism is thus a "Que sera sera" theology.[88]

Calvinist objection:

What is required for salvation in free-will, in terms of what percentage or ratio is performed on my own apart from God? In Pelagianism, salvation is perhaps accomplished in a 50/50 ratio, of God's choice and man's choice. God takes the initiative through Calvary and the message of the gospel, and man must respond to receive it, in order for it to be personally applied, which means that man's response is ultimately the determining factor in his salvation. In Semi-Pelagianism, or other forms of Arminianism, the best case scenario is that salvation is accomplished in a 99/1 ratio, but which still means that man has a hand in his own salvation, and thus salvation cannot be said to be 100% of God.

Our reply:

In other words, Calvinists normally think in terms of Irresistible Grace, such that God contributes 100% to salvation and man contributes 0%, since regeneration (in Calvinism) does all 100% of the work. So, Calvinists devise *other ratios* in their conversations with non-Calvinists, asking whether God contributes 99% for providing salvation and then man contributing 1% for choosing to believe in Christ—or in some cases being 50/50. Realize that all of this stems from the Calvinist's perspective that, apart from Calvinism, if we were able to freely choose to accept the free gift of salvation from God, then we would be contributing some percentage of our own to salvation.

As an analogy, the next time when the Calvinist's significant-other presents them with a gift, ask them to tell their significant-other that they cannot—in good conscience—accept the gift, on the grounds that if they were to freely accept it, then any free acceptance of the gift would naturally contribute some percentage to their gift, thus accruing credit for themselves, simply by accepting it, and hence it would no longer remain a true gift. Accepting the gift could even establish themselves as their own "gift-giver," because they never would have received the gift if they had not said "yes" to it. The absurdity should make the point.

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[88] This comment refers to a 1956, Doris Day song.

The simple reality is that everyone is 100% responsible for their own choices. God is 100% responsible for providing salvation and man is 100% accountable for whether or not they receive it. As an illustration, citing the parable of the Prodigal Son, it was 100% the son's choice to ask to leave with his share of the inheritance, and it was 100% the father's choice to allow him to go. It was 100% the son's choice to squander his fortune, and 100% the son's choice to return home in disgrace, and then 100% the father's choice to receive him back as a son. Everyone is 100% responsible for their own choices. The father had no moral obligation to take his son back but did so anyway out of the graciousness of his heart.

Similarly, Calvary was not owed to anyone but was 100% God's choice to provide forgiveness, simply out of the graciousness of His heart, and He regularly raises up servants to spread His message of reconciliation. Man's choice to either receive or reject God's gracious gift is also 100% their own choice, with the result being that man becomes 100% accountable for his own choice.

Additionally, no matter how many people may *help* you to receive Christ, either by witnessing to you, or praying for you, or living a godly example to encourage you, ultimately you still have to make your *own* choice, and your choice remains 100% your choice.

Life is indeed about choices, but our environment can also affect those choices. While sometimes we can't help our environment, sometimes we can. At some point, our choices can greatly affect our environment. If we choose the baser things of this world, then our environment can come to reflect such baser choices. Conversely, if we choose to immerse ourselves in the things of God (i.e. going to Church, reading the Bible, prayer, ect.), our environment can come to reflect those choices as well. Moreover, someday in Heaven, we will learn that throughout all our lives, we were under various influences—some good and some bad. We will learn that God had been speaking to us our whole life. If we choose the wrong things, then it has the effect of drowning out God's voice, in exchange for hearing a different voice, and one with far less wisdom than what it otherwise portrays. Given these influences, and the impact of our own choices affecting our successive choices, it must be concluded that despite whatever nature we were born with, life is dynamic, rather than static. Our nature is ever-changing, either for good or for bad. God warns us not to harden our heart. So, if our heart is indicative of our nature, then we can affect our nature. Moreover, even if we are on the wrong path, and with a worsening heart and nature, we can change that, even by as little as a choice, because good moral choices forms good moral character. We end up hearing the voice of God afresh and come under the influence of God, leading to new courses of action. Of course, the old nature can creep back

in as well. So, our choices, our environment, outside influences and our nature are all dynamic and constantly changing.

CHURCH SPLITS

Church Splits occur when a significant portion of a church leaves to form a separate church. Calvinism is a common cause of such splits. It usually occurs when a new pastor is hired and conceals their theology, with the secret intent to change the church into a Calvinist church.

Founders Ministries, a Calvinist group within the Southern Baptists Convention, advocates using the following strategies in order to turn a non-Calvinist church into a Calvinist church:

> *"Don't tackle the whole church at one time. Choose a few men who are sincere, teachable and spiritually minded and spend time with them in study and prayer. They will help you to reform. ... In the pulpit, don't use theological language that is not found in the Bible. Avoid terms such as Calvinism, reformed, doctrines of grace, particular redemption, etc. Most people will not know what you are talking about. Many that do will become inflamed against you. Teach your people the biblical truth of these doctrines without providing distracting labels for them. ... Set up a book table in your church. Start with little things at first, that is, pamphlets and books with some doctrinal and experiential substance. ... Check the history of your church to see if it has any early constitutions or declarations of faith. Often you will find, particularly in older churches, a statement expressing the doctrines which you desire to establish. A gracious appeal to such a document will help give you credibility. ... Since nothing in this mortal life is more important than true religion in the soul and in the church, reformation should be diligently sought after, and carefully looked into. It is not enough to pout and complain about what is wrong in the visible church, but we must be occupied in reforming and restoring what is right and biblical."*[89]

It's odd that Calvinists would need to employ such subterfuge, especially when they claim to have "Irresistible Grace" on their side. Is such chicanery therefore deemed as *the means*?

> Roger Olson: *"Some Calvinists are attempting to impose Calvinism on Christian organizations that have traditionally been neutral with regard to Calvinism and Arminianism and have included both. They are often doing this under the guise of*

[89] Founders: *Walking Without Slipping: Instructions for Local Church Reformation* https://founders.org/library/quiet-revolution/walking-without-slipping/

warding off open theism. Arminians need to band together, in spite of our differences over things like open theism (whether it's a legitimate evangelical option or not) and push back when this happens."[90]

Bruce McLaughlin: *"SBC Seminaries and Bible Colleges are riddled with Calvinist faculty sending a steady stream of Calvinist pastors into predominately Traditional congregations. If the Calvinist pastor has the courage of his convictions and tells the truth about his beliefs, he will either fail to find employment or split a church. A new strategy has evolved based on stealth, subterfuge, deceit, guile and duplicity employed, of course, with God's approval for the 'greater good.' This strategy is to suppress the issue of Calvinism in all local churches. If the topic surfaces in a church in spite of the pastor's best efforts to suppress it, he may try to convince the congregation that each individual's choice is simply a matter of personal preference, like whether to wear brown shoes or black shoes to church; no one must be allowed to express the possibility that Calvinism is blasphemy at its core. Because some local churches may see through this subterfuge, other strategies have been introduced with the hope of 'tap dancing' around the core conflicts. These strategies include: (1) undermine all discussion and teaching on this issue and thereby maintain a level of ignorance within congregations and particularly within pastor search committees, (2) subordinate the importance of this issue to church growth, music, other entertainment and family ministries, (3) argue that the seriousness of the conflict is contrived in the sense that a Traditional pastor is really no different than an evangelical Calvinist pastor who believes in unconditional election, limited atonement and irresistible grace, (4) utilize Seminaries and Bible Colleges to convert Christians to Calvinists, (5) avoid Articles of Faith that clarify the denominational position, (6) assert the simultaneous validity of both Calvinism and Traditional Baptist beliefs using a type of logic popular among intellectual elite called 'positive tolerance,' (7) claim to be above the fray by just 'believing in the Bible' and (8) assert the sovereignty of God and the free will of man are like two parallel lines that meet at infinity."*[91]

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[90] Roger Olson, *Beware of Stealth Calvinism!*
https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2014/07/beware-of-stealth-calvinism/
[91] Bruce McLaughlin, *Corruption Of The Southern Baptist Convention*
http://www.christianapologetic.org/TheologyCorner.aspx

> James Leonard: *"In my own case, as an interim music minister, I served under a new pastor at a thoroughly semi-Arminian congregation. That is to say, there was no one in the congregation who held to limited atonement or unconditional election, and everyone in the congregation would have dismissed such notions as pure unbiblical non-sense. Yet the new pastor came to the church already fully committed to Five Point Calvinism. We'll refer to him as Pastor X. Pastor X taught Calvinism on the sly. He could not come right out and declare, 'Jesus died only for the elect! Jesus did not die for everyone!' Rather, he would say, 'Jesus died for the sins of his people.' Of course, this language was nothing but pure obfuscation, but it duped the congregation to affirm his comments with many amens. Pastor X could not teach Calvinism directly. He had to situate his theology at an angle, attempting to wedge it into the congregation in order to get some future leverage."*[92]

The root of such Calvinist-activism may, in part, be due to Calvinists taking in the dogmatic writings and statements of leading proponents of Calvinism and then come to perceive Calvinism as "the gospel" itself, with the result that they, then, take on an aggressive mission to "reform" Christian non-Calvinists. For such adherents, Calvinism comes to dominate their entire Christian *identity*.

Part of the insidious nature of Calvinism is that sometimes Calvinist pastors will try to disguise their Calvinist theology in a cloak of orthodoxy, thus making it easier for their Calvinist beliefs to stealthily work its way through the church *unencumbered*, until it is too late and the damage is done. That is accomplished by invoking intentionally misleading statements and carefully constructed words. For instance, such stealth Calvinists will speak of salvation being "offered to all" and Jesus having "died for sin," but here is what is really meant:

- Calvinism: While salvation is "offered" to everyone, it only extends to Calvinism's elect who alone are given the ability to receive it.

- Calvinism: Jesus "died for sin," but not everyone's sin, since all but Calvinism's elect are excluded from a Limited Atonement.

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[92] James Leonard, *Churches Beware! Calvinism on the Sly!* http://arminianbaptist.blogspot.com/2008/04/churches-beware-calvinism-on-sly.html

So, a person can listen to the statements of Calvinists and think that everything is perfectly fine, but not realize what is truly going on:

> David Allen: *"Furthermore, when high-Calvinists say, 'Christ died for sinners,' the term 'sinners' becomes a code word for 'the elect only.' To be consistent with their own theology, they have to say the deliberately vague statement 'Christ died for sinners.'"*[93]

Here is how John Calvin speaks of the "offer" of the gospel:

> *"Paul makes grace common to all men,* ***not*** *because it in fact* ***extends to all****, but because it is* ***offered to all****. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him."*[94]

> *"But the solution of the difficulty lies in seeing how the doctrine of the Gospel* ***offers salvation to all****. That it is* ***salvific for all*** *I do not deny. But the* ***question*** *is whether the Lord in His counsel here* ***destines*** *salvation equally for all."*[95]

> *"Hence, we conclude that, though reconciliation is* ***offered to all*** *through Him, yet the benefit is peculiar to the elect, that they may be gathered into the society of life. However, while I say it is* ***offered to all****, I do* ***not*** *mean that this embassy, by which on Paul's testimony (II Cor 5:18) God reconciles the world to Himself,* ***reaches to all****, but that it is not sealed indiscriminately on the hearts of all to whom it comes so as to be effectual."*[96]

How is the gospel truly "offered" to those who are purposely excluded from Calvinism's Limited Atonement? Christ's atonement is the only *basis* for the salvation of anyone's sin, and therefore to exclude someone from it, would leave them utterly without hope, without the possibility of ever becoming saved. Such an "offer" of salvation is therefore turned into a cruel hoax. Indeed, Calvinists speak of the gospel being "offered to all" as "salvific for all," but then undermine it by saying

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[93] *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 97.
[94] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 117-118, emphasis added.
[95] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 103, emphasis added.
[96] Ibid., 149, emphasis added.

that it neither "extends to all," "reaches to all" nor was ever "destined for all." It makes absolutely no sense to even speak in such universal terms, if Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace are affirmed, unless the intention was to deliberately be deceptive, in order to make Calvinism more palatable and appealing to a wider, mainstream Christian audience.

What do Calvinists believe?

God's sovereignty means that God is in charge of what is ultimately going to come to pass in the world—not ourselves. God has the final say in everyone's eternal destination—not ourselves. This is what Calvinists mean when they say that God is sovereign. God is in charge—not ourselves.

Our reply:

This is a perfect example. When Calvinists say, "This is what Calvinists mean," what follows sometimes conceals, masks and hides what Calvinists often *really* mean. For instance, when Calvinists say that God determines what is ultimately going to come to pass in the world and determines our final destiny, it sounds totally innocent, like God ultimately ushering in the End Times with the return of Christ and the establishment of God's eternal kingdom on earth, or God determining Heaven as the eternal destination for believers and Hell as the eternal destination for unbelievers, but what Calvinists really mean is that (a) God decrees whatsoever comes to pass, including all sins (in which every single sin committed anytime, anywhere allegedly has its own predesigned purpose), and (b) God determines our final destiny in terms who becomes a believer and who doesn't—via TULIP Calvinism. So, while on face value, the statements of Calvinists can seem to be theologically sound, the problem is the underlying presumptions which are strategically designed to make Calvinism appear more palatable to those who are unsuspecting. Raw Calvinism comes later when the church-split is already in full operation.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

Cognitive dissonance occurs among Calvinists when they try to distance themselves from the inevitable conclusions drawn by the logical implications of their own systematic. One example is that Calvinists insist that God ordains sin, such that, without a divine ordination of sin, sin would otherwise have no purpose, meaning that sin would become merely meaningless and random, whereas in Calvinism, all sin has a specific purpose originating from within the total plan of God, decreed and rendered certain by Him from before the foundation of the world. So, does that mean that God is the "author of sin"? Calvinists deny this. But how? That is a prime example of the cognitive dissonance which frequently occurs among Calvinists when they deny the inevitable conclusions drawn by the logical implications of their own systematic.

COMPATIBILISM

Compatibilism is a Calvinist doctrine which attempts to harmonize divine determinism and human free-will. Calvinists often use this term to claim that they, too, believe in free-will, that is, "compatibilistic free-will." Unfortunately, though, it is a non-free, free-will and hence nothing more than camouflaged determinism.

Compatibilists teach that people will do what is "natural" for them, that is, whatever is consistent with their nature. However, what they often fail to disclose is that they also believe a person's nature comes completely determined, meaning that it is subject to exhaustive, meticulous determinism. Hence, compatibilistic free-will is the antithesis of freedom. Genuine free-will must include autonomy of reason. Only then can a person's choices be uniquely and *independently* their own.

What do Calvinists believe?

Compatibilism is God being God, and man being man.

Our reply:

Compatibilism is God being God, and then also God *playing man* by exhaustively decreeing every man's nature, from which springs all thoughts and intentions. Even by the Compatibilist's own admission, "Compatibilism is no less deterministic than hard determinism."[97] Within the compatibilist's framework, there is no such thing as what the human *really* wants to do in a given situation, considered somehow apart from *God's* desire in the matter (i.e., God's desire as to what the human agent will desire). In the compatibilist scheme, human desire is wholly derived from and wholly bound to the divine desire. God's decree encompasses everything, even the desires that underlie human choices.

This is a critical point because it undercuts the plausibility of the Compatibilist's argument that desire can be considered the basis for human culpability. Ascribing culpability to humanity simply because they are 'doing what they *want* to do,' appears plausible only because it subtly evokes a sense of *independence* or *ownership* on the part of the human agent for his or her choices.

But once we recognize (as we must within the larger deterministic framework encompassing Compatibilism) that those very desires of the

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[97] John Hendryx, *How can God be Sovereign and Man still be Free?* Web site: https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/sovereignfree.html in which this article was endorsed by Phil Johnson of Grace to You.

agent are equally part of the environment that God causally determines, then the line between environment and agent becomes blurred, if not completely lost. The human agent no longer can be seen as owning his own choices. For the desires determining those choices are in no significant sense independent of God's decree.

For this reason, we feel human desire within the compatibilist framework forms an insufficient basis on which to establish the autonomy of human freedom and from this the legitimacy of human culpability for sin. Even John Calvin recognized this problem within the claims of his systematic:

> John Calvin: *"How it was ordained by the foreknowledge and decree of God what man's future was without God being implicated as associate in the fault as the author or approver of transgression, is clearly a secret so much excelling the insight of the human mind, that I am not ashamed to confess ignorance…. I daily so meditate on these mysteries of his judgments that curiosity to know anything more does not attract me."*

As a disclaimer, philosophical Compatibilism should not be confused with the fact that Scripture shows God working compatibly with the intentions of others. For example, in Genesis 37:28 (as it relates to 50:20), God may have steered the Midianite traders nearby to Joseph's brothers because He knew that *utilizing them as an alternative to murdering their brother* would be "compatible" with their intentions and interests, with which God would then facilitate Joseph's rescue, apart from having to use more obvious, supernatural intervention. In other words, saying that two things are compatible is not to say that this makes philosophical Compatibilism true. That would be an equivocation fallacy. For instance, just because a husband and wife's wills are compatible in accomplishing something doesn't mean "Compatibilism" is true.

DEADNESS

What must the spiritually *dead* do, in order to receive spiritual *life*?

> **John 5:40:** "'And you are unwilling to come to Me **so that you may have life**.'"

The answer would seem to be that you have to come to Jesus.

In Calvinism, spiritual deadness implies *unresponsiveness*, whereas in non-Calvinism it deals with a *judicial status* before God.[98] Whereas non-Calvinists speak of humanity as being *lost* and in need of a *Savior*, Calvinists speak of humanity as being *dead* and in need of a *resurrection*. While non-Calvinists treat *faith in Christ* as the solution for a lost world, Calvinists treat *Irresistible Grace* as the solution, but for only Calvinism's elect, in which God never intended for everyone to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. As a result, the following maxim emerges from Calvinism:

> *I was dead and in need of a resurrection.*

Calvinists believe that it is impossible for anyone to turn to Christ apart from the pre-faith regeneration of Irresistible Grace. The key verse in the Bible that Calvinists cite as evidence of the total inability of humanity to receive the gospel is Ephesians 2:1-2: "And you were **dead in your trespasses and sins**, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience." Ironically, though, the text never mentions that mankind is unable to believe in the gospel. For that, Calvinists turn to other texts such as Romans 3:9-13: "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written, 'There is **none righteous**, not even one; there is none who understands, there is **none who seeks for God**; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is **none who does good**, there is not even one.'" The solution given by Calvinists is an Irresistible Grace, which regenerates Calvinism's elect, for whom it is alone designed.

There are at least five primary areas in which the Calvinist view ultimately withers:

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[98] See also the discussion on *Responsibility* and *Total Depravity*.

1. Culturally, being *dead in sin* simply meant being lost.
2. Contextually, being *dead in sin* means separation.
3. Practically, being *dead to sin* does not imply an inability.
4. Eternally, spiritual death does not mean unconsciousness.
5. Evangelistically, the apostles never used the Calvinist maxim.

Culturally, at Luke 15:24, regarding the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father declares: "'…for this son of mine was **dead** and has **come to life again**; he was **lost** and **has been found**.' And they began to celebrate." So, being dead meant being lost, which did not prevent the son from returning home in pursuit of reconciliation. Being dead, culturally speaking, simply meant being alienated.

Contextually, at Ephesians 2:11-13, being dead in sin is illustrated as follows: "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands--remember that you were at that time **separate from Christ**, **excluded** from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers** to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**. But now in Christ Jesus you who **formerly were far off** have been brought near by the blood of Christ." The contextual concept of deadness, according to Ephesians 2:1-13, was not an inability to receive God's gift to return to Him, but rather separation. While it is true from Romans 3:9-12 that fallen humanity does not seek God, the good news is that God seeks humanity, and has positioned Himself as "not far away," according to Paul's sermon to the Athenians at Acts 17:27, specifically so that people can and will seek Him: "'…**that they would seek God**, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though **He is not far from each one of us**….'"

Practically, the Bible speaks of Christians as being dead *to* sin: "Even so consider yourselves to be **dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus." (Romans 6:11) So, if being dead *in* sin means that one cannot respond to God, then does being dead *to* sin mean that Christians cannot respond to sin? Clearly, that doesn't mean that Christians cannot sin, or cannot respond to sin, or that we aren't affected by sin and don't face the temporal consequences of our sin. Calvinists need for spiritually deadness to mean more than it does.

Eternally, Revelation 20:6 speaks of the second death: "'Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the **second death** has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.'" Do Calvinists wish to say

that the "second death" means unconscious, *inability*? Or, will Calvinists agree that it simply means a conscious, *separation* from God?

Evangelistically, no apostle ever presented Irresistible Grace as the gospel's "good news" for the solution to the spiritual deadness of humanity. In Calvinism, Irresistible Grace is the only solution to stand against a works-based salvation, or that which negates boasting. Yet, the Calvinist imperative is completely absent from Scripture. It's made-up.

DECREE

What has God decreed? Does God decree many things, or has God decreed absolutely everything that comes to pass, as per Calvinism? The belief that God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass is what is termed, "exhaustive divine determinism."

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."*[99]

Calvinists insist that exhaustive divine determinism is the essential ingredient for divine omniscience. In other words, Calvinists believe that God knows everything *because* He has decreed everything, and if He hadn't exhaustively decreed everything then He couldn't infallibly know what will happen next, and if God didn't infallibly know what will happen next, then He couldn't have an exhaustive plan and purpose for everything that happens in the future. So for Calvinists, there is a critical, over-arching necessity for exhaustive divine determinism.

Non-Calvinists do not believe that God must decree the future in order to know it. God created time and space, and therefore it is illogical to suggest that God is somehow limited by what He created. Perhaps God exists in another dimension, in which God can know everything that happens in our dimension, without necessarily having to cause it all. Therefore, God can have a plan and purpose for the future without deciding what every creature will choose to do. God can intervene whenever and however He sees it.

What do Calvinists believe?

Tell mankind that he has the freedom to do whatever he wills and no one bats an eyelash. Tell mankind that God has the freedom to do whatever He wills and everyone loses their minds.

Our reply:

The dispute is not over God's freedom. The dispute is over what Calvinists allege that God has done with His freedom. Did God use His

[99] Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter III - *Of God's Eternal Decree*.

freedom to be the Author of Sin? Did God decree all human sin? The Bible shows that God disavows being behind many acts of human sin. Non-Calvinists do not believe that God has made everyone's choices for them, but rather has determined that everyone will be free to make their own choices, within the scope of autonomy and independence that God has granted mankind, that is, either to follow God or to walk away from God. God intervenes how and when He deems fit, according to His own plans and purposes, and ultimately judges all sin on Judgment Day.

Whenever Calvinists and non-Calvinists read the Bible, we carry with us whatever we presuppose to be true about our world and then we mentally situate a given verse within our already established worldview. If one believes that everything has been decreed and predetermined by God from eternity-past, then we will read the Bible from within a somewhat fatalistic mindset, and our various mindsets shape our behavior. Life follows doctrine. We live according to what we believe.

Calvinists believe that if God has permitted someone to do a certain thing, then it's the same as if He had *decreed* it, because He would have to have consciously chosen to allow it, versus not allowing other things, and therefore divine permission is the same as divine determinism. Therefore, God allows only what He has determined to allow. However, just because God allows something, doesn't necessarily mean that He likes what He has allowed. He might hate it! But, He might love the fact that we are free to make our own choices, and what that might mean for His own kingdom. When people freely choose God over the world, then God inherits a kingdom of people who chose to love Him and chose to want to be with Him. Choices are important to God. The angels made choices. Adam and Eve made their choice in the Garden of Eden. As their offspring, we too make our own choices. The Christian Church consists of those who have made their own choice to ultimately reject the world, and to instead seek to be with God for all eternity. God doesn't decree our choices but only that we would be free to make them.

DETERMINISM

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

It is common for Calvinists to accuse non-Calvinists of misrepresenting Calvinism whenever we speak of it as "too deterministic." For instance, Calvinistic apologist Matt Slick, stated in an online debate with Leighton Flowers that he did not believe in determinism, but only later to affirm the statement read from monergism.com which states, "compatibilism is no less deterministic than hard determinism."[100]

Dr. William Lane Craig regularly describes Calvinism as "universal divine causal determinism—God determines everything that happens in the world," and he provides many solid arguments for doing so. One listener brought a similar critique to Dr. Craig:

> *"Question: I believe you really mischaracterize Calvinism. What you are talking about sounds more like Hyper-Calvinism. Because Calvinism actually does affirm free will; I can read chapter 10 of the Westminster Confession of Faith where it actually explains how free will works within that system."*

Dr. Craig's answered by saying:

> *"What I am rejecting is universal divine causal determinism. Now, if Reformed theology rejects compatibilism then I have got no quarrel with it. In fact, when I read much of the Westminster Confession, I resonate with it. The problem is that I don't think that the Reformed theologian can give us a coherent interpretation of Scripture. As I said, the Reformed divines – in my first point – typically say that the reconciliation of these texts is just inscrutable. They can't put them together; it is a mystery."*[101]

What many lesser informed Calvinists seem to miss is that compatibilism, the philosophical system adopted by most notable pastors/scholars leading in the resurgence of Calvinism today, is a form of determinism. It is the belief that God's determinism of all things (sometimes referenced as "sovereignty" or "meticulous providence") is compatible with "creaturely freedom" (defined as creatures acting in accordance with their predetermined natural desires).

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[100] John Hendryx, *How can God be Sovereign and Man still be Free?*
[101] William Lane Craig, http://www.reasonablefaith.org/defenders-2-podcast/transcript/s8-10#ixzz486DZNR4F

Calvinists feel that advocacy of God's determinism of all things is necessary and fundamental to protecting divine sovereignty and divine omniscience. However, the criticism against such a view is that if God truly needed to determine all things in order to maintain both divine sovereignty and divine omniscience, then it would become self-evident that God is not truly all-powerful, all-wise or all-knowing after all. Calvinism, therefore, unwittingly denies the core traits of God's divinity.

While there is no dispute that God determined *some* things, it is denied that God determined *all* things, particularly since God specifically stated that there are some things that He did not do:

> **Isaiah 30:1:** "'Woe to the rebellious children,' declares the Lord, '**Who execute a plan, but not Mine**, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin.'"
>
> **Isaiah 54:15:** "'If anyone fiercely assails you **it will not be from Me**. Whoever assails you will fall because of you.'"
>
> **Jeremiah 32:35:** "'They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which **I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this** abomination, to cause Judah to sin.'"
>
> **Hosea 8:4:** "'**They have set up kings, but not by Me; They have appointed princes, but I did not know it**. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, that they might be cut off.'"
>
> **Zechariah 1:15:** "'But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while I was only a little angry, **they furthered the disaster**.'"
>
> **1st Corinthians 14:33:** "For **God is not a God of confusion but of peace**, as in all the churches of the saints."
>
> **Galatians 5:7-8:** "You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? **This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you**."
>
> **James 1:13:** "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and **He Himself does not tempt anyone**."

> **1st John 2:16:** "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is **not from the Father, but is from the world**."

To summarize:

- Not My plans.
- Not My assault.
- Not My command.
- Not My kings.
- Not My excess.
- Not My teaching.
- Not My persuasion.
- Not My temptation.
- Not My worldliness.

A Calvinist who says that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass" would have a difficult time explaining these things.

Calvinism also doesn't make sense in terms of God's inquiries into mankind. God *examines* hearts. God *tests*. God *evaluates* whether there are any who seek Him. Why do this, if all is determined by decree?

> **Psalms 53:2:** "**God has looked down from heaven** upon the sons of men **to see if there is anyone who understands, who seeks after God**."

> **Proverbs 17:3:** "The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but **the LORD tests hearts**."

> **1st Thessalonians 2:3-4:** "For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but **God who examines our hearts**."

Again, if God meticulously and exhaustively determined our nature, from which our thoughts and intentions arise, what would God be testing and examining when He "tests" and "examines" hearts? Moreover, if there really was determinism in the Bible as Calvinism teaches it, then there is a high probability that the devil would have tried citing it before God, to accuse God of causing his own immorality by divine decree.

DOCTRINES OF GRACE

The term "Doctrines of Grace" is a title Calvinists often use to identify their distinctive doctrines under the acronym for TULIP, such as signifying their belief in Elective Grace, Atoning Grace, Irresistible Grace and Persevering Grace. While non-Calvinists also cherish God's grace, the concern of many non-Calvinists is that it is a deceptive title for Calvinists to use since they reject that God's saving grace was intended for everyone.

What do Calvinists believe?

> George Whitefield: *"And so it is,* ***but not his saving mercy****. God is loving to every man: he sends his rain upon the evil and upon the good."*[102]

> John Calvin: *"Two people may hear the same teaching together; yet one is willing to learn, and the other persists in his obstinacy. They do not differ in nature, but* ***God illumines one and not the other****."*[103]

Our reply:

The idea that God's saving grace was never meant for everyone suggests that Calvinism is not as gracious as its title suggests. This has led to the charge that it should instead say, "The Doctrines of *Limited* Grace."

> Dave Hunt: *"All is to the glory of God's limited grace, Christ's limited atonement, and God's limited love, attributing to God lower standards of each than He expects of us."*[104]

If the "Doctrines of Grace" actually represents Limited Grace, then it becomes an Orwellian term. George Orwell identified a danger in losing the battle over language. Language is key to communication and communication is key to clear thinking, and so one way to distort someone's thinking is through the use of manipulative language. For instance, calling Islam a religion of "peace" conceals and distorts the darker reality of what it really is. It is peace *through violent submission*.

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[102] *Whitefield's Letter To Wesley On Election, Dec. 24, 1740*, http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/5514/0491/7249/wltw.pdf.
[103] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 229, emphasis mine.
[104] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 215.

Similarly, in the Holocaust, certain code words were used to conceal the darker reality of murder. Examples include "Evacuations", "Special Treatments" and "The Final Solution." Its purpose was to disconnect people from a darker reality. This is what the flowery term of Calvinism's "Doctrines of Grace" serves to accomplish. It redefines an *absence* of love as an *act* of love, thus providing an emotional detachment from the darker underlying reality of a theology whose God births babies into existence for the purpose of receiving glory from their eternal suffering.

In Calvinism, there is a "grace" associated with each doctrine of "TULIP" except for the "T." The "T" is associated with the Total Depravity of mankind, in which Calvinism teaches that God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including the Fall of man and having rendered it certain, so that mankind would be born Totally Depraved—helpless and hopeless—thus facilitating salvation being limited to only Calvinism's elect. Yet, when the Bible speaks of the universal condemnation of mankind, it actually is associated with a *grace* because God is said to intend mercy to *all*. Romans 11:32: "For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all." That indeed sounds like a grace, since it reveals that God antecedently wills for all to be shown mercy, though consequently if people refuse it then they will experience God's judgment instead.

- "Grace" is all over the Bible. However, confounding it with Calvinism's self-titled "Doctrines of Grace" doesn't automatically mean that Calvinism is, therefore, *all over the Bible*.

- Just because Calvinists use the term "Doctrines of Grace" doesn't automatically mean that they are *defending* grace.

The Calvinist label has an insulting implication, implying that non-Calvinists somehow don't believe in grace. Former Calvinist and notable Hebrew scholar, Dr. Michael Brown observes,

> *"I'm fully aware that 'the doctrines of grace' is a terminus technicus (albeit a popular one) for Calvinism, and I know that some of you use it here without the slightest condescension on your part, but as a non-Calvinist, I find the term offensive. I revel in God's grace as much as any Calvinist I have ever met or ever read, and every Arminian I have ever met who sang Amazing Grace did so with amazement and astonishment. I fervently hold to the doctrines of grace! To help balance the discussion, then, I propose here that Arminians consistently say that we hold to the*

DOCTRINE OF THE GOODNESS OF GOD. This will do two things: 1) It will convey to our Calvinistic friends that, in our eyes, they diminish God's goodness by their doctrine (just as they believe we diminish God's grace); and 2) It will make them realize how their use of terms like 'the doctrines of grace' (as opposed to the Reformed Faith) and 'orthodoxy' make Arminians immediately protest, 'But I too hold to the doctrines of grace and I too am orthodox!' I know that we sometimes describe our beliefs in this way, but let's do it consistently to level the playing field with the hope that, over time, Calvinists would no longer describe their belief as 'the doctrines of grace' without saying, 'And, of course, we know that Arminians also hold to the doctrines of grace.' Should they say to us, 'But you don't!,' then we could say, 'Neither do you hold to the doctrine of the goodness of God,' thus driving home to the point. (I could make similar points about those, like my friend Dr. White, who like to frame things in terms of monergism vs. synergism.) Shall we do it? For me, I am NOT saying that a Calvinist doesn't hold to the goodness of God but rather that their emphasis diminishes the presentation of His goodness."[105]

[105] Michael Brown, Line of Fire Blog, March 25, 2010, *Finding Common Ground*. Web site: http://www.lineoffireradio.com/2010/03/25/march-25-2010/

DOUBLE PREDESTINATION

The idea behind "Double Predestination" is that if God eternally determined to create an "elect class" who *alone* are predestined to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, then the other side of the coin, logically speaking, is that those outside of such an "elect class" will spend eternity somewhere else, such as Hell. So, logic dictates that people will go to Hell simply because they weren't elected to go to Heaven. Calvinists, however, often vehemently reject this type of logical *symmetry*, but the following series of questions will demonstrate that despite a Calvinist's reservations, the dark conclusion is unavoidable:

> (1) *Do you, as a Calvinist, believe that God created the "elect" with the intention of spending eternity with Him in Heaven?*

That seems fairly straight-forward, and Calvinists will easily affirm it.

> (2) *Do you, as a Calvinist, believe that God created the "non-elect" also with the same intention of spending eternity with Him in Heaven?*

Calvinists (who are not Universalists) will overwhelmingly answer "no."

> (3) ***Where*** *do you, as a Calvinist, believe that God* ***intended*** *for the "non-elect" to spend eternity, if not with Him in Heaven?*

Aside from "High Calvinists" or "Hyper Calvinists," don't expect a straight-forward answer such as "Hell." A more moderate Calvinist will instead say something like, *"Salvation is all of God while damnation is all of man."* Obviously, this doesn't answer the question, and frankly, it is not designed to do so. Calvinists sometimes try to avoid these type of logical conundrums and instead defer to "mystery." Nonetheless, keep pressing.

> (4) *Since Calvinism teaches that God has decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," wouldn't it be impossible to say that God simply put no thought into where the non-elect might spend eternity?*

By speaking of God's *intended destination*, this cuts right through the fog of "Preterition" vs. "Reprobation." The result is this: If someone is not a member of an "elect class," then before they were born, and before they had ever done anything good or bad, God intended for them to spend eternity in Hell. Is this what Calvinists mean when they sometimes refer to "hard truths"?

What do Calvinists believe?

The non-elect are dead rebel sinners who don't want God and hate God, and God doesn't owe them anything.

Our reply:

The discussion is about God's *eternal* intentions, meaning *before* they were ever born—before they were ever a dead, rebel sinner.

ELECT

Who are the "elect"? That is a frequently asked theological question. The answer is that it is a biblical term for those chosen by God for various reasons. Sometimes it is for *service* (1st Peter 1:1-2) and sometimes it is for *salvation* (2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14), depending upon the context.[106] The most common meaning of the "elect" are Christians. (Romans 8:33; 1st Peter 2:9) In other words, believers in Christ are called "elect" on the grounds that Jesus is called "Elect," and so, those who are *identified* with Him as the **Bride of Christ**, or in the **Body of Christ**, jointly share in what is *His* election.

> **Isaiah 42:1:** "'Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; **My chosen one** in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.'"
>
> **Luke 9:35:** "Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is **My Son, My Chosen One**; listen to Him!'"
>
> **1st Peter 2:6:** "For this is contained in Scripture: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a **choice stone**, a precious corner stone, and He who believes in Him will not be disappointed.'"

As such, God didn't choose who would be in Christ; He chose Christ as the One who all needed to be in. God also knows who will be in Christ; that doesn't mean He predetermined who would be found in Christ.

In certain contexts, the Jews are also called "elect" (Matthew 24:16-24, 31; Luke 18:7) because they are the chosen people of the Old Covenant. (Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 45:4) Although there is no *spiritual* distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Christ (Romans 10:12; Galatians 3:28), there remains a *physical* distinction between Jews and Gentiles since the Jewish people retain the gifts and calling of God. (Romans 11:29) Additionally, faithful angels are also called "elect" (1st Timothy 5:21) which may signify an approved status such as being worthy, as holy angels. Such a chosen *status* may be indicative of Matthew 22:11-14; Luke 14:8; 1st Peter 2:9.

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[106] See the respective commentaries for a detailed discussion on those verses.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"When D.L. Moody quipped, 'The elect are the whosoever wills and the nonelect are the whosoever wont's,' he was right. Calvinists could not agree more."*[107]

Our reply:

As a non-Calvinist, I could not *disagree* more, as it would imply that there exists elect-*unbelievers*. In other words, in a **New Covenant** context, if the elect are Christians, then there could be no such thing as an elect-*unbeliever*, any more than there could be a Christian-*unbeliever*. So, the elect are not the "whosoever-wills" and the non-elect are not the "whosoever-wont's." *Instead*, the elect are the "whosoever-has" and the non-elect are the "whosoever-hasn't." The elect are in Christ and free of condemnation (Romans 8:1, 33), while unbelievers remain already judged and under condemnation. (John 3:18) So, for there to be an elect-unbeliever—in a New Covenant sense—it would mean that someone is simultaneously redeemed and condemned, which is a contradiction.[108]

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[107] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 192.

[108] The point of qualifying a "New Covenant" context is because under the Old Covenant, Israel remains God's elect people, chosen as God's witness nation, all while currently being subject to a partial hardening, as per Romans 11:25, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

ELECTION

Theological "election" deals with God's choices. For instance, the Bible refers to an election of:

- Christ (Isaiah 42:1; Luke 9:35; 1st Peter 2:6)
- National Israel (Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 45:4)
- Jerusalem (1st Kings 11:13)
- Disciples (John 13:18; John 15:16)
- Christians (Ephesians 1:1-3; 2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14)

In Calvinism, election is labeled as **Unconditional Election**, in terms of God having decreed a *total plan* of all things from eternity, which includes a bifurcation of humanity into elect and non-elect camps, that is, fixed classes of sheep and goats. Individuals comprising the elect camp are unconditionally chosen by God for salvation prior to the Genesis creation, the basis of which being known only to Him, while the non-elect camp comprises those whom God never *intended* to spend eternity with Him in Heaven and thus passed by for salvific graces.

In non-Calvinism, election is labeled as **Conditional Election**, in which there are primarily two different views:

(1) The Wesleyan-Arminian "foresight of faith" model of Election and,
(2) the Corporate model of Election.

In the **Wesleyan** model, by God's eternal foreknowledge, all whom He found that will ever positively respond to the gospel and persevere in the faith, He foreordained as members of "the elect."

As for the **Corporate** model, the foundation is that Jesus Christ is the Elect One, resulting that all who come to be "in Him," that is, *identified* with Him in His *body* and as His *bride*, jointly *share* in His election, and hence believers in Him may rightly also be called "the elect" or favored. In other words, **Corporate Election** is a class election of Christ's family, and for His part, He would like to see everyone in it, which He made possible at Calvary.

Comparing and contrasting, Election in Calvinism means God choosing unbelievers, that is, of the elect kind, unto the gift of faith. Election in non-Calvinism means God choosing Christians, that is, unto salvation, service and blessings. Does God choose us or do we choose God? The answer is that God chooses to show His favor on Christians and we choose whether or not to become a Christian.

What do Calvinists believe?

The doctrine of Unconditional Election should not be thought of as God keeping people *out* of Heaven. Rather, it should be considered as God getting people *into* Heaven, albeit a predetermined and fixed number, though if God had not done this, then *none* would be saved.

Our reply:

Unconditional Election certainly would keep people out of the Kingdom of Heaven because if God pre-temporally intended for only *some* people to be unconditionally elect, then it logically follows that God did not intend for *others* to be unconditionally elect, and that begs the question of what would be intended for these others, and the Calvinist answer is that they would be born to ultimately glorify God in Hell, by providing God the means with which to demonstrate His various attributes, inclusive of justice and wrath. Moreover, if none would be saved apart from Unconditional Election, then that would be a factor of the *total plan* of God in having decreed that mankind would be born helpless and hopeless, under the inherited guilt of Adam. So, Calvinism's *decree* is what would ensure that none could be saved apart from Unconditional Election.

Calvinist Objection:

In Arminianism, God chose us because we first chose Him, while in Calvinism, we choose God because He first chose us.

Our reply:

God's disposition is that He desires everyone to come to know Him, but He won't force anyone to believe in Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Conditional election is usually based on God's foreknowledge of human actions and responses. This is often called the prescient view of election or predestination. The term prescience or pre-science simply refers to foreknowledge. The idea is that from all eternity God looks down the tunnel of time and knows in advance who will respond to the gospel positively and who will not. He knows in advance who will exercise faith*

and who will not. On the basis of this prior knowledge, God chooses some."[109]

Our reply:

Calvinists who argue against Conditional Election, often make the Wesleyan "Foresight of Faith" model their primary target, perhaps because they feel that it is an easy, low-hanging fruit. They'll say something like, "He foreknew by looking ahead into the future to discover what was going to happen, and when He learned who was going to respond positively to the gospel, He chose them as His people. He elected them because of the choice He knew they would make." By contrast, the "Corporate" model deals with Election in a totally different way. Rather than focusing on how someone becomes in Christ, it focuses on all that comes with being in Christ, in terms of all that God has predestined in Christ, namely, service and blessings.

Corporate Election is *Christocentric*, while Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election is *Patricentric*. In other words, whereas the focus of Corporate Election is on all that God intended to accomplish in Christ, the focus of Unconditional Election is on all those whom the Father secretly chose to someday be irresistibly converted to become Christians. So, as you can clearly see, both doctrines have a starkly different function. In other words, in Calvinism, God unconditionally determines the identity of His elect and then effectually draws them to believe in Christ. Corporate Election instead deals with what God predestined in Christ, such as giving Christians redemption, an inheritance and a future home in Heaven.

Calvinist Objection:

Corporate Election involves an impersonal plan, and which is tantamount to the election of an empty-set, rather than being a personalized plan whereby God selects exactly who will be His sheep.

Our reply:

Corporate Election does not address how someone comes *to be* in Christ but instead deals with God's eternal purposes for those *who are* in Christ. In other words, God didn't elect who would be in Christ. Rather, He elected Christ as the One who we all needed to be in. Although God certainly knows ahead of time who will become Christians, that doesn't mean that He predetermined who would be found in Christ. As such, the

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[109] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 142.

Corporate model seems to be more accommodating to Jesus' parable of the Wedding Feast of Matthew 22:1-14, in terms of its open invitation to all, versus Calvinism's pre-established set of future converts.

Calvinist Objection:

What determines whether someone is elect? Is it God who chooses His sheep, or do individuals choose to elect themselves?

Our reply:

We don't choose to elect ourselves. Rather, we choose whether or not to join ourselves to the already Elect One, Jesus Christ, who offers Himself freely to whosoever will: "'And you are unwilling to come to Me so *that you may have* life.'" (John 5:40) So, Jesus does not exclude people, but rather, people only exclude themselves from joining the Elect One.

What do Calvinists believe?

> *"From a Reformed perspective, how does one handle the divine imperatives, such as 'repent and believe' if one truly has no choice in the matter of salvation?"*[110]

Our reply:

The question is the answer, as one *does* have the ability and opportunity to repent and believe. Calvinists simply assume the opposite, in that God has created a class of the "non-elect" who are born helpless and hopeless. So, Calvinists simply assume the rightfulness of their own paradigm, and then progress in their logic from their circular perspective. In other words, what if God didn't create a class of the non-elect and, as such, everyone can repent, believe and be saved, and will ultimately be held accountable for failing to do so when they had their opportunity and squandered it?

In Calvinism, God chooses *unbelievers* to believe, whom He created as part of an "elect" class. (The criticism, then, is that in Calvinism, God creates "yes men" through irresistible means.) By contrast, in non-Calvinism, God chooses *believers* to receive eternal life, having never created anyone to be born in an alleged "non-elect" class.

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[110] *Does God choose us or do we choose God?*, 2:57-3:08. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TdZKabg2ZNY

EMOTION

According to Calvinism, God decreed whatsoever comes to pass. Such belief in exhaustive determinism has then led to the longstanding objections made against Calvinism in that God's emotions would no longer make any sense if He unilaterally causes everything that happens:

- Why *marvel* over people's faith if God (according to Calvinism) flipped a regeneration-switch and unilaterally caused it? Matthew 8:10 states: "Now when Jesus heard this, He **marveled** and said to those who were following, 'Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.'"

- Why the *tears* of Jesus over Israel's rejection of God if God (according to Calvinism) never intended for them to respond in larger numbers? Luke 19:41 states: "When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and **wept** over it."

- Why *plead* with people whom Jesus says are not His sheep if God (according to Calvinism) made it so that they can never be saved? John 10:37-38 states concerning those whom Jesus just said in v.26 were not His sheep: "'If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works, so that you may know and understand** that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.'"

In other words, if God has already exhaustively determined, fixed, scripted and meticulously decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then what are these emotions all about? For some Calvinists, this is explained by invoking a Revealed Will vs. Secret Will, in which a Revealed Will signifies an anthropomorphism for expressing various divine attributes. The problem in alleging that God condescends to humanity with a Revealed Will naturally erodes divine authenticity. More commonly, Calvinists will cite divine omniscience as a set up for a **You Too Fallacy**. The way it works is by suggesting that your criticism of an opponent also affects you as well (i.e. *You Too!*[111]), and so you're told to drop the whole argument altogether in order to prevent hurting both sides. Proponents of this technique enjoy the advantage of never having to explain anything.

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[111] Leighton Flowers, *You Too!* https://soteriology101.wordpress.com/2016/07/14/you-too/

What do Calvinists believe?

> *"You do affirm that God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all events, and so that then raises the question as to whether some of these objections are not valid against both of us, that is, if God chose to create the universe that He created, and at the time of creation, He knew exactly what was going to happen, then we either have to believe that He had a purpose in everything happening, or He just simply gave this concept of freedom and sort of rolled the cosmic dice and said, 'Ah, I win at the end,' but if He created this particular universe with all the events in it, then the question as to why He does that is a question that really any Christian theist has to answer."*[112]

Our reply:

The underlying fallacy of this argument is a *non-existent* common ground. In other words, although both sides believe in divine omniscience in which God has exhaustive foreknowledge of all events, both sides do not share the same foundational understanding behind it. For instance, with Calvinists, exhaustive omniscience is only made possible by exhaustive determinism, whereas with non-Calvinists, God doesn't need to cause something in order to have advance knowledge of it. In other words, from the non-Calvinist perspective, just because God knows something is going to happen, doesn't make Him the One causing it.

As an analogy, consider an encounter about a friend (who we will call "Dave") who tells me about another friend (who we will call "Jimmy") who is pressuring him to lend him a thousand dollars which he promises to quickly return. I try to convince Dave not to lend the money to Jimmy because I overheard that Jimmy has no intention of ever paying it back, but intends to take it and skip town. Unfortunately, I knew that Dave wouldn't listen to me and he ended up lending the money to Jimmy, who of course does exactly what I forewarned. Now, I may grieve with Dave over the loss of his hard-earned money—with total authenticity and without the slightest contradiction on my part—because despite my advance knowledge over the matter, I neither caused Jimmy's dishonesty nor Dave's naivety. Each made their own choices which I did not cause, and that's precisely why Calvinists and non-Calvinists are not in the same boat.

In summary, Jesus *marvels* over people's faith (which He knew would happen since God knows what is in the heart of man) but they self-

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[112] James White, *Day 1 - Arminianism (Dr. Michael Brown) vs Calvinism (Dr. James White)*, 15:39-16:21: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNcvYs-xjOI

determined their own choices, which alternatively means that they could have negatively chosen against believing, instead. Jesus *laments* people's unbelief (which He knew would happen because He knows the heart of man) but they didn't have to, as they alternatively could have done the opposite, like the other people just mentioned who acted positively in faith, instead. Jesus *persuades* the lost (knowing the ultimate outcome of their choices) but the certainty of His knowledge does not make their choices necessary, meaning that they could have chosen something different and if they had, then God's knowledge would reflect whatever else they chose. As a result, only non-Calvinists can demonstrate Jesus' displayed emotions as being truly genuine and authentic, whereas with Calvinism's eternally fixed decree, you'd have God playing both sides of the chessboard, marveling at each other's moves that God Himself would be causing.

ETERNAL SECURITY

See also the discussion on *Assurance*. Three distinct doctrines on the matter of Assurance involve the following:

- The doctrine of Eternal Security (Traditionalism)
- The doctrine of Conditional Security (Arminianism)
- The doctrine of Perseverance of the Saints (Calvinism)

For Arminians, assurance in the doctrine of **Conditional Security** means *presently* knowing Christ, assuming the potential of being able to ultimately fall away.

For Traditionalists, the doctrine of **Eternal Security** generally means that those who are truly Born Again now possess a new nature given to them by God, accompanied by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whereby they will not permanently fall away.

For Calvinists, the doctrine of **Perseverance of the Saints** stems from the other five points of TULIP, in which the "elect" who are unconditionally chosen through monergistic and irresistible means cannot permanently fall away.

EVANESCENT GRACE

John Calvin taught a doctrine known as Evanescent Grace which Calvinists nearly universally denounce, though without providing an alternative explanation. The basis for the doctrine was to explain why the non-elect sometimes take root in appearance as being one of the elect and how the non-elect are able to overcome their Total Depravity so as to look, act and talk like every other Calvinist. Recall that in Calvinism, fallen man suffers from Total Inability, insomuch that apart from regeneration, he cannot take even *one* step towards God, and so the doctrine of Evanescent Grace attempts to provide a solution for how to interpret such texts as Luke 8:13 which shows the unregenerate believing and even taking joy in the gospel: "'Those on the **rocky soil** are those who, when they hear, **receive the word with joy**; and these have no firm root; **they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away**.'" The solution offered by John Calvin is a temporary grace to bridge the gap from Total Inability:

> John Calvin: *"Let no one think that those [who] fall away…were of the predestined, called according to the purpose and truly sons of the promise. For those who **appear to live piously** may be called sons of God; but since they will eventually live impiously and die in that impiety, God does not call them sons in His foreknowledge. There are sons of God who do not yet appear so to us, but now do so to God; and there are those who, on account of **some arrogated or temporal grace**, are called so by us, but are not so to God."*[113]

> John Calvin: *"Sometimes, however, he communicates it also to those whom **he enlightens only for a time**, and whom afterwards, in just punishment for their ingratitude, **he abandons** and smites with greater blindness."*[114]

Therefore, by "some arrogated or temporal grace," God "illumines only for a time" the alleged non-elect in order to overcome their inability and thus temporarily provide the illusion of being one "of the predestined."

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[113] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 66, emphasis mine.

[114] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 24, Section 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 811, emphasis mine, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

> John Calvin: *"Still it is correctly said, that the reprobate believe God to be propitious to them, inasmuch as they accept the gift of reconciliation, though confusedly and without due discernment; not that they are partakers of the same faith or regeneration with the children of God; but because, under a covering of hypocrisy, they seem to* ***have a principle of faith in common*** *with them. Nor do I even deny that* ***God illumines their minds*** *to this extent, that* ***they recognize his grace****; but that conviction he distinguishes from the peculiar testimony which he gives to his elect in this respect, that* ***the reprobate never attain to the full result*** *or to fruition. When he shows himself* ***propitious to them****, it is* ***not as if he had truly rescued them*** *from death, and taken them under his protection.* ***He only gives them a manifestation*** *of his present mercy. In the elect alone he implants the living root of faith, so that they persevere even to the end. Thus we dispose of the objection, that if God truly displays his grace, it must endure for ever. There is nothing inconsistent in this with the fact of his* ***enlightening some with a present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent****."*[115]

According to John Calvin, God "shows himself propitious" to the non-elect, in which He "illumines their minds" so that they "recognize his grace" in a "present sense of grace, which afterwards proves evanescent" in which He "only gives them a manifestation of his present mercy," though "the reprobate never attain to the full result." Although it seems harsh for God to provide people who are born non-elect with an illusion of salvation, if Calvinists also believe that mankind is nothing more than clay vessels for God to do with however He pleases, even to provide them with a false salvation through temporary grace, then Calvinists would have to accept the internal consistency of their own theology.

> John Calvin: *"Whoever has sinned, I shall delete him from the book of life. … But the meaning is simple: those are deleted from the book of life who, considered for a time to be children of God, afterwards depart to their own place, as Peter truly says about Judas (Acts 1:16). But John testifies that these never were of us (1 Jn 2:19), for if they had been, they would not have gone out from us. What John expresses briefly is set forth in more detail by Ezekiel (13:9): They will not be in the secret of My people, nor written in the catalogue of Israel. The same solution applies to Moses and Paul, desiring to be deleted from the book of life (Ex*

[115] Ibid., Book 3, Chapter 2, Section 11, 467, emphasis mine.

> *32:32; Rom 9:3): carried away with the vehemence of their grief, they prefer to perish, if possible, rather than that the Church of God, numerous as it then was, should perish. When Christ bids His disciples rejoice because their names are written in heaven (Lk 10:20), He signifies a perpetual blessing of which they will never be deprived. In a word, Christ clearly and briefly reconciles both meanings, when He says: Every tree which My Father has not planted will be rooted up (Mt 15:13). For even the reprobate take root in appearance, and yet they are not planted by the hand of God."*[116]
>
> John Calvin comments on Hebrews 6:4-6: *"...God certainly bestows His Spirit of regeneration only on the elect, and that they are distinguished from the reprobate in the fact that they are re-made in His image, and they receive the earnest of the Spirit in the hope of an inheritance to come, and by the same Spirit the Gospel is sealed in their hearts. But I do not see that this is any reason why He should not touch the reprobate with* ***a taste of His grace****, or illumine their minds with* ***some glimmerings of His light****, or affect them with some sense of His goodness, or to some extent engrave His Word in their hearts. Otherwise where would be that passing faith which Marks mentions (4.17)? Therefore there is some knowledge in the reprobate, which later vanishes away either because it drives its roots less deep than it ought to, or because it is choked and withers away."*[117]

In this way, "the reprobate take root in appearance" as one of the elect, in which God, according to John Calvin, will "illumine their minds with some glimmerings of His light" by receiving "a taste of His grace" until such temporary grace "later vanishes away."

Scorecard for Calvinism's special class of the "non-elect":

> They accept the gift of reconciliation? Yes.
> They are enlightened and illumed by God? Yes.
> They recognize God's grace? Yes.
> They live piously for a while? Yes.

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[116] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 151-152.
[117] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, translated by W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 76.

> They have a principle of faith in common with Christians? Yes.
> Are they actually saved? No.

So, basically this could be any Calvinist. The difference with non-Calvinism is that God is sincere—not giving mere fake grace. If man is sincere toward God, God is sincere toward them. God doesn't play games with people by giving them only a half-measure of grace and then later abandoning them for some sick pleasure. John Calvin, however, seemed to revel in such sick pleasures, totally justifying it.

What do Calvinists believe?

> *Mark Talbot: "Now of course, nothing, that I, nor anyone else, can say can guarantee that anyone will continue to believe. Faith is a gift of God that we cannot produce."*[118]

Our reply:

In other words, the fact that you believe today is no guarantee that you will still believe tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after. You can only hope for the best that monergistic salvation works out in your favor and that your ordained fate is better than others, hoping that your grace is not a temporary one that is here today and gone tomorrow. The true horror of this statement is that if there really was such a thing as Evanescent Grace or Temporal Grace, then how would Calvinists know whether this will someday apply to them since faith is supposedly a gift that they cannot produce of themselves or of their own will and ability to maintain? The good news is that there is no such thing as the non-elect, and which means that God does not deal with anyone in such a frightful manner. If Jesus died for *all*, and if I'm part of the *all* that He died for, then I don't need to guess whether God wishes to save me, or falsely suppose that the God of Truth may be secretly out to get me with illusions to deceive me in some twisted view of divine glorification.

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[118] Mark Talbot, *Sin and Suffering in Calvin's World*.

EVANGELISM

There certainly are Calvinists who are evangelists, but one issue worth discussing is how the theology of Calvinism impacts evangelism. Some are turned off from Calvinism because of how it is perceived that it would affect their own evangelism—why bother? In other words, if humanity is divided between eternal elect vs. non-elect camps, in which some will be saved, no matter what, and some will remain lost, no matter what, then what difference do we make? Calvinists often respond by suggesting that our personal efforts in evangelism may be part of a larger, predestined chain of events, resulting in the *means* by which various elect people become saved. Nonetheless, non-Calvinists remain unsatisfied:

> Adrian Rogers: *"There are those who believe that some being born today, no matter what age they may attain, whether they die in infancy, or whether they die of old age, will never have an opportunity, a chance, to be saved, no matter what else happens, if they are not one of the elect, they cannot be saved. ... Did you know that there are some people who believe, honestly believe this, have a form of theology that teaches this, they're very serious about this, that God does not love everybody...that God only has a select few that He loves, but that He does not love the entire world, that some are loved and therefore predestined for heaven, and there are others who are not loved of God, not chosen, not elect, and therefore, have no chance, none, nada, none, of ever going to heaven. There's some who believe that. There's some who teach that. I reject that with all of the unction, function and emotion of my soul! I believe that God wants everybody saved! ... Now some of these people who believe that God only loves some are missionaries. I want to say in all honesty, and fairness, some of them are soul-winners, and I thank God for that. But I'm going to tell you, if you take this kind of belief and let it go to the extreme, it is deadening to evangelism; it is stultifying to soul-winning. ... Now I want to make it very clear. I believe in the Sovereignty of God. I believe in Election. I believe in Foreknowledge. I believe in Predestination. But I do not believe in Fatalism, that says that some can never, ever, be saved, no matter what."*[119]

For Calvinists, in addition to the biblical command for evangelism (Ezekiel 33:7-11; Matthew 28:19) and the reasoning that they might be the

[119] Adrian Rogers, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 2004.

predestined *means* whereby God dispenses an Irresistible Grace, they also reason that God may have seeded their audience with a member of the secret elect, thus *guaranteeing* the success of their work and hence supplying the boldness to carry on. The problem, though, is that evangelism then becomes a round-up of the elect, rather than an *authentic saving mission*. In Calvinism, elect-unbelievers would be lost sheep, but who were also born in such a way that they were never, at any time, in danger of the fires of Hell and judgment. Moreover, in Calvinism, evangelism no longer becomes an *open offer to anyone* like in the parable of the Wedding Feast of Matthew 22:1-10 (since in Calvinism, Jesus didn't die on the Cross for everyone, as per the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement) but simply a *command* that the non-elect cannot receive while the elect cannot ultimately resist.

Evangelism is also what typically creates a distinction between a "High Calvinist" and a "Hyper Calvinist." A "Hyper Calvinist" personally applies Calvinism with *logical consistency* in such a way that often results in going from being an *evangelist* of the gospel to a *debater* of Calvinism against other Christians.

An additional manifestation of Calvinism upon evangelism is a Calvinist's steadfast rejection of a "Gospel Invitation" or "Altar Call." In fact, Calvinists can become quite hostile toward a non-Calvinist's method of evangelism, particularly in the way that it presumes human free-will.

The ministerial practice of extending invitations through what is commonly referred to as an "Altar Call," invites the unsaved to publicly pray to receive Jesus Christ into their heart and become saved. From the Calvinist perspective, though, such a practice necessarily results in a theology of "decisional regeneration," whereby a decision for Christ results in salvation, thus placing the matter of salvation within the power of human choice, when yet in Calvinism, elect people are total haters of God until regenerated by an Irresistible Grace. Therefore, Calvinists have a theological pre-commitment to reject giving a gospel invitation.

Whereas *sanctification* is a process over time whereby the Holy Spirit develops the believer into greater spiritual growth through a deeper relationship with God, *salvation* is instantaneous, representing a point in time when a person goes from lost to saved and judged to redeemed. Romans 10:8-13 illustrates this process:

> **Romans 10:8-13:** "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that **if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses,

> resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for '**Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved**.'"

Moreover, the *prayer* of the remorseful tax-collector of Luke 18:9-14 resulted in him walking away "justified." So, the evangelist is essentially a middle-man, placing two parties together—the lost sinner like the aforementioned tax-collector begging for mercy and forgiveness, and a willing God who stands ready and able to give it. Bible verses cited in support of a gospel invitation are as follows:

> **Matthew 11:28:** "'**Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest**.'"
>
> **John 14:23:** "Jesus answered and said to him, '**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our abode with him**.'"
>
> **Acts 2:37-38:** "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, '**Brethren, what shall we do?**' Peter said to them, '**Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**.'"
>
> **Revelation 3:20:** "'Behold, **I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> Jeff Noblit: *"The work of praying a 'sinner's prayer' is not salvation. It can become a silly superstition and nothing more than a sacrament in Baptist clothes."*[120]

Our reply:

So, Calvinists typically hold that the notion of "praying to receive Christ" is not an authentic act resulting in salvation. Ironically, though,

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[120] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 98.

some Calvinists consider one's decision to convert to Calvinistic theology as a form of "salvation within salvation."[121] In Calvinism, salvation is not something you *do* to receive, such as, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31), but something you *passively* receive, in terms of a secret regeneration, resulting in faith and repentance. Therefore, salvation in Calvinism is a matter of self-discovery, in terms of coming to discover one's place within divine providence as one of the elect.

An important thing to remember is that while salvation is *free*, discipleship is *costly*. Salvation is a gift for the guilty, simply at the asking, that is, God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ in terms of what He did for each of us at Calvary so that anyone can come to Jesus and be saved. So while salvation involves Christ's sacrifice, discipleship involves our own sacrifice, and when salvation is conflated with discipleship, Legalism necessarily follows.

What do Calvinists believe?

> J.I. Packer: *"…the new gospel has in effect reformulated the biblical message.…we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence 'at the door of our hearts' for us to let them in."*[122]

> James White: *"Jesus does not seek to 'woo' them to a 'freewill decision,' nor does He strike up a lengthy invitation hymn and try to overcome their stubborn rejection of truth through an emotional appeal."*[123]

Our reply:

Although gospel invitations are opposed by many Calvinists, it does not reflect the views of *all* Calvinists:

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I further believe, although certain persons deny it, that the 'influence of fear' is to be exercised over the*

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[121] One Calvinist stated in a message forum at OldTruth.com: "A wonderful friend of our family once commented that coming to understand the Doctrines of Grace was akin to a type of salvation within salvation."

[122] *Introductory Essay to John Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/others/deathofdeath.html.

[123] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 121-122.

> *minds of men, and that it ought to operate upon the mind of the preacher himself."*[124]

> Charles Spurgeon: *"Some of my Brethren are greatly scandalized by the general invitations which I am in the habit of giving to sinners, as sinners. Some of them go the length of asserting that there are no universal invitations in the Word of God."*[125]

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I know the Lord has blessed my appeals to all sorts of sinners and none shall stop me in giving free invitations as long as I find them in this Book. And I do cry with Peter this morning to this vast assembly, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of the Lord Jesus. For the promise is unto you and to your children, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call.'"*[126]

> D. James Kennedy: *"Are you tired of the emptiness and purposelessness of your life? Are you tired of the filthy rags of your own righteousness? Would you trust in someone else other than yourself? Then look to the cross of Christ. Place your trust in him. Ask him to come in and be born in you today. For Jesus came into the world from glory to give us second birth because we must--we MUST--be born again."*[127]

Perhaps the reason why many Calvinists reject an "Altar Call," "Gospel Invitation" and "Sinner's Prayer" is because they do not believe that the invitation to be saved is for everyone. In other words, why give someone a choice to be saved when God hasn't given everyone that same opportunity? Remember that a Limited Atonement, as per Calvinism, guarantees that only a select few have any opportunity for salvation.

If Calvinists refuse to give gospel invitations to the lost on the grounds that the lost *may not really mean it*, then consider an analogy of wedding vows. While the Bible may not provide explicit instructions on wedding vows, we nonetheless still do take wedding vows, and we could argue that since 50% of all marriages end in divorce, 50% of the people aren't keeping their wedding vows so let's stop doing wedding vows altogether because some obviously don't mean it and are not keeping it. Of course, that is simply an example of the proverbial "throwing the baby out

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[124] Charles Spurgeon, *How to Win Souls for Christ*.
[125] Charles Spurgeon, *The Silver Trumpet*, 1861.
[126] Ibid.
[127] *Why I Believe* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 140.

with the bath water." Has anyone ever heard a preacher say, "Well, I just don't know if I ought to lead them in their wedding vows because I don't know if they really mean it"? So, if pastors are still willing to lead couples in their wedding vows, not knowing whether they will ultimately keep it, why should pastors be reluctant to lead a lost sinner in a gospel invitation, not knowing whether they will ultimately keep it?

FAILURE

Frequently, Calvinists contend that if God really *wanted* for someone to be saved but who ultimately died in unbelief and perished, then God would have proven to be a failure, and therefore only an effectual calling (i.e. Irresistible Grace) of God's elect (i.e. Unconditional Election) guarantees the success of God's purposes.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The text does not say that 'He will try, **but often fail**, to save' but that He will save His people from their sins. Redemptive love in Jesus Christ fulfills to the uttermost the saying, '**Love never fails**.' This is powerful and effective love, powerful and effective grace, and why anyone would wish to diminish that power is truly beyond my comprehension."*[128]

Our reply:

In other words, the Calvinist objection to non-Calvinists is that God often desperately "tries but fails" to save the people that He sincerely desires to save. The error with this objection is that non-Calvinists do not believe that God is *trying to save someone but ultimately cannot*. Non-Calvinists do not believe that God is trying to effectually save anyone, at all. Instead, what non-Calvinists believe is that God *calls* people to be saved through faith, and therefore, if God makes such an appeal to a free moral creature, the response of the free moral creature does not negate God's sovereignty but rather establishes it, by virtue of fulfilling God's design to provide salvation as a good-faith, well-meant offer of the gospel—with the advantage that God would then gain a kingdom of willing creatures who freely loved Him and desired a relationship with Him and welcomed an eternity spent together with Him.

God never promised unbelievers an unconditional salvation, but instead a *conditional* salvation, namely on the condition of turning to Christ, which is the essence of the gospel message at John 3:16: "'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, **that whoever believes in Him** shall not perish, but have eternal life.'" The verse does *not* state: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever shall not perish, but have eternal life." That would be Universalism, and if God had promised Universalism and did not deliver

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[128] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 270, emphasis mine.

on that promise, then one could make the argument that God had failed to keep His promise. However, God cannot rightly be deemed a failure on account of something that He *never* promised. **So, while Calvinists contend that God is not a failure because He irresistibly saves His elect by effectual means, non-Calvinists contend that God is not a failure because He makes good on His promise to save believers in Christ.** Interwoven with divine sovereignty, God determined that man would be free to both *have* and *make* choices concerning his eternal destiny, and so when man does make his choice, even when it is against God's will for them, this does not negate divine sovereignty but rather demonstrates it.

So, Jesus overcame the world undefiled, and Jesus endured the Cross—not to mention all of the scorn He received along the way for telling the truth during His earthly ministry—and Jesus purchased our redemption on the Cross, but if someone doesn't respect or want what He accomplished at Calvary, then somehow He is the One who is a "failure"? I just can't relate to that. I think the Calvinist accusation of "failure" is just an emotional ploy to try to make "Irresistible Grace" more palatable.

FAITH

Faith is common to man, which Calvinists readily acknowledge, though while offering the caveat of a distinction between what they define as human "natural faith" vs. divine "saving faith." For the Calvinist, "natural faith" never saves, while special "saving faith" is a product of a gift of Irresistible Grace for Calvinism's elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God will not abandon His own. We are kept indeed by the power of faith, but it is not a merely human faith, but a divine faith, a gift from God! Why do some stumble and fall while others persevere? Is it that some are better, stronger, than others? No. The reason lies in the difference between having a saving faith and a faith that is not divine in origin or nature. Many are those who make professions not based upon regeneration, and the 'faith' that is theirs will not last. Jesus taught this truth in the parable of the soils in Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23. But the growth produced no fruit and did not last. These are those who have false, human faith that does not last. But those with true faith produce fruit and remain."*[129]

Our reply:

Calvinists frequently say that the unregenerate cannot take even one step toward God, and yet, what does this parable show? Luke 8:13 shows that some, with whatever faith they had, whether "natural faith" or "human faith," did "receive the word with joy" and did "believe for a while," until in times of temptation had fallen away. So from the Calvinist perspective, does that not constitute a "step"? What do Calvinists define as a "step"? Also from the Calvinist perspective, why would God have opted against giving these joyful believers an effectual "saving faith"? Is it because they were not elect? In Calvinism, the concept of "Monergism" means that God gives regeneration, not based upon *anything whatsoever in the individual*, but solely based upon God's secret purposes.

Conversely, from the non-Calvinist perspective, God is always interested in the repentance of even a single sinner. (Luke 15:7) So, it's not that God did not want them. He certainly did. God has a universal Salvific Will. God wants everyone, though not unconditionally but conditionally. God is looking for something in the individual to bestow regeneration. The

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[129] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 293.

problem for the temporary-believers is that they didn't truly have a heart for God after all, unlike those who "have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance." (Luke 8:15) So the contrast with Calvinism is that non-Calvinists believe that God indeed looks to the individual, order to determine whether they have met the divine condition for giving the promise of eternal life, while in Calvinism, God doesn't look to the individual for anything at all, as the temporary believers are just a special class of the damned.

What do Calvinists believe?

Everything good comes from God, and since faith in God is good, then the faith to believe in God must come from Him.

Our reply:

Faith is not a "thing," as in a tangible object, such as the sun and rain which God provided to nourish life on earth. Faith (or trust) in God is an act of the will, describing an action between two agents. If the agency of man is absorbed under "Monergism," then it is no longer faith or trust being displayed, but instead an action that God does to Himself through another agent. Faith and trust in God requires *willing human consent*, or else it's no longer faith and trust that we are talking about. The reality is that faith is common to mankind. Everyone trusts in something. Even Atheists have faith. Anyone who has ever witnessed to the Jehovah's Witnesses know that they have faith. Their trust is in the Watchtower Society. So, the problem isn't whether they have faith, but that they have *misplaced* their trust.

FATALISM

If divine sovereignty meant that "whatsoever comes to pass" was predetermined in eternity, then wouldn't my fate have been sealed from eternity, either for good or for bad?

> John Calvin: *"…the reason why God elects some and rejects others is to be found in His purpose alone. … **before men are born their lot is assigned** to each of them by the secret will of God. … the salvation or the destruction of men depends on His free election."*[130]

Change "lot" to "fate" and what do you have? Fatalism. Recalling his own conversion to Calvinism, Calvinist R.C. Sproul comments:

> *"I no longer feared the demons of fatalism or the ugly thought that I was being reduced to a puppet. Now I rejoiced in a gracious Savior who alone was immortal, invisible, the only wise God."*[131]

Perhaps some Calvinists no longer fear the "demons of fatalism" because they envision themselves as coming out on the winning end of a "secret will." Nonetheless, Calvinists wish for people to understand that the specter of fatalism is not necessarily *unique* to Calvinism, but is applicable to theism in general, just as Calvinist, Erwin Lutzer explains:

> *"Even if, as Arminians believe, foreknowledge does not cause anything to happen, still the future will unfold as God knows it will. Yes, even for Arminians, whatever will be, will be."*[132]

However, since non-Calvinists do not believe that God's foreknowledge causes anything to happen, the future that God infallibly knows is simply what *individuals will self-determine*, which is very different than alleging that God causes everything to happen just because He knows it will happen. For instance, just because Jesus *knew* and informed Peter that he would deny Him three times before the cock crowed, does not mean that Jesus caused Peter's denials, simply because He knew it would happen. Jesus knew what *Peter* himself would do—not

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[130] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 203.
[131] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 13.
[132] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 216.

what *God* caused Peter to do. So, Erwin Lutzer's argument amounts to what is called a "You-Too" fallacy. It's a debate tactic designed to shield one's position by pleading an erroneous common dilemma.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Richard Mouw: *"There is no denying that a belief that we are predestined to eternal life can lead to a deterministic, even fatalistic, understanding of the Christian life. If it is God who does the choosing, then we may be tempted to think that our own choosing, our own responding to God, is a charade. It is all preprogrammed. But Calvinist theologians go out of their way to deny this implication."*[133]

Our reply:

Sure, because the term is terrible for marketing for Calvinism. Calvinists would much rather use flowery terms like "doctrines grace."

> Jacob Arminius: *"While, therefore, the fate of the stoics may not be presented in your doctrine, yet a fate is presented, which places a necessity upon all things, and takes away freedom."*[134]

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"Now, there may be Calvinists who are fatalists, but Calvinism and fatalism are two distinct things. Do not most Christians hold the doctrine of the providence of God? Do not all Christians, do not all believers in a God hold the doctrine of his foreknowledge? All the difficulties which are laid against the doctrine of predestination might, with equal force, be laid against that of Divine foreknowledge. We believe that God hath predestinated all things from the beginning, but there is a difference between the predestination of an intelligent, all-wise, all-bounteous God, and that blind fatalism which simply says, 'It is because it is to be.'"*[135]

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[133] *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004),66.
[134] *Arminius Speaks* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 200.
[135] Charles Spurgeon, *Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace*, 1861.

Our reply:

Again, we see another "You Too" fallacy raised regarding divine omniscience. Nonetheless, the main reason advanced for distinguishing Calvinism from Fatalism is by attributing Fatalism to "blind fatalism," as in naturalistic causes versus a divine cause. But, then, why not admit to calling it "Theistic Fatalism" since Calvinists profess belief that God causes the fate and destiny of whatsoever comes to pass? But, again, Calvinists will not accept the stigma associated with that term, just as the following response from John Calvin shows:

> John Calvin: *"Those who would cast obloquy on this doctrine, calumniate it as the dogma of the Stoics concerning fate. The same charge was formerly brought against Augustine. We are unwilling to dispute about words; but we do not admit the term Fate, both because it is of the class which Paul teaches us to shun, as profane novelties (1 Tim. 6:20), and also because it is attempted, by means of an odious term, to fix a stigma on the truth of God."*[136]

However, non-Calvinists reject that Calvinism is "God's truth" and feel very strongly that the determinism of Calvinism is more akin to Greek philosophy than a product of the Bible.

> Laurence Vance: *"Although Calvinists go out of their way to distance themselves from fatalism, they are in essence teaching the same thing. When a philosopher believes 'what is to be will be' it is called determinism. When a Stoic believes 'what is to be will be' it is called fate. When a Muslim believes 'what is to be will be' it is called fatalism. But when a Calvinist believes 'what is to be will be' it is called predestination. The only way the Calvinist gets away with it is by saying that predestination alone is a Bible doctrine."*[137]

As it pertains to evangelism, Calvinists are *not* typically anti-evangelistic and most modern day Calvinistic pastors are very interested in spreading the gospel to all people. As logically inconsistent as that may

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[136] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 16, Section 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 182, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

[137] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 278.

appear to some, it is a verifiable fact of the matter, just as Adrian Rogers acknowledges:

> *"Now some of these people who believe that God only loves some are missionaries. I want to say in all honesty, and fairness, some of them are soul-winners, and I thank God for that. But I'm going to tell you, if you take this kind of belief and let it go to the extreme, it is deadening to evangelism; it is stultifying to soul-winning. ... Now I want to make it very clear. I believe in the Sovereignty of God. I believe in Election. I believe in Foreknowledge. I believe in Predestination. But I do not believe in Fatalism, that says that some can never, ever, be saved, no matter what."*[138]

In other words, the fact that many Calvinists are evangelistic does not negate the merit of some sound logical arguments raised against the Calvinistic belief system. There is a good reason that when believers are introduced to Calvinism, their first question is typically about the necessity of evangelism. This natural reaction to the teaching of Calvinism is evidenced by the volumes of work which have been produced by Calvinistic scholars over the years to answer this objection:

The following material is from Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101.

> "If God has unchangeably determined who will and won't be saved, then what does it matter if I evangelize or not?"

Below is a clip from an article written by a respectable Calvinist attempting to answer this all too common objection:

> Shane Kastler: *"Some would see the Calvinist as holding to what is sometimes called 'Theistic Fatalism.' Obviously, much different than pure 'fate' type fatalism, this view would acknowledge God as the cause of all things, <u>which is certainly true</u>, but would then lead to a false conclusion of inactivity. And this really is ultimately what separates a Theological Calvinist from a Theistic Fatalist: the conclusion we draw based on God's sovereignty and ordination. Fatalism leads to inactivity, while Calvinism leads to the opposite…The Calvinist's belief in God's sovereign power does not lead to inactivity, but rather activity on a grand scale. And part of the reason for this is that* ***a Calvinist believes that***

[138] Adrian Rogers, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 2004.

> ***God not only ordains the end; but also the means.*** *Fatalism, however, is largely unconcerned with the means, holding to more of a "let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die" sort of philosophy. This is much different from the result of a Calvinistic philosophy of God's ordaining work. The* ***Calvinist teaches that while God ordains the 'end' of salvation for His elect; He also ordains the 'means' of their salvation through belief in the gospel.*** *Pure, Biblical Calvinism would lead to a vibrant form of evangelism; as I think you clearly see displayed in the New Testament by the Apostles. So* ***the 'end' and the 'means' are both ordained by God****."*[139]

It's interesting that when a Calvinist seeks to defend against the charge of being a "Theistic Fatalist" he often argues "***God not only ordains the end; but also the means***" as if that is a point the Theistic Fatalist would in any way deny.

That argument does not avoid the charge of Theistic Fatalism, but in fact, affirms it. For what is Theistic Fatalism if not God's determination of not only the ends but every single desire, thought and action (i.e. "means") that bring about those ends?

What do the Calvinists think this qualification is accomplishing in their effort to distinguish themselves from the Theistic Fatalist? The belief that God unchangeably causes every meticulous detail of both the ends and their given means is at the very heart of Theistic Fatalism.

Are there Theistic Fatalists out there arguing, "God doesn't determine the means," while the Calvinists are going around correcting them saying, "No, no, no, God does control the means too?" Of course not. Both systems of thought clearly affirm God's cause of all things, including the ends and their respective means.

So, what is the author seeking to accomplish by pointing out a common belief that Calvinists share with Theistic Fatalists? It appears the only real difference between a Theistic Fatalist and a Compatibilistic Calvinist is that the latter refuses to accept the practical implications of their own claims in an attempt to remain consistent with the clear teaching of the Bible.

According to both Theistic Fatalism and Calvinistic Compatibilism, if God sovereignly decrees for me to go witness to my neighbor (the ends), then He will give me the effectual desire to go witness

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[139] Shane Kastler, *Why Calvinism Is Not Fatalism: The "Means" and the "Ends" of Life*, emphasis added.
http://shanekastler.typepad.com/pastor_shanes_blog/2014/05/why-calvinism-is-not-fatalism-the-means-and-the-ends-of-life.html

to my neighbor (the means). If my neighbor is one of His elect and God has unchangeably decreed for me to be the means by which my neighbor comes to Christ, then logically I would have to believe that God will give me the effectual desire and the opportunity to carry out His preordain plan (i.e. "God will ordain the means"). If that effectual desire never comes then I could rightly conclude that it ultimately was not God's pre-ordained planned for me to be the means through which my neighbor would come to Christ.

The only rebuttal a Compatibilistic Calvinist could bring to this charge is, "That's true but you can't think that way!" In other words, the Compatibilist has to ignore the truth-claims of their own systematic in order to live practically. His actual beliefs are untenable and must be ignored in order to remain consistent with the Biblical mandate.

If you go back and re-read the Calvinistic explanation shown above you will notice that there is no difference in the actual claims of the Calvinist and the Theistic Fatalist. The only difference is in how the person chooses to act in response to that commonly held belief of divine Determinism. And therein lies the problem for the Calvinist. For that choice is just as unchangeably determined by God as is the choice of His elect to believe.

Did you follow that? Under the Calvinistic system, God unchangeably determines those who will accept the belief that "***God not only ordains the end; but also the means.***" <u>And He determines if that believer will respond with evangelistic activity or inactivity</u>. In other words, God decides if the believer of theistic determinism will become a hyper-Calvinist who refuses to actively participate in evangelism or a productive, obedient Calvinist like the author above.

Calvinists are known to argue, "God has ordained for His elect to be saved through the proclamation of the gospel," But wouldn't they likewise argue that God has ordained for the saved to proclaim the gospel when they do proclaim it and not to proclaim it when they remain disobediently inactive? After all, the author does affirm that God does indeed cause all things that come to pass, which would include the inactivity of the saints, would it not?

Think about this. If any particular Calvinist chooses to disobey God and not proclaim the Gospel when impressed to do so by the Holy Spirit, who is really responsible for that choice to disobey?

Has God, for some unknown reason, not granted the sufficient grace to convince the will of His messenger to proclaim the truth when told to do so? Or has that messenger disobeyed of his own libertarian free will? And what is the result of that disobedience? When an individual Calvinistic believer disobeys God's command to evangelize, did any fewer elect individuals respond in faith than what God ordained? Of course

not. Why? Because God ordained for that Calvinist's disobedience with the same level of "sovereign control" as He does in ordaining for another Calvinist's obedience.

You see, a Calvinist may argue that evangelism, in general, is necessary for the salvation of the elect in general, but logically your individual responsibility to evangelize any particular elect person is not necessary for the salvation of that elect person. After all, if you were not ordained to evangelize that elect individual, someone else was, otherwise they would not be elect.

Granted, someone (but not necessarily you) has to share the gospel with the elect in order for them to be saved. If God has ordained you to be that evangelist, then He will give you the effectual desire to do so. Thus, if you refrain from doing so you could rightly conclude that you were not meant to be the means for that person's salvation. You are left with the perfect excuse for your inactivity and disobedience to God's command: "God unchangeably ordained the means, or in this case, my lack of participation in those means."

So the next time a Calvinist argues that "God ordains the ends as well as the means" just remember this does not avoid the charge of Theistic Fatalism but actually confirms it. In fact, their system logically affirms that the believer's inactive disobedience is as much according to God's ordained plan as is another believer's active obedience. So, if and when a Calvinist becomes "hyper" or "anti-evangelistic" in his behavior, he does so by God's decree. And, so too, if a Calvinist becomes highly evangelistic in his behavior he does so equally by God's decree (i.e. "God ordains the means"). A consistent Calvinistic scholar cannot get around this logical fact no matter how much theological rhetoric they use to placate their opponents. The best they can do is say, "Just do not think of it that way," which in essence means, "Act like what we believe is not true." And to that, we say, "Amen."

Fatalism defies one of the primary reasons for the creation of man in the first place—decision making. God created man with autonomy of reason (i.e. free-will) for the purpose of being suitable caretakers of God's living ways. Genesis 2:15 states: "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it." With autonomy and freedom also comes creativity and imagination, and Genesis 2:19-20 shows that God appears to delight in this, exemplified by Adam's naming of the animals: "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man **to see what he would call them**; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him." Fatalism, however, takes our decision-making

function and replaces it with the resignation that all of our choices are already predetermined and scripted from eternity by decree.

> Greg Boyd: *"If you're here and you're not a believer—you haven't surrendered to Him—you've got to know that His hands are outstretched wide toward you and He's saying, 'Come to Me. Return to Me. I created you for this purpose. I want to make you a vessel of mercy and not a vessel of destruction. Turn to Me. Put you're trust in Me and let's start this relationship.' And what it means for us folks is that there isn't a person who's going to hear this message this weekend, or a person who has ever been born, that was born fated. Yeah, there's a lot of things about us that we don't choose, obviously. Most things about us we don't choose but that doesn't mean that we are fated—certainly not in our eternal destiny. I have met so many people who think they are fated. Fatalism is, I think, one of the worst demonic diseases that's ever affected the human mind and you find it throughout world religions throughout history. It was a tragedy when it infected Christianity because Fatalism completely dehumanizes us. Now we are just puppets—there's nothing we can do about it. Que Sera Sera. Whatever will be will be. That totally disempowers us to be decision-makers, which is the whole point of things."*[140]

[140] Twisted Scripture | Romans 9 | Greg Boyd, 40:59 - 41:59. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akmIf4WIWs0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1sL62I8QzVfLo4amX5e2Ip8jhxFsJZaPKhPlNHAKFhwW3NR1hpgsZdGbE

FAVORITISM

At Acts 10:34-35, the apostle Peter treated divine *impartiality* as a virtue, implying that it is something good and noble about God, perhaps which we should all emulate in our own interactions with our neighbors: "Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that **God is not one to show partiality**, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" However, if those who "fear Him" and "does what is right" are those who are hand-picked from eternity to be irresistibly caused to want to do that, then how would that be a demonstration of impartiality?

In a biblical context, the notion of Favoritism is that God only accepts people who are into the right race. For Peter, that race was being born a Jew, whereas for Calvinists of our modern era, that race is Calvinism's caste of "the elect." The biblical reality, however, rebukes both! God does not show Favoritism (i.e. God is not a Calvinist), but is willing to accept anyone, regardless of what race they were born into or what alleged caste they were created into, so long as they fear Him and do what is right.

What do Calvinists believe?

Favoritism means that there is something about the person that is the favorite that would cause them to be favored. That's not at all what Unconditional Election is like.

Our reply:

Assuming Calvinism for a moment, why would God choose one person over another? The very moment that ignorance is confessed, then nothing can be ruled out. In fact, arbitrary favoritism is more favorable to the Calvinistic paradigm, in which God's choice has literally nothing to do with the individual, but instead has everything to do with God's sovereign right to act in arbitrary fashion. Ultimately, if God were to act in *truly arbitrary fashion*, then He would not be showing Favoritism, since the individuals involved would make no difference to Him. In fact, a truly random draw would highlight divine privilege. In Determinism, God controls all of the variables, and hence whatever choice God makes for any individual, God (according to Calvinism) causes the uniqueness of that individual when making His choice. Hence, for a consistent determinist, God (according to Calvinism) must be acting in arbitrary fashion. In Calvinism, it is about arbitrary favoritism—one is chosen over another to

be favored, not because of anything *derived* from the individual but *applied* to the individual.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Sam Storms: *"So, does the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional divine election and monergistic regeneration make God 'a respecter of persons, arbitrary, and morally ambiguous'? Or again, God is not impartial, say many Arminians, if he favors some with life but not all. He is guilty of showing partiality toward the elect. Of course he is! That is what unconditional election is all about. But we should refrain from saying that God is 'guilty' of being partial toward the elect because this kind of partiality is a virtue, not a vice. It is a divine prerogative for which God should be praised, not vilified."*[141]

Our reply:

This seems more like "damage control" than a fair treatment of the text since Peter seems to be praising divine *impartiality* as a virtue. He is not saying that God should be praised for His partiality, in making only certain people want Him.

Does God show favoritism? As an illustration, suppose a High School Principal selected 12 of his Seniors to spread a message to the student body about a special treat being given out in the cafeteria. Would the Principal's choice of these 12 messengers demonstrate that he has favorites or has unfairly shown partiality to some individuals over others? The answer is No. He has chosen these messengers to bring a blessing to the entire student body and his selection of one messenger over another is not in any way to the detriment or neglect of another student.

We believe this is what God has done with the gospel. He has selected from Israel (like the Senior class) messengers to bless all the world (the entire student body). (Bible verses which indicate this are Genesis 12:2-3; Mark 16:15; John 15:16; Acts 10:40-42 and Acts 13:47.)

Now let's revise our illustration to depict the partiality and favoritism shown in the Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Election. Suppose the High School in the aforementioned analogy was bilingual and most of the students only spoke and understood Spanish. And what if this Principal only selected English speaking messengers to take the message to

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[141] Sam Storms, *Does Unconditional Election Make God A 'Respecter of persons'?*, emphasis mine. https://www.samstorms.org/enjoying-god-blog/post/does-unconditional-election-make-god-a-respecter-of-persons

the entire student body, knowing full well that only the English speaking students would hear and understand the news about the blessing he made available in the cafeteria. Suppose that the Principal only bought enough treats for his English speaking students and so his intention was for only them to hear and understand the message. He didn't want to appear bias so he told the messengers to invite the entire student body but secretly he knew only the English speaking students would understand the message and respond.

So does that indicate an unfair bias or partiality? Of course it does! Now, did the Principal owe any of the students these treats? No, and no one is saying that he did. But for him to outwardly pretend as if he wished for the entire student body to be blessed while secretly only purchasing treats for some and sending a message that was intended only for some to understand it is clearly showing favoritism and an unjust bias. (Bible verses which indicate this are Matthew 22:16; Mark 12:14; Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:8-11; Galatians 2:6; Ephesians 6:9; James 2:9 and 1st Peter 1:17. So if your soteriological systematic paints God as partial, then it's not a biblical soteriology.)

FOREKNOWLEDGE

Foreknowledge is prescience, meaning knowing ahead of time. For instance, God said of Pharaoh: "'But **I know** that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion. **So** I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.'" (Exodus 3:19-20) Notice how God determined to act *dependently* upon what He knew of a person's intention.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"God's omniscience refers to God's total knowledge of all things actual and potential. God knows not only all that is, but everything that possibly could be."*[142]

> R.C. Sproul: *"It is said that God knows all contingencies, but none of them contingently. God never says to himself: 'That depends.' Nothing is contingent to him. He knows all things will happen because he ordains everything that does happen. This is crucial to our understanding of God's omniscience. He does not know what will happen by virtue of exceedingly good guesswork about future events. He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it."*[143]

> R.C. Sproul: "*Does this mean that everything that happens is the will of God? Yes. Augustine qualified this answer by adding the words, 'in a certain sense.' That is, God ordains 'in some sense' everything that happens. Nothing that takes place is beyond the scope of his sovereign will."*[144]

Our reply:

A lot of things happen outside of God's will, namely sin. Just because God permits something doesn't necessarily mean that He wanted that as His *first* choice. The concept is acquiescence. For instance, the father of the Prodigal Son didn't want for his son to leave as his *first* choice but did ultimately acquiesce to permit it. Moreover, to root omniscience in exhaustive determinism actually undermines divinity. To

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[142] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 171.
[143] Ibid., 172, emphasis mine.
[144] Ibid., 172, emphasis mine.

limit foreknowledge to only what is decreed is certainly not omniscience. In this way, Calvinists conflate foreknowledge with foreordination so that God must necessarily know what He decrees.[145]

> Laurence Vance: *"To further add insult to injury, the Calvinists claim that God could not have absolute knowledge of the future events unless he actually decreed them to happen. This is a direct attack on the omniscience of God. What kind of power does it take to know something one has already decreed to take place?"*[146]

Calvinist objection:

If God's foreknowledge is perfect, and if God has foreknowledge of what a person will choose tomorrow, then that person's future choices are fixed, and being thus fixed, how can that person have free-will to avoid choosing what God already, infallibly knows will happen?

Our reply:

Indeed the future is fixed, but it is fixed by all who live in it, as each person self-determines their own actions. Foreknowing those choices *captures* information rather *causes* anything. For example, does holding a mirror in front of a person cause their height and weight? When taking a picture of a person, does the camera cause their gender? The mirror and camera take in an image, rather than causing the object to exist. So if God foreknew that a person would self-determine something *different* tomorrow, then God's foreknowledge would perfectly reflect *that* instead.

In effect, God created time through the Genesis creation of our dimension of existence. The passage of time is what keeps us from perceiving everything happening all at once, and so if God is eternal in the sense of existing independent of our created dimension, then we cannot consider God's relationship with time on the same level that mankind perceives it. For the same reason, presently being limited to our dimension, we cannot relate to God's eternal existence.

> Daniel Whedon: *"God's mind, according to the 'eternal now,' is like this mirror, before which I may stand. Every movement of my head, hand, body is reflected with perfect accuracy according as that movement is by me freely and alternatively made. The image in the mirror does not shape or constrain the movements of my*

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[145] See also the discussions on *Determinism, Middle Knowledge* and *Omniscience*.
[146] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 259.

choice, but accepts them in all their freedom, and represents them precisely in the mirror; the mirror does not cause a necessitated act. … The divine knowledge takes them, not makes them."[147]

Jerry Vines: *"God's knowledge of the future doesn't determine the future any more than man's knowledge of the past determines the past."*[148]

Ken Wilson: *"I explain this by analogy of holding a heavy book. I ask the class what will happen if I let go of the book if gravity is not changed and no person intervenes. They reply it will hit the floor. I ask, 'Are you 100 percent sure?' They reply 'yes.' I respond, 'So you have perfect foreknowledge?' to which they respond, 'Yes.' I drop the book. It hits the floor. I look at them and say, 'You caused the book to hit the floor.' Now they understand why Christian foreknowledge does not cause events. No analogy is perfect, but it makes the point."*[149]

Adrian Rogers: *"Foreknowledge does not mean to cause to happen. Some people think that if God foreknows it, then God makes it happen. That would mean that because God foreknew that there was going to be blasphemy or sodomy or rape that God caused it to happen. And of course He does not cause those things to happen. The astronomers know when Halley's comet is going to appear again. But their knowledge does not cause it to happen. Foreknowledge means one thing: knowing ahead of time. God has foreknown you and your salvation, if you know Christ."*[150]

Dave Hunt: *"In order to escape foreknowledge as the basis of predestination, the Calvinist must establish another meaning for foreknow/foreknowledge that fits his theory."*[151]

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[147] *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 240.
[148] *Calvinism – A Baptist and his Election*, http://www.fbcw.org/media/mediacenter/index_demand-2.php?detail&id=195.
[149] *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (Regula Fidei Press, 2019), 88.
[150] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 91-92.
[151] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 279.

Calvinists often conflate foreknowledge with foreordination by grounding exhaustive divine omniscience in exhaustive divine determinism, such that God must necessarily know what He decrees.[152]

[152] See also the discussions on *Determinism, Middle Knowledge* and *Omniscience*.

FREE WILL

God gives man free-will, and man chooses to believe in determinism, instead. That is the sad irony that Calvinists introduce into Christianity. So, is "freewill" a pagan term? No, it is a *biblical* term:

> **Philemon 1:12-14:** "I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of **your own free will**."

There are several references to "freewill" that occur in the Bible, as found in the *King James* translation of the Bible. Here is one example:

> **Ezra 7:13:** "I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are minded of their own **freewill** to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee." (*KJV*)

Here are additional variations to free-will, as found in the *New American Standard* translation:

> **Genesis 49:6:** "Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their **self-will** they lamed oxen."
>
> **1st Peter 5:2:** "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but **voluntarily**, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness."
>
> **Luke 12:57:** "'And why do you not even on your **own initiative** judge what is right?'"

If God has free will (Ephesians 1:6), and if man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), it stands to reason that man may also have free will, or else in what way is man created in the image of God? Free will is the gift of a life-giving God in order for humans and angels to possess a living mind, with autonomy of reason and creative intelligence, so as to be able to act independently, all so that mankind may be suitable caretakers of God's creative works.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"The more technical definition of free will that some people use is this: We have free will if we are ultimately or decisively self-determining, and the only preferences and choices that we can be held accountable for are ones that are ultimately or decisively self-determined. The key word here is ultimate, or decisive. The point is not just that choices are self-determined, but that the self is the ultimate or decisive determiner. The opposite of this definition would be that God is the only being who is ultimately self-determining, and is himself ultimately the disposer of all things, including all choices — however many or diverse other intervening causes are. On this definition, no human being has free will, at any time. Neither before or after the fall, or in heaven, are creatures ultimately self-determining. There are great measures of self-determination, as the Bible often shows, but never is man the ultimate or decisive cause of his preferences and choices. When man's agency and God's agency are compared, both are real, but God's is decisive. Yet — and here's the mystery that causes so many to stumble — God is always decisive in such a way that man's agency is real, and his responsibility remains."*[153]

Our reply:

So, the type of free-will that Calvinists advocate is one in which man's self-determinations are "never" the "ultimate or decisive cause of his preferences and choices." So, think of any action, and according to Calvinism, you are not the ultimate and decisive self-determiner of the choice and preference to perform that action—God is. That is the type of *non-free* free-will that Calvinists advocate, also termed "compatibilistic free-will," meaning that an individual is free to perform only and precisely what is compatible with their predetermined nature. Hence, there is no meaningful distinction between Compatibilism and Determinism. The opposite of deterministic Compatibilism is autonomous, libertarian free-will, in which libertarian free-will is comprised of three main elements:

(1) Independent will. God does not cause our motives.
(2) Autonomy of reason. We self-determine our own motives.
(3) Power of contrary choice.

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[153] *A Beginner's Guide to 'Free Will'*, emphasis mine, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/a-beginners-guide-to-free-will.

Set within the context of Cain, according to Genesis chapter 4, God asked why he was angry, warning and encouraging him of potential dangers that he must get under control so that things will go well with him.

> **Genesis 4:6-8:** "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but **you must master it**.' Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him."

The fact that God is acting persuasively shows the independence of Cain. He was his own person, though unfortunately acting contrary to the way in which God felt that he should. The fact that God reasoned with Cain, in that he must "master" the sin that was crouching at this door, shows that God believed that Cain could exercise his autonomous, self-determination in a positive manner. He should be able to control the murderous motives that he felt inside. The fact that God warned Cain what would happen if he failed to control himself shows that God believed that Cain possessed the power of contrary choice, that is, Cain did not have to murder Able, even though that is exactly what he eventually did.

Evolutionists also reject free-will, instead professing biological determinism, in which that is the driving cause that shapes our choices. Such determinism is attractive to philosophers because it provides a neat and clean philosophical framework in order to explain all of our choices—i.e. something else renders it certain. Whereas for the Evolutionist, it is biological determinism, for the Calvinist, it is divine determinism. By contrast, though, non-Calvinists presuppose that man is a self-determining being. This is a difficult concept for philosophers, which perhaps even presupposes the need for a special Creator. Mankind is special in its self-determining, autonomous condition, because God is special, and God has created special creatures for His own unique special purpose, that is, to be caretakers of His creative works.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Let us lay aside this canard once for all…Man has a will. Unregenerate man's will is, according to the Lord Jesus Himself, enslaved to sin (John 8:34), but it is still a will."*[154]

[154] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 347.

Our reply:

But is it an *independent* will? If man does not have an autonomous will that is independent from God, then there is no meaningful way to defend against the charge that God is the author of *their* sin. Only an independent will, *coexisting* with God's will, can distinguish God's holiness from man's sinfulness. If God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, so that man's will stems from God's will, then we are left with only one will in the cosmos: God's Will. Conversely, the concept of a truly independent free-will maintains God's holiness, explains a myriad of Scripture verses in which God denies doing certain things, and also gives rise to a true meaning of divine permission. An *independent* will is crucial to this debate. Otherwise, Calvinism's purported decree of "whatsoever comes to pass" would give the unbeliever an excuse for rejecting Christ, such that they were born this way. Free-will says No! You have a choice for which each of us are eternally held responsible.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"From the time a child in the United States enters kindergarten, he begins to be taught and to learn, if only through osmosis, a particular understanding of the nature of man—this concept of free will—that man is free to choose the good or evil, on either side. That's a blasphemous doctrine. The Bible tells us that something happened, radically, to the constituent nature of humanity in the Fall."*[155]

Our reply:

In other words, the Calvinist view of free-will is that our will is free to choose only evil, all the time, because our nature has been altered by our father, Adam. Thus, mankind is incapable of humbly admitting its fallen state and receiving God's free offer of healing and restoration. However, our freedom of the will has not been lost from birth due to the fall of Adam, but rather God uses the power of the gospel to tap into our natural freedom of the will, in order to convict and to persuade us, so as to place one's faith in Christ for salvation. If fallen mankind did not possess freedom of the will to accept Christ, then what would be the point of the Holy Spirit's work of conviction and persuasion of the lost?

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[155] R.C. Sproul, *Calvinist* movie trailer.

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101.**

> Al Mohler states: *"The subversion of moral responsibility is one of the most significant developments of recent decades. Though this subversion was originally philosophical, more recent efforts have been based in biology and psychology. Various theorists have argued that our decisions and actions are determined by genetics, environmental factors, or other forces. Now, Scientific American is out with a report on a study linking determinism and moral responsibility. The diverse theories of determinism propose that our choices and decisions are not an exercise of the will, but simply the inevitable outcome of factors outside our control. As Scientific American explains, determinists argue that 'everything that happens is determined by what happened before — our actions are inevitable consequences of the events leading up to the action.' In other words, free will doesn't exist."*[156]

"Other forces" such as God's divine decree? The *naturalistic* determinism of the evolutionist is reminiscent of Calvinism's *theological* determinism. So here you have one leading Calvinist defending free-will when talking to the naturalistic atheist, while on the other hand, another leading Calvinist calls the doctrine of free-will "blasphemous." Part of the issue is that when Calvinists refer to free-will, they infer *compatibilistic* free-will, but yet which is still determinism, that is, a very similar type of determinism that is being denounced by Al Mohler.

> Al Mohler continues: *"Used in this sense, free will means the exercise of authentic moral choice and agency. We choose to take one action rather than the other, and must then take responsibility for that choice. This link between moral choice and moral responsibility is virtually instinctive to humans."*[157]

It's almost like Al Mohler is saying: From the very first day you enter kindergarten, this is being taught to you….

> Al Mohler continues: *"As a matter of fact, it is basic to our understanding of what it means to be human. We hold each other responsible for actions and choices. But if all of our choices are*

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[156] Albert Mohler, *So . . . Why Did I Write This? The Delusion of Determinism*. http://www.albertmohler.com/2008/08/21/so-why-did-i-write-this-the-delusion-of-determinism/

[157] Ibid.

> *illusory — and everything is merely the 'inevitable consequence' of something beyond our control, moral responsibility is an exercise in delusion."*[158]

How do Calvinists avoid seeing these things in relation to their own soteriological determinism? Is it attributable to cognitive dissonance?

Calvinistic Apologist, Matt Slick, of CARM ministries, defines the point of our contention over the issue of free-will on his web site. I will go through each of Matt's points here:

> *"Free will is the ability to make choices without external coersion. There are debates as to what extent this free will is to be understood as it relates to people. There are two main views: compatibilism and libertarianism."*
>
> *"The compatibilist view is the position that a person's freedom is restricted by his nature as is described in Scripture. In other words, he can only choose what his nature (sinful or regenerate) will allow him to choose. Therefore, such verses as 1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 3:10-12; Rom. 6:14-20 are used to demonstrate that, for example, the unbeliever is incapable of choosing God of his own free will since they say that the unbeliever cannot receive spiritual things, does no good, and is a slave to sin. …*
>
> *The biblical position is compatibilism. Since the Bible clearly teaches us that the unbeliever is restricted to making sinful choices (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 3:10-12; Rom. 6:14-20), then we must conclude that anyone who believes in God (John 3:16; 3:36) does so because God has granted that he believe (Phil. 1:29), has caused him to be born again (1 Pet. 1:3), and chosen him for salvation (2 Thess. 2:13)."*

Let's look at Matt's errors, point by point, in light of the Scriptures:

Matt wrote, "a person's freedom is restricted by his nature as is described in Scripture. In other words, he can only choose what his nature (sinful or regenerate) will allow him to choose."

While we would agree that mankind's freedom to choose is restricted to the confines of his nature, we disagree as to what those confines *are* in relation to sinful humanity. For instance, a man is not free to flap his arms and fly around the world, no matter how much he may will

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[158] Ibid.

to do so. He is confined by his physical abilities. So too, there are moral confines on the abilities of sinful man's will.

We would agree that mankind is born incapable of willingly keeping all the demands of the law so as to merit salvation. And we would also agree that mankind is in bondage to sin. We would not agree that a man is born incapable of willingly admitting that he is in bondage and in need of help — especially in light of God's gracious, Holy Spirit inspired, clear revelation — by means of the law (a tutor) and the gospel (a powerful appeal to be reconciled).

Suppose a man was born in a prison cell and never told that he was in a cell. He was simply unaware of any thing outside the walls of his world. We would all agree that the man is born in bondage and incapable of even recognizing his position. But, suppose someone came into his cell and informed him of the world outside the walls. Does the fact that he was born in bondage prove he is incapable of hearing the messenger and believing his message? Of course not. You can acknowledge the bondage of the man from birth without assuming he is also born incapable of believing the testimony of the messengers sent for the purpose of helping him to be set free.

The belief that a man is born in a prison cell is distinct from the belief that the man is incapable of acknowledging that he is in a prison cell and accepting help to escape when it is clearly offered. Calvinists have pointed to passages that prove mankind is born in the cell while assuming mankind is incapable of humbly admitting they are in a cell and trusting in Christ to set them free.

No passage in all of scripture ever suggests that fallen men are incapable of willingly responding to God's own appeal to be reconciled from their fallen condition.

Matt wrote, "such verses as 1 Cor. 2:14; 3:10-12; Rom. 6:14-20 are used to demonstrate that, for example, the unbeliever is incapable of choosing God of his own free will since they say that the unbeliever cannot receive spiritual things, does no good, and is a slave to sin. … the Bible clearly teaches us that the unbeliever is restricted to making sinful choices (1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 3:10-12; Rom. 6:14-20)

The passages cited simply do not say what Matt asserts. (See Section 3 for exegetical commentary on each of these texts). Nothing in the three passages listed even come close to suggesting that mankind is incapable of admitting they need help when God Himself offers it. Matt goes on to describe libertarian free will (LFW) in this manner:

> *"Libertarian free will says that the person's will is not restricted by his sinful nature, and that he is still able to choose or accept*

> *God freely. Verses used to support this view are John 3:16 and 3:36."*

This is an over-simplified and very shallow explanation of LFW. LFW (or contra-causal freedom) is "the categorical ability of the will to refrain or not refrain from a given moral action." So, in relation to soteriology, LFW is mankind's ability to accept or reject God's appeal to be reconciled through faith in Christ. Given that mankind is held responsible for how they respond to Christ and His words (John 12:48), there is no biblical or theological reason to suggest that mankind is born unable to respond to His powerful, life-giving words (Heb. 4:12; 2 Tim. 3:15-16; Rm. 10:17; John 6:63; 20:31). It makes no practical sense to hold mankind responsible (response-able) to Christ's words if indeed they are unable-to-respond to those words, nor is it ever explicitly taught in Scripture. Matt continues:

> *"All the cults and false religious systems teach the libertarian view of free will…."*

This is factually inaccurate. Islam, naturalistic Atheism, and ancient Gnosticism, to name a few, all held to forms of determinism. Matt goes on:

> *"…that salvation and spiritual understanding are completely within the grasp of sinners (in spite of their enslavement to and deadness in sin). For them, salvation would be totally up to the ability of the individual to make such a choice."*

This is a common error made by Calvinistic believers. They wrongly assert that non-Calvinists believe salvation itself is "within the grasp of sinners" because we teach that mankind is responsible to believe and repent of sin. Being capable of repenting in faith is not equal to saving oneself. Matt is conflating two separate choices as if they are one in the same.

By conflating these two very distinct actions, the Calvinist causes much-unneeded confusion. It would be tantamount to suggesting that because the Prodigal son chose to return home that the father was obligated to accept and restore him *because* of his choice to return. The son alone was responsible for his choice to return. Likewise, the father alone was responsible for his choice to accept and restore him. The only obligation on the father is one he puts on himself on the basis of his own goodness and grace. Nothing is owed to the son on the basis of his choice to return.

When the Calvinist conflates these two choices as if they are one in the same it confounds an otherwise very simple gospel message.

Free Will as "Human Autonomy" (the "separateness" of God)

Webster's defines "autonomous" simply as "undertaken or carried on without outside control." Autonomous describes things that function separately or independently. For instance, once you move out of your parents' house, and get your own job, you will be an autonomous member of the family. This adjective "autonomous" is often used of countries, regions, or groups that have the right to govern themselves. Autonomous is from Greek autonomos "independent," from autos "self" plus nomos "law."

Some wrongly assume that the Traditionalist's use of this term is meant to suggest that mankind's existence, sustenance and natural abilities are completely independent of God, altogether. This is absurd, of course. Paul asked his readers, "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Cor. 4:7), which strongly implies that all our abilities, including the ability to make choices, is given to us by a gracious God.

We can affirm that "God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him," (Ps. 115:3) while still holding on to the equally valid truth that, "the highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to mankind" (Ps. 115:16). This means it pleases God to give man a certain level of "autonomy" or "separateness." This is a biblical view of divine sovereignty and human autonomy. As A.W. Tozer rightly explains:

> *"God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so."*[159]

Some Calvinists have wrongly concluded that the Traditionalist seeks to downplay the sovereignty of God and highlight the autonomy of

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[159] *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1961), 110-111.

man, when in reality we seek to maintain the right biblical understanding of man's autonomy so as to better highlight the Sovereignty, Love and Holiness of God.

Let us turn our attention to the attribute of God's Holiness. If you notice that the Tozer quote above is from his book, "The Knowledge of the Holy." Tozer's intentions are in defense of God's Holiness, not an attempt to undermine other equally important attributes of our good God.

I suspect that Tozer, like myself, would wholeheartedly agree with John Piper's teaching on God's Holiness here:

> *"Every effort to define the holiness of God ultimately winds up by saying: God is holy means God is God. Let me illustrate. The root meaning of holy is probably to cut or separate. A holy thing is cut off from and separated from common (we would say secular) use. Earthly things and persons are holy as they are distinct from the world and devoted to God. So the Bible speaks of holy ground (Exodus 3:5), holy assemblies (Exodus 12:16), holy sabbaths (Exodus 16:23), a holy nation (Exodus 19:6); holy garments (Exodus 28:2), a holy city (Nehemiah 11:1), holy promises (Psalm 105:42), holy men (2 Peter 1:21) and women (1 Peter 3:5), holy scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15), holy hands (1 Timothy 2:8), a holy kiss (Romans 16:16), and a holy faith (Jude 20). Almost anything can become holy if it is separated from the common and devoted to God.*
>
> *But notice what happens when this definition is applied to God himself. From what can you separate God to make him holy? The very god-ness of God means that he is separate from all that is not God. There is an infinite qualitative difference between Creator and creature. God is one of a kind. Sui generis. In a class by himself. In that sense he is utterly holy. But then you have said no more than that he is God." – John Piper (emphasis added)*

Notice the common term used to describe God's Holiness and man's autonomy? The word "separate" is referenced in both definitions. This is significant.

Some Calvinists fail to see that the Traditionalists defense of man's separateness (autonomy) is actually in defense of God's Holiness, or as Piper put it, God's separateness "from all that is not God." But, in a world of divine meticulous control of all things, what is left to be considered "separate" in any meaningful sense of the word?

One would think that sinful intentions would be included in "all that is not God," yet many Calvinistic scholars affirm that man's sinful

intentions are unchangeably predetermined or brought about by God so as to glorify Himself.[160]

We must understand that John Piper, while holding to the same definition of holiness as Tozer, comes to a very different conclusion about the nature of our thrice Holy God. Continuing with the quote above, Piper concludes:

> *"If the holiness of a man derives from being separated from the world and devoted to God, to whom is God devoted so as to derive his holiness? To no one but himself."*

Piper fails to relate his understanding of God's Holiness (separateness) to the nature of morally accountable creatures (as autonomously separate) but instead uses this attribute to emphasize his Calvinistic view of God's self-seeking nature.

Piper is arguing that God is all about Himself because there is no "higher reality than God to which He must conform in order to be holy." In other words, God is all about God because there is nothing more Holy than God. But, what does this even mean unless you establish that which God has separated Himself from in the meticulously determined world of Piper's Calvinism?

How can one celebrate God being about God unless you separate that which is not about God from that which is about God? What exactly can be deemed as "separated" in a worldview where absolutely everything is brought about by God for God? Holiness loses its meaning in a deterministic worldview because nothing can be described in any significant way as being "separate" from God and His will.

It is senseless to speak of God's Holiness (as separateness) unless there is something outside of God from which to separate. God cannot be separated from Himself or His own choices. And if you insist on the one

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[160] "God . . . brings about all things in accordance with his will. In other words, it isn't just that God manages to turn the evil aspects of our world to good for those who love him; it is rather that he himself brings about these evil aspects for his glory (see Ex. 9:13-16; John 9:3) and his people's good (see Heb. 12:3-11; James 1:2-4). This includes—as incredible and as unacceptable as it may currently seem—God's having even brought about the Nazis' brutality at Birkenau and Auschwitz as well as the terrible killings of Dennis Rader and even the sexual abuse of a young child…" (Link)— Mark R. Talbot, "'All the Good That Is Ours in Christ': Seeing God's Gracious Hand in the Hurts Others Do to Us," in John Piper and Justin Taylor (eds.), Suffering and the Sovereignty of God (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 31-77 (quote from p.42).

hand that God is unchangeably determining all creature's sinful inclinations so as to glorify Himself, then how can you on the other hand claim that God is wholly separate from those same sinful, yet self-glorifying means? You might as well be claiming A is not A (God is separate but not separate).

Listen, either God is implicated in moral evil or He is not. He is either Holy or He is not. He is either separate (an affirmation of both Divine Holiness and human autonomy) or He is not (a denial of both Divine Holiness and human autonomy). Do not allow the Calvinists to have their cake and eat it too on this point.

John Piper takes the attribute of Holiness to teach that "God is all about Himself." Whereas, Tozer takes the attribute of Holiness to teach that while God would be perfectly just to be all about Himself and His own glorification, He graciously chooses to glorify undeserving creatures who have separated themselves from Him through autonomously sinful choices.

Traditionalists, like myself, simply believe that Tozer is right and Piper is wrong.

Calvinist objection:

If true love requires "free will," and if there is no "free will" in Heaven to sin, then it follows that there cannot be true love in Heaven by sinless beings, and yet who would suggest that there is no love in Heaven?

Our reply:

When people receive Christ, they receive all that comes with being a Christian, including eternal life and a future sinless nature. So, even if there will be no "free will" in Heaven to sin, we will have essentially chosen (on earth) to receive that (future) sinless nature.

Calvinist objection:

Non-Calvinists virtually deify "free will" even though it is God's sovereign choice that saves individuals. For instance, if left to himself, Paul would never have chosen Christ. God graciously made the choice to save Paul. That is why he is saved. It's not because Paul made a free will choice. Paul's positive choice is only an after-effect of God's choice.

Our reply:

If I've chosen a fork instead of a spoon, have I deified the fork? Whichever is chosen, it's still my choice to use whichever utensil that I

deem best. So, regardless of whether God chose to save people through free-will or Irresistible Grace, either would still be God's choice to use or not to use. God ultimately determines His own system of providence.

Inherent to Calvinism is the notion that God has secretly, already sorted and ordered humanity from eternity past, having selected certain future, unborn humans that He wished to save, and discarded the rest, and the whole idea of free-will could undermine who God wished to save. The opposing view is the following: (a) God desires all to come to Him, and (b) the sorting and ordering of humanity is not yet complete, and (c) the sorting and ordering is done by His creatures—just like with the angels. Free-will is simply the utensil God has chosen for the sorting and ordering to take place, consistent with the principles of (a), (b) and (c) above.

Indeed, Paul (or at the time Saul) would *likely* not have chosen to come to Christ, aside from Christ's visible encounter along the road to Damascus, though even that is still speculation, just as anti-Christians do sometimes convert to Christianity without major revelations of God. Some even have a death-bed conversion. Clearly, God was not going to wait that long since He intended to call him to evangelism. Nonetheless, two facts remain: (a) God didn't make Paul positively respond to His orders, and (b) others in similar circumstances chose not to act positively to God's orders, such as Balaam and Jonah. Paul still had his own choice to make while he was blinded for three days. He could have chosen to harden his heart, like with Jonah and Balaam. It is question-begging to suppose that since Paul made the right choice, that his choice must have been made for him.

GASLIGHTING (SPIRITUALIZED)

According to psychological experts, "gaslighting" is a form of manipulation that seeks to sow seeds of doubt in a targeted individual or in members of a targeted group, hoping to make them question their own perception of reality in order to make them more vulnerable to persuasion.

Some Calvinists argue that we are all born believing in the basic concepts of human freedom and free will, though which is actually false, since God controls all of our preferences, and thus our choices (under their definition of "sovereignty").

If one attempts to disagree, they are often made to feel as if they are crazy, heretical, or just too ignorant to really understand. I believe this is a form of "spiritualized gaslighting."

It comes in the form of statements like, "You just don't understand Calvinism," even after reading directly from a quote of John Calvin himself. Or a statement like, "Yes it's actually your choice," after they just argued that God is the decisive cause (determiner) of every desire and choice that has ever been made.

If one objects to the apparent contradiction of such claims, they are painted as an ignorant and/or rebellious person who just won't "accept the plain reading of Scripture," even though Biblical scholars have disagreed over these interpretations for generations.

Do not allow yourself to be gaslighted. We are born with the perception of free will (responsibility) because that's how God created us.

GIFT PRINCIPLES

The Bible presents eternal life as a free gift. Romans 6:23 states: "For the wages of sin is death, but the **free gift** of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord." So, if we meet God's condition for eternal life according to John 3:16, by believing in Jesus, and thereby receive God's free gift, can it be said that we thus *earned* salvation or in any way *contributed* to our salvation?

If a gift could be earned, then it is no longer a gift but a *payment* due. For instance, when the Prodigal Son returned home after squandering his share of the inheritance, humbly asking his father to make him as one of his servants, can it reasonably be said that the Prodigal Son contributed, caused, earned or in any induced his father to shockingly put the ring back on his finger, kill the fatted calf and throw a celebration party? (See Luke 15:11-32.) That type of unexpected welcome was completely the father's grace and choice. If anything, the Prodigal Son possibly deserved to be stoned to death. So, too, when the penitent sinner comes to Christ, our submission doesn't merit, cause or contribute to God's grace. God's response in adopting us as sons, bestowing eternal life and giving us the grace of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is pure shocking grace on His part. To suggest otherwise is to imply that God's plan of salvation through Christ's death upon the cross was compulsory. Far from it. Our personal decision to submit to Christ did not *cause* God to establish the plan of redemption at Calvary. Instead, Calvary was completely God's choice and totally gracious on His part. Our choice to either accept or reject His well-meant offer of the gospel is all part of the system of grace that God has chosen.

Calvinists argue that if God's free gift of eternal life could be refused, then conversely its acceptance necessarily establishes credit for the receiver, who thus can comparatively boast of their good, wise and smart choice to accept it, in comparison to others who reject it. However, in order to correct this type of thinking, ask the Calvinist to take the following challenge, to show their logic in action: Upon receiving a wedding anniversary gift from their spouse, tell their spouse that they are taking credit for their spouse's gift since it is being freely accepted, and also add that the gift is not truly *gracious*, since it is a gift that can be refused.

In Calvinism, faith is a gift that God only gives to some people, namely those whom God has chosen (i.e. Calvinism's elect). Calvinists frequently cite Ephesians 2:8 as evidence that faith is a gift, but in context, *salvation* is the gift, just as Romans 6:23 confirms. Calvinists also cite instances where repentance and belief in the gospel are "granted," such as Acts 5:30-31, Acts 11:17-18, Philippians 1:27-30 and 2nd Timothy 2:24-26.

However, being granted the privilege of believing in Christ is similar to (a) Israel being granted repentance, as per Acts 5:30-31, and (b) the Gentiles being granted repentance, as per Acts 11:17-18, which comes about by the opportunity to hear and believe in the gospel. Obviously, not all Jews and Gentiles took advantage of that opportunity—and which makes us all the more accountable. When people embrace the light that God gives them, then God will give more, but if people reject the light that they do have, then there is no reason to supply more.

Romans 10:17 tells us where faith comes from, which is by hearing the gospel, so that when a person hears the gospel, they can choose to place their faith in the gospel, instead of anywhere else they had previously placed their faith.

GLORY

Have you ever heard a Calvinist say, "It's all about the glory of God?" That seems to be a common expression, but it begs the question: What brings God the most glory? Non-Calvinists believe that God is most glorified by His love and provision for all people. Would Calvinists ever affirm that God is most glorified by stepping on poor helpless creatures who can only think and do what is *exhaustively* decreed for them?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Vincent Cheung: *"One who thinks that God's glory is not worth the death and suffering of billions of people has too high an opinion of himself and humanity."*[161]

> James White: *"The punishment of deserving sinners glorifies Him in the demonstration of His holiness and righteousness."*[162]

> James White: *"God is all-sufficient, and all life, glory, goodness and blessedness are found in Him and in Him alone. He does not stand in need of any of the creatures that He has made, nor does He derive any part of His glory from them. On the contrary, He manifests His own glory in and by them."*[163]

> James White: *"The truth is that the Bible speaks much of free will-God's free will, that is, not man's. The utter freedom of God to do with His creation as He sees fit, not as His creatures see fit, is a constant theme. God's purpose rules over all, not just in the 'big things' but in all things. This is the basis of the Christian doctrine of God's eternal decree: that in creating all that exists, God does so for a purpose, that being His own glorification."*[164]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, the purpose of humanity, elect and non-elect, is to display God's various attributes of love and hate, peace and wrath, grace and judgment. However, wouldn't that just be vanity? Why would God feel any need to do this? How would that be an honorable pursuit?

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[161] *The Problem of Evil*, 2004, 10, www.vincentcheung.com.
[162] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 269.
[163] Ibid., 35.
[164] Ibid., 36.

Moreover, if God is the source and origin of all good and evil on display, then would that make God morally ambiguous? Calvinism ultimately seems to portray God like the flawed gods of the Greeks and Romans.

Conversely, non-Calvinists believe that God created humanity with the purpose and intention of having a relationship, in which freewill makes relationships truly possible, insomuch that free-will is necessary for there to be genuine worship and reciprocated love. In other words, God is most glorified by His love and provision for all people, with real relationships among real people who are not puppets who are irresistibly forced to do anything.

God's greatest glory is manifested in His own selflessness. God does not selfishly sacrifice creation for the sake of His own glory, but instead He selflessly sacrifices Himself for sake of His creation, which in turn reveals Him as the most glorious of all. It is the selfless motive of Christ's sacrifice that brings Him so much glory. To in anyway undermine the selflessness of the Divine motive actually undermines the very thing that makes His grace so glorious.

Jesus described the greatest commandment at Matthew 22:37-40: "And He said to him, '"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'" So, the purpose of the world is to glorify God by *reciprocating* His love, and to effect the same in others, by showing them God's love so that they would love God in return.

> Dave Hunt: *"...God sovereignly endued man with a free will so that he could love God and his fellows from his heart. Man's will is no threat to God's sovereignty. Instead, it brings greater glory to God, who wins the love and praise of those who are free to choose otherwise."*[165]

> Dave Hunt: *"We have quoted leading Calvinists to the effect that God is the cause of the evil in each heart. If so, in preventing evil, wouldn't God be restraining Himself? What is the point, and how would that bring Him glory? The sovereignty White elevates above all else turns out to rule over a theatre of meaningless marionettes."*[166]

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[165] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 49.
[166] Ibid., 51.

Dave Hunt: *"Surely love is the most important and most thrilling subject of all--and nothing is so beautiful as God's love manifest in Jesus Christ. Tragically, Calvinism robs us of what ought to be 'the greatest story ever told.' It reduces God's love to a form of favoritism without passion, and it denies man the capacity of responding from his heart, thereby robbing God of the joy of a genuine response from man and the glory it alone can bring."*[167]

Roger Olson: "True glory, the best glory, the right glory, worthy of worship and honor and devotion, necessarily includes goodness. Power without goodness is not truly glorious, even if it is called that. What makes someone or something worthy of veneration is not sheer might, but goodness. Who is more worthy of imitation and even veneration: Mother Teresa or Adolph Hitler? The latter conquered most of Europe. The former had little power outside of her example, and yet most people would say that Mother Teresa was more glorious than Adolph Hitler. God is glorious because He is both great and good, and His goodness, like His greatness, must have some resonance with our best and highest notions of goodness, or else it is meaningless. All that is to say that Arminianism's critics are the proverbial people casting stones while living in glass houses. They talk endlessly about God's glory, and about God-centeredness, while sucking the goodness out of God, and thus divesting Him of real glory. Their theology may be God-centered, but the God at its center is unworthy of being at the center. Better a man-centered theology, than one that revolves around a Being hardly distinguishable from the devil. In spite of objections to the contrary, I will argue that classical Arminian theology is just as God-centered as Calvinism, if not more so, that God at its center, whose glory, to the contrary of critic's claims, is the chief end or purpose of everything, is not morally ambiguous, which is the main point of Arminianism."[168]

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[167] Ibid., 255.

[168] *Roger Olson: What is God Centered Theology?*, 8:06-10:05, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8eq7D_SHDs.

GOD

God is Love, Light and Life. Each of these things tell us something special about God.

1st John 4:7-8 tells us that God is *love*: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, **for God is love**." 1st John 4:16 also states: "We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. **God is love**, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." Referring to God as "love" means that He is intelligent, emotional and also possesses a free-will, insomuch that love requires a choice.

1st John 1:5-7 tells us that God is *light*: "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is Light**, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we **walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light**, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." Referring to God as "light" conveys God's holiness, in terms of His holy character. James 1:17 further adds: "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the **Father of lights**, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." Habakkuk 1:13 states: "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil, and You can not look on wickedness with favor." Non-Calvinists argue that this disproves Calvinism's doctrine of exhaustive determinism, because God is too holy to ever be considered sin's author.

John 1:3-4 tells us that God is *life*: "**All things came into being through Him**, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. **In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men**." God is the source of all life in existence. Jesus states at Luke 20:38: "Now He is not the **God** of the dead but **of the living**; for all live to Him." Genesis 2:7 states of the first man, Adam: "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being**." God is life, and what He seeks from us can be referred to as **The Great Exchange**. God seeks to give life for life. God desires to give you *His* life in exchange for *your* life. He will give you eternal life, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, if you will give Him your life. God chooses us to choose Him. Will we?

GOD-CENTERED

Calvinists believe that non-Calvinism is necessarily man-centered, rather than God-centered, if the choice of salvation is left up to the sinner's own decision to humble themselves, confess their sins and ask God for forgiveness, rather than God irresistibly making the choice for them. Nonetheless, that becomes a moot point if God chose the non-Calvinist paradigm over Calvinism as His system of providence. In other words, how can you tell God that His system of providence is "man-centered" if He ultimately chose it as something that brings Him the most glory?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Provisionism replaces the power of God with possibilities fulfilled by the power of man."*[169]

Our reply:

In Provisionism, man's free-will does not change the fact that salvation hinges on God alone. For instance, if a sinner asks God for forgiveness, it remains entirely God's choice whether to grant it. Consider the analogy of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Did the son's return in humility *force* the father to restore him? In that culture, the father may have had the right to simply have him stoned. So, for the father to instead forgive and restore him, after bearing the full cost of his son's misdeeds, means that it was the father's unnecessitated, free choice to simply be gracious, when he otherwise didn't have to.

What do Calvinists believe?

When you heard of the gospel, didn't it seem irresistible to you?

Our reply:

In the Parable of the Sower, even those who were characterized as being among the "rocky soil" (Luke 8:13), did *initially* "receive the word with joy" and "believe for a while," though "in time of temptation fall away." Sometimes, people will proudly declare their deconversion from

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[169] *Dr.Flowers' Invitation to a John 6 Birthday Party!*, 14:29 – 14:36. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-irNakI8yf4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2XCui-GH0zbCQpwuwwoBUYzLI_XNZbqZjATQwIaEL8vt_mOkfK1SbZR64

Christianity, citing various things such as (a) reservations over theology, in terms of the existence of Hell or general suffering in the world, (b) science, in terms of Darwin's Theory of Evolution, and (c) Christians themselves, labeling them as "judgmental." However, as Luke 8:13 shows, the real reason can be traced back to choosing sin over God. People don't just fall away. They fall *into* sin, and then justify it with a bunch of misdirection. God explains it this way: "But **your iniquities** have made a separation between you and your God, and **your sins** have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." (Isaiah 59:2) So, while the gospel is indeed appealing, as legitimately good news, people still have to choose God over sin, in the form of repentance.

While the message of the gospel may indeed seem *irresistible* to those who are now Christians, the reality is that we must continue to consciously choose God over sin every day. Ask Calvinists whether they had ever asked God to give them an "Irresistible Grace" to never sin again, for the rest of their lives. If they have, they will know by now that God gives that gift to no one—at least not yet on this side of eternity. However, what God will do, is provide a "way of escape." (1st Corinthians 10:13) So, we all have to make our own choices, even as believers, and God will not let us escape from having to make our choices. Joshua 24:15 states: "'If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, **choose for yourselves today whom you will serve**: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; **but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

If God allows man to choose his eternal destination, either Heaven or Hell, then God is no longer in control of the outcome.

Our reply:

If God allows someone to choose something, then it's God's choice to give them that freedom and responsibility in the first place.

GOD'S WILL

Is it true that every time we sin, we thwart God's Will for our life? Yes, of course. However, we can never thwart God's overall purpose for creation and mankind. Hence, it is necessary to give further consideration to the nature of God's Will.

- God's **Antecedent Will** is what He wants to be the case.

- God's **Consequent Will** is what He allows to be the case, in spite of His Antecedent Will, and is consequent to the creature's free decisions to obey or disobey.

As an example, consider an illustration in which the Antecedent Will of our founding fathers was that all of our citizens enjoy life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, though the Consequent Will is to deprive certain citizens of that right, should they violate certain laws and thus instead come to be in need of incarceration.[170] Similarly, God antecedently desires that all men receive His free offer of forgiveness through the gospel, though He will consequently deprive people of the hope of spending eternity with Him in Heaven if they perish in a state of rejecting Him.

Regarding God's overall purpose for creation and mankind:

- God's **Unilateral Will** is when He alone does an action, in which His actions can never be thwarted or prevented or stopped or hindered in any way.

- God's **will concerning others** involves an Antecedent Will, which is what He wants to be the case, and a Consequent Will which is what He allows to be the case, depending upon whichever way a person chooses.

In Calvinism, God desires the salvation of certain individuals that He never *intended* to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. That Will is just a hopeless contradiction. In non-Calvinism, though, God desires the salvation of everyone, and has provided the means of salvation to everyone through the Cross, but allows people the *dubious* privilege of rejecting Him (and spending eternity apart from Him) or the *glorious* privilege of

[170] Helpful illustration provided by the **Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

accepting Him (and spending eternity with Him in Heaven). That's *complimentary*. Moreover, God's **Consequent Will** is never sinful because He does not cause the evil human motives and intentions that He uses, whereas in Calvinism, God has a *total plan* of all things to happen exactly as they are, in which He meticulously, exhaustively, unchangeably, unilaterally, universally and purposefully causes every human intention, good and evil, thus making Him the mastermind of this sinful world. As such, God according to Calvinism, would not be acting consequently to people's actions (i.e. extending the offer of the banquet to additional groups at Matthew 22:9, as a consequence of the first group rejecting the offer), but instead God would be acting to achieve all that was previously, antecedently decreed.

What do Calvinists believe?

Was it God's will that Jesus be murdered on the Cross?

Our reply:

Only *consequently*. God *antecedently* willed for Adam and Eve to remain faithful in the Garden of Eden, and serve as suitable caretakers for His creative ways. God willed Calvary only *consequently* as a means to redeem fallen mankind. By contrast in Calvinism, God willed Calvary as part of a *total plan* of all things, in which God *antecedently* willed the creation, fall and redemption of mankind, the death of His Son, and the bifurcation of humanity into elect and non-elect components. In other words, in Calvinism, there is no Consequent Will—only the Antecedent Will, and their Antecedent Will is subdivided between a Secret Will and a Revealed Will, in which only the Secret Will is what God truly desires and brings to pass, while the Revealed Will is sort of like a fantasy island which ponders all that could be, had God decreed things differently.

GOSPEL

The message of the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in which there is life in His name, for whosoever believes in Him. John 3:16 summarizes it well: "'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'" So, everyone in the world has a Savior, and if they will place their trust in Him, they will receive His promise of eternal life. John 20:31 also states: "These have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." So, a major aspect of the New Testament gospel is the message of how you can be saved by Jesus Christ.

Calvinists, however, don't believe that just anyone is able to receive the gospel on their own. Calvinists believe that due to the fallen state of man, God must give people an Irresistible Grace in order to overcome the effects of the Fall and believe in Christ. Of course, the Bible doesn't teach an inborn inability to receive the gospel, except perhaps for those who have already, persistently rejected it and have thus become hardened in their heart—which even then can still be rectified. The Calvinist claim is inconsistent with anything that we are able to relate to. For instance, saying that a person is unable to confess their sins and accept forgiveness from Christ is like saying that a person entering AA cannot admit their alcoholic addiction and freely accept help.

The point in saying this is that there is an underlying reason for *why* Calvinists make the claim that not just anyone can receive the gospel. It has to do with logical consistency with TULIP Calvinism. If the gospel was actually open and available to just anyone, then salvation couldn't be limited exclusively to Calvinism's elect. So, that's the theological pre-commitment that is driving this.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Jay Adams: *"As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ Himself who are His elect for whom He died."*[171]

Our reply:

The Apostle Paul didn't seem to follow that advice. He had no problem telling unbelievers that Jesus died for them.

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[171] *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), 70.

> **1st Corinthians 15:1-5:** "Now I make known to you, brethren, the **gospel which I preached to you**, which also **you received**, in which also you stand, **by which also you are saved**, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

The key point is that Paul was recalling the gospel message he taught them, not after they were saved, but *before* they were saved, and His message included the fact that Jesus died for them, according to the Scriptures. That means that any unbeliever can be told that Jesus loves them, died for them on the Cross and made a way for their salvation if they will believe in Him. Realize what is at stake. Paul states at Galatians 1:6-9: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a **different gospel**; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to **distort the gospel of Christ**. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a **gospel contrary** to what **we have preached to you**, he is to be **accursed**! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" In this particular context, the "different gospel" pertained to Judaism. However, any gospel that is contrary to what the apostles taught is subject to a curse, and which becomes relevant when Calvinists claim that Calvinism is the gospel.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the*

> *fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor."*[172]

Our reply:

So is that what the apostles defined as the gospel and preached? One of the biggest concerns about Calvinism is that it has far exceeded the actual writings of the apostles. In other words, if Calvinism is the gospel, then why didn't the apostles lay out the gospel in the form of a well-defined, 5-Point system, and then push it on to the congregations with all of the same clarity and vigor that Calvinists aggressively do today?

Calvinism has taken the gospel of Jesus Christ and boiled it down to the "good news" of a romantic idea that God eternally selected you to be one of the few and favored ones, although which is actually bad news for billions of people who would have been eternally passed over for grace, and also bad news for countless individuals who are left to *speculate* on whether they may truly be one of Calvinism's secretly chosen ones.

> Steven Hitchcock: *"As far as what the gospel really is to the Calvinist, which is his election, we find that what the Calvinist preaches is not so much an offer to sinners, and certainly not that God loves them, but rather, an in-house idea to those already saved that God has saved them, in such a way, that He has even caused them to believe. This in-house idea of an absolutely done-for-you salvation is the gospel to the Calvinist. The Evangelical Calvinist is forced to compartmentalize the gospel in two contradictory ways. On the one hand he must assert that God personally and genuinely invites every non-Christian to respond to the gospel while on the other hand his Calvinism necessitates the assertion that God does not really will the salvation of all. Countless sermons by those on either side of Calvinism have emphasized a particular understanding or dogma while failing to present the actual promise that is to be personally felt by the hearer. It must be a matter of focused attention that it is for every person, that the hearer is to know that the message of the gospel is for him or her personally. The gospel preacher is an Ambassador making a personal appeal to the hearer that the good news is to be personally owned. Therefore, the preacher must have the confidence that God Himself does truly want every person to turn*

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[172] Charles Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*.
http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/calvinis.htm

to Christ in faith and he must not be uncertain because God may have secretly willed to not save them."[173]

Calvinist objection:

How is the gospel message of salvation "open" to the Reprobate, who are known to God from the foundation of the world?[174]

Our reply:

Restated: How can salvation be "open" if God "closed" salvation through eternal election and reprobation?

The simple answer is that God didn't "close" salvation through eternal Election and Reprobation. There is no reason why a non-Calvinist should accept the Calvinist's premise that the Reprobate is of God's own creation. (The purpose of rephrasing the Calvinist's own question is to unmask their presuppositions. Therefore, it can be helpful to restate a Calvinist's own question twice in the following two ways: [1] Restate it in a way that unmasks their presuppositions, and [2] Restate it a second time in a way that replaces their presuppositions with your own, so that the answer to their question is made self-evident. So the restated question above successfully achieves [1].)

Restated a second time: How can salvation be "open" to everyone if God eternally knows beforehand who will choose to meet His genuinely free and well-meant offer of salvation?

Simple. He's omniscient and knows what people will choose for themselves. God's well-meant offer of the gospel remains open until people close it. This successfully achieves [2]. People make their own self-determined choices to "close" salvation for themselves, and an eternal God (who created time and is thus independent of time) can know ahead of time what our self-determined future choices are. We become "elect" when we join the Elect One, Christ, and conversely, we become "reprobate" by our own conscious choice to participate in Adam's Fall and remain as a reprobate until or unless a person accepts God's "open" offer of the gospel.

What do Calvinists believe?

Fallen man cannot repent through the gospel's appeal while suffering from the debilitating condition of spiritual death, in terms of being a dead sinner, without God first regenerating them.

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[173] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 74.

[174] See also the topical discussion on *Omniscience*.

Our reply:

Calvinism dumbs down the gospel, which effectively becomes:

"I was dead. I needed a resurrection. God made it irresistible to me because I'm elect."

However, ask the Calvinist: "Did you know that the prodigal son was described by his father as being *dead*?" A Calvinist will readily agree: "Oh, absolutely!" says the Calvinist.

> **Luke 15:22-24:** "'But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was **dead** and has come to **life again**; he was **lost** and has been **found**." And they began to celebrate.'"

Then ask the Calvinist: "Did you know that the prodigal son was also *lost*? "

A Calvinist will respond: "Of course."

Reply: "Obviously, the prodigal son was *physically* alive. Being *figuratively* 'dead' and 'lost' is like the familiar expression: 'You're dead to me!' The father didn't mean deadness in terms of skeletal remains. He simply meant *separation*. So, do you think you may have taken the Bible out of context with your citation of deadness as requiring a resurrection?"

Calvinist objection:

For Arminians, the power of the gospel is in one's own abilities to conjure up the faith to believe and rescue themselves unto salvation.

Our reply:

Everyone has faith in something. Even Atheists have faith in their theory of Evolution for how they came to be, and they also have a host of modern scientists to place their trust in. The cults also have faith. For instance, the Jehovah's Witnesses place their trust in the authority of the Watchtower Society to be God's voice to them.

The Bible doesn't question *whether* people have faith, but *what* people place their faith *in*. Is it in idols? Is it in riches and power? Or, is our faith placed in God?

A significant problem for Calvinism is that there can be no power in the gospel to lead to the conversion of lost sinners, unless the gospel is accompanied by a preceding regeneration of *Irresistible Grace*. So, for the Calvinist, the real power of the gospel is in regeneration, without which, the gospel is dead and lifeless to lead to the conversion of any lost sinner. John Calvin described this very thing:

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"The minister's teaching and speaking does no good unless God adds his inward calling to it. ... Preaching alone is just a dead letter, and we must beware lest a false imagination, or the semblance of secret illumination, leads us away from the Word on which faith depends."*[175]
>
> John Calvin: *"Now let Pighius asseverate that God wills all to be saved, when not even the external preaching of the doctrine, which is much inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, is made common to all."*[176]
>
> John Calvin: *"In a word, Paul indicates that all clamorous sounding of the human voice will lack effect, unless the virtue of God works internally in the heart."*[177]

However, the apostles didn't seem to connect those same dots when they described the power of the gospel:

> **Romans 1:16:** "For I am not ashamed of the **gospel**, for it is the **power** of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
>
> **Hebrews 4:12**: "For the word of God is **living** and **active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the

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[175] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 278.
[176] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 109.
[177] Ibid., 104.

division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

For the Calvinist, the power of the gospel is completely ineffectual and insufficient *unless* accompanied by an irresistible regeneration, by first making a person Born Again in order to be able to repent, believe and be saved. So, while it is agreed that fallen man, if left to themselves, will not seek God, what about when God seeks and calls man through the message of the gospel? In such a case as God seeking and calling man to repentance, are we going to say that man cannot answer God, unless He first regenerates them? If so, then Calvinists are essentially agreeing with unrepentant Israel at Jeremiah 18:11-12: "'So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. **Oh turn back**, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" But they will say, "It's **hopeless**! For **we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart**."'"

What do Calvinists believe?

That would mean that the appeal of the gospel itself would be sufficient to instill *regeneration*.

Our reply:

No, the appeal of the gospel is sufficient to motivate *repentance*, by supplying a compelling reason to turn to the Lord (Acts 26:28-29), and for those who do, God gives the free gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who delivers regeneration. Ephesians 1:13 states: "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also **believed**, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

Calvinists want to say that God works to make the gospel have power by infusing regeneration onto an elect recipient, while non-Calvinists are saying that the gospel is powerful, in its own right, because the gospel is a work of God from start to finish. It is a message of divine truth, and for that reason, it is compelling to our God-given conscience. Those who embrace it receive peace; those who reject it receive guilt, which if persistently rejected eventually turns into a seared conscience.

GRACE

What is God's grace? It is several things. It includes the fact that Jesus died for you, so that your sins can be forgiven, if you will meet His condition of placing your faith and trust in Him. (John 3:16) God's grace is also the condition of receiving salvation apart from the basis of one's performance under the works of the Law, and belief in Christ is how you enter into that grace.

> **Romans 3:28:** "For we maintain that a man is **justified by faith** apart from works of the Law."

> **Titus 3:3-8:** "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but **according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being **justified by His grace** we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men."

Sometimes Calvinists get the idea that grace can only be grace if it is administered irresistibly. However, consider the way in which Jesus illustrated grace in the parable of the Prodigal Son at Luke 15:11-32. The father did not force his son to stay against his will, and the father was not required to take his son back once he returned home but did so anyway. Grace is shown when God answers prayer, or when God sees a king's tears and adds 14 years on to his life, or when God sees a sick man of 38 years who laments that he has no man to help him into the water when an angel stirs the water and then God becomes that man for him and heals him, or when God provides forgiveness to a woman caught in adultery who was otherwise about to be stoned to death, or when a dying man asks that God remember him when He enters into His kingdom. Grace is marked by compassion, rather than Calvinistic irresistibility.

> Dave Hunt: *"But grace cannot be forced upon anyone or it would not be grace. Thus, it takes the power of choice for man to assent*

> *to God's grace and to receive the gift of salvation God graciously offers."*[178]

> Dave Hunt: *"God is not in any way obligated to provide salvation for anyone. Yet the Bible repeatedly makes it clear that God's gracious purpose is for all mankind to be saved: 'Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth…. Christ Jesus…gave himself a ransom for all….' (1 Timothy 2:4-6)."*[179]

So, for God to be gracious to all men, as per John 3:16, bore no *external* obligation, except God's own *internal* pleasure to be gracious. In fact, the question of whether or not God's grace is owed to all is rendered *moot* by the fact that God *already made His choice* to be gracious to all. The fact that some are not saved is reflective of man, not God, since God extends a well-meant offer of the gospel to all men.

We say that someone acted with grace whenever they had justification to act more *harshly* but instead chose to act more *charitably*, and that about sums up Calvary, since God had justification to judge all mankind but instead chose to act more charitably by providing the fallen world with a Savior so that it be redeemed instead of condemned. From the Calvinist perspective, however, grace is only grace *when it is irresistible*, that is, when it is effectual by overcoming resistance and guaranteeing that it is applied, apart from the autonomous, libertarian human free-will to either consent to receive or reject it. Hence, Calvinists cannot consider an open invitation of a well-meant offer of the gospel to be *truly* gracious.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"It still seems that if God gives grace to one person, in the interest of fairness he 'ought' to give grace equally to another. It is precisely this 'oughtness' that is foreign to the biblical concept of grace. Among the mass of fallen humanity, all guilty of sin before God and exposed to his justice, no one has any claim or entitlement to God's mercy. If God chooses to grant mercy to some of that group, this does not require that he give it to all."*[180]

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[178] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 233.
[179] Ibid., 258.
[180] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 150.

Our reply:

In other words, if God owed grace to everyone then it would no longer be grace. (This logic then justifies grace only being showed to an elect class.) However, one must consider such statements in connection with Calvinism's underlying doctrine of exhaustive determinism, in which Calvinists teach that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including the sin that left mankind morally wounded in the first place. In other words, Calvinism has God injuring all humanity by having decreed the Fall, and then picks which victims to rescue, in order to appear gracious.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"God could have chosen not to save anyone. He has the power and authority to execute his righteous justice by saving nobody. In reality he elects to save some, but not all. Those who are saved are beneficiaries of his sovereign grace and mercy. Those who are not saved are not victims of his cruelty or injustice; they are recipients of justice."*[181]

> James White: *"The wonder of God's act of predestination is not that He justly condemns rebel sinners who love their sin and spit in His face on a daily basis. The wonder is that He actually quells the rebellion in the hearts of innumerable rebel sinners and solely from grace works the miracles of regeneration, removing their hearts of stone and given them hearts of flesh."*[182]

Our reply:

When Calvinists suggest that it is a *wonder* or *miracle* that God chose to save anyone at all, namely Calvinism's elect, when yet He could have chosen to save "nobody," it is essentially an attempt to *set the bar of God's mercy to zero*, so we can all feel better about an eternal decree to unconditionally forsake and damn a multitude of non-elect souls.

> Steven Hitchcock: *"We ought to stop and question a gospel that proclaims, 'The wonder is not that He withholds mercy from some, but that He should be gracious to any.' It sounds so spiritual, so humble, so weighty, and awesome, and yet it is a lie.*

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[181] Ibid., 150-151.
[182] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 19.

> *Because of Calvinism we have actually come to think that God's great willingness to be gracious is more unlikely than likely."*[183]

Which does God desire to display more? Mercy or wrath? Ezekiel 18:23 shows that God desires to display His mercy more than His wrath:

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

However, in Calvinism, this verse might as well say: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, 'Absolutely! It is a wonder that I should be merciful to anyone at all.'" In this way, Calvinism does a poor job of capturing the heart of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

When one examines the sinfulness of man compared to the holiness of God, then it is indeed a wonder that God saves any.

Our reply:

In Calvinism, God is able to look at injustice and deal with it without ever having to show mercy. In other words, in Calvinism, God can be merciful even if He never showed mercy at all. But how is one merciful while withholding it? Celebrating divine justice and holiness by stripping away divine mercy leaves us with a God devoid of love and goodness.

> **Psalms 145:8-9:** "**The Lord is gracious and merciful**; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. **The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works**."

> **Romans 11:32:** "For God has shut up all in disobedience **so that He may show mercy to all**."

Still, Calvinists argue that God didn't have to save anyone. Why do Calvinists persist in pushing that notion? The idea that God doesn't have to save *anyone* is used to acclimate potential converts for Calvinism with the idea that it was never God's good intention to save *everyone* and so we shouldn't expect it. (In Calvinism, salvific mercy is relegated to Calvinism's "elect" alone.) Since it's true that raw justice does not demand

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[183] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), xxvi-xxvii.

showing mercy, withholding mercy would be inconsistent with God's other traits of love and goodness, and true to form, God the Son showed that He would rather suffer and die on a cross than allow someone to perish with no hope at all.

HARDENING

The operative word in human hardening is *resolve*, and there are two types of hardening. There is the hardening that we do to ourselves within our own heart and there is the hardening that God applies to our heart through various means.

We harden our own heart when we strengthen our resolve to take a particular course of action. In the negative sense, through disobedience, we can make ourselves more resistant to God's call to turn back to Him. Psalm 95:8-9 states: "'**Do not harden your hearts**, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work.'"

God hardens people's heart when He uses the circumstances of their life to similarly strengthen their resolve, so that by their increased stubbornness, a matter may be advanced to its final conclusion. As such, it is purely a *contingent* action, meaning that it may not reflect God's *original* intentions. Divine hardening is not necessarily *efficacious* either, since a person can crack under pressure and repent, which God gladly welcomes since He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked but would rather have it that they turn from their wicked ways and live. (Ezekiel 18:23) An example of this is found in regard to King Ahab when he humbled himself and repented: "It came about when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 'Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'" (1st Kings 21:27-29)

A classic example of divine hardening is found in the Book of Exodus concerning Pharaoh:

> **Exodus 3:19-20:** "'But **I know** that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, **except under compulsion**. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go.'"

> **Exodus 7:3-4:** "'But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt and bring out My hosts, My people the sons of Israel, from the land of Egypt by great judgments.'"

> **Exodus 7:22:** "But the magicians of Egypt did the same with their secret arts; and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said."

Scripture indicates that Pharaoh hardened his own heart several times before God intervened to harden it further, which intervention became necessary in order to accomplish His plan of bringing His people out of Egypt and set on a course to the "Promised Land." The way in which God hardened Pharaoh's heart was by allowing his sorcerers to copy Moses' miracles so he would think that he was able to withstand God.

The point to make is that the hardening of Pharaoh's heart only proves what God was doing in the life of that particular individual, rather than speaking of what God does to everyone. Additionally, the fact that God hardened Pharaoh's heart proves that there is something present to harden, namely his own will. In other words, if God was already meticulously determining whatsoever Pharaoh desired to do, as per the determinism of Calvinism, then what is there to harden? So the implication of divine hardening is that people have their own free-will for which God may interact with.

As an analogy of a divine hardening, consider a police sting operation. Police want to stop all drug deals but at times they may need to conceal their identity by going undercover in order to use the bad behavior of already corrupt men in order to accomplish the good purpose of halting illegal drug operations.[184] Claiming that God secretly and exhaustively brings about all sinful desires and actions based on the unique events involving judicial hardening is like saying that police sting operations cause all of the drug deals that they are working to thwart.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Those who are dead in sin can indeed understand the facts of the gospel message, but they will always respond in the same fashion: with rebellion, rejection, or suppression. Until God takes out the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26), or causes His Spirit to make those dead bones come together into living beings (Ezekiel 37:1-14), men are dead in their trespasses, incapable of doing what is pleasing to God."*[185]

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[184] Calvinists will object that God is not like a police officer. However, this is just an analogy, and Jesus often used analogies of Himself in order to convey God's will.
[185] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 69.

Our Reply?

If people are born helpless and hopeless, and could never respond to the gospel apart from an Irresistible Grace, then why would God ever *need* to harden someone's heart if they are already irredeemably hardened?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"If the salvation of all men was his overriding priority, he could prevent Satan from blinding the eyes of the unconverted so that more would believe. He would work toward the softening, not hardening, of all men."*[186]

Our reply:

An unconditional salvation of all men was never God's overriding priority. Instead, God conditionally desires the salvation of all men by coming to Him *freely*. God never promised an unconditional salvation. Eternal life is offered upon believing in Jesus. (John 3:16) Secondly, God's choice to harden someone's heart or to give them over to Satan is not God's *first* choice. God says He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn and live. (Ezekiel 18:23) So the wicked perish, not as God's *first* choice, but as His *subsequent* choice, as a consequence of having rejected the grace that could have been theirs.

Divine hardening can also be evangelical. Unrepentant Israel came under such divine hardening (Isaiah 6:9-10; Romans 11:7-11), and Paul stated that it was *not* "so as to fall" but instead "to make them jealous" (Romans 11:11) so that the gospel would "save some of them." In some cases, though, divine hardening is for the purpose of reprobation, when God sends a strong delusion so that the unrepentant would believe what is false, having heard the truth so as to be "saved" but rejected it. (2nd Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Judicial hardening may also be referred to as **Reprobation**, which is the *conditional* divine act of judicial hardening of unrepentant sinners. By contrast, Calvinism's doctrine of Reprobation is *unconditional*, and fixed by an eternal and unchangeable decree.

According to Isaiah 6:9-10, Israel fell under judicial hardening: "He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and

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[186] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 171.

return and be healed.’”” Jesus later quoted this passage in relation to His manner of speaking in parables: “‘Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.’” (Matthew 13:13) God wanted them to turn back to Him, but because they had persistently refused, He placed them under divine judicial hardening.

> **Isaiah 65:2:** “‘I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.’”
>
> **Jeremiah 18:11:** “So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.”’”
>
> **Ezekiel 18:23:** “‘Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,’ declares the Lord GOD, ‘rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?’”

We see something similar at 2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12 where God judicially hardened people because “they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” The conclusion, therefore, is that God is not some celestial despot, arbitrarily determining certain people for damnation from birth, as part of some eternally reprobated, non-elect class. Rather, God lovingly calls people to salvation, and if they get to a point of self-hardening against God, sometimes He will give them up to their fallen desires and let them have their way.

Can they still be saved? In the case of John 10:26-38, Jesus *encouraged* those whom He declared were not His sheep/followers to consider the evidence of His miracles in order to believe in Him and become His sheep/followers. Therefore, if one was not one of Jesus’ sheep/followers, they later still could be. Despite Israel’s judicial hardening, Paul believed they could still be saved: “But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, **if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them**. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:13-15) The “some” means that everyone’s human experience is unique, especially as it relates with people in their life who are praying for them. Ultimately, judicial hardening is neither permanent nor predetermined from birth.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death."*[187]

> John Calvin: *"The rest of mortal men who are not of this number, but rather taken out of the common mass and made vessels of wrath, are born for the use of the elect."*[188]

> Joseph R. Nall: *"Reprobation is indeed a very sad truth. But how much more reason to be thankful that I am saved."*[189]

Our reply

This raises all sorts of difficult questions for Calvinists. Are all men born equal? Are some born for the use of the elect? Is there a universal salvific will on God's behalf? Did God create the non-elect with the intention that they spend eternity with Him in Heaven, and if not, where did He intend for the non-elect to spend eternity? Is the purpose of the non-elect to glorify God in Hell? Did God hate the non-elect before they were born, that is, before they had ever done anything good or bad? Hence, while Calvinists are very comfortable when speaking of God's grace shown toward Calvinism's elect, they are comparatively less comfortable when speaking about God's relationship with the non-elect, and often end up changing the subject to man's fallen perspective.

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[187] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 21, Section 5 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 770, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

[188] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 107.

[189] Joseph R. Nall: *What is Reprobation?* http://thirdmill.org/answers/answer.asp/file/40207

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"It is not that God puts his hand on them to create fresh evil in their hearts; he merely removes his holy hand of restraint from them and lets them do their own will."*[190]

Our reply

But, if God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, as per Calvinism, then what is left for God to *restrain* except His own decree? So, is God restraining Himself or is He restraining the independent will of another? The Calvinist notion that God simply taking His hand off of dead, rebel sinners omits the Calvinist decree that predetermined the very rebellion of the dead rebel sinners.

What do Calvinists believe?

Since God is omniscient, why would He choose to create a man whom He knows will never come to Christ and thus perish in Hell forever unless the purpose of his existence was to serve as an eternal Reprobate?

Our reply:

What if God also knows that the same man will have a child who will grow up to love the Lord and become a Christian? If God prevented the birth of the father, then how can the Christian son be born? To explain how people are interconnected this way, consider Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares at Matthew 13:29, in which it was stated that an "enemy" sowed the tares in the field (not God), and the parable instructs the angel not to uproot the tares, because it would otherwise disturb the wheat, and that things will get sorted out in the final harvest. So that's how that particular conundrum is resolved.[191]

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[190] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 145.
[191] See also the discussion on *Omniscience* and *Preterition*.

HATE

How do non-Calvinists deal with certain Bible verses which show that God hates certain people?

> **Psalm 5:5:** "The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity."
>
> **Psalm 7:11:** "God is a righteous judge, and a God who has indignation every day."
>
> **Psalm 26:5:** "I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked."
>
> **Malachi 1:3:** "But I have hated Esau [referencing Edom], and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

It is answered in two ways. In some instances, the word "hate" just reflects *preference*, such as Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." *However*, that may not be a suitable understanding for all occurrences, such as Malachi 1:3, in which God said that He is "indignant forever" with the Edomites, regarding their betrayal of Israel during the Babylonian captivity. So, how can a God who "is love" (1st John 4:8, 10) hate anyone? It's not that He wants to, or that He needed to create people to hate. God's wrath is *conditional*. Evil distorts God's perfect ways, and for those who do commit evil, God would rather have it that they turn back to Him, so that He may show them mercy, than to have to exercise judgment upon them.

> **Micah 7:18:** "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? **He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love**."

So, although God may declare that He hates a particular sinner, that does not *preclude* His longing to see restoration through repentance. One example is that of wicked King Ahab, when God was delighted to see his repentance, and in turn, relented from His intentions of judging him: "'Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has

humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'" (1st Kings 21:29)

To further illustrate, I might say: "I hate people who tailgate on the highway and drive recklessly," or I might say, "I hate people who don't flush the toilet when they're done." This doesn't mean that I have *arbitrarily* thrown names into a hat, and chosen to *unconditionally* hate them for no reason whatsoever. Rather, it means that my disapproval of them is based upon their *free will* choice to commit an act which I disapprove of. This is what God is expressing at verses like Psalm 5:5, Psalm 7:11, etc., as He is defining a certain class of people who have *freely chosen* to enter that class, by freely choosing to sin. It's somewhat similar to when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. expressed a desire for his children to be judged, "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character." Make no mistake, God still *does* judge people. However, He judges them for the "content of their character," so to speak, as displayed by the type of actions that they chose to engage in. (In other words, He doesn't judge them on arbitrary things, such as skin color, or whether or not He unconditionally picked their name out of a hat from eternity, and arbitrarily decided to hate them for no other reason than that their name was selected.) God looks to the heart, and judges people accordingly: "'**I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind**, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.'" (Jeremiah 17:10)

HELL

The purpose of Hell is to restrain evil. For those who do not want God, they get an eternity without God. For those who do not love God, they get an eternity without God's love. However, how does Hell make sense in Calvinism if everyone's wants, wishes and choices to love or not to love are all exhaustively predetermined by God's alleged decree? Moreover, in Calvinism, those in Hell never sinned against God's saving grace, since they never had a Savior or an Atonement, as per Calvinism's doctrine of a Limited Atonement. For that reason, in Calvinism, no one can be told that they didn't have to be in Hell, in that they could have done something else and gone somewhere else (i.e. that they could have believed in Jesus and have gone to Heaven instead). In Calvinism, those who are in Hell are designed to be there. In Calvinism, those who are in Hell were never intended to spend eternity in Heaven.

For the Calvinist, the purpose of Hell is divine self-glorification, in which God is said to receive glory by certain people perishing in Hell forever, who were eternally predestined to Hell, not based upon anything foreseen in them, but rather the divine will and necessity to demonstrate and differentiate God's various attributes of love and wrath. In the end, Calvinism presents a deity with the same flawed characteristics of the Greek and Roman gods.

God takes no glory in anyone going to Hell. In fact, it makes God sad. It's not God's will, but at the same time, He chooses not to force His love on anyone. He lets people perish, just as reluctantly as the father of the prodigal son reluctantly allowed his son to leave. That's a very different version of Christianity than Calvinism, in which Calvinism depicts God as creating people to go Hell for His glory.

So, why would God design a system that He knew would ultimately yield a minority of the human population becoming saved? The answer is because God is not interested in ratios and percentages. If God's objective was based on meeting certain pre-determined ratios and percentages, then that would actually suggest a deterministic system. Contrary to Calvinism, God is more interested in building a kingdom of people who chose to love and to be with Him, despite the adverse circumstances of this present world, in which meaningful relationships trump the value of having to create a kingdom full of yes-men.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Jeff Noblit: *"The ultimate purpose is the glory of God. Sinners will glorify God either in Hell, vindicating His justice which*

should come against sinners, or in heaven praising His grace that saves us. But we will glorify God."[192]

Our reply:

The problem with Calvinism is that no one can ever be said that they didn't have to be in Hell, or that they could have believed in Jesus instead and have gone to Heaven, since in Calvinism, they never would have had a Savior who loved and died for them at Calvary, which would otherwise have been the only means of their forgiveness.

[192] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 103.

HOLINESS OF GOD

James 1:17 states: "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow." One of the most fundamental objections against Calvinism is with respect to its impact on the holiness of God. For if God predestined all things before there was anything at all, and if it included all sins ever conceived and committed, then how could God remain holy, and in a way that could be meaningful to us? One way is to suggest that God, although decreeing all sin, is not *tainted* by the sin that He has fixed and determined. The problem with that view, however, is that it is not very compelling, primarily because it is difficult for us to relate to. If God is the creative origin behind the Occult and every monstrous thing throughout all time, then how could God's character *not* be tainted by it? Calvinists indicate that there are passive and active decrees of God, and the holiness of God can be maintained by understanding the perspective of first and second causes, in which God is not responsible for the evil deeds which are decreed by means of secondary causes:

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."*[193]

However, when compared to the matter of David and Uriah, according to 2nd Samuel 11:1-27, David's use of secondary causes to arrange the murder of Uriah did not seem to remove any implication on his part, as God directly charged him with Uriah's murder. (2nd Samuel 12:1-15) David could have said: "I didn't kill him! I merely sent a letter to Joab to place him before the Philistines and then permit their archers to kill him. It wasn't me. It was the secondary causes!" However, it doesn't matter how many layers of causation there are, since the true mastermind behind any crime is always held to the greatest level of guilt. One defense for this, and which is common with Calvinists, is to suggest that you cannot compare God and man. In other words, *David* may be guilty, but one cannot extrapolate that to mean *God* is guilty for doing similar things. However, that is yet another unconvincing Calvinist argument.

The implication of Calvinism is that if God is holy and yet decrees sin, in whatever way, then evil must in some way be good. One suggestion

[193] The Westminster Confession of Faith, *Of God's Eternal Decree*, 1646.

to resolve this dilemma is through a holistic approach, in that while the exhaustive determination of all moral evil would seem to be bad, on balance, it is actually good when considered from the broad scale of human history. Calvinists often cite Calvary in such a defense. Calvinists will say that Calvary was the worst act in human history, and yet God decreed it for an ultimately beautiful purpose in the redemption of God's elect. However, the counter-argument is that Calvary was not a matter of God inventing crucifixion, but instead using the customary evil practice of the day and using it to bring good out of *their* evil. God's determination to use Calvary would only be *consequent* to His knowledge of the evil thoughts and intentions of the primary players involved.

Notice how the two sides contemplate divine holiness in light of absolute determinism:

> **Calvinism:** The Bible says that God is holy, and therefore the sovereign decree of all sin cannot nullify His holiness.
>
> **Non-Calvinism:** The Bible says that God is holy, and therefore He could not have exhaustively decreed any sin.

Calvinists, therefore, cite God's holiness as cover for determinism while non-Calvinists cite God's holiness to refute even its *possibility*.

The charge against Calvinism is that while Satan is unable to rise to the moral level of God, what he can do, through Calvinism, is perhaps bring God down to his own level, or make God worse, as the ultimate mastermind and creative origin of all moral evil in the universe. Calvinism thus aligns with Satan's primary objective.

HUMANITY

The deepest desire and need in the soul of every human being are to know that they are loved and that they matter. Calvinism teaches the opposite. Through Preterition and Reprobation, you may not matter and you can never know until death whether you've won the spiritual lottery. Here are perhaps three of the most well-known verses on God's love:

> **Matthew 5:43-48:** "'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But **I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven**; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'"
>
> **John 3:16:** "'**For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'"
>
> **1st John 4:8-11:** "**God is love**. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that **God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him**. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."
>
> ***What do Calvinists believe?***
>
> James White: *"The contrast between the God-centeredness of the doctrines of grace and the man-centeredness of human tradition could hardly be stronger!"*[194]
>
> James White: *"If there can be anything said of much of evangelicalism, it is man-centered.*"[195]

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[194] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 297.
[195] James White, *The God Centered Gospel vs. a Man Centered Gospel*, 3:53-3:57. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtKRX58ujcY

> James White: "*As long as we think of the Gospel as being about men—saving men, redeeming men—those are all true things, but they are secondarily true. They are the result of what God has done in glorifying Himself, through the redemption of a particular people in Christ Jesus. But you have to start where the revelation starts. The revelation doesn't start with man. If you start off with, 'Well, we need to think about man's need.' No. You need to start with God's glory. God's decree. He is the Creator. He's the One who made everything the way that it is.*"[196]

Our reply:

Calvinists believe that God loves everyone in *some* sense, but not in the *same* sense. Indeed, God is said to have a greater love for Christians (John 16:26-27), but the question is how does predestining someone to be "non-elect" meet *any* sense of true love? Calvinists will speak of God giving rain and delaying judgment as being acts of love, but the bottom line in Calvinism is that predestining someone to be "non-elect" is not really *any* sense of true love that humans can readily identify with.

Here is a candid answer from Calvinist, R.C. Sproul in terms of God's love in relation to people being created as non-elect:

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."*[197]

Here is how that view even further devolves:

> Vincent Cheung: *"One who thinks that God's glory is not worth the death and suffering of billions of people has too high an opinion of himself and humanity."*[198]

So, the candid answer in Calvinism is that creating people as non-elect is "not all that loving," and that if that bothers you, then you have too high of an opinion of yourself and of humanity in general. In this way, Calvinism sucks the goodness out of God by presenting a very harsh view of God with virtually no sense of broad sympathetic appeal. In fact, it seems that the darker Calvinists portray God, the greater one's faith that

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[196] Ibid., 4:30-5:17.
[197] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[198] *The Problem of Evil*, 2004, 10, www.vincentcheung.com.

they could still revere such a God. All of this may be attributable to a Calvinist's own gloomy way of coming to terms with their own sin. They know that they are sinful creatures but instead of responding to God with faith and hope in His goodness to forgive their sin and to help them overcome their sin, they respond to God as One who decreed their sinful inclinations in the first place, all for His own glory. In that way, Calvinism reduces humanity to a very utilitarian perspective—people are created for an overarching purpose of serving as vessels for use in displaying God's various attributes of grace vs. wrath, love vs. hate ect., while in contrast, in non-Calvinism, God seeks a mutually loving relationship with humanity, in that He loves every lost sinner and paid the ultimate price at Calvary for the provision to rescue their soul.

Non-Calvinists indeed teach a much higher view of humanity than in Calvinism, but nonetheless which also matches what God thinks about humanity. Matthew 6:6 states: "Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. **Are you not worth much more than they?**" God values humanity far more than what Calvinism describes, and that's because we are all God's children by creation. (Acts 17:28-29) Our value is derived, not in the way that we might feel about ourselves, but in how God values humanity who are created in His image.

IN CHRIST

Provisionists believe their theology does more to honor Christ—as a Christ-centered theology—because unlike Calvinism, Provisionism teaches that people have to come to Christ *before* they can be reconciled to the Father, and *before* they can receive spiritual life, regeneration, ect.

> **John 14:6:** "'Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me**.'"

> **Ephesians 1:3:** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places **in Christ**."

Being "in Christ" implies being a Christian believer, in union with Christ, that is, spiritually residing in the Body of Christ. After all, John 3:18 indicates that unbelievers remain condemned and judged, while Romans 8:1 indicates that those in Christ are redeemed:

> **John 3:18**: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been **judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

> **Romans 8:1-2:** "Therefore there is **now no condemnation** for those who are **in Christ Jesus**. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."

> **2nd Corinthians 5:17:** "Therefore if anyone is **in Christ**, he is a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

So, the idea of an "*unbeliever* who is in Christ" would be virtually unthinkable, requiring the meaning that someone would be both redeemed and simultaneously judged, thus violating the Law of Non-Contradiction.

> **Ephesians 2:7:** "So that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward **us in Christ Jesus**."

Redemption, Regeneration and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit only comes after one is in Christ. However, Calvinists teach pre-faith Regeneration, which as a spiritual blessing, would then necessitate pre-faith placement in Christ. Indeed, that is what Calvinists teach:

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"When the time comes in God's sovereign providence to bring to spiritual life each of those for whom Christ died, the Spirit of God will not only effectively accomplish that work of regeneration but that* ***new creature in Christ*** *will, unfailingly, believe in Jesus Christ ('all that the Father gives Me will come to Me'). Hence, we are not saved 'without' faith, but at the same time, Christ's atonement is not rendered useless and vain without the addition of libertarian free will."*[199]

Our reply:

So, Calvinists believe in Pre-Faith Regeneration and also Pre-Faith placement in Christ—the latter of which being inconsistent with the Bible:

> **Romans 16:7:** "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were **in Christ before me**."

So, we are not "in Christ" *before we are born*.

> **Ephesians 1:13:** "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also **believed**, you were **sealed in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise."

We become "sealed in Him" when we hear and believe in the gospel.

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[199] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 191, emphasis mine.

INERRANCY

Calvinists teach that if free-will was true, then it would overthrow biblical inerrancy because the human free-will of the prophet or apostle would be prone to introducing errors into the biblical text. Hence, only exhaustive determinism can guarantee that the Bible is 100% inspired. However, have you ever heard a pastor pray from the pulpit, "Lord, may I step aside, and allow the Holy Spirit to take over, and speak through me"? Now, if that actually happened, and the Holy Spirit really did take over and speak through that person, then the pastor's free-will did not spoil this, but rather, the pastor's own free-will yielded to the Holy Spirit. So if you imagine Scripture being written in similar manner, then it's not hard to understand how free-will and biblical inerrancy could be compatible.

What do Calvinists believe?

> George Grant: *"Arminianism has real implications for the doctrine of Scripture. How can God superintend men's words so carefully and so precisely so as to ensure an inerrant Scripture, if God is a God who allows absolute freedom, and allows sinners, like the apostle Paul, or sinners like the apostle Peter, to make absolute choices? If the Arminian God is inspiring Scripture, we would expect it to be filled with some mistakes, because that's the nature of freedom. If on the other hand, we have the sovereign God who exercises His good providence for the purpose of mercy upon His creatures, then we can expect that there are times when He does not allow freedom, in order, for a particular task to be accomplished, thus superintending every single word that the Apostle Peter writes. Though the Apostle Peter, as we know, is prone to sin."*[200]

> Thomas Nettles: *"The Arminian says, 'no you have to have free will that operates on its own, and divine sovereignty respecting free will.' If that is so, how can we be guaranteed that the persons who penned the Bible did not sometime exert their free will, apart from the sovereignty of God, and put some mistakes in it? And this is the common way that Arminianism leads. It leads to higher criticism. It leads to a man-centered understanding of the Bible*

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[200] *Arminianism: The Root of "Christian" Liberalism?* 3:01-4:10, taken from the DVD entitled, *Amazing Grace: The History & Theology of Calvinism*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=g0uACs89vhE

and the inspiration. Eventually, you lose the doctrine of Inerrancy."[201]

Roger Schultz: *"Arminians have a problem defending the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture because the way it would require God to override the free will of man."*[202]

Eric Holmberg: *"Of course, this is not to say that all Arminians today are likely to compromise on the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. Many, thankfully, do not. What we are saying, however, is that one who consistently holds to the doctrine of free will, the foundation for believing the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God, will ultimately be compromised."*[203]

Our reply:

In the example of Peter, if he freely yielded to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then free-will presents no problem. As an analogy, if I normally drive a car, but I chose to take a flight aboard a plane instead, then I am no longer in control during the course of the flight, as it was my choice to yield full control over to a professional airline pilot in order to reach my destination. Even if I tried to interrupt the pilot, I would be restrained. My freedom ended the moment I freely yielded control.

The whole concept of divine *inspiration* conveys the meaning of divine *intervention*, in which God steps into a particular matter to express Himself. However, if as Calvinists say, that God had decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," then wouldn't we have to conclude that all things are subject to divine inspiration? That's what becomes deeply problematic for Calvinists. For example, we know that God literally penned the Ten Commandments into stone tablets, and so if all things were exhaustively fixed and determined by God without the slightest deviation ever, then all things would be similarly set in stone, and hence, there would be nothing in existence that is outside of divine inspiration. That would mean that the daily life of every individual is every bit as much *inspired* as the Ten Commandments. It would mean that *every* book, not just the Bible, is inspired by God. Follow the Calvinist's trail of logic: How can God guarantee the accuracy of His immutable decree if individual persons could at sometimes exert their free will, apart from the sovereignty of God, and thus introduce mistakes in the divine decree? So, Calvinists are not

[201] Ibid., 4:11-4:39.
[202] Ibid., 4:40-4:49.
[203] Ibid., 4:50-5:14.

merely denying free-will in times of inspiration, but also denying free-will in total, and so when Calvinists hold to *exhaustive determinism*, then they are also holding to *exhaustive inspiration*. The existence of sin, therefore, would be just as much divinely inspired as anything else in existence, and hence which leads to the common "author of sin" charge, rightly applied to Calvinism.

INTENTIONS

Where do fallen man's evil intentions and bad motives come from? 1st John 2:16 states that it comes from the world: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is **not from the Father**, but is **from the world**." So, then, evil intentions do not come from God, although He may use it to His own advantage, in order to redeem good from evil. Calvinism, however, claims that all evil intentions come from God, necessarily so, despite the fact that it contradicts 1st John 2:16.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...since God judges on the basis of the intentions of the heart, there is in fact a ground for morality and justice."*[204]

Our reply:

So, does Calvinism teach that God causes and renders certain those same evil intentions that He judges? The answer according to Calvinism is yes, and what follows is the explanation for why.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: "*How could it have been God's eternal purpose to judge this generation of Israel that was judged by the Assyrians? How could He do that? Because He's dependent upon the evil intentions of the Assyrians which do not arise from a divine decree? Now I would argue that means He could not have known them anyways, but that's another issue."*[205]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, God decrees whatsoever comes to pass, including the motives and intentions of every created being throughout all time. So, according to Calvinism, (a) God had to determine their intentions or else if He didn't exhaustively and precisely determine their intentions, then (b) He couldn't infallibly *know* what their intentions would be, and if He couldn't infallibly know what their intentions would be, then (c) He

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[204] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 320.
[205] *Does Isaiah 10 prove Determinism?*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upzG62s2018, 1:05:31–1:05:49.

couldn't have had an eternal *plan*, and if He didn't have an eternal plan, then (d) He couldn't have had an eternal *purpose*, and if He didn't have an eternal purpose, then (e) it follows that everything that happens must be random and pointless. Of course, (a) through (e) completely unravels if one accepts the belief that God is capable of knowing something without causing it. Additionally, 1st John 2:16 indicates that evil intentions come from the world, without saying that it somehow comes from God in order to execute His plans. Calvinists seem to have a really low view of God's omniscience and omnipotence, if they really think that God must play both sides of the chess board in order to win.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

In Calvinism, everyone who will ever become saved is already predetermined from eternity past, and those individuals comprising such a *preselected saved-class* are called "the elect," or what non-Calvinists often refer to as "Calvinism's elect" because many non-Calvinists believe that the *real* New Testament "elect" are simply Christians, that is, believers in Christ whom God has chosen to save—not unbelievers God has chosen to make into believers. So, that brings us to the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace. "Irresistible Grace" is a necessary component to Calvinism's doctrine of "Unconditional Election," because if someone is preselected to someday become a believer, then something needs to happen in order to *guarantee* that a member of Calvinism's elect does in fact become a believer. An *irresistible* grace is what makes that happen. However, Calvinists typically don't use the term "Irresistible Grace." Often, instead, they use different terms such as Pre-Faith Regeneration, Effectual Grace, Efficacious Grace, Radical Grace, Powerful Grace, Scandalous Grace, ect.

Calvinists insist that it's not a "decision for Christ" that produces conversion, but instead a preemptive, preceding grace work of the Holy Spirit who irresistibly and inescapably causes conversion for those whom such an Irresistible Grace is secretly applied. But what's really going on when Calvinists *piously* champion "Irresistible Grace" is just a pretext to advocate for their own presumed and assumed personal claim to being unconditionally elect. That's the hidden agenda. Calvinists will cite "Total Depravity" to build their case for "Irresistible Grace," which is ultimately aimed to justify their personal claim for "Unconditional Election."

If God applied an "Irresistible Grace" to a believer—such as in Heaven—then there would be no controversy because it would be something applied to a *willing* recipient. The problem for Calvinism is that it would be something applied to a "total hater of God," as per the Calvinist doctrine of "Total Depravity." In other words, in Calvinism, God administers an Irresistible Grace to elect-*unbelievers*, simply because they happen to be "elect," and certainly not because they asked for it. In Calvinism, everyone is born a "total hater of God," and so when someone (according to Calvinism) becomes a believer, it's because God did something against their will—transforming their will—in order to unilaterally *change their mind for them* so that they would be made to "freely" receive Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

You believe that you were saved by grace, but it was up to you?

Our reply:

In order to be "saved," it is up to *you* to "confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead" (Romans 10:9), and it is up to God to keep His promise to grant salvation on the terms He alone had set. Ultimately, however, this is another instance where Calvinists use normal words like "grace" but with *hidden* meanings. In other words, for any grace that is associated with salvation, a Calvinist will always assume it must have been an Irresistible Grace, and so unmasked, here is what a Calvinist is really asking: "You believe that you were *saved* by *irresistible* grace, but it was up to you?" Since non-Calvinists don't believe that God's grace is *irresistible*—such as at Acts 7:51—then a grace that is *resistible* means that we indeed have a choice to make, for which we are eternally accountable and responsible.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"…God can work in the heart so that without fail the regenerated person will naturally, fully, consciously cling in faith to Jesus Christ."*[206]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Now (and here it gets tricky) Calvinism goes on to say that God grants the inclination and ability to choose Christ to some, namely, the elect. God does not coerce anyone, if that means he saves a man against his will."*[207]

> R.C. Sproul: *"Reformed Theology does not teach that God brings the elect 'kicking and screaming, against their wills,' into his kingdom. It teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to* ***make them willing*** *and pleased to come to Christ. They come to Christ because they want to. They want to because God has created in their hearts a desire for Christ."*[208]

Our reply:

"Made willing" is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, although Calvinism does not teach that God *saves* anyone against their will, it does teach that God *regenerates* people against their will, simply because they

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[206] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 219.
[207] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 191.
[208] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 159, emphasis mine.

happen to be among Calvinism's elect. However, to claim that God creates "yes-men" with an "Irresistible Grace" or that God could not get anyone to love Him apart from apart from using irresistible-means would be embarrassing, shameful, unethical, immoral, hardly glorious and frankly very insulting to God. At best, it would be analogous to brainwashing and at worst, comparable to using a date-rape drug. Thankfully, Irresistible Grace doesn't appear to be anything on God's realm of thinking:

> **Isaiah 5:1-5:** "Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. **What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?** So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground."

God is not merely pronouncing judgment but also pointing out that He did everything He could—consistent with His set of principles—in terms of anything He would ever consider doing. Obviously, God could have waved a magic wand and turned everyone into obedient citizens, but He doesn't, and instead asks, "**What more** was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?", showing that using an irresistible force is simply outside of His set of principles. Yet, in Calvinism, using an irresistible force is the only way anyone is *ever* saved. So, obviously, that puts Calvinism into a strange predicament. So, one object lesson is this: The Holy Spirit will never override a proud and haughty heart. A humble heart of faith with trust is required before He will choose to take residence in the spirit/soul of any human.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"The Lord in His unmerited election is free and exempt from the necessity of bestowing equally the same grace on*

> *all. Rather, He passes by those whom He wills, and chooses whom He wills."*[209]

Our reply:

So, for Calvinism's non-elect, the type of grace they receive—by contrast—is a "Common Grace" which does not include regeneration, and hence is not efficacious and will never result in true conversion.[210] It's hard to understand the purpose of such a "Common Grace," especially if it is given to those whom (according to Calvinism), God never *intended* to save and never intended to spend eternity with Him in Heaven.

In Calvinism, Irresistible Grace is not the belief that *all* grace is irresistible, but rather that when God chooses to convert Calvinism's elect, He unilaterally and involuntarily implements an irresistible *regeneration* against their otherwise depraved will, simply because they happen to be among His eternally chosen "elect." Such pre-emptive regeneration accompanies a new heart that is made receptive to conversion so that the individual has been *made willing* to love God. However, if God wills to act irresistibly upon human volition so as to guarantee conversion, then why would God (according to Calvinism) be unwilling to cause Calvinism's elect to never *sin* again? In other words, why would it only function in *conversion*?

> Dave Hunt: *"And why is irresistible grace no longer irresistible grace once a person is saved, so that Christians can so often be carnal?"*[211]

Non-Calvinists, by contrast, believe that grace is *resistible*, both in conversion and in daily living. Every Christian would love to be able to receive an Irresistible Grace so as to never sin again, but we intuitively know that that isn't how God works, and instead, we must battle with our own fallen nature *daily* in order to walk in fellowship with God.

Our choices matter to God, but in Calvinism's decree which causes everything that comes to pass, *our* choices become a function of *God's* choices. Can one do differently from that which is immutably decreed? This concept can have a very negative impact upon the minds of those converts who struggle with addictions and sometimes fail, believing

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[209] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 200.
[210] See also the discussion on *Evanescent Grace*.
[211] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 209.

that their sinful desires come from God, who not only permits their sin but also conceived their sin in eternity and effectually executed it according to a divine decree.

Another problem for the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace (which is made necessary to overcome humanity depravity in order to guarantee the conversion of certain "elect" people), is that such irresistible preemptive regeneration doesn't seem to be able to account for *gradual* conversion. In other words, salvation doesn't always amount to a light-switch being flipped and someone insistently becoming a believer. Sometimes conversion is progressive and gradual until a person finally surrenders to God in repentance and faith, thus culminating in salvation. Alternately, sometimes such progression doesn't end in salvation at all. Jesus illustrates the reasons why in Luke chapter 8, citing various metaphorical soils in His parable of the Seed and the Sower. Suffice it to say, though, Calvinism does not provide a compelling answer to gradual conversion. According to the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity and Total Inability, the unregenerate are entombed, total haters of God, rather than being people who are open, seeking and receptive to God. To illustrate, consider the following testimony:

> *"I remember the Spirit beginning some serious convicting work in my heart in 1993. It was greater and subtle respectively over the next two years. I finally repented May of 1995. During that time I resisted, but some times drew closer. Then I would resist again. The whole experience was like that: steps forward and steps back. The clincher was in May of 1995 when my dad was talking to me about the return of Christ. It was that brief phone call that caused me to seriously think about my standing with God. In a moment, I knew the reality of Christ's return (something to which I hadn't really given much thought), and I knew that I was not right before God (I had previous knowledge of these things, being raised in the church). I told my dad that I'd be home in two weeks. I hung up the phone, prayed to the Lord to forgive me of living my life in sin, and to make me into a new person. I was changed. What do we do with those three years of the Spirit's work (1993, 1994, 1995)? How does the Calvinist explain that the Spirit was convicting me concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11), but I resisted that work much of the time? Must we concede that the Spirit waited three years after His initial (and strong) conviction to irresistibly regenerate me unto faith / repentance and salvation? This is why I say that Calvinism cannot be lived out; it may look good to some in black and white, but it does not correspond with reality, which, if I remember correctly, is the*

> *definition of 'truth,' right? 'Truth is that which corresponds to reality.'"*[212]

By experience, we observe similar examples. An unbeliever mocks Christianity, but a Christian patiently explains the gospel to them. The unbeliever launches well-known objections to Christianity involving things like evolution, or Bible mysteries such as how Noah safely transported the animals, or moral dilemmas such as the existence of suffering in the world. The Christian answers the questions as best as they can and gives them a Bible. The unbeliever is invited to church and agrees to attend. They read some more. They ask more questions. They attend church some more. At some point—in being open, seeking and receptive to the Christian gospel—they inform the Christian that they prayed to receive Christ in their heart and request to be baptized as a believer. Now, *when* were they saved? The answer is when they gave their heart to Christ—not before. However, previously they were in a place of transition, in a process of gradually becoming converted. How does such progression work with Calvinism's irresistible regeneration?

In Calvinism, the unregenerate are totally depraved—born helpless and hopeless to accept the gospel—being hostile, uninterested and unseeking toward God, having no desire for Him whatsoever, being dead an entombed like "Lazarus." But human experience shows otherwise. An unbeliever may read the Bible or hear the gospel preached and come under conviction. Sometimes it takes a while, but the individual is in a transitional condition, which may result in salvation if they do not persist in resisting the Holy Spirit. In this transitional, open state they may or may not ever end up getting saved, but while lost, but they are also enlightened by the Holy Spirit through God's word. So, there is the totally lost state, and the saved state, but also the state in between—the transitional state—where the person is still lost and unsaved but yet the proof-texts used by Calvinists do not apply to them, and that's the problem for Calvinists. The Calvinist scheme leaves no room for a *process* of someone gradually coming to faith. Their scheme leaves only two options, that is, either rabid God-hater or regenerated God-lover. In some cases, the former may be deluded in thinking that they love God, but are revealed to be God-haters when they reject the gospel and persecute those who preach it. But what about those who don't hate the gospel, and actually believe it for a while, until in times of temptation fall away? (Luke 8:13) How does Calvinism's doctrine of Total Depravity and Total Inability account for them without resorting to smoke-screens, red herrings and other diversionary tactics?

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[212] Testimony provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"Arminianism is the theological perspective that basically says man is sovereign and God can't really determine what he's going to do, He just leaves it up to man and God does love everybody and certainly wishes everybody would get saved, but everybody won't, and so God's as disappointed as anybody else would be who would like to see that happen."*[213]

Our reply:

Firstly, when Calvinists insist that in non-Calvinism, "man is sovereign" over salvation, or makes man the decisive cause of his own salvation, consider that in terms of the parable of the Prodigal Son. Although it was 100% the son's choice to return home and apologize to his father, it was also 100% the father's choice to receive him back, when he otherwise didn't have to. The father was not compelled to take his son back or put the family ring back on his finger. Instead, the father could have had him stoned to death. So, while the son was 100% the decisive cause in his own choice to return home, the father was 100% the decisive cause of his own choice to accept him back and to restore him. In terms of salvation, we may be 100% the decisive cause in our choice to ask God for the forgiveness of our sins, it remains 100% God's choice to set the terms of forgiveness to grant it to whoever asks Him. In non-Calvinism, it's not a 50/50 or 90/10 ratio. Both God and man remain 100% responsible for their own choices.

Secondly, when Calvinists say that non-Calvinism makes man sovereign over salvation, or makes man the decisive cause of his own salvation—even after correcting this flawed perspective by citing the parable of the Prodigal Son—are Calvinists really offering a morally superior alternative in the form of Irresistible Grace? As an analogy, consider a man who believes that a certain woman would not want to be with him unless he first "made her willing" without her prior consent through the use of a stealthily administered date-rape drug. Someone may say, "Sure, that would be immoral, and even criminal, but that's not what Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace is all about." But, how so? How would the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace (which teaches that God unilaterally regenerates certain people without their prior consent and against their will, so as to make an unwilling person, willing to love and worship God) avoid the moral equivalent of a date-rape drug?

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[213] John MacArthur, *The Love of God, Part 4*, January 1, 1995. https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-80/the-love-of-god-part-4

One answer is that one thing is considered a heinous crime while the other amounts to God saving someone. So, "saving" someone (such as by Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace) then becomes the moral justification to act with stealth and without consent, that is, for God, as described by Calvinism, to administer a pre-faith regeneration so that the unwilling recipient is unconsciously made willing. This is still scandalous. Consider the example of famed atheist, Christopher Hitchens, who said that if anyone were to find out that he became a Christian on his death-bed, to know in advance that if that really were to happen, it would be a lie or he would not have been in his "right mind." As a Christian, I believe that if he were to have become spiritually saved, even on his death-bed, it would be a good thing, but not necessarily if it was stealthily and irresistibly imposed against his consent. That would be disturbing behavior.

JUDAS

Is Judas proof that God predestines some people to Hell? The Scriptures foretold plenty about Christ's crucifixion, such as Psalms chapter 22 and Isaiah chapter 53, including by how much silver He would be valued. (Zechariah 11:13) The real issue comes down to whether prophecy demands predestination. Non-Calvinists believe that God can know things that He does not cause. Moreover, Judas was a single person, rather than a class of people, such as a class of allegedly "non-elect" people predestined to Hell.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Scripture explicitly teaches that God actually ordains the evil choices of men. In the case of Judas, for example, God allowed (or used) Satan to put the idea of the betrayal in his heart. 'The devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon to betray Him' (John 13:2). That Judas had to betray Christ is clear from repeated statements that say this happened that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. Even in such cases, however, it is reasonable to suppose that Judas had made many prior deceitful decisions so that the activity of Satan was quite compatible with his own inclination and desires. The same applies to the many instances in the Bible in which God says the wicked do what he predetermined would happen."*[214]

Our reply:

Calvinists believe that if God *knows* something will happen, and if His foreknowledge is *perfect*, then it *must* therefore happen. However, non-Calvinists believe that if God had foreknown that Judas would not have betrayed, such as chickening out and just fleeing, then God's perfect foreknowledge would have reflected that, instead. So, non-Calvinists do not believe that omniscience demands determinism, and that's the pivotal issue. For instance, when Jesus informed Peter that he would deny Him three times that evening (Matthew 26:34), non-Calvinists do not believe that Jesus' revelation *caused* Peter to do anything. Jesus was simply letting Peter know what was in his heart and what he would self-determine to do.

As for people like Judas, God can providentially place them in certain positions in which He knows how they will act, in order to accomplish His own purposes, such as Calvary. So when Jesus chose Judas

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[214] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 190-191.

to be one of His disciples, He knew exactly who Judas was, and what was in his heart:

> **John 6:64:** "But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus **knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him**."

> **John 6:70:** "Jesus answered them, '**Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?**'"

Even John Calvin agreed that prophecy is not the same thing as predestination:

> John Calvin: *"I acknowledge that nothing happens but what but has been ordained by God, but the only question now is whether their being foretold or prophesied makes people do things, and I have already shown this is not so."*[215]

Non-Calvinists are free to deny John Calvin's belief in exhaustive determinism while still citing him as a "hostile witness" to point out a mutual agreement that omniscience does not require determinism.

[215] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 397.

JUDGMENT

Our concept of just judgment is based upon the belief that someone who does wrong, could and should have done otherwise, or else if they could not have, then there would be a mitigating factor.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...since God judges on the basis of the intentions of the heart, there is in fact a ground for morality and justice."*[216]

Our reply:

> Dave Hunt: *"Yes, God judges 'the intentions of the heart,' but Calvinism falsely says that He causes the intentions He judges."*[217]

So while Calvinists wish to portray divine judgment in some way in relation to what *we* do, Calvinism nonetheless teaches that whatsoever we happen to do is based upon what is *unilaterally* decreed for us, and which ultimately boils down to this: In Calvinism, people are held accountable simply because a higher power requires it. In this way, Calvinism sucks the justness from divine justice.

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[216] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 320.
[217] Ibid., 327.

JUSTICE

God is the author of all things, but not the author of all *effects*. Otherwise, one could convict God of all murder, malice and mayhem, and rationalize that it was God who made the serial killer to kill and the molester to molest and placed immorality into the former angel, Lucifer, to irresistibly become Satan. To be like this is not in accord with perfect justice, governed by mercy, refined with kindness, and balanced by wisdom. This would not be perfect justice. It would defy what "all powerful" truly denotes. For God to remain blameless in connection with being the author of all things would necessitate free-will, that is, designing creatures with autonomy of reason and creative intelligence, whose choices are uniquely their own and not God's.[218]

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"In the plan of salvation God does nothing bad. He never commits any injustice.* ***Some people get justice****, which is what they deserve, while* ***other people get mercy****. Again, the fact that one gets mercy does not demand that the others get it as well. God reserves the right of executive clemency."*[219]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, the non-elect actually get *injustice* because they are unchangeably decreed to *want* to do God's bidding to commit moral evil, and then get blamed and condemned for what God according to Calvinism made them do via exhaustive, meticulous determinism. How would that be justice? If Calvinism was true, real justice would be the author of immorality being punished for causing all immoral effects.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"We will never be able to divest God of the responsibility for the* ***existence of evil****. He* ***allowed*** *it and* ***designed*** *it into this universe, without being responsible for it. I don't really think He was in the Garden [of Eden] keeping His fingers crossed, hoping for the best from Adam and Eve, and I'll tell you one thing,*

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[218] B. W. Melvin, *A Land Unknown: Hell's Dominion* (Xulon Press, 2005), 149.
[219] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 38.

if positive thinking for God doesn't work, you can forget about it."[220]

Our reply:

If God, according to Calvinism, didn't just cross His fingers and hope for the best with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but instead *scripted* the existence of moral evil in our universe through the Fall, as a total plan for all things, and then preselected certain people among their descendants to save and rescue while never intending to the remainder to ever spend eternity with Him in Heaven, then that is not really justice any more. It, instead, actually aligns with the "Wicked Fireman" analogy.[221] In other words, if a fireman were to set a building on fire (analogous to Calvinism teaching that God decreed the Fall), and then picked certain people to rescue that he liked (i.e. Unconditional Election), while passing by the rest (i.e. Preterition of Unconditional Reprobation) so that they would burn to death, would anyone really consider that to be heroic? It would actually be criminal. However, if someone else set the building on fire (i.e. Adam and Eve's own free will), and then a fireman rescued everyone that was willing to let him help them, then that certainly would be heroic.

What do Calvinists believe?

If you complain about the injustice of the elect getting Heaven, for no action on their part, and the non-elect getting Hell, with no chance at Heaven, remember that everyone—including you and me—never had a chance of going to Heaven in the first place, because our heart is evil continually.

Our reply:

In Calvinism, why was our heart evil continually, in the first place? Remind Calvinists—who often seem to forget—that they believe in exhaustive, meticulous determinism, in which they believe in a *total plan* that includes the Fall of man, from which some get Heaven, for no action on their part, and the non-elect get Hell, with no chance at Heaven. Again, refer to the aforementioned Wicked Fireman illustration.

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[220] *John MacArthur: Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering and Evil?*, 35:31-36:06, emphasis mine. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LFzk1afiD8

[221] The Parable of the Wicked Fireman - Calvinism - Kerrigan Skelly. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHJZRx-Y2QE&t=11s

LAZARUS

The essence of the Calvinist gospel is this: I was *dead* and in need of a *resurrection*. (This combines the Calvinist doctrines of Total Inability and Irresistible Grace.) Naturally, then, Calvinists feel that Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead to be a perfect example to illustrate their concept of the gospel, that is, of Jesus calling *elect* people from death to life with an irresistible calling, just as Jesus irresistibly called Lazarus out of his tomb. Calvinists add that Lazarus didn't have a choice in the matter, in that he wasn't *invited* but instead *ordered*.

> **John 11:40-44**: "Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?' So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, **so that they may believe that You sent Me**.' When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, '**Lazarus, come forth**.' The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

Calvinists are like: "Hey look—something relevant to bodily resurrection! Must be an example of effectual faith!" Right from the start, as an apples to oranges comparison, it's obvious that Calvinists are conflating the apple of *physical* resurrection with the orange of *spiritual* resurrection.

An additional problem, among several, is that if Lazarus was already a *believer*, how can this rightly be used to illustrate how *unbelievers* come to faith? Interestingly, though, this miracle does indeed contain a lesson on coming to faith, not necessarily for Lazarus, but for the *witnesses* of the miracle. In other words, people would *believe* who Jesus was—not by being called out of their so-called spiritual tombs, as Calvinists have pulled out of thin air—but simply by seeing a miracle performed and then knowing what it would mean about who Jesus must be, namely their long-awaited Messiah. So, instead of needing a spiritual regeneration in order to believe, all people needed to believe was to see a miracle take place. Certainly, that doesn't say much for the Calvinist doctrine of Total Inability, that is, if people can believe simply by witnessing miracles, which is also Jesus' point at John 10:37-38, though at the same time, Jesus also said at John 20:29 that it is more blessed to believe and yet have not seen than to believe only after visible proofs.

What do Calvinists believe?

James White: *"On the level of spiritual capacity the unregenerate man is just like Lazarus: dead, bound, incapable of 'self-resurrection.' It would be patently absurd to demand that Jesus first ask Lazarus for 'permission' to raise him to spiritual life. Corpses are not known for engaging in a great deal of conversations. No, before Lazarus can respond to Christ's command to come forth, something must happen. Corpses do not obey commands, corpses do not move. Jesus changed Lazarus' condition first: Lazarus' heart was made new; his mind revitalized. Blood began once again to course through his veins. What was once dead is now alive, and can hear the voice of his beloved Lord, 'Come forth!' The term 'irresistible' then must be understood as speaking to the inability of dead sinners to resist resurrection to new life."*[222]

R.C. Sproul: *"We respond in a manner similar to that of Lazarus when, after being loosed, he stepped out of the tomb. In like manner we step out of our tombs of spiritual death. We also respond when we hear the call of Christ."*[223]

R.C. Sproul: *"Arminians do not appreciate this analogy and protest that we are here comparing apples to oranges. Obviously in the case of physical death, a corpse cannot respond or cooperate."*[224]

Our reply:

The reason why non-Calvinists reject the notion that the raising of Lazarus has anything to do with spiritual regeneration is because:

1. Lazarus was already a believer, whom Jesus knew and called His "friend." (John 11:11)
2. Neither Jesus nor any apostle ever cited this miracle in the context of the spiritual regeneration.
3. Jesus stated what the purpose of this miracle was, which was so that witnesses "may believe." (John 11:42) And that is precisely

[222] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 284-285.
[223] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 186.
[224] Ibid.

what resulted: "Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him." (John 11:45)

4. Jesus did plenty of other miracles as well, such as cleansing a leper (Matthew 8:2-3) and commanding the healing of a Centurion's sick servant. (Matthew 8:5-13) Why don't Calvinists develop metaphors around those things? I think we all know why. Those people were just sick and diseased, not dead. At John 5:6, Jesus asks: "Do you wish to get well?" Obviously, Calvinists can't cite that miracle either since Jesus conditioned it on a choice.
5. Lazarus was only *temporarily* raised and later died. So, how do Calvinists wish to fit that into their extra-biblical explanation? Will they suggest that spiritual resurrection is therefore just temporary?

Calvinists will insist that, like Lazarus, we too are dead, that is, dead in our sins. However, being dead in sins is illustrated at Ephesians 2:11-22 as *separation*, not unconsciousness. A perfect example is found at Luke 15:24: "'For this son of mine was **dead** and has **come to life again**; he was **lost** and has been **found**.'" Obviously, that was only figuratively being dead, and not literally. In our own culture, we hear the expression: "You're dead to me." Certainly, that doesn't mean that a person is lifeless, but rather is *cut off*, which can be restored under the right conditions.

Calvinist objection:

The context of raising Lazarus from the dead clearly dealt with the matter of salvation because Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." (John 11:25-26) For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom He will. (John 5:28-29)

Our reply:

Sure, in terms of *witnesses* becoming believers (i.e. "…so that they may believe that You sent Me" John 11:42), but Lazarus was not an unbeliever transformed into a believer, and yet, that is exactly the comparison that Calvinists are trying to make, that is, in which Lazarus supposedly depicts unbelievers becoming spiritually regenerated to become believers. If Lazarus was not an unbeliever, then Calvinism's extra-biblical metaphor really has no basis, and it's puzzling that more Calvinists don't realize this.

LOGIC

If you've ever had a discussion with a Calvinist where you thought you had made a strong argument about the necessary *implications* of Calvinism (i.e. God being made into a divine tempter and puppet master who is the author of sin and arbitrarily chooses some people for salvation) and why it, therefore, must be rejected, but the Calvinist nonetheless remained totally unconvinced, here is what you need to know: Calvinist soteriology stands on the pillars of two presuppositions, **X** and **Y**, representing a sovereignty/responsibility tension, which they hold as fundamental truths, and as truths, all inherent difficulties are in God's hands to resolve by means of **Z**. This is why Calvinists often invoke divine mystery to resolve all of their logical difficulties. Developed further:

- **X** = God's decree of an exhaustive, total plan of all things.
- **Y** = The uncoerced, voluntary free agency of man.
- **Z** = The logic equation which perfectly reconciles **X** and **Y**.

Calvinists will declare that they know for a fact that **X** and **Y** are both true and therefore **Z** must necessarily follow, even though **Z** has yet to be revealed to mankind. So while the non-Calvinist enters the discussion to employ logic to prove that **X** and **Y** are *incompatible*, the Calvinist has no concern on whether they are compatible, so long as both **X** and **Y** remain true. So the only way to properly engage a Calvinist is by challenging their *presuppositions*, rather than the *implications* since they are taking it on faith that the implications are resolved by **Z**. So a non-Calvinist might instead wish to challenge the deterministic presupposition, **X**, while agreeing with **Y**, by identifying places in Scripture where **X** is directly contradicted, such as where God claims that He is neither the author of confusion (1st Corinthians 14:33) nor the source of temptation (James 1:13), so that the problem of sin is resolved logically by **Z** equating to the divine permission of the unnecessitated actions of **Y**. While some Calvinists concede to the existence of divine permission, it nonetheless amounts to God allowing Himself to do whatsoever He decrees and allowing man to do whatever is unilaterally decided on their behalf, and hence it is no longer a type of permission that is relatable to the human experience. However, once again, this implication is not a concern for a Calvinist, so long as both **X** and **Y** remain true. In defense of **X**, sometimes Calvinists will offer Bible verses *proving* that God ordains sin, all with the intent of proving presupposition **X**, though with theoretical **Z** guaranteeing a perfect solution to the dilemma of God being made into the author of divinely caused sin. Therefore, the ultimate weakness of Calvinism is that

it obliges Calvinists to argue that God wills all sin, as being necessary to their presupposition of **X**. So when focusing your attack on **X**, expect to encounter a vigorous defense of God ordaining sin by "secondary causes," which is like a husband defending his hiring of a hitman to kill his estranged wife on the grounds that he carried it about by "secondary causes." (We also know from the instance of David and Uriah that the Calvinistic approach of "secondary causes" holds no weight with God.)

LOTTERY

The Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Election seems to turn salvation into the luck of a lottery. In Calvinism, those who are born saved are far more *fortunate* than those born non-elect and un-savable.

What do Calvinists believe?

The elect are better termed "graced," than "fortunate" or "lucky." Grace is neither luck nor good fortune since grace is not determined by blind, random chance or possibility, but rather is determined by God.

Our reply:

Whichever way Calvinists perceive things having been fixed in their favor as "graced," the ultimate conclusion is still that they were fortunate and lucky that God cosmically worked it out that way.

> John Goodwin: *"And whether that doctrine, which teacheth that God intendeth only the salvation of a few, but the condemnation of many, and yet commandeth all to believe that they may be saved, doth not make the glorious gospel of God like unto one of such lotteries, I leave to all understanding and unprejudice men to consider."*[225]

By "unprejudice men," the implication is that those who are not fully indoctrinated into Calvinism will naturally associate Calvinist election with luck and good fortune. Calvinists deny the natural association because it gives a negative impression of Calvinism.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Every time I look at chapter 9 of Romans, or teach on this passage, there are immediately people who respond to me by saying (and maybe you are thinking this), 'Well, I'm not a believer now, so why should I even be concerned by about these things because if I'm not elect, I'm not going to be saved; and why should I bother—I guess I just missed the lottery or I lost the decision in eternity.' I want to say to those of you who do not have faith in Jesus Christ right now, that if you do not, at this moment,*

[225] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 140-141.

> *have faith in Christ, there is no reason whatsoever to assume your non-election. Because every person who has ever come to faith in Christ has had a period in their life that preceded that moment of faith, and all of the elect who come to faith at one time were unbelievers, and you may very well be numbered among the elect and have not yet realized your election. And one of the most important questions that the New Testament raises to us, or admonitions given, is that we make our election and calling sure. And if you don't know if you are numbered among the elect, I can't think of a more important question for you to focus your attention upon until you know the answer to that question than that one. And here's some good news: if you are struggling about that question. That's not proof positive that you are elect, but it's a good sign because most of the non-elect could care less—ever—about being reconciled with God."*[226]

Our reply:

If they are not "elect," in the Calvinist sense, then indeed in that system, they would have "missed the lottery" and "lost the decision in eternity." There is really no way around that. Also, the fact that Calvinists fixate so much on the question of an eternal election shows how much Calvinism is centered on a *presumption* to election rather than being centered on the *promise* of eternal life for whosoever believes in Christ.

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[226] R.C. Sproul, *Predestination: Lecture 4, The Divine Choice*. http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/predestination/the-divine-choice/

LOVE

Omni-benevolence is the basis for a universal atonement, which is also the basis for asserting a universal salvific will, which is then the basis for giving a universal offer of the gospel. However, before Calvinists connect the dots to Universalism, realize that universal salvation is not being suggested, and thus there is a perfectly logical distinction from Universalism, especially if we hold that only those who meet the *condition* of the well-meant offer of the gospel will experience the saving benefits of Christ's universal atonement. (The underlying problem with the Calvinist accusation of Universalism upon its non-Calvinist opponents is that Calvinists believe that if Jesus died for you, then you are saved, end of story—faith comes later, upon receiving Irresistible Grace. Non-Calvinists obviously reject the notion that Christ's atonement *saves without faith*.)

> Adrian Rogers: *"Does God love everyone? Did Jesus die for a certain few?—for the chosen ones? Friend, can I walk up to any man on the face of this earth and tell him without stutter-stammer, apology or equivocation that God loves you? I can do that, without qualification."*[227]

Does God love everyone the same? No. God does not love everyone *equally*, but rather, God loves everyone *uniquely*. In the former case, if God loved all of us the same, then it would render any single person superfluous, while in the latter case, each person is special to God, for Him to love uniquely from others. In Calvinism, however, God simply doesn't love most of humanity *at all*.

Ask Calvinists: "Do you believe that God intended for the 'non-elect' to spend eternity with Him in Heaven?" Calvinists will answer "no." Then ask: "Where, then, do you believe God intended for the 'non-elect' to spend eternity?" To pivot from this painfully obvious point, Calvinists will raise some rather odd arguments until finally conceding the matter.

What do Calvinists believe?

> George Whitefield: *"God is loving to every man: He sends His rain upon the evil and upon the good."*[228]

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[227] Adrian Rogers, *Let The Earth Hear His Voice, 2 Corinthians 5:13-20, 2004.*
[228] *Whitefield's Letter To Wesley On Election*, Dec. 24, 1740, http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/5514/0491/7249/wltw.pdf.

George Whitefield: *"For the Word may be useful even to the non-elect, in restraining them from much wickedness and sin."* [229]

James White: *"There is no basis in the Bible for asserting that God's love knows no levels, kinds, or types."* [230]

James White: *"And the love God has for His own people, the elect, is different than the love He shows to the creation in general or to rebel sinners outside of His grace in particular."* [231]

James White: *"The biblical teaching is that God brings His elect to Himself in love while showing much patience toward those who deserve to be cut off immediately under His wrath (Romans 9:22-23)."* [232]

Our reply:

No one disagrees that God has a special love for Christians. (John 16:27) The issue at hand is whether there is any level, kind or type of love that accompanies predestining someone to Hell. Such a concept cannot meet any rational basis for love. Moreover, it is not an act of kindness to preach to those who are *excluded* from the hope of gospel through a Limited Atonement. It is not an act of kindness to provide *temporal* blessings for those who have been predestined for *eternal* torment. It is not an act of kindness to *delay* judgment for those who have been created for the purpose of perishing. (In a fully deterministic framework, how is anything "delayed," anyway? That doesn't make any sense, but Calvinists use such a concept anyway, in order to fabricate a sense of compassion.)

From the Calvinistic perspective, the non-elect do not love God, and therefore God *owes them nothing*, but once again, if Calvinists are honest with regard to their eternal decree, they must ask themselves who it ultimately is that decreed the wants and desires of the non-elect, from cradle to grave, in terms of who and what they love? Calvinists cannot revel in a type of sovereignty which determines whatsoever comes to pass, and then retreat from its uglier implications. They can spin and pivot all they wish, but these questions are not going to go away.

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[229] Ibid.
[230] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2004), 267.
[231] Ibid., 268.
[232] Ibid., 269.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The punishment of deserving sinners glorifies Him in the demonstration of His holiness and righteousness."*[233]

Our reply:

How are the "non-elect" *deserving* of God's wrath if all of their wants and desires are unchangeably decreed for them, without the slightest deviation? Calvinists will insist that the Bible says so at Romans 9:19-20, but the counter-argument is that Calvinists have misread that chapter, which actually addresses the judicially hardened Jews, whom Paul is trying to *win* for Christ, rather than being a fixed class of non-elect. Nonetheless, once Calvinists honestly face the logical implications of their determinism, you'll see more of the following types of *candid* answers instead.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."*[234]

> James White: *"No matter how one understands 'JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED' (Romans 9:13), this verse alone should be enough to refute such an errant view of God's love."*[235]

Our reply:

So in Calvinism, the "levels, kinds, or types" of love is actually unveiled as what it more honestly would be—*hate*.

> Jerry Walls: *"In a nutshell, our case against Calvinism is that it doesn't do justice to the character of God revealed in Scripture. It does not accurately portray the Holy One who is 'compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love' (Ps. 103:8), the God for whom love is not merely an option or sovereign choice, but who is such that His eternal nature is love (1 Jn 4:8)."*[236]

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[233] Ibid., 269.
[234] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[235] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 268.
[236] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 220.

Dr. Walls goes on to make a case that God's very nature is love, and therefore it is not even an option for Him to "not love His creation." For example, we would be repulsed by someone who breeds puppies for the purpose of torturing any of them. Likewise, we would consider it evil for a father or mother to hate any of their own children who they chose to conceive. And, in the same way, it would appear to be evil for God to hate those who He chose to create. Walls argues:

> *"God cannot fail to be perfectly loving any more so than He can lie. You don't have to have children, but if you do you take on an obligation to love them. God's freedom was in the freedom to create, or not. He didn't have to create. But once having created, as a necessarily good and loving Being, He cannot but love what He has created. Love is not an option with God…It's not a question of whether or not God chooses to love, it is WHO HE IS…HE IS LOVE."*[237]

This is not a weakness of God, Walls insists, but His greatest and most self-glorifying strength. Would you consider it a strength or a weakness that my character will not allow me to be cruel to my pets?

Is it a weakness that I am unable to willingly strangle one of my own children to death, as Walls argues? No! That is a strength!

God's inability to be unloving is not a short coming of God's strength and power, but the greatest most glorifying characteristic of His eternal nature. To declare God's universal self-sacrificial love to the entire world reveals God for what makes Him so abundantly glorious!

Therefore, the question Calvinists are asking is backwards. Instead of asking, as John Piper does, "How does a sovereign God express His love?" We should be asking, "How does a loving God express His sovereignty?"[238]

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[237] *Jerry Walls: What's Wrong With Calvinism*, Part 1, 1:00:55-1:01:43. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Daomzm3nyIg

[238] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 219.

MERIT

Do non-Calvinists believe that they have a hand in their own salvation? Calvinists sure think so. Is believing in Jesus something smart, wise and good? Calvinists believe that since it is, and since fallen is not good but evil, then anything good coming from fallen man must come from another source, specifically God through deterministic means. But, really consider whether faith in Christ is something truly meritorious, that is, whether it means that we've earned something.

If simply asking God for forgiveness merited or earned salvation, then why was Calvary needed? After all, if asking for forgiveness from God in any way merits being forgiven, then there would be no need for Christ's atonement. God could simply just say, "Okay, whoever asks for forgiveness, I'm going to choose to forgive them." In that case, no atonement is needed and forgiveness is simply merited. If simply humbling yourself and asking for forgiveness, somehow earned or merited being forgiven, then the Cross was not needed and there is absolutely no justification for why Jesus died. So, both Calvinists and non-Calvinists should mutually agree that asking for forgiveness does not merit being forgiven, whether if you were to ask for forgiveness *freely* or whether you were to ask for forgiveness due to some *effectual causal decree of God*. If all men need the Cross, then there is no justification for Calvinists to accuse non-Calvinists of believing in meritorious salvation simply by asking God to save us.[239]

[239] *John 6:45 and Calvinism??*, 19:47 – 21:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aIIDaY6-LEQ.

MIDDLE KNOWLEDGE

Middle Knowledge is the knowledge of contingencies (i.e. the knowledge of the *what-if's*), which exemplifies an extreme sense of divine omniscience. In some cases, it could represent an element of hyperbole, such as if that's the case with Matthew 11:20-24, in order to establish a larger point concerning the lack of repentance of certain Israelite cities. However, in the cases of 1st Samuel 23:9-13 and Jeremiah 38:17-24, God's Middle Knowledge represented actionable information, which David followed and it saved his life, and which if king Zedekiah had followed, it would have saved the life of his two sons. Here are the texts:

> **1st Samuel 23:9-13:** "Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. **Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant**.' And the LORD said, 'He will come down.' Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the LORD said, '**They will surrender you**.' Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit."
>
> **Jeremiah 38:17-24:** "Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, "If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive. But if you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand."' Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, 'I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for they may give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.' But Jeremiah said, 'They will not give you over. **Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you** and you may live. **But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word which the LORD has shown me**: "Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say, 'Your close friends Have misled and

> overpowered you; while your feet were sunk in the mire, they turned back.' They will also bring out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand, but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned with fire."' Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, 'Let no man know about these words and you will not die.'"

> **Matthew 11:20-24:** "Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For **if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes**. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for **if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day**. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.'"

The men of Keilah never surrendered David into the hands of Saul, but they *would* have, had David remained there. Things *would* have gone well with king Zedekiah, but he refused to obey God's warning. The wicked cities of Tyre and Sidon (who effectively served as object lessons of immorality) *would* have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes, and even remained to this day, had they been placed under similar circumstances as the Israelite cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida.

That demonstrates what Middle Knowledge is and how it is useful. In fact, there is an entire theological system centered around divine Middle Knowledge. It is called Molinism, named after a 16th-century Spanish Jesuit theologian named Luis de Molina. Of course, one is not a Molinist simply because they believe in divine Middle Knowledge. Rather, Molinism is a theology that proposes how God *uses* His Middle Knowledge to providentially govern His created order, and Molinism can include both Calvinists and non-Calvinists. It really all depends on what one believes God does with it. For example, does God use His Middle Knowledge simply to shape the future to reach His own goals, in the midst of creatures with autonomy of reason, such as Jonah, in order to prepare a storm and a "great fish" to ensure that he ends up where God called him? Or, does God use His Middle Knowledge in a meticulously deterministic way, so that everything that happens, both good and evil, all occur exactly as designed, without even the slightest deviation, so that the appearance of

human freedom is really more attributable to a form of Calvinistic Compatibilism? How one answers that question will determine whether they are an Arminian-Molinist or a Calvinist-Molinist.

So, what do Calvinists teach about Middle Knowledge? The answer is that they affirm it, but since Calvinists ground divine omniscience in determinism, then Middle Knowledge must similarly be grounded in determinism, and that, of course, leads to an entirely different meaning of Middle Knowledge. In other words, in Calvinism, God knows something because He has meticulously determined it, without which, He otherwise could not infallibly know it, which also represents a big difference from what non-Calvinists believe about divine omniscience. Non-Calvinists believe that God can know something, without causing it, simply because God exists independently of our dimension of time and space. So, while the Calvinist understanding of divine omniscience is really simple (i.e. God determined everything and necessarily must know what He's done), the non-Calvinist understanding of divine omniscience is very complicated, which is also a factor of God being a complex Being. For instance, non-Calvinists believe that God knows *everything*, but cannot explain how God knows *anything*. This is not necessarily paradoxical, but simply awaits revelation of God's essential nature. That is similar to God's eternal existence. Calvinists and non-Calvinists agree that God is eternal and uncreated, but neither can explain *how*. It is not necessarily paradoxical, but just awaits explanation from God as to who He is, relative to His dimension of existence in relation to our own.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"God's omniscience refers to God's knowledge of all things actual and potential. God knows not only all that is, but everything that possibly could be. … God knows not only all available options, but also which option will be exercised. He knows the end before the beginning. It is said that God knows all contingencies, but none of them contingently. God never says to himself, 'That depends.' Nothing is contingent to him. He knows all things will happen because he ordains everything that does happen. This is crucial to our understanding of God's omniscience. He does not know what will happen by virtue of exceedingly good guesswork about future events. He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it."*[240]

[240] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 171-172.

Our reply:

That would mean that God knows all counterfactual ramifications and contingencies to the extent that He knows all that He decreed. Infinite potential, then, would simply be a factor of the decreed order. Middle Knowledge, in Calvinism, would ultimately seem to be like a fantasy island, in which God ponders all that which He chose never to be.

MYSTERY

The general perspective of Calvinists is that since we know that God is sovereign, who determines whatsoever comes to pass, and since we know that man is free, we must simply accept the mystery in that.[241] Hence, "mystery" is made into a convenient theological tool to escape contradictions, to make one immune to having to provide logical answers and to make one's arguments ultimately *unfalsifiable*. This can be observed in Calvinism in a number of ways. Calvinists affirm that God is the ultimate cause and origin of everything that happens, including sin, and yet is not the author of sin, while mankind is deemed solely responsible. How? It's a mystery. Calvinists affirm Ezekiel 18:23, in that God desires that the wicked turn from their sins and repent. How is that congruent to special election? Transcendence.[242] It is only reflective of a "revealed will," in contrast to a "secret will" in which only some are effectually made to become believers.[243] Calvinists affirm that the fallen angels, including Adam and Eve, were originally made *free* agents, but yet fell according to an eternal and unchangeable design, by which they could not do otherwise. How? We don't know. It's a mystery.[244]

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"If anyone object that this is beyond his comprehension, I confess it. But what wonder if the immense and incomprehensible majesty of God exceed the limits of our intellect? I am so far from undertaking the explanation of this*

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[241] Also see the section on Logic.

[242] Calvinist, John MacArthur: "Now, having said that you believe all of that, you now have a problem. And that is that your brain can't handle all of that information and bring complete resolution. But that's okay; because if you could, you wouldn't be human. There are things that only God can understand. And I really do believe that. I'm very content with that. That's one of the reasons I know the Bible is written by God, because men would fix it. If I wrote a book that had those contradictions, Phil would edit them all out. One of the bench marks of divine inspiration is the fact that you're dealing with transcendence." (*Election and Predestination: The Sovereignty of God in Salvation*) https://www.gty.org/library/articles/BRG-90-20/election-and-predestination-the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

[243] "The revealed will was that all men be saved, but the hidden will was that the greater part of mankind be damned." Erwin Lutzer, *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 195.

[244] "But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don't know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know." R.C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986).

sublime, hidden secret, that I wish what I said at the beginning to be remembered, that those who seek to know more than God has revealed are crazy. Therefore let us be pleased with instructed ignorance rather than with the intemperate and inquisitive intoxication of wanting to know more than God allows."[245]

John Calvin: *"But now, removing from God all proximate causation of the act, I at the same time remove from Him all guilt and leave man alone liable. It is therefore wicked and calumnious to say that I make the fall of man one of the works of God. But how it was ordained by the foreknowledge and decree of God what man's future was without God being implicated as associate in the fault as the author or approver of transgression, is clearly a secret so much excelling the insight of the human mind, that I am not ashamed to confess ignorance. Far be it from any of the faithful to be ashamed of ignorance of what the Lord withdraws into the glory of His inaccessible light."*[246]

Our reply:

When a person is determined to reject the truth, the first step is the muddy the waters. That is the net effect of Calvinists frequently appealing to mystery, transcendence and a secret will. True biblical mystery awaits revelation, such as the mystery of Genesis 28:14, ultimately being revealed in the welcoming of the Gentiles according to Ephesians 2:11-22, or such as the mystery of the Messiah Himself, who first came to suffer and later to return in glory. These are not necessarily contradictions, but rather function as a plot twist, being somewhat unexpected. Certainly, the triune nature of God, His omniscience and His eternal nature are complex matters, but that is because God Himself is complex, and which merely awaits His own revelation, and is not necessarily a contraction.

[245] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 123.
[246] Ibid, 123-124.

OMNIPOTENCE

Being omnipotent means being all-powerful. But what does it mean for God to be all-powerful, and more specifically, what does it mean for God to govern all-powerfully? Many imagine how they might govern the universe.

God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise and in all ways completely perfect, justly governing impartially in complete self-control. How better to see this lived-out, except in the life of Jesus Christ on earth? But, how can God be perfect in all His ways if there resulted from His created beings both the fall of man in the Garden of Eden and war in Heaven among His angels? Does God not possess omniscience? Surely He does. God is all-knowing, even including all potential possibilities for each scenario. God cannot help but know this as God. He instantly foresees beginning to end. Foreseeing what would be found in each individual, God assigned a time and place for each person.

To answer the question about the Fall, it must first be known that God intended to *sort* men and angels all along, and that which is *found* is not necessarily *placed*. God is the author of all *things*, but not the author of all *effects*. In other words, God is responsible for the *fact* of freedom, but each is responsible for their own *acts* of freedom. God created beings to form their own choices, which again are their choices—not God's—and hence each is responsible for their own choices. God's eternal intentions of sorting His created beings thereby necessitated granting a latitude of reason, meaning granting autonomous reasoning together with a creative intelligence. Apart from this, how could the sorting be done?

Redemption is also a function of the sorting. God *tests* but He does not *tempt*. Just as God forms light and creates darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity (Isaiah 45:7), redemption is its purpose so that restoration may occur. God only lets things go so far until He must restore order. God's choice is that each will choose Him, but ultimately each must make their own choice in the foreordained sorting process.

To govern the universe in such a manner, without strings attached, would indeed require a God who is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-wise and in all ways completely perfect, judiciously governing with impartial wisdom, self-restrained under perfect self-control.

Life begets life and stones beget stones. Calvinism's purported decree of closed determinism is completely static and unchanging like something that of a stone, while open self-determinism is dynamic and changing like something that of life. Closed determinism is inconsistent with a God who is Life, and if the divine sorting were of things that were placed and not merely found, then what would that say of the sorting?

"For God to be truly all-powerful and all-knowing is to be able to govern by steering all possibilities, every conceivable scenario, towards a desired end, no matter what meddling tries to thwart a plan. To be this perfectly powerful allows the created to act as they will, and still maintain governance towards a perfecting goal."[247]

[247] B. W. Melvin, *A Land Unknown: Hell's Dominion* (Xulon Press, 2005), 118.

OMNISCIENCE

Divine omniscience is the characteristic of an all-knowing God, and although we believe that God knows *everything*, we candidly admit that we do not know how God knows *anything*. The same perplexity also exists concerning God's eternal nature. Although we believe that God is timeless, we cannot explain how God can exist and yet not have a beginning. This is not necessarily a logical contradiction, but rather a mystery that awaits the revelation of God's essential nature when He chooses to reveal the full aspect of His nature to mankind.[248]

What do Calvinists believe?

> Greg Welty: *"For example, given God's foreknowledge, God creates at least some people whom He knows will never come to faith. Thus, He knows they will end up in hell if they are created. Knowing this, God creates them. Why would He do a thing like that? Why create people whom He knows will end up in hell when it was in His power not to create them?"*[249]

> Greg Welty: *"Or again, clearly it is an evident fact of history that multitudes of people are born, live, and die without ever hearing the gospel, even though it would be a trivial thing for divine omnipotence to directly reveal the gospel message to them. Again, why would God not ensure they get the gospel message when He could do so?"*[250]

> Greg Welty: *"Presumably, God infallibly knows who will and who will not come to faith, and He has known this from all eternity. How can God sincerely offer salvation to those whom He knows will never accept it? Is God sincerely hoping that His infallible foreknowledge is mistaken?"*[251]

Our reply:

Calvinists cite divine omniscience to advance several arguments:

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[248] See also the discussions on *Determinism*, *Foreknowledge* and *Middle Knowledge*.
[249] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 230.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid., 231.

1. Why would God purposely choose to create, or simply opt not to halt the birth of, those whom He knows will never receive Him and ultimately perish in Hell forever?

2. What about those who never hear the gospel? God knows that some will never hear the gospel, and yet He loves and desires their salvation equal to everyone else?

3. Can God be sincere in offering salvation to those whom He knows will never receive Him?

4. If God is omniscient and His knowledge is infallible, then what He knows *will* happen *must* happen, and if the future unfolds exactly as God foreknows it, then is not the future fixed, and if the future is foreordained, how can mankind be free or have free-will?

One can become easily confounded by such conundrums, but there are simple and easy answers to each of them:

1. Jesus addresses the matter of human interconnection in the parable of the "Wheat of the Tares" at Matthew 13:24-30. First of all, God does not sow the tares, but rather an "enemy" has done that. Secondly, while God may know that a certain man would be born and grow up to reject God's offer of salvation and ultimately perish in Hell, what if God *also* knew that such a man would have a son who would one day grow up to become a Christian and have children of his own, with subsequent generations of Christian offspring? If God prevents the birth of the father, then none of the Christian children could be born. This is how people are interconnected and which is why it is unsurprising to see the instructions to the angel not to uproot the tares since it would otherwise disturb the wheat, and that all things will all get sorted out in the final harvest.

2. First, God does not accept blame for the unreached but instead holds believers accountable for not getting the message out, even to the point of saying that the blood of the unreached is on the hands of His followers. (Ezekiel 3:7-9; Acts 18:5-6) Second, light given is proportional to the level of light received, so that more light may be justifiably given. If people reject the light that they do have, why should God give more? Of course, such light alone does not save, but what it does do is that it prompts God to give more light. Throughout history, God has sent missionaries to all

sorts of places. For instance, we know that He sent the prophet Jonah to warn wicked Nineveh of impending judgment. God has always been an active evangelist to the world, calling missionaries to the furthest reaches of the globe.

3. Jesus offered discipleship to the "Rich Young Ruler" at Mark 10:21-23, which was genuine since Jesus "felt a love for him." Therefore, some Calvinists assume the rich young ruler must have been "elect" and later converted, though the Bible never says that.

4. God's knowledge of our future, self-determined choices does not cause our choices but reflects them, such that if we would have chosen something different in the future then God's knowledge would reflect that instead, and therefore what God foreknows is our *self-determined* future choices, including His own, and hence omniscience does not contradict free-will at all. God necessarily must have known that Adam and Eve would choose to disobey Him in the Garden of Eden, so knowing this eventuality does not necessitate that He determined it. Moreover, God desires a creation with whom He can share in a relationship with, which then necessitates the freedom to choose to either love or not to love, all being essential to possessing a free and independent will.

OPEN THEISM

Calvinists believe that God infallibly knows the future because He exhaustively fixed, decreed, scripted and determined the future, and that if He had not done so, then according to Calvinists, He could not infallibly know what would happen *next*, thus rendering Calvinism as more or less, "Open Theism with a Decree." Open Theism is the belief that God *could* have similarly chosen to exhaustively decree the future, exactly in the same manner as described by Calvinism, but that God has instead chosen not to do so, by instead having only *partially* decreed the future, leaving some of the future unsettled and undetermined, and hence "open" to individual, self-determination. In this way, Open Theism does not reflect a weaker God than Calvinism, but rather the same God who could do everything that the God of Calvinism can do, but simply chose a different manner of providentially governing the created order. Non-Calvinists (who are not Open Theists) believe that God, as a factor of being eternal, must necessarily perceive all time instantaneously as an "Eternal Now," and yet who can also interact with time. This cannot, however, be adequately explained until we first come to know how God is eternal, and that awaits God revealing it to us. Nonetheless, with Calvinism, there is a shared view with Open Theists that the future would be open and unknowable unless God closed it by a fixed and settled decreed:

> Daniel Whedon: *"There is a class of thinkers who avoid the difficulty of reconciling foreknowledge with free agency by denying the existence or the possibility of the foreknowledge of a free or contingent event. They affirm that a free act is, previous to its existence, a nothing, and so not an object of knowledge. The knowing it, therefore, supposes a contradiction."*[252]

Now notice the similarity with Calvinism:

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"If you think about it, if God really knows what man's going to do, is man really free?, and that's why the Open Theists go the direction that they do."*[253]

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[252] *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 229.
[253] James White, *Arminianism: It Robs the Gospel of its Personal Nature*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj5DhowHTBc&feature=related

James White: *"How God can know future events, for example, and yet not determine them, is an important point…."*[254]

James White: *"How can God know what these free creatures will do in the future, if they are truly free (the argument open theists are aggressively promoting today)?"*[255]
James White: *"If God's foreknowledge is perfect, does it not follow that the future is, in fact, fixed? And if it is fixed, upon what basis did it take the shape it did?"*[256]

James White: *"Is [Dave Hunt] saying that man's actions determine the future and that God merely knows what will happen?"*[257]

Our reply:

So according to Calvinism, the future is *unknowable*, even to God, unless He has *scripted* the future—God *knows* it because He's *decreed* it. By saying this, however, four problems emerge:

1. God must predetermine *everything* in order to know *anything*, which Calvinists remedy by saying God *has* decreed everything, including an unending, eternal future since God's omniscience extends to infinity (though Calvinists need to explain how something that is infinite can be fixed and determined).

2. God's knowledge has *increased* by virtue of a decree.

3. God must have *lacked* omniscience, logically prior to issuing an exhaustive decree.

4. Omniscience depends upon Determinism? How could an attribute of God's nature be subject to His plans? Saying God can only know what He determines means that God has foreknowledge in the same way as any normal man. For instance, imagine if I said, "I foreknow that a certain bank is going to be robbed tomorrow," but that I only know this because I secretly planned to be the one to rob it. Or, imagine that your neighbor comes over to you and

[254] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 163.
[255] Ibid., 168.
[256] Ibid., 360.
[257] Ibid., 57.

says, "Someone shot my dog," and you act outraged and say, "I knew that your dog was going to get shot in this neighborhood because it's a really bad area," when in reality, you knew this because you are the one who shot the dog. If that is the kind of omniscience that Calvinists attribute to God, then Calvinists and non-Calvinists disagree on what omniscience really means.

Dave Hunt: *"[James] White denies omniscience in his repudiation of any 'grounds upon which to base exhaustive divine foreknowledge of future events outside of God's decree.' If God must decree the future to know it, He's not omniscient."*[258]

Laurence Vance: *"What kind of power does it take to know something one has already decreed to take place? To take away God's absolute omniscience under the guise of an all-encompassing decree is not only a deliberate rejection of the word of God, but a subtle attack on the nature of God himself. In their zeal to uphold their 'divine determinism,' Calvinists are actually denying not only God's 'middle knowledge' (knowledge of what will or would happen), but his 'simple foreknowledge' (knowledge of what will actually happen), and limiting God to possessing only 'present knowledge' (knowledge of what has actually happened). In this response the Calvinists are no different than those philosophers and Arminians who deny to God absolute omniscience. In fact, they have even gone beyond some of those who deny God's absolute omniscience, for at least some of them ascribe to God some knowledge of future events without any divine decree."*[259]

While Open Theists have the same general perspective of God's character as non-Calvinists, in that God is good and for His part sincerely desires the salvation and well-being of all men, Open Theists nonetheless agree with Calvinists that if God infallibly knows the future then mankind could not otherwise have and make genuinely free choices.

Open Theism

God decreed many things but not everything, and what He didn't decree, determine, fix and settle *in the Calvinist sense of determinism* is

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[258] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 389.
[259] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 389-390.

therefore left open and undecided, and hence if undetermined, then unknowable. God is omniscient to the extent of what is logically knowable. The percentage in the Open Theism paradigm of what is left by God as open vs. closed remains a mystery. Hence, Open Theism is actually best understood as "Partial Open Theism," or for that matter, "Partial Closed Theism." So, the title itself is a misnomer, creating the mistaken impression that Open Theists believe that the future is 100% open, when yet that is not at all what Open Theists believe.

Calvinism

Whereas Open Theism is actually Partial Open Theism, Calvinism is 100% Closed Theism. God foreknows all things because God decreed all things, and God must necessarily know what He decreed. Our choices are all infallibly known to God since they were all decreed by God in a *closed* system before any choice had ever existed.

Traditionalism

God is an eternal and uncreated Being who, having created time and space in this dimension, cannot be limited to the thing He created, and hence He is able to interact with time, while also existing independently of time. If God had to determine something in time in order to infallibly know it, then it would mean that God is subject to the very thing He created and that just wouldn't make any sense at all.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"We also meet another group of theologians in this category of limited knowledge, and they are known as the 'Openness Group,' and they simply say this, and it's another form of the same thing: 'God doesn't know the future. God doesn't know the future; God can't know the future. Because the future can't be known—because it hasn't happened yet—that God does not know the future.' Do you understand all the machinations you have to go through to write a book to make that convincing argument using the Bible? But they do. God, the newly designed God, has a huge limitation. He does not know what hasn't happened, so everything God does is a reaction, and I just want to say, 'Well, then, how do you explain Psalm 22, which starts out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"' Because Jesus said that on the Cross—and Psalm 22 gives details of the Cross,*

explicit details of the Cross—and that's just one important passage to bring up."[260]

Our reply:

However, since Open Theists believe in a partially *open* and partially *closed* future, in which the closed portion is fixed, settled, decreed, and rendered certain and necessary, in exactly the same deterministic sense that Calvinists perceive a closed future, the answer to MacArthur's question is the same answer that MacArthur himself would give. This is what Calvinists misunderstand about Open Theism. The "details" relayed in the prophecy of Psalm 22—for an Open Theist—would be something determined and closed, and hence fully foreknown on that account. For instance, an Open Theist believes that God predestined that *someone* would betray Christ for thirty pieces of silver, though not necessarily that it would be Judas, until he proved himself to be a dubiously suitable vessel for that role.

Traditionalists differ from both Calvinists and Open Theists by *not* grounding divine omniscience in divine determinism at all, but instead grounding divine omniscience in God's eternal and uncreated essence, as part of what is understood as the "Eternal Now" perspective, in which God has a bird's eye view of eternity, and can thus infallibly know what people *self-determine* in the future. So, it wouldn't be a matter of God knowing what is *undetermined*, but what is *determined*, and though while from our finite and linear perspective on time, the future hasn't happened yet, for God, He can look *back* on what is still yet *future* to us, all *simultaneously* because God cannot help but be God. God knows what *is*, what *will* be and what *could* be, not by grounding His omniscience in what He determines, but in who He is as an eternal and uncreated Being.

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[260] *John MacArthur: Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering and Evil?*, 33:14-34:35. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LFzk1afiD8

ORIGINAL SIN

The traditional understanding of "Original Sin" is that due to Adam's fall, his offspring is born with a sin-nature with the moral weakness of a propensity to sin, including resulting physical death. By contrast, under Calvinism it includes inherited sin and guilt, including a total inability to believe in the gospel. However, the concept of inherited sin contradicts divine justice: "'The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.'" (Ezekiel 18:20) As for total inability, God rebuked unrepentant Israel for claiming an inability to respond to His call: "'But they will say, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart." Therefore thus says the Lord, "Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done a most appalling thing.'" (Jeremiah 18:12-13)

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Though liberal theology, deeply influenced by humanistic assumptions, often decries original sin, all the historic confessions include the doctrine."*[261]

Our reply:

Citing "liberal theology" is a "poison the well" technique, and referencing the "historic confessions" necessarily degrades the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. The Bible alone is a Christian's authoritative source of theological doctrine, in which the historical Councils, Confessions, Creeds and Synods are nothing more than the opinions of corruptible men.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"The basic posture of unregenerate man is that of a fugitive. Our natural inclination is to flee from God."*[262]

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[261] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 121.
[262] Ibid., 124.

Our reply:

The whole purpose for Calvinists to raise the issue of Original Sin is to insinuate that unregenerate mankind is so utterly captive to the fallen condition that only a unilateral, Irresistible Grace can change them from total *haters* of God into total *lovers* of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"How then can it be true that the son will not bear the penalty of the father's guilt? And on the other hand I ask how any man will boast himself innocent who is born an unclean raven from an unclean egg. For original sin is so contracted from Adam that it becomes a property of each man. No one can therefore rightly complain, as if he innocently bore the guilt of another's sin."*[263]

Our reply:

The primary verse used by Calvinists to infer that mankind is not only born with a sin-nature but is also born guilty of Adam's sin is Romans 5:12-13 which states: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." Calvinists believe that when Adam sinned, his progeny became guilty of his sin, just as if they were doing it. However, this is not necessarily so.

> Adam Harwood on Romans chapter 5: *"Sin entered through one man. So sin came into the world, and we understand that to be at the time of Adam's disobedience. So that's when sin entered into the world, and death came through sin, and then it spread to all. Why did it spread to all people? Because all sinned. … Now notice the text doesn't say we sinned in Adam. It just says 'death spread to all because all sinned.' … Romans 5 never says we're guilty of Adam's sin. In fact, there's no Bible verse that says we're guilty of Adam's sin. … So the contrast [in vv.18-19] is between the work of Adam and the work of Christ, and if a person takes the position that because of the work of Adam, all are condemned, then it seems, in this parallel, that because of the work of Christ, all would be made righteous. … So if it's the case that we're not*

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[263] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 151.

> *automatically saved because of what Christ did, then why would we be automatically guilty because of what Adam did?"*[264]

The answer is that we are not automatically guilty of Adam's sin, any more than we are automatically righteous because of what Christ did. Just as we must participate in sin to be guilty of Adam's sin, so too we must participate with faith in Christ in order to be made righteous by Him.

Calvinists will point to Psalms 51:5 to suggest that we are indeed born in sin: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." However, while an infant may be born demonstrating the fallen characteristics inherited from Adam's nature, they are not necessarily charged by God with sin, at least not until they have reached the age or condition of accountability, upon becoming morally aware of sinning against God. As such, we are not *born good*, but we're not necessarily born with imputed sin, either. From a practical implication, if babies do not have the guilt of sin imputed to them, then they have no need for any type of infant baptism to save them. However, those who have reached the age or condition of accountability to make morally conscious choices *would* certainly need to turn to Christ, and once saved, then to make a public profession such as a believer's baptism. While infant baptisms are not recorded in Scripture, there are baby dedications and circumcisions, even as Jesus had a baby dedication and circumcision by Anna (Luke 2:38) and Simeon. (Luke 2:34)

The Calvinistic principle behind inherited guilt is that infants are found guilty by God for the sins of their parents, under the federal headship of Adam. Yet, if we are guilty of the sins of others, then why did God tell Abraham that He would not destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if there were as few as ten righteous people in the city? (Genesis 18:32) The ten righteous would be spared, despite the sins of an entire city. The sins of the city would not *translate* over to the ten righteous. So too, then, a person's own sin is what establishes their guilt before God, and since infants lack moral *ability*, they necessarily lack moral *accountability*.

The principle of imputed sin is also found at John 9:39-41: "'And Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, 'We are not blind too, are we?' Jesus said to them, '**If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains.**'" In other words, for the imputation of sin in God's justice system, *inability is a mitigating factor*. That is a crucial point. Since babies do not have a moral

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[264] *Dr. Adam Harwood on Original Sin - Part 1*, 18:09-26:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ETajCNdPBI.

consciousness, they cannot have an imputation of sin, for when they demonstrate Adam's fallen nature. Hence, deceased infants would have a mitigating factor in their sin. On a related noted, when Calvinists say that mankind has "total inability," then they are, in effect, creating a mitigating factor for adults who do not believe in Jesus. They are in essence saying, "Though they cannot help but remain as unbelievers, they are nonetheless condemned, anyway." But that would violate God's justice system of mitigating factors. The non-Calvinist alternative is that adults (or those who have reached the age and condition of accountability) most certainly *can* help it, and therefore do not possess a mitigating factor with their unbelief in Christ.

So moral *accountability* requires moral *ability*, and hence that is the reason why deceased infants are not imputed with the guilt of sin. By contrast, Jesus said to the woman who was caught in the act of adultery: "From now on sin no more." (John 8:11) He recognized her moral ability. She was consciously sinning, and thus was rightly imputed with the guilt of sinning, and although she was forgiven by Christ, moving forward, she was told to cease such sinning. For these reasons, it is unsurprising to find examples in Scripture where deceased infants (who lack moral ability) are described as receiving a positive eternal destination. Concerning the death of King David's first baby son through Bathsheba, David stated to his servants: "'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live." But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? **I will go to him, but he will not return to me**.'" (2nd Samuel 12:22-23) David had full expectation of one day going to be with his child, but obviously not in joining him in a place of torment. Concerning the prophet Ahijah's prophecy against Jeroboam, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, he stated to Jeroboam's wife: "'Now you, arise, go to your house. When your feet enter the city the child will die. All Israel shall mourn for him and bury him, for he alone of Jeroboam's family will come to the grave, because **in him something good was found** toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.'" (1st Kings 14:12-13) As these two texts show, the idea of deceased babies going to Hell is foreign to Scripture.

Most Calvinists deal with the theological problem of infant mortality is by simply assuming that they must be "one of the elect," which is odd, though, since Calvinists also insist that they do not know who the elect are. So, in this case, they are contradicting themselves by claiming that they do know. It seems to be a matter of Special Pleading.

ORWELLIAN

"Orwellian" is a term based upon a book entitled "1984" written by British author, George Orwell. It refers to the dystopian oppression imagined in a future totalitarian government which suppresses liberty and freedom. So, how might Calvinism be considered as "Orwellian"? Two ways are thought-crimes and language manipulation.

Consider the following testimony of a former Calvinist, Greg Boyd, particularly in regard to what he would allow himself to think:

> *"You can see how people come to this conclusion. In fact, I came to this conclusion for several years while I was in seminary. I simply couldn't figure out any other way of interpreting Romans 9. God must determine who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell and everything in between. It's what Scripture teaches. I guess it's what I've got to believe. So, I get why sincere people come to this conclusion. I even admire them because it's not an easy thing to believe and even shows their trust in Scripture that they'll believe something which I find so unpalatable but they believe it because they sincerely believe this is what the Bible teaches. What I've never been able to understand is how people enjoy it. Because even when I believed it, I didn't enjoy it. I mean the folks who hold this view, they would say, 'God's so glorious; He's all beautiful; He is majesty; He determines all things; it's all for His glory, even the people who suffer in Hell—it's all decreed for His glory; it's altogether lovely and beautiful,' and I could never get in on that.* ***Even when I believed it, it struck me as frankly ugly and terrifying. And you're not supposed to say that, or even think that, because it might mean that you're not one of God's elect.*** *Maybe you're one of the reprobates—the vessels of wrath—but if I was honest with myself and with God, it was ugly and I couldn't get in the joy of this. At the time, I had two young children. One was just a newborn, and I thought to myself, for all I know and for all they know, those—my precious babies that I loved so dearly—are created for the sole purpose of suffering endlessly and hopelessly in exquisite pain for all eternity for the glory of God. And I am supposed to—if I'm one of God's elect—I'm supposed to say, 'God, You are all the more glorious for having decided to show forth Your power and wrath on my two lovely children, an eternity ago, before they're ever born.' And now I feel bad for having brought them into existence. You know, I'm the means through which they're going to suffer forever. How do I say this is beautiful and glorious? I never got that. And I never got the joy of*

> *being one of God's elect, either. Hey, I'm in but my kids are out. It takes away the joy a little bit. How do you have this assurance? People talk about this eternal security. I didn't find any security in this. Because for all I know, God has determined—right now I'm a believer, right now I'm one of God's elect, at least I look like I'm one of God's elect—but how do I know that in ten years, God hasn't destined me to walk away from the faith, give up on Jesus Christ and become a total pagan? People do that, you know. If God is determining everything, they do it because God determined them to do it, and if God determined it for them, how do I know He didn't determine it for me?"*[265]

From Greg Boyd's testimony, he says that *at the time*, he couldn't figure out any other interpretation for Romans 9 besides the Calvinist interpretation, and so when he came to believe that Calvinism was biblical, he felt that he was thereby compelled to believe it, and not only that, but also compelled to like it, and even shun any thought that opposed it.

- Believe it.
- Like it.
- Advocate for it.
- Avoid any thought-crime that might oppose it.

That certainly doesn't lend itself to an open-mind. In Calvinism, the identity of Calvinism's "elect" remains hidden and unknown to all except God. So, for anyone to include themselves among Calvinism's elect, they must *presume* it, likely based upon their behavior conforming to what they suppose is consistent with Calvinism's elect. Calvinists sometimes fret over whether they are among "the elect."[266] Boyd states: "Even when I believed it, it struck me as frankly ugly and terrifying. And you're not supposed to say that, or even think that, because it might mean that you're not one of God's elect." Controlling one's own thoughts freely, and for the sake of practical living is not really Orwellian. However, slavishly living under the fear of thought-crimes, simply for the sake of unconditional conformity with a superseding authority structure can be dangerously Orwellian.

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[265] *Twisted Scripture | Romans 9 | Greg Boyd*, 15:45–18:09, emphasis mine. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akmIf4WIWs0&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR1sL62I8QzVfLo4amX5e2Ip8jhxFsJZaPKhPlNHAKFhwW3NR1hpgsZdGbE

[266] For more information on this topic, see the discussion on *Eternal Security*, regarding a quote from Calvinist, Charles Spurgeon in his sermon entitled, *Election*.

Keeping up the facade of pretending to be among Calvinism's elect requires supporting it through carefully constructed language such as "transcendence" and "mystery," necessary to cover up Calvinism's many contradictions and inconsistencies. Such language manipulation also takes form by redefining "grace" to mean an anti-grace of God unconditionally choosing some to save and the rest being passed by. Like it, love it, promote it and don't commit any thought-crimes against it, or else you may not be one of the elect. Behavioral conformity means that if anyone challenges belief in Calvinism, they must simply not understand. In the end, Boyd's self-described thought-crimes amounts to an Orwellian nightmare. By contrast, non-Calvinists have no such problem giving a sober evaluation of Calvinism because they are not pretending to be among Calvinism's elect. With the absence of fear of thought-crimes, non-Calvinists may think freely without fear of self-imposed repercussions.

PARABLES

Why did Jesus speak in parables? Jesus answers by saying: "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." (Matthew 13:13) What followed was a quote from Isaiah 6:9-10 regarding their judicial hardening by God.

Parables are used to convey truth and wisdom in such a way so as to deliver it to those who love and seek God, while veiling it to those who already have set themselves against God's purpose for their life. For instance, Jesus' sermon on being the "Bread of Life" at John chapter 6 (i.e. His *body* being true food and His *blood* being true drink) turned off many who were not right with God, with the result that they stopped following Him. (John 6:66) Meanwhile, honest and truly repentant believers will seek to understand the meaning of the parables and receive its answer from the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, compare with John 10:37-38, where even hardened unbelievers, who were not His sheep, were encouraged by Jesus anyway, so that by considering the compelling evidence of the miracles, they would believe and *become* His sheep.

PATIENCE

Throughout the scriptures we see evidence of God's patience and long suffering with mankind:

> **Nehemiah 9:30:** "For many years you were patient with them. By your Spirit you warned them through your prophets. Yet they paid no attention, so you gave them into the hands of the neighboring peoples."
>
> **2nd Peter 3:9:** "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
>
> **Romans 10:21:** "But concerning Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'"

If Calvinism is true, then what is God waiting on? He need simply to effectually regenerate their hearts to get them to respond in a timely manner.

Some Calvinists argue that God is waiting on His timing and will, but that is not what the text says. It says, "he is patient with **you**," not His own plans or timing (2nd Peter 3:9). Peter goes on to write:

> "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that **our Lord's patience means salvation**, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him" (2 Pet. 3:14-15).

How does God's patience with you mean salvation if Calvinism is true? Peter references Paul's teaching on patience as well, which can be seen in Romans 2:

> "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed" (Romans 2:4-5).

Notice in this passage that Paul credits God's kindness in patiently waiting on these rebellious individuals as potentially leading them to

repentance. Conversely, He blames their own stubbornness for the wrath being stored up against them at Judgment. God's patient enduring of their stubborn rebellion in hopes to lead them to repentance becomes nonsensical if Calvinism's claims are true.

PELAGIANISM

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

Typically, the accusation of Pelagianism comes from those who are less informed about the historical use of these labels and their actual meanings as it relates to our current soteriological disagreements.[267] So, let's get educated.

Pelagius was a 5th-century British monk who was accused of teaching that people had the natural ability to fulfill the commands of God by an exercise of the human will apart from divine assistance (grace). Pelagianism came to be known as the belief that mankind is born basically good, without a sinful nature, and is thus capable of doing good without God's help.[268]

Because Pelagius was deemed a heretic, little of his work survived to the present day except in the quotes of his opponents (not the most reliable of sources). Many modern scholars suspect that Pelagius' actual teachings were greatly misrepresented so as to demonize and marginalize him.

Despite what is commonly known of Pelagius, evidence indicates that he and his followers taught that all good works come only by divine aid (grace), which was seen as "enabling," not "effectual/irresistible" in nature. For instance, in a letter to the Pope defending himself, Pelagius is reported to have written:

> *"This grace we for our part do not, as you suppose, allow to consist merely in the law, but also in the help of God. God helps us by His teaching and revelation, whilst He opens the eyes of our heart; whilst He points out to us the future, that we may not be absorbed in the present; whilst He discovers to us the snares of the devil; whilst He enlightens us with the manifold and ineffable gift of heavenly grace… This free will is in all good works always assisted by divine help."*[269]

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[267] I highly recommend reading this journal article by Dr. Adam Harwood explaining in great detail why Traditionalists are not Semi-Pelagian. Web page: http://baptistcenter.net/journals/JBTM_10-1_Spring_2013.pdf

[268] Matt Slick, CARM Ministries: https://carm.org/pelagianism

[269] Bonner, Gerald (2004). "Pelagius (fl. c.390–418), theologian". Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/21784. Retrieved 28 October 2012.

And in an accompanying confession of faith, he states, "Free-will we do so own, as to say that we always stand in need of God's help," And he affirmed, "We do also abhor the blasphemy of those who say that any impossible thing is commanded to man by God; or that the commandments of God cannot be performed by any one man." So, while Pelagius maintained human responsibility to keep the commands of God, he still seemed to maintain the need for a divine aid in doing so.[270]

Augustine, a contemporary of Pelagius, was the first on record to teach the concept of individual effectual election to salvation. Even Calvinistic historian Loraine Boettner concedes that Calvinistic soteriology "was first clearly seen by Augustine" in the fifth century. In fact, Boettner notes, not only did the earliest Church Fathers not interpret the doctrine of election "Calvinistically," but much of their teaching stands in strong opposition to such conclusions. A great emphasis on the absolute freedom of the human will and repudiations of individual predestination to salvation is found clearly throughout the earliest writings of the church.[271]

John Calvin himself acknowledged this fact when he stated:

> *"Moreover although the Greek Fathers, above others, and especially Chrysostom, have exceeded due bounds in extolling the powers of the human will, yet all ancient theologians, with the exception of Augustine, are so confused, vacillating, and contradictory on this subject, that no certainty can be obtained from their writings."*[272]

So, by Calvinists own admission, Augustine introduced much of these unique (and often controversial) doctrinal beliefs in the 5th century.[273] Pelagius stood up against Augustine's new doctrinal positions and even went so far as to accuse him of being under the influence of his former Manichean (Gnostic) roots, which was known to teach pagan fatalism as if it were a Christian doctrine.[274] Augustine, in turn, accused

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[270] Pohle, Joseph. "Pelagius and Pelagianism." The Catholic Encyclopedia. Vol. 11. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911. 18 Jan. 2014

[271] Loraine Boettner, *Calvinism in History: Before the Reformation*, web site, available from http://www.seeking4truth.com/before_reformation.htm accessed 17 April 2015.

[272] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 2, Chapter 2, Section 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 226, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

[273] Robert Arakaki, Calvin Dissing the Early Church Fathers: https://blogs.ancientfaith.com/orthodoxbridge/calvin-dissing-the-fathers/

[274] Augustine is known for his nine-year fascination with Manichaeism: http://blogs.record-eagle.com/?p=4705

Pelagius of denying any need for divine aid in the conversion process. It is likely that both of them went too far in their accusations, but history reveals that it was Augustine's smears of Pelagius that won over in the court of public opinion.[275]

Pelagianism, therefore, has become known historically as "the teaching that man has the capacity to seek God in and of himself apart from any movement of God or the Holy Spirit, and therefore that salvation is effected by man's efforts."[276]

Non-Calvinists, like myself, wholeheartedly deny this belief and consider the label offensive and completely misrepresentative of our actual teachings. Here are a few reasons why this label would not rightly represent our views:

- We believe man has the capacity to respond willingly to God's means of seeking to save the lost, NOT that man would seek God if left alone.

- We believe our gracious God is actively working in and through creation, conscience, His bride, His Holy Spirit filled followers, and his Word to aid humanity in their conversion.

- We believe salvation is wholly of God in that He owes no man forgiveness or eternal life, even if they freely repent and humbly submit to Him as Lord and Savior. Asking for forgiveness no more merits that forgiveness than the prodigal son's return home merited the reception he received from his father. That was the choice of a gracious father alone.

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[275] The determination of the Council of Orange (529) could be considered "semi-Augustinian." It defined that faith, though a free act, resulted even in its beginnings from the grace of God, enlightening the human mind and enabling belief. However, it also explicitly denied double predestination (of the equal-ultimacy variety), stating, "We not only do not believe that any are foreordained to evil by the power of God, but even state with utter abhorrence that if there are those who want to believe so evil a thing, they are anathema." The document links grace with baptism, which was not a controversial subject at the time. It received papal sanction.[Oakley, Francis (Jan 1, 1988), The Medieval Experience: Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity, University of Toronto Press, p.64.; Thorsen, Don (2007), An Exploration of Christian Theology, Baker Books, 20.3.4. Cf. Second Council of Orange ch.5-7; H.J. Denzinger Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum, 375-377; C. H. (1981) [1967]. "Faith". The New Catholic Encyclopedia 5. Washington D.C. p.797; Cross, F. L., ed. The Oxford dictionary of the Christian church. New York: Oxford University Press. 2005]

[276] Adams, Nicholas (2007). "Pelagianism: Can people be saved by their own efforts?". In Quash, Ben; Ward, Michael. *Heresies and How to Avoid Them*. London: SPCK Publishing. p.91.

What about Semi-Pelagianism?

First, it should be noted that the term "Semi-Pelagian" was first introduced in the late 16th century by Calvinistic theologians attempting to combat the rising popularity of Molinism, an alternative method of reconciling the problem of divine omniscience and human freedom.[277]

Calvinistic Apologist, Matt Slick, describes Semi-Pelagianism in this way:

> *"Semi-Pelagianism is a weaker form of Pelagianism (a heresy derived from Pelagius who lived in the 5th century A.D. and was a teacher in Rome). Semi-Pelagianism (advocated by Cassian at Marseilles, 5th Century) did not deny original sin and its effects upon the human soul and will, but it taught that God and man cooperate to achieve man's salvation. This cooperation is not by human effort as in keeping the law but rather in the ability of a person to make a free will choice. The semi-Pelagian teaches that man can make the first move toward God by seeking God out of his own free will and that man can cooperate with God's grace even to the keeping of his faith through human effort. This would mean that God responds to the initial effort of a person and that God's grace is not absolutely necessary to maintain faith."*[278]

Regarding the charge of Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism, do Provisionists believe that "God and man cooperate to achieve man's salvation?" Phrased differently: "Did the prodigal son and his father *cooperate* to achieve the son's restoration, or was that a gracious choice of the father alone, upon his son's return?" The false belief that forgiveness is

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[277] Named after 16th Century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, is a religious doctrine which attempts to reconcile the providence of God with human free will: Joseph Pohle, "Semipelagianism" in Catholic Encyclopedia 1912.

[278] Matt Slick, CARM Ministries, web site: https://carm.org/semi-pelagianism
Ironically, there is also much dispute as to whether Cassian actually taught what he was accused of teaching as well: The view that Cassian propounded Semi-pelagianism has been disputed. Lauren Pristas, writes: "For Cassian, salvation is, from beginning to end, the effect of God's grace. It is fully divine. Salvation, however, is salvation of a rational creature who has sinned through free choice. Therefore, salvation necessarily includes both free human consent in grace and the gradual rehabilitation in grace of the faculty of free choice. Thus Cassian insists salvation is also fully human. His thought, however, is not Semi-Pelagian, nor do readers who submit to the whole corpus emerge Semi-Pelagians." [see Lauren Pristas (1993), The Theological Anthropology of John Cassian, PhD dissertation, Boston College, OCLC 39451854]

somehow owed to those who freely humble themselves and ask for it leads to erroneous conclusions such as this.

Do Non-Calvinists teach that "man can make the first move toward God by seeking God out of his own free will?" Do Non-Calvinists teach that "God responds to the initial effort of a person?" Of course not! The belief that mankind is able to willingly respond to the gracious means of God to seek and save the lost **IS NOT** equal to mankind making "the first move toward God."

If it was proven that I could not call the President of the United States on the phone, would you also conclude, based on that information, that it would be impossible for me to answer the phone if the President tried to call me? Of course not, but that is exactly what those who accuse us of Semi-Pelagianism are doing.

In their ill-informed effort to discredit our perspective, they have resorted to what is known as a "boogie-man fallacy." This is a certain type of argument, which, in fact, is not an argument, but a means of forestalling discussion and erroneously labeling an opponent's position with that of a known heresy so as to demonize and discredit it.

For example, someone in a debate might say, "See, his view sounds like something Hitler said once, so you shouldn't listen to him anymore." Hitler is a known "boogie man" or "bad character," so if I can associate my opponent's views with Hitler, then I'll discredit him altogether. Likewise, Pelagius has become the Calvinist's go to "boogie man," and many of them will stop at nothing to slap that label on us so as to marginalize and discredit anything we say.

This method bears a certain resemblance to the ad hominem fallacy and comes from the same root motivation: Discredit and marginalize the person and their views rather than objectively evaluating and offering a sound, non-fallacious rebuttal. The ad hominem fallacy consists of attempting to refute an argument by impeaching the character of its proponent, whereas the boogie man fallacy seeks to associate an argument with that of someone whose character (or belief) has already been impeached (like poor ol' Pelagius). This would be like an Arminian calling John Piper a "Hyper-Calvinist" (those who denounce the need of evangelism) on the basis that he teaches some similar views to that of known hyper-Calvinists.

This is pure "guilt by association" and it is the lazy man's approach to avoiding an otherwise rational and informed discussion of the issues. Those who resort to such tactics either do not know any better or they are nefariously attempting to marginalize and demonize the views of

those who disagree with them. Readers of this article can no longer appeal to the former as an excuse.[279]

[279] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1leIaJntzo

PERMISSION

To allow something implies acquiescence. For instance, in the Book of Job, God allowed the devil to enter Heaven to issue a challenge against both God and Job. God allowed it, so that in Satan's arrogance, he would be brought to shame, and that God and Job would be vindicated:

> **Job 2:3:** "The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And **he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause**.'"

God took full responsibility for what He allowed, but clearly, He was displeased by what Satan goaded Him to permit. That leads to the following principles: (a) That which God *allows* to happen is not always what He *wants* to happen, and (b) while God may not always keep something bad from happening to you, He can always bring you *through* it.

According to Calvinists, if God "allows" or "permits" something, then it's the same thing as if He "ordained" it.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If He decides to allow something, then in a sense he is foreordaining it."*[280]

Our reply:

To show how this type of thinking is erroneous, consider the following example. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, when the father allowed his son to leave, does that mean that he either wanted or ordained for his son to leave? Obviously not. Similarly, when God allows someone to perish, that doesn't necessarily mean that He wanted or caused them to reject Him, as evident from Ezekiel 18:23: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" But, if you listen to a Calvinist, they'll allege a "Secret Will," saying God secretly ordains the choice of rebellion, rather than simply ordaining that a person should be *free* to make their own choice to either rebel or obey. So, when God allowed Satan to enter Heaven to blaspheme God and Job, God merely ordained that Satan should

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[280] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 26.

be free to exercise his rebellion, so that God could turn it around to humiliate Satan, and vindicate both God and Job.

Deterministic Calvinists, however, have an ulterior motive when citing Job 2:3, attempting to prove that God causes whatever He permits. While it's true that God took *full responsibility* for what He allowed to take place, the text never states that God caused Satan's arrogance, or caused Satan to enter Heaven to issue a challenge, or caused Satan to move forward with harming Job. God pointed the blame at Satan, saying: "…you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." But if exhaustive determinism was true, then Satan could have turned it around and replied: "It was You who incited me to seek permission to ruin him without cause." Obviously, Satan knew better than to try to throw Calvinism at God. If Calvinism was true, then one would have to believe that Satan would have tried that excuse to get himself off the hook.

What do Calvinists believe?

God never needs our permission to do anything.

Our reply:

Of course, but by the same token, it doesn't necessarily mean that God wants to force Himself on to anyone, either.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Being eternal, God's sovereign decree is not contingent upon human activity or decision. The will of God is never reactive, but always prior to and determinative for human affairs. God predetermines all events and all human destinies by his eternal will, his decree."*[281]

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"The Calvinist notion of divine sovereignty is often portrayed as little more than a theological gloss upon a doctrine of philosophical determinism. But this misses the Calvinist point, and certainly misses the biblical witness to the sovereignty of God. The providential and sovereign power of God is neither an abstract nor distant force; rather, through personal power God effects his will in the world."*[282]

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[281] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 95.
[282] Ibid., 142.

Our reply:

But even if we were to grant a difference between *philosophical* determinism and Calvinism's *theistic* determinism, Calvinism's version is nonetheless said to be "never reactive" and "not contingent upon human activity or decision," and so, how then is there any room left for a meaningful sense of divine permission of human choices? This clearly shows that Calvinists believe that God causes whatever He permits, and really, what Calvinists are showing is that they want it both ways.

Calvinist objection:

If God could have morally sufficient reasons for *permitting* something, why can't God have morally sufficient reasons for *decreeing* something?

Our reply:

Because exhaustively and meticulously decreeing something would require God's determination of someone's evil intentions in order to guarantee a predetermined outcome, whereas with permission, God doesn't need to determine someone's evil intentions. Determinism requires God predetermining people's evil desires, and that's the difference. Calvinists want their cake and eat it too, meaning that Calvinists want God to be holy, but their theological Determinism consumes God's holiness.

What do Calvinists believe?

Permission is determinism once removed. For if God decreed to allow something, then He necessarily decreed not to stop it. Since God does everything for a purpose, whatever He allows must also have a purpose, which then is tantamount to God determining all things, both caused and allowed. Hence, what God permits, He decrees to permit it.

Our reply:

That's permission in appearance, only. Permission, in that sense, is merely veiled determinism. The issue to consider is that permission is *multifaceted*. Sometimes it is unethical not to try to prevent something (like helping a drowning person, assuming that one can swim), while in other situations, it may be unethical not to allow something that you don't otherwise prefer (such as letting your daughter marry someone that she really loves but whom you believe would be an imperfect spouse).

Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father allowed his son to leave with his demanded share of the inheritance. Obviously, that was not what the father primarily wanted, but the father acquiesced to his son's demand perhaps because he could not justify holding him against his will. The father's only *purpose* in allowing his son to leave was not to violate his own personal standards, principles and ethics. Similarly, for God to allow Adam to sin in the Garden of Eden was not because that was what God primarily wanted or had a purpose in Adam doing, but rather that God had a purpose in not violating his own personal standards, principles and ethics by preventing Adam from both having and making his own choice, and of course, also experiencing the consequence of his choice.

In Calvinism, divine permission is often used as theological cover, so to speak, against the apparent harsh reality of God having decreed whatsoever comes to pass. John Piper provides a sample. In the setting of 9/11, in which children lost their parents, Piper was asked:

> Kathy Grossman of USA Today: *"It seemed to me that you said that the answer to these children was, 'Look at what the great opportunities are that God gives you now for your life'…."*[283]
>
> John Piper: *"No, that is not what I said. He didn't give them opportunities. What He did was govern all things at the moment when their parents died. So if they asked me, 'So where was God?', or 'Did God have the ability to stop my daddy's death?,' I would say that He did have that ability and He didn't use it, and then they would say, 'So you're saying God took my daddy?' I would say, 'God was wise, loving and good towards you <u>when He did not stop them</u>.' I'm trying to avoid words…."*[284]

However, in Calvinism, it is not simply a matter of God having chosen not to "stop" a tragedy, but rather in God having eternally decreed the tragedy and rendered it certain. In contrast, John Calvin makes sure there is no misunderstanding in God's role in the affairs of mankind:

> John Calvin: *"But where it is a matter of men's counsels, wills, endeavours, and exertions, there is greater difficulty in seeing how the providence of God rules here too, so that nothing happens*

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[283] Kathy Grossman of USA Today, *On the New Calvinists, Q&A with Reporters*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6Dh9J-0KM4

[284] Ibid., emphasis mine.

> *but by His assent and that men can deliberately do nothing unless He inspire it."*[285]

> John Calvin: *"But when they call to mind that the devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how much soever they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service,—when the godly think of all these things they have ample sources of consolation. For, as it belongs to the lord to arm the fury of such foes and turn and destine it at pleasure, so it is his also to determine the measure and the end, so as to prevent them from breaking loose and wantoning as they list."*[286]

> John Calvin: *"…how foolish and frail is the support of divine justice afforded by the suggestion that evils come to be, not by His will but by His permission…It is a quite frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them, when Scripture shows Him not only willing, but the author of them."*[287]

So in Calvinism, God does not merely permit things; God insists. All things, including sin and tragedy are part of a *total plan* and design for everything to occur exactly as it is. So, then, for the Calvinist, for God having chosen not to "stop" a tragedy like 9/11 means that God *foreordained* it. So, why would Calvinists ever invoke divine permission in the first place, when they could simply—and more candidly—speak of God having foreordained all things? The answer is that they are trying to tailor their words to the appropriate audience. That is very evident.

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[285] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 171-172, emphasis mine.
[286] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 17, Section 11 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 196, emphasis mine, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.
[287] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 176, emphasis added.

What do Calvinists believe?

> The Westminster Confession Of Faith: *"God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established."*[288]

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"But if God created the world, knowing that sin and evil would certainly enter it, how is his action different from causing or foreordaining evil? It was he who set the process in motion, knowing where it would go."*[289]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Both Calvinists and Arminians teach that God does not and cannot do evil. Calvinists say that God nonetheless ordains it through secondary causes. Arminians say God only permits it. Nonetheless, his permission necessarily means that he bore ultimate responsibility for it. After all, he could have chosen 'not to permit it.'"*[290]

Our reply:

In our legal system, if an estranged husband hired a hit man to murder his wife, would he ever be exonerated on the grounds that he used a "secondary cause"? Of course not, and neither did God exonerate David for having used the Philistines as a secondary cause to murder Uriah.

Moreover, if God chooses to permit something, then it's not necessarily because He *wanted* it to happen, since God may be acquiescing to the will of another. For example, in the parable of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15:11-32, the father *allowed* his son to leave home with his share of the inheritance, even though he sincerely wanted for him to say. So by a Calvinist's reasoning, the father must have secretly *wanted* for his son to leave, and even ordained it, or else he would have put an immediate halt to it. The underlying problem is that Calvinists do not think in terms of free-will, and so they necessarily see permission as a subset of determinism.

So in terms of God creating the Garden of Eden, knowing that Adam and Eve would choose to sin, we could say with equal force that God had a purpose in letting them exercise their own free and

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[288] *The Westminster Confession Of Faith, Chapter III. Of God's Eternal Decree*, 1646.
[289] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 157.
[290] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 209-210.

unnecessitated choice, even if their poor choice was against God's wishes, since God had a purpose in letting them *have* and *make* their own choice, so as to experience the consequence of their choice, whether for good or for bad, as God's ultimate purposes for mankind possessing such autonomy would nonetheless still be achieved in the long run.

> Ken Keathley: *"Permission is problematic for the Calvinist—particularly to those who hold to determinism—because permission entails conditionality, contingency, and viewing humans as in some sense the origin of their own respective choices."*[291]

> Jerry Walls: *"In a normal case of permission, the person granting permission does not determine the choices of the one who is granted permission."*[292]

That which God permits is the autonomous free-will of creatures, or else what you would have, as reflected in the Calvinist paradigm, is God permitting to *not stop Himself* from exercising whatsoever He has foreordained and unconditionally decreed. Omni-causality is fraught with problems, and hence words like permit, allow, concur have no room in a consistent Calvinist's theological language.

So the question to ask Calvinists is this: When you speak of God permitting something, do you mean that God is allowing something that *may* or *may not* come to pass, or do you mean something else? The answer, of course, is something else, which effectively unmasks the duplicitous nature of a Calvinist's theological language. Ultimately, divine permission in Calvinism means that God scripted things to *look like* He was permitting someone else to exercise their own self-determination when yet their self-determination was unchangeably predetermined for them.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Again it is quite clear from the evidence of Scripture that God works in the hearts of men to incline their wills just as He will, whether to good for His mercy's sake or to evil according to their merits, His judgment being sometimes open and*

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[291] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 197.
[292] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 131.

> *sometimes concealed, but always just. For it ought to be fixed in your hearts that there is no iniquity with God."*[293]

> John Calvin: *"For the man who honestly and soberly reflects on these things, there can be no doubt that the will of God is the chief and principal cause of all things."*[294]

Despite John Calvin's affirmation that God is the "chief and principal cause of all things," in which it is "quite frivolous refuge to say that God otiosely permits them," as Albert Mohler testifies, John Calvin does not avoid using the word "permit" in his pastoral ministry to those who suffer great loss. Is this an inconsistency in Calvin's teaching? We believe it is. John MacArthur, a notable Calvinistic pastor, wrote:

> *"But God's role with regard to evil is never as its author.* ***He simply permits evil*** *agents to work, then overrules evil for His own wise and holy ends. Ultimately He is able to make all things-including all the fruits of all the evil of all time-work together for a greater good (Romans 8:28)."*[295]

As previously cited, famed Calvinist pastor, John Piper has written:

> *"God has established a world in which* ***sin will indeed necessarily come to pass by God's permission****, but not by his "positive agency." God is, Edwards says, "****the permitter . . . of sin****; and at the same time, a disposer of the state of events, in such a manner, for wise, holy and most excellent ends and purposes, that sin, if it be permitted . . . will most certainly and infallibly follow."*[296]

Contrast the statements of Edwards, Piper and MacArthur with the one from Calvin above and the inconsistency becomes quite clear. Calvinistic theologian, R.C. Sproul, addresses the heresy of "equal ultimacy" by giving this warning:

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[293] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 177.
[294] Ibid.
[295] John MacArthur, *Is God Responsible for Evil?*, emphasis mine. https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A189/is-god-responsible-for-evil
[296] John Piper, *Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained That Evil Be?*, emphasis mine. http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/is-god-less-glorious-because-he-ordained-that-evil-be

> *"[Equal ultimacy is the belief that] God works in the same way and same manner with respect to the elect and to the reprobate. That is to say, from all eternity God decreed some to election and by divine initiative works faith in their hearts and brings them actively to salvation. By the same token, from all eternity God decrees some to sin and damnation (destinare ad peccatum) and actively intervenes to work sin in their lives, bringing them to damnation by divine initiative. In the case of the elect, regeneration is the monergistic work of God. In the case of the reprobate, sin and degeneration are the monergistic work of God. Stated another way, we can establish a parallelism of foreordination and predestination by means of a positive symmetry. We can call this a positive-positive view of predestination. This is, God positively and actively intervenes in the lives of the elect to bring them to salvation. In the same way God positively and actively intervenes in the life of the reprobate to bring him to sin. This distortion of positive-positive predestination clearly makes God the author of sin who punishes a person for doing what God monergistically and irresistibly coerces man to do. Such a view is indeed a monstrous assault on the integrity of God. This is not the Reformed view of predestination, but a gross and inexcusable caricature of the doctrine. Such a view may be identified with what is often loosely described as hyper-Calvinism and involves a radical form of supralapsarianism. Such a view of predestination has been virtually universally and monolithically rejected by Reformed thinkers."*[297]

So do John Calvin's comments reflect support of "equal ultimacy" or not? If not, how are they different in any meaningful way? And what practical difference is there with the Calvinistic claims and that described above as "equal ultimacy?" Can anyone clearly define a distinction with a difference between a world where God is said to hate one brother and love another before the creation and the world described by Dr. Sproul under the label of "equal ultimacy?" Is God merely permitting or allowing anything according to Calvinism's teaching?

For a Calvinist to affirm divine permission in any sense of the word is for them to affirm contra-causal (or autonomous) free will, for what is there to permit in a deterministic worldview except God's own determinations? Likewise, for Calvinists to speak of God restraining evil is

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[297] R.C. Sproul, *"Double" Predestination*. http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/double-predestination/

also an affirmation of autonomous freedom, for what is there to restrain outside of God's own determinations? Is God restraining that which He determined? If not, then there must exist something that He did not determine, which is itself an affirmation of creaturely autonomy.

As most theologians regularly acknowledge, the doctrine of the fall of man is quite complicated and mysterious. However, the root question boils down to this:

> "If mankind was created good and not inclined to evil, then how could he choose to do other than what is good?"

The Calvinist must appeal to a mystery on this question, as evidenced here in the words of John Piper:

> *"How God freely hardens and yet preserves human accountability we are not explicitly told. It is the same mystery as how the first sin entered the universe. How does a sinful disposition arise in a good heart? The Bible does not tell us."*[298]

The answer for those of us who do not affirm meticulous divine determinism is relatively simple. The non-Calvinist simply affirms the permissive will of God in creating others with libertarian freedom, while consistent Calvinists teach that the ultimate cause of every choice, for good or evil, is God Himself.

The inconsistency of the Calvinist is evident in the quotes above and in examining of writings of their scholars, such as Jonathan Edwards. On the one hand, Edwards argues that mankind always chooses according to their greatest inclination, which is ultimately determined by their God given nature, yet on the other hand Edwards preached that Adam "was perfectly free from any corruptions or sinful inclinations," and that he "had no sinful inclinations to hurry him on to sin; he did it of his own free and mere choice."[299]

How does this not violate Edwards own definition of human will and choice? For Adam to choose to sin he must violate the law of his own nature, as defined by Edwards. Thus, the Calvinist rejects the mystery of contra-causal freedom only to adopt another even more difficult mystery. One that arguably brings into question the holiness, righteousness and

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[298] John Piper, *The Hardening of Pharaoh and the Hope of the World*. http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-hardening-of-pharaoh-and-the-hope-of-the-world

[299] Jonathan Edwards, 'All God's Methods Are Most Reasonable', in Sermons and Discourses: 1723-1729, ed. by Kenneth P. Minkema, Works 14 (1997): 168.

trustworthiness of our Go (i.e. the theory that God is implicated in the origin of moral evil--see Calvin's original quote).

PRAYER

Prayer is communicating with God, and prayer changes things. It changes both us and God. It changes *us* because it centers our attention around Him. It changes *God* because God is an emotional Being who feels our suffering and pain. The Bible does, in fact, show that God can be moved by our heartfelt prayers. For instance, when God heard king Hezekiah's prayer, God extended his life: "Then the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, 'Go and say to Hezekiah, "Thus says the Lord, the God of your father David, 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will **add** fifteen years to your life.'"'" (Isaiah 38:4-5) Of course, this doesn't mean that God's character changes. God's character never changes, but His plans for us may be contingent on our actions. That's how real life works. In other words, prayer may be seen as a condition that God sets before taking certain actions. As an analogy, I may have decided to take my son to the ballpark today, but I don't take him until he first asks. His asking didn't change my mind, but rather I chose not to act until that condition was present—when it was demonstrated that he valued something that I valued, too.[300] Prayer can also express love and gratitude. It engages God in our daily life, which is exactly what God desires as part of our relationship with Him.

> **James 4:2-3:** "**You do not have because you do not ask**. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures."
>
> **James 5:16:** "Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. **The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much**."

This is God's way of encouraging us to change our circumstances by getting *Him* involved in the struggles of our life. We can go on without Him but it would miss out on experiencing what He can do.

What do Calvinists believe?

Prayer does not change God; prayer changes man.

Our reply:

From the Calvinist perspective, everything is already fixed and predetermined by an eternal decree, and so, prayer cannot change God's

[300] Helpful illustration provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

decree of "whatsoever comes to pass," and if it did change His plan, then that means He decreed all along what He was actually going to change it to be. If that seems fatalistic, it is. It's a form of Christian fatalism.

> Philip Yancey: *"Calvinism, with its emphasis on God's absolute sovereignty, shifted the focus of prayer from its effect on God to its effect on the person praying."*[301]

> Philip Yancey: *"In a sort of negative proof of the power of prayer, three times God commanded Jeremiah to stop praying; God wanted no alteration in his plans to punish a rebellious nation. Prayer had, after all, softened God's resolve before."*[302]

> **Jeremiah 7:16-18:** "'As for you, do not pray for this people, and **do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you. Do you not see what they are doing** in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me.'"

> **Jeremiah 11:14:** "'Therefore **do not pray for this people**, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them; for **I will not listen** when they call to Me because of their disaster.'"

Calvinist objection:

How would prayer be *effectual* if God refused to violate a person's will in any way, and especially if God has *already* done everything that He could possibly do to save someone?

Our reply:

First of all, if lost people reject the light they are given, there is no need for God to give further light to be rejected. So, what our prayers accomplish is intercession before God so that the Holy Spirit would *effectually humble* the lost under the conviction of their sins by means of the gospel, told by various people who are brought into their life.

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[301] *Prayer: Does it Make Any Difference?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 131.
[302] Ibid., 134.

Calvinist objection:

Isn't praying to God asking that He would *save* our lost friends and family members a tacit admission of Irresistible Grace? Simply put, isn't it inconsistent for non-Calvinists to pray that God would "save" one of their lost loved-ones if they don't believe that God would, in fact, effectually overcome the will of the hearer and save them?

Our reply:

First of all, ask Calvinists: Before you became a Calvinist, did you ever pray that God would save one of your loved ones? Many have, and it was simply without the expectation of any unbiblical, Irresistible Grace. Secondly, is your earthly father all powerful and does he work effectually? No. But do you still ask him for help with things you desire in your life? Yes. Why?

If God wished to do so, He certainly could bestow an Irresistible Grace and regenerate a person against their will, but non-Calvinists do not believe that's how God operates in the lives of the lost. (Compare with Isaiah 5:1-7.) As an example, we may be introduced to someone in a cult, such as a Jehovah's Witness, and if we happen to know of someone else who escaped from that very same cult, we might wish to consult with them and even ask for them to speak with them. We obviously know that the ex-Jehovah's Witness will not *make* that other person *irresistibly* change their mind, but instead just serve as a witness and plant a seed that will help them to escape. In a similar way, our prayers to God for our lost loved-ones is for Him to influence and convict them through the gospel message.

Furthermore, Jesus prayed for the very people who crucified Him, and He did so simply to forgive them, though without any indication that it meant that they would be *irresistibly* saved. Luke 23:34 states: "But Jesus was saying, '**Father, forgive them**; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves." Later, we learn that salvation was offered to these very same people who participated in His crucifixion, and being convicted, they asked Peter what to do. Peter's answer encouraged them on what they needed to do to become saved. (Acts 2:36-41)

Calvinist objection:

God knows with absolute certainty whether our loved ones are someday going to become Christians, and yet we still pray for them anyway, and hence, living with a sense of deterministic certainty, in the assurance of God's decree, doesn't dissuade our prayers or Christian life.

Our reply:

Our actions are part of what makes the future. If we choose to pray, or not to pray, that's part of what defines the future. So, this sense of being able to *affect* the future gives us a reason to pray—we can make a difference! But, if Calvinists feel that living under a sense of Christianized fatalism makes things better for them, then great, but for non-Calvinists, it's the very opposite, in that if there is no inevitable sense of "what will be will be," then we are motivated all the more.

PREDESTINATION

Predestination is a biblical term, referring to anything that God, in advance, has purposed and planned to bring about. Here are some examples found in the Bible:

> **Luke 22:22**: "'For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been **determined**; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!'"
>
> **Acts 2:23:** "'This Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan** and **foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.'"
>
> **Acts 4:27-28:** "'For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined** to occur.'"
>
> **Romans 8:29:** "For **those whom He foreknew**, He also **predestined** to become **conformed** to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren."
>
> **1st Corinthians 2:7:** "But we speak **God's wisdom** in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God **predestined** before the ages to our glory."
>
> **Ephesians 1:5-6:** "In love He **predestined** us to **adoption** as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."
>
> **Ephesians 1:11:** "In Him also we have obtained an **inheritance**, having been **predestined** according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

Biblical "predestination" can deal with either God's eternal plans for Christians or instances involving specific events, such as Calvary, in which God's plans utilize His omniscient "foreknowledge," evident from Acts 2:23. After all, why wouldn't God use His omniscience in all of His activities? Certainly, God does have this ability. If Jesus knew the future free choice of Peter, in that he would deny Him three times before the

rooster crows (John 13:38), it would only seem reasonable that God would use His limitless knowledge of all things (actual and potential) as a basis for His own interactions to steer all things forward toward His predetermined objective.

While the terms "*pre*-destine" and "*fore*-ordain" indicate pre-determination, the terms "destine" and "ordain" without a prefix can imply contingency planning. For example, Isaiah 65:12 states: "**I will destine you for the sword**, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. **Because I called, but you did not answer**; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight." So, if God destines something, it could still have been conditional.

The difference with Calvinism is that non-Calvinists believe in *conditional* predestination, that is, God contingently planning events based upon His foreknowledge of the thoughts and intentions of those involved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"In summary we may define predestination broadly as follows: From all eternity God decided to save some members of the human race and to let the rest of the human race perish. God made a choice--he chose some individuals to be saved unto everlasting blessedness in heaven, and he chose others to pass over, allowing them to suffer the consequences of their sins, eternal punishment in hell."*[303]

Our reply:

In other words, "predestination" *broadly* means what is *narrowly* defined only in Calvinism. The reality, though, is that there is no aspect of biblical predestination that deals with God allegedly choosing certain unbelievers to make into believers.

> Adrian Rogers: *"What is Predestination? Predestination is not God saying from eternity that one man's going to heaven and another man is going to hell. Predestination deals primarily with what God intends to do for those who trust Him and what God will do for saved people. Predestination teaches me on the authority of God that when I've trusted Christ as my personal Savior and Lord, I will be like Jesus Christ."*[304]

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[303] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 141.
[304] Adrian Rogers, *What We Have in the Lord Jesus, Ephesians 1:1-12*, 1995.

Adrian Rogers: "When God sees me receiving Christ as my personal Lord and Savior, He predestines me to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. ... When God made the decision to conform me to the image of Christ, it started with my decision to accept Jesus as my Savior."[305]

[305] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 105, 106.

PRETERITION

Preterition is the Calvinist doctrine which addresses God's relationship with the alleged "non-elect," who are unconditionally *omitted* from God's salvific will.[306] These would be those who were not chosen to receive God's "Irresistible Grace," but instead who were *left alone* to receive justice for their sins (i.e. the "elect" receive grace; the "non-elect" receive justice). However, when considering the larger picture of Calvinistic teaching, it is no longer recognizable as justice, because the part that Calvinists leave out is the fact that they also teach that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including the hopelessly fallen environment in which these "non-elect" are *purposely* born into.

The irony is that the same "pass by" terminology is also found with respect to the priest and Levite whom Jesus denounced at Luke 10:30-37: "Jesus replied and said, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he **passed by** on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, **passed by** on the other side. But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he **felt compassion**, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you." Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?' And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same.'" The Calvinist response is that this was what *man* was beholden to follow, not something that *God* was required to do. However, that would be a costly position since God hates hypocrisy.

Dave Hunt asks: *"God is not as kind as the Samaritan?"*[307]

What do Calvinists believe?

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unreachable 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;*

[306] See also the discussion on *Reprobation.*
[307] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 262.

> *and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of his glorious justice."*[308]

> John Calvin: *"The Lord in His unmerited election is free and exempt from the necessity of bestowing equally the same grace on all. Rather, He passes by those whom He wills, and chooses whom He wills."*[309]

> James White: *"The wonder is not that God passes by rebel sinners and shows His justice in their condemnation; the wonder is that in eternity past He foreknew a people, chosen them in love, and decreed their eternal salvation in their perfect Savior, Jesus Christ."*[310]

> R.C. Sproul: *"God made a choice--he chose some individuals to be saved unto everlasting blessedness in heaven and others he chose to pass over, to allow them to follow the consequences of their sins into eternal torment in hell."*[311]

> George Whitefield: *"For, without doubt, the doctrine of election and reprobation must stand or fall together."*[312]

Our reply:

If God made a pre-temporal decision to pick only some people for Heaven, then the rest who are conversely left unpicked would seemingly be predestined for Hell, unless there was a third option, and neither Calvinists nor non-Calvinists generally believe in a third option. It would seem unavoidable, then, that in Calvinism, God would not be very loving to those whom He allegedly did not *intend* to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, and one leading Calvinist's comment would seem to agree:

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them*

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[308] Westminster Confession of Faith, *VII. Of God's Eternal Decree*.
[309] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 200.
[310] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 152.
[311] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 22.
[312] *Whitefield's Letter To Wesley On Election*, Dec. 24, 1740, http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/5514/0491/7249/wltw.pdf.

it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."[313]

What do Calvinists believe?

Greg Welty: *"There is no 'fault' in God if He passes over some for salvation—whether by election, creation, or providence—for He did not owe salvation to any. God is not defaulting on some sort of obligation to humanity if He does not secure the salvation of all. If salvation is in fact by God's grace, then it cannot be something God is obligated to provide."*[314]

Our reply:

God would be defaulting on His Word, His principles and His honor. How would Jesus be able to speak unfavorably of the priest and Levite if God essentially did the same thing, in terms of the doctrine of Preterition? Does it really glorify God to say that God is exempt from the principles that He sets forth for mankind? Does it really honor God to say that we must be forgiving toward every man but He does not? God's Word says that Jesus was given for the world (John 3:16) and that God desires all men to become saved (1st Timothy 2:4), and therefore if, in the total plan of God, He pre-temporally intended only some of His children to be saved, then it would seem that God had either broken His promise or that He was insincere in what He stated. God actually mocks the concept of love that is empty of provision (James 2:15-16) and detests those who do not provide for their own. (1st Timothy 5:8)

From the Calvinist perspective, if God had not elected some to salvation, then no one would be saved, and therefore Unconditional Election results in the salvation of *some*, whereas otherwise there would have been *none*. However, if Calvinist's naively felt this way, then they would be disregarding their teaching on absolute divine determinism, in which the *total plan* of God has mankind being born helpless and hopeless aside from a remedy that is only given to a predetermined, select few. So the idea that apart from Unconditional Election, none would be saved, would be a factor of divine *design*.

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[313] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[314] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 231, emphasis mine.

PREVENIENT GRACE

This is a doctrine that deals with evangelism, in terms of what God does to reach the lost. The word "prevenient" infers something that *precedes*, and so a prevenient grace is a *preceding* grace.

> **Acts 18:27-28:** "And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had **believed through grace**, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

Every evangelical believes in some type of **Prevenient Grace**. The point of contention is not whether grace is necessary, but whether grace is made *irresistible*, and obviously non-Calvinists disagree that God forces His grace on to the unwilling, such as God forcing *regeneration* on to someone who hates Him, but does so anyway—against their will—simply because they happen to be one of Calvinism's elect, and who must necessarily become saved according to the dictates of an eternal decree.

Here is now Calvinists, Arminians and Traditionalists believe about Prevenient Grace:

Calvinism:

Fallen humanity *lacks* the capacity to positively respond to God's appeals, and therefore God has predestined to unilaterally give an *elect* portion of humanity an *ontological change in nature* through pre-faith "Regeneration" or "New Birth" (i.e. being made "Born Again" in order to believe in the gospel) otherwise described as an "Irresistible Grace," so that Calvinism's elect are effectually *made willing* to compatibilistically receive the gospel message.

Arminianism (classical):

Fallen humanity *lacks* the capacity to positively respond to God's appeals, and therefore God has predestined to unilaterally give *all men* an *ontological change in nature* through a *pre-regenerating* grace (or "Partial Regeneration") constituting the Holy Spirit's preceding work on the human heart of opening spiritual eyes (though which is not "Regeneration" or the "New birth" since that is reserved only for those who are converted "in Christ" as believers), otherwise known as a "Resistible Grace," so that

all men are effectually *enabled* with the power of contrary choice to *autonomously* either receive or reject the gospel message.[315]

Arminianism (modern):

Fallen humanity *lacks* the capacity to positively respond to God's appeals, and therefore God has predestined to unilaterally help *all men* to believe the gospel (not "Partial Regeneration") constituting the Holy Spirit's preceding work of enlightening, convicting, drawing, and opening the heart (not "Regeneration" or the "New birth" since that is reserved only for those who are converted "in Christ" as believers), otherwise known as a "Resistible Grace," so that all men are effectually *enabled* with the power of contrary choice to *autonomously* either receive or reject the gospel message.[316]

Traditionalism:

Fallen humanity *maintains* the capacity to positively respond to the gospel, inclusive of the power of contrary choice to *autonomously* either receive or reject the gospel message, *without any ontological change in nature* (or "Partial Regeneration), in which the "Resistible Grace" of God presents itself in the form of the Holy Spirit goading and convicting man's conscience through general revelation or the compelling message of the gospel.[317]

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[315] "Pre-regenerating grace simply means that the Spirit of God overcomes that inability by a direct work on the heart, a work that is adequate to enable the yet unregenerate person to understand the truth of the gospel, to desire God, and to exercise saving faith. … It is so closely related to regeneration that it inevitably leads on to regeneration unless finally resisted." Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 2002), 154, 156.

[316] See the article, *Brian Abasciano, "A Response to John Piper on the Heart of the Divide Between Arminianism and Calvinism"*. http://evangelicalarminians.org/brian-abasciano-a-response-to-john-piper-on-the-heart-of-the-divide-between-arminianism-and-calvinism/?fbclid=IwAR1JxLf4VWh5sbLaWsMnh8yj46XfhrY7vXD1Y667gn7uPOoLc7pg9-Zcp8w

[317] Leighton Flowers: "My tradition is that men maintain, by God's grace, the capacity to respond to the gracious gospel appeal, and there is no reason to suggest otherwise unless the Bible explicitly tells us, 'Oh by the way, lost people can't respond to God's appeals for lost people.' The Bible just never says this. This is a presupposition of the Calvinistic worldview, and unfortunately even some Arminians adopt that worldview but then they add in supernatural 'Prevenient Grace' that somehow changes people ontologically, internally, to make them able to, again, respond to God, which again, I

> Adrian Rogers: *"Spiritual blindness makes beggars of us all. ... The blind need more than light in order to see. ... I used to think, as a young preacher, that what you had to do to get people saved is just to tell them how to be saved. Just turn on the light. But it doesn't matter how much light there is, or the person is blind because he cannot see it. It takes more than light, it takes sight. And a person who is blind cannot see the light, no matter how strong the light is or how pure the light is. It takes more than preaching to get people saved. That's the reason I frequently say to you, I can preach truth, but only the Holy Spirit can impart truth. That is the reason why we must be a praying church. That's the reason you must be a spirit-filled soul winner. That is the reason that we must have the anointing, because we are dependent upon God to open blinded eyes to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It takes more than light, it takes sight. We need to understand that nobody can be argued into the kingdom of heaven. Nobody can be educated into the kingdom of heaven. I'm not against letting the light shine. You must let the light shine. You must preach. But remember, there is another dimension."*[318]

This quote would appear to favor the Classical Arminian perspective on Prevenient Grace. One interesting aspect of this quote is in its dichotomy between *light* and *sight*.

- **Light** deals with *external* influences.
- **Sight** deals with *internal* regeneration.

If a person just needs more *light* (and perhaps other external factors such as divine effectual humbling through adversity) to compel them to place their faith and trust in Christ, then it presupposes that through the means of such *light*, a person is enabled to believe in the gospel. However, if a person needs more than *light*, but also restored *sight*, then it presupposes that a person's nature is spiritually damaged (i.e.

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think is baggage added to the text. I think the gospel is God's 'Prevenient Grace' work of grace. Sending Jesus was a 'prevenient' work of grace. Sending inspired messengers, prophets and apostles—that's a 'prevenient' work of grace. In other words, anything that helps people to come to faith—revelation, light—that is a 'prevenient' work of grace, and all those means that God uses—I think—are sufficient to do what the Bible says they were meant to do." (*Exegesis & Hermeneutics vs James White*, 3:59 – 4:52) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgBADMzGl8o&fbclid=IwAR1FcegwZRfKxKzX1cIpAzavPRf8EOSkeWy0hEj6YXRSAtVtyZkyFIOk1vo

[318] Adrian Rogers, *Jesus is God's Answer to Man's Darkness: John 20:30*, 1996, emphasis mine.

blinded or deadened from the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden) which entails a loss of ability to perceive and accept the *light* of truth, thus requiring a metaphysical, "partial regeneration" or ontological change in one's spiritual makeup in order to restore lost ability. However, the latter perspective suffers from conflating spiritual blindness with physical blindness, and even spiritual deadness with physical deadness. The two really should not be conflated. The devil blinds people—not literally—but by tempting people with the things of this world so that their heart will turn against God. (Luke 8:12-13) Jesus said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." (Matthew 7:7) I'm all for a praying church and an anointed evangelist, but that doesn't necessary translate to someone receiving "partial regeneration." Of course, we do need spiritual sight, and spiritual life, but we only get those things *when we place our trust in Christ*. People can be stubborn, and any spiritual blindness they possess is purely out of their own *volitional* obstinance. If you really want to intercede on their behalf and ask God to help them to believe in the gospel and become saved, then it's not with God secretly and preemptively imparting a pre-faith, partial regeneration, but instead with God bringing adversity in their life that will break their will. That happened with the apostle Paul back when he was resisting God as "Saul of Tarsus," in which Jesus personally confronted him. (Acts 9:1-9) That's an example of an *external*, General Revelation, rather than an *internal*, partial regeneration. Jesus told people to consider the compelling evidence of His miracles. (John 10:37-38) Why wasn't someone there to correct Him and insist, "But they first need a partial regeneration, don't they?" Doubting Thomas believed when he saw Jesus' wounds (John 20:27-28), but not because he received a partial regeneration. In the case of Jonah, when he disobeyed God, he didn't get a partial regeneration. He got a storm with whale-transportation. God knows how to break down a person's walls of volitional resistance, and it's not with a partial regeneration, but with using the circumstances of an individual's life to effectually humble them, so that upon being broken, they will more seriously contemplate their eternal future in light of what the gospel says. If you want regeneration, you have to first place your faith and trust in Christ, and then He will supply your spiritual needs. It's not "seeing is believing" but "believing is seeing." We must all take a step of faith.

PRIDE

In terms of Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election, if one believed that God chose them from eternity—over their neighbors—how might that type of thinking tend to affect them, behaviorally?

> Dave Hunt: *"Theology inevitably affects behavior."*[319]

> Dave Hunt: *"Life reflects doctrine (2 Timothy 3:10)."*[320]

> A. Brent Cobb: *"We become more and more like our concept of God. If I see him as harsh, that's the way I'll become, but if I see God as compassionate, that's the kind of person I'll become."*[321]

Whereas Calvinists feel that their doctrine of Unconditional Election is the most humbling doctrine in all of Scripture, the concern is that its practical application functions in exactly the opposite manner.[322]

As a form of soteriological elitism, Calvinism can flatter people into thinking that they had a greater potential for salvation than ordinary people. By observation, Calvinists tend to take great pride in their personal election. While feigning humility in their perceived election, they can become arrogant and abusive when challenged, in order to protect their turf, so to speak, over their perceived spiritual birth-right.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"**All are not created on equal terms**, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death."*[323]

> John Calvin: *"Hence Augustine, having treated of the elect, and taught that their salvation reposes in the faithful custody of God so that none perishes, continues: The rest of mortal men who are*

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[319] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 227.
[320] Ibid., 248.
[321] A. Brent Cobb, *The Great Scandal*.
[322] See the discussion on *Boasting* and *Cage Stage*.
[323] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 21, Section 5 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 770, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

> *not of this number, but rather taken out of the common mass and made vessels of wrath, are* ***born for the use of the elect****."*[324]
>
> John Calvin: *"Solomon also teaches us that not only was the destruction of the ungodly foreknown, but* ***the ungodly themselves have been created for the specific purpose of perishing*** *(Prov. 16:4)."*[325]

Our reply:

These quotes are exactly the opposite of how Peter understood humanity, in terms of God not being partial to anyone:

> **Acts 10:28:** "And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet **God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean**.'"
>
> **Acts 10:34-35:** "Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that **God is not one to show partiality**, but in every nation **the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him**.'"

In which of these quotes do we learn that all are not created equal or that some are born for the use of the elect? The concern with Calvinism is that it does not remove pride, but instead systemizes it.

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[324] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 107, emphasis mine.

[325] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 207-208, emphasis mine.

PROBLEM OF EVIL

One way that Atheists assail Christianity is by asking rhetorical questions like: "Given all of the evil and misery in this world, if there really was a God, how could he be good?" So, then, how would Christians explain this? The dilemma is referred to as the "problem of evil." Most often, the answer is that God is good, but He has given mankind a free-will and so man's free-will is to blame, not God. This is also where Calvinism enters the picture. In Calvinism, all sin comes from God who ordained precisely every last bit of it and mankind does not possess libertarian free-will in order to do anything different from what was eternally decreed. Naturally, then, when Atheists assail Christianity, it is often from the perspective of Calvinism's representation of Christianity. So, Christians must then advise Atheists that *not* all Christians are Calvinists and hence some of the Atheist's fiercest objections against Christianity are only applicable to a relative minority of Christians. Atheists, then, wishing to preserve some of their strongest denunciations against Christianity, will try to insist that Calvinism does in fact represent mainstream Christianity.

What do Calvinists believe?

How would God truly be in control of the limits of creaturely evil unless He determined it? God's decree of whatsoever comes to pass naturally places a check on evil. The reason why we can trust God is because He both controls evil and has a long term plan for evil, including a purpose for every single act of evil ever allowed to be committed.

Our reply:

It appears that Calvinists wish to solve the problem of evil by making God into the One who is determining it. Then it follows that if God is good, evil cannot be all that bad, especially when viewed as a whole. However, let's consider the opposite approach. Evil *is* all that bad, and there is nothing good in evil. God is holy, and therefore He will not have any part in evil. Just because God allows independent creatures to do evil, that doesn't mean that He is pleased by someone doing it, any more than the father of the Prodigal Son would be glad to see his son leave home, simply because he *allowed* it. God doesn't cause evil, but He is aware of the evil of others, and at times will redeem good from the evil of others, but never causing the evil that He redeems.

The primary objection against Calvinism is that it sacrifices God's goodness and holiness in favor of exhaustive determinism. Why? Perhaps Calvinists need the warm emotional blanket of determinism so that they

can better trust in God—which means they don't really trust God. Ask Calvinists, "So, you can't *trust* God unless He determined all sin? What if God was powerful enough to deal with sin, without being the cause of it? You couldn't trust in a God like that?" It certainly wouldn't seem like much of a God who has to cause all sin in order to be in control over it.

What do Calvinists believe?

Why should I be more comforted by a God who allows sin, when He otherwise could have stopped it, versus a God who causes all sin for a specific purpose that He uses for good? At least the God who "causes all sin" still remains in control and is not simply letting everything spin out of control.

Our reply:

There is nothing wrong for God to allow sin as a result of free moral agency, but there is everything wrong in meticulously causing all moral evil and then blaming secondary agents for doing what is decreed. As for preventing all sin, if God really was to do that, then it would come at the cost of no one being able to choose, from their heart, to love God, thus robbing Him of genuine fellowship. While God surely could have created robots, what would He really gain from that?

Consider it this way. If creating beings with free-will knowingly would result in some becoming angels and some becoming demons, should God have foregone creation altogether, on account of those who go bad? Why should God deny Himself the benefit of having angels, on account of some who become demons? Moreover, why should God deny Himself the benefit of having saints, on account of some who become atheists? God is not being selfish here. The demons and the atheists are the ones who are selfish by denying God the glory that He is rightly due.

What do Calvinists believe?

In the Garden of Eden, why did Adam exercise his own free-will to choose to sin? You can't say "because he chose to," since that would be a mere repetition of the question in a declarative form.

Our reply:

To demand an external reason is to assume determinism. The answer may very well be internal to Adam, being specific to himself, since after all, not every being with free-will chose to sin. Consider the fact of

the 2/3's of the angels who chose to remain faithful to God. Do we assume the reason is attributable to something external to themselves, or do we allow that the reason is internal to each individual and their own choice? This is where moral good and moral evil comes from. God gave us intelligence and autonomy of reason, and our respective use of it has resulted in everything that exists, for good and for bad.

To be sure, Calvinists don't believe that God is a monster. However, many non-Calvinists cannot bring themselves to understand how He wouldn't be, given a Calvinist's insistence upon asserting that God causes the evil He redeems, rendering it both certain and necessary. The best theologians on the Calvinist side can only assert "transcendence" as a "mystery that cannot logically be solved," though which is also just a theological broth for spiritualized gaslighting.

PROPHECY

Prophecy involves divine omniscience. It's supernatural because it's the ability of God to know beforehand what free creatures are going to do. If prophecy was instead only a matter of God knowing what He unilaterally decreed that creatures would do, then that is no longer special. For instance, what would be special about me telling you what I plan to do? However, if I could tell you what will unfailingly happen that I neither cause nor influence, then that is special, and it would have to come from God, who alone has that ability. God created all time and space, so it is illogical to place Him within the confines of what He created.

Frequently, the matter of Judas comes up with this type of discussion. For instance, in the Old Testament, does God *prophesy* that a certain person would betray the Messiah or does it say that God *predestined* it?[326]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"These are places were plainly the sovereign decree of God is guiding and determining what takes place in time. There's no question about it. If you believe in prophecy, you have to believe this. If you don't believe this, you have no basis for believing in prophecy."*[327]

Our reply:

Prophecy does not *determine* the future but instead *reveals* the future, because God (who is not limited to time in our dimension, and moreover who created all time and space), can know what man will self-determine in the future. Even John Calvin agreed that prophecy is not the same thing as predestination:

> John Calvin: *"I acknowledge that nothing happens but what but has been ordained by God, but the only question now is whether their being foretold or prophesied makes people do things, and I have already shown this is not so."*[328]

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[326] See also the topical discussion on *Judas*.
[327] *Does Isaiah 10 prove Determinism?* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upzG62s2018, 6:28-6:53.
[328] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 397.

Non-Calvinists are free to deny John Calvin's belief in exhaustive determinism while still citing him as a "hostile witness" to point out a mutual agreement that omniscience does not require determinism.

PROPITIATION

Christ's propitiation deals with the blood covenant and atonement of Calvary, in terms that God has accepted what Jesus did at Calvary to effectively atone for the sins of all mankind. It is addressed at 1st John 2:1-2: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and **He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world**." This forms the basis for why anyone can come to Christ and become reconciled with God the Father. However, no one receives the benefit of this atonement until they first come to Christ.

PROVISIONISM

Provisionism is a more descriptive term for Traditionalism, that is, more specifically describing the nature of God's grace shown toward humanity. God provides. He does not force His love upon anyone. In other words, the question is this: Does God *impose* His love on humanity—whether they want it or not—as per Calvinism, or does God simply *provide* grace to humanity, and let people decide for themselves whether they wish to receive it or not?

In Calvinism, fallen man is totally depraved and therefore as "total haters of God," they do not *want* God's grace, and so any whom God desires to have (i.e. Calvinism's class of the unconditional elect), are given a "regeneration" against their totally depraved will, so that they will "freely" be *made* to love God. How that could genuinely be considered true freedom is the subject of much debate. For example, if a woman at a bar is the unwilling recipient of a deviant's date-rape drug, and as a result, freely goes home with her secret assailant, in what legitimate sense was she genuinely acting *freely*? In our society, that would be considered a crime, but in Calvinism, it's called "grace." So, this is the type of question that arises from Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace, which is secretly and unilaterally imposed upon those whom the God of Calvinism desires to have, and to make willing to love Him. It's scandalous. It's corrupt. There's not a lot of good things to say about it. It should really shock our conscience, but here is how Calvinists try to sell it.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Provisionism replaces the power of God with provisions that are fulfilled by the power of man."*[329]

Our reply:

By "power of God," James White means "Irresistible Grace" and by "power of man," James White means "human free-will." Part of the difficulty in dealing with the subject of Calvinism is that Calvinists often have their own built-in meanings to words and terms that most people who are unfamiliar with Calvinism might not readily identify.

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[329] *Dr.Flowers' Invitation to a John 6 Birthday Party!*, 14:40 – 14:47. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-irNakI8yf4&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2XCui-GH0zbCQpwuwwoBUYzLI_XNZbqZjATQwIaEL8vt_mOkfK1SbZR64

A positive case for Provisionism is often described by citing the following quote:

> A.W. Tozer: *"Here is my view: God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give man limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, 'What doest thou?' Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so."*[330]

If God gets more glory from Provisionism over Calvinism, then that alone is sufficient basis for God to reject the Calvinist paradigm. So, would Provisionism bring God more glory than the exhaustive, meticulous determinism of Calvinism—devoid of true free-will? Would God receive more glory from the reciprocated love of free people, as per Provisionism, or would He receive more glory from someone that is forced to love Him, as per the Irresistible Grace of Calvinism? It's hard to avoid seeing Calvinism as a depiction of robots and puppets, as it is often accused of being. In fact, it's really hard to see how building a kingdom of marionettes and yes-men can truly be deemed glorious at all.

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[330] *The Knowledge of the Holy: The Attributes of God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1961), 110-111.

PUPPETS

On the one hand, Calvinists will often argue (using passages like Romans 9:20-21) that mankind has as much control over how he believes and behaves as a piece of clay has over its own shape, while on the other hand vehemently objecting to their opponent's accusations of making men into mere puppets.

Some Calvinists want to have their cake and eat it too on this point. If they are going to interpret these biblical analogies in such a way that removes mankind's responsibility in the process, then they cannot object to another analogy which draws the exact same conclusion. After all, what more or less responsibility does a puppet have in relation to the puppet master than a lump of clay has in relation to the potter on Calvinism's interpretation? If you want to interpret Paul's analogy of the potter and the clay literally to mean that man has no say in how he believes and responds, then own it. Don't object to other analogies that draw the exact same implications unless you are not willing to live with those implications.

One of the problems for Calvinists is the natural reaction that people often have when hearing of Calvinism for the very first time: "Oh! That would turn us into puppets and robots!" So although though Calvinists don't actually teach that mankind is reduced to being puppets, it is a natural implication, just like how Calvinism's critics also charge Calvinism with being fatalistic.

If God had exhaustively decreed all things, including having decreed the Fall of man and rendered it certain, and which also included the totally depravity of every human's sin-nature to thus exclude all from the hope of eternal life except those whom are elected to receive an Irresistible Grace, then the result would be the common criticism against Calvinism that the human race is made up puppets and robots for divine gratification. The other issue is whether creating a race of marionettes would be too far beneath the integrity and character of an all-wise, all-knowing and all-powerful God. Moreover, such a scenario may also deprive God of genuine relationships and genuine love, if God is simply loving Himself through human puppets. So the essence of this particular criticism against Calvinism is that it would demean God with the mediocrity of being a Puppet Master. In contrast, it certainly would require an all-wise, all-knowing and all-powerful God to providentially govern the human race which was created without strings.

As an example of the negative implication of being a Puppet Master, consider the rebellion of Israel against Samuel, when the people demanded to have a king just like the other pagan nations: "Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; and they

said to him, 'Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.' But the thing was displeasing in the sight of Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to judge us.' And Samuel prayed to the Lord. The Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for **they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me** from being king over them. Like all the deeds which they have done since the day that I brought them up from Egypt even to this day—in that they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.'" (1st Samuel 8:4-8) So if God, according to Calvinism, had decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including every thought, word and deed, then it would seem that the people of Israel are being used as sock-puppets to say: "Now appoint a king for us," while Samuel is being used as a sock-puppet to express disappointment, with the result that God concludes, in this scenario, "They have forsaken Me." The teaching that people have free-will would restore the integrity of God so that He is not shown to be a Puppet Master.

> Billy Graham: *"God created man in His own image and gave him an abundant life. He did not make him as a robot to automatically love and obey Him, but gave him a will and freedom of choice. Man chose to disobey God and go his own willful way. Man still makes this choice today. This results in separation from God."*[331]
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> Hal Lindsey: *"So God did this because He did not want to create robots. You see, He wanted a creature that could respond to Him. But, most of all, He wanted a creature that could respond to His love. Now, there cannot be love without freedom of choice. Unless you can choose not to love, you can't love."*[332]
>
> Dave Hunt: *"Surely love is the most important and most thrilling subject of all--and nothing is so beautiful as God's love manifest in Jesus Christ. Tragically, Calvinism robs us of what ought to be 'the greatest story ever told.' It reduces God's love to a form of favoritism without passion, and it denies man the capacity of responding from his heart, thereby robbing God of the joy of a genuine response from man and the glory it alone can bring."*[333]

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[331] *The Enduring Classics of Billy Graham: The Secret of Happiness, Happiness Through Peacemaking* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2002), 125-126.
[332] Hal Lindsey, *The Gospel of John*. http://www.hallindsey.com/store/gospel-of-john-cd-series/56/
[333] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 255.

> Dave Hunt: *"The entire history of mankind becomes a puppet show, with God the puppeteer. He looked down upon men and saw that 'the wickedness of man was great…Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually…. The earth also was corrupt…and…filled with violence' (Genesis 6:5, 11). This situation 'grieved [God] at his heart.' But, if as Calvinism says, God caused every evil thought, word, and deed, why was He grieved? And how could God be grieved if He could have caused those living in Noah's day to be saints rather than sinners but instead chose to damn them? Yet God is love?"*[334]

> Dave Hunt: *"Calvinism treats man as a puppet that God makes willing, yet the Bible gives man credit for having a willing heart as though the willingness were his own. The judgment seat of Christ, His promised rewards, the Great White Throne judgment, and the lake of fire are meaningless if all is of God and nothing is from the heart of man. The many statements about the person being willing from his heart become nonsensical."*[335]

Calvinist objection:

In Heaven, the saints are not free to sin. They do not have free-will in that sense. God gives them a nature whereby they have no desire for sin, but instead to only love God and worship Him forever. So if we were to say that "since God determines the regenerated nature of the elect on earth, that that makes them puppets or robots," then by the same force of logic, we would have to say that those in Heaven are puppets and robots, too—a claim Arminians would certainly reject. So just because God determines people's nature, does not make them robots.

Our reply:

The new nature that the saints receive in Heaven, which is not to desire sin but only to love and worship God, is as an *outworking of their prior choice on earth*, in which, while on earth, they freely chose to receive God's offer of forgiveness and eternal life, so that God would give them the sinless nature that they one day receive in Heaven. The Monergism of Calvinism cannot say that. So to compare the situation in Heaven between the Calvinist and non-Calvinist paradigms is an apples to

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[334] Ibid., 314.
[335] Ibid., 339.

oranges comparison. There is a significant dissimilarity which eliminates Calvinists from making such a comparison with non-Calvinist theology.

REGENERATION

What is regeneration? It is something that God does for *believers*.

> J. Vernon McGee: *"The minute you turn to Christ, you are regenerated by the Holy Spirit; you are indwelt and baptized by the Holy Spirit; you are put in the body of believers."*[336]

What is not in dispute is that regeneration is the sovereign act of God whereby He imparts His very life and nature into the spirit of every *believing* sinner. (John 1:12-13; Titus 3:5) While man's first birth is natural, his second birth is spiritual and supernatural. His first birth makes him a member of a fallen race; his second birth makes him a member of a redeemed race. His first birth gives him a depraved nature (Ephesians 2:3); his second birth makes him partaker in the divine nature (2nd Peter 1:4). The moment a person is born again, he receives a new life (John 6:47; 1st John 5:12) and a new position as a child of God (John 1:12; 1st John 3:1-2). In short, he is a new creature in Christ (2nd Cor. 5:17).[337] This is not in dispute. We can all affirm these truths. The controversy over regeneration with respect to Calvinism is in its *timing*. Does God do this wonderfully gracious thing for *believers* who accept Christ, as non-Calvinists contend, or does God do this for *unbelieving* "elect" people, as Calvinists contend, in terms of an "Irresistible Grace" to overcome "Total Depravity"?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Outside of the miracle of divine grace changing a God-hater into a God-lover, no man would ever be saved."*[338]

> R.C. Sproul: *"Reformed Theology does not teach that God brings the elect 'kicking and screaming, against their wills,' into his kingdom. It teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to* ***make them willing*** *and pleased to come to Christ. They come to Christ because they want to. They want to because God has created in their hearts a desire for Christ."*[339]

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[336] *Thru the Bible: Proverbs through Malachi, Vol. III* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982), 508.
[337] Note taken from web source: http://www.middletownbiblechurch.org/reformed/regenera.htm.
[338] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 64.
[339] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 159, emphasis mine.

Our reply:

So in Calvinism, God regenerates *elect-unbelievers* against their God-hating, totally depraved will and **makes them willing**, simply because they happen to be among Calvinism's secret elect. Therefore, imagine God taking a leading atheist like Richard Dawkins—a genuine God-hater—and then *regenerating* him against his *unregenerate* wishes, so as to **make him willing**, and who then suddenly repudiates every negative thing he's ever said about God. That would be rather scandalous, and it's also pretty insulting—to God—to say that that's the only way that He can get anyone to follow Him, that is, by manufacturing Yes-Men on the assembly line of Irresistible Grace. Nonetheless, that's apparently how Calvinists envision the way in which the kingdom of God is constructed—total haters of God transformed against their unregenerate will, simply because they happen to be "elect."

Besides being an absurd violation of a person's will, what kind of glory would God really derive from such a thing? Contrast that with another type of thinking, in which God regenerates *believers*, that is, those who ask God to forgive them and who actually *want* His mercy. However, due to the fallen human condition of "Total Depravity," Calvinists do not believe that the lost would ever independently want that. It is encouraging, though, to find at least one leading Calvinist teaching that lost people can and should ask God to make them Born Again:

> D. James Kennedy: *"Would you be born anew? There has never been a person who sought for that who did not find it. Even the seeking is created by the Spirit of God. Would you know that new life? Are you tired of the emptiness and purposelessness of your life? Are you tired of the filthy rags of your own righteousness? Would you trust in someone else other than yourself? Then look to the cross of Christ. Place your trust in him. Ask him to come in and be born in you today. For Jesus came into the world from glory to give us second birth because we must--we MUST--be born again."*[340]

In that way, the kingdom of God would be comprised of those who chose to love and to be with God, despite the adverse circumstances of this present, fallen world, and God would derive glory from such meaningful relationships.

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[340] *Why I Believe* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), 140.

The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000, regarding **IV. Salvation** states regarding Regeneration:

> *"Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace."*[341]

Notice that "Regeneration" is explicitly referenced with regard to "believers." That is correct. Non-Calvinists have no problem saying that a believer's Regeneration is a change of heart (again, for the believer) wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds (daily) in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (in a believer's walk with Christ). Part of the problem is that Calvinists envision Regeneration exclusively a mechanism for an *unbeliever's* conversion, rather than seeing it as a work of the Holy Spirit for the *believer*, necessary to live the Christian life.

> Jerry Vines: *"The lost man or woman has no desire for the things of God. Unregenerate souls have no interest in finding out what God wants them to be and to do. But the new-birth experience puts into our heart a desire really and actually to do what God wants."*[342]

> Jerry Vines: *"When we are born of God, his seed, a new nature, remains in us. The new life we receive from God at the moment of salvation is the seed, the new dynamic."*[343]

> Jerry Vines: *"But the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ through the new-birth experience will give you a new nature, the nature of God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ can meet the battles for you and conquer them, giving you victory."*[344]

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[341] http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp
[342] *Exploring 1-2-3 John* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers Inc., 1989), 49.
[343] Ibid., 117.
[344] Ibid., 184.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"No more soul-destroying doctrine could well be devised than the doctrine that sinners can regenerate themselves, and repent and believe just when they please."*[345]

> James White: *"Dave Hunt is actually defending the idea that a man with a heart of stone can choose to remove that heart and implant a heart of flesh in its place and that he possesses the capacity to perform this operation on himself."*[346]

> James White: *"Can dead rebel sinners exercise saving faith to cause their own spiritual birth?"*[347]

Our reply:

Non-Calvinists do not believe that they regenerate themselves, any more than they give themselves eternal life for believing in Christ. God gives regeneration to whomever He wishes, and non-Calvinists argue that God gives it to only believers, for the purpose of the believer being able to walk with Christ while here on earth.

> Dave Hunt: *"Who imagines that receiving by faith the gift of eternal life causes eternal life? And who would suggest that 'a man with a heart of stone can...implant a heart of flesh in its place'? We believe. God does the rest: 'Through faith...we are his workmanship...unto good works.' (Ephesians 2:8, 10)."*[348]

What do Calvinists believe?

Fallen man is spiritually dead. Regeneration must *precede* faith in order for there to *be* faith. John Piper, a Calvinistic pastor, puts it this way:

> John Piper: *"We can say, first, that regeneration is the cause of faith… Having been born of God results in our believing. Our believing is the immediate evidence of God's begetting."*[349]

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[345] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 90.
[346] Ibid., 297.
[347] Ibid., 293-294.
[348] Ibid., 303.
[349] John Piper Sermon titled, "Regeneration, Faith, Love; In that order." Web page: http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/regeneration-faith-love-in-that-order

R.C. Sproul: *"The Reformed view of predestination teaches that before a person can choose Christ his heart must be changed. He must be born again."*[350]

R.C. Sproul: *"A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: 'Regeneration precedes faith.' Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ."*[351]

Our reply:

Some Calvinists will argue that the order of regeneration and faith is a logical order, not necessarily a temporal one, meaning that the two can occur *simultaneously* within time. They teach that at the moment a person is born again, he will come to faith. The moment he is regenerated, he also places his trust in Christ. It happens all in an instant of time. Yet, logically as we think about this transaction, we must put a *causal order* to it. Does the Bible indicate that a person must be regenerated so that he can believe or does the Bible teach that a person must believe in order to be regenerated? Do we need life in order to believe or do we need to believe in order to have life? That logical order is what is in dispute.

But what does the Scripture actually say about the logical order of new life and man's responsibility in attaining it? Which comes first, new life or faith? Let's observe:

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

> **Ezekiel 18:30-32:** "Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!"
>
> The order clearly laid out is as follows:
> - "Repent, Turn away…Rid yourselves…"
> - "…get a new heart and a new spirit."

[350] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 72.
[351] Ibid., 72-73.

Verse 32 makes it even more simple:

- "Repent and…"
- "…live!"

Life comes from repentance, not the other way around.

Acts 11:18: "When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.'"

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

- "Repentance unto…"
- "…life"

The Gentiles were not granted life unto repentance, but just the opposite according to the text. And the gospel is the means God grants mankind the ability to believe. He sent the gospel first to the Jews and then the Gentiles which enabled their faith response. (Rom. 1:16, 10:14-17)

John 5:40: "…yet you refuse to come to me to have life."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

2 "Come to me…" (through faith)
3 "…to have life."

John 6:53: "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "Unless you eat…drink" (by faith)
2 "…you have not life in you."

John 6:57: "so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "the one who feeds on me…" (by faith)
2 "…will live"

John 20:31: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "these are written…" (scriptures)
2 "…that you may believe…"
3 "…by believing you may have life…"

Life clearly is a fruit of faith and repentance, not the other way around.

Acts 15:9: "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "He purified their hearts…"
2 "…by faith."

It does not say He purified their hearts by regeneration so as to make them have faith. Clearly, a purified heart is a fruit of faith, not the other way around.

John 1:12-13: "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The right to be born of God is given only to those who believe."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…all who did receive him…who believed…"
2 "…he gave the right to *become* children of God…"

You are not even given the right to become a child of God, much less be born again as his child, *until* you "receive him" and "believe in his name." And while placing our trust in Christ is man's responsibility, the work of regeneration is all of God's doing. It does not come by way of inheritance, marriage, works or striving. (Rom. 9:30-32)

Galatians 3:26: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus…"

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "You are all sons of God…"
2 "…through faith in Christ…"

Obviously, becoming a son (born of God) is a fruit of faith, not the other way around.

John 12:36: "Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "Believe in the light…"
2 "…so that you may become children…"

Ephesians 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places **in Christ**,"

Consider the following Syllogism:

1 If every "spiritual blessing" is in Christ,
2 And if regeneration is a "spiritual blessing,"
3 Then regeneration must exclusively be *in Christ*.

So, how can Calvinists say, "regeneration precedes faith"?

Ephesians 1:13: "And you also were included in Christ when you **heard** the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you **believed**, you were **marked** in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit…"

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "when you heard the message of truth…when you believed…"
2 "you were included in Christ…you were marked in him…"

Ephesians 2:5: "even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),"

We are not made alive *without* Christ, but only *with* Christ:

1 "…dead in our transgressions…made us alive…"
2 "…with Christ…"

Galatians 3:2, 5: "I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?… So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?"

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…received the Spirit…"
2 "…by believing what you heard…"

2nd Corinthians 3:14-16: "But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…anyone turns to the Lord…" (by faith)
2 "…the veil is taken away."

1st Timothy 1:16: "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…those who would believe in him…"
2 "…may receive eternal life."

Colossians 2:12: "…having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…baptism, in which you were also raised…"
2 "…through your faith…"

James 1:18: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

The order clearly laid out is as follows:

1 "…give us birth…"
2 "…through the word of truth…"

Calvinists teach the word of truth will certainly be rejected by the unregenerate, thus how can the apostle say that the word may be the means of new birth? Birth must precede the word of truth if Calvinism is true, and that is not what the text clearly indicates.

The Philippian jailer inquired, "What must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30) If Paul was Calvinistic he should have replied, "You can do nothing to be saved. You were born corpse-like dead in your sin and a dead man can do nothing. If God makes you alive then you will be convinced to believe our gospel." But Paul does not hesitate to simply say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved." (Acts 16:31) Believe so as to have new life. Repent so as to live! That is the gospel appeal sent for all to hear it and respond.

In terms of a logical order of faith and regeneration, in relation to Calvinism's claim that both are necessarily *simultaneous*, how does that affect what is observable as a progression toward incremental conversion? In other words, sometimes people do not convert to Christianity right away but instead, are said to be seeking God and headed in the right direction. As such, upon hearing the gospel, they *gradually* come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and start reading the Bible more and demonstrate a real interest in God by asking more theological questions and attending church more, until at last when they come to a point where they are ready to surrender their heart to Christ and publicly profess Him. So while regeneration is immediate, the *steps* that lead to regeneration are gradual. How would that work in Calvinism? In Calvinism, one is either an unregenerate, total hater of God or is a regenerated God-lover. There can

be no middle ground for a transition within a Calvinistic, soteriological framework. Take, for instance, Lydia, described in Acts 16:13-15. Before she met Paul and heard his gospel message, she was already a "worshiper of God." God opened her heart to understand his message, but prior to that, she was not a total hater of God. What about Cornelius? He, too, was a worshiper of God, "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." (Acts 10:2) As a "God-fearing man" (Acts 10:22), he asked to hear Peter's gospel message, and soon after received the gift of the Holy Spirit and was baptized. Calvinists would be theologically pre-committed to insisting that both Lydia and Cornelius had already been regenerated the moment they ever showed even the very slightest interest in God. Or, perhaps Calvinists would wish to say that "Common Grace" precedes "Irresistible Grace." The answer is not clear. Conversely, non-Calvinists are faced with no such quandary. The Holy Spirit convicts unbelievers of their sin through the message of the gospel (John 16:8), and if they become believers, the Holy Spirit regenerates them as reborn, new creations.

What do Calvinists believe?

Calvinists pray to a God who actually has the *power* to regenerate hearts and bring people to saving faith.

Our reply:

It's really not about *power*. Non-Calvinists believe that God can regenerate anyone He wants to, and He has made His sovereign choice to bestow regeneration only upon believers in Christ, particularly as a way to honor Christ, resulting that "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" is "in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

What do Calvinists believe?

Would an unregenerate, God-hater ever choose to love God?

Our reply:

Is every unregenerate person a "God-hater"? See Luke 8:13.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"I just know that no man will do it unless and until the miracle of regeneration takes place first."*[352]

Our reply:

How do Calvinists address the fact that regeneration and salvation are treated as synonymous terms in the Bible? Can a person be regenerated with the Holy Spirit while yet *unsaved*?

> Dave Hunt: *"So Calvin's newly regenerated elect are unsaved?"*[353]

> Dave Hunt: *"Why the gospel, if the nonelect can't believe it and the elect are regenerated without it?"*[354]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"First, he confuses terms, such as salvation and regeneration. In most theological works, regeneration is a subset of the larger and broader term, salvation, which often includes within it justification, forgiveness, redemption, and adoption. Sometimes it can be used in a narrower sense, but in historical discussions of these issues, regeneration has a specific meaning that Mr. Hunt normally confuses."*[355]

Our reply:

Does that really answer the question? It seems like James White is masking a non-answer behind personal insults.

> Dave Hunt responds: *"White says I confuse salvation and regeneration. But in the Bible these terms are synonymous. No one can be saved without being regenerated or regenerated without being saved. ... A 'subset of...salvation' would be 'part of'*

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[352] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 305.
[353] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 301.
[354] Ibid., 221.
[355] Ibid., 305.

salvation, which White now admits comes by faith, making regeneration by faith also."[356]

[356] Ibid., 307.

REMOTE TRIBES

What about those who have never heard the gospel? A common objection from Calvinists about non-Calvinism deals with whether God could really love those who have never heard the gospel, such as unreached-people from remote tribes, and if God didn't really love them, then how can non-Calvinists claim that God loves everyone? The reality is that God does love them, if people respond favorably to the light that God gives them, then He will give them more light. That's a concept that deals with "General Revelation." If people reject the light that God does give them, then there is no need to give them more of what they've already rejected. But, if people do positively respond to the light that God gives them, then He will give more and more. God will make a way to bring them a messenger of the gospel. (Acts 10:20) God did it with Nineveh, by bringing them the prophet Jonah, even when Jonah didn't want to go.

> **Romans 1:20:** "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."

Of course, the "General Revelation" of God's existence alone is not the same as the gospel, and does not save anyone, but it is a necessary component to believing in the gospel. According to Acts 10:1-2, Cornelius was "a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." According to Acts 16:14, Lydia was "a worshipper of God." However, Cornelius hadn't heard the gospel until he met Peter, and Lydia hadn't heard the gospel until she met Paul. When they did hear and believe in the gospel, they became saved, just as Ephesians 1:13 similarly shows: "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also **believed**, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." So, don't let Calvinists talk you into the idea that because some remote tribe hasn't heard the gospel yet, that God somehow doesn't love them, as part of a "non-elect" corporate entity.

Another way that Calvinists often argue that God must not love certain people (as a way to prove non-election in a larger sense), is to ask why God allows certain people to be born, that *He knows* will never become a Christian. After all, if God knows that they will never become a Christian, then it would be far more loving if God stopped them from being born in the first place. However, people are interconnected in a way that rebuts that argument. In other words, what if God also knew that the descendant of that person someday would grow up to become a Christian?

If God stopped the birth of the father, then how would the eventual Christian descendant ever be born? God would have it that everyone come to know Him, but if some choose not to, then that is their choice, and God will allow them their dubious privilege of rejecting Him. So, again, don't let Calvinists use clever arguments to talk you into the idea that God doesn't love everyone because God absolutely does love everyone. Who in their right mind would suggest that the father of the "prodigal son" did not truly love his son because he allowed him to exercise his will to leave? As the parable of Luke chapter 15:11-32 shows, the father certainly did love his son and was gracious upon his return back home. So, in a similar way, even though God allows people to reject Him, He still loves them and sincerely desires their reconciliation with Him. He cannot rightly stop their birth though, having the foreknowledge of how they will end up, because otherwise that will have a negative ramification on their descendants who might otherwise come to be saved.

RESPONSIBILITY

In Calvinism, God is the decisive cause of each person's choice to accept or reject God's appeal to be reconciled, whereas non-Calvinists believe that God decided, not which choice each person would make, but that everyone would be free to make it. The dilemma with deterministic Calvinism is in the question of how humans could have real, meaningful *responsibility* if all of their thoughts and intentions were eternally and unchangeably predetermined for them.

What do Calvinists believe?

The unregenerate are not free to make a choice for God while being a slave to sin. Only after regeneration can the elect recognize their formerly enslaved state and turn to God.

Our reply:

However, the unregenerate can admit their enslavement upon being graciously confronted by God who has the power to set them free, if they so wish to be released. For example, if a drunk can admit they have a drinking problem and submit themselves to "Alcoholics Anonymous," why can't a lost sinner admit they have a sin debt and submit themselves to Jesus Christ who stands willing to set them free?

Calvinists like to say that the unregenerate are "enslaved to sin" and hence unable to make a God-honoring free choice, but in deterministic Calvinism, it's more than that, as they are enslaved to *whatsoever* is decreed by God to think, to will and to do (in which the same decree alternatively could have causally determined their good choices instead).

The following material is from **Leighton Flowers of Soteriology101**.

Webster's Dictionary defines *responsibility* as:

- *the state of being the person who caused something to happen*
- *a duty or task that you are required or expected to do*
- *something that you should do because it is morally right, legally required, etc.*[357]

[357] Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary, web page: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/responsibility

What do Calvinists believe?

Calvinists say they believe men are "responsible" but they do not mean what most people think when they hear the word "responsible" (able-to-respond freely and thus culpable for that response). What Calvinists mean is that mankind is justly punishable, even though they were born "*unable-to-respond"* willingly to God's revelation. They do not mean that mankind is morally capable of responding to God's appeals to be reconciled from their fallen condition (as implied in 2 Cor. 5:20, John 3:16 and elsewhere).

Calvinists insist that man is born dead in sin and therefore "corpse-like" in his abilities to respond to God's life giving truth. Therefore, according to their logic, God must bring the corpse back to life so that he will certainly believe God's revealed truth.

Our reply:

Human responsibility is our response to God's provided ability. Naturally, as non-Calvinists, we believe that God's Word and His General Revelation are sufficient for us to contemplate and *choose* the good, simply because we do not see ourselves as unconscious corpses. "Corpse Theology" is the essential ingredient to restrict the way to salvation to all except those who are secretly *activated* by Irresistible Grace. The raising of Lazarus is perfect for Calvinists because Lazarus literally *was* a corpse, but just like Calvinists read "corpse" into spiritual death, they also read "spiritual regeneration" into the Lazarus incident. Conclusion: Calvinism survives on key presumptions. When you expose those presumptions, you then threaten the underlying foundation of Calvinism.

Because we are held responsible for the truth of God, the question often arises regarding those who've never heard the gospel. If Jesus is the only way for salvation, then how are those who never hear the gospel still held responsible? It is one thing to hear and reject the gospel truth, but to be condemned for rejecting a message you never heard just does not seem fair. There is just one problem with that reasoning. Mankind is not primarily condemned for rejecting the gospel message. They are condemned for sin. Our sin is an offense against an eternally holy God, thus the only just punishment must likewise have eternal consequence, which Scripture describes in horrific terms as a place called Hell (Mt. 25:31-46). Justice demands Hell for all who sin against God.

The gospel is an appeal to repent and believe in Christ, so as to be rescued from this much-deserved just punishment. God does not owe salvation, or even the means to be saved to anyone. It is wrong-minded to approach this question as if any sinner deserves more than divine justice.

Our heavenly Father desires mercy over justice (Mt. 5:38-48, Mt. 12:7). He is a loving and gracious God who does not want any to perish but all to come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9, Ezek. 18:30-32). God is all-loving and perfect in every way so we can trust that He will always do what is right, even when we do not understand.

While Scripture may not give us perfect clarity on this topic, we do have some strong biblical insight that may help guide our thinking: God's eternal power, divine nature, and all that may be known about God's invisible qualities, is plain for everyone to see and understand. This is referred to as God's "general revelation," which renders all people "without excuse" for their unbelief (Rom. 1:19-20, Acts 14:17, Heb. 3:4, Ps. 19:1). While this revelation is not sufficient to lead someone to faith in Christ, there is strong biblical evidence to support that it is sufficient to lead to the acknowledgment of God and the potential of further revelation (Lk. 16:10-12).

J.I. Packer taught "that God's general revelation, even when correctly grasped, yields knowledge of creation, providence, and judgment only, not of grace that restores sinners to fellowship with God" (1973, p.115).[358] While this is certainly true, nothing in the text suggests that mankind is unable to respond to such revelation by either "exchanging the truth for lies" (Rm. 1:25) or "retaining the knowledge of God" (Rm. 1:28). Such inability to respond to this revelation would nullify the point of the apostle in verse 20 in declaring that all are "without excuse." (i.e. "I was born unable to respond to God's revelation.")

This ability to respond (responsibility) in light of God's clear revelation does not solve the problem of sin and the need for redemption, however. Even those who acknowledge what they know of God to be true still deserve condemnation for their sin. Sinners who respond in reverent fear and attempt to be faithful to His laws (or their conscience) are still sinners. They still deserve Hell and condemnation (Rom. 3:10-11, 23). Even their good deeds would be as worthless as filthy rags given the penalty due for their sin (Is. 64:6).

Throughout Scriptures, we see examples of God "finding favor" in believing individuals (Job, Enoch, Noah, Abram, etc.), but these men, like all of humanity, still fell short of God's glory and were unrighteous according to the demands of God's law. They needed a savior. They needed redemption and reconciliation. Even those who believe the truth of God's revelation deserves eternal punishment for their sin.

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[358] Packer, J.I. (1973), "Are Non-Christian Faiths Ways of Salvation?," [Part IV of a series titled, "The Way of Salvation"], *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April.

What must be understood is that no one was righteous according to the demands of the law. However, that does NOT mean that all people are unable to believe God's revealed truth so as to be credited as righteous by God's grace. Paul taught that no one was righteous in Romans 3, yet he turns around and declares in the very next chapter that, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (4:3). How can that be? Has Paul contradicted himself? First, he declares that no one is righteous and then he tells us that Abraham was righteous? Which is it?

Paul is drawing the distinction between righteousness by works (Rm. 3:10-11) and righteousness by grace through faith (Rm. 3:21-24). The former is unattainable but the latter has always been very much attainable by anyone, which again, is why ALL ARE "WITHOUT EXCUSE" (Rm. 1:20).

Without excuse for what? For their unbelief in God's revelation. When it comes to revelation, scholars speak in terms of two distinct kinds: God's general and special revelation. General revelation is just that, God making Himself known generally through the natural world and moral conscience. Special revelation consists of His Word (the Messiah) and His inspired message.

God certainly holds man responsible to all His revelation, yet there are some biblical scholars who teach that mankind is born unable to respond to any revelation of God without first being born again (i.e. the view of Calvinists that regeneration precedes faith).

Is it right to hold someone responsible for something for which they are unable to respond? If a man had a dog that was born deaf and he punished it harshly for her lack of response to his verbal commands, would anyone consider such actions good or just? Not even for a dog is this kind of treatment deemed acceptable. Should we conclude that God would act in this manner toward his own image bearers--those He loves? I cannot fathom that our perfect Father would treat people in this manner. And I have yet found anyone who can show me an example from scripture of God holding men responsible for that which they were never given the moral ability to respond.[359]

But, one may object at this point and remind me of my earlier statements regarding man's sinful condition and the fact that fallen humanity deserves nothing more than what is just, the punishment of hell. However, I am not talking about man being held accountable for his sin. I

[359] Calvinists often reference our inability to keep the law as proof for the false notion that God readily holds men responsible for that which they cannot do, but it simply begs the question to presume that because we are unable to fulfill the demands of the law that we also are unable to admit that fact and believe in the one who fulfilled the law on our behalf.

am specifically addressing sinful man's response-ability to God's revelation. Some scholars confound this issue by speaking of man's responsibility to God's revelation when really they are referencing man's culpability for their sin. Let's unpack this point:

- All humanity is guilty of sin and deserves Hell. (We can agree on this point.)
- Sinners are held responsible to God's revelation. (Here is where some disagree.)

When some scholars speak of man being "responsible to God's revelation" they really mean that man is "justly punished due to their sinfulness even though they cannot respond to God's revelation." This is confounding two separate issues causing much confusion over this topic. We must separate each point in order to understand the truth as revealed in scripture.

While it is certainly true that all fallen man is deserving of hell, it is certainly untrue that fallen man is born morally unable to respond to God because of that fall. Let's look in Genesis chapter 3 and see if the first man is morally able to respond to God after he sinned:

> **Genesis 3:9-10:** "But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.' Adam answered God even after he had fallen revealing his ability to do so. Did God have to regenerate Adam to grant him the ability to respond? The text certainly never indicates that need."

Let us look at another example:

> **Acts 28:23:** "They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets **he tried to persuade them about Jesus**."

Some people ridicule pastors who allow their invitations to go on too long, yet in this passage, we witness Paul earnestly attempting to persuade his fellow countryman for the entire day. Some were persuaded while others refused to believe.

> **Acts 28:24-28:** "**Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe**. They disagreed among themselves and

> began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: 'The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet: "Go to this people and say, 'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.' **For this people's heart has become calloused**; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. **Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them**." Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and **they will listen**!'"

What does Paul conclude about the condition of these people? They had "*become* calloused." The problem is not a lack of revelation. They have one of the greatest biblical teachers in the world pouring out *special* revelation all day long. So, what is the problem according to Paul? Are the Calvinists right in teaching that all men are born total unable to see, hear, understand and turn in light of the revelation?

That is not what Paul concluded. Paul does not teach that these men were born calloused, but they had **become** such by ignoring God's truth and replacing it with their man-made self-righteous dogma. Babies are not born with callouses on their hands or their hearts. Scripture warns all of us not to allow our hearts to grow hardened in this manner (Heb. 3:8). They were calloused by their own doing, not God's rejection or lack of revelation (Rm. 10:21, Mt. 23:37).

Had they not "*become* calloused" we know "they might see, hear, understand and turn." What is the ability of someone who has not yet grown calloused? Paul spells it out very clearly in this passage: "they might turn." These men have no excuse for their unbelief because they have rejected the truth for so long that they have grown calloused to it; otherwise, they might turn and be healed.

Notice the contrast with the Gentiles in verse 28, "they will listen." Why does Paul draw this conclusion? Is it because Gentiles are more moral or less fallen in their sin? Are Gentiles less deserving of hell? Of course not. Gentiles were known to be grossly immoral in this day. We must understand that there is a difference in being culpable for sinful immorality and growing calloused to divine revelation sent to rescue us from our sinful condition. The former doesn't necessarily imply the latter. This is why we can affirm the concept of "Original Sin" (man is born with a sinful nature and in need of a savior) while denying the doctrinal teaching of Total Inability (man is born unable to see, hear, understand or turn in light of God's clear revelation).

Why is all this relevant to the question at hand? Because it speaks to the natural man's abilities to respond to the light of God's

revelation, IN CONTRAST TO their culpability for sin. When one confounds those two doctrines it becomes as difficult as untangling a wad of fishing line to correct.[360]

It must be understood that both the Jews and the Gentiles are equally culpable for being sinful (Rm. 1-3:19). Both Jews and Gentiles are NOT equally calloused in their self-righteousness, which is what makes it so difficult, if not impossible, for the Israelites to respond to God's clear revelation.

Why do you suppose Jesus referred to a child as an example of what we must become like to enter His kingdom (Mt. 18:3)? What is the difference in the condition of a child's heart and the heart of an older man? Are they both equally "hardened" from birth as some impose onto the text? Clearly not. The heart of a child, while fully culpable for sin, has not yet grown calloused and stubborn in his rebellion. A child, like the Gentiles referenced above, "will listen" because they are able to "see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart and turn" (Acts 28:27-28).

Now, that addresses the ability of man to respond (responsibility) to the special revelation, but what about the general revelation? Is there any biblical reason to suggest that man is not "able to respond" for that which God holds him "response-able?" Paul's declaration of no one having any excuses in light of God's clear revelation certainly suggests no good excuse exists. Any doctrine that teaches man is born unable, by God's own decree, to respond to His clear revelation certainly seems to be giving back the very excuse that Paul is attempting to remove. For what better excuse is there for not responding than an innate inability to do so as determined by one's own creator?

Keep in mind that Calvinists must conclude that God has never desired the salvation of those who do not hear the gospel, which is biblically indefensible (1 Tim. 2:4, Ez. 18:30-31, 2 Pt. 3:9). Non-Calvinists, on the other hand, believe God genuinely desires for all to come to repentance, as scripture clearly states, which is why we are not so quick to dismiss the concept of human responsibility (the ability to willingly respond to God's revelation).

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[360] Beware of the "Pelagianism" accusation brought by many Calvinists if you dare take on the challenge of untangling this mess. Pelagianism is often the "boogie man fallacy" of Calvinists. Some pull out this label anytime they do not want to deal with the substance of the argument but rather label and dismiss it as heretical. This serves to scare off the undiscerning from being willing to dive below the surface level of the argument.

In Romans 1, Paul taught that mankind's "thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened…therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires" (vs. 21, 24). They were not born futile, darkened and given over. Paul is revealing the natural result of those who continue to ignore God's revelation and "trade the truth in for lies." Not everyone who has ever lived would match the description of the Apostle. Some people feared the Lord, worshipped Him in earnest and believed in the revelation they received (Heb. 11).

Objection anticipated:

Are you suggesting that people were able to respond to God's general revelation in faith? That is the heresy of Pelagianism!

That objection is confounding two separate points. One must understand the distinction between a sinful man's culpability for sin and a sinful man's responsibility to God's revelation. As explained above, Paul is addressing two types of righteousness being pursued: One is **by works** and the other is **by faith**. All have fallen in regard to the former, but not the latter. No one is able to attain righteousness by works, but that does not mean that no one is able to attain righteousness by faith (Rom. 9:30-32).

In Romans 1:1 – 3:20, Paul is attempting to demonstrate that both Jews and Gentiles have fallen short of the demands of God's law. **He IS NOT attempting to teach that man is born unable to respond in faith to the revelation of God.** That would give them back the very excuse he took away in verse 20 of chapter 1.

The reason why this has become such a perplexing question for so many students of the Bible is that some have confounded Paul's teaching to suggest that man is unable to acknowledge God in light of His general revelation and yet we are to believe He holds mankind "responsible" for their response to that revelation.

It is one thing for parents to discipline their children for lying by grounding them to their room. It is a whole other thing for parents to lock the door from the outside and then hold the children responsible for not coming out when called. Likewise, it is possible for us to affirm man's complete culpability for sin (i.e. being sent to their room) while still rejecting the notion that God has disabled sinners from responding to his own revelation all the while holding them responsible (i.e. locking the door so as to disable one from responding to an appeal for reconciliation).

The bottom line is that everyone has what they need to respond to God, and therefore are held responsible. No one anywhere in this world has any excuse for his or her unbelief. Mankind is responsible to all of God's revelation because they are able to respond to all of God's revelation. If they acknowledge the truth of the little revelation that they

have received, then God is faithful to entrust them with more (Mt. 25:21). If they trade the truth in for lies, then they have no excuse (Rm. 1:20). In short, the general revelation is sufficient to lead any one to know God's special revelation, thus no one has any excuse for their unbelief.[361]

[361] Paige Patterson recorded a statement, endorsed by many Southern Baptist leaders, that put it this way, "…whenever or wherever in the world there is a man or woman who cries out to God with all of his heart, 'Lord I want to know you, I want to know what kind of a God you are,' then I [God] will make it possible for him to hear the saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The good news is that God is so loving and so merciful that He makes Himself available to everyman who seeks Him, which is why the Bible says, 'You shall find Me when you seek for Me with all your heart'" (Jer. 29:13). Web site: https://www.truelife.org/posts/new-video-release-what-about-those-who-haven-t-heard

SALVATION

For mankind, getting to Heaven is not a reward for the righteous but a gift for the guilty. Consider who a pardon is for. Typically, it's not for those who have never done anything wrong. Spiritually speaking, God offers guilty mankind a free pardon. If it must be asked why one particular person gets admitted while another is turned away, the answer is because one said "yes" and the other said "no." It's like the two individuals on the cross next to Jesus. One rejected Christ and the other asked Jesus for a gift and was given the promise of "yes," that He could be in paradise with Jesus.

There is a point in time when a person goes from lost to found, and dead in sin to redeemed. In summary, a change occurs. While the process of sanctification may occur over time, salvation is instantaneous. So, then, what is this instantaneous form of salvation? Whereas man does the believing, God does the saving, and the saving that God does comes in the form of the New Birth. God makes us Born Again. Therefore, a reborn person is *no longer the same as they were prior to conversion*.

How do we know that we are Born Again? The lesson of the parable of the Seed and the Sower of Luke chapter 8 demonstrates that while sometimes conversions do not take, true conversion results from "the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart." (Luke 8:15) Jesus does not turn people away, at least not on this side of eternity. If you seek God in an honest and good heart, He will gladly receive you, and once He does, God sends the Holy Spirit to come and live inside of your soul/spirit.

> **Romans 10:8-11:** "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, that **if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.'"

The destination of the Holy Spirit is in the soul/spirit of every believer:

> **John 14:23:** "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our abode with him**.'"

1st Corinthians 3:16: "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you**?"

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence within a person, they are reborn and transformed. They are forgiven of their sins and given access to all of God's predestined spiritual blessings for Christians.

What do Calvinists believe?

Charles Spurgeon: *"'Salvation is of the Lord' in the application of it. 'No,' says the Arminian, 'it is not; salvation is of the Lord, inasmuch as he does all for man that he can do; but there is something that man must do, which if he does not do, he must perish.' That is the Arminian way of salvation."*[362]

Charles Spurgeon: *"That is just an epitome of Calvinism; it is the sum and substance of it. If anyone should ask me what I mean by a Calvinist, I should reply, 'He is one who says, Salvation is of the Lord.'"*[363]

Our reply:

When a Calvinist says that "Salvation is all of God," that is their code-word for "Irresistible Grace." In other words, Calvinists conflate our choice to believe in Christ *with* God's choice to bestow salvation, so that the whole package of salvation (our believing and God's saving) are both wrapped up into God's effectual action as the "complete work of God." Hence, in Calvinism, God does the believing for us, but Calvinists strongly *reject* that concept in so many words, though only to affirm it in practicality. In other words, in Calvinism, God does the believing for us insomuch as it is made irresistible through preemptive regeneration, in which a person is first regenerated by God and then they are guaranteed to believe. Calvinists reject the notion that "God does the believing for us" but only by asserting first and second causes, which is the same argument Calvinists raise to reject the argument that God is the "author of sin," even though Calvinists say that God decreed all sin.

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[362] Charles Spurgeon, *Salvation of the Lord* by Charles Haddon Spurgeon May 10, 1857. https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/salvation-of-the-lord#flipbook/

[363] Charles Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*. http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/calvinis.htm

The parable of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15:11-32 has the effect of beautifully illustrating the fact that our response to God does not merit anything of our own and shows how the grace of God is solely of Him, ultimately then erasing Spurgeon's moral objection against "the Arminian" (or Traditionalist). From the non-Calvinist perspective, there are two distinct choices being made in salvation. There is our independent choice to respond to God's call, and then there is God's independent choice to bestow forgiveness. In the example of the Prodigal Son, the son's return home did not *merit* salvation. He really only merited being stoned to death, but it was the father's choice to *instead* extend forgiveness and full restoration. So, of the two choices being made, it is reasonably clear that the choice of the father to be gracious was 'all of him' and not compulsory. This is what non-Calvinists think of salvation being 'all of God.'

SALVIFIC WILL

As much as Calvinists will deny this, I believe that at a subconscious level, a universal "salvific will" is offensive to Calvinists because it undermines their self-conception to holding an elite status.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The God of Scripture is able to save perfectly and completely all He desires to save: the fact that not all are saved leads inexorably to the truth of divine election."*[364]

Our reply:

God desires that everyone become saved. However, God doesn't want all to be saved *irresistibly*, but rather He wants all to be saved *freely*, which He accomplishes through a well-meant offer of the gospel.

The problem with Calvinism is that it portrays God as having decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including all sinners and their sin, and then not wanting to save all, never intending to save all, in which God had created most people for the purpose of perpetual misery in being eternally separated from His love, in order to use them for the purpose of having object lessons of the divine attribute of wrath.

> David Allen: *"Without belief in the universal saving will of God and a universal extent in Christ's sin-bearing, there can be no well-meant offer of the salvation from God to the non-elect who hear the gospel call."*[365]

That is why some Calvinists reject that the gospel is an *offer* all at, suggesting that although the gospel may appear to come across as an offer, it is actually a *command* which only some are elected to be made irresistibly regenerated to effectually receive. Matthew chapter 22's parable of the Marriage Feast is perhaps the strongest portrayal of the gospel as being an open and indiscriminate invitation and offer of salvation to all men, and which if true, would bring us back full circle to the principle of a universal salvific will of God, for His part. I believe that the deepest desire and need in the soul of every human being is to know that

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[364] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 99.
[365] *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 95.

they are loved and that they matter. The teaching of God's universal salvific will delivers on this need.

The matter of God's salvific will is tied to God's purpose for creating mankind in the first place. Was mankind created to glorify God? Sure, but what truly glorifies God? Let's see.

What do Calvinists believe?

If God loves every single person just as much as the next, why does He create those whom He knows will reject Him, and why does He let them go to Hell when He could otherwise choose to save all?

Our reply:

First of all, God doesn't love everyone *equally*—God loves everyone *uniquely*. Moreover, God may indeed know of a particular father who will die rejecting Christ, but what if God also knows that the man's son would someday become a Christian? Preventing the birth of the father would prevent the birth of the Christian son, and this is how people are interrelated, and why God will instead wait until the end of the Harvest to sort the sheep from the goats.

We may also ask why the father of the Prodigal Son allowed his son to leave, even though he sincerely loved him and desired that he to stay? The answer is because the father had principles and didn't want to hold him against his will, if his son truly loved him so little.

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

God gives people a choice, and what has been happening in the world since Genesis is ordering and sorting. God doesn't want people to be goats. He wants people to become His sheep. In the end, as a master fisherman, God will net a kingdom of people who chose to love Him and to be with Him, despite the adverse conditions of this presently fallen world. In the end, God wins true fellowship among His faithful, while those who refuse Him have made their choice and have to live with it.

SECRET WILL

Sometimes when Calvinists are faced with a conundrum, they will invoke two wills in God, in which there is a "Revealed Will" and a "Secret Will." The former is intended for man, and does not necessarily reflect the deepest truth of God, while the latter is God's sovereign will, which He always brings about, even which it contradicts the Revealed Will. Deuteronomy 29:29 states: "The **secret things** belong to the LORD our God, but the **things revealed** belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." Although there are some things that we must trust God with, that does not necessarily mean that they are in contradiction to God's stated Word.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"[Martin] Luther at this point made a distinction that was important to his theology: There is the revealed will of God and the secret, hidden purpose of God. On the one hand, God pleads with the sinner to believe; yet, on the other hand, he plans the damnation of many. This secret will is not to be inquired into but to be reverently adored. We should not ask why it is so but rather stand in awe of God."*[366]
>
> Erwin Lutzer: *"The revealed will was that all men be saved, but the hidden will was that the greater part of mankind be damned."*[367]

Our reply:

This claim also establishes an extra-biblical authority, since it requires a Calvinist to tell us whenever a given verse refers to the Revealed Will or the Secret Will. When God says that He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1st Timothy 2:4) and is "patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2nd Peter 3:9) and does not "have any pleasure in the death of the wicked" but rather would have it he "should turn from his ways and live" (Ezekiel 18:23), is that the Revealed Will or the Secret Will? When Jesus said to Jerusalem, "How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were

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[366] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 170.
[367] Ibid., 195.

unwilling" (Matthew 23:37), did He secretly mean that He never *really* wanted to do so, as part of a Secret Will in predestining them to Hell?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? 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, but only of His loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel."*[368]

Our reply:

So here we have an interpreter to tell us when the Bible means the exact *opposite* of what it says.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"So God elects those that are saved; those that perish do so without any help from God. He is, as Phil [Johnson] said, passive. And you see that in Romans 9 where God is fitting vessels unto salvation. But vessels are being fitted unto damnation, and God is passive in that. It is also true that God does love humanity, and manifests that in common grace, as I said. Now, having said that you believe all of that, you now have a problem. And that is that your brain can't handle all of that information and bring complete resolution. But that's okay; because if you could, you wouldn't be human. There are things that only God can understand. And I really do believe that. I'm very content with that. That's one of the reasons I know the Bible is written by God, because men would fix it. If I wrote a book that had those contradictions, Phil [Johnson] would edit them all out. One of the bench marks of divine inspiration is the fact that you're dealing with transcendence."*[369]

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[368] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, translated by W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 364.

[369] John MacArthur, *Election and Predestination: The Sovereignty of God in Salvation*, http://www.gty.org/Resources/Articles/415.

Our reply:

From the Calvinistic perspective, all of this is an *apparent* contradiction but not an *actual* contradiction, since our finite minds are incapacitated by the pollution of sin in the world. However, *apparent* contradictions are resolved with logic, while *actual* contradictions are resolved with Double-Talk, and that appears to be a Calvinist's only real defense.

SELF-SAVIOR

A common argument by Calvinists is to suggest that anything apart from an Irresistible Grace, necessarily results in the individual becoming their own Savior, as a Self-Savior.

What do Calvinists believe?

Arminians effectively make themselves their own Savior by thinking that they are saved by their own choice to receive salvation, that is, through the exertion of the strength of their own willpower, both which births and sustains salvation, as the author and finisher of their own faith—the captain of their own salvation—all apart from the gracious gift of God's effectual drawing, by which the human "decision of salvation" is actually secured and guaranteed on our behalf, that is, for God's elect.

Our reply:

Believing in Christ does not mean that you either lived a perfect life or died on the Cross to become a perfect Savior. Instead, assenting to God's ultimatum for salvation, through belief in His Son, simply means that you are accepting the heavy-lifting and hard work of what Jesus did—not what you did—in Him having overcome the world and Him having accomplished a perfect provision and atonement for sin. After all, if a non-Calvinist truly was their own savior and the captain of their own salvation, then they wouldn't need Jesus at all, and could then stand on the merits of their own perfection, like what Jesus did. So, by having to utterly depend on someone else for salvation, namely depending upon Jesus, we are most definitely *not* our own savior. But, this is the point where Calvinists like R.C. Sproul will object and say,

> *"But though God does 99 percent of what is necessary, the man is still left with 1 percent."*[370]

However the perspective of percentages is a fallacy, as everyone is 100% responsible for their own choices. God's decision to provide redemption, at His own personal cost, was 100% His own choice. There is no split percentage. Additionally, mankind's decision to receive or reject God's offer is 100% their own choice. There is no split percentage.

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[370] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 115.

SHEEP

The Calvinist perspective is that God chooses His own sheep, that is, He seeks them and finds them, and has chosen them from eternity past.

What do Calvinists believe?

As the Parable of the Lost Sheep illustrates, God went looking for us, long before we were looking for Him. God tracked me down and found me by the Holy Spirit. By Supernatural intervention in my heart and life, I became a Christian.

Our reply:

God indeed seeks the lost, but the objection is over the notion that God makes the choice for us. Instead, we must choose God over sin. In other words, if you were to ask God to give you an "Irresistible Grace" so that you would never sin again, ever—you won't get it. Like Peter, you will fall, and get back up again, and you must choose God over sin, every day. It's the struggle that everyone faces. Some people don't want to let certain things go. Others fall back into the same sins over and over, but we must get back up again. We must choose. We have to make a choice. He won't make it for us. Thankfully, because we have turned to God, He has given us a new nature that seeks to walk with Him and to do His will.

SOVEREIGNTY

Often in the Calvinist and non-Calvinist debate, Calvinists use the same vocabulary but a different dictionary. We all agree that God is sovereign, but we don't all treat it to mean the same thing. Calvinists define "sovereignty" in a way that assumes Calvinism, such as Theistic Determinism, namely the belief that God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, whereas non-Calvinists interpret divine sovereignty to simply mean God's kingly right to rule as He pleases; God sits in the heavens and does what He pleases.

Does God's sovereignty terminate at the point of being able to offer someone an independently made choice, that is, a choice that God does not determine?

If God must meticulously decree every thought, word and deed ever conceived in order to remain "sovereign," then that wouldn't say much for divine sovereignty. In contrast to Calvinism, God exhibits being all-wise, all-knowing and all-powerful when He governs without any strings attached. The contrasting Calvinist conception of divine sovereignty would make God out to be pretty mediocre.

All of scripture supports God's "sovereignty," though Calvinists highjack the term in order to force it to mean something exclusive to Calvinism, and they do the same thing with the biblical term, "predestination." However, the fact that God predestines *some* things does not necessarily mean that God predestines *everything*.

God is the ultimate cause of everything that exists, meaning that without Him, nothing can come to pass, which is something that all theists can affirm, *so long as* one incorporates a truly meaningful definition of divine permission, which includes God's own determinations and man's own determinations, which God permits within certain parameters that He defines. The problem in Calvinism, however, is that divine permission is reduced to God allowing people to do what He already decreed, thus redefining permission as camouflaged determinism.

God is *in control* of all things, though He is not *all-controlling*. Calvinists, however, believe in a type of divine sovereignty which requires God to exhaustively predetermine everything that ever comes to pass, including every person's thoughts, intentions and actions, for all eternity, including *sinful* thoughts, intentions and actions, thus drawing a sharp rebuke from non-Calvinists. This is what Calvinists term "predestination," though the Bible does not teach predestination in such a way. Moreover, such a notion has historically drawn the criticism of being a form of Christian fatalism.

Frankly speaking, Calvinistic determinism would mean that God cannot handle free-will, which would then gut all creation of true life. It would render God as a marionette, pulling the strings of dead things. By contrast, under non-Calvinism, whenever we make free choices, it is understood that we are not countervailing the will of God, but rather we are acting in accordance with the ability God has granted.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"This is the divine truth of God's sovereignty: His right to rule over what He has made. Those who love their king and are subject to Him find His sovereignty a great comfort and delight. Those who are in rebellion against Him fight and chafe against this divine truth. Much can be determined concerning our true subjection to God by asking if, in fact, we love God as He has revealed Himself to be, the divine ruler over all things, or whether we seek to 'edit' Him down to a more 'manageable' and 'manlike' deity. Modern men struggle with the biblical teaching of God's sovereignty."*[371]

> James White: *"The complete freedom of God, combined with God's role as the divine King who rules over His creation, provide the irrefutable foundation of God's sovereign decree."*[372]

> James White: *"Many are willing to confess God's sovereign rule over such things as earthquakes, floods, or other 'acts of God.' Yet the fortress of man's pride, his 'free will,' is strictly off-limits."*[373]

Our reply:

Notice how Calvinists use the ploy of divine "sovereignty" to work their way to a "sovereign decree" in exclusion of human "free will." Unless one affirms exhaustive, meticulous determinism, then it is said that they do not "love" God, are not "subject to Him" and are "in rebellion" against Him. Calvinism, then, becomes a litmus test for *true* spirituality, and that's a really concerning aspect of Calvinism, because it offers people assurance. In other words, just believe these doctrines and you can have

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[371] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2004), 36, emphasis mine.
[372] Ibid., 38, emphasis mine.
[373] Ibid., 49, emphasis mine.

assurance of being "elect," because it requires of work of the Holy Spirit to believe these things, which "modern men" cannot do.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"I have often heard it said, 'God's sovereignty is limited by human freedom.'"*[374]

> R.C. Sproul: *"To say that God's sovereignty is limited by man's freedom is to make man sovereign."*[375]

Our reply:

God's sovereignty is never limited by *man's* freedom. God's sovereignty can only be limited by *God's* freedom, such as when God freely chose to give Adam the choice of what to name the animals. (Genesis 2:19)

> Ultimately, R.C. Sproul agrees: *"Any limit here is not a limit imposed on God by us, but a limit God sovereignly imposes on himself."*[376]

First of all, why not give non-Calvinists the benefit of the doubt, rather than just disparaging them? Second of all, how can a Determinist (who believes that God exhaustively and meticulously decreed whatsoever comes to pass) even suggest the idea of a *limitation*? So, Calvinists are not being truly honest, either with non-Calvinists or with themselves.

What do Calvinists believe?

Non-Calvinists despise God being in control of all things, and even promote the idea that God's will can be thwarted by puny man.

Our reply:

Rather, non-Calvinists despise the misrepresentation of God's sovereignty as being meticulous divine control over every thought, action and deed of sinful creatures, and furthermore, it is recognized that God's will is thwarted only insomuch that God *allows* it during this temporary

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[374] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 26.
[375] Ibid., 27.
[376] Ibid.

time while on earth. Non-Calvinists fully recognize that presently, God's will is not always being done on earth, as it is in Heaven, though someday it will be, when Jesus returns to earth to rule and reign as King. To illustrate this point, consider the following questions:

When can the will of a truly omnipotent God ever be thwarted?

Only when He allows it.

Why would a truly omnipotent God ever wish to allow His will to be thwarted?

When it serves a higher purpose.

How could it ever serve a "higher purpose" for God to allow someone to thwart His will?

If God values real relationships, and if true love requires the autonomy to either 'choose to love' or 'choose not to love', then that's a scenario in which God might indeed wish to extend such autonomy. While it is unclear how God might have meaningful fellowship within the fully deterministic paradigm of Calvinism, it is easily plausible to see how God could have meaningful fellowship with people who freely chose to love and to be with Him, despite the adverse circumstances of this present world. So, extending to mankind an autonomy of reason seems to be something that serves the higher purposes of God.

Here is the question for Calvinists: Will you allow God to be sovereign enough to create beings with autonomy of reason and creative intelligence in order to independently form their own thoughts and actions, in order to serve as suitable caretakers for God's creative ways? Or, is God sovereign, but not that sovereign? Who are the ones who are really questioning God's sovereignty? God can do whatever He wants. He can do things in the way described by Calvinism or non-Calvinism. Will Calvinists allow God enough sovereignty to providentially govern in a manner that may be inconsistent with their deterministic expectations?

What do Calvinists believe?

Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Within the incompatibilist assumption of Arminian theology, responsible*

> *human freedom and divine sovereignty conflict, and since Arminianism is committed to libertarian free will, the sovereignty of God must be limited in order to preserve human free will."*[377]
>
> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"It is difficult to imagine what such a sovereignty would look like, or if it could rightly be called a sovereignty at all, given the insistence upon the integrity of libertarian free will."*[378]
>
> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"The difficulty that believers often have in relating to God's sovereign lordship to human responsibility, as in the case of the Arminian doctrine of incompatibilism, comes not from Scripture but from an anthropocentric and abstract view of human freedom."*[379]

Our reply:

We do not believe that there is any conflict between *genuine* human freedom and divine sovereignty, primarily because we do not equate divine sovereignty with exhaustive determinism, as Calvinists do. Sovereignty, apart from determinism, looks just like 1st Corinthians 10:13. Moreover, we do not believe that free-will *limits* God's sovereignty, but rather that God has chosen to *express* His sovereignty by giving man free-will, based upon God's purposes for mankind, and therefore we neither attribute our views to man-centeredness nor to any extra-biblical source.

Calvinists hold their theology as superior on the grounds that it is truly God-centered and God-honoring because it magnifies God's sovereignty over the created order, towering over all other theologies as inferior, on the grounds that those other theologies are man-centered and man-honoring, transmitting sovereignty from God over to the creature, man. Ironically, though, it is actually Calvinists who deny God's sovereignty. For if it is admitted that God has free-will, and if God had the sovereign freedom and authority to choose to reject the Calvinist paradigm, in favor of a well-meant offer of the gospel where God makes people freely choose where they will spend their eternity, either from Heaven or from Hell, then who are Calvinists to deny God's sovereign freedom and authority to determine His own method of providence? Once Calvinists acknowledge that God has sovereignty over paradigm choices,

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[377] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 143.
[378] Ibid., 143.
[379] Ibid., 145.

the quibble over which system is superior becomes superfluous, as the real issue becomes: Which system has God, in fact, chosen?

SPECIAL

I'm not special. I didn't get a special grace to believe in Christ which others were denied. Instead, I have to come to the Cross to receive God's grace, just like every other regular person. How many times did Jesus have to preach about treating our neighbor, in order to deliver the point that we should not think of ourselves as more special to God than others? God loves all of us, though not *equally*, but *uniquely*, because each person is different, loved by God in a different way, so that none of us are superficial and unnecessary.

The problem with Calvinism is the inherent claim to be special. Calvinists even affirm divine Favoritism[380], indicating that that's what Unconditional Election is all about. The irony is that Calvinists can get very pious in their tacit claim to being special, in which they received a special grace (i.e. Irresistible Grace) to believe in Christ which others were stepped aside and passed over to receive.

Calvinists will often use the suddenness or stunning nature of their own conversion to assume, presume and insist that they must have gotten an Irresistible Grace, in which God *made the choice for them* to believe in Christ. Calvinists will sometimes ask: "Didn't Jesus seem irresistible to you?" Yes, but that doesn't mean that I received an Irresistible Grace. Calvinists have a system that makes sense of their world: They were dead, and Jesus seemed irresistible to them, which they got because they were elect, and that's why they are saved. This helps to make their world make more sense, and consequently, they like it a lot. Then a non-Calvinist responds to their claims by pointing out that the biblical nature of being "dead" meaning separation—not corpse-like unconsciousness—and also that the Bible never explicitly teaches Irresistible Grace, and that election is only "in Christ" for believers to receive various spiritual blessings. Calvinists will then claim that non-Calvinists are boasting of their decision to come to Christ, because they were able to do it on their own (meaning without Irresistible Grace), even though non-Calvinists do not make any such "boast" about their decision, but only boast of Jesus Himself. So, this is what's going on. Calvinists are claiming that non-Calvinists make themselves out to be special, and non-Calvinists reply that it is Calvinists who make themselves out to be special, through a claim to special graces.

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[380] See the topical discussion on *Favoritism*.

STRAW MAN ARGUMENT

Calvinists often object that non-Calvinists misrepresent Calvinism. Here is Calvinist, Charles Spurgeon explaining it:

> Charles Spurgeon: *"…there are many of our opponents, who, when they run short of matter, invent and make for themselves a man of straw, call that John Calvin and then shoot all their arrows at it."*[381]

This is why it is so critical for non-Calvinists to quote leading Calvinist authors when stating objections to Calvinism, in order to avoid being accused of *inventing* Calvinism. The reality is that there is vast diversity within "Calvinism," thus making an isolation of what is truly "Calvinism" somewhat challenging. In Calvinism, there are 4-Point Calvinists, 5-Point Calvinists, Low Calvinists, High Calvinists, Hyper Calvinists, Single Predestinationists, Double Predestinationists, Sublaparians, Infralapsarians and Supralapsarians, Molinist-Calvinists and various other hybrids. Even Spurgeon himself debated his variety of Calvinism with other Calvinists, in his denial of Double Predestination.[382] So, given all of Calvinism's variations, Calvinists probably ought to pause before asserting offenses against their critics and instead show more sympathy and understanding.

> Braxton Hunter: *"Calvinists will say—well some Calvinists will say—whenever I say what Calvinists will say, I know that at least half of them in any given situation are going to have a problem…."*[383]

So, what might be a misrepresentation for one Calvinist could be a *perfect* representation of what another Calvinist believes. What happens in many cases is that the "internet Calvinist layman" will take a non-standard position on a particular doctrine, which contradicts mainstream Calvinist authors, and then on the basis of their unique position, will condemn non-Calvinists for having "misrepresented Calvinism." One common example involves regeneration. The Calvinist layman will agree with non-Calvinists that "regeneration comes after faith," but in a way which takes a more nuanced view on Irresistible Grace, where the "Effectual Calling" is taken

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[381] Charles Spurgeon, *Exposition of the Doctrines of Grace*, April 11, 1861.
[382] Charles Spurgeon, *Jacob and Esau*, paragraphs 18-20, January 16, 1859.
[383] Braxton Hunter, *S7E11: Atheists, Calvinists, and Open Theists - Oh My!*, 3:52-4:03. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UFVPnzzjIU

to mean that God simply "made the gospel irresistible to them," after which they are made Born Again. It's fine if Calvinist laymen wish to take non-standard views, but in doing so, they'll need to temper their sweeping denunciations of "misrepresentation," which restraint, though, they often fail to exercise.

Often, though, the real dispute by Calvinists over "misrepresentations" centers on non-Calvinists simply applying *logical consistency*. Let's cite an example:

> 1689 Baptist Confession Chapter 3: *"God hath decreed in himself, from all eternity, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably, all things, whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby is God neither the author of sin nor hath fellowship with any therein; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor yet is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established; in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree."*[384]

So, a non-Calvinist inference could be: If God fixed and decreed all things from eternity, including all sin, then isn't God simply redeeming His own determinations? Is God both the fireman rescuing us from the fire and the arsonist who started it? Therefore, is that truly a misrepresentation, or a reasonable criticism made from listening to Calvinistic statements?

What do Calvinists believe?

People use an improper understanding of a teaching to prove a point and to make themselves feel better. Fallen man is born in sin and shaped in iniquity. They love the darkness rather than the light. It is a misrepresentation to say that as Calvinists, we deny that the Reprobate have a choice and a will. We simply point out that as a result of their fallen condition, the only choice of their will is to refuse and reject God.

Our reply:

If people are born in a condition where they cannot *want* God, we must ask Calvinists: "Whose choice do you believe it was to punish

[384] A simple disclaimer here. That was not a quote from the Bible, but only what an assembly of Calvinists composed. That is an important distinction because we need to recognize the difference between biblical inerrancy vs. fallible man's interpretations.

humanity for Adam's sin by making all men born morally incapable of responding positively to God's own appeals to be reconciled?"

Calvinism is like a two-sided coin. Calvinists often focus their attention solely on the *one* side of the coin depicting fallen humanity while ignoring the *other* side of the coin which necessarily contains implications about a God who, in a sinful world, decrees whatsoever comes to pass. Indeed, fallen humanity equates to dead rebel sinners, but who decreed the sins of the dead rebel sinners in the first place, as part of a "total plan" of all things? So, before leveling a charge of misrepresentation, Calvinists should first consider the necessary logical implications of absolute determinism, and the fact that most will not accept their tendency toward Special Pleading.

Some Calvinists insist that Calvinism only be represented by the historical Creeds and Confessions. However, even that carries certain objections.

> Johnathan Pritchett: *"We already know that Traditionalism, Arminianism, Calvinism has a standard to it that identifies it as such, or otherwise it doesn't mean anything. And so, quoting prominent Calvinists, if you just want to disagree with all of them, in what meaningful sense are you calling yourself 'Calvinist' if your brightest scholars—you don't agree with them? ... Just appealing to the Confessions—the Confessions are just summary statements of beliefs. They're not arguments for those beliefs, and the second you give an argument for those beliefs, we're no longer talking about the Confession itself, we're talking about what undergirds the Confession's statements, which either I can discuss that with my opponent and if he says something similar to what all these other prominent Calvinists that they end up saying, 'Well, that's not me,' at what point is it Calvinism?"*[385]

So, to accommodate Calvinists by limiting all quoted references to just the Creeds and Confessions would mean that Calvinist logic could never really be tested, and which may be their primary objective. Some Calvinists seem to desire such a citadel of unfalsifiability.

In some cases, there is a darker side behind the motivation of serially asserting "misrepresentations." It involves a technique of "mock, scoff and ridicule" in order to shame and humiliate people into emotional manipulation. It's also known as Gaslighting. Example: "It's ludicrous, laughable and so obvious that you're wrong." So, would a Calvinist ever

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[385] Johnathan Pritchett, *Does the Westminster Confession Really Explain Anything?*, 17:55-19:28. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sX5CZt0org

say anything like this? Example: "This is all just a bunch of misrepresentations. You people don't understand Calvinism. You should first take the time to learn what it really means before criticizing something you clearly don't understand. You just refuse to accept the sovereignty of God." Consider the following rebuke by a Calvinist regarding alleged misrepresentations:

> James White: *"First, he confuses terms, such as salvation and regeneration. In most theological works, regeneration is a subset of the larger and broader term, salvation, which often includes within it justification, forgiveness, redemption, and adoption. Sometimes it can be used in a narrower sense, but in historical discussions of these issues, regeneration has a specific meaning that Mr. Hunt normally confuses."*[386]

What, then, might we conclude about "Mr. Hunt"? He doesn't just "confuse" things, but he "normally" misrepresents matters. Maybe, then, he is incompetent, or worse, a deceiver. That appears to be the intention behind these subtle insults. Notice, however, how much worse it gets:

> James White: *"Dave Hunt's fourth presentation is marked by shrill rhetoric, an incredible lack of understanding of the issues he has chosen to denounce, and a scattergun approach that presents a disjointed collage of false allegations against Reformed theology containing so many basic errors of fact and logic that one could fill a book with in-depth refutations. To say it is disappointing is a gross understatement. Mr. Hunt does not understand the issues before him. I, along with dozens of others, have attempted over the past couple of years to explain to him the large number of misapprehensions he has about the Reformed faith, but he has refused to listen. This chapter exhibits many of these mistaken assumptions in full color. But what should concern all serious readers is the fact that in his dogged attacks upon Calvinism, Hunt does not provide a coherent, thought-out alternative. In this chapter, Hunt derisively attacks God's sovereign rulership over all things."*[387]

So, in this case, the Calvinist charge of misrepresentation is used for the darker purpose of character assassination. "Misapprehensions" with an "incredible lack of understanding" and "basic errors of fact" implies

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[386] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 305.
[387] Ibid., 319.

gross *ignorance*, while a "disjointed" collage of false allegations" implies gross *incompetence*. The implication of "dozens of others" who have "attempted over the past couple of years" to explain things implies gross *incorrigibility*. The accusation of derisively attacking "God's sovereign rulership" implies gross *irreverence*. So, over alleged misrepresentations, the subject is scolded for being ignorant, incompetent, incorrigible and irreverent. That is the *essence* of "mock, scoff and ridicule" in order to shame and humiliate a person into intimidating emotional manipulation.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I recollect an Arminian brother telling me that he had read the Scriptures through a score or more times, and could never find the doctrine of election in them. He added that he was sure he would have done so if it had been there, for he read the Word on his knees. I said to him, 'I think you read the Bible in a very uncomfortable posture, and if you had read it in your easy chair, you would have been more likely to understand it. Pray, by all means, and the more, the better, but it is a piece of superstition to think there is anything in the posture in which a man puts himself for reading: and as to reading through the Bible twenty times without having found anything about the doctrine of election, the wonder is that you found anything at all: you must have galloped through it at such a rate that you were not likely to have any intelligible idea of the meaning of the Scriptures.'"*[388]

Our reply:

Again, the allegation by Calvinists that non-Calvinists do not "understand" is undergirded with mockery and insults, such as, "the wonder is that you found anything at all." Atheists are well-known for talking so derisively, and it seems that Calvinists, in their dialogue with non-Calvinists, have adopted a similar posture as well.

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[388] Charles Spurgeon, *A Defense of Calvinism*. http://www.romans45.org/spurgeon/calvinis.htm

TOTAL DEPRAVITY

Although the Bible speaks of "depravity" (Hosea 5:2, 9) and a "depraved mind" (Romans 1:28; 1st Timothy 6:5; 2nd Timothy 3:8), it never mentions "total depravity." Instead, it is a theological term that theologians use to describe the fallen state of mankind, and while Calvinists and non-Calvinists hold to *some* view of the fallen state of mankind, such views can vary greatly, even among non-Calvinists.

The doctrine of "Total Depravity" can become spiritually hazardous if turns into an *excuse* for why a person refuses to answer God's call to turn to Him in faith and repentance, and Jeremiah 18:11-13 shows just how indignant God can become whenever someone tries to throw a doctrine of human depravity in His face as their rationalization for stubbornly remaining obstinate.

What do Calvinists believe?

Arminians believe that in our fallen condition, we have the ability to come to God on our own.

Our reply:

From the normal understanding of "on our own," that statement is untrue of both Arminians and Traditionalists, since both sides agree that God must intervene and initiate conversion. However, when Calvinists say "on our own," what they really mean is anything that doesn't include Irresistible Grace. So, if God doesn't give you an Irresistible Grace which *irresistibly* causes conversion to Christ, then by default, you were left "on your own"—according to Calvinism.

To be clear, both sides agree that fallen man is corrupt and in bondage to sin. The difference is that non-Calvinists believe that fallen made is able to admit and confess the error of their ways and may freely welcome the help that someone else kindly offers, just like an alcoholic can admit that they have a drinking problem and welcome the help of an organization like Alcoholics Anonymous. However, what Calvinists really mean by mankind being in bondage to sin is that they can't freely admit the error of their ways, and thus require an Irresistible Grace to change their mind for them.

What do Calvinists believe?

Arminians believe that despite mankind's fallen condition, we retain the moral ability to repent and believe in the gospel.

Our reply:

That is equally true of a drunk—as flawed as they are in their alcoholic addiction—who is still able to admit that they are a flawed drunk and welcome help when it is offered. The impact of the Fall is the moral inability to perfectly keep God's Laws 100% of the time, and hence the need for a Savior so that we can be forgiven of our sins.

The following are the definitions of Total Depravity that Calvinists, Arminians and Traditionalists each use to define the term:

> **Calvinists** believe that Total Depravity means that due to our moral depravity, we are totally disabled from believing in the gospel, apart from God dispensing an *Irresistible* Grace, which is given only to Calvinism's elect. This type of thinking helps form the links in the chain of TULIP Calvinism: Everyone suffers from a total inability to receive the gospel by their free-will, and so all whom God eternally and unconditionally elects for salvation are given an Irresistible Grace to come to God in faith.
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> **Arminians** agree with Calvinists that fallen man does not possess the capacity to freely receive the gospel, which would then equate to at least some aspect of total inability. However, instead of insisting that an Irresistible Grace is the only solution to remedy the problem, Arminians believe that God may instead extend a *Resistible* Grace, which simply *enables* fallen man to receive the gospel, depending upon their choice, thus resulting in the concept of "freed-will," as opposed to "free-will."
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> **Traditionalists** disagree with both Calvinists and Arminians on this point by insisting that the concept of fallen man being unable to freely receive God's offer of grace is inconsistent with the Bible, human experience and the early Church's efforts to combat Gnosticism. Traditionalists believe that Total Depravity, as a theological term, simply refers to the fallen condition of mankind, whereby we (as fallen creatures) are totally able to perfectly keep God's Law, up to His level of standards which requires absolute perfection. Hence, fallen man needs a savior to rescue him from the separation caused by sin. Enter grace. God sends His Son to pay for the sin of mankind, and providing forgiveness to whosoever receives His indiscriminate, well-meant offer of the gospel. Anyone is welcome to come and freely receive it for salvation, and God is willing that any and all do. In this way, for

> the Traditionalist, "Total Depravity" would not refer to an inability to humble oneself to freely receive God's provision for spiritual restoration, but would instead refer to the fallen human state of moral imperfection to perfectly keep God's laws.

What do Calvinists believe?

Once you understand the doctrine of Total Depravity, belief in Unconditional Election becomes necessary.

Our reply:

That assumes that each camp teaches the doctrine of Total Depravity in exactly the same way—which we know is not true. A more accurate statement from Calvinists would be: Once you accept the *Calvinist* understanding of the doctrine of Total Depravity, belief in Unconditional Election becomes necessary.

What do Calvinists believe?

The reason why a lot of Christians object to "Calvinism" is because they don't first start with the total depravity of mankind, understanding that as fallen creatures, we are dead in our sins and trespasses. How can we come to Christ if we are dead? Hence, we must first be restored to life by means of an Irresistible or Effectual Grace.

Our reply:

The simple answer is that spiritual deadness does not mean an inability to receive God's help when graciously offered. Spiritual deadness deals with the fact that we are separated from God by our sins, which only the blood of Christ at Calvary can remedy.

When Ephesians 2:1 speaks of being "dead" in sin, the context goes on to describe it in terms of *separation*, rather than *unconsciousness*:

> **Ephesians 2:1-2:** "And you were **dead in your trespasses and sins**, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."
>
> **Ephesians 2:11-16:** "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human

> hands— remember that you were at that time **separate** from Christ, **excluded** from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers** to the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God in the world**. But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were **far off** have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the **barrier** of the **dividing** wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might **reconcile** them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity."

Notice the language of *separation*, and which is also reinforced by Isaiah 59:2: "'But your iniquities have made a **separation** between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.'" (Isaiah 59:2)

Another example of spiritual death implying spiritual *separation* is found in the parable of the prodigal son: "'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was **dead** and has **come to life again**; he was **lost** and has been **found**.' And they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:22-24) The prodigal son was "dead" in terms of being "lost." He could still return home to humbly admit his error, though. A similar expression is, "You're dead to me." It is a metaphor to convey the concept of separation and being *cut off*.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Dead men cannot make themselves come alive. Dead men cannot create spiritual life within themselves. Paul makes it crystal clear here that it is God who makes alive; it is God who quickens us from spiritual death. … The Bible does not speak of morally ill sinners. According to Paul they are dead. There is not an ounce of spiritual life left in them."*[389]

Our reply:

Calvinists often conflate *physical* death with *spiritual* death in this manner, in order to make it appear that the lost are lifeless corpses, so that only Calvinism's elect can be saved, once activated by an Irresistible

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[389] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 114, 115.

Grace. However, as can be seen with the parable of the Prodigal Son, the lost are most certainly *not corpses*.

When discussing *spiritual* death, Calvinists often invoke Lazarus, who was *physically* dead according to John 11:1-46, while ignoring the Prodigal Son who was *spiritually* dead.[390] The Prodigal Son didn't need a resurrection. He just needed to return home and apologize, after which, he would receive full restoration by his father. As for Lazarus, Jesus stated exactly *why* He raised him from the dead, and it had nothing to do with illustrating spiritual death. It was so that people would believe that He was the Son of God who had power over life and death. In fact, Lazarus was a *saved* person who was *physically* dead, that Calvinists use as an analogy for how *unsaved* people are *spiritually* dead.

The concept of spiritual deadness implying *separation*, rather than *annihilation*, is also evident from the fact that the Bible speaks of Hell as a "second death" (Revelation 20:14), in which the "eternal punishment" (Matthew 25:46) of Hell carries a conscious "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28), in terms of an eternal separation from the love of God and the presence of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"The corruption of sin extends to his mind as well as his will; consequently, no one seeks God."*[391]

Our reply:

To prove their case, Calvinists appeal to verses which deal with the ways in which the lost find the gospel *objectionable*, and while that is certainly true, it doesn't mean that the lost cannot change their mind.

> **1st Corinthians 1:18:** "For the word of the cross is **foolishness to those who are perishing**, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
>
> **Romans 3:11:** "There is none who understands, there is **none who seeks for God**."

Yes, the lost can be obstinate, and sometimes it takes a while for the lost to come around to receive the gospel. Indeed, most never do, but that doesn't mean that they can't, or that God isn't seeking them. They can,

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[390] See also the topical discussion on *Lazarus*.
[391] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 179-180.

and God is indeed calling all to receive His grace. The problem with Calvinism, though, is that it uses "grace" as a pre-text to limit salvation, so as to suggest that the act of coming to God is restricted to all, except those whom God provides secret, special ability, as in "Irresistible Grace." In this way, grace is no longer a depiction of God's love, but a depiction of a lack of love.

For Calvinists who wish to promote a doctrine of Total Inability, there is good and bad news. The good news is that it really is a doctrine found in the Bible. The bad news is that it reflects the doctrine of unrepentant Israel, which doctrine, God repudiated:

> **Jeremiah 18:11-13:** "'So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" But **they will say, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart**." Therefore thus says the Lord, "Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done a most **appalling** thing.""

So, God finds the doctrine of Total Inability to be "a most appalling thing." The implication, therefore, is that where God leads, God enables, and if people should reject God's sincere and genuine offer of mercy, then they will earn the indignation of God.

Clearly, God does not consider it impossible for people to respond to His call to repentance. Another good example in the Book of Ezekiel.

> **Ezekiel 3:4-7:** "Then He said to me, 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, but to the house of Israel, nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to **them who should listen to you; yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me**. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate.'"

Notice that God is not saying that they *can't* listen—in the Calvinist sense of Total Inability—but rather "should listen" but "will not be willing." Even wicked King Ahab of Israel was able to repent, and God pointed this out:

> **1st Kings 21:20-27:** "Ahab said to Elijah, 'Have you found me, O my enemy?' And he answered, 'I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. "Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel; and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and because you have made Israel sin." Of Jezebel also has the Lord spoken, saying, "The dogs will eat Jezebel in the district of Jezreel. The one belonging to Ahab, who dies in the city, the dogs will eat, and the one who dies in the field the birds of heaven will eat." Surely **there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord**, because Jezebel his wife incited him. He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the Lord cast out before the sons of Israel. It came about **when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently**. Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, '**Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?** Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'"

This is what Israel should have done, instead of justifying their actions on the grounds of moral inability. What happened is that God warned that He would effectually humble Ahab, and Ahab believed it and chose to humble himself, reminiscent of the matter of Jonah and the people of Nineveh, as recorded in the Book of Jonah. Because Ahab chose to humble himself in that manner, God was pleased, and as a result, He chose not to bring His judgment against him, but instead against Ahab's son.

Additionally, the Bible never says that the means of receiving the gospel is a preemptive new birth. Instead, the Bible speaks of regeneration as something that is exclusive to believers in Christ, together with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as part of the overall package that God has predestined for Christians:

> **2nd Corinthians 5:17:** "Therefore **if anyone is in Christ**, he is a **new creature**; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

> **Titus 3:5-7:** "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the

> washing of **regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."
>
> **Ephesians 1:13:** "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also **believed**, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise."

- Indeed, no one seeks God, so God seeks man. (Luke 19:10)
- Man is dead in trespasses, not in consciousness. (Eph. 2:1)
- Faith comes from hearing the Gospel preached. (Rom. 10:17)
- Regeneration is alone reserved for those in Christ. (Eph. 1:13)

Note that the Bible never says that God is left with *no other option* but to use an Irresistible Grace. In fact, Isaiah 5:1-7 reveals that the concept of an Irresistible Grace is not even on the scope of things that God considers:

> **Isaiah 5:3-4:** "'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. **What more** was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?'"

Every Calvinist would have to answer: "I'll tell you 'what more'! Irresistible Grace!"

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Because man is dead in trespasses and sins, God must regenerate him and even grant him the faith to believe. … Arminianism said man was sick; Calvinism said man was dead. If he is only sick, common grace might help him to recover by enabling him to make a right choice. But if he is spiritually dead, he needs the Giver of Life to make the choice for him…."*[392]

[392] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 179-180, emphasis mine.

Our reply:

Insisting that "God must" is a tricky thing. *Why* must God's hands be tied? Therefore, it may be beneficial to ask the following question: Is God powerful enough to reach fallen man by convicting, calling and knocking through the power of the gospel, without the use of Irresistible Grace in preemptive regeneration? If we say, "No, man is too far gone even for God!" then haven't we simultaneously constructed a doctrine of *divine inability*?

A Calvinist will insist that matters are being turned around, but the question itself is a valid one to ask. If we were to say that mankind is too far gone even for God to reach him, and therefore an Irresistible Grace is necessary, then this would necessarily imply something about *both* God and man. It would be better if Calvinists had instead stated that God could theoretically reach fallen man without having to use an Irresistible Grace, but that God instead *chose* to use an Irresistible Grace, then the matter would consist of divine choice, rather than necessity, though such a concession might forfeit too much for the Calvinist's own liking.

God never establishes the spiritual state of fallen man as a basis to assert an Unconditional Election, though Calvinists indeed draw such a connection:

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Thus the doctrine of total depravity leads directly to that of unconditional election--a dead man cannot respond to the gospel's appeal."*[393]

Our reply:

Calvinists may, therefore, be insisting upon a doctrine of Total Inability simply to undergird an overarching belief in personal, special election. So, when a Calvinist beats the drums of Total Depravity, in which it is inferred that mankind cannot positively respond to a well-meant, free offer of the gospel apart from an Irresistible Grace, their ulterior motive may be to establish the condition by which a doctrine of Unconditional Election may be rendered necessary.

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[393] Ibid., 181.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Why, then, is one person saved and another lost? The Arminian says the difference is to be found in man. ... The Calvinist says that the difference is in God, for all men are equally in bondage to sin. Any differences in disposition is due to his work in the human heart. Thus since some are saved, it must be that God has elected them."*[394]

Our reply:

While fallen man is indeed in bondage from perfectly keeping God's Law, that doesn't mean that we cannot humbly admit our fallen condition and receive God's outstretched hand of forgiveness. As far as the reason why some receive Him while others do not, non-Calvinists defer to the concept of free-will and self-determination, and hence the reason why one can be held accountable for the ramifications of their own choices.[395]

What do Calvinists believe?

We always choose in accordance with our greatest desires. The fallen nature produces fallen desires and fallen choices. Sure, God has decreed all that comes to pass, but that doesn't imply direct causation.

Our reply:

Sure it would. David decreed the death of Uriah, and used his general's shrewdness and the Philistine enemies to pull it off, and if anyone tried to deny that implied "direct causation," God certainly connected those dots by charging David with murder. The other matter is the question of why the natural fallen man *only* desires to hate and reject God's appeals to be reconciled from that fall. Is that something within man's control or not? If not, why not, if it's not by sovereign decree?

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[394] Ibid., 180-181.

[395] For more information, see the discussion on *Why do you differ?*

TRADITIONALISM

A significant misunderstanding in the Calvinism vs. Arminianism debate is the notion that there are only two camps. Calvinists consider any option other than their particular understanding of Calvinism [which can include fellow Calvinists who are deemed "not truly reformed"] defaults to a broad umbrella of "Arminianism." However, a legitimate third option, namely, "Traditionalism" or "Provisionism" is a system of belief that can be distinguished from both camps, and has been the predominant view of non-Calvinistic Christians within the Southern Baptist Convention for the last couple hundred years.[396]

> *"What is Traditionalism? By predestination we mean the predetermined redemptive plan of God to justify, sanctify and glorify whosoever freely believes. All people are created with equal value as image bearers of God. Because God desires mercy over justice and self-sacrificially loves everyone, He has graciously provided the means of salvation to every man, woman, boy and girl. No person is created for damnation, or predetermined by God to that end. Those who perish only do so because they refused to accept the truth so as to be saved."*[397]

Traditionalists are not Calvinists because (a) while they believe that man is born fallen, they do not believe that this includes a total inability to receive Christ's well-meant offer of the gospel, (b) do not believe that God uses effectual means to irresistibly cause people to turn to Him, (c) do not believe that Christ's death failed to propitiate for the sins of the whole world, (d) do not believe that God has excluded anyone from the hope of salvation, to which He graciously and sincerely offers it, (e) do not believe that God has ordained sin, such as having exhaustively decreed "whatsoever comes to pass" in the sense of determining the thoughts and intentions of the heart of every individual person, from cradle to grave, and (f) do not believe that exhaustive divine omniscience is made possible only by virtue of exhaustive divine determinism.

Traditionalists are not Arminians because (a) while they believe that some people do permanently fall away from the faith, they do not believe that such is ultimately possible for one who has been accepted

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[396] See also *Neither Calvinists nor Arminians but Baptists*, 2010. http://www.baptisttheology.org/white-papers/neither-calvinists-nor-arminians-but-baptists/

[397] *Talking Through TULIP: Is Calvinism the Best Option?* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGisYWuZU7M

in Christ and sanctified by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a reborn Christian, (b) do not believe that something in addition to the power of the gospel is needed for a person to be able to positively receive the gospel, and (c) do not believe that God elects anyone to salvation on the basis of "foreseen faith," but rather that election is corporately of Christ's Church for specific spiritual callings and blessings.[398]

[398] See also *The 5 Points That Led Me To Leave Calvinism*, Point #1. https://soteriology101.wordpress.com/2014/12/08/the-5-points-that-lead-me-out-of-calvinism/

TRANSCENDENCE

In a theological setting, when is it applicable and necessary to speak of transcendence and mystery? The answer is when you are dealing with things about God who exists outside of our dimension. For instance, we accept that God is eternal and uncreated, but we don't use the principle of cause and effect to explain it. Otherwise, if you apply cause and effect, you would have to say that God is indeed a created Being. So, transcendence (rather than cause and effect) is necessary to explain things about God's eternal nature in another dimension.

(1) We don't apply cause and effect to God being eternal.
(2) We don't apply cause and effect to God being triune.
(3) We don't apply cause and effect to divine omniscience.

Anything pertaining to God's nature—outside of our dimension—necessarily entails transcendence, and anyone who wishes to ascribe cause and effect to something about God then needs to be *consistent* by applying the same standard of cause and effect to God's other attributes, such as His eternal and uncreated triune Godhead.

So, how does that relate Calvinists? It means that when Calvinists try to throw cause and effect into God's omniscience, by saying that God infallibly knows the future *because* (cause and effect) He exhaustively decreed the future, then they have violated transcendence and thus need to apply the same standard of cause and effect to all of God's other attributes, which they would never dare to do. So, Calvinists are being inconsistent.

So, when do we apply cause and effect? It is for whatever pertains to our dimension. While we don't apply it to God's nature—outside of our dimension—we do conversely apply "cause and effect" to things within our dimension. So, if God were to decree something in our dimension, then that would be subject to the logical principles of cause and effect.

God's attributes outside our dimension → transcendence
God's decree inside our dimension → cause and effect

So, if Calvinists were to teach that God exhaustively decreed everyone's sin in our dimension, but deny that God is the "Author of Sin", all on the grounds of transcendence, then their defense would not hold, because they are dealing with something *within* our dimension rather than without.

God's attributes of being eternal and uncreated, triune and omniscient are all subject to otherworldly transcendence and mystery that awaits revelation, while by contrast, any purported divine decree involving

the people in our dimension would not be subject to transcendence but instead be subject to our normal application of logic and cause and effect. This means that Calvinists cannot rightly defer to transcendence (avoiding cause and effect) to the notion that God exhaustively decrees all things but is not the "Author of Sin."

The lesson of the Book of Job is that you can trust God, but not because He is complex in some mysterious and contradictory way, and then we just have to accept Him in all of His contradictory brokenness. It's exactly the opposite. God is perfect and righteous, and always conducts Himself according to perfection and righteousness. The reason why we can trust God, despite all of the suffering in the world, is because He is always making decisions which align with perfection and righteousness, and certainly not that He is causing chaos and disorder, but rather that He is correcting chaos and disorder with perfection and righteousness. We cannot see all the things that are going on in Heaven, but if we could, we would see perfection and righteousness in action. Since we cannot see what lies behind the curtain of this world, we just have to trust God, and know that whatever He is doing, perfection and righteousness are at the center of what He is doing.

UNIVERSALISM

Universalism is the teaching that God will eventually give "Irresistible Grace" to all men, so that the whole world will eventually become saved, whether in this life or even in the next.

What do Calvinists believe?

It is the view that the atonement is efficacious to redeem all sinners from all time. Some Universalists believe this is extended to the sinful angels as well.

Our reply:

Calvinists believe that if one affirms the doctrine of "Unlimited Atonement," then that automatically falls into the definition of **Universalism**, which is because Calvinists believe that if Jesus died for you, then you are automatically saved—guaranteed! However, non-Calvinist who affirm "Unlimited Atonement" also reject that anyone is saved without faith. Although the atonement was made for everyone and is *available* to everyone, and is efficacious to save any sinner, it is not *applied* to anyone until they place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Hence, it follows that non-Calvinists are not necessarily Universalists since it is obviously recognizable that not everyone believes in Jesus.

As an illustration, the atonement of the "serpent on a standard" of Numbers 21:6-9 was fully efficacious to save every single person who was bitten. Of course, they also had to *look* upon it, and if they refused, that doesn't change the fact that it was still efficacious to have saved them, had they obeyed God's instruction through Moses to look upon it. Primarily, Calvinists use accusations of "Universalism" just to troll non-Calvinists.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Will God truly save the world through Christ? Inserting the concept of 'universal individualism' into world in verse 16...raises real problems."*[399]

Our reply:

It's not a real problem. It's just Calvinists engaging in trolling. Again, although Christ's universal atonement is *available* to everyone, its

[399] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 378.

benefits are not automatically ***applied*** unless a person looks to Jesus in faith and trust in Him.

Universalism appears to be more amenable to Calvinism because if God had sovereignly determined to save an elect class through monergistic regeneration, despite their resistance to the gospel stemming from Total Depravity, then God could just as easily *morally justify* doing the same thing for everyone else as well. Moreover, when Calvinists admit that they do not know why God decided against sovereignly saving everyone, Universalists add their own element of mystery by supposing that in eternity God will eventually save everyone.

UNPARDONABLE SIN

Here are the biblical texts which deal with this particular subject:

> **Matthew 12:32:** "'Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but **blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven**. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.'"
>
> **Mark 3:28-30:** "'Truly I say to you, **all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness**, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit.'"
>
> **Luke 12:10:** "'And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but **he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him**.'"
>
> **1st John 5:16:** "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. **There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this**."

The challenge facing Calvinists regarding the "unpardonable sin" is that Calvinism's elect are unable to commit it since that their grace is unconditional and irresistible, while Calvinism's non-elect have every sin *equally unpardonable*, via exclusion from a Limited Atonement. So, for the non-elect who are thusly excluded from any basis for the forgiveness of sins, how can be it said that, aside from the unpardonable sin, they are eligible for the forgiveness of all *others* sins (so that "all sins shall be forgiven" including "whatever blasphemies they utter" and any "word against the Son of Man")? The only way this warning would make any sense is if there was someone who could actually commit it. If man (a) has a free-will and (b) can choose to commit such a sin, then there would indeed be good reason to warn people against committing it.

> Adrian Rogers: *"There is a time, I know not when. There is a place, I know not where, which marks the destiny of men, to Heaven or Despair. There's a line by us not seen, that crosses every path. Tis the hidden boundary, between God's mercy and*

God's wrath. And if you step over that deadline, you will have committed an unpardonable sin. Now what is the unpardonable sin? It is not some moral sin. It is not rape. It is not murder. It is not child molestation. As bad as those are, horrible and wicked as those are, anyone who has done that, can still be saved."[400]

Adrian Rogers: *"What is the 'blasphemy of the Holy Spirit'? That's the 'unpardonable sin', and we're going to see in a moment, that it is attributing to the devil, the work of the Spirit of Almighty God. Now this sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, the sin that can never, never, never, never, never be forgiven, is a sin that one may commit, and will commit, knowingly, willfully, with his eyes wide open, and then forever shut."*[401]

Bruce McLaughlin: *"Matthew 12:31, 32 and Mark 3:29, 30 present the 'unpardonable sin' of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. Attributing, to Satan, Christ's authenticating miracles, done in the power of the Holy Spirit, is one path to blasphemy. What about attributing Satan's evil to the Holy Spirit? Is that less heinous than attributing the Holy Spirit's goodness to Satan? Might that be another path to blasphemy? ... Calvinists may have found another path to blasphemy by attributing all Satan's evil to God."*[402]

[400] Adrian Rogers, *The Unpardonable Sin*, 2000.
[401] Adrian Rogers, What is The Unpardonable Sin?
https://www.lwf.org/bible-study/posts/what-is-the-unpardonable-sin
[402] Bruce McLaughlin, Can God's Will be Thwarted?
http://christianapologetic.org/thology.htm#2

WEAKNESS

A common argument from Calvinists is the notion that non-Calvinists present a weak God, that is, in terms that God desires to save everyone, but is ultimately too weak and fails to accomplish that desire, whereas in Calvinism, God secures the salvation of everyone that He *really* (and secretly) wants to save, namely Calvinism's elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> J.I. Packer: *"…the new gospel has in effect reformulated the biblical message.…we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence 'at the door of our hearts' for us to let them in."*[403]
>
> Alan Kurschner: *"God desires that his sheep are saved. God desires that his people are saved. He does not desire that every single individual who has ever lived, live in glory with him forever. If that were the case, we have an incompetent, unhappy, and impotent God."*[404]
>
> Matthew McMahon: *"I reject anything which makes God a cosmic bell-hop tending to the commands and demands of sinful men as another gospel. I reject anything which removes God's sovereignty to place man as the Sovereign as another gospel. I reject anything which denies the sovereign decrees of God and His electing grace to put salvation into the hands of sinful men as another gospel. I reject anything which denies man's total depravity and exalts his fictitious free will as another gospel. I reject anything which places the perseverance of man to glory in the incapable hands of a sinful man as another gospel. I reject anything which endeavors to treat God as the great Grandfather in the sky beckoning and pleading with man to be saved as changing the true God into a pitiable wimp."*[405]

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[403] *Introductory Essay to John Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, https://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/others/deathofdeath.html.
[404] Alan Kurschner, Blog comment posted at "The Calvinist Gadfly." http://www.calvinistgadfly.com/?p=348#comments.
[405] Matthew McMahon, http://www.apuritansmind.com/TULIP/WhyIAmACalvinist.htm.

Our reply:

God has the power to save anyone irresistibly—if He wanted to do so. Non-Calvinists simply argue that God generally chooses against using effectual or irresistible means, not wishing to force His grace on anyone, like the father of the prodigal son did not wish to hold his son against his will, even though he certainly could have. So, the dispute is not really about God's power at all. The dispute is really about how God chooses to save. Which method would serve the greater glory of God? Non-Calvinists believe that for God to use (what is perceived as) puppetry to save people, is just too far beneath the dignity and majesty of God to ever conceive of doing. Plus, would it really profit God to gain a kingdom of yes-men?

It is also true that Jesus lamented at being unable to save people due to their unwillingness (Matthew 23:37), and He did try his best to reason with the religious elite to ensure they be saved, such as pointing to the compelling evidence of His miracles. (John 10:37-38) However, keep in mind that Jesus made a choice to save only those who are willing. So, it is an exercise of sovereignty, rather than a lack of power or ability, for God to only bestow salvation on those who are willing. God is just as concerned with *how* people are saved, as to *whether* people are saved.

WHY DO YOU DIFFER?

Have you ever been asked the question, "Why did you believe the gospel but your friend did not? Are you wiser or smarter or more spiritual or better trained or more humble?" The "Why do you differ?" argument is one of the most popular questions used by Calvinists to convince others of their theological worldview.[406]

Calvinists ask this having already assumed a *deterministic answer*. Often, Calvinists don't come right out and say that they believe that God, not man, decides who will say "yes" to Him and who will say "no" to Him. Instead, Calvinists want for you to conclude *their* assumption on your own. It's a clever form of manipulation to try to get someone else to assume your own assumptions, without revealing your hand.

Calvinists also often then add an element of self-righteousness, insisting that if we believe that we made the choice to ask God for forgiveness, then we are claiming to be a good creature. However, that's like saying that because the "prodigal son" freely returned home after squandering his inheritance on sinful living that somehow, simply by his choice to return home, he was now somehow a good creature. Was he? The reality of that parable is that it was all of the father's goodness to welcome him back. Another father might have just killed him on the spot.

Calvinists often add another assumption, in that if the choice to say "yes" to God had been left to themselves, they *never* would have chosen God. Again, this also reinforces a deterministic assumption. It is pure *speculation* on the Calvinist's part to suggest that, in the absence of an Irresistible Grace for God to make the decision for themselves, they never would have freely chosen to receive Christ at the presentation of the gospel. Moreover, asserting that God makes our choice for us through an Irresistible Grace, inevitably shifts accountability for our choices from man to God. Instead, we each have the personal responsibility of believing and trusting in God, which is the whole basis for judgment. Why have a Judgment Day if God makes everyone's choice for them?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Now let me ask, if you are correct, then why do you embrace Christ, and your moral Buddhist neighbor across the street does not? Are you smarter than he is? More spiritually sensitive? Better, in any way? What makes you to differ? Is the Holy Spirit working just as hard on him as He did on you? If so,*

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[406] *Answering the Calvinist's most Popular Argument*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mA_v_qTYsk

> *why do you believe, and he does not? No matter how hard you try, you can't avoid coming to the conclusion that, in a 'free will' system of salvation, those who believe do so because there is something different about them. If the Spirit is bringing equal conviction to bear upon each individual, the only deciding factor, given equality in everything else, is something in the person himself."*[407]

Our reply:

There are several theological and logical problems associated with this question. The Calvinist argument relies upon the logical fallacy of question-begging because it *presumes a deterministic answer* is required. It's tantamount to asking, "What determined the response of you and your friend?" as if something or someone other than the responsible agent themselves made the determination. The question presumes determinism is true and that libertarian freewill is not—which is question-begging. The cause of the choice is the chooser. Now, a friend may list influential factors in their decision-making process but it doesn't mean that those influential factors somehow determined the agent to make a particular choice. Influential factors do not determine choices—people do. For example, your friend may say, "I ate a piece of cake because it tastes so good." That, of course, does not mean that the tastes determined the agent to choose to eat the cake but only that that was a factor that the agent used in making their own determination. So, when a Calvinist asks the question, "Why did you accept the gospel but your friend did not?" you can list influential factors in your decision but it is a logical fallacy for them to assume that someone other than yourself determined your choice.

This mystery of freewill is not one that Calvinists can really escape. Even R.C. Sproul, a well-known Calvinist, conceded the following regarding freewill:

> *"But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don't know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know."*[408]

What many Calvinists fail to realize is that Calvinism is actually the only system that teaches the believer is better or more capable than the

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[407] James White, http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/2002/05/04/blinded-by-tradition-an-open-letter-to-dave-hunt/

[408] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 31.

one who refused to believe. Calvinistic scholar, R.C. Sproul, taught at the heart of Reformed Theology this axiom resounds: regeneration precedes faith. What that means is that someone is born again in order to believe. They're regenerated in order to have faith. Well, regenerated people are more capable or better than unregenerate people. So, if the claims of Calvinism are true, the person who accepts the gospel does so because they have been made better—they have been regenerated or born again, and thus they have a capacity that their friend does not have.

On Provisionism, however, all people have the necessary insight and moral capacity to respond willingly to God's appeal. Thus, all are truly "without excuse" because everyone has everything they need to believe in God. This is due to the fact that everyone is created as His image-bearers in a world where His truth is made abundantly clear and believable.

On Provisionism, no one who remains enslaved can fall back on the excuse that God did not make them morally capable to respond positively to His own appeals to free them from their bondage or insightful enough to understand and accept plainly spoken truth, like they can on Calvinism.

The Fall doesn't cause humanity to become morally incapable of accepting God's appeals to be reconciled from that Fall. If it did, then what better excuse do unbelievers have than, "I was born incapable of responding to my own God and His appeals to be reconciled? I was born unwanted by my Maker. I wasn't given the grace needed to come to Him, and Jesus didn't, in fact, die for me." I can't think of a better excuse, and the Bible clearly teaches that we are without excuse.[409]

> Brian Wagner: *"Man freely chooses or rejects because he is made sufficiently free by God to weigh the choices given him, and then his free will decides to trust the valuation made for a certain choice. He often has sufficient understanding of God's will for the some of those choices, but he does not have all information. Thus it is always a decision of faith, even when it's a rejection of the truth in an offer of grace or divine warning. Did Adam freely choose to change his will's previous decision of obedience to a decision of disobedience? Did he freely choose to listen to his wife's information and freely weigh it more important than continuing to heed God's previous warning, or were these new influences compelling and causative for his will to change and for him to choose disobedience? God made man's will free so that true love relationship could exist. Even with the inherited*

[409] Answering the Calvinist's most Popular Argument. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2mA_v_qTYsk

> *propensity towards sin, from Adam, man's will is strong enough to respond to any gracious offers from God. There is no eternal, immutable, predestined, meticulous providence of every decision of the human will. That definition of divine providence is a fantasy and unbiblical. Of course, freewill is not stronger than anything that does get immutably predestined by God. And God is still freely making such determinations. But all decisions of personal sin and each personal faith acceptance of grace were not eternally, immutably pre-determined by Him. Why do some reject? It is because they freely choose not to trust in the truth of the sufficient grace when it's offered, but freely choose instead to trust in a lie or in another truth as if it was of greater value."*[410]

Our self-determined choices are a function of (a) how God made us and (b) the purpose for which God created mankind. God's purpose for mankind is to freely reciprocate God's love for us and to have the honor of serving as the caretakers of His creation. (Genesis 1:26-30) In order to adequately serve in this capacity, God gave mankind a living mind with creative intelligence, including an independent will with a latitude of autonomy of reason so that we can form our own opinions and to express our own choices—*which are not God's*. That strongly contrasts with Calvinism which asserts that, by way of Irresistible Grace, our positive choices toward God are most certainly *His choices*, thus spoiling God's purposes in the ordering and sorting of humanity for those freely wishing to love Him and to be with Him, rendering any such ordering and sorting to be something already completed in eternity past—by God—before any person had ever made any choice of their own. Again, Calvinism is antithetical to God's purposes for His created beings, that is, to be sorted, one from another, in terms of what will be found, i.e. those who will walk *with* God and those who will walk *away* from God.

Secondly, to clarify the matter of boasting, in relation to God's glory, notice that there is a sense in which God actually *encourages* it. God says that if we are to boast, then let us boast that we know Him: "'But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 9:24) When we place our trust in God, it says *nothing about our own goodness*, but instead speaks of the goodness of the One in whom we are placing our trust, namely God. "Works" look *inward* to show how *we* are great, whereas faith in Christ looks *outward* to Christ, hoping in *His* greatness to save those who cannot save themselves. As an illustration, consider the

[410] Facebook post, May 24, 2020.

two thieves on the cross next to Jesus. One believed in Him while the other did not, but even the one who did believe in Him was still a thief, and recognized that he was receiving rightful punishment for his crime. So, even though he chose Christ (and he was smart and wise for doing that), he was still a thief and was still condemned, and his only remaining hope was for the after-life in being united with Jesus in His kingdom.

Thirdly, if God was the "difference maker" on those who do *not* become a Christian, then how would Calvinists feel if God created *them* for Hell, as part of the Matthew 7:21-23 crowd, and they just don't know it yet? (Sometimes, our conscience activates when things affect ourselves.) In Calvinism, God chose people for Hell *before* they were ever wicked, before they were ever immoral and before they were ever sons of the devil. Nonetheless, expect Calvinists to instinctively justify the concept of "Predestination to Hell" by reinforcing the fact that those condemned to Hell *deserve* to be there, though while completely avoiding the point that in Calvinism, the divine choice of Unconditional Reprobation was made *before* they were ever born, and before they had ever done anything good or bad. In other words, in Calvinism, the divine choice to consign someone to a negative fate would not be based upon their future immorality, or God's foreknowledge of it, but rather because the creation of a non-elect class was *necessary* for the demonstration of God's various attributes, such as hate and wrath. So, again, for Calvinists, how would they feel if God was the decisive difference on *them* being born non-elect? Ultimately, Calvinists will conclude that God is sovereign and that He can do whatever He wants, even if it means their own pre-birth, unconditional non-election unto damnation. Nevertheless, it is important to get Calvinists to personalize and contemplate their doctrine's impact upon themselves, in order to shock their senses and to shock their conscience into operation.

WONDERFUL PLAN

Does God love you and have a wonderful plan for your life? It is the longing of every soul to know that they matter and that God loves them.

> Billy Graham: *"In all of life there is nothing more wonderful than discovering peace with God. Step one to this discovery is realizing God's plan—peace and life. God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life—abundant and eternal."*[411]

However, those who reject the gospel do not want to hear about any "wonderful plan" that God has for them—they have their own plans for their life. However, on Judgment Day, if they come to find out that God gave them certain talents and abilities intended to be used for God's glory, but were instead misused for their own glory, thus denying God the glory that was due to Him, then they will come under a rightful and just divine judgment.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Surely it is part of modern evangelical tradition to say, 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,' but providing a meaningful biblical basis for this assertion is significantly more difficult."* [412]

Our reply:

He has to say that. Obviously, there can be no "wonderful plan of salvation" for Calvinism's non-elect, whom Jesus allegedly did not die for, as per Calvinism's doctrine of a Limited Atonement. So, he is just speaking out of a prior theological commitment. It's like when Calvinists argue that all sin must have a "purpose" and that there can be no random, purposeless sins. Why? Because of a theological pre-commitment. In other words, if God "decreed whatsoever comes to pass"—which is what Calvinists believe—then how would it make sense to say that He decreed something for no reason? Obviously, if God does something, there has to be a reason, and hence Calvinists are *obligated* to say that there can be no

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[411] *The Enduring Classics of Billy Graham: The Secret of Happiness, Happiness Through Peacemaking* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2002), 125.
[412] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 265.

random, meaningless sins. Calvinists often take stances without disclosing their theological pre-commitments.

So, what might be a "meaningful biblical basis" to support the assertion that God does indeed indiscriminately love everyone and generally does have a wonderful plan for everyone's life?

> **2nd Chronicles 24:19:** "Yet He sent prophets to them to **bring them back to the LORD**; though they testified against them, they would not listen."
>
> **Jeremiah 29:11:** "'For **I know the plans that I have for you**,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'"
>
> **Ezekiel 24:13:** "'In your filthiness is lewdness. Because **I would have cleansed you**, yet you are not clean, you will not be cleansed from your filthiness again until I have spent My wrath on you.'"
>
> **Hosea 7:13:** "'Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! **I would redeem them**, but they speak lies against Me.'"
>
> **Matthew 23:37:** "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted to gather your children together**, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and **you were unwilling**.'"
>
> **Luke 7:30:** "But the Pharisees and the lawyers **rejected God's purpose for themselves**, not having been baptized by John."
>
> **Luke 19:41-44:** "When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, '**If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace!** But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.'"

Any verse that speaks of God showing mercy to all is strong, too, such as John 1:29, 12:47, Romans 11:32, 1st Timothy 2:4, 4:10 and 2nd Peter 3:9, but the verses cited above are all things in which God says that

He had a good plan and would have showed it to people but they refused His good plans for them.

WORKS

The Bible teaches that we are saved, not based upon our performance under the Law, but instead by turning to Christ and placing our hope and trust in Him.

> **Ephesians 2:8-9:** "**For by grace you have been saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast."

One of the most significant aspects to the nature of works and faith is this: "Works" speak to your own merits, while "faith" in ***someone else*** speaks of the merits of the other person in whom you are placing your trust. So, while "works" speak of your value, faith speaks of someone else's value. That's a key distinction, and perhaps is why the apostle Paul spoke of the works of the Law and faith as being mutually exclusive:

> **Romans 4:4-5:** "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does **not work, but believes in Him** who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Faith does not exclude grace, but is directly linked to grace:

> **Romans 4:16:** "For this reason it is by **faith**, in order that it may be **in accordance with grace**."

Faith is also our introduction to grace:

> **Romans 5:1-2:** "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our **introduction by faith into this grace** in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

> **Galatians 3:2:** "Did you **receive the Spirit** by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?"

Obviously, we receive the Spirit by hearing with faith, and hence faith is our introduction to grace. However, from the Calvinistic perspective, any religion that teaches that salvation comes about by anything other than an "Irresistible Grace," necessarily makes salvation into a works-based process, because once you incorporate any act of the

human will, even as little as a person's submission in passive non-resistance, what is left is some element of *human contribution* in the process. So, when Calvinists say that salvation is all of God, what they really mean to say is that God does everything in salvation, including the act of faith, on behalf of the elect person by *overcoming their resistance* through regeneration. As such, Calvinists insist that if God had not chosen some, namely Calvinism's elect, then no one would have freely chosen to love God. Nonetheless, Calvinists deny that God *coerces* any person to believe or that God believes on behalf of the elect, even though Calvinists concede that God regenerates the *unregenerate elect* against their totally depraved will, simply because they are elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

The essence of Arminianism is that we are *contributing to our salvation*. As such, faith becomes a work when we ascribe it to our own wisdom in having made the right choice, in being smarter and wiser than others, apart from acknowledging faith as solely the effectual gift of God. Who boasts? It is non-Calvinists who say that *they* made the choice to believe in God.

Our reply:

This is a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of works and faith. Again, "works" speak of our own merit, while faith in someone else to save us, speaks of the merit of the one in whom we are placing our trust. So, when we place our faith in Christ, we are not adding to our own merits. We are not building up our own value. Faith in Christ, instead, points to someone else's merits, who saves us solely by His choice to show grace toward anyone who puts their trust in Him.

As an illustration, consider the example of the thief on the Cross next to Jesus, who asked that Jesus remember him when He entered into His kingdom:

> **Luke 23:40-43:** "But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'"

His salvation was due to trusting in someone else. His faith in Jesus did not contribute or add to his self-worth, value or merit, but rather simply met God's condition for freely choosing to be gracious toward anyone who trusts in Him. This is why God gets all of the credit. Faith *in someone else's goodness* neither contributes to our own merit nor boasts of our own achievement, but instead boasts of the goodness of the One in whom we are placing our trust. That is the fundamental distinction that Calvinists are unwilling to recognize.

Although it is both smart and wise to place one's trust in God, it is God, rather than ourselves, who is made the focus and object of our faith. Essentially, then, faith in God shifts focus away from our insufficiency over to God's sufficiency. Finally, the Calvinist's passionate contention that only Irresistible Grace *alone* can successfully mitigate against faith becoming a work is entirely *absent* from Scripture.

God saves us apart from the works of the Law, and on the basis of His own purpose and grace. If one does not conflate man's free choice to repent with God's free choice to save the repentant, then this is not an issue that needs to be reconciled. Humbly admitting you need salvation is not equal to saving yourself. Confessing your sin, even if done freely, does not earn or merit forgiveness for that sin, otherwise, there would have been no need for the cross. God could have just forgiven Abraham of his sin debt because his faith merited it. Even though Abraham believed in God, he still had a debt that he could not pay. God graciously chose to pay that debt through the sacrifice of His Son, without which no one would be saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Because salvation rests wholly with God, no one can say he chose Christ because he is wiser than others; he did so because God had chosen him and quickened him that he might believe. Calvinists have often accused the Arminians of taking at least a bit of credit for their salvation."*[413]

Our reply:

The part about "rests wholly with God" and "quickened" are tributes to Irresistible Grace. Nonetheless, concerning the argument that free-will necessarily steals credit from God, consider the analogy of an anniversary gift. Upon receiving a wedding anniversary gift from your spouse, tell your spouse that your Calvinistic principles dictate that you

[413] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 181.

can take credit for *their* anniversary gift to you since you are freely, voluntarily and consciously choosing to accept it, and also clarify with your spouse that their gift was not truly gracious since theoretically it could have been refused. Obviously, no one would do such a ridiculous thing as that, but that is what Calvinists are essentially claiming when they say that an open *offer* of the free gift of eternal life would leave room to boast and is not truly gracious.

WORLD ARGUMENTS

One of the most difficult theological challenges for Calvinists is in having to answer the "all men" and "world" arguments frequently raised by non-Calvinists. The term "world" implies a meaning of everyone indiscriminately, as an unbounded or unrestricted term. So, when God says that He "so loved the world" that He gave His only begotten Son to be its Savior (John 3:16), one naturally feels *included* in that unbounded term for "world."

The term "world," as it is found in Scripture, reveals that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of **the world**." (John 1:29) 1st John 2:1-2 speaks of Jesus' atoning death at Calvary as being a propitiation for the sins of the "whole world." John 12:47 mentions that Jesus came to "save the world." 1st Timothy 2:4 says that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" while 1st Timothy 2:6 adds that Jesus "gave Himself as a ransom for all." For this reason, non-Calvinists contend that Jesus loved and died for the whole world, and naturally desires that all men come to know Him and be saved. Calvinists, however, don't truly believe this, since they believe that God only *intended* for an elect class (not everyone), to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, and decreed it so. Thus, to deal with these texts mentioning "all men" and "world," Calvinists often infer a *limitation*, so that the texts intend a meaning of *all men of the elect* or *world of the elect*.

Sometimes in the Bible, the word "all" is indeed meant to be limited, but only when the context makes it reasonably clear. For instance, Romans 3:23 is an *unqualified* reference to "all," since it is indisputable that everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. By contrast, Philippians 4:13 is a *qualified* reference to "all," since "all things" pertain specifically to godly living, most certainly excluding sin and wickedness. Additional examples of *unqualified* references are as follows:

> **Romans 12:17-18:** "Never pay back evil for evil to **anyone**. Respect what is right in the sight of **all men**. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with **all men**."
>
> **Galatians 6:10:** "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to **all people**, and **especially** to those who are of the household of the faith."
>
> **Titus 3:1-2:** "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign **no one**, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for **all men**."

The *unqualified* sense is the normal understanding of the term, and hence, should be the default meaning, unless the context reasonably indicates otherwise, and thus the burden of proof rests with those asserting a special qualification.

Often, Calvinists will suggest that if one interprets John 3:16's reference to "the world" in an unqualified, unrestricted sense, then the result is necessarily Universalism (which is the false teaching that everyone will ultimately be saved). However, Universalism is not what the Bible teaches, nor is it what John 3:16 teaches. The essential point to raise with Calvinists is that whereas the Bible uses the universal terms "all men" and "the whole world" when speaking of the extent of Christ's *atoning death* and God's *salvific desire*, the Bible conversely never invokes similar comprehensive universalities when speaking of *redemption* and *salvation*. That's the difference, and it's certainly a point that is lost on the minds of many Calvinists who often erroneously assert the false doctrine of Universalism as a logical necessity for non-Calvinistic theology. In other words, while the Bible speaks of Jesus having died for everyone and God's desire to "show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32), no apostle ever said that "the whole world will be redeemed" or "all men will be saved." Of course, all men do have a Savior (1st Timothy 4:10), but that doesn't mean that all men are saved. One must still believe in Jesus in order to receive His promise of eternal life. (John 3:16) That's where the restriction comes in.

So it's worthwhile to ask Calvinists: Why do you suppose that the Bible uses universal expressions to describe the extent of Christ's atoning death at Calvary and the extent of God's salvific love for the world, while yet *refraining from using the same universal terms* to describe redemption and salvation?

The other issue is this: Calvinists tend to manipulate the meaning of the term "world" at various portions in Scripture. Consider two verses:

> **John 17:9:** "'I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of **the world**, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours.'"

> **John 17:21:** "'That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that **the world** may believe that You sent Me.'"

Do Calvinists believe that the term "the world" means the same thing at John 17:9 and John 17:21, or do Calvinists believe that two different types of worlds are in focus? Calvinists often point to John 17:9 as proof that Jesus does not *pray* for the world, but if we keep reading, John 17:21 concludes Jesus' prayer with the message that through the

disciple's message, the world may believe. In 5-Point Calvinism, though, Jesus (according to Calvinism) excludes most of the world from His atonement at Calvary, and if that was true, for what purpose would He still want the excluded ones to believe in Him? It makes much more sense to believe that none are excluded, and His desire that everyone come to know Him is real and genuine.

WORSHIP

If Calvinism causes us to worship God better, then why wouldn't God elect for all Christians to be Calvinists? In other words, if it really was all about giving God glory and honor, then why would He sovereignly and unchangeably elect for non-Calvinist Christians to reject Calvinism? The common Calvinist response is to conclude something like this:

"Well, God just hasn't revealed it to them yet."

So, then, for the Calvinist, it's not about our independent choice to freely accept or reject Calvinism, but about hidden, irresistible deterministic forces at play. The only logical option for the consistent Calvinist is to then conclude that non-Calvinist Christians were *decreed* by God to reject Calvinism for the maximum manifestation of God's glory, and even potentially to serve as vessels prepared for destruction. (If God, according to Traditionalism or Arminianism is true, then Calvinists will find God to be merciful, loving and forgiving of their erroneous Calvinism, but if Calvinism is true, then the Traditionalist or Arminian will find a God who created them as a vessel irresistibly preordained to reject Him.)

> **Philippians 2:9-11:** "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus **every knee will bow**, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

So, why would God, according to the Calvinist worldview, create people to reject Him—and certainly not to worship Him—only to force them in eternity to worship Him? Calvinism causes these kind of odd theological quandaries. As humans, God commands all men everywhere to love Him and to worship Him, only to make certain that that's something that doesn't happen, by decreeing a world where it is impossible for a certain class of "non-elect" to have that ability. Additionally, we are required to love our neighbor, even though God (according to Calvinism) might have created them as "non-elect" and doesn't love them as we are commanded to love them. The theological quandaries created by Calvinism seems virtually endless.

Section 3: Verse by Verse

Chapter 1: The Books of the Law

Genesis 1:28
"God blessed them; and **God said to them**, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and **subdue** it; and **rule over** the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

God's sovereign prerogative was to delegate dominion of the earth over to Adam, who would then "subdue" and "rule over" it. Psalms 115:16 states: "The heavens are the heavens of the LORD, but the earth He has given to the sons of men." However, since Calvinism teaches that God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including every thought, word and deed, how would God be delegating anything over to mankind?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Westminster Confession of Faith: "*God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass, upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not decreed any thing because he foresaw it as future, as that which would come to pass, upon such conditions."*[414]

Our reply:

The implication of absolute determinism is that that which is delegated by the right hand is taken away by the left.

Genesis 2:16
"The Lord God commanded the man, saying, '**From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat**, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.'"

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[414] The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), Chapter III., verses I. and II. on *"Of God's Eternal Decree,"* emphasis mine. http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/westminster_conf_of_faith.html

Why did God place the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" in the Garden of Eden, and then tell Adam and Eve not to eat of it? Was it to tempt them to disobey, knowing that they would fail, and thus securing the Fall of Man? First, God does not *tempt* anyone: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death." (James 1:13-15) However, God does *test* people. The difference between *tempting* and *testing* is that temptation is made with the intent that someone fails, whereas testing is made with the intent that someone passes. Second, the **Tree of Knowledge** was not the *only* special tree in the Garden of Eden, as there was also the **Tree of Life**, as Genesis 2:9 states: "Out of the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; the **tree of life** also in the midst of the garden, and the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**." There was no mandate against partaking of the Tree of Life until after Adam and Eve had first partaken of the fruit of the forbidden tree: "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and **now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**'—therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. **So He drove the man out**; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to **guard the way to the tree of life**." (Genesis 3:22-24)

The fruit from the two various trees represented two different choices. One produces life while the other produces death. One relies on the knowledge that comes from God, while the other steals knowledge from God. One seeks to trust in God's ways, while the other seeks knowledge to govern by one's own judgment. The evil choice was not placed within them. That came from themselves. God had given them a choice, just like with the angels. Hence, we see that God values choices.

Calvinists Often Ask:

If God foresaw the fall of man, then why didn't He prevent it by simply removing the Tree of Knowledge from the Garden of Eden?

Our reply:

For God to either allow or forbid every choice of man based upon what He foreknows will be chosen is not real life, and is just another way

of describing fatalistic determinism, and we do not believe God was pleased to create such a world, though He certainly *could* have, if that was what He wanted. In fact, it seems relatively easy for God to have created a world full of such automatons, though resulting in divine mediocrity.

We do not believe mankind was created with strings. God created mankind with autonomy of reason, or free-will, in order to serve as adequate caretakers of God's living ways. Therefore, for mankind to form its own choices is necessary to its intended function. (Psalms 115:16) Moreover, philosophical speculations on how God's omniscience relates to the temporal choices of morally free creatures are just that—speculative.

Genesis 2:19

"Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and **brought them to the man to see what he would call them**; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name."

So who named the animals? There are some things that God has placed under the dominion of man (i.e. control, power and liberty), and God willfully chose to do this by His own sovereign prerogative. Also consider James 2:4: "You do not **have** because you do not **ask**. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures." So, God has placed the *having* in the dominion of man for the *asking*, though on condition of asking from within godly motives. So again, we see that God is willing to conditionally place matters in the hands of man, and God's sovereignty remains undiminished because that is His sovereign choice—meaning that He *wanted* it to be that way.

Consider the following illustration: A father gives a doll to his daughter and says to her, "You can name the doll whatever name that you wish to give it." In any normal sense, the mind of the child would understand the father to mean the following: (1) the father is giving the child a choice, (2) the father is not making the choice, but leaving it to the child, (3) the child really has a choice (is not just making a choice) as the child could name the doll various different names (both sensible and funny), (4) the father has not already decided the name of the doll, (5) the choice is up to the child, as it is their choice, (6) the choice is not necessitated, as they don't have to name the doll some pre-decided name.

Instead of a doll, God is giving Adam the choice of what to name the animals. That is a lot of naming to do, but if Calvinistic determinism was true, in which God determined the names before Adam did, then God

is deceiving Adam, and the names are not up to him at all but are merely meant to *appear* that way.[415]

What do Calvinists believe?

Through Compatibilism, God's choices for us perfectly coincides simultaneously with our own human choices.

Our reply:

It is agreed that in Calvinism's conception of Compatibilism that humans *make* choices, but would they really *have* a choice, if all of their choices are already predetermined for them? The answer is—not really. It's not a *meaningful* choice, if the choice is already made for you. The end result of Compatibilism is undeniably puppeteering.

Genesis 3:8-16

"They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' He said, 'I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.' And He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' The man said, '**The woman whom You gave to be with me**, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.' Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?' And the woman said, '**The serpent deceived me**, and I ate.' The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.' To the woman He said, 'I will **greatly multiply your pain in childbirth**, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'"

As a figure of speech, notice how Adam threw Eve under the bus: "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." Then notice how Eve threw the Serpent under the bus: "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." However, if God controls the devil, in having decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including every thought,

[415] Helpful illustration provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

word and deed of the devil throughout all eternity, then why did the devil not form a similar defense by throwing God's *decree* under the bus? For instance: "But God, You sovereignly decreed it and rendered it certain for your own glory." Perhaps the devil knew that while he could trick certain human beings into thinking deterministically, he may also have known that he could not trick God, who knew better, having never made such a decree.

Also, notice the judgment of multiplying the pain of childbirth. If that was determined all along, then what exactly was being *multiplied*? In Calvinism, we live in a static universe, rather than a dynamic universe, and hence any *change* by God is inconsistent with Calvinism's static decree.

Genesis 4:3-7

"So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? **If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up?** And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but **you must master it**.'"

The message from God is simply that Cain could do better, and by doing better, all will go well. In other words, why would God say to Cain that "you must master it" if He really believed that Cain could not? Obviously, God believed, and in fact knew for certain, that Cain certainly could and must master his impulses, if he were to live righteously. Any suggestion that Cain was unable to do as God said, would draw the same rebuke that God gave to unrepentant Israel at Jeremiah 18:11-13.

However, according to deterministic Calvinism, God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including Cain's errant offering, the anger in his heart, his refusal to take God's counsel and his murder of Abel. So, in Calvinism, it's not just that God knew it and allowed it, but also that He (according to Calvinism) meticulously planned every wicked detail for a purpose and rendered it certain. With that in mind, God says to Cain that if he chooses to "do well" by being a "master" over the sin that is crouching at his door, then his "countenance" will be lifted up. If God, according to Calvinism, secretly planned that Cain will *not* do well, then these gracious words would be no longer gracious at all, as God would be deceiving him about the possibility of right-choices ending with better results.

What do Calvinists believe?

God does not say to Abel that he *can* do well. It only says that *if* he does well, then so and so will happen. So, this cannot be used to prove that Cain had ability.

Our reply:

God's *encouragement* of Cain implicitly indicates ability, or else if not, then God would be deceiving Cain with false ability, and moreover, why would God command Cain to do something that he could not?

What do Calvinists believe?

Scripture is full of commands that fallen creatures cannot do, and Cain is no different. Look at the Old Testament Law. Do we keep it? Yet, God has commanded it. Just because God commands something, doesn't mean that we can perform it.

Our reply:

While it's true that God commands perfect obedience to His Law, and it's also true that we cannot *perfectly* keep the Law all 100% of the time, there are many single instances where we can and do obey God. In the instruction to Cain, God expected Cain to make it an instance of obedience but Cain chose not to. Even wicked king Ahab once humbled himself and repented in sackcloth and ashes. (1st Kings 21:27-29) We don't disobey God all 100% of the time or else mankind would be like demons.

Genesis 6:5
"Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that **every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually**."

That statement appears to be a case of hyperbole, demonstrating the prevailing condition of *Noah's* fallen generation, since obviously, some people were an exception, such as Noah himself. As an analogy, someone might say, "Everyone knows who the Pope is," even though some might never have heard of him. Similarly, a cook might say, "No one cooks their meat that way," even though someone might actually do so, for which an objection is made.[416] Genesis 8:21 adds of Noah's generation: "The LORD

[416] Helpful illustration provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the **intent of man's heart is evil from his youth**; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" Jeremiah 17:9 similarly states: "**The heart is more deceitful than all else** and is **desperately sick**; Who can understand it?"

What do Calvinists believe?

Of themselves, lost people can do no good, and since responding positively to the Gospel is good, lost people, therefore, cannot respond to the Gospel. Fallen man is born into a state of Total Depravity in which the heart of lost people is so corrupt that the unregenerate are at all times hostile haters of God, totally incapable of asking for God's forgiveness. Apart from regeneration (i.e. an Efficacious Call or Irresistible Grace), the only response that any evangelist will ever receive from the lost is an ultimate rejection of the Gospel.

Our reply:

God's holiness requires sinless perfection, and since no one is capable of perfectly keeping the Law, all, therefore, stand condemned and are in need of a Savior. The problem is not that lost people are incapable of *single* acts of relative goodness, but rather the problem is an absence of complete and total perfection. That is what scripture means when it says that "no one is righteous" (Rom. 3:10). This does not mean no one is able to respond willingly to God's revelation or believe His truth. It simply means no one can attain his own righteous through the works of the Law.

When lost people hold up a clenched fist toward Heaven and declare: "God, I don't need You. I am good enough as I am. If my life isn't good enough for You, then I don't want You," then they will suffer the due consequences of their rebellion. If the lost judge themselves to be "good enough" (righteous) by their own standards, they will find out on Judgment Day that they are guilty sinners, and moreover twice guilty for also having passed up their opportunity on earth to trust in the righteousness of another, namely Jesus.

As for the Genesis text, it does not state that lost people are impervious to receive God's grace. It only reveals the condition of those who continue in their rebellion and refuse to humbly admit their own need for help. It seems that the Calvinist perspective is simply making an unwarranted logical extrapolation from the text, based upon a theological pre-commitment. Calvinists erroneously conclude that since mankind is unable to attain their own righteousness, they must therefore also be

equally unable to place their trust in the righteousness of another. The text simply never makes that claim.

Genesis 6:6-8

"The Lord was **sorry that He had made man on the earth**, and He was **grieved in His heart**. The Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for **I am sorry that I have made them**.' But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord."

An frustrated father might say: "I'm sorry that I ever got married" or "I wish I had never had kids." Obviously, though, they still love their wife and children, but are just lamenting the temporary troubles experienced by human failings in interpersonal relationships. At Genesis chapter 6, God was expressing a temporary emotion over the impact of creating free creatures who abused their freedoms and caused so much evil on the earth. This knowledge, which He possessed from eternity, did not stop Him from creating humanity. However, He did lament the problems along the way—not things that He did wrong or designed to go wrong—but rather things that others did wrong, and how God would have to bear the burden of correcting and fixing it.

God created humanity free, necessary for real relationships so that people could love God from their heart, but in doing so, also makes it possible for people to refuse to reciprocate God's love and cause evil instead. However, in deterministic Calvinism, where God is literally the only One who can make people choose Him—not simply in the persuasive sense but in the effectual, irresistible sense—then for God to express frustration with people's disbelief (which He kept them from), to marvel at people's faith (which He effectually caused), or to grieve over people's persistent wickedness (from which He alone could release them), is nonsense. In other words, in Calvinism, God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including all of the evil in the world. So, in Calvinism, why would God grieve over getting 100% of what He wanted? It's a much different picture in non-Calvinism. By creating free creatures, God foresaw the benefits of creation, culminating in His Church, the body of Christ, despite the regretful abuses of fallen humanity along the way, for which Christ suffered and died, bearing the full cost to remedy.

Genesis 18:25

"'Far be it from You to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous and the wicked are treated alike. Far be it from You! **Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?**'"

To Abraham, the answer was a given, and so he was appealing to what he knew of God's fairness in order to save his relative, Lot, who lived in the city that God was going to judge.

The same sense of fairness is also exemplified at Jonah 4:10-11: "Then the Lord said, 'You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. **Should I not have compassion on Nineveh**, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?'" Not only is God reasonable in this way, but He can also be reasoned with. At Exodus 32:11-14, Moses pled for God's mercy with regard to Israel, even while they were building the golden calf. God could have easily destroyed Israel and started over with the line of Moses, as He threatened to do, and in so doing, He still would be honoring His promise to Abraham since Moses was a descendant of Abraham. However, instead, God agreed to Moses' intercession on behalf of Israel regarding what the Egyptians might have concluded: "So the LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people." (Exodus 32:14)

All of this is to show that God is indeed a God of love, and although willing to show His wrath and make His power known, He *prefers* mercy instead: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance**." (2nd Peter 3:9) The Calvinist doctrine of Preterition, and its associated non-elect caste, seems to be contradicted by the character of God that is revealed in these Scriptures.

Genesis 20:1-7

"Now Abraham journeyed from there toward the land of the Negev, and settled between Kadesh and Shur; then he sojourned in Gerar. Abraham said of Sarah his wife, 'She is my sister.' So Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, 'Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is married.' Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, 'Lord, will You slay a nation, even though blameless? Did he not himself say to me, "She is my sister"? And she herself said, "He is my brother." In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this.' **Then God said to him in the dream, 'Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her**. Now therefore, restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. **But if you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours**.'"

The text tells us *why* God frustrated Abimelech's attempt to take Sarah as his wife, and it was because God knew that he was innocent in this matter, which God readily acknowledged. God didn't have to do this. He could have just killed Abimelech and all who were his. However, God is infinitely fair-minded and knew that Abimelech had been deceived. So, God frustrated his plans up until that point and gave him one last chance with a solemn warning. Abimelech wisely complied. So, why do Calvinists have an issue here?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Theodore Zachariades: *"Here's man with his free will. Here's man wanting to sleep with this woman. He is the king of the country. He is the most powerful man in the nation. He can do whatever he wants and yet God tells him, 'I did not let you touch her.' Now, this is one example. There are many like it. What does the New Testament tell us? Well, of course, there again, passages, passages and passages. The main reason why I became a Calvinist, if that's the term, is because I recognize that in Ephesians chapter 1 (and this is one of those few places, gentlemen, where 'all' means all) God works all things after the council of His will, even keeping those kings who want to commit adultery from committing so, and when He wants to, He orders those to commit adultery, when He wants to."*[417]

Our reply:

The simple fact that God intervened to frustrate Abimelech's plans does not *disprove* that he had a free and independent will, but rather *proves* it, since God was frustrating Abimelech's own will and intention. Moreover, notice how Calvinists conclude from this narrative that sin ultimately comes from God. That will be a major point of contention.

In a larger sense, the Calvinist perspective seeks to ask why God would *forbid* adultery by Abimelech with Sarah but then *allow* adultery by Abraham with Hager, and if God forbade the former but permitted the latter, doesn't it show that God had a *purpose* in allowing the one and not the other, and moreover, if He purposed to allow something, then doesn't that demonstrate that He, in fact, decreed it? First, in terms of Abimelech, God made a promise that He wouldn't be able to keep if He allowed him to take Sarah as his wife, and so God intervened to thwart him. However,

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[417] *Free Will Debate: What is the Biblical View of Free Will?, 43:10-44:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfyOmkaDtMg*

allowing Abraham to acquiesce to Sarah's wishes to sleep with Hager did not prevent God from still keeping His promise to her. Second, just because something is allowed, doesn't mean that it is wanted. Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. The father allowed his son to leave with his share of the inheritance. So, does his permission indicate that he, in some way, wanted for his son to leave, or had a purpose in his son leaving? The better way to look at it is that the father simply didn't want to hold him against his will and thus acquiesced to his desire to leave. Similarly, God lets people freely reject Him, though that is not what He prefers. Nonetheless, such permission is necessary to having real relationships, since for there to be real love, one must be free to love or free not to love. Mankind is therefore granted autonomy of reason in order to fulfill the relational purposes of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God prevented Abimelech from committing an act of sin. If God could keep him from sinning in this instance, could He not have kept him from sinning in any other given instance? Of course. And yet, He had not done so. Why? He had a purpose in restraining Abimelech in this instance. And if He has a purpose in this instance, does He not have a purpose in all instances, with each and every person? Surely."*[418]

> James White: *"And does this not mean that God's eternal decree, by which He acts in this world, includes the existence of evil for a purpose, one that leads to God's glorification through the work of Jesus Christ in redeeming a people unto Himself?"*[419]

Our reply:

If God has an eternal decree by which He has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then why even speak of God *preventing* or *allowing* something in the first place? Those two concepts do not seem congruent with meticulous, exhaustive determinism.

A major difference between Calvinists and non-Calvinists is over the question of where sin comes from. Does sin come from man, or does it come from God? While some Calvinists may wish to say both, in actuality, Calvinism teaches that sin comes from a decree made by God. Non-Calvinists obviously disagree. In Calvinism, though, God has a purpose for

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[418] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 41.
[419] Ibid.

every single sin, and therefore, even what God permits, He decrees to permit it, and so everything, inclusive of sin and evil, is meticulously and exhaustively determined by God. Calvinists, then, have to weigh and ponder the implications of such a decree.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"If, as we have seen, the Bible teaches the absolute sovereignty of God over His creation and that He has a purpose He is accomplishing in all that happens as part of His divine decree, what of the obvious fact that man makes choices and God holds him accountable for them? Despite the constant misrepresentation of the opponents of God's sovereignty, to fully appreciate the biblical evidence is to recognize that God's decree does not make Him the author of sin."*[420]

Our reply:

Non-Calvinists who reject Calvinism's purported decree therefore do not share the same moral dilemmas and logical conundrums that Calvinists face.

Genesis 50:15-21

"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!' So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, 'Your father charged before he died, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong. And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.'"' And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, 'Behold, we are your servants.' But Joseph said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? As for you, **you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result**, to preserve many people alive. So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' **So he comforted them** and spoke kindly to them."

Joseph's answer to his brothers was meant to reassure them that they could trust him. His answer showed that he truly had forgiven them from his heart, and internally reconciled the matter by believing that God

[420] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 42.

had sent the slave traders in order to bring him where he needed to be, including also preventing his brothers from committing a much worse crime, namely murder.

The nature of the debate with Calvinists is this: Does God redeem evil for good, which is the non-Calvinist perspective, or does God cause evil to redeem, which is the Calvinist perspective? Calvinists depict God as having exhaustively decreed the pride and evil intention of the brothers. (It's sad that Calvinists have chosen a version of divine sovereignty which has them defending why it's good that God is cruel mastermind behind all evil.) Non-Calvinists, instead, believe that God brings some good out of mankind's independently conceived evil. In that way, God acts according to what He knows of the heart and intention of others, so as to take advantage of a given situation, in order to bring about His own will and purpose, in spite of the sin and disobedience of others, thus redeeming good from evil. However, God does not cause what He uses—an important distinction. God uses what others independently cause. So, here you have the brothers intending to kill Joseph, but God wasn't going to allow that. So, God took what was the common practice of that generation, namely slavery, and brought the slave traders into the situation so that the brothers would go with that option instead of murder. Therefore, while the brothers intended death, God intended life, and in the process, God provided a way to get Joseph into Egypt, where he would one day save his entire family. Nowhere in that scenario is God's character impugned. Instead, He is the hero, also demonstrating that He is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-wise.

What do Calvinists believe?

Joseph said to his brothers that, in terms of the evil of slavery that they meant against him, God meant that very same evil thing for good. So, to the extent that Joseph's brothers meant the evil of slavery, God devised, planned and foreordained the inner evil inclinations which rendered it certain. God had *good* intentions in determining their *evil* intentions.

Our reply:

This is a common error of Calvinists. They take unique examples of God working to bring about a good purpose through an ***already*** evil intention of man and then use that as proof that God (1) sovereignly brought about the evil intentions themselves and (2) that He sovereignly works in this same way at all times throughout history. In other words, God didn't cause their evil intentions. God used the evil intentions of others to His own advantage to redeem good from evil. The problem with Calvinism is that it makes their evil intentions part of God's design, and

then when pressed about how that might make God evil, Calvinists defer to mystery, thus abandoning the principles of cause and effect whenever it suits their need.

Did God determine the pride and evil intention of the brothers? Calvinists say yes, but the text does not go that far. The text says that God intended the *event* (namely the act of slavery in order to spare a life from what otherwise would have been the brothers moving ahead with murder), but the text does not say that God caused the evil *motives* of the brothers, which is key because Calvinists *need* for the text to make God the cause of the evil intentions of the brothers, all part of an over-arching theory that God decrees *everything* that comes to pass.

1st John 2:16 states: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." So, how can everything come from God if pride does not come from God? In other words, if the origin of pride is "from the world," then there cannot be an exhaustive divine decree. So, neither Genesis 50:15-21 nor 1st John 2:16 serves the Calvinist's interest in promoting their theory that God causes evil *motives*, pivotal to their theory of exhaustive divine determinism.

The evil intentions of the brothers were the product of their own independent will. God *knew* their hearts and used *their intentions* to His own advantage, so that by their own greed, they would sell Joseph into slavery instead of killing him, and in so doing, God would spare Joseph's life and achieve His objective for getting Joseph into Egypt. So, the point of divergence between Calvinists and non-Calvinists over Genesis 50:20 is not whether both sides believe that God meant the same evil act of slavery, but instead, whether God caused the evil intentions of the brothers. Again, proof that God intends an evil event to happen, does not prove that God determines the motive or desire of all the parties involved in that event.

As an analogy, if my son chooses to sign up for baseball, and he means to have fun by it, I may mean for him to play baseball too, although with perhaps a different objective, in terms of having him learn discipline by it. My approval doesn't mean that I irresistibly caused my son to want to sign up, nor would it mean that I wanted for my son to potentially take up a bad habit of chewing tobacco. It simply means that I acted upon my son's own interests in order to bring about something good. In furthering the analogy, my son becomes quite good at baseball and ultimately achieves a college scholarship. While he may have meant to go to college to party, I would have meant for him to go to college to further his baseball skills and to get an education. Although we both meant the same thing, namely going to college, does that mean that I irresistibly caused him to want to go to college or that I caused him to misuse his important opportunity by engaging in reckless behavior? So, it's perfectly natural for

both parties to have meant the same event, though with completely different motives.[421] This is the best way to understand the intentions of Joseph's brothers, in conjunction with the intentions of God, all while demonstrating how God's holiness would remain perfectly intact.

What do Calvinists believe?

James White: *"I'm not impugning God's character."*[422]

Our reply:

If you are contradicting 1st John 2:16 by suggesting that the pride of the brothers came from God's sovereign decree, rather than from the brothers themselves, then you are indeed impugning the character of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

How could God be able to guarantee the success of His plans if He does not determine the underlying motives and intentions of the people involved? If the brothers truly possessed their own autonomous, libertarian freedom, then it would at least be theoretically possible that the brothers might not have accepted the alternative of slavery, and have instead just gone ahead with the original plan of killing Joseph.

Our reply:

God's own omniscience guarantees the success of His plans. Consider the exchange at Jeremiah 38:17-24 between the prophet Jeremiah and king Zedekiah, in which Jeremiah kept relaying what God showed him about how the king's choices would result in different scenarios. Zedekiah didn't believe him. Ironically, Calvinists might think Zedekiah's doubts would be warranted, if God did not meticulously and exhaustively determine the intentions of everyone involved.

Calvinist objection:

The rebuttal that "just because God ordains evil sometimes, does not prove that God ordains evil all of the time" does not work, because

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[421] Helpful illustration provided by our friends over at the Society of Evangelical Arminians. http://evangelicalarminians.org/

[422] James White, *Genesis 50 De-Calvinized*, 6:48–6:50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jScJZ6MEULY

Scripture reveals a discernable pattern in which God does, in fact, ordain evil very often, and moreover, if it is accepted that God ordains evil, even sometimes, then Calvinism's exhaustive decree of meticulous providence cannot be rejected on the grounds that God would *never* ordain evil.

Our reply:

While it is true that God *sometimes*, not always, incorporates controversial things like slavery (Genesis 50:20) and crucifixion (Acts 2:23) into His redemptive plans, God *never* ordains evil, at least in the sense of causing anyone's evil intentions. That is a key point. Rather than causing anyone's evil motives, desires and intentions, God takes what He *knows* of the evil intentions of others and uses *their intentions* to His own advantage for redeeming good from evil, but never causing the evil that He redeems. Hence, non-Calvinists retain a legitimate basis for rejecting Calvinism's exhaustive decree of meticulous providence.

Exodus 5:10-15

"So the taskmasters of the people and their foremen went out and spoke to the people, saying, 'Thus says Pharaoh, "I am not going to give you any straw. You go and get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, but none of your labor will be reduced."' So the people scattered through all the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw. The taskmasters pressed them, saying, 'Complete your work quota, your daily amount, just as when you had straw.' Moreover, the foremen of the sons of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten and were asked, 'Why have you not completed your required amount either yesterday or today in making brick as previously?' Then the foremen of the sons of Israel came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, 'Why do you deal this way with your servants?'"

Notice the similarly with Calvinism. In Calvinism, it is said that the non-elect suffers from Total Inability to believe in the gospel, and yet are still commanded to repent and believe anyway. Pharaoh does not feel obligated to provide anyone with straw, just as Calvinists insist that God is not obligated to provide anyone with the grace to believe. So does that make God in Calvinism similar to Pharaoh in Egypt, demanding the impossible, and yet holding people responsible anyway and punishing them accordingly? If Pharaoh was being *unjust*, how do Calvinists claim that their depiction of God is *just*, despite essentially doing the same thing? (A *just* God does not command the impossible.)

Exodus 13:2
"'**Sanctify to Me every firstborn**, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; **it belongs to Me**.'"

This is reiterated at Luke 2:23: "As it is written in the Law of the Lord, '**Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord**.'" In Calvinism, would that mean that every firstborn male baby in Israel was among Calvinism's elect? That would imply a birthright salvation, reinforcing something Israel already struggled with, erroneously supposing that all sons of Abraham were saved by default. In Calvinism, would that mean that a firstborn *unbeliever* is a holy Reprobate?

Exodus 21:28-32
"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall surely be stoned and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall go unpunished. **If, however, an ox was previously in the habit of goring and its owner has been warned, yet he does not confine it and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death**. If a ransom is demanded of him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is demanded of him. Whether it gores a son or a daughter, it shall be done to him according to the same rule. If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned."

God establishes His own principle of liability, and the interesting part is how it relates to Calvinism, in terms of how God would avoid liability after having allegedly ordained sin.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"But where it is a matter of men's counsels, wills, endeavours, and exertions, there is greater difficulty in seeing how the providence of God rules here too, so that nothing happens but by His assent and that men can deliberately do nothing unless He inspire it."*[423]

> John Calvin: *"Thinking that the difficulty here may be resolved by a single word, some are foolish enough serenely to overlook what occasions the greatest ambiguity; namely, how God may be free of*

[423] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 171-172, emphasis mine.

guilt in doing the very thing that He condemns in Satan and the reprobate and which is to be condemned by men."[424]

John Calvin: *"We learn that nothing happens but what seems good to God. How then is God to be exempted from the blame to which Satan with his instruments is liable?"*[425]

Our reply:

When Calvinists say that sinners only, not God, are blameworthy for their desire to sin, even though Calvinists simultaneously say that their desire for sin is immutably determined by God and rendered certain, it's like saying that if a man trains one of his animals to be dangerous and lets it loose upon a person and it kills them, the animal is solely to blame and not the owner. However, according to the Book of Exodus, the owner is also to blame.

So if Calvinism were true, and if God wished to avoid hypocrisy involving sin, He must acknowledge responsibility and culpability for the wants of sinners that He allegedly renders certain. Calvinists avoid this by saying God is not held to the same standards that He sets forth for man, but which is also not unlike saying: "Do as I say, not as I do." However, that's the exact opposite of what the Bible teaches when it affirms that we are to do as God does: "For it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1st Peter 1:16) and "'Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'" (Matthew 5:48) Non-Calvinists do not accept an answer of: "Well, it's a mystery!"

Leviticus 16:29-34

"'This shall be a **permanent statute** for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the **native, or the alien** who sojourns among you; for it is on this day that **atonement shall be made for you** to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD. It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute. So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, and make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. **He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly**. Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make **atonement for**

[424] Ibid., 179, emphasis mine.
[425] Ibid., 180, emphasis mine.

the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year.' And just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he did."

If the Old Covenant sacrifices foreshadowed the New Covenant atonement of Calvary, and if those Old Covenant sacrifices were made indiscriminately "for all the people of the assembly," that is, "atonement for the son's Israel" in general, then how do Calvinists say that the New Covenant atonement was not also made indiscriminately for all people? (Likewise, the atonement at Numbers 21:6-9 was also made indiscriminately available to all who were bitten.)

What do Calvinists believe?

The Old Testament sacrifices were offered only for those who believe, rather than being offered for all Israel.

Our reply:

The benefits were certainly only for those who believe, but that does not change the fact that the Levitical sacrifices were *provided* for all Israel, and in the case of Yom Kippur, the "Day of Atonement," it included every soul within the borders of Israel, both native and alien, so that all for whom it is offered may benefit from it, if it is received by faith, since it is only efficacious through faith.

> Dave Hunt: *"...the Levitical sacrifices were for all Israelites, though most rebelled. That only those who believed were saved does not mean salvation was only offered to them."*[426]

Numbers 21:6-9

"The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that **everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live**.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."

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[426] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 384.

Jesus cited this event at John 3:14-15: "'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

Verse 6 states that many Israelites had died because of the fiery serpents that God had sent. Did He not love them? God preserved only those who He wanted to preserve among the Israelites. It's the same today. God saves who He wants to save from out from this world, and just as the serpent was not a provision for all other nations, neither is the Cross a provision for all others, except the elect, the Bridegroom's wife.

Our reply:

In other words, by this view, the serpents killed off all of the "non-elect," so that only "the elect" were alive and remaining for the provision. How would that be indicative of Calvary? The common view of Calvinists is that the only thing that can be gleaned from Numbers 21:6-9, when quoted at John 3:14-15, is the *manner* in which Jesus was lifted up, which symbolized the Cross. However, the provision at Numbers 21:6-9 was also a form of an atonement, and therefore it becomes very telling. It satisfied God's justice. It would save their life. There was a condition attached to it, as stipulated by God. It was God's sovereign choice to make it efficacious only upon active participation. In spite of the existence of the provision, if someone chose not to look upon it, then they perished, even though everything necessary for their salvation was fully provided. That provides some terrific lessons for Calvary. People can perish and die in their sins today, even though everything necessary for their salvation has been fully provided by God. It's not a double-payment by sinners in Hell, but rather people having declined to receive the payment that would have otherwise satisfied their debt, thus establishing a basis for accountability.

As an analogy, if you choose not to cash a check that was written out to you, that doesn't mean that the check was bad. So, too, those who refuse Jesus' free gift of forgiveness cannot allege a double payment, since the transaction, though perfectly valid and completed on the giver's end, was never completed on the recipient's end.

Deuteronomy 5:29

"'**Oh that they had such a heart in them**, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, **that it may be well with them** and with their sons forever!'"

This is reminiscent of Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 18:11, Ezekiel 33:7-11 and Matthew 23:37. From these words, it is hard to deny God's salvific intent for mankind. Calvinists have two choices: (a) Either God doesn't really mean what He is saying, and these words should be understood from the perspective of being anthropomorphisms, or (b) God does mean what He says, but these words can only be applied toward Calvinism's elect. However, neither statement is a compelling argument.

What do Calvinists believe?

This expresses God's heart toward the rebellious people of Israel. Despite their rejection, He passionately desired their covenant blessings anyway. Although He had not effectually called them to salvation, this verse reveals a desire on God's part that was not in accordance with what, for higher reasons, He had decreed.

Our reply:

That explanation takes the route that God doesn't really mean what He says. Calvinism's "Secret Will" simply does not match God's stated passion. It seems to present God as compassionate and merciful while having decreed the opposite. However, if instead, God had made their return possible, but the people refused, then their refusal would in no way diminish the true sincerity on God's part.

This verse must be very confusing to Calvinists since Calvinists believe that God simply installs a regenerated new heart whenever He wants to. It's like saying: "Oh that the non-elect would have the same regenerated new heart that I irresistibly give to the elect."

Deuteronomy 29:4

"Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear."

Evident from Isaiah 6:9-10 and Jeremiah 18:11-13, this type of spiritual blindness in God's people from judicial hardening is attributable to a failure to properly respond to His grace. With all of the signs and wonders shown to Israel, their status was inexcusable. The problem with Calvinism, though, is that it takes such passages out of context and incorporates them into a general systematic whereby everyone is born blinded and hardened and cannot respond to God unless He has elected them to receive regeneration. The truth is that they can and should respond to God, and He is indignant when they say they cannot: "'But they will say, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of

us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart." Therefore thus says the Lord, "Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done a most appalling thing."'" (Jeremiah 18:12-13) When people properly respond to God, the veil of ignorance is taken away. (2nd Corinthians 3:14)

Deuteronomy 29:29

"The **secret things** belong to the LORD our God, but the **things revealed** belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."

The context is in regard to the judgments of God, in terms of the plagues and diseases (Deuteronomy 29:22), the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim (v.23), and the prophecy that God will do the same to Israel, for having forsaken their covenant with the Lord who led them out of Egypt. (v.25) "Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?" Answer: because "they went and served other gods." (v.26) "Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book." (v.27) The result is that "the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day." (v.28) The conclusion at v.29 is that the secret things (i.e. these judgments) are God's concern, and that man's business is to obey Him. You could argue from vv.3-5 that God's business also includes hardening and blinding the disobedient: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear." This is reminiscent of Isaiah 6:10 and Isaiah 65:2.

God works in mysterious ways. This is why we trust in God. This is why Job maintained his faith in spite of adversity, which appeared to have even come from God. There are things that we don't know, but we can maintain our trust in God's character to always do right and to ultimately set things straight. In terms of secret things, there are secret things of heaven, which are unlawful for a man to speak (1st Corinthians 2:7-9; 2nd Corinthians 12:4), and the mystery of the ages which has now been revealed as God indwelling man. (Romans 16:25-27; Colossians 1:26) Jesus also states: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." (Matthew 13:33) Jesus also describes the mystery of the work of the Holy Spirit: "'Do not be amazed that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not

know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'" (John 3:7-8)

What do Calvinists believe?

> Mark Kielar: *"You can't stand there stagnant in disputing your conversion or your election, if you're sincere. Just get down to repenting and believing. Cry to God for converting grace. And stick to the things that God has revealed to you, because as Deuteronomy 29:29 puts it: 'The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.'"*[427]

Our reply:

However, the context doesn't indicate that the "secret things" refer to a Calvinistic election. Moreover, by "converting grace," that is meant to indicate Calvinism's Irresistible Grace, though in Calvinism, one must already be granted a "converting grace" in order to have the desire to cry out and ask for it. This is what happens when Calvinists mix evangelism with Calvinism—their evangelism ends up contradicting their Calvinism, and which is a good thing.

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

"'For this commandment which I command you today is **not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach**. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?" But **the word is very near you**, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it. See, **I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity**; in that I **command** you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. **But if** your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I

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[427] Mark Kielar, *How Do I Know If I'm One of God's Elect?*, 8:27-8:59. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RClNArrlt7A

call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you **life and death, the blessing and the curse**. So **choose life in order that you may live**, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.'"

The addition to God's "command" of "but if" shows that He allows His commands to be thwarted, within this brief space in eternity, of which there are consequences. Moreover, God's command to follow Him is "not too difficult" and does not require an Irresistible Grace from Heaven. They merely need to "choose life" in order that they may live.

So where do we get our idea of free-will in the Bible? It is all throughout the Bible, including right here in Deuteronomy. God is not saying that He is choosing for them. He is making *them* decide which it will be.

Chapter 2: The Books of History

Joshua 11:18-20

"Joshua waged war a long time with all these kings. There was not a city which made peace with the sons of Israel except the Hivites living in Gibeon; they took them all in battle. For **it was of the LORD to harden their hearts**, to meet Israel in battle in order that he might **utterly destroy** them, that they might receive **no mercy**, but that he might **destroy them**, just as the LORD had commanded Moses."

God's will to "harden their hearts," to show them "no mercy" and to "destroy them" would be *consequent* to their own evil deeds, and which was perhaps necessary so that they would not corrupt Israel with their idolatry. For God's part, we know from Ezekiel 18:23 that God would prefer that the wicked turn from their sins, repent and be spared, even as evident from the Book of Jonah. God had decreed the destruction of Nineveh and directed Jonah to deliver the message, and when Nineveh repented, God relented on His threats of judgment. So, whenever we see examples from Scripture in which God determined to destroy and judge a nation, it is always understood as conditional, especially evident at Jeremiah 18:7-8: "'At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"We do not make the minds of men to be impelled by force external to them so that they rage furiously; nor do we transfer to God the cause of hardening, in such a way that they did not voluntarily and by their own wickedness and hardness of heart spur themselves on to obstinacy. What we say is that men act perversely not without God's ordination that it be done, as Scripture teaches. Similarly it is said elsewhere that the fact that the inhabitants of Gibeon opposed Israel was ordained by God who made their heart obstinate (Josh 11.20)."*[428]

Our reply:

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[428] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 174-175, emphasis mine.

Notice how contradictory Calvinism is. On the one hand, man acts "voluntarily and by their own wickedness" but then it is immediately followed by "God's ordination." It would seem that the objective of Calvinists is to find places in Scripture where God is portrayed in a negative light, in order to then ask: How is that morally superior to what you deem morally objectionable in Calvinism? The primary goal of the Calvinist is to defend absolute determinism. The existence of sin complicates things, and so Calvinists resolve the complication by showing that sin has a place in the overall plan and purpose of God. This way, no one can object to exhaustive determinism on the grounds that God would never ordain sin. The counter-argument to such exhaustive determinism is by highlighting *conditionality* in Scripture, whereby sin is not an ordination of God, but rather is something that God permits of an independent party and judges accordingly.

Joshua 24:15

"'If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, **choose for yourselves today whom you will serve**: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.'"

Our choices matter to God, but what would be the value of our choices if God had already, secretly decreed all of our choices for us? In other words, if God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including all of the thoughts and intentions of the heart, then while we certainly *make* choices, we wouldn't really *have* a choice, besides what is chosen for us. Moreover, why would God respond with approval or displeasure, if *our* choices were really just and extension of *His decreed choices*? If Calvinists were to deny that God makes our choices for us, but merely that God renders our choices certain, then that would seem like a distinction without a difference.

Lucifer became Satan through a choice, and a third of the angels became demons by their choice. Conversely, two thirds of the angels also remained as angels by their choice. Adam and Even fell by their choice. So it seems that our choices matter to God, and it also seems that God has placed the eternal destination of our soul within our own choosing, or else why would God warn us not to place material wealth above the value of our soul? Matthew 16:26 states: "'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'"

What do Calvinists believe?

This was only a choice according to their flesh, as any actual choice for God was already made for them. If God had not made the choice to select some to save, then none would want God and all would reject Him and perish.

Our reply:

We believe that it is highly disrespectful for Calvinists to say that apart from Irresistible Grace, no one would want God. Second, the doctrine of total inability to respond to God's grace was first established by unrepentant Israel at Jeremiah 18:12, which God rebuked at v.13. Third, it is apparent that the reason why one person would choose to respond to God's invitation, and not another, is attributable to the free-will choice of the individual. Simply ask Calvinists why Adam and Eve, who were directly created by God as innocent creatures, chose to rebel? (The same question is applicable to the pre-Fall angels as well.) So, Calvinists must either to defer to the free-will choice of the individuals (in agreement with non-Calvinists) or claim that God decreed and rendered certain for innocent creatures to sin. Some Calvinists simply refuse to answer.[429]

> Adrian Rogers: *"God is a God who gives us the choice. Now I want to give you some Choice Principles. You are free to choose God. God says, 'I set before you life and death, blessing and cursing.' Here you're in the Valley of Decision. There's a mountain of misery and a mountain of mercy. You can choose. You are free to choose. Now, I am a Calvinist to the degree that I believe that God is sovereign. But I am not a Calvinist to the degree that I believe that God does not enable anybody to choose, or that God chooses for anybody. God gives you the choice. You must choose. And God says to all of us, 'Choose you this day.'"*[430]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Jesus came to deliver you. Jesus came to set you free. He came to give you peace and power, forgiveness of sin and a home in heaven, but He will not force it upon you. The same*

[429] "But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don't know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know" R.C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers Inc., 1986), 31.

[430] Adrian Rogers, *Choices Made in the Valley of Decision: Joshua 8:1*, 1996.

> *God that gave to Lucifer the power of choice, gives to you the power of choice. 'Choose you this day whom you will serve.'"*[431]
>
> Adrian Rogers: *"Your responsibility is your response to His ability. ... Now you must choose. Listen, you can't do it without Him; He will not do it without you. You must yield. ... When temptation comes, you must yield, and you will yield. That much is settled. The only question is, which way you will yield? Will you yield to Satan, or will you yield to Christ?"*[432]

1st Samuel 3:11-14

"The LORD said to Samuel, 'Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle. In that day I will carry out against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons brought a curse on themselves and he did not rebuke them. Therefore I have sworn to the house of Eli that **the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be atoned for by sacrifice or offering forever**.'"

Eli did the opposite of what the faithful Israelites did at Exodus 32:29: "Then Moses said, 'Dedicate yourselves today to the LORD--for every man has been against his son and against his brother--in order that He may bestow a blessing upon you today.'" The egregious sin of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, is that they had desecrated the worship of God in Israel by sleeping with women in the tabernacle and mocking God's sacrifices: "Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD." (1st Samuel 2:17) The curse that they had brought upon themselves was the end of the line for the house of Eli from its priestly heritage, forever. They had crossed the line, so to speak, from being able to have this judgment atoned for, meaning that God would not change His mind concerning the calamity with which He was now going to judge it. Fulfillment of this curse is found with Abiathar, descendant of Eli, who was a faithful priest for King David, but turned against David when David's son, Adonijah, tried to take the crown from Solomon. (1st Kings 1:7). The result was this proclamation from King Solomon: "Then to Abiathar the priest the king said, 'Go to Anathoth to your own field, for you deserve to die; but I will not put you to death at this time, because you carried the ark of the Lord GOD before my father David, and because you were afflicted in everything with which my

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[431] Adrian Rogers, *From the Palace to the Pit: Ezekiel 28:8*, 2004.
[432] Adrian Rogers, *Abounding Victory Thru Amazing Grace: Romans 6:6-7*, 1994.

father was afflicted.' So Solomon dismissed Abiathar from being priest to the LORD, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD, which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh." (1st Kings 2:26-27) Also perhaps in fulfillment of the curse was the murder of 85 priests of Nob, descendants of Eli, whom Saul, in a fit of rage, had "Doeg the Edomite" murder. (1st Samuel 22:22)

What do Calvinists believe?

These are people that Jesus could not have died for, since their sin cannot be atoned for, ever. So when someone comes along and says that Jesus loves the world and died for everyone, show them this passage. Not these people! Not the house of Eli!

Our reply:

There is no mention in the prophecy of 1st Samuel 2:28-36 that says that the "curse" on the house of Eli was that every one of its descendants was doomed to Hell. Instead, the unatonable curse on the house of Eli was premature death, poverty and the loss of its priestly heritage, and there was no sacrifice or offering that would remedy that judgment. So, the argument is not whether the curse was unatonable, but what exactly the "curse" was.

1st Samuel 23:9-13

"Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the **ephod** here.' Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. **Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard?** O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.' And the LORD said, '**He will come down**.' Then David said, 'Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?' And the LORD said, '**They will surrender you**.' Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit."

God claimed to know something with absolute certainty but which never actually happened, though *would* have occurred had David stayed.[433]

[433] For a similar discussion on God's "Middle Knowledge," see also Jeremiah 38:17-24, Matthew 11:20-24 and Matthew 26:34.

This begs the question: *How* could God infallibly know what never actually happened? Did God know it because (a) He is an extremely good estimator, or (b) because God determined all things and thus knows all possibilities to the extent that He knows all that He fixed and determined, or (c) did God know it because He searches the hearts of men and knows what is in them? Jeremiah 17:10 states: "'I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"He knows all things that will happen because he ordains everything that does happen. This is crucial to our understanding of God's omniscience. He does not know what will happen by virtue of exceedingly good guesswork about future events. He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it."*[434]

Our reply:

So, then, from the Calvinist's perspective, should David have more precisely asked: "Did you counterfactually decree that the men of Keilah would surrender me into the hand of Saul?"

What do Calvinists believe?

God could no more infallibly know an *undetermined* event than to make a square circle. It's a logical fallacy. So if man really was free, as autonomous, libertarian free-will implies, then man's choices would be undetermined, and if undetermined, they would be logically unknowable. This is why those who consistently believe in such libertarian free-will must become Open Theists.[435] Nevertheless, God does infallibly know contingencies, that is, that which would have otherwise occurred, simply as a function of all that which *has* been meticulously decreed.

Our reply:

To say that God can only infallibly know what He determines really lowers the bar on divine omniscience, and if that really was the case,

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[434] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 172.
[435] See the quotes provided in the following article:
http://www.examiningcalvinism.com/files/Articles/Omniscience.html

then why even speak of divine foreknowledge at all? Why not just speak of foreordination instead?

The difficulty in this matter is that although we believe that God knows *everything*, we don't exactly know how God knows *anything*, and which is not necessarily due to a logical conundrum, but simply due to the fact that God is a complex Being, in which we do not yet have all of the answers. For instance, we believe that God is eternal, though we cannot explain *how*. God exists, and yet is uncreated. How? It's not necessarily a logical conundrum, but rather a mystery that simply awaits the revelation of God's nature.

1st Samuel 24:4

"The men of David said to him, 'Behold, this is the day of which the LORD said to you, "Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and **you shall do to him as it seems good to you**."' Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly."

God did not tell David what to do with Saul but left it in his hands to decide, and David chose mercy. However, if God had eternally decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then the idea of God giving David the choice about what to do with Saul would be misleading, and which represents one of the more troubling aspects about Calvinism, as it drastically alters the plain reading of Scripture in contradictory fashion.[436]

It seems odd that God, according to Calvinism, would want for people to think that they are choosing something when yet it is actually a matter of God who has made all choices for them, both good and evil. How do Calvinists think that God would be benefitting from such a thing?

2nd Samuel 24:1

"Now again **the anger of the LORD** burned against Israel, and **it incited David** against them to say, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.'"

David's census, of course, was a sin. Verse 10 states: "Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the LORD, 'I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have acted very foolishly.'" So, how could it be David's sin, when yet it was *God* who had incited David to commit the sin? There's more. 1st Chronicles 21:1-2 states: "Then Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel. So David said to Joab and to the princes of the people, 'Go, number Israel from Beersheba even to Dan, and bring me word that I may know

[436] See Genesis 2:19 for a similar discussion.

their number.'" So, not only was the census a sin, for which David himself took the blame, and not only was it God who incited David to commit this sin, but it was also Satan who moved David to sin.

What do Calvinists believe?

God ordained David's sin. Satan was the instrument through which David was tempted and carried out God's will for David to sin. The decree of God both establishes "second causes" and the responsibility of those individuals who commit the sinful acts that God decrees for the ultimate manifestation of His glory.

Our reply:

There is a similar passage in the Book of Job which reveals a more sensible way to understand what is actually going on. According to Job 2:7, the *devil* harmed Job, and at Job 2:3, God says that *He* harmed Job: "...you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." Sound familiar? However, the context reveals that what actually happened was that God had taken personal responsibility for having granted *permission* to the devil to harm Job, though with certain restrictions. So God took responsibility for allowing it, but that doesn't mean that God was in agreement with the devil, or that He wanted the devil to succeed against Job, in getting him to doubt God. Instead, here is what we know from the text: God was angry with Israel's sin, and Satan brought his usual accusation before God and makes his usual demand to be allowed to harm someone. (Job 1:11-12; Luke 22:31-32) Since God was angry with Israel and sees a benefit in bringing judgment upon it in order to motivate it toward repentance and restoration, He allows Satan to do as he asks. Whereas Satan was a willing party to harm Israel, God was a reluctant party to permit it, knowing that Israel had to experience the judgment that it brought upon itself, like a reluctant parent having to discipline their beloved child in order to instill good moral character. In this way, the entire matter is resolved, and without impugning the character of God.

2nd Samuel 24:11-14

"When David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 'Go and speak to David, "Thus the LORD says, '**I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you**.'"" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, 'Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what

answer I shall return to Him who sent me.' Then David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.'"

Similarly, as with 1st Samuel 24:4, God gave a choice to David to make. Given three options, David decided: "Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man." (2nd Samuel 24:14) So, God did according to David's choice, but if all human choices are the product of an eternal decree, including David's choice, then why would God seek to mislead people in this manner? The alternative is that God is not misleading people at all, and there is no such "immutable decree" as taught by Calvinists.

1st Kings 21:29

"'Do you **see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me?** Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

Unregenerate sinners do not possess sufficient moral strength to humble their own heart, to the pleasing of God, and therefore God must perform that spiritual work for them.

Our reply:

Do Calvinists mean to say that God caused Ahab to irresistibly humble himself and then God acted amazed by it? Ahab perished rebelling against God, and therefore would not be a fitting candidate for one of Calvinism's elect. Yet, at one point in Ahab's life, he did sincerely humble himself before God and it pleased God. So, to what do we attribute this? The only way this makes any real sense is if Ahab *could* have either chosen to humble himself or not, and by making the right choice, God received glory and withheld His judgment.

Even as unregenerate sinners, fallen man is capable of performing single acts of goodness. However, single acts of goodness are insufficient to enter Heaven. Since God is holy, only sinless perfection will do. Thankfully, Christ's shed blood at Calvary achieves exactly the level of sinless perfection necessary to enter Heaven, and Christ's atonement is available to anyone, simply at the asking.

2nd Kings 19:25-28

"'Have you not heard? Long ago I did it; From ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps. Have you not heard? Long ago I did it; from ancient times I planned it. Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, they were dismayed and put to shame; they were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, as grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up. But I know your sitting down, and your going out and your coming in, and your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me, and because your arrogance has come up to My ears, therefore **I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came**.'"

God knew about the evil intentions of King Sennacherib of Assyria (v.27), and "planned" to use it to His own advantage. To bring judgment upon Israel, all God needed to do was to lift His hand of protection. God did not need to push the Assyrians out the door. They already desired to plunder Israel.

What do Calvinists believe?

God's determined-will is that King Sennacherib of Assyria would do exactly as God had stated, and which proves that divine determinism and human freedom are not incompatible, which serves as the basis for "Compatibilism" or "Compatibilistic free-will."

Our reply:

God did not cause King Sennacherib's evil intentions but rather used it to His own advantage, for the purpose of judging disobedient Israel. The king's slaughter of many people was an evil sin, but that is due to the king's own *independent* will, which God planned to put to use.

As for God having put a "hook" in the king's "nose" and driving him back home, that was a matter of situational force, as the defeated king had no other *feasible* choice but to return back home. As an analogy, someone might say, "I had to obey the Court Order." That is not meant to imply that they are a puppet for a third party or that they are being programmed in their choices, but rather that the circumstances dictated that their only feasible choice was to take a certain course of action.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: "*How could it have been God's eternal purpose to judge this generation of Israel that was judged by the Assyrians? How could He do that? Because He's dependent upon the evil intentions of the Assyrians which do not arise from a divine decree? Now I would argue that means He could not have known them anyways, but that's another issue."*[437]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, God decrees whatsoever comes to pass, including the motives and intentions of every created being throughout all time. So, according to Calvinism, (a) God had to determine their intentions or else if He didn't exhaustively and precisely determine their intentions, then (b) He couldn't infallibly *know* what their intentions would be, and if He couldn't infallibly know what their intentions would be, then (c) He couldn't have had an eternal plan, and if He didn't have an eternal plan, then (d) He couldn't have had an eternal purpose, and if He didn't have an eternal purpose, then (e) it follows that everything that happens must be random and pointless. Of course, (a) through (e) completely unravels if one accepts the belief that God is capable of knowing something without causing it. Additionally, 1st John 2:16 indicates that evil intentions come from the world, without saying that it somehow comes from God in order to execute His plans. Calvinists seem to have a really low view of God's omniscience and omnipotence, if they really think that God must play both sides of the chess board in order to win.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Which means He cannot discipline or judge others unless given the opportunity by the rebellion of autonomous, libertarianly free creatures."*[438]

Our reply:

Why would God even want to judge these creatures unless they freely sinned? The answer from Calvinism is that God [allegedly] needs to do this in order to have a script whereby He can display His various divine

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[437] *Does Isaiah 10 prove Determinism?*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upzG62s2018, 1:05:31–1:05:49.
[438] Ibid., 1:32:34–1:32:43.

attributes, which is somehow a really important thing, despite an otherwise apparent vain and petty aspiration. Calvinism is beneath God's dignity.

In Calvinism, God wants to create a people and then decree their evil intentions so that He can punish them. The Calvinist complaint is that free-will might otherwise get in the way and deny God the opportunity to have an eternal plan to do this. The bottom line in Calvinism is exhaustive divine determinism, without which, God could neither know people's future intentions nor have any sure plan concerning them. That is the systematic that Calvinists drag into their Bible interpretations.

2nd Kings 20:1-7

"In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him and said to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Set your house in order, **for you shall die and not live**."' Then he turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD, saying, 'Remember now, O LORD, I beseech You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a whole heart and have done what is good in Your sight.' And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, 'Return and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, "Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, 'I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. **I will add fifteen years to your life**, and I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake.'"' Then Isaiah said, 'Take a cake of figs.' And they took and laid it on the boil, and he recovered."

God says that 15 years were added to Hezekiah's life. However, in Calvinism's fixed and unchangeable decree, nothing can change from whatever was originally decreed, and so how would Calvinists explain something changing, unless they don't really believe anything changed at all, but was only made to look that way to Hezekiah. But, then, how could God be truthful in saying to him, "…you shall die and not live"? The alternative is that Calvinism is wrong and not everything is fixed by God. Surely, God's knows the end from the beginning but that doesn't necessary mean that God caused it all. Outside of Calvinism, the conclusion is that God meant what He said but was moved to compassion to relent when Hezekiah humbled himself and prayed. So, prayer changes things.[439] That's why Determinism seems to be an odd way of reading Scripture. According to Determinism, this was an entirely scripted event, despite the

[439] See also the topical discussion on *Prayer*.

appearance of God experiencing a moving event and adding more time to his life.

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

This also establishes the fact that God makes Himself accessible to those who seek Him, reminiscent of the apostle Paul's evangelical sermon to the Athenians: "'And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, **that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us**.'" (Acts 17:26-27)

Jeremiah 17:10 similarly states: "'I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds.'" God "weighs the motives" (Proverbs 16:2) and "weighs the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2), "searching all the innermost parts of his being." (Proverbs 20:27) Why would God weigh and search what Calvinism says that He already meticulously decreed? So, this verse begs for an interpretation that God is searching the hearts of those whose thoughts that He has not decreed.

> Dave Hunt: *"Yes, God judges 'the intentions of the heart,' but Calvinism falsely says that He causes the intentions He judges."*[440]

> Dave Hunt: *"...'the LORD pondereth the hearts'--a meaningless statement if God decrees every thought, word, and deed. What would He ponder?"*[441]

If God had pre-determined everything, then this statement is deeply superfluous and even false. Calvinists might play their metaphor card at this point, but that's nonsense. A cry for "metaphor" would undermine the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture here. Second, there is a powerful statement from God Himself concerning Solomon's conditional covenantal fellowship with God: "...but if you forsake Him, He will reject

[440] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 327.
[441] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 129.

you forever." There's room for healthy debate over whether this rejection is about salvation and/or Solomon's royal vocation. Either way, though, this is an explicit endorsement of Conditional Election. Calvinists would have to claim that God foreordained Solomon's fellowship with God and also Solomon's idolatrous turn from God—all for the sake of His glory! Imagine that! God ordains idolatry for the sake of His own glory, even though He commands the opposite in the Scriptures. Isn't it wonderful "God-centered" theology to sacrifice God's character and testimonies on an altar to His sovereignty?[442]

2nd Chronicles 18:18-22

"Micaiah said, 'Therefore, hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing on His right and on His left. The Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab king of Israel to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord and said, "I will entice him." And the Lord said to him, "How?" He said, "I will go and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "**You are to entice him and prevail also. Go and do so**." Now therefore, behold, the Lord has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of these your prophets, for the Lord has proclaimed disaster against you.'"

This is reminiscent of a "sting operation." The purpose of a police "sting operation" is not necessarily to add more evil to the world but to curtail it by bringing an end to criminals and their criminal behavior.

Similarly, 2nd Thessalonians 2:11-12 states: "For this reason God will send upon them a **deluding influence** so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be **judged who did not believe the truth**, but took pleasure in wickedness." Those who are dedicated to rejecting the truth will be given lies to believe, and it's in that context, that Ahab was deceived, though even with that, God still would have gladly welcomed his repentance, as God had done before. 1st Kings 21:29 states: "'Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.'"

King Ahab heard *more* than just a lie. He was also told the truth. After the prophet's initial sarcastic response, Ahab demanded: "How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" (2nd Chronicles 18:15) Once King Ahab recognized that Micaiah was now telling the *truth*, he exclaimed to King Jehoshaphat: "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but

[442] Helpful explanation from our friends at The Society of Evangelical Arminians.

evil?" King Ahab foolishly chose to act on the lie and was killed in battle. However, if God had wanted to make certain that Ahab would fail, why would He allow Micaiah to reveal the *whole story* behind the scenes? Obviously, God didn't want for him to fail, and which is also indicative of Ezekiel 33:11: "'Say to them, "As I live!" declares the Lord God, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?"'"

What do Calvinists believe?

While God does not sin, He decrees, ordains and commands sin. In this passage, God decreed the sin of false prophecy, and used a lying spirit to deceive Ahab. So, how is that morally superior to what is deemed objectionable in Calvinism? In other words, if you can accept this verse, then why can't you accept the fact that God ordains sin?

Our reply:

The passage makes no mention of any decree, and God did not force anyone to participate. It was completely ***voluntary***: "Who will entice Ahab king of Israel…." That's hardly a command. God was asking for a volunteer who will entice Ahab into battle. So, a spirit ***volunteered*** by explaining that they will be a "deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." God told the volunteer to go and do so.

Calvinists believe in a type of "sovereignty" which manifests itself in the form of exhaustive determinism. The problem is that the world includes sin, and so for Calvinists to maintain exhaustive determinism, they need to explain it in relation to the world's sin. So, Calvinists heavily nuance the meaning of what God "decrees," though which just ends up being little more than double-talk.

Why do Calvinists scour the Scriptures in search of a text that can be used to prove that God does immoral things like lying and deceiving? The answer is because the primary objection against Calvinism's doctrine of exhaustive determinism is that God would *never* commit moral evil, such as ordaining sin as the author of sin, and so for Calvinists to prevent exhaustive determinism from being automatically disqualified, they seek to find things in the Bible that shows God doing immoral things. Non-Calvinists would, of course, then be obliged to defend God's holiness from Calvinism's proof-texts.

The fact of the matter is that God didn't make anyone do anything in this passage. Hence, God's holiness is preserved. It was completely voluntary, and moreover, Ahab was also given the *truth*, in terms of

everything that was going on behind the scenes in Heaven, which was more than even righteous Job was given. God was testing Ahab. The difference between testing and temptation is that God tests people, desiring that they pass (1st Kings 21:29), while the devil tempts people, trying to get them to fail. (Luke 22:31) God is good. Calvinists agree, but also insist that God ordains wickedness. Non-Calvinists insist that *both cannot be true*.

2nd Chronicles 24:19
"Yet He sent prophets to them **to bring them back** to the LORD; though they testified against them, **they would not listen**."

This is reminiscent of Matthew 23:37, and in fact, God said of the Pharisees and the lawyers that they had "rejected God's purpose for themselves" by having not been baptized by John the Baptist. (Luke 7:30) Ultimately, Calvinists will need to insist that the subject party does not include Calvinism's elect, such that the text only addresses the non-elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

The purpose of sending the prophets was to show God's glory.

Our reply:

The purpose of sending the prophets was to "bring them back."

Calvinists would say that if God *really* wanted to bring them back, then He would have effectually regenerated them, which is another way of describing Irresistible Grace. However, Scripture shows that Irresistible Grace is not even something that God considers to be an option. Isaiah 5:3-4 states: "'And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. **What more** was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when **I expected** it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?'" Irresistible Grace was not an option on the table, and yet God clearly wanted for them to turn back to Him, and sent His prophets for that very purpose. Ultimately, as with John 5:40, it comes down to God having been *willing*, while His people were *unwilling*. Calvinists see an inherent weakness in this, but it also reflects a sense of depth and richness within God that Calvinism simply cannot account for, meaning real relationships. Human experience teaches us that relationships don't always go our way, and by allowing such relationships, God exposes Himself to being rejected, and of course, also being genuinely loved. Can Irresistible Grace produce genuine relationships?

Ezra 7:13
"I make a decree, that all they of the people of Israel, and of his priests and Levites, in my realm, which are **minded of their own freewill** to go up to Jerusalem, go with thee." [*KJV*]

This is one of 17 references to "freewill" that occurs in the Bible, as found in the *King James Version* of the Bible. There are also several other texts in which freewill is implied:

> **Genesis 49:6:** "Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their **self-will** they lamed oxen."
>
> **1st Peter 5:2:** "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but **voluntarily**, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness."
>
> **Luke 12:57:** "'And why do you not even on your **own initiative** judge what is right?'"
>
> **1st Corinthians 9:17:** "For if I do this **voluntarily**, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me."
>
> **Philemon 2:14:** "But without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of **your own free will**."
>
> So "freewill" is not a pagan term but a biblical term.

Nehemiah 9:28-31
"But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and many times You rescued them according to Your compassion, and admonished them in order to turn them back to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. However, **You bore with them for many years, and admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets, yet they would not give ear**. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Your

great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God."

Isaiah 65:2 similarly states: "'I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face.'" God instructed Israel by His Spirit, and yet they would not turn back. He "bore with them for many years," which is the same word used at John 6:44 for "draw."

It's not that God can't save. He can. It's not that God won't save. He will. God puts it back upon man to repent in order to receive His grace. Isaiah 59:1-2 states: "Behold, the LORD's hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But **your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God**, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." Therefore, separation is conditional and is removed when people repent of their sins.

Chapter 3: The Books of Wisdom

Job 1:9-12

"Then Satan answered the LORD, 'Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not **made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has**, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But **put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face**.' Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.' So Satan departed from the presence of the LORD."

Irresistible Grace means that the elect are regenerated against their totally depraved will, so as to be *made willing*. So, if Job was one of Calvinism's elect, endowed with an Irresistible Grace, then why would the devil construct an argument around something that Job would have no free-will to resist? In other words, Satan never would have agreed to go along with God's decision to test Job if Satan knew that God would rig the outcome against him. That said, Satan also thought he could get Jesus to sin too, in having tempted Him at Matthew 4:1-11, and therefore some caution ought to be shown whenever constructing a point involving Satan's actions. Nonetheless, if Calvinism was true, and if the devil knew and understood it, then the better question would have been: "Have You not [given him an Irresistible Grace]? But [take away his Irresistible Grace and give him free-will] and touch all that he has; he will surely curse You to Your face." Instead, Satan seems to think that the "hedge about him and his house and all that he has" is what keeps Job faithful to God, while yet according to Calvinism, Irresistible Grace and Persevering Grace are what keeps Job faithful to God.

Job 2:3

"The LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although **you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause**.'"

Notice how God took personal responsibility for *allowing* Satan to proceed with his challenge against Job as if God had done it Himself: "…you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." (v.3) However, the truth is that God did not harm Job. God loved and bragged about Job, and merely allowed Job to be tested in order to refute Satan's malicious accusation against him. Rightly, now God accuses the true culprit, Satan.

Permission is again evident in the second test, when God said to Satan: "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." (v.6) God certainly could have chosen not to permit Satan's challenge, but perhaps God saw some benefit in it, particularly for Job, both by giving him an opportunity to demonstrate his faithfulness and to refute Satan's charge and also perhaps God may have seen this event as being useful in helping to transform Job from being a moralist into having a deeper level of faith.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"When Satan taunted God about Job, the Lord allowed Satan to inspire evil men to kill Job's servants and steal his cattle; he gave Satan the power to use wind and lightning to kills Job's children."*[443]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Nonetheless, his permission necessarily means that he bore ultimate responsibility for it. After all, he could have chosen 'not to permit' it."*[444]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"In a word, what God permits, he ordains."*[445]

Our reply:

"Ordains" is an ambiguous term. Would we also say that in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son that since the father *permitted* his son to leave with his share of the demanded inheritance that the father thus *ordained* the matter, or do we mean something else? It seems as if Calvinists are taking something in which God is entirely *passive* and rendering it as something in which God is *active*. John Calvin more clearly affirms this:

> *"From the first chapter of Job we learn that Satan appears in the presence of God to receive his orders, just as do the angels who obey spontaneously. The manner and the end are different, but still the fact is, that he cannot attempt anything without the will of God. But though afterwards his power to afflict the saint seems to be only a bare permission, yet as the sentiment is true, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; as it pleased the Lord, so it has been done,' we infer that God was the author of that trial of which Satan and wicked robbers were merely the instruments.*

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[443] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 220.
[444] Ibid., 210.
[445] Ibid., 210.

Satan's aim is to drive the saint to madness by despair. The Sabeans cruelly and wickedly make a sudden incursion to rob another of his goods. Job acknowledges that he was deprived of all his property, and brought to poverty, because such was the pleasure of God. Therefore, whatever men or Satan himself devise, God holds the helm, and makes all their efforts contribute to the execution of his Judgments."[446]

Michael Brown responds: *"Sickness, suffering, sovereignty of God, Satan, what does God do?; what does Satan do, especially as it relates to human sickness and disease? ... From the Book of Job, there are two very important truths that we learn. Number one, you see someone suffering, maybe a godly person, someone who loves the Lord, and you've known them for years, and suddenly all kinds of calamity, sickness, tragedy in the family, don't say, 'Oh, they must have sinned real bad, because these things only happen to wicked people,' like Job's friends did. Don't judge Job, don't judge your friend who loves the Lord, and say, 'they must have sinned, otherwise this couldn't have happened.' Conversely, there's another great lesson from Job. Don't judge God. Job was wrong to think that God did these things. God gave permission to Satan, but it was the malignant hand of Satan that afflicted Job, that afflicted the children, that killed the children and destroyed the livestock. That was the work of the devil, the destroyer. That was not God doing that to Job. There is a distinction in the text. God says to the devil, 'You're moving Me to destroy him without a cause; you're trying to incite Me.' Job wrongly judged God, and said, 'God's guilty.' See, the friends said, 'Job, you're guilty.' Job said, 'God, You're guilty.' Both were wrong. Sometimes inexplicable things happen to the righteous, but it is wrong to turn around and judge the person and say, 'you must be in sin; that's why this happened.' And it is wrong to turn around and say, 'Well, we don't know why God sent that.' Who said God sent it? Just because it happened, doesn't mean that God sent it."*[447]

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[446] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 18, Section 1 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 201, emphasis mine, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

[447] Michael Brown, *Line of Fire*. http://lineoffireradio.askdrbrown.org/2009/11/11/november-11-2009/

While the devil hated Job and tempted him with the desire to *fail*, God loved Job and allowed him to be tested with the desire that he *succeed*. The problem with deterministic Calvinism and its associated teaching that God decreed *whatsoever comes to pass* is that such a decree would necessarily include both the existence of the devil, as a wicked entity, and also the devil's desire to enter Heaven and to blaspheme both God and Job, which then raises the question of whether the alleged decree is, in actuality, the smiling face behind all evil, having secretly decreed absolutely every single bit of it. In other words, it is one thing for God to *use* Satan's blasphemy as an occasion to ultimately achieve some benefit for Job, but it is entirely another thing for Calvinists to suggest that Satan was *forced* to act by God's *command*, as John Calvin appears to affirm:

> John Calvin: *"But when they call to mind that the devil, and the whole train of the ungodly, are, in all directions, held in by the hand of God as with a bridle, so that they can neither conceive any mischief, nor plan what they have conceived, nor how much soever they may have planned, move a single finger to perpetrate, unless in so far as he permits, nay, unless in so far as he commands; that they are not only bound by his fetters, but are even forced to do him service,—when the godly think of all these things they have ample sources of consolation."*[448]

Although some Calvinists may wish to deny John Calvin's quote, the reality is that Calvin was simply expressing logical consistency with determinism, and when Calvinists push divine permission into some form of *active* agency by God, then this is what necessarily results.

Job 4:12-21

"Now a word was brought to me stealthily, and my ear received a whisper of it. Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling, and made all my bones shake. Then a spirit passed by my face; the hair of my flesh bristled up. It stood still, but I could not discern its appearance; a form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: '**Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?** He puts no trust even in His servants; and against His angels He charges error. How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth! Between morning and evening they are

[448] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 17, Section 11 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 196, emphasis mine, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

broken in pieces; unobserved, they perish forever. Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them? They die, yet without wisdom.'"

Whenever an angel startled a person, it was often followed up with, "Do not be afraid." (Matthew 28:5; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10) No such assurance was given in this particular incident. In fact, this spirit reflects a spiteful attitude that is the exact opposite of how Jesus felt about humanity: "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are **more valuable** than many sparrows." (Luke 12:6-7)

When this particular spirit asks whether mankind can be just before God, can Calvinists truly *contradict* it, since Limited Atonement guarantees that the vast majority of mankind are indeed excluded from the hope of justification? In other words, adapted to Calvinism:

> "Can [the non-elect] be just before God? Can [those whom God passes by] be pure before his Maker? He puts no trust even in His servants; and against His angels He charges error. How much more [the non-elect] who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth! Between morning and evening [the non-elect] are broken in pieces; unobserved, [the non-elect] perish forever. Is not their tent-cord plucked up within them? [The non-elect] die, yet without wisdom."

Psalms 37:4

"Delight yourself in the LORD; and **He will give you the desires of your heart**."

Similarly Psalms 84:11 states: "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory; **No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly**." That being said, if we pray for someone's salvation, but they are not one of Calvinism's elect, then how can God give us the desire of our heart by answering that prayer?

Perhaps some Calvinists might wish to suggest that we should not indiscriminately pray that the lost will become saved, in case we may be found wishing for the salvation of someone that God has created absent of a desire to share eternity in Heaven with and subsequently excluded from a Limited Atonement. In fact, one Calvinist suggests that Christians should not randomly tell the lost that Jesus died for them, in case He did not:

> Jay Adams: *"As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died*

> *for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ Himself who are His elect for whom He died."*[449]

So, from the Calvinist perspective, if no one knows who God had secretly chosen and died for, then to be on the safe side, one might think that Calvinists would only pray that the *elect* would become saved, which of course must necessarily happen anyway, regardless. However, that is not how Calvinist, Charles Spurgeon, indicated that he would pray:

> *"Lord, hasten to bring in all Thine elect—and then elect some more."*[450]

That's the problem with Calvinism, though, as there can be no "more." In other words, Spurgeon's prayer is not in sync with his theology. For this reason, Spurgeon was known to say:

> *"I fear I am not a very good Calvinist because I pray that the Lord will save all of the elect and then elect some more."*[451]

The good news is that God, for His part, does in fact desire that everyone become saved (1st Timothy 2:4; 2nd Peter 3:9), and thus we can be encouraged to keep on persistently praying for lost loved ones.

Psalms 37:12-13
"**The wicked plots against the righteous** and gnashes at him with his teeth. **The Lord laughs at him**, for **He sees his day is coming**."

Similarly, Psalms 2:2-6 states: "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us!' **He who sits in the heavens laughs**, **the Lord scoffs at them**. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His fury, saying, 'But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.'" If God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including the folly of the wicked, as Calvinists teach, then would Calvinists have God be laughing at His own decree? How would a holy and righteous God find humor in unconditionally creating people to be evil?

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[449] *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), 70.
[450] W. Y. Fullerton, *A Biography of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, Chapter 8*: *An Intimate Interlude*. http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/spurgeon/fullerton/bioch08.htm
[451] Jerry Harmon, *The Soteriology Of Charles Haddon Spurgeon And How It Impacted His Evangelism*. http://faithalone.org/journal/2006i/5_harmon.pdf

Psalms 95:7-11

"For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, **if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts**, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. For forty years I loathed that generation, and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."

People determine the disposition of their own heart. Rejecting the light of God's revelation in repetitive fashion results in a calloused heart toward God. So when God speaks, the response of our own heart affects who we are moving forward. If we respond in obedience, we form a pattern of humility in our heart, while if we respond in disobedience, we form a pattern of stubbornness, and making it easier to repeat the similar behavior in the future. God warned Israel not to go down that path, presumably because if they did, then only total brokenness could restore them, and God's intent for Israel was not punishment but blessings.

Relevant to Calvinism, the elect cannot harden their heart, due to an Irresistible Grace, while the non-elect cannot soften it, as they are subject to Total Inability and Unconditional Reprobation. So in Calvinism, how does this verse retain any meaning if it is relevant to no one?

What do Calvinists believe?

It makes no sense for God to claim *He* is the One who hardens hearts, as with Pharaoh, when in actuality, people harden their own heart. So either God hardens hearts or He does not. If He does, He does so for a reason: either to prevent action or prevent inaction. When God says He hardened Pharaoh's heart to show His power, we have to believe His power would not be shown in the way He wanted it to be shown, if He had not hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Our reply:

It is perfectly reasonable to say both that Pharaoh first hardened his own heart and then also God hardened it further, through the use of signs and wonders, in order to bring a certain matter to a conclusion. The only reason why an either/or scenario would be necessary is if one had already presupposed absolute divine determinism, in which the events of human history are all unilateral actions by God through an alleged immutable decree. Conversely, it would make no sense at all to say that

God hardened Pharaoh's heart if (a) Pharaoh was already born totally hardened, and (b) God is hardening someone whom He already determined, fixed and decreed their every last want, wish, thought and desire from womb to tomb.

Divine hardening is a contingent, judicial response by God, which takes those who are already rebellious, and uses a given situation to exacerbate their problem, in order to bring it to a conclusion. In terms of God's hardening of Pharaoh, already his heart was not right with God, and God *strengthened his resolve* by allowing his magicians to mimic Moses' miracles, and to ultimately believe that he was withstanding God until he was finally broken and conceded to God's demand. So you have two independent free-wills in action, where God works *with* people. The alternative is puppetry, which is perceived to be *beneath* God.

Psalms 115:3
"But our God is in the heavens; **He does whatever He pleases**."

Similarly, Psalms 135:6 states: "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps." God does whatever He pleases, but why should that be taken to mean that God is pleased with the evil that mankind does? It shouldn't, unless one is a Calvinist who believes in exhaustive determinism. The Calvinist syllogism works like this: Since God does whatever He pleases (which we can all agree with), and if God decreed whatsoever comes to pass (which only Calvinists presume), and since sin frequently occurs in our world (that much is agreed), then (conclusion) sin must in some way be pleasing to God. So, a Calvinist's logic hinges upon the presumption that God decreed everything. If determinism is instead removed from the equation, then there is no reason to assume that mankind's frequent sin in the world has anything at all to do with God. Although He may allow it for a season, He will one day pass judgment against it and then sin will be gone forever.

What do Calvinists believe?

If one ultimately agrees that God does whatever He pleases (Psalms 115:3), then one cannot help but conclude that those who are not included in salvation, are not included by God's good plan, and therefore ultimately, by His good pleasure. Moreover, how is it possible that a Sovereign God, about whom Scripture plainly says He does what 'He pleases' (Psalms 115:3), would fail to save those whom He wants to save?

Our reply:

First of all, God does not exclude anyone from the hope of salvation—people exclude themselves, against God's wishes for them, which is rather clearly stated at Ezekiel 18:23: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" Secondly, God *never* fails to save those who turn to Him. The problem with Calvinists is that their logic is riddled with assumptions, inevitably resulting in Circular Logic.

Psalms 139:16

"Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and **in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them**."

The King James Version translates: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and **in thy book all my members were written**, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." There is ambiguity as to whether the "book" literally references the Book of Life or metaphorically references God's mind, just as whether the "members" references prenatal body parts or the days of our life.

The Psalmist presents a poetic expression of God's intimate knowledge and remarkable care for us, even from the womb. If such intimacy were to include God's plan and purpose for our life, then it would be consistent with Ephesians 2:10 which speaks of "good works" that God "planned beforehand." Job 14:5 speaks of the "days" of our life which are "determined." Proverbs 20:24 speaks of "man's steps" being "ordained by the Lord." Acts 17:27 speaks of God's determination of the "appointed times and boundaries" of our "habitation." These concepts, however, would not necessarily rule out contingency in God's determinations, either. For instance, God had to use a whale to get Jonah to do the good work that was ordained for him to do in preaching to Nineveh. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem for the "peace" that had been ordained for them but "now they have been hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:42) The Pharisees "rejected God's purpose for themselves." (Luke 7:30) Calvinists would have to say that God intended precisely all of it, and meticulously determined it so.

What do Calvinists believe?

The events of our life are predestined from before we are born, and if the days are fixed, so too must the content of those days, and since we are all interconnected, all things must necessarily, therefore, be fixed and determined by God.

Our reply:

Calvinists certainly hold to those concepts, though given the ambiguity of the text, it is doubtful that Calvinists would unanimously assert it as a proof-text as they do elsewhere.

Psalms 141:3-4
"**Set a guard**, O LORD, over my mouth; **keep watch** over the door of my lips. **Do not incline my heart to any evil thing**, to practice deeds of wickedness with men who do iniquity; and do not let me eat of their delicacies."

Similarly, Matthew 6:13 states: "'And **do not lead us into temptation**, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]'" In the case of Psalms, David's perspective was that he wanted God to search and try his heart, and to root out any evil within him: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts." (Psalms 139:23)

David had two major sins: An affair and a census. Perhaps that's why he wanted to make sure he was in right standing with God, so he would not repeat past mistakes. Scripture records that David was very cold in the murder of Uriah. If God had not confronted him through the prophet Nathan, David could have remained cold and hardened indefinitely. For God to *allow* his heart to be included toward evil, all God would have to do is *nothing at all*. God's exposure of him through the prophet Nathan actually set him on a new course of remorse and repentance. As an example, by not disciplining your child, non-action may effectively incline your child toward evil. In fact, the Bible teaches that if you truly love your child that you will discipline them. Non-action, in such cases, can effectively be an action. David was making a call to God for action.

Psalms 150:6
"**Let everything that has breath praise the LORD**. Praise the LORD."

Such "praise" is pleasing to God since it reciprocates God's love for us. 1st Corinthians 16:22 adds: "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha."

Certainly, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (Philippians 2:10) We determine whether we will be kneeling and confessing from the location of Heaven or Hell.

If God created a class of the non-elect, who God allegedly did not *intend* to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, and who are purposely

excluded from the hope of Calvary in the form of a Limited Atonement, how would God expect such a class to praise Him from their heart, if He does not love them, or at least, does not love them salvificly?

Proverbs 1:24-30
"'Because **I called and you refused, I stretched out my hand and no one paid attention**; and you neglected all my counsel and did not want my reproof; **I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes**, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; **they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord. They would not accept my counsel, they spurned all my reproof**.'"

Similarly, Isaiah 65:2 states: "'I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.'" Does that sound like God felt that they had Total Inability? God says that He "called" but the people "refused," though in Calvinism, God called with a mere ineffectual, General Call, which guarantees that all who are non-elect cannot possibly answer. The rebuke loses all weight if God called them with no intention that they respond. In reality, God sincerely loved them but they refused to reciprocate.

Proverbs 11:30
"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and **he who is wise wins souls**."

Similarly, John 9:4 states: "'We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work.'" If everyone is unconditionally predestined to either Heaven or Hell, then how can a soul be truly *won* to the Lord? The only people that can be *won* in Calvinism are those who have already won, that is, won by an eternal, secret election, which many non-Calvinists compare to a lottery or raffle.

In Calvinism, is the soul-winner "wise" for being inescapably predestined to be the means through which an elect person is irresistibly regenerated and who cannot help but believe? (The whole idea of 'irresistible' is that it cannot be stopped or resisted.) If certain people are going to be saved, *no matter what*, then such a concept would seem to impact one's thinking on evangelism. However, if Calvinism is false, and if someone really was in danger of spending eternity in Hell, and if a Christian shared the gospel with them so that they fell under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and repented of their sins and received Christ, then you could rightly say that such a person was truly *won* to the Lord. In such a

case, the evangelist was truly "wise" for doing so, knowing the divine response: "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." (James 5:19-20) The non-Calvinist view harmonizes much better with Jesus statement: "I tell you that in the same way, there will be **more joy** in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Proverbs 15:26
"Evil plans are an **abomination** to the LORD, but pleasant words are pure."

If "evil plans are an abomination to the Lord," then why does He decree them and render them certain? Is God not holy? A non-Calvinist would never think this way because non-Calvinists do not believe that God is the author of sin. Calvinists, on the other hand, believe that God has decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including the plans of the wicked.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"More arduous is the other question: Does God work in the hearts of men, directing their plans and moving their wills this way and that, so that they do nothing but what He has ordained? We do not ask here whether He inspires the pious and holy affections in their hearts, for about this there is no controversy. The question is whether He has in His power also the depraved affections of the ungodly, moving them here and there so that they will what He has decreed they should do. Certainly when Solomon declares (Prov 21.1) that the heart of the kings are in the hand of God so that He inclines it as He pleases, he shows that in general the will not less than external works are governed by the determination of God."*[452]

> John Calvin: *"This is said more explicitly elsewhere, where an evil spirit of the Lord enters Saul (1 Sam 16:14ff.). Saul is certainly moved by his own criminality, and indulges his fury consciously and voluntarily. But none the less Satan impels him, and this with God not idly observing but actively willing."*[453]

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[452] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), emphasis mine.
[453] Ibid., 175, emphasis mine.

> John Calvin: *"For the man who honestly and soberly reflects on these things, there can be no doubt that the will of God is the chief and principle cause of all things."*[454]

Our reply:

Calvinism teaches that God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, in which its primary impediment to broad acceptance is that fact that evil exists in this world and God is too holy and good to be its creative origin. So what Calvinists do to defend absolute determinism is to present proof-texts in order to prove that God is an active, willing participant in the sinful affairs of humanity, so if it can be shown that God ordains sin, then absolute determinism cannot be excluded as unbiblical.

If God genuinely *abhors* the plans of the wicked, the very plans Calvinists insist that God has actively *willed* for the wicked to perform, then it would seem that God, as described by Calvinism, would either be conflicted or disingenuous. Another solution is to simply believe what God says and reject that He is the origin of evil, just as He said at Jeremiah 32:35 concerning child sacrifice.

Proverbs 16:1-3

"**The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord**. All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, but the Lord weighs the motives. **Commit your works to the Lord and your plans will be established**."

The nature of Proverbs is that it contains pithy sayings of wisdom, often speaking of what is generally true, though not necessarily absolute. As wisdom literature, they contain vague and challenging sayings designed to get the reader to think. Sometimes multiple meanings are even possible which can yield deep and varied applications.[455]

Our plans will be established *when we commit our works to the Lord*, just as the Lord's answer from the tongue comes *when we commit our plans to Him*. As an example, Jesus told His disciples not to worry about what to say when they are arrested since "the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." (Luke 12:11-12) Additional examples include "things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit" (1st Corinthians 2:13) and "whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of

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[454] Ibid., 177.

[455] Perspective offered by our friends at The Society of Evangelical Arminians.

God." (1st Peter 4:11) So, this text appears to be a message for the believer in terms of God's provision at the appropriate time. Therefore, this verse would be inappropriate to serve as a proof-text for absolute determinism.

Proverbs 16:4

"The LORD has **made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked** for the **day of evil**."

Either this means that God creates people for the "purpose" of doing wickedness so He can punish them for it, or it means that God incorporates evildoers into His plans to serve His "purpose." One example might be King Sennacherib of Assyria. God told him that He *planned* for his numerous military successes by making his enemies weak, like walking on grass: "Have you not heard? Long ago I did it; **from ancient times I planned it**. Now I have brought it to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into ruinous heaps. Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, they were dismayed and put to shame; they were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, as grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up." (2nd Kings 19:25-26)

God had to keep His word in disciplining Israel for theirs sins, and He planned in advance to use Sennacherib to bring it about, but that doesn't mean that He wanted Sennacherib to be evil, any more than He wanted for Israel to disobey Him. God is simply using what is available to Him for His own advantage. God would much rather have it that everyone turn to Him in repentance so that He wouldn't have to resort to punishing and judging anyone at all.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Solomon also teaches us that not only was the destruction of the ungodly foreknown, but the ungodly themselves have been created for the specific purpose of perishing (Prov. 16:4)."*[456]

> John Calvin: *"The rest of mortal men who are not of this number, but rather taken out of the common mass and made vessels of wrath, are born for the use of the elect."*[457]

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[456] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 207-208.

[457] John Calvin quotes Augustine in agreement. *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 107.

Our reply:

This is in reference to God's *use* of mankind, not that He creates wicked people. The "day of evil" is like the "day of vengeance" (Proverbs 6:34), the "day of wrath" (Proverbs 11:4), the "day of battle" (Proverbs 21:31), the "day of distress" (Proverbs 24:10), and the "day of your calamity." (Proverbs 27:10) Each of these days represents an event. So for God to have "made everything for its purpose" speaks of such events.

Proverbs 16:9
"The mind of **man plans his way**, but **the LORD directs his steps**."

Similarly, Proverbs 20:24 states: "Man's steps are ordained by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?" The disciple Thomas once asked Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, **how do we know the way?**" (John 14:5) Jesus answered: "**I am the way**, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

This proverb would be for the one who trusts in God, so that *when* we make *His* priorities *our* priorities, He will direct our steps and calm our fears. For example, we may have planned things out for ourselves, thinking what is good for us, not realizing that it may be the wrong path, but if we trust in the Lord, He will direct, or even redirect, our steps in the right direction for what He has in store for us. Hence, sometimes God will frustrate our plans, which we later come to realize why. God helps us to get where we need to go. Such does not sit well with absolute determinism, however, since what we plan and what we envision are *contrasted* from what God plans and where God directs.

Proverbs 16:33
"**The lot** is cast into the lap, but **its every decision is from the LORD**."

Similarly, Proverbs 29:26 states: "Many seek the ruler's favor, but justice for man comes from the LORD." Regarding the use of lots, Jonah 1:6-7 states: "So the captain approached him and said, 'How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish.' Each man said to his mate, 'Come, let us cast lots so we may learn on whose account this calamity has struck us.' So they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah." The Old Testament contains several examples of lots being used in such a manner and which was necessary for direction since the Holy Spirit had not yet been given. Today, believers do not cast lots since we have a much more intimate

relationship with the Lord. However, the same principle still applies, since when we truly seek God's will, He will guide us: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

As further example, lots were used to designate land assignments. A lot was used to detect the sinner, Achan. Punishment against the tribe of Benjamin was determined by lot. Jonah's role in the great storm was detected by lot. Essentially, people were seeking direction from God in situations where they had no other way to discern truth. When the lot was used obediently, the action expressed commitment to do as God willed. The method of the lot itself is insignificant. For instance, David used an ephod to obtain direction from God. (1st Samuel 23:9-13) Gideon used a fleece to obtain confirmation from God. (Judges 6:37-40) Whether it was a lot, an ephod or a fleece, it really made no difference, so long as there was a desire to seek the Lord and be obedient to Him, who gives wisdom and controls the outcome. So to use this passage as a proof-text for absolute determinism, in which God controls the outcome of lots in all random occurrences is problematic since all random occurrences may not involve God's will being sought, nor carry a pre-commitment of obedience to God in whatever is the outcome.[458]

Proverbs 21:1-3

"The **king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes**. Every man's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD **weighs the hearts**. To do righteousness and justice is desired by the LORD more than sacrifice."

This isn't speaking of Calvinism's irresistible regeneration, but of God's ability to influence and effect outcomes, and it stands to reason that God could do this for any person and in any scenario, should God wish it. For example, I can turn my dog's attention whenever I wish, but that doesn't mean that I always do so. Establishing God's ability over a king's will doesn't disprove free human agency, but rather establishes it. After all, what is there for God to overcome or guide if not the autonomous will of His subject? Why turn a will *left* that wants to go *right* if you're already controlling the want of that will?

We see from Scripture that our choices have meaning to God, and hence we find that God "weighs the hearts." In a negative sense, God weighed the heart of wicked king Sennacherib of Assyria and said, "But I know your sitting down, and your going out and your coming in, and your raging against Me. Because of your raging against Me, and because your

[458] Helpful illustration provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

arrogance has come up to My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose, and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way which you came." (2nd Kings 19:27-28) God intervened to effect a circumstance which left Sennacherib with no other feasible choice but to head back home. The LORD said of him: "He will not come to this city or shoot an arrow there; and he will not come before it with a shield or throw up a siege ramp against it. By the way that he came, by the same he will return, and he shall not come to this city." (2nd Kings 19:32-33) "Then it happened that night that the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men rose early in the morning, behold, all of them were dead. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh." (2nd Kings 19:35-36) In a positive sense, God used the interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams to bring Joseph into a position of authority in Egypt, just as He also used various factors involving Esther and Mordecai to motivate king Ahasuerus to rescue the persecuted Jews in captivity.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"What is apparent here is that God has the right and the power to restrain the sins of secular rulers. When he does, it is his will to do it. And when he does not, it is his will not to. Which is to say that sometimes God wills that their sins be restrained and sometimes he wills that they increase more than if he restrained them."*[459]

Our reply:

If, according to Calvinists, God has brought all things to pass by His unchangeable decree, then what is it in the heart of this ruler that God is now turning or restraining except that which He has already decreed? For example, suppose the ruler of Proverbs 21:1-3 wanted to rape his servant but God restrains him from acting upon his lustful intention. From the Calvinist perspective, where did the ruler's lustful intention originate? Did God not sovereignly bring about the ruler's evil desire, and then by the same decree also restrain him from acting upon that desire? In such a case, God would merely be restraining His own determinations in a world where there are no autonomously free creatures. It is nonsensical to suggest God is restraining a will that He has already been meticulously controlling. The passage doesn't make any sense unless there is free-will, in which under divine influence, a *new* course is being directed.

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[459] *Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved*. http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god

The Calvinist argument is especially self-defeating when considering that God "weighs the motives" (Proverbs 16:2) and "weighs the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2), "searching all the innermost parts of his being." (Proverbs 20:27) Why would God be weighing and searching what Calvinism says that He meticulously decreed?

Chapter 4: Major Prophets

Isaiah 5:1-7

"Let me sing now for my well-beloved a song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it and also hewed out a wine vat in it; then He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between Me and My vineyard. **What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?** So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. I will lay it waste; it will not be pruned or hoed, but briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it."

God uses metaphorical language to express the fact that He had set Israel up for success, but which turned out the other way, as Jeremiah 2:21 similarly states: "'Yet I planted you a choice vine, a completely faithful seed. **How then** have you turned yourself before Me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?'" Zephaniah 3:7 similarly states concerning God's legitimate expectation of repentance and righteousness from Israel: "'I said, "**Surely you will revere Me, accept instruction**." So her dwelling will not be cut off according to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they were eager to corrupt all their deeds.'" 2nd Chronicles 36:15-16 similarly states: "The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by His messengers, because **He had compassion on His people** and on His dwelling place; **but they continually mocked** the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, **until there was no remedy**." The people were reaching a point of no return even though God had done everything He felt was *sufficient*. What "more" could He have done? That rhetorical question affirms an answer of nothing else, at least from the standpoint of what was consistent with God's standards, as He has generally determined not to irresistibly control people's wills, and which shows that God is just as concerned with *how* people become saved, as to *whether* they become saved.

The problem for Calvinists is that their theology requires them to answer back to God and say, "You didn't do *all* You could do. You could have given them an Irresistible Grace, just like You do for all of the elect." The result is that Calvinists are theologically committed to turning this

passage into an anthropomorphism, whereby God represents Himself in relatable, human terms, though while it not being indicative of how God truly feels. The problem with Calvinist assertions of anthropomorphisms is that it is often used to imply the opposite of what God actually says.

What do Calvinists believe?

We should be offended by the concept of a Messiah who can't be a Savior without our permission.

Our reply:

What if that is God's choice? Should God's choice offend us? Perhaps what is truly offensive to God is the Calvinist allegation that no one would ever want Him apart from an Irresistible Grace. Some people refuse God, but some people warmly receive Him. For Calvinists to say that the latter could only be true if God unilaterally changed their mind for them, might indeed someday be revealed as insulting to Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

The expression of divine disappointment evidences God's complex set of emotions, since while on the one hand, He acts on behalf of sinners, on the other hand, He knows full well that it is futile since He has also decreed their rebellion from before the foundation of the world and rendered it certain for His glory.

Our reply:

Invoking a "complex set of emotions" asserts a contradictory behavior in God. Moreover, recall that this passage is not merely about God declaring judgment, since He is also asking a question about *why* Israel didn't answer His call. He says, "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" (Isaiah 5:4) To make this passage merely about *judgment* simply ignores the key question that God is asking. God gave them everything needed in order to do what? It is everything needed in order for them to *answer His call*. But in Calvinism, what is needed to answer His call? In Calvinism, they'd need an Effectual Call, also termed an "Irresistible Grace." So, Calvinists would have to conclude that God didn't give them an Effectual Call, even though God is asking what "more" He could have done, revealing that an Effectual Call is

nowhere within His realm of thinking. Hence, Isaiah 5:1-7 presents a very strong challenge to the Calvinist doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

Isaiah 6:8-10

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then I said, 'Here am I. Send me!' He said, 'Go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand." **Render the hearts of this people insensitive**, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, **otherwise they might see** with their eyes, **hear** with their ears, **understand** with their hearts, and **return** and be **healed**.'"

The prophecy of "this people" specifically references *Israel*, rather than, for instance, some Gentile nation. It's quoted at Matthew 13:14-15, John 12:37-41, Acts 28:24-29 and Romans 11:8, and fulfilled in parables: "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while **seeing they do not see**, and while **hearing they do not hear**, **nor do they understand**." (Matthew 13:13) Jesus' saying of "He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:9) was meant to convey that those who were sincerely interested in hearing His words with faith would be granted understanding. Certainly, God desired that all Israel become saved (Israel 45:22), but only on His terms, "otherwise" while in an *unrepentant state*, they might see, hear, understand, return and be healed. In other words, God doesn't want for people to come to Him because God is clearly visible and there is no other option besides God, and then having to worship God out of a sense of duty and obligation. That will not result in the type of meaningful relationship that God really desires. The advantage of faith is that people come to believe in God *despite* the circumstances that might otherwise work against it, and which results in a deeper bond with God.

The judicial hardening also shows that God believed that Israel had the ability to positively respond to His message. Even more interesting is the fact that, like Calvinists, Israel believed that they did *not* have that ability. Unrepentant Israel is depicted as saying from Jeremiah 18:12: "'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" So, Calvinists can correctly state that the doctrine of Total Inability is in the Bible, though it is the doctrine of unrepentant Israel, and it is exactly the opposite of what God believes to be true.

By judicially blinding and hardening Israel, God followed through on His forewarned calamity, which was accomplished by not meeting their expectations of the coming Messiah. Hence, God closed *His* door when Israel closed *theirs*, though not permanently, and certainly was conditional:

"…a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." (Romans 11:25)

What do Calvinists believe?

The intended will of God is that Israel largely reject Him, according to His redemptive purposes at Calvary. Otherwise, if God had truly desired their salvation, He would have effectually called them, and yet here, we see that God does not even permit them to believe.

Our reply:

As evidenced at Jeremiah 18:11-13, the judicial hardening of Israel was not due to an *unconditional* decree of Reprobation, but due to Israel's stubbornness in rejecting His many offers of reconciliation. So, it's not that God does not wish for Israel to believe in the Messiah, but rather that He wishes to make it more difficult for those who remain unrepentant. It is purely conditional. God will not restore Israel on their own terms.

Isaiah 30:1-3

"'Woe to the rebellious children,' declares the LORD, '**Who execute a plan, but not Mine, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit**, in order to add sin to sin; who proceed down to Egypt without consulting Me, to take refuge in the safety of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt! Therefore the safety of Pharaoh will be your shame and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt, your humiliation.'"

Similarly, Hosea 8:4 states: "'**They have set up kings, but not by Me**; they have appointed princes, but I did not know it. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, that they might be cut off.'" Also compare with Jeremiah 32:25 and Zechariah 1:15. Proponents of absolute determinism would have to conclude that it really was God's plan and appointments all along. In fact, if God had decreed whatsoever comes to pass, then it would be more of His doing than anyone else's.

What do Calvinists believe?

Did God know their plan? If He knew it and permitted it, then He must have had a purpose in permitting it, and by permitting one thing but not another, their plan must also be part of God's plans, ultimately reconciling itself with God's decree.

Our reply:

While the Calvinist answer reconciles itself to Determinism, it nonetheless becomes vulnerable to the accusation of turning the text on its head, by making the exact opposite point that God makes, thus contradicting God. Moreover, there is no real room for "permission" within a fully deterministic framework. In other words, if God were to decree a person's every want, will, wish, desire and intention of the heart, then for God (according to Calvinism) to permit their activities, would amount to God *permitting Himself* to accomplish all that He decreed. Normal use of permission implies allowing something one does not want, while in Calvinism, what is permitted is *always* what is wanted.

Isaiah 43:1

"But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, **O Jacob**, And He who formed you, O Israel, 'Do not fear, for **I have redeemed you**; I have called you by name; **you are Mine!**'"

In reference to Israel, God says: I have "redeemed" you. You are "Mine!" (v.1) "I will be with you." (v.2) I am "your Savior." (v.3) You are "precious in My sight." "I love you." (v.4) "I am with you." (v.5) "My chosen people." (v.20) He "wipes out your transgressions." (v.25) "I will not remember your sins." (v.25) "Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." (44:22) However, God also says of Israel: "Yet you have not called on Me, O Jacob." (v.22) "You have become weary of Me, O Israel." (v.22) "Nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices." (v.23) "You have burdened Me with your sins." (v.24)

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I do not come into this pulpit hoping that perhaps somebody will of His own free will return to Christ, that may be so or not, but my hope lies in another quarter. I hope that my Master will lay hold of some of them and say, 'You are Mine and you shall be Mine. I claim you for Myself.' My hope arises from the freeness of grace, and not from the freedom of the will."*[460]

[460] *Other Sheep and One Flock*, March 25, 1883.

Our reply:

This quote was made in reference to Calvinism's doctrines of Unconditional Election and Irresistible Grace, and yet God spoke the same words in reference to Israel, though in terms of *Conditional* Election (Romans 11:15) and *Resistible* Grace. (Acts 7:51) God similarly laid hold of Israel and said, "I have called you by name; you are Mine" and "return to Me, for I have redeemed you," yet without implying Calvinism.

Isaiah 45:6-7
"That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, **causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these**.'"

The evil spoken of in this context is not about *moral* evil, in the sense of wickedness, but instead "calamity" in the sense of disaster from divine judgment, in which Amos 3:5-6, Haggai 1:7-11 and Jeremiah 18:11 also speak of "calamity" in similar context.

What do Calvinists believe?

God's will is the primary cause of all things, even including moral evil. Although God decreed that sin must happen, only man is to blame.

Our reply:

Calvinists are well aware that their deterministic theology is often rejected for making it appear as though God is the "author of sin," in terms of God, according to Calvinism, having allegedly ordained sin by virtue of having decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," and so to restore Calvinism back into the realm of orthodoxy, Calvinists seek to employ proof-texts which show God causing *moral* evil, all with the aim that if it can be shown from the Bible that God does cause moral evil, then absolute determinism cannot be automatically excluded as unbiblical. So, it is important to challenge Calvinists on their "proof-texts" that God—in a context like Isaiah 45:6-7—is only causing evil or "calamity" in the sense of judgment—not moral evil.

Isaiah 45:22
"'**Turn to Me** and **be saved, all the ends of the earth**; For I am God, and there is no other.'"

Similarly, Matthew 11:28 states: "'**Come to Me**, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and **I will give you rest**.'" Acts 17:30-31 states: "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that **all people everywhere should repent**, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

> Robert Shank: *"The call is authentic and sincere, and it is addressed to all men in good faith."*[461]

What do Calvinists believe?

All men are called by a General Call of the gospel, but only the elect receive an Effectual Call which overcomes the sinful fallen condition and guarantees salvation.

Our reply:

If God did not *intend* for the non-elect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, then what would that say about the sincerity of a General Call?

Isaiah 46:9-11

"'Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, **declaring the end from the beginning**, and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying, "My purpose will be established, and **I will accomplish all My good pleasure**"; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.'"

God can prophetically declare the "end from the beginning" because He has neither an end nor a beginning, being timeless and eternal. The Bible does not state that God *caused* the end from the beginning, though Calvinists teach that that's the only way God could infallibly know the end from the beginning. That view, however, has challenges.[462]

What do Calvinists believe?

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[461] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 196.
[462] See the topical discussion on *Open Theism*, in which the Calvinistic view of omniscience is essentially reduced to *Open Theism with an exhaustive decree*.

God declares the end from the beginning, not because He merely foresees it, but because He actually brings it about.

Our reply:

Declaring and *determining* are not the same things. For example, according to 1st Corinthians 15:1, Paul makes known the gospel. So, does that mean that Paul caused the gospel, or does it mean that he is revealing what the gospel already is? This is why it is improper to automatically conflate declaring with causing.

Isaiah 55:6-7

"**Seek** the LORD while He may be found; **Call** upon Him **while He is near**. Let the wicked **forsake his way** and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him **return to the Lord**, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."

God's expectations are that the lost are very much able to "seek the LORD," "call upon Him," "forsake his way" and "return to the Lord." Surely, that doesn't say much for Calvinism's doctrine of Total Inability to receive the gospel. What would this mean in Calvinism? Would it mean that we should seek the Lord *while we still have Irresistible Grace*? Calvinism creates these kinds of odd conundrums.

Notice from Acts 17:26-17 where Paul preached that God expects everyone to "seek" and "find" Him: "He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would **seek God**, if perhaps they might grope for Him and **find Him**, though **He is not far from each one of us**; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'" If though, according to Calvinism, there is a non-elect class who are born predestined for Hell and who have no Savior who loved and died for them, as per Limited Atonement, then salvifically speaking, how would God be "near" to them?

Isaiah 55:9

"Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. 'For **My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways**,' declares the Lord. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are **My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts**.'"

Notice the metaphorical language conveying the depth of God. We all stand on the surface of the "earth" and can look up at night and see just a small part of the "heavens," filled with its many galaxies. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth" is the measure that God chose to illustrate the distinction between His thoughts and ways in contrast to ours.

God is not discouraging interaction. He invites discourse: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.'" (Isaiah 1:18)

If God exhaustively and meticulously decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," as per Calvinism, then our "thoughts" and "ways" would be God's thoughts and ways, eternally and unchangeably decreed for us to perform. In other words, if Calvinism was true then the text would instead need to say: "My thoughts are decreed to be your thoughts, and My ways are predetermined to be your ways." So, this passage actually proves that mankind has an independent free-will, or else if not, then there would be nothing to contrast our will from God's will.

Isaiah 64:7

"There is **no one who calls on Your name**, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for **You have hidden Your face from us** and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities."

The prophet's lament acknowledges divine judicial hardening resulting from a severely deteriorated spiritual state in Israel. God hiding Himself indicates that He has given them up and given them over to reprobation, though it is not necessarily permanent and uncorrectable.

> Steven Hitchcock: *"Isaiah writes the perfect text of Scripture for the Calvinist, that is, until we read '...for You have hidden your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities.' The reason for 'no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You' is because God has withdrawn His mercy and justly put the power of their sins on them. The important thing to see here is that it was not because God arbitrarily chose them for damnation, but that He is responding to their sins with hardening so that their sins will become evident. When the power of our iniquities dominate us we are not loving God and it is for this reason that God exposes us to*

darkness so that we might be forewarned of that greater darkness to come."[463]

Isaiah 65:2
"'**I have spread out My hands all day long** to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts, a people who continually provoke Me to My face.'"

Similarly, Psalms 81:13 states: "Oh that My people would listen to Me, That Israel would walk in My ways!" If God had spread out His hands in a way where the people had no ability to respond, then the force of His rebuke would become diluted. Moreover, it was Israel—not God—who concluded that it was impossible to return to Him: "'So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" But **they will say, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart**." Therefore thus says the Lord, "Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of **Israel has done a most appalling thing**."'" (Jeremiah 18:11-13)

> **Nehemiah 9:28-31:** "But as soon as they had rest, they did evil again before You; Therefore You abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they ruled over them. When they cried again to You, You heard from heaven, and **many times You rescued them** according to Your compassion, and **admonished them in order to turn them back** to Your law. Yet they acted arrogantly and did not listen to Your commandments but sinned against Your ordinances, by which if a man observes them he shall live. And they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck, and would not listen. However, **You bore with them for many years**, and **admonished them by Your Spirit through Your prophets**, **yet they would not give ear**. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in Your great compassion You did not make an end of them or forsake them, for You are a gracious and compassionate God."

What do Calvinists believe?

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[463] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 177.

God is not frustrated by the will of His creatures. God's goals are always fulfilled. Those whom He desires to be saved, *will* be saved. It is highly dishonoring to God to suggest that He in any way struggles along with humanity, sometimes, if not most times, losing out to the will of man.

Our reply:

What if God should desire to condescend to mankind in such a manner as this? Who are Calvinists to say that God cannot providentially govern in the manner of His own choosing? Isaiah 59:1-2 also states: "Behold, the LORD's hand is **not so short that it cannot save**; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. **But your iniquities have made a separation** between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." God puts it back on man to act on what separates them from God.

Isaiah 65:12
"'**I will destine you for the sword**, and all of you will bow down to the slaughter. **Because I called, but you did not answer**; I spoke, but you did not hear. And you did evil in My sight and chose that in which I did not delight.'"

If everything was *already* predestined—fixed and unchangeable—then why would the Bible ever speak about something being destined *consequently*, as in a *future* aspect (i.e. "I *will* destine") based upon the choices of individuals in time? In other words, deterministic Calvinism would instead need the verse to say, "I *have* destined," but that's not what it says. The implication of "I *will* destine" means that their fate *hadn't* already been sealed. If they had positively responded to God's calling, then they would have been blessed instead of cursed. They were only being destined for the sword as a *consequence* of their refusal to answer to God. The implication of something being destined *consequently*, rather than antecedently, is that God can purpose (or destine) the end (consequences) while still permitting man to independently choose freely in time.

This also disproves the Calvinist doctrine of Total Inability, since God reveals an expectation that they could and should have responded differently, for which they would be held accountable.

- God called, but they did not answer.
- God spoke, but they did not hear.
- God desired good, but they did evil.

However, if God knew that they had Total Inability to respond to Him, then why would He be upset? However, if they could have done right and chose not to, then there would be a legitimate basis for divine wrath. So, human accountability rests of human ability. Inability would otherwise be a mitigating factor, just like being an infant (or not having reached the age or condition of accountability) would be a legitimate mitigating factor.

Jeremiah 1:4-5
"Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and **before you were born I consecrated you**; I have **appointed you a prophet** to the nations.'"

Similarly, Galatians 1:15-16 states of the apostle Paul: "But when **God**, who had **set me apart even from my mother's womb** and **called me through His grace**, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood." John the Baptist can also be included. These were each examples of an *election to service* as a prophet or an apostle.

What do Calvinists believe?

Jeremiah was one of the elect. He did not fit himself to election, but before he was born, he was set apart by God's secret purposes. Though this was specifically a calling to office and service, this is also how it goes with the calling to salvation and life.

Our reply:

The challenge for Calvinists is to take an election to *service* and use it as evidence to infer an election to *salvation*, such that their calling necessitated salvation. While Jeremiah, John the Baptist and Paul were all saved in the common sense of the term, their calling did not necessitate salvation, as God can even use unfaithful prophets to accomplish His will, such as Balaam, Jonah and an unnamed prophet described at 1st Kings 13:1-32. Hypothetically speaking, even if raising up an *individual* prophet for the greater blessings of mankind did necessitate their salvation—which is debatable since Paul didn't think that way (1st Corinthians 15:10)—it would only speak of what God was doing for that particular individual, rather than establishing an entire *class* of people, such as Calvinism's fixed class of elect vs. non-elect.

Jeremiah 3:6-10

"Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there. **I thought, "After she has done all these things she will return to Me"**; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. Yet **in spite of all** this her treacherous sister **Judah did not return to Me with all her heart**, but rather in deception,' declares the LORD."

Similarly, Isaiah 5:4 states: "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" God allowed Israel's sin of idolatry to run its course so that afterward Israel would turn back to Him, "but she did not return." God allows people to determine their own eternal destination, and the payoff, of course, is that Heaven would be comprised of those who chose God, in spite of the obstacles created by this present world. In Calvinism, however, our choices have no value to God because according to Calvinism, God does not allow anyone to make any choice, or think any thought, that had not already been decreed for them in eternity and rendered absolutely certain.

Jeremiah 7:13-19

"'And now, because you have done all these things,' declares the LORD, 'and **I spoke to you**, rising up early and speaking, **but you did not hear**, and **I called you but you did not answer**, therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim. As for you, **do not pray for this people**, and **do not lift up cry or prayer for them**, and **do not intercede with Me**; for **I do not hear you**. **Do you not see what they are doing** in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods in order to spite Me. Do they spite Me?' declares the LORD. 'Is it not themselves they spite, to their own shame?'"

In a negative sense, this really reinforces the power of prayer, if God says to stop praying and stop interceding.[464] In deterministic Calvinism, what they are "doing" is also what God predestined. If God is the sole source and origin for what simultaneously enrages Him, then it follows that God decreed to frustrate Himself. Consider it:

1. Why would He be so indignant over Israel's sin and rebellion? (*If, on the other hand, they had the legitimate opportunity to have done otherwise and yet refused, then God's indignation would make much more sense.*)

2. Would this amount to God decreeing to frustrate Himself? (*So God would have decreed that the faithful pray for His people only to decree that He won't hear those prayers and while retorting, "Do you not see what they are doing…."*)

3. Would God's desire that they turn back be sincere? (*Calvinists are forced to conclude that God never intended their repentance, having decreed the very opposite.*)

4. The true intentions of God cannot be discerned by His words. (*The result is that we cannot rely on what the text actually says, and must instead trust in Calvinists to tell us when God really means what He says, which thus usurps biblical authority.*)

Jeremiah 10:23
"'I know, O LORD, that a **man's way is not in himself**, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.'"

Similarly, Proverbs 20:24 states: "Man's steps are ordained by the LORD, how then can man understand his way?" Calvinists misuse such texts to prove exhaustive determinism, in that *all things* fall within the ordinance of God, including sin. However, this should not be understood as including an ordination to sin, but instead, the *good works* that God has in store for us: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10) Proverbs 2:5-6 also states: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. **In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight**." In other words, that won't happen *until* you acknowledge Him.

[464] See also the topical discussion on *Prayer*.

Jeremiah 13:15-17
"Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, for the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, before He brings darkness and before your feet stumble on the dusky mountains, and while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, and turns it into gloom. But **if you will not listen to it, My soul will sob in secret for such pride**; and **my eyes will bitterly weep and flow down with tears**, because the flock of the LORD has been taken captive."

Similarly, Paul reflects the same emotions at Romans 9:1-3. This also bears similarity to Matthew 23:37, in which Jesus laments the predicament of Jerusalem which He had otherwise so often desired to gather. Calvinism really struggles to make sense of the deep reflections of God, in light of absolute determinism. Clearly, God sovereignly chose to allow Himself to be independently rejected, and who are Calvinists to mock God as a "failure" for doing so? If this is how God wants to providentially govern His created order, then Calvinists ought to instead humbly bow before God's sovereign prerogative.

Jeremiah 13:22-25
"**If you say in your heart, 'Why have these things happened to me?' Because of the magnitude of your iniquity** your skirts have been removed and your heels have been exposed. **Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil**. Therefore I will scatter them like drifting straw to the desert wind. 'This is your lot, the portion measured to you from Me,' declares the LORD, '**Because you have forgotten Me** and trusted in falsehood.'"

Using the leopard metaphor, Israel needed to turn to the divine Spot-Changer. In other words, Israel was being bad, and would remain that way indefinitely until they were ready to submit to the divine Spot-Changer. It's like someone who is a drunk. A drunk will remain a drunk until they decide that enough is enough and finally get some help, in order to defeat their addiction. Israel wasn't going to change, at least not until they were ready to repent and turn back to the Lord.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Those who are accustomed to doing evil can no more simply decide to do good than a leopard can simply 'choose' to change its spots. Why? Because a leopard's spots are part of its*

nature, and sinners, fallen sons and daughters of Adam, likewise share his corrupted nature."[465]

Our reply:

The context neither speaks of all mankind in general, nor does it speak of the human condition from birth. The context is of Israel, and how their progressively self-hardened state of being "accustomed to doing evil" resulted in such a condition whereby reformation was as improbable as a leopard trying to change its spots. So as horrible as the Babylonian captivity would be for Israel, it was actually God's loving way to break them, so that upon being humbled, they could be remade as God intended. Moreover, while it is agreed that a leopard cannot change its own spots, that does not mean that the analogous leopard cannot *admit* that its spots need changing, upon being humbled by the divine Spot-Changer?

Jeremiah 17:9
"**The heart is more deceitful than all else** and is **desperately sick**; who can understand it?"

What is this about being "sick"? Calvinists insist that fallen man is not merely *sick* but *dead*, and cannot respond to God. However, when the Bible speaks of spiritual *deadness*, it is in terms of spiritual *separation*, such as someone saying: "You are dead to me." For instance, Luke 15:24 states: "For this son of mine was **dead** and has **come to life again**; he was **lost** and has been **found**." This type of deadness conveyed being *cut off*.

What do Calvinists believe?

Erwin Lutzer: *"Arminianism said man was sick; Calvinism said man was dead. If he is only sick, common grace might help him to recover by enabling him to make a right choice. But if he is spiritually dead, he needs the Give of Life to make the choice for him…."*[466]

Our reply:

The Calvinist perspective is one of pious, self-deprecation. Calvinists insist that fallen man is so utterly fallen—namely dead—that they would never have chosen God, had God not elected them for salvation

[465] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 66.
[466] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 180.

secretly from eternity-past as part of a special class and given them an Irresistible Grace. So, Calvinists use the sinful state of fallen mankind as a ploy to assert assumed special graces for themselves on the grounds that this must explain why they, and not others, became a Christian. Calvinists are having fun assuming things.

Jeremiah 18:1-10

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, 'Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will announce My words to you.' Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, '**Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?**' declares the LORD. '**Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel**. At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; **if** that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, **I will relent** concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; **if** it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, **then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it**.'"

Notice that God, who likens Himself to a Potter of humans, *conditionally* fashions vessels, as evidenced by the if/then statements. For instance, if a nation like Nineveh repents, God will relent, as Jonah had suspected. If a nation like Israel turns from doing righteousness, God will not only cease to bless it but also punish it. Here God threatens to stop blessing Israel and to punish it, if Israel refuses to repent and turn from its sin. In other words, God doesn't arbitrarily fashion vessels without any consideration of the individuals. Instead, God molds vessels according to whether they answer His call to repent and turn back to Him. The vessels of honor can be seen in God's fashioning to "bless" (v.10) "build up" and "plant" (v.9), while the vessels of dishonor can be seen in the fashioning to "uproot," "pull down" and "destroy" (v.7) including "fashioning calamity" and "devising a plan against." (v.11) (See also Jeremiah 26:2-6.)

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Read Jeremiah 18 and see if the point of the parable of the potter and the clay is that there is something in the clay that determines what the potter will do? The parable shows*

> *God's complete sovereignty over the nation of Israel. He can do with the nation as He wishes. He is not limited by the 'free choices' of people. Surely he calls the nation to repent beginning in verse 7, but upon what principle of logic or hermeneutics are we to believe that the actual point of the parable is that the clay can force the potter's hand either by its sin or its repentance?"*[467]

Our reply:

In the Potter's providential governance, His only limitation is in how He freely wills to limit Himself, with respect to how He wills to condescend to mankind in order to operate contingently, either for blessings or punishments. Furthermore, there may be instances in which we actually *would* say that the clay's compliance, or lack thereof, would necessarily force the Potter's hand, especially if the Potter should make a statement that He must honor, even if *unwillingly* so. As an analogy, a parent may establish the household rules over their children, and if a child should disobey, then the credibility of the parent's own word may dictate that they have no other choice but to hand down certain punishments for misbehavior, or else forfeit their credibility. In summary, it must not be overlooked that the Potter sovereignly establishes His own conditions, *rather than the clay setting the conditions*, and once we understand who sets the conditions, then all objections over the extent of the clay's determinations must necessarily disappear.

In summary, God desires that all men come to Him *freely*, and while He could have chosen to save everyone *irresistibly*, He has generally chosen against using such effectual means.

Jeremiah 18:11-13

"'So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. **Oh turn back**, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" **But they will say, "It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart**." Therefore thus says the LORD, "Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done a **most appalling** thing."'"

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[467] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 225.

Unrepentant Israel is essentially throwing the Calvinist doctrine of **Total Inability** in God's face, as an excuse for why they cannot respond to His call to "turn back" to Him.

In v.11, God calls Israel to return to Him: "Oh turn back."
In v.12, God anticipates unrepentant Israel's flimsy excuse.
In v.13, God rebukes the flimsy excuse.

So, what is unrepentant Israel's "most appalling" *excuse* for why they cannot "turn back"? If unrepentant Israel's *excuse* **(a)** *affirms* Total Depravity or Total Inability, and **(b)** *denies* having the libertarian free-will to respond to God's call in v.11, then we know that the exact *opposite* of **(a)** and **(b)** are true.

So, how does the Calvinist explanation of **Total Inability** *differ* from what unrepentant Israel states in v.12? It's a good thing that God appealed to the heathens, and not Calvinists! The *good news* for Calvinists is that **Total Inability** is indeed a *biblical* doctrine, though the *bad news* for Calvinists is that **(a)** it was held by unrepentant Israel—not God, and **(b)** God rebuked it!

The language of **Total Depravity** and **Total Inability** is so unmistakably clear and *emphatic* (such as "It's hopeless" and "we are going to follow our own plans" and "each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart"), that one would *have to think* that Calvinists would have cited it endlessly as one of their favorite "Go-to" proof-texts—except that God rebuked it in v.13.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Unregenerate men are dead in their trespasses and sins and not only cannot believe it but do not wish to believe it."*[468]

Our reply:

So, how does that *differ* or *contrast* from what unrepentant Israel is saying at Jeremiah 18:12?

Calvinist objection:

How do you answer this verse and reconcile it with the notion of free will?

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[468] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 321.

Our reply:

If unrepentant Israel alleges in v.12 a lack of "free will" as their *excuse* for not being able to positively respond to God's calling in v.11, then we know from God's rebuke in v.13 that the *exact opposite* must be true, meaning that they must have, after all, the free will sufficient to positively respond to God's call in v.11 to "turn back." Remember that God is *disagreeing* with unrepentant Israel. So, Calvinists need to isolate whatever it is in unrepentant Israel's excuse that God is *rejecting*, and when they do, they'll see that God is rebuking their very own doctrine of Total Inability. To be clear, God is not denying that fallen creatures succumb to times of moral failure. God is denying that people can't then *admit* to their sins, *repent* and then "turn back" to Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

It is agreed that unbelievers do that which is evil. Unrepentant Israel is saying that they are unable to stop from doing evil.

Our reply:

God does not dispute that fallen creatures succumb to times of moral failure. What God rebukes is the excuse that people somehow cannot admit to their mistakes, turn from those sins, and ask for God's forgiveness, in order to experience reconciliation with God who extends open arms to receive them back. But tragically, that is exactly what the Calvinist doctrine of **Total Inability** alleges. It alleges that people cannot "turn back" to God unless they are first given an **Irresistible Grace**. So, Calvinists need to explain what it is in v.12 that they think God is rebuking, and how that is differentiated from what Calvinists similarly teach about mankind's inability to "turn back" to God.

Jeremiah 19:9

"'**I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege** and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them.'"

Chapter 19 continues with the previous "Potter" metaphor in chapter 18. Jeremiah 19:4-5 invokes the abomination of Israel that never

entered God's mind, either to "command" or speak of it.[469] As far as God making the people eat their children, that should be understood as an *indirect* making, as a consequence of an intervening event, which in this case is the forewarned "calamity" of the Babylonian siege. By being placed in this set of circumstances, the natural result is cannibalism, though theoretically they could have chosen to have starved to death, instead.

2nd Kings 19:25-28 similarly illustrates this point, in which God told king Sennacherib that He would put a hook in his nose and drive him back the way that he came. This also was accomplished *indirectly*, through the defeat of his entire army in one night by the angel of the LORD (2nd Kings 19:35-37), leaving the king with no other feasible choice to make.

Jeremiah 26:2-6

"'Thus says the LORD, "Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the LORD's house all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word! **Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds**. And you will say to them, "Thus says the LORD, '**If** you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; **then** I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.'"'"

"Perhaps" refers to something that is *undetermined*. However, according to Calvinism, everything is already predetermined. So, how does that leave room for "perhaps" in any legitimate sense? Clearly, God had something that He was "planning," but He was reluctant to bring it about. This speaks of conditionality, which of course would just be an illusion if all of their choices were immutably scripted by decree. Of course, God *knows* the future, and what their future self-determined choices would be, but the point is that God is giving them a genuine opportunity, and He is being exceedingly patient about it. As such, He did not believe that the situation was hopeless, though in Calvinism it very much would be if God had never *intended* their repentance by a secret decree of Preterition.

Jeremiah 32:35

"They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech,

[469] For a further review on this point, see the discussion at Jeremiah 32:35.

which **I had not commanded** them **nor had it entered My mind that they should do** this abomination, to **cause** Judah to sin."

See also Jeremiah 7:31, 19:4-6 and 44:4. God uses emphatic language to deny having ever taken part in the practice of child sacrifice. The relevance to Calvinism is in its claim that God has decreed "whatsoever comes to pass." Obviously, that could not be the case with respect to Jeremiah 32:35.

If God emphatically said that He neither commanded—nor had it entered His mind—that Israel should perform the abomination of child sacrifice to Molech, but secretly decreed, determined, fixed, originated and rendered it certain and necessary, then hypothetically speaking, would it be an act of unrighteousness? If Calvinists answer "no," then how would non-Calvinists be able to relate to a Calvinist's perspective on righteousness and unrighteousness?

What do Calvinists believe?

A literal interpretation of this passage leads to Open Theism, since if it never entered God's mind in a *literal* sense, then it means that it never entered his mind in terms of his foreknowledge, either.

Our reply:

No. God is not denying knowledge that it would happen. Rather, He is using emphatic language to show that He never "commanded" it, meaning that it never entered His mind that they "should do" this awful thing, even *such as* to "cause" Israel to do it.

As an analogy, if someone asked whether you had ever cheated on your wife, you might honestly respond with, "It never occurred to me," even though the temptation had been placed before you on more than one occasion, in which your truthful answer is rooted in the fact that the *thought of actually doing so* was completely out of the question. However, if you actually tried to do so on some occasion, even if ultimately unsuccessful, then the claim would be a lie because it *was* something that was contemplated and attempted. So, for God to say that it never entered His mind that Israel should do this, means that God neither contemplated nor ever attempted to bring it to pass, and which really defeats the Calvinist argument which claims that God secretly decreed it all along.

What do Calvinists believe?

God decreed for children to be sacrificed to Molech for His glory. This refers to God's Secret Will. God does not desire Israel to engage in children sacrifice, but He does desire, for purposes known only to Him, to absolutely make sure that they do it, even though He is against it, and He meticulously renders it certain by His eternal, fixed decree.

Our reply:

The harm in that kind of teaching is what it would otherwise do to our confidence in God's Word and biblical authority, as we would always be left wondering whether we can take God's Word at face value, and then seeking a Calvinist interpreter to inform us of whether God was speaking from a Revealed Will or a Secret Will. The devil lies about God, and the idea of a *contradictory* Wills plays right into that. Non-Calvinists might not even have an issue with a Revealed Will and Secret Will, so long as both were treated as *complimentary*, rather than *contradictory*.

What do Calvinists believe?

Could God's Secret Will ever contradict His Revealed Will? As an example, God would never *command* child sacrifice, though by contrast, He could indeed *decree* child sacrifice by His Secret Will, since similarly, while He would likewise never openly command the crucifixion of His own Son, He secretly decreed that very thing according to Acts 2:23 and Acts 4:28. So, while the Secret Will and Revealed Will appear contradictory, God has a good and noble purpose behind it.

Our reply:

So, in Calvinism, what God *commands* and what God secretly *decrees* are not the same thing. The key to this argument is the Calvinist conception of the Crucifixion itself. In Calvinism, God secretly scripted the whole thing. By contrast, in non-Calvinism, God is acting in conjunction to what He knows of the people involved. For instance, there were multiple attempts on Jesus' life, each of which God thwarted, until the time came when Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, when God ultimately used their evil intentions of murder to culminate in God's predestined means of redemption at the Cross. So, God is using their evil intentions to our advantage for the purpose of redemption, *but not that He is causing anyone's evil desires*. In the same way, God obviously allowed the wicked practice of child sacrifice, but He didn't decree anyone's evil intentions.

Evil does have a purpose. It has a purpose for the one who commits it, but God doesn't necessarily have a purpose in it, unless He chooses to turn their evil into something good that glorifies God. Sometimes, God just lets people make their own choices and experience the consequences.

Jeremiah 38:17-24

"Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, "**If** you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, **then** you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive. **But if** you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, **then** this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand."' Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, 'I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for **they may** give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.' But Jeremiah said, '**They will not** give you over. **Please** obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live. **But if** you keep refusing to go out, **this is the word which the LORD has shown me**: "Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say, 'Your close friends Have misled and overpowered you; while your feet were sunk in the mire, they turned back.' They will also bring out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand, but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned with fire."' Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, 'Let no man know about these words and you will not die.'"

God knows the *what-if's* (i.e. Middle Knowledge), based upon what He knows about each of the individuals involved, and what they would alternatively self-determine to do in various situations. Exodus 3:19 states of Pharaoh: "But I **know** that the king of Egypt will not permit you to go, except under compulsion." Isaiah 37:28 states of Sennacherib: "'But I **know** your sitting down and your going out and your coming in and your raging against Me.'" Furthermore, it appears that Jeremiah didn't believe that the future was fixed and decreed, as he was *pleading* for what would be a *better* future for Zedekiah. Moreover, Jeremiah never said, "Believe me, because God fixed each of their alternative choices."

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"It is said that God knows all contingencies, but none of them contingently. God never says to himself, 'That*

depends.' Nothing is contingent to him. He knows all things that will happen because he ordains everything that does happen."[470]

Our reply:

Contingencies in Calvinism would be senseless. It would be like a fantasy island in which God ponders all that He chose *not* to decree.

Jeremiah 44:4

"'Yet I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, "Oh, **do not do this abominable thing which I hate**."'"

Since Calvinism teaches that God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, from which all things originate, should we understand this to mean that God is pleading with Israel not to do what He predestined? It sounds like: "Don't do what I unchangeably determined for you to *want* to do." How would God "hate" it, if it was His idea in the first place and rendered it certain? Remember that God does all He "pleases." (Psalms 115:3) So, how would it *please* God to decree an "abominable thing" He *hates*? Only the concept of an *independent* free-will can reasonably make sense of this.

Lamentations 3:37-41

"Who is there who speaks **and it comes to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it**? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that **both good and ill** go forth? Why should any living mortal, or any man, offer complaint in view of his sins? **Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the LORD**. We lift up our heart and hands toward God in heaven."

This is a challenge to seriously consider one's ways in light of God's reliability to carry out His threats and promises.

What do Calvinists believe?

Name an event, any event. Does it fit in one of the two above categories? All events are either good or bad. And what does the Bible say about them? They are from God.

Our reply:

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[470] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 172.

The prophecies contained both "good and ill," in which the "ill" referred to God's repeated warnings of calamity in exile due to the sins of the people, while the "good" referred to God's promises of bringing them back from exile. This has nothing to do with either God decreeing moral evil, or decreeing whatsoever comes to pass. Indicative of the fact that God is patient and long-suffering in terms of making good on the ill judgments, Lamentations 3:33-36 states: "For **He does not afflict willingly** or grieve the sons of men. To crush under His feet all the prisoners of the land, to deprive a man of justice in the presence of the Most High, to defraud a man in his lawsuit—of these things the Lord does not approve."

Ezekiel 18:23

"'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, '**rather than that he should turn from his ways and live**?'"

What would God prefer to display more: His mercy or His wrath? Calvinists want to believe this verse, in as much as they want to uphold the authority of the Bible, but let's be *honest*: How can there be some "sense" in which God genuinely desires the salvation of all, if simultaneously there is a Limited Atonement which excludes most people, an Unconditional Reprobation which creates a fixed caste of the non-elect, and an exhaustive decree which scripts most people spending eternity apart from Him?

A consistent Calvinist would insist that God does indeed take pleasure in the death of the wicked because their judgment glorifies God. The reasoning is that while God is not pleased in the death of the wicked, He is pleased with the greater good that their death brings about, such as when God carried out His good pleasure against Babylon and the Chaldeans: "Assemble, all of you, and listen! Who among them has declared these things? The LORD loves him; he will carry out His good pleasure on Babylon, and His arm will be against the Chaldeans." (Isaiah 48:14) However, based upon Ezekiel 18:23, it would seem that God is *more pleased* if the wicked would turn to Him and live, rather than to have to bring judgment upon them in the first place.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"On the one hand, God pleads with the sinner to believe; yet, on the other hand, he plans the damnation of many. This secret will is not to be inquired into but to be reverently adored."*[471]

[471] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 170.

Our reply:

There is no mention of a "secret will" at Ezekiel 18:23. Calvinists are forced to assume it, in order to make their theology work.

What do Calvinists believe?

Since God does whatever He pleases (Psalms 115:3), those who are excluded from salvation are excluded by God's pleasure.

Our reply:

The perishing exclude themselves. God would rather have it that they turn back to Him and live, though He will allow them the dubious privilege of rejecting Him and experiencing the consequence of their choice. Our choices matter to God. By contrast, in Calvinism, what are our choices but that which is fixed and decreed? The problem with Calvinism is the implication that God is not entirely honest. How would Calvinists explain God's *regret* in seeing the wicked fall under judgment, if the sin for which they are judged is the same sin that He decreed and rendered certain for them to want to commit, as part of a total plan, in which He never intended to save them, but unconditionally consigned them to non-election before their first breath? Calvinists certainly will defer to a divine prerogative but they nonetheless still need to explain the expression of divine disappointment.

> Roger Olson: *"It seems to me that Sproul and many other contemporary Calvinists either forget or want readers to forget their doctrine of meticulous providence when it comes to explaining God's regret at having to pass over the reprobate (i.e., condemn them to hell when he could save them because salvation is unconditional). Their analogies don't work when you take into account what they say about divine providence. God is the one who controls all things including every thought and action of every human being. People sin because God predestined sin and rendered it certain by withdrawing the grace sinners would need not to sin. So sin and evil are part of the divine plan and purpose even if God regrets that it has to be so. Then, under the doctrine of predestination they claim that God regretfully allows the reprobate to go to their deserved condemnation out of his justice. (What kind of justice is that when he is saving many others who are in the same situation?) But how can God be regretful about his decision to pass over a multitude of people created in his own*

likeness and image when he is the one who predetermined and rendered certain their sinful decisions and actions? If all this is glorifying of God why would God be regretful? John Piper uses the analogy of an alleged incident in Revolutionary War history when General George Washington regretfully signed the death warrant of a young soldier who acted in a cowardly manner. The soldier had a wife and children, so Washington expressed deep regret that he had to have the soldier hanged. But he had to do it because the soldier deserved it and Washington had to make an example of him to prevent further acts of cowardice among the troops. What this analogy totally overlooks (and is so obvious that one cannot be blamed for suspected Piper purposely doesn't mention it) is that Washington did not in any way cause or render certain that the soldier would act in a cowardly manner. And it overlooks that Washington did not grant amnesty (so far as we know) to another soldier who acted in a cowardly manner at the same time. The analogy totally breaks down when one examines it just a little. It doesn't even take a bright mind to see its problems. Yes, all analogies have points where they break down, but this one (and all like it) are simply absurd; they are not analogous at all to the Calvinist belief about God and the reprobate."[472]

Adrian Rogers: *"God did not say that some people can be saved and other people cannot be saved, that some are in a select group. No! There is no respect of persons with God. None whatsoever. The Lord is not willing that any should perish. If you go to hell, a broken-hearted God will watch you drop into hell. It is not God's plan that you die and go to hell. The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*[473]

Adrian Rogers: *"Some people submit to the will of God, some people do not. All are called, but not all respond. Those who do not say to God, 'Not my will, but thine,' will one day in hell hear God say to them, 'Not My will, but thine be done.' What a terrible way to end, resisting God."*[474]

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[472] Email from Roger Olson. A more complete discussion of this point is found in *Against Calvinism: Rescuing God's Reputation from Radical Reformed Theology*, Zondervan, 10/25/2011, Kindle Edition, 119-121.

[473] Adrian Rogers, *The Christ of the New Testament: Acts 10:43*, 2001.

[474] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 94.

Ezekiel 24:13
"In your filthiness is lewdness. **Because I would have cleansed you**, yet you are not clean, You will not be cleansed from your filthiness again until I have spent My wrath on you."

Despite God's reasonable efforts to cleanse His people, they resisted Him and remained morally impure. Generally speaking, this shows that God does not operate by effectual means but instead has created man with a free-will. In Calvinism, however, obedience depends upon God's Irresistible Grace. So for God to say what He "would have" done, had it not been for human disobedience, seems awfully confusing in light of how Calvinism teaches that God unilaterally acts.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Paul Washer: *"The question is not whether you would like to pray this prayer and ask Jesus to come into your heart - after all, you know, the handle to your heart is on the inside and if you do not open it Jesus cannot come in. My friend, Jesus is Lord of your heart and if He wants to come in, He will kick the door down."*[475]

Our reply:

If that was true, then why don't we see that type of behavior applied by God to His chosen people in the Old Testament? In other words, instead of complaining all the time that they are not listening to Him, just "kick the door down" of their hearts and make the obey. But that's not what God did. He doesn't act the way that Calvinists describe.

Ezekiel 33:7-11
"'Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and **you do not speak to warn the wicked from his way**, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but **his blood I will require from your hand**. But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but **you have delivered your life**. Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, "Thus you have spoken, saying, 'Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?'"'"

[475] Paul Washer. https://www.azquotes.com/quote/799431

> Adrian Rogers: *"Now if you believe that there is a kind of Predestination and Election that men are going to be saved no matter what, or lost no matter what, this verse makes no sense to me whatsoever."*[476]

In Calvinism, if the "wicked man" is elect, he cannot perish. The gospel must necessarily get to him. If the "wicked man" is non-elect, it makes no difference if the gospel gets to him, as his fate cannot change. Why would God, according to Calvinism, hold the elect accountable for the perishing of the non-elect who cannot believe the gospel anyway?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"If he should reply that God, so far as He is concerned, wills all to be saved, in that salvation is offered to the freewill of each individual, then I ask why God did not will the Gospel to be preached to all indiscriminately from the beginning of the world. Why did He allow so many peoples for so many centuries to wander in the darkness of death?"*[477]

Our reply:

For God's part, He does will that all be saved, and He sends His messengers to preach the gospel throughout the world. God sent Jonah to the Ninevites. Sodom and Gomorrah had the witness of Abraham and Lot. If the gospel is not preached, then God *assigns* blame rather than *accepts* blame. That is why the apostle Paul echoed similar language at Acts 18:6: "But when they resisted and blasphemed, he shook out his garments and said to them, '**Your blood be on your own heads! I am clean**. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'"

Ezekiel 36:24-32

"'For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a **new heart** and put a **new spirit within you**; and **I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh**. **I will put My Spirit within you and cause you**

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[476] Adrian Rogers, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 2004.
[477] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 149.

to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. **You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers**; so you will be My people, and I will be your God. Moreover, I will save you from all your uncleanness; and I will call for the grain and multiply it, and I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field, so that you will not receive again the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you will remember your evil ways and your deeds that were not good, and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and your abominations. I am not doing this for your sake,' declares the Lord God, 'let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, **O house of Israel**!'"

Is this a promise for believers or unbelievers? If *repentance* is required in order to receive the promise of a new heart and a new spirit, then it's a promise for *believers*, and hence Calvinists are wrong to apply it to Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers* as a form of Irresistible Grace.

> **Psalms 51:10:** "**Create in me a clean heart**, O God, and **renew a steadfast spirit within me**."
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> **Jeremiah 24:7:** "'**I will give them a heart to know Me**, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.'"
>
> **Ezekiel 11:19-20:** "'And **I will give them one heart**, and put a new spirit within them. And **I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh**, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God.'"
>
> **Ezekiel 18:30-31:** "'Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct,' declares the Lord God. '**Repent** and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and **make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!** For why will you die, O house of Israel?'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"…Reformed Theologians believe fallen man to be dead in sin, an enemy of God, in need of spiritual resurrection and a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26)."*[478]

> James White: *"While unregenerate men may know the facts of the gospel, they have no desire to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and cast themselves solely upon Him. It requires the work of the Spirit to take out their stony hearts and give them hearts of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26). Dave Hunt is actually defending the idea that a man with a heart of stone can choose to remove that heart and implant a heart of flesh in its place and that he possesses the capacity to perform this operation on himself."*[479]

Our reply:

Can a man with a heart of stone admit their error and seek help? Can an alcoholic admit their addiction and submit themselves to rehab? While it is agreed that fallen man is morally depraved, unable to restore themselves and in need of God's restoration, it is certainly another matter to claim that people cannot admit their error and welcome the relief that someone else graciously offers.

Using the metaphor of a tree, Matthew 12:33-34 reinforces the concept that we must decide the condition of our heart: "Either **make the tree good** and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit." If we have no control over our heart, then why did God warn Israel not to harden their heart? Psalm 95:8-9 states: "**Do not harden your hearts**, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work."

> Norman Geisler: *"First, in context the passage is speaking prophetically about 'the house of Israel' returning to 'their own land' in the last days (v. 17 NASB). Further, the new heart was a result of their repentance (cf. v. 31). And in a similar text it says plainly that their stony heart condition was a result of their own free choice. Ezekiel told them earlier: 'Cast away all your transgressions … and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit' (Ezek. 18:31 NASB). On another occasion God said through*

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[478] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 69.
[479] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 297.

Jeremiah, '"They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline"' (Jer. 32:33). Rather, '"They set up their abominable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it"' (Jer. 32:34). But when they returned to God, then He said, '"I will give them one heart and one way"' (v. 40 NASB; cf. also Jer. 24:7). Second, as many other passages indicate, Israel's return is contingent on their repentance. Moses wrote, 'When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you' (Deut. 30:1-3). It is clear that their restoration was dependent first on their repentance. They have to change their minds first before God will change their hearts."[480]

Calvinists Objection:

John Calvin: *"To restrict this to those who are worthy or who have rightly prepared themselves by their own endeavor would be worse than gross folly; for the Lord addresses those whose hearts were formerly stony, as is clear from another prophet (Ezek 36:26)."*[481]

Our reply:

If repentance is first required before God will give a person a new heart and a new spirit, then the debate is over and Calvinism loses.

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[480] *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 63-64.

[481] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 106.

Chapter 5: Minor Prophets

Hosea 7:13
"Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! **I would redeem them**, but they speak lies against Me."

Notice God's *intent*. He wanted to redeem Israel, but since they were unwilling, He let them have their way. However, if God had decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including the sin and rebellion of Israel, then "I would redeem them" must necessarily become "I would *not*," and that's the problem with Calvinism. Too often, it takes the exact opposite position of what God actually says, and then Calvinists need a "secret will" to fix the contradiction.

Hosea 8:4
"**They have set up kings, but not by Me**; They have appointed princes, but **I did not know it**. With their silver and gold they have made idols for themselves, That they might be cut off."

Similarly, Isaiah 30:1 states: "'Woe to the rebellious children,' declares the Lord, '**Who execute a plan, but not Mine**, and make an alliance, but not of My Spirit, in order to add sin to sin.'" For God to say "not by Me" and "I did not know it," implies that Israel had acted *independently* of God, and demonstrates that despite the claims of Calvinists, God most certainly did *not* decree whatsoever comes to pass.

Amos 3:5-6
"Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground when there is no bait in it? Does a trap spring up from the earth when it captures nothing at all? If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? **If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?**"

Similarly, Isaiah 45:7 states: "'I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, **causing well-being and creating calamity**; I am the Lord who does all these.'" Calamity in this sense does not imply *moral evil* but rather *divine judgment*. Moreover, such divine judgment is *conditional*, as Jeremiah 18:8 reveals: "'If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, **I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it**.'"

Perhaps the best example of conditionality in divine judgment is reflected in the prayer of Jonah: "'Please Lord, was not this what I said

while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and **one who relents concerning calamity**.'" (Jonah 4:2)

Jonah 1:1-4
"The word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.' But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea so that the ship was about to break up."

When you reference a passage where God is contending with the will of man, you're actually dealing with a *free will* passage.

> **Jonah 1:1:** "And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights."

So, the fact that God uses a sea storm to motivate His prophet Jonah to change his mind and fulfill God's mission to preach to Nineveh, and uses a great fish to transport him there, establishes the fact that Jonah had a contrary free will that God was having to contend with. Moreover, nothing in this narrative suggests that God preselected certain Ninevites to irresistibly be made to believe his message.

Jonah 2:8-9
"'Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness, but I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. **Salvation is from the Lord**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The Christian heart is glad to confess, 'Salvation is from the Lord.' All of it. In completeness. In perfection. The God who decrees all things saves perfectly. Salvation is a divine act, a divine work. It is centered upon God, not upon man. It is God's glory, not man's, that is at stake. The God-centeredness of*

the gospel is what makes the biblical teaching so fundamentally different than all the religions of men."[482]

Our reply:

Non-Calvinists affirm with Jonah 2:9 that "salvation is from the Lord" and is *all of God* primarily because non-Calvinists do not conflate *our* decision to repent with *God's* decision to save. So, when a Calvinist says that salvation is all of God, they mean that our decision to turn to Christ is also made by God. That's the subtle addition Calvinists make. Calvinists typically don't come right out and say that, perhaps because it sounds ridiculous. Calvinists would rather drop bread crumbs and hope their listeners make that assumption themselves.

As an illustration of salvation being one-sided, and yet not implying anything Calvinistic, consider the example of the father of the Prodigal Son of Luke 15:11-32. When the son returned home in disgrace, the father could have had him stoned to death, but instead, the father chose to give his son full restoration. No one made him do it. The parable indicates that he simply, freely decided to show grace and mercy all on his own, even after bearing the full cost of his son's misdeeds. Hence, restoration was all of the father.

We can understand salvation in similar manner. We come to God with confessions of guilt and sin in repentance, and God decides to show grace and mercy, even after bearing the full cost of our misdeeds through His Son's death at Calvary. No one makes God do this. He simply does it because He wants to, as a good, kind and merciful Father. Calvinism is not required. In fact, the Irresistible Grace of Calvinism would dilute its gloriousness by having God play both hands, thus robbing God of the opportunity to respond to someone else's repentance. In other words, in Calvinism, God would simply be responding to Himself and what He Himself is causing. Moreover, if God is responding to the repentance that He irresistibly caused in the first place, through the sin that He (according to Calvinism) exhaustively decreed and effectually brought to pass, then Jonah 2:9 could say, "Sin and Salvation are of the Lord."

Habakkuk 1:13

"**Your eyes are too pure to approve evil**, and **You can not look on wickedness with favor**. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"

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[482] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 51.

According to Calvinism, God ordains sin, insomuch that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass." So, if God ordained sin, including every sinful impulse throughout all eternity, how would He be able to conceive of, decree and render certain, the very thing that He is "too pure to approve" of?

Habakkuk's appeal to God involves a logic-syllogism containing two premises followed by two rhetorical questions, in which Habakkuk believes that both premises are mutually shared with God, so that on those grounds, the resulting rhetorical questions will persuade God against following through on His stated plans concerning the Babylonian invasion. (Moses similarly reasoned with God at Exodus 32:32 against destroying Israel.) In other words, since Habakkuk did *not* believe that God would "approve evil" (Premise 1) and cannot "look on wickedness with favor" (Premise 2), it follows that a Babylonian invasion, if followed through, would amount to God contradicting His own principles, by therefore looking on the Babylonian's wickedness with favor and being silent when they begin slaughtering people. However, from God's point of view, both Premise 1 and 2 are the very reason for the Babylonian invasion. In other words, God could no longer justify looking on Israel's own evil with favor, by continuing to plug the dam on protecting them from their enemies who otherwise sought to surge in and plunder them, and hence Israel's own evil is persuading God to let the evildoers have their way. If Israel had repented, then it would have given God all the justification He needed to persuade Himself to continue to protect them. Hence, the importance of repentance becomes extremely clear. Moreover, Questions 1 and 2 are not necessarily true, as God was not favoring Babylon and was not silent with Israel. Those whom God loves, He disciplines. God was disciplining Israel in order to restore it. God had no such plans for Babylon. Additionally, God was not silent with Israel, given His communications to the prophet, Jeremiah, to King Zedekiah. The problem was not that God wasn't speaking but rather that Israel wasn't listening.

What do Calvinists believe?

Despite Habakkuk being used to record Scripture, his statements are untrue, but are recorded only to capture his feelings. Since it was God who sent the Babylonians, God therefore approved of the judgment He sent upon Israel.

Our reply:

Just because God used the evil Babylonians to discipline Israel does not mean that God either approves of them or looks on their

wickedness with favor. God is simply using what is available to Him for His own advantage to break and ultimately remake Israel as a Potter would do to a piece of damaged clay. (Jeremiah 18:1-13) To suggest that God's use of the Babylonians means that God approves evil is very strained.

Zechariah 1:1-4

"In the eighth month of the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah the prophet, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo saying, 'The LORD was very angry with your fathers. Therefore say to them, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, '**Return to Me**,' declares the LORD of hosts, '**that I may return to you**,' says the LORD of hosts." Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Return now from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.' But they did not listen or give heed to Me," declares the LORD.'"

Similarly, Malachi 3:7 states: "'From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. **Return to Me, and I will return to you**,' says the LORD of hosts. 'But you say, "How shall we return?"'"

According to Calvinism, fallen man cannot "return" to God unless God first regenerates them with an Irresistible Grace. However, such a theology contradicts what Zechariah was preaching. Zechariah said that their relationship with God had been severed on account of their sins, and that it was up them to return to God in order to experience restoration. As such, God expected the people to make the *next* move. Granted that God is the impetus of restoration through His prophet's warning to turn back, their relationship would remain broken indefinitely until they chose to return.

Zechariah 1:15

"'But I am very angry with the nations who are at ease; for while **I** was only a little angry, **they furthered the disaster**.'"

If everything is exhaustively decreed, as per Calvinism, then how can something be *furthered*? God was distinguishing Himself from the Babylonians using "I" and "they." Why would God say this, if there was no difference between the God who decrees "whatsoever comes to pass," and the subjects of such a decree? The consistent Calvinist must confess: "I, God, furthered the disaster." Calvinism leaves us with a scandal.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"The Bible nowhere attempts to defend God's reputation as we are often inclined to do. When God wanted to punish Israel by using the armies of a wicked power, he did not evade responsibility by distinguishing between what he permits and what he ordains."*[483]

Our reply:

Actually, God did indeed evade responsibility by distinguishing between what He *permits* and what He ordains: "'Sit silently, and go into darkness, **O daughter of the Chaldeans**, for you will no longer be called the queen of kingdoms. I was angry with My people, I profaned My heritage and **gave them into your hand**. You did not show mercy to them, on the aged you made your yoke very heavy.'" (Isaiah 47:5-6) The people had heard through the prophet Habakkuk that God was sending the Babylonians as punishment (Habakkuk 1:5-6), by allowing them to fall into the hands of their enemies. However, afterward, God reassures the people that He was absolutely *not* behind their excessive cruelty. But what comfort would that be for a Calvinist who believes that God was indeed behind it—all of it—and is now lying about it?

[483] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 210.

Chapter 6: Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 1:21

"'She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for **He will save His people from their sins**.'"

"His people" (Matthew 1:21), "My people Israel" (Matthew 2:6) and "the house of Jacob" (Luke 1:33) likely references ethnic Jews.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Jesus 'will save His people from their sins' (Matthew 1:21). That is not the same thing as saying 'Jesus will make a way for those who exercise their free will, despite being dead in sin and a slave, to be saved through theoretically bearing their sins.' Either Jesus can, and will, save His people from their sins or He will not."*[484]

> James White: *"The text does not say that 'He will try, but often fail, to save' but that He will save His people from their sins. Redemptive love in Jesus Christ fulfills to the uttermost the saying, 'Love never fails.' This is powerful and effective love, powerful and effective grace, and why anyone would wish to diminish that power is truly beyond my comprehension."*[485]

Our reply:

By "powerful and effective love, powerful and effective grace," he means Calvinism's doctrine of "Irresistible Grace," and while "free will" is an actual *biblical* term (Philemon 1:14), Irresistible Grace is not.

Two questions will need to be answered: (1) Who are "His people," and (2) what does it mean that He will "save" them?

> Dave Hunt explains: *"'His people' is found 150 times in the Old Testament. Most often the phrase means Israel or physically related; never does it mean Calvinism's elect. It occurs nine times in the New Testament; eight times it means Israel (Matthew 1:21;*

[484] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 190.
[485] Ibid., 270.

> *Luke 1:68, 77; Romans 11:1-2, 15:10; Hebrews 10:30) and one time the redeemed (Revelation 21:3).”*[486]

If Calvinists wish to suggest that “My people” means Calvinism’s elect, then they’d need to explain that from Hosea 4:6: “‘**My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge**. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.’” That sure doesn’t sound like Calvinism’s elect. Citing John Calvin as a “hostile witness,” even he argued that Matthew 1:21 referenced ethnic Jews:

> *“Doubtless, by Christ’s people the angel intends the Jews, over whom He was set as Head and King, but as soon after the nations were to be ingrafted into the race of Abraham, this promise of salvation is extended openly to all who gather by faith into the one body of the Church.”*[487]

In terms of Israel being saved, the Bible speaks of such a future time:

> **Romans 9:27:** “Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, ‘Though the number of the sons of **Israel** be like the sand of the sea, **it is the remnant that will be saved**.’”

> **Romans 11:1:** “I say then, God has not rejected **His people**, has He? May it never be! **For I too am an Israelite**, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.”

> **Romans 11:25-27:** “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and **so all Israel will be saved**; just as it is written, ‘The deliverer will come from Zion, **He will remove ungodliness from Jacob**.’ ‘This is My covenant with them, **when I take away their sins**.’”

These words would fulfill Matthew 1:21, and the way in which all Israel will be saved is described at Romans 11:23: “And they also, if they

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[486] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 182.
[487] *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries: A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. I*, translated by A.W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 65.

do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

Matthew 5:27-30

"'You have heard that it was said, "You Shall Not Commit Adultery"; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for **it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell**. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.'"

Similarly, Matthew 16:25-26 states: "'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For **what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?** Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?'" How would either passage apply to Calvinism's elect or non-elect since Calvinism's *elect* cannot be "thrown into Hell" while Calvinism's *non-elect* cannot avoid it? Aside from Calvinism, this shows that we determine our own eternal destination.

The passage deals with the true keeping of the Law (Matthew 5:21), and Jesus' explanation adds an *internal* element of anger (v.22) and lust (28), being also in violation of the Law. So, in keeping with that logic, the conditional "if" statements of vv.29-30 shows that the true problem facing fallen-man is not the outward "right eye" or "right hand" but the *inner man* who needs deliverance. For example, if you have a problem with cursing, losing your voice will only mean that you'll now curse in your mind. The inner man needs to change, and that can only happen by the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Although what Jesus said was literally true, He wasn't actually advocating that people dismember themselves. None of His disciples had done so. Jesus' ministry was not about people harming themselves but about Jesus healing everyone who wished to receive it. The purpose of this teaching was simply to get people to live with an *eternal* perspective, rather than just a *temporary* earthly perspective, and live accordingly, having the appropriate value on life in eternity, because Jesus knew people who were in Hell and knew what caused them to stumble.

Matthew 5:43-48

"'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in**

heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and **sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous**. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'"

If we wish to be *like* God, then we must love *our* enemies because God loves *His* enemies. However, if God only loved Calvinism's elect, then how would that differentiate Him from the Gentiles He mentions?

What do Calvinists believe?

> George Whitefield: *"And so it is, but not his saving mercy. God is loving to every man: he sends his rain upon the evil and upon the good."*[488]

Our reply:

That trivializes God's love by limiting it to *temporal* matters. In Calvinism, God loves the non-elect by giving them rain, while excluding them from a Limited Atonement, that is, something of *eternal* value. Moreover, rain was not intended to be a *definition* of God's love, such as a cap, limit or ceiling, but rather an *expression* of God's love, since rain sustained life. Given that God is so concerned about *physical* welfare, how much more is God concerned about a person's *spiritual* welfare?

James 2:15-16 states: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, **what use is that?**" This shows that God recognizes superficial love. It is also evident that the type of love Calvinism offers the alleged non-elect is indeed *superficial*. The paradox for Calvinism at Matthew 5:44-45 is this: God is not truly loving toward everyone, even though we as individuals are to be loving toward everyone *in order to be like Him*.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them*

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[488] *Whitefield's Letter To Wesley On Election*, Dec. 24, 1740, http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/5514/0491/7249/wltw.pdf.

> *it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."*[489]

Our reply:

That comment addresses God's love from an *eternal* perspective, unlike Whitefield's *temporal* perspective, and the honest candor from R.C. Sproul is a welcome admission.

Matthew 6:10

"'Your kingdom come. **Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven**.'"

> Roger Olson: *"If God's sovereignty were already completely exercised de facto, why would anyone need to pray for God's will to be done on earth? In that case, it would always already be done on earth. The distinction between God's sovereignty de facto and de jure is required by the Lord's Prayer."*[490]

We pray that "God's Will" will be done here on earth, as it is currently being done in Heaven, not because we believe it's *already* being meticulously done, but because we *want* for that to happen. We are petitioning Heaven that it *would* be done now. We're praying for God to intervene, and to work His Will, and to bring about His redemptive plans, despite the sinful choices of free moral creatures here on earth.

What do Calvinists believe?

God's *determinate* Will is always done, both in Heaven and on earth. The fact that God's commands are largely rejected by this present world indicates that God's *revealed* Will is being thwarted, though never for His sovereign, decretive Will.

Our reply:

When Calvinists pray for God's "will" to be done on earth, *which* Will are they referring to? Is it Calvinism's "Secret Will" (i.e. the Determinate Will), or is it Calvinism's "Revealed Will"? Recall that in Calvinism, the "Secret Will" will always be done, no matter what, while the "Revealed Will" may never be done, as it is just for show, or else if it

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[489] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[490] *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 117-118.

really was what God had wanted, then it would have been incorporated into the "Determinate Will."[491] So, which is it?

Matthew 7:7-11

"'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? **If you then, being evil**, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good **to those who ask Him**!'"

The context is of morally imperfect people, and yet God says He will give them good gifts when they request it. So, their moral depravity doesn't preclude them from *asking* for help. In fact, there is an expectation by God that we *will* take Him up on His offer and ask for spiritual gifts.

So, what would Calvinists need to do in order to make this work with Calvinism? The solution is to restrict the audience to Calvinism's elect, or else otherwise everyone would come under this *divine expectation* and offer of grace. The problem overshadowing Calvinism is that much of the Bible must be read through a filter that excludes most people.

In terms of asking, seeking and knocking, we're supposed to ask God for all things large and small, but those who don't, either don't feel worthy, or think they're bothering Him, or think it's too much to ask, or don't think God will answer. The reality, though, is that God wants for people to engage Him. However, if God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," as per Calvinism, then God would be criticizing people for failing to do what He decreed they would not do. How would that make sense?

Matthew 7:21-23

"'Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not **prophesy in Your name**, and in Your name **cast out demons**, and in Your name **perform many miracles**?" And then I will declare to them, "**I never knew you**; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."'"

The text does not challenge whether or not they had actually prophesied in Jesus' name, cast out demons or performed "many" miracles. Instead, it implies that *despite* these things, they omitted something far more important, which is a saving relationship with Jesus

[491] See the topical discussion on the *Will of God*.

Christ. Now in relation to Calvinism, one thing that is particularly troubling is that if Calvinism was true, then the divine rebuke could just as easily have been: "I never wanted to know you." (It is important to remember that in Calvinism, God never intended for the non-elect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. So, this is a valid concern to raise.) Nonetheless, the point of the text is that these people did something wrong, for which they had no excuse and could legitimately be held accountable.

God often warns people about the dangers of self-deception. The problem, though, in relation to Calvinism, is that Calvinism teaches that God exhaustively decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including all personal self-deception. So, in Calvinism, God would have predetermined that those of Matthew 7:21-23 would be self-deceived, assuming that they truly perceived themselves as followers of the Lord. That's an example of the type of moral dilemmas that exhaustive determinism creates.

Matthew 9:1-8

"Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city. And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, 'Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven.' And some of the scribes said to themselves, 'This fellow blasphemes.' And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, '**Why are you thinking evil in your hearts?** Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Get up, and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'--then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home.' And he got up and went home. But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men."

This is reminiscent of what God said to Cain: "'**Why are you angry?** And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.'" (Genesis 4:7-8) The distinct impression drawn from these passages is that Cain didn't have to be angry, just as Israel didn't have to think evil thoughts. But if Calvinism was true, then the answer to both questions would depend upon what they were sovereignly decreed to think and to do. In fact, the answer to every question of "why" would necessarily fall back upon God.

According to 2nd Corinthians 10:5, though, we are to take "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ," which reveals the divine expectation. However, according to Calvinism, every thought is *already* taken captive to the obedience of Calvinism's "sovereign decree."

Matthew 9:36-38

"Seeing the people, **He felt compassion for them**, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The **harvest is plentiful**, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'"

This passage seems to indicate Jesus' indiscriminate concern for the lost. Sheep that are distressed and dispirited run around in circles, calling out, because they are scared and confused. To these sheep, Jesus likened Israel, and felt compassion for them. So the question is whether Jesus' heart of compassion is truly reflected in Calvinism's cold doctrine of Preterition? In other words, if there really was a class of non-elect, then based upon the parable of the 99 and the 1, one might conclude that Jesus would feel more burdened to rescue *them* [the non-elect] rather than those who are already elect: "'What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not **leave the ninety-nine** on the mountains and **go and search for the one that is straying?** If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, **he rejoices over it more** than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray.'" (Matthew 18:12-13)

Similarly, Mark 10:21 states concerning the rich young ruler: "Looking at him, **Jesus felt a love for him** and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" Jesus' love is *salvific*. Such a thing, though, could not be possible for Calvinism's non-elect.

Matthew 10:5-7

"These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: 'Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as you go, preach, saying, "**The kingdom of heaven is at hand**."'"

How would the kingdom of heaven be "at hand" for the *non-elect* who have no Savior, no Atonement and no hope? Were the disciples sent only to Calvinism's *elect* with this message? Certainly not. Some, Jesus warned, would not receive them, and as a sign, they were to shake the dust off of their feet: "'Whoever does not receive you, nor heed your words, as you go out of that house or that city, shake the dust off your feet.'" (Matthew 10:14) So, was the kingdom of heaven at hand for these people? It certainly was, but they rejected the grace that was *intended* for them. However, in Calvinism, God never really intended it at all.

Matthew 11:20-24
"Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For **if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes**. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it **would have remained to this day**. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be **more tolerable** for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.'"

The term "sackcloth and ashes" reflects a depth of remorse, and for the destroyed cities that would have "remained to this day," perhaps speaks of an enduring legacy they otherwise would have had. Jesus was shaming the unbelieving Jews by pointing out that Sodom and Gomorrah, and Tyre and Sidon (i.e. object lessons of immorality), "would have" done better if placed under *similar circumstances*. On account of this, heathen nations are going to rise up on Judgment Day to engage in finger-pointing:

> **Matthew 12:41-42:** "'**The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it** because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. **The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it**, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, **something greater than Solomon is here**.'"

> **Luke 11:30-32:** "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. **The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them**, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. **The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it**, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, **something greater than Jonah is here**.'"

So, in other words, the Queen of the South and Nineveh both received less with Solomon and Jonah but did more than Israel with Jesus and all of His miracles. What Matthew 11:20-24 does is to take the divine shaming a step further by revealing that those who are considered as object

lessons of immorality, Sodom and Gomorrah or Tyre and Sidon, "would have" done better under similar circumstances than the unbelieving Jewish cities, and not merely that, but would have even repented in "sackcloth and ashes," reflecting a deep level of remorse, and to the point where they even would have "remained to this day." That is a fairly stunning rebuke. In other words, how disgraceful is it that God's own people should fail to do what even Sodom and Gomorrah, of all people, would have done?

Considering that in Calvinism, the only way that anyone could ever repent and believe is if they were recipients of an Irresistible Grace, the conclusion for the Calvinist would have to be that Sodom and Gomorrah would have to have been given an Irresistible Grace in this scenario, in order to have done any better, especially in light of repentance. However, if Irresistible Grace is the only reason why Sodom and Gomorrah would have done differently, then it's no longer a comparison of *similar circumstances*. Otherwise, the Jews could hypothetically ask: "Ok, why didn't you give us the same advantage that these others would have gotten?" So the idea of an Irresistible Grace would ruin the entire illustration. Calvinism simply does not work in this passage.

How could Jesus know, as fact, non-existent events that otherwise never actually happened in our world? Yet, Jesus claims to possess such information which will ultimately be cited on Judgment Day, resulting in the unbelieving Jews being held in great contempt, in comparison to the heathen nations. Such information must be able to withstand any reasonable objection, or otherwise, it is merely just divine *speculation*.

What do Calvinists believe?

As a lament, this idiom has equivalent meaning as: "If only I had done the same thing there, then things would have been different."

Our reply:

Jesus is saying more than just what *He* would have done, but what *others* would have done, namely, what those who are object lessons of immorality would have done under similar circumstances as with Chorazin and Bethsaida, and thus to their shame in having squandered God's grace.

As an analogy, a parent may say to their child: "Considering all the money that I had given to you, if I had given that same money to any one of your brothers instead, it would have been put to far better use." However, if that money would have been put to "far better use" only because the parent would have unilaterally and unchangeably determined all of the other sibling's spending habits, then any shame upon the disobedient child naturally would be diminished. Hence, the Calvinist

interpretation is best illustrated as follows: "You should feel ashamed, Chorazin and Bethsaida! For if the same miracles that had occurred in you had also occurred in notorious pagan cities, *I would have determined* that the pagan cities would have been far more receptive." If that were the case, why should the Israelite cities feel any shame?

What do Calvinists believe?

If God knew of people who, under certain circumstances, would have believed, but God chose to deny them those very circumstances, then how can it be said that God truly loved them?

Our reply:

It is not feasible that the Messiah should personally visit every nation of every generation in all human history. Israel was given a special task of being His Witness Nation. Moreover, it is not as if the pagan cities were left without a witness. The Queen of the South had the testimony of Solomon, while Nineveh had the testimony of Jonah. Sodom and Gomorrah had the testimonies of Abraham and Lot. They had *sufficient* opportunity to repent, and some like Nineveh actually did.

Matthew 11:25-26
"At that time Jesus said, 'I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have **hidden these things from the wise and intelligent** and have **revealed them to infants**. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.'"

Notice the *condition* upon which God chooses some people and rejects others. There's no mention of Calvinism's elect and non-elect, but instead the "wise and intelligent" vs. "infants." So, why would God wish to spurn the high and mighty, especially if God desires "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"? (1st Timothy 2:4) The answer is that God desires to save all men *freely*, and therein lies the issue, which is that the high and mighty gravitate themselves toward *pride* whereas the simple-minded typify *humility*. Similarly, Luke 1:52 states: "'He has **brought down rulers** from their thrones, and has **exalted those who were humble**.'" God has intentionally chosen a method of salvation which involves humbly confessing one's moral failures and seeking forgiveness from God, which is more conducive to those who are already humble, but will conflict with those who are too prideful to admit error and humble themselves before God.

Matthew 13:10-15
"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' Jesus answered them, '**To you it has been granted** to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but **to them it has not** been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore **I speak to them in parables**; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; For **the heart of this people has become dull**, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them."'"[492]

Why would God, according to Calvinism and its sovereign decree, complain about "the heart of this people" if that was the condition imposed upon mankind from birth? Moreover, how would it make sense to say that their heart had "become dull" if that's how it had always been from birth?

It's reasonable to conclude that the implication behind the use of parables is that God is just as concerned with *how* people come to Him, as *whether* they come to Him. In other words, God wants to be embraced for the right reasons. He doesn't want to be embraced as a conquering hero to be idolized, but to be embraced for something more meaningful.

What do Calvinists believe?

How does someone come to know the Father? It's to those whom the Son wills to reveal Him, while for some "it has not been granted."

Our reply:

The Son wills to reveal the truth of His Father to those who humbly fear the Lord, whereas in Calvinism, it just gets punted to mystery.

Matthew 13:24-30
"Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while his men were sleeping, his **enemy came and sowed tares** among the wheat, and went away. But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said

[492] Matthew 13:14-15 quotes the source material from Isaiah 6:9-10.

to him, "**Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?**" And he said to them, "**An enemy has done this!**" The slaves said to him, "Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?" But he said, "**No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest**; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"'"

Similarly, Matthew 15:10-14 states: "After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, 'Hear and understand, "It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Then the disciples came and said to Him, 'Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?' But He answered and said, 'Every plant which **My heavenly Father did not plant** shall be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.'" If God had decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," then who would be the real "enemy" that planted the tares?

Sometimes people will ask, "Why would a loving God create people that He knew would ultimately reject Him and perish in Hell? Wouldn't it have been more loving of God to have prevented them from being born?" This parable provides the answer. For what if God also knows that the same man will have a child who will grow up to love the Lord and become a Christian? If God prevents the birth of the father, how can the believing son be born? People are interconnected. God is not the mastermind behind what the "enemy" has sown. The overnight planting of the tares was the devil's work. So in this parable, God instructs the angel not to uproot the devil's tares since it would otherwise disturb God's precious wheat. In the end, God will sort things out in the final harvest, i.e. Judgment Day.

Matthew 15:18-20

"'But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For **out of the heart come evil thoughts**, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. **These are the things which defile the man**; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.'"

Whereas Jesus teaches that "out of the heart come evil thoughts," Calvinism teaches that out of God's *decree* comes evil things, in which God had allegedly ordained all things, including sin. With such a decree, the verse must mean the following:

"For out of [**the Father's decree**] come evil thoughts, murders,
adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.
[**The Father's decree**] are the things which defile the man;
but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

Calvinists will appeal to Compatibilism, but that is no solution since Compatibilism is still Determinism. The sinful wants of fallen people are precisely the *same* wants—according to Calvinism—which God intended, and which God exhaustively and meticulously decreed and rendered absolutely certain. That's what Calvinists claim about a God whose "eyes are too pure to approve evil" and "can not look on wickedness with favor." (Habakkuk 1:13)

Matthew 16:18

"'I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock **I will build** My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.'"

> Gordon Robertson: *"'And I also say that you are Peter (and there is a word-play going on here, where He names him "Peter," which means "Pebble," and you can get this one wrong; He names him Peter, which means, "You are Pebble"), and on this Rock (and He is talking about Himself), I will build My Church.' So, 'I (this Rock) will build My Church (out of you, little pebbles, and it's a Greek word-play).' Who builds the Church? You are the Church, and Jesus is building on you, and in you, and He's doing it in such a way, that the Gates of Hell will not prevail against you, which means that you're free from the bondage of sin and death."*[493]

Is the Church already built, or is it being built? If Jesus had said, "Upon this rock I *have* built my Church," then Calvinists might claim this as evidence for Calvinism, since everyone who will ever be saved has already been predetermined. However, the verse instead states, "Upon this rock I *will* build my Church," indicating an *ongoing* process whereby names are continually being added to the Lamb's Book of Life.[494]

Matthew 16:25-26

"'For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole

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[493] Gordon Robertson, *Power For Life—Power of an Overcoming Church*, 2013.
[494] See also the discussion on Revelation 13:8.

world and forfeits his soul? Or **what will a man give in exchange for his soul?**'"

Similarly, Matthew 5:27-30 states: "'You have heard that it was said, "You Shall Not Commit Adultery"; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for **it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell**. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.'"

When Jesus asks, "What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?", He implies that if a man loses his own soul (due to placing a greater importance on living a life dedicated to gaining material wealth or power), then he has made a *poor* choice. However, if Jesus was speaking to those who could never be saved, namely Calvinism's non-elect, then the question becomes irrelevant because they are going to lose their soul whether they die rich or poor. On the other hand, if Jesus is talking to Calvinism's elect, then the question also becomes irrelevant because they are not going to lose their soul whether they die rich or poor. Calvinism aside, Jesus' question reveals that anyone can lose their own soul if their desire to obtain riches and power is more important to them than God. The responsibility of choosing between wealth and power, over the final destination of one's soul, is placed back upon the *individual*.

Matthew 18:6-7

"'And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its **stumbling blocks**! For it is **inevitable** that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!'"

Notice that Jesus chose the word "inevitable." Now, why is that? According to Calvinism, God "decreed whatsoever comes to pass," and therefore a term more consistent with Calvinism would have been "deliberate." In other words, "For it is *deliberate* that stumbling blocks come, because God decreed everything, including all stumbling blocks."

The implication of Jesus using the word "inevitable," in relation to stumbling blocks, would seem to be a tacit *denial* that He is its source. Consider the following analogy to see why: A neighbor stops by my house

to inform me that his beloved dog was just shot and killed, and I respond, "Well, I knew that was ***inevitable***. After all, this is a dangerous neighborhood." In reality, though, I shot the dog. Of course, I didn't want to tell him that. So, I disguised my actions by saying it was "inevitable," as if to suggest that it wasn't me who did it. That's how the word "inevitable" sounds in relation to determinism. In other words: It's an evil world, and I just know there will be people who cause temptations and bring stumbling blocks. It's "inevitable." Woe to those bad people. (Secretly, it is withheld that God decreed every temptation ever conceived and rendered certain every stumbling block ever brought about.) The word "inevitable" in relation to Calvinistic determinism seems to result in deception.

Matthew 18:10-14

"'See that you **do not despise one of these little ones**, for I say to you that **their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father** who is in heaven. [**For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost**.] What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, **does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one** that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, **he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine** which have not gone astray. **So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish**.'"

God does not want the "little ones who believe in Me" (v.6) to "perish" (v.14) at the hands of the inevitable "stumbling blocks." (v.7) But why are the stumbling blocks "inevitable"? (v.7) Is it because men have free-will and there are bound to be some who abuse it, or is it inevitable because God (according to Calvinism) scripted and decreed it so?

Regarding the meaning of being lost, Luke 15:9-10 compares a lost sinner to a lost coin. That lost coin would otherwise be considered *as good as gone*, and so to find it again is truly *gain*.

However, none of this really makes much sense in Calvinism:

1. Anyone who perishes must necessarily also be one of Calvinism's non-elect who were never intended for Heaven.

2. The stumbling blocks are meticulously decreed by God.

3. In terms of the 99 and the 1, the one that is found is found because they are regenerated against their unregenerate will, simply because they are elect, and somehow that type of predetermined inevitability is supposed to generate joy in Heaven.

4. How did the lost sheep get lost in the first place, so that it later could be found? In Calvinism, becoming lost is unchangeably scripted and decreed, and thus meticulous determinism robs the parable of conveying a truly authentic saving act.

Matthew 19:23-26

"And Jesus said to His disciples, 'Truly I say to you, it is **hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven**. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?' And looking at them Jesus said to them, '**With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible**.'"

In Calvinism, the peril of riches is irrelevant, as all men, rich or poor, are born equally incapable of believing in the gospel. In that sense, riches would make no difference, and Irresistible Grace wouldn't be any more difficult for those rich or poor.

The reason why Jesus made it a point in His offer to the "rich young ruler" to sell all of his possessions was because He knew that it was something he valued more than God. Wealth isn't evil, but the snare of an idolatrous love of money is. Being rich leads one to be more entangled with the world. The natural implication is that a person with less worldly entanglements has an easier time of coming to Christ and being saved. Free will is thus the natural implication. Irresistible Grace would otherwise unwind Jesus' lesson completely.

What do Calvinists believe?

Jesus actually doesn't say that it is harder for a rich man than for a poor man to be saved. He was correcting the commonly held belief of the day which implied that being rich meant that one was blessed by God and therefore righteous. The illustration Jesus uses of a camel passing through the eye of a needle actually demonstrates that salvation is impossible for anyone, rich or poor, and which is why the disciples naturally replied: "Then who can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25) In other words, if even a blessed rich man can't be saved, then who else stands a chance? Jesus goes on to teach that with man, it is impossible to be saved, but with God, all things are possible, which could accommodate Prevenient Grace in Arminianism or Irresistible Grace in Calvinism.

Our reply:

Jesus purposely characterized the rich young ruler as a "rich man," and then spoke of how "hard" it was for the rich to become saved. So, regardless of what the cultural perspective of the disciples was toward the rich, Jesus pointed out the vice of riches in order to show the danger involved, in terms of inhibiting one from seeking the kingdom of God. In other words, if the rich young ruler had been a commoner, then selling all of his earthly wealth would not have been as great of a sacrifice, and he might very well have *accepted* Jesus' offer instead of spurning it. The problem with Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace is that it would render Jesus' mentioning of riches as completely moot, and furthermore, Jesus didn't offer Irresistible Grace as a solution. We find from passages like Isaiah 5:1-7 that God doesn't even consider an Irresistible Grace to be within the realm of what He would consider doing.

It was not uncommon for Jesus to highlight the pitfalls of earthly riches. Jesus states in the Parable of the Sower: "The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with **worries and riches and pleasures of this life**, and bring no fruit to maturity." (Luke 8:14) Jesus also asked: "What will it profit a man if he **gains the whole world** and forfeits his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) So on that account, it really is *harder* for a rich man than a poor man to get saved, given the entanglements of this world. Obviously, a poor man wouldn't have *that* specific drawback, though plenty of others. The reason why Jesus agreed with the disciples' rhetorical question of, "Then who can be saved?" by answering, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible," is because while He knew of the impossibility for fallen man to perfectly keep God's Law, the grace of Calvary is what is *possible* with God so that all men can be saved.

Matthew 20:28

"'Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom for many**.'"

So it's not a ransom for *few*, but a ransom for *many*. Compare with Matthew 22:14: "'For many are called, but few are chosen.'" So, there is a ransom sacrifice for the many who are called, even though only a few are chosen. That could only mean an Unlimited Atonement. It's not that unbelievers lack a Savior and lack an Atonement. The problem, according to John 3:18, is that they fail to believe in the Savior that they *do* have.

Similarly, Matthew 26:28 states: "'For this is My blood of the covenant, which is **poured out for many for forgiveness of sins**'" and 1st

Timothy 2:5-6 states: "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a **ransom for all**, the testimony given at the proper time." The "many" refers to a large number, as in "all men," in which Paul interchangeably uses "many" and "all men" at Romans 5:12-21.[495]

Why is it important to affirm with Scripture that Jesus died for everyone? The answer is that if Jesus didn't die for everyone, but only died for Calvinism's elect, then I would have no reason to believe that Jesus died for me in particular, except by just *supposing* it to be true. Christian assurance must never be grounded on guesswork, but instead must be rooted in an Abrahamic confidence that God will keep His promise to do what He says, and God promises to save "whosoever believes in Him." (John 3:16) If Jesus died for everyone, then I don't ever need to *wonder* about whether God has a good intention for me.

Matthew 22:2-14

"'**The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son**. And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come. Again he sent out other slaves saying, "Tell those who have been **invited**, 'Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and **everything is ready; come to the wedding feast**.'" But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire. Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but **those who were invited were not worthy**. Go therefore to the main highways, and **as many as you find there, invite** to the wedding feast." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, **both evil and good**; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, **he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes**, and he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?" And the man was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." **For many are called, but few are chosen**.'"

Israel was first called, but as Jesus told them, "…you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:44)

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[495] See also the discussion on John 10:15 and 2nd Peter 2:1.

> **Matthew 22:8:** "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were **not worthy**.'"

> **Acts 13:46:** "Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves **unworthy** of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.'"

The king's "slaves" who were "mistreated" and "killed" are reminiscent of the prophets that Israel killed. (Luke 11:49) The secondary invitation is indicative of the gospel message being delivered to the Gentiles. The king's choice of those who were allowed to eat at the banquet was *conditioned* upon the individual showing up in the proper clothing, in which the wedding garments represents being clothed in Christ's righteousness.

The first objection against Calvinism is the question of how there can be a sincere, well-meant offer of the gospel to all men, in light of the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement?

> Steven Hitchcock: *"Would a Calvinist portray the king in this way, which is to portray the Father inviting people to the wedding feast and being rejected? Where is the Effectual Call? The sovereignty of the king is being undermined for those whom he has invited have refused to come! A Calvinist would say that this is an impossibility, that Jesus should portray the Father in this manner. But Jesus does portray the Father as One who genuinely calls sinners that nevertheless reject Him. The heart of the parable is the strangest thing to a Calvinist."*[496]

The expression, "**many** are called, but **few** are chosen" (Matthew 22:14) is reminiscent of a few other texts:

> **Matthew 19:30:** "'But **many** who are first will be **last**; and the last, first.'"

> **Matthew 7:13-14:** "'Enter through the **narrow** gate; for the gate is **wide** and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are **many** who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are **few** who find it.'"

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[496] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 270.

> **Matthew 20:27-28:** "'And whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for **many**.'"

As evidence of an Unlimited Atonement, Jesus gave His life for "many," which resembles the "many" who are called, though only a few are "chosen." The "chosen" would be those who positively responded to the invitation and who showed up dressed in Christ's righteousness. So, if Jesus had only died for the "few," as Calvinism teaches, then *to what* would the "many" be "called" to receive? Would it be a gospel that was never intended for them? By comparison, that would make the king's offer completely *disingenuous*. Instead, the "ransom for many" at Matthew 20:28 seems comparable to the "ransom for all" according to 1st Timothy 2:5-6.

It is also evident that *more* are called than chosen, proving that the *calling itself does not save*. For if it did, then the text would instead need to state: "For *few* are called, and *few* are chosen." This is why Calvinism requires a "General Call" by Common Grace for the non-elect vs. an "Effectual Call" by Irresistible Grace for the elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Ron Rhodes: *"Theologians point out that the phrase 'many are invited, but few are chosen' (Matthew 22:14) indicates that God issues two calls to sinners inviting them to receive His salvation: a general call to all and a specific call (or election) to some."*[497]

Our reply:

The context does not distinguish between *types of callings*, whether "general" or "specific." Moreover, the parable did not state that being chosen meant being chosen to believe, or chosen to answer the call, but rather implies being chosen *for having answered the call* and appearing dressed in Christ's righteousness. Israel did not answer its call from God and now God would be turning to the Gentiles. That appears to be the message being conveyed.

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[497] *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 154.

What do Calvinists believe?

The fact that "many are called, but few are chosen," shows that God has a Chosen People that He wants to attend the Wedding Feast.

Our reply:

Did Jesus explain Matthew 22:14's quote of "many are called, but few are chosen" in the sense that He has only picked certain people to *become believers*? That is simply not what the text states. The "many" and "few" seems to echo the broad road to destruction vs. the narrow path to life, in terms of the few that find it. So, a simple meaning to Matthew 22:14 is that God calls everyone to salvation, but only chooses for salvation those who believe in Him, consistent with John 3:16. I find that to be a simple and consistent meaning of the Gospels, without inferring that God only wants certain people to become believers.

Matthew 22:34-40

"But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?' And He said to him, '"**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind**." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.'"

All Calvinists will agree that Calvinism's elect were created for Heaven, while comparatively few Calvinists will be so candid so as to state that Calvinism's non-elect were conversely created for Hell. However, if the alleged non-elect were not created for Heaven, then what other option for them is there? Ultimately, this begs the question of how Calvinism's non-elect could be ethically demanded to "love"—with all their heart, soul, mind, body and strength—the very same One who decreed the circumstances by which they would be born as helpless and hopeless? Instead, it stands to reason that if God commands all men to love Him, it is because God first loved all men and desires that His love be reciprocated. A parallel passage at Mark 12:32-34 records, "The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is one, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, '**You are not far**

from the kingdom of God.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions." If the scribe was a member of Calvinism's non-elect, then how could it be said that he was "*not far* from the kingdom of God"? In Calvinism, there is no such thing as "incremental regeneration" or being "headed in the right direction," but instead, one is either *regenerate* as God-lovers or *unregenerate* as total haters of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

While it is true that God is not all that loving toward the non-elect, why *should* He be loving toward creatures who hate and reject Him? It is by God's grace that He should show love toward any fallen creature who does not deserve it.

Our reply:

It's odd that Calvinists must be reminded that they are the ones who profess belief in exhaustive determinism. In Calvinism, the creatures who hate and reject God are exactly what God created them to be, without deviation. Calvinists protest that the non-elect are nonetheless blameworthy because, in their depravity, they do what they *want* to do. Yet, Calvinists must again be reminded that the *wants* of the non-elect also fall within the scope of exhaustive determinism. For Calvinists to cite divine permission is also a red herring since that which is permitted is also part of the total plan of everything that is exhaustively determined.

By contrast, God can ethically demand that every member of the lost human race love *Him* because He does, in fact, love *them*, as testified in Matthew 5:43-48: "'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, **love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, so **that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven**; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? **Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect**.'" So, although God is not obligated to love anyone, He does so anyway, simply because that is part of His character. "God is love." (1st John 4:8)

Matthew 23:13-15

"'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because **you shut off the kingdom of heaven** from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, **nor do you allow those who are entering** to go in. Woe to you, scribes

and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.'"

Similarly, Luke 11:52 states: "'Woe to you lawyers! For you have **taken away the key of knowledge**; you yourselves did not enter, and you **hindered those who were entering**.'" Additionally, 1st Thessalonians 2:14-16 states: "For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, **hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved**; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."

If Calvinism's elect are saved by an Irresistible Grace, then how could any mortal man "shut off" or be said to have "hindered" that which is irresistible? Moreover, how could anyone who is among the alleged non-elect ever be said to have been "entering" the kingdom of God but then stopped? Recall that in Calvinism, such non-elect have no Savior who died for them, in having been excluded from a Limited Atonement, and therefore it becomes puzzling how such a one could be said to have been "entering"? In Calvinism, what were they entering?

Matthew 23:37-39

"'**Jerusalem**, **Jerusalem**, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! **How often I wanted to gather your children together**, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and **you were unwilling**. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"'"

Similarly, Luke 19:41-44 states: "When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and **wept over it**, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your

children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because **you did not recognize the time of your visitation**.'" Had Israel not missed the time of their "visitation," they would have seen God's intended gathering, in terms of "restoring the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6), as anticipated by the disciples.

Speaking of Israel being unwilling, Jesus states: "And **you are unwilling** to come to Me so that you may have life." (John 5:40) So, Jesus expresses a sincere desire to *gather* people who ultimately were *not gathered*, given their unwillingness. This establishes a general principle of human free-will. God gave them a choice. This is also evident from Ezekiel 18:23: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" There is simply no legitimate basis to question God's sincerity in this matter, and that raises the question of how God really *could* be sincere, if Calvinism was true. According to Calvinism, God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including the obstinance and resistance of those who refused to be gathered, all determined before they were ever born, and without any possibility of wanting or desiring anything different. So, if that really was the case, then how could Jesus be genuinely sincere in His statement of, "How often I wanted"?

> Roger Olson: *"Jesus, I point out to them, wept over Jerusalem's rejection of Him. Why in the world would He, as God, weep over their rejection of Him, if their rejection of Him was predestined—foreordained by God—for His glory? So, to me, Calvinism gets tied up in conundrums—paradoxes—that it really can't relieve. A major one is if God is, as John Piper says, the One who designs, ordains and governs everything, including evil, including heresy, including calamities and disasters of all kinds—sin, even sin—if God is the One who designed it, foreordained it and governs it for His glory, then why regret it? Why cry over it? Why think it's bad? If it glorifies Him, then it's really good. If I were a Calvinist, I would have to think that things like heresy and sin, and even genocide and so forth, were somehow part of a plan of God, that's all for the good, and therefore that would change my whole attitude toward those things."*[498]

So, Calvinists can either (a) deny that Jesus truly *meant* what He said, or (b) insist that those whom He desired to gather were, in fact, all gathered. Let's start with the first perspective.

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[498] Roger Olson, *"Against Calvinism" with Dr. Roger Olson*, 28:47-30:01. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db7jS4Loa9g

What do Calvinists believe?

Erwin Lutzer: *"When Christ pled with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, we see the revealed will of God. Yet, the secret will of God was that the people not believe. God apparently had some ultimate purpose for displaying mercy to some and hardening others."*[499]

John Calvin: *"As for this passage being taken by sophists to support free will and abolish God's secret predestination, there is an easy answer. God wishes all to come together, they say: therefore all are free to come and their wish does not depend on the election of God. I answer, that the will of God as mentioned here must be judged by the result. Seeing that in His Word He calls all alike to salvation, and this is the object of preaching, that all should take refuge in His faith and protection, it is right to say that He wishes all to gather to Him. Now the nature of the Word shows us that here there is no description of the secret counsel of God (Arcanum Dei consilium)--just His wishes. Certainly those whom He wishes effectively to gather, He draws inwardly by His Spirit, and calls them not merely by man's outward voice. If anyone objects that it is absurd to split God's will (duplicem in Deo volunteer fingi), I answer that this is exactly our belief, that His will is one and undivided: but because our minds cannot plumb the profound depths of His secret election (ad profundam arcanae electionis abyssum) to suit our infirmity, the will of God is set before us as double (bifariam)."*[500]

Our reply:

In other words, when Jesus said, "How often I wanted," but "you were unwilling," what He secretly must have meant was, "I never really wanted" since you were purposely excluded from the secret predestination of God. Alleging a "secret will" suffers from the problem of being unable to explain Jesus' sincere lament.

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[499] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 171.

[500] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. III, and the Epistles of James and Jude*, translated by A.W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 69, emphasis mine.

> Dave Hunt: *"God irrationally mourns and weeps over the multitudes He has predestined to eternal doom and from whom He withholds the ability to repent?"*[501]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Now folks, I want to submit to you that if He had said, 'I would have, but you couldn't,' that whole thing will have been a great charade."*[502]

The fact that an all-powerful God would allow His will to be thwarted, at least temporarily in this present world, shows *self-restraint*. It shows that God is capable of being an adult. However, in Calvinism, God must always get His way in every instance, which is more like the behavior of an immature child. So Calvinism fails to represent the depth of God.

As an analogy of God's desire to save people *freely*, a father may express *how often* he wanted to bless his child, but due to misbehavior, could not morally justify rewarding disobedience. Either way, the father is still in control. The father, by his own authority, has set the conditions by which he has chosen to administer rewards, all the while being desirous to be gracious since he very much does love his child. God long desired to bless Israel because they are His chosen people, but He had no intention of rewarding their disobedience, either:

> **Deuteronomy 5:29:** "'**Oh that they had such a heart in them**, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, **that it may be well with them** and with their sons forever!'"

> **Ezekiel 24:13:** "'In your filthiness is lewdness. Because **I would have cleansed you, yet you are not clean**, you will not be cleansed from your filthiness again until I have spent My wrath on you.'"

> **Hosea 7:13:** "Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! **I would redeem them, but they speak lies against Me**."

> **Hosea 11:8:** "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? **How can I surrender you, O Israel?** How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? **My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled**."

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[501] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 333.
[502] Adrian Rogers, *You Can Be Sure: Romans 8:28-31*, 1998.

Next, let's consider the second Calvinist perspective:

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Who, then, is 'Jerusalem'? It is assumed by Arminian writers that 'Jerusalem' represents individual Jews who are, therefore, capable of resisting the work and will of Christ. But upon what warrant do we leap from 'Jerusalem' to 'individual Jews'?"*[503]

> James White: *"A vitally important point to make here is that the ones the Lord desired to gather are not the ones who 'were not willing'! Jesus speaks to the leaders about their children that they, the leaders, would not allow Him to 'gather.' Jesus was not seeking to gather the leaders, but their children. This one consideration alone renders the passage useless for the Arminian seeking to establish freewillism."*[504]

> James White: *"...Matthew 23:37 (a passage condemning the Jewish leaders for seeking to keep those under their authority from the ministry of Christ)...."*[505]

Our reply:

However, Jesus is not just *condemning* but also *lamenting*. What would be the point of Jesus' *lament* if everyone with whom He desired to gather were, in fact, all gathered? In Calvinism, the elect will all be gathered by being regenerated against their unregenerate will, simply because they are elect, while the non-elect have no Atonement by which to base their gathering, in having been excluded from a Limited Atonement. Either way, in Calvinism, Jesus' lament makes no sense.

The suggestion that "Jerusalem" only means its *leaders* (whom Jesus did *not* desire to gather, in contrast to the "children," who are the city's collective *elect* inhabitants that He *did* desire to gather), is negated by Jeremiah 4:14: "**Wash your heart** from evil, **O Jerusalem, that you may be saved**. How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you?" So, whatever is meant by "Jerusalem," either its leaders or all of the people, God, for His part, wanted to see it become "saved."

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[503] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 137.
[504] Ibid., 138.
[505] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 375.

It is also worth pointing out that early Church father, Irenaeus (130-200), contended against the Gnostics[506] by appealing to none other than Matthew 23:37:

> *"This expression, 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, and thou wouldst not,' set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free (agent) from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God...And in man as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice...If then it were not in our power to do or not to do these things, what reason had the apostle, and much more the Lord Himself, to give us counsel to do some things and to abstain from others?"*[507]

This shows that the free-will debates which take place in our modern era between Calvinists and Arminians had already been debated for two thousand years, even well before the time of Augustine (354-430), between the Gnostics and the early Church.

Matthew 24:16-24, 31

"'Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then **those who are in Judea** must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a **Sabbath**. For then there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of **the elect** those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, "Behold, here is the Christ," or "There He is," do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even **the elect**. … And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together **His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.'"

Similarly, Luke 18:7 states: "And the Lord said, 'Hear what the unrighteous judge said; now, will not God bring about justice for His elect

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[506] Irenaeus, *Peri Monarchias*. http://www.mb-soft.com/believe/txv/irenae6.htm
[507] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies XXXVII*, Book 4, Ch. 37. http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf01.ix.vi.xxxviii.html

who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?'" For those listening, "His elect" would have been understood as the Jews.

> Dave Hunt: *"Israel is called God's elect in both the Old and New Testaments (Isaiah 45:4; 65:9, 22; Matthew 24:31, ect.). There is no question that God chose Israel, called her, and drew her with 'bands of love' (Hosea 11:4) unto Himself."*[508]

This "great tribulation" prophecy specifically dealt with future Jewish suffering, in terms of "those who are in Judea" occurring on the "Sabbath." In this context, "the elect" was not in reference to Calvinism's elect, but instead referred to the Jews, that is, "the chosen people." (Deuteronomy 7:6; Isaiah 45:4, 65:9, 65:22) In the Bible, the Jews are sometimes referred to as "the elect" (2nd Timothy 2:10) or "the circumcised." (Galatians 2:7-9) In a New Covenant context, such as Romans 8:1, 33, "God's elect" refers to redeemed, believing Christians, excluding unbelievers.

Matthew 25:23

"'His master said to him, "**Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful** with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master."'"

Jesus' praise would only make sense if people have a choice. Of course, Calvinists agree that we *make* choices, but in Calvinism, if all was decreed from eternity past, then while we *make* choices, we don't really *have* a choice, since whatever choice man makes would be whatever God, according to Calvinism, chose for them to choose. The opposite of that is that God chose all of us to choose Him, but will we? Will we choose Him? Will we reciprocate God's love for us?

> Adrian Rogers: *"God gives everybody a power of choice. If we had no choice, we could neither be praised for doing good or blamed for doing evil."*[509]

> Adrian Rogers: *"God gives us the privilege of saying 'no' so that we can have the delight of saying 'yes.'"*[510]

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[508] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 424.
[509] *Adrian Rogers: From the Palace to the Pit (2458)*, 16:22-16:31.
[510] *Adrian Rogers Reformed Theology Talk College Bible Study*, 11/10/1997.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"What differentiates the elect from the reprobate is no inherent power or talent or achievement but solely the gracious choice of a sovereign God."*[511]

Our reply:

If the only difference between Calvinism's elect and non-elect was *God's choice*, then why would the congratulations of "Well done" be appropriate for the *passive* recipients of Monergism, that is, those who are *made willing* by irresistible and unavoidable means? Would Calvinists reply to God, "No Lord, my faithfulness was not my decision but was your 'gracious choice'—I had nothing to do with it"? Would it be more appropriate for the Lord to instead say: "Well done, good and faithful [decree]"? Why congratulate puppets? However, Calvinists do not believe that Irresistible Grace and exhaustive determinism makes people into puppets. In fact, Calvinists believe that divine determinism makes real people really free, *even though* all of their wants and intentions of their heart are meticulously predetermined by decree from cradle to grave. Such a proposition is difficult for Calvinists to explain, and human analogies tend not to help. For instance, who would say that a woman that is unknowingly given a date-rape pill *freely* received her assailant? Similarly, is it reasonable to say that an unregenerate person (who is unknowingly regenerated against their unregenerate will, simply because they are elect) *freely* receives Christ? Calvinism would present a type of freedom that implies coercion, though Calvinists often deny that coercion is involved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Now (and here it gets tricky) Calvinism goes on to say that God grants the inclination and ability to choose Christ to some, namely, the elect. God does not coerce anyone, if that means he saves a man against his will."*[512]

Our reply:

Would it be "coercion" if God regenerated the unregenerate elect against their unregenerate will, simply because they are elect?

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[511] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 134.
[512] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 191.

Matthew 25:34

"'Then the King will say to those on His right, "Come, **you who are blessed of My Father**, inherit the **kingdom prepared** for you **from** the foundation of the world."'"

Similarly, Jesus stated: "'In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for **I go to prepare** a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.'" (John 14:2-3)

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"The Lord designed His kingdom from before the foundation of the world and He designed who would be in it from before the foundation of the world. And you and I are saved and we know the Lord Jesus Christ because God chose us before the world ever began. What an incredible reality!"*[513]

Our reply:

Why do Calvinists insert the word "before" in front of "from the foundation of the world"? From *before* "foundation of the world" implies something prior to Genesis, whereas something "from" the foundation of the world (as the verse states) implies something from Genesis to present, as can be demonstrated from Luke 11:50-51: "'…the blood of all the prophets, shed **since the foundation of the world**, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah….'" In other words, "since the foundation of the world" signifies the time from Abel to Zechariah (i.e. from Genesis). Otherwise, the blood of Abel would have been spilt from *before he was born*, that is, from *before* the foundation of the world, which is obviously incorrect.

Who did God design to be in the kingdom? Christians. Those who are in Christ. Believers are the "blessed of My Father." However, from the Calvinist perspective, the blessed ones are those whom God pre-temporally intended to bring to faith, as members of the secret elect. Calvinists assume quite a bit into the Bible, and expect others to make the same inferences, even if the immediate text offers no such support.

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[513] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

Matthew 25:41

"'Then He will also say to those on His left, "Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been **prepared for the devil and his angels**."'"

> Adrian Rogers: *"If you go to Hell, you'll be an intruder. Hell was not prepared for you. It was prepared for the Devil and his angels. But if you choose to follow Satan, you'll follow him to Hell."*[514]

Obviously, some people will go to Hell, as in the "broad" road to destruction. (Matthew 7:13) The question to be answered, however, is whether those who end up on the broad road to destruction are there by God's design, as part of a *total plan*, in terms of God having allegedly decreed "whatsoever comes to pass."

Jesus says that Hell was "prepared for the devil and his angels," although Calvinists must admit that Hell was prepared for the non-elect as well. For instance, if you ask Calvinists whether they believe that "the elect" were created for Heaven, they will quickly answer "yes," but if you ask Calvinists whether "the non-elect" were conversely created for Hell, you will receive a more hesitant and conflicting answer. For those Calvinists who say "yes," they are simply being consistent with Calvinism's immutable decree, though inconsistent with Matthew 25:41. Calvinists who answer "no" are left explaining where exactly the alleged non-elect were created to spend eternity, and how such indeterminism would fit with the exhaustive determinism of Calvinism's decree.

What do Calvinists believe?

> George Whitefield: *"For, without doubt, the doctrine of election and reprobation must stand or fall together."*[515]

Our reply:

Logical consistency demands such an answer, but Calvinists are often left fighting against logic, and instead pleading for divine mystery.

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[514] Adrian Rogers, *Five Minutes After Death: Luke 16:19-31*, 2000.
[515] *Whitefield's Letter To Wesley On Election*, Dec. 24, 1740, http://www.chapellibrary.org/files/5514/0491/7249/wltw.pdf.

Matthew 26:24
"'The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! **It would have been good for that man if he had not been born**.'"

In other words, Judgment Day will be very bad for such people, and the same could also be said of anyone who ends up in Hell. What is important to point out, though, is that anyone who ends up in Hell would do so by their *own* choice, rather than *God's* choice because God's *antecedent* choice is that they turn and live: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord God, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'" (Ezekiel 18:23) Only by God's *consequent* choice do they experience eternal separation from Him, meaning that Hell was not God's original plan and intention for them.

The problem with Calvinism is that Calvinism's non-elect end up in Hell entirely by *design*, as part of an eternal "total plan" of "whatsoever comes to pass," in which the non-elect were never *intended* to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. As unfortunate recipients of an unconditional Reprobation, viz. a "dreadful" decree?[516], the non-elect would really be more in line for pity than blame. However, Scripture paints a different picture. 2nd Peter 2:21 states: "For it would be **better for them** not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them." How could the offense be *greater* if they rejected God's saving grace that was never intended for them in the first place unless it was, in fact, intended for them but they rejected the grace that could and should have been theirs?

Question: If God knows that it would have been "better" for someone if they had not been born, why then does He allow them to be born? In other words, why does God keep creating people that He knows will perish in unbelief and suffer eternally?

There are four points I'd like to make:

(1) God only directly-created Adam and Eve, but for the sake of argument, what if God knew that a certain person would eventually perish as an unbeliever, so instead He caused them to miscarriage in the womb and thus never be born? Sounds merciful, right? What if that person was your great,

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[516] *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 23, Section 7 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 796, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

great grandfather? Then, you, the believing descendant, could never be born. People are interconnected.

(2) Taking that same person, what if their bad choices ended up scaring someone else straight, so that someone else ended up getting saved? Again, people are interconnected.

(3) I don't think we should hold God accountable for what other people independently do. Independence, of course, presupposes the type of human autonomy as taught in non-Calvinism. So, let's consider it. People both *have* and *make* their own choices. They *have* a choice because their choice it is undecreed and unnecessitated. (Non-Calvinists believe that God's knowledge *captures* the information of their futures free choices but does not *cause* their choices.) Secondly, having their own undecreed choice, they *make* their own choice. In Calvinism, people indeed *make* choices—true enough—but do they really *have* a choice if everything they will ever choose is exhaustively and meticulously determined for them? Non-Calvinists say, "no." Following the non-Calvinist paradigm, then, people are given a wonderful gift of life, and are then held accountable for how they use their gift of life in a world that belongs to God. So, instead of casting aspersion on God for being cruel to allow someone to be born that will eventually misuse God's gift, we should instead be casting aspersion on the one who abuses God's gift that makes His world a less glorious place.

(4) Matthew 26:24 speaks of Judas Iscariot regarding the Messiah's prophesied betrayal. (Zechariah 11:13) Does this prophecy mean that Judas made his choice but didn't really have a choice, since Calvary was determined and predestined? (Luke 12:2; Acts 2:23, 4:28) Non-Calvinists believe in conditional predestination, in which God plans certain things contingently. In other words, unbelievers tried to throw Jesus down a cliff (Luke 4:29), tried to stone Him (John 8:59) and tried to seize Him (John 10:39), but God thwarted and frustrated all of their attempts until the moment of Calvary. As a backdrop, non-Calvinists believe that God foresaw that there would be willing traitors, undecreed and unnecessitated, in which God predestined to use their self-determined evil motives and intentions—which God did not cause—so that their instrument of death would become God's instrument of life.

Matthew 26:30-35

"After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, "I will strike down the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall

be scattered." But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee.' But Peter said to Him, 'Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.' Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, **you will deny Me three times**.' Peter said to Him, '**Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You**.' All the disciples said the same thing too."

Jesus knew what Peter would choose, not because He forced it, but because He knew it. Jesus knew Peter's weaknesses. This was not a matter of God's *predestination*, but rather God's *prophecy*.

- Predestination deals with what God unilaterally does.
- Prophecy deals with what God knows that others will do, and what God may also consequently do.

If Peter had thought that God predestined him to make the wrong choice, then by his own reasoning, he could avoid feeling bad about it, knowing that it was not his choice but God's. Peter's *remorse*, however, gives away the fact that he knew that he both *had* a choice and *made* his choice. The problem with Calvinism, though, is that it teaches that God has pre-scripted "whatsoever comes to pass," thus meaning that while we *make* choices, we do not really *have* a choice in what we choose, since *what* we will choose, has already been decided on our behalf from eternity-past, which we are enslaved to meticulously and unchangeably perform, without ever the slightest deviation. In Calvinism, therefore, Peter's choice was actually *God's* choice, but made to *look* like Peter's choice, which he, then, would ultimately feel bad about. That would not be indicative of a loving God, but rather just cruel manipulation. Calvinism is a very dark portrayal of God's sovereignty, and one wonders whether its real purpose is the demonic intention of getting people to turn against God.

Chapter 7: Gospel of Mark

Mark 10:21-23

"Looking at him, **Jesus felt a love for him** and said to him, 'One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and **you will have treasure in heaven**; and **come, follow Me**.' But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, 'How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!'"

"Jesus felt a love" for the Rich Young Ruler, but who did not reciprocate, and instead walked away. In Calvinism, however, true love does not merely call and offer, but *secures*. True grace, in Calvinism, means that God does not merely leave man to their own free-will, but overcomes their resistance and effectually secures their salvation. So, in Calvinism, Jesus could not truly have loved him, unless he later converted.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."*[517]

Our reply:

Perhaps that's why some Calvinists suppose that the rich young ruler had later become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"…we don't know what happened to the rich young ruler. We don't know after Pentecost if he was converted."*[518]

Our reply:

In this way, Calvinists can hedge their bets, so to speak, in order to interpret the text in a way that remains consistent with Calvinism.

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[517] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[518] James White, *Dividing Line*, *In What Sense Did Jesus Love the Rich Young Ruler?*, 2:35-2:39. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o844Tf57w1s

Otherwise, in order to protect Calvinism, Calvinists might instead insist that the Rich Young Ruler was insincere, and that he didn't really mean it, and wasn't truly interested in knowing how to get saved, but only wanted validation in front of his friends. Nonetheless, Jesus offered him "treasure in heaven," which would be inconsistent if Jesus also knew that he was a member of the non-elect, with whom God never intended Heaven.

Mark 12:28-34
"One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, 'What commandment is the foremost of all?' Jesus answered, 'The foremost is, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is One Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.' The scribe said to Him, 'Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love One's neighbor as Himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.' When Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, He said to him, '**You are not far from the kingdom of God**.' After that, no one would venture to ask Him any more questions."

Jesus didn't say that the *answer* was not far from the kingdom of God, but rather that the *person* himself was not far from the kingdom of God. Jesus was pointing out something with respect to the individual, and which operates against the logic of monergistic Calvinism. In Calvinism, conversion is sudden and immediate through the preemptive regeneration of Irresistible Grace, in going from God-hater to God-lover, while common experience conversely shows us that more often, conversion to Christ is sometimes transitional, as a person gradually becomes more open to God until they are ready to commit their heart to Christ and welcome His forgiveness, resulting in God then granting them His promise of the Holy Spirit in regeneration as a Born Again new creation so that the convert is thereby enabled to truly walk with God.

Mark 16:15
"And He said to them, 'Go into **all the world** and preach the gospel to **all creation**.'"

In this occurrence of "all the world" and "all creation," why don't Calvinists infer the same scope at John 3:16? In other words, "'For God so loved [all the world, all creation], that He gave His only begotten Son, that

whoever [in all the world, all creation] believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'" The inconsistency of a Calvinist's understanding of the term "world" is puzzling to non-Calvinists.

The reason why God commands global evangelism is because God desires that everyone come to know Him, which global evangelism would be necessary to make possible. It is also objectively good news for everyone, because Jesus did something for everyone—He died for them, so that if they will believe in Him, they will not perish but have eternal life. Moreover, at John 3:18, Jesus said that whoever does not believe in Him is judged already. The gospel is good news for them because it can save them from being judged already. So, the gospel goes out to all the world, and it is good news for all the world, and anyone who rejects it is rejecting their own interests.

> Dave Hunt: *"If salvation is not genuinely available to all, why did Christ command His disciples to go into all the world and 'preach the gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15)? Is that not giving a false impression, both to His disciples and to all who would read their account of Christ's teachings in the four Gospels?"*[519]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"We do not know who the elect are; hence, we preach the gospel to every creature."*[520]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"All of the elect will be saved because God's grace will accomplish God's work."*[521]

Our reply:

So, in Calvinism, the elect must be saved, no matter what. It is a necessary function of Unconditional Election. However, Calvinists are able to rationalize evangelism in the following way: The Bible commands it, and since they do not know the secret identity of Calvinism's elect, it is possible that God may seed their audience with Calvinism's elect, thereby guaranteeing the success of their evangelistic work. The objection against Calvinism is that evangelism, therefore, simply becomes a round-up of the elect, rather than an authentic saving mission.

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[519] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 260.
[520] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 135.
[521] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 188.

What do Calvinists believe?

If God is not sovereign over salvation, then what is the point of evangelism?

Our reply:

In other words, due to the Fall of man, people are so fallen that they cannot believe in the gospel unless God gives them an Irresistible Grace, and therefore apart from such an Irresistible Grace, evangelism would be pointless. However, there is no verse in the Bible which states that people cannot believe in the gospel, nor does the Bible ever say that God gives people an Irresistible Grace. So, given the absence of those two premises from being found in the Bible, why should any Christian accept the Calvinist's conclusion?

Chapter 8: Gospel of Luke

Luke 2:10-11

"And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you **good news of great joy** which will be **for all the people**; for today in the city of David there has been **born for you a Savior**, who is Christ the Lord.'"

Good news of great joy for all the people who now have a Savior born to them. Heralded by a choir of angels, this marked the greatest act of grace that God ever provided to humanity. The mystery of redemption hinted at in the Old Testament was now a mystery fully revealed. What the people had long-hoped for, in the coming of a Messiah, was now a reality unfolded upon the earth. Just as the people back then hoped for the *coming* of the Messiah, today we long for the *return* of the Messiah. For those who reject God, neither the coming nor the returning of the Messiah is good news, but that is simply due to their own choice not to receive Him. They could be saved. Nothing stops them but their own obstinance and/or love for the things of this world. God freely offers salvation to all, and that remains undiminished whether people receive Him or not. For those who reject Him, that is on them. They can't blame God for what happens next.

Of course, this was not an Irresistible Grace. People have a choice whether to welcome the Savior or not, and sadly, "the people" largely did not receive Him: "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him." (John 1:11) Still, though, it is good news for those that do love God. God has provided everyone with a Savior. The relevant question for Calvinism, though, is how would Jesus be "good news of great joy" for Calvinism's non-elect? Of course, it would not.

> Dave Hunt: *"Paul preached the same 'good tidings of great joy...to all people' announced by the angel of the Lord (Luke 2:10). Yet those predestined to eternal torment find no 'joy' in knowing that Christ came to save others--but not them! Calvinism limits to an elect the joy the angel said was for all. ... The Calvinist claims that the angel didn't mean 'all people' but 'all kinds of people.'"*[522]

> Dave Hunt: *"All of the apostles' hearers surely understood that the good news of salvation was offered to every one of them: 'We*

[522] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 365.

declare unto you [all] glad tidings.' (Acts 13:32) But if Calvinism is true, how could the gospel be 'glad tidings' to anyone who didn't know that he was one of the elect?"[523]

What do Calvinists believe?

Christ did not come to bring peace to the world at large, but only for those with whom He is pleased to elect.

Our reply:

In other words, in Calvinism, God never meant this as good news for everyone, but only for a secretly chosen elect-class. This is why Calvinism requires that the Bible be read very differently than what it actually states. If Calvinism was true, then the declaration might better have been stated as, "Good news of great joy for some of you. Born for some of you is a Savior." It is well documented that even Calvinists who are professed-believers ponder and ruminate over the question of whether or not they are secretly "elect."[524] So, if the angels meant this declaration only as a tribute to Calvinism's elect, then it might have only brought more questions than answers.

Luke 2:22-24
"And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, **'Every firstborn male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'**), and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, 'A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.'"

The Old Testament reference states: "'Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; **it belongs to Me**.'" (Exodus 13:2) Would Calvinists be willing to say that every firstborn male is one of Calvinism's elect? Otherwise, how would those whom God calls "holy" simultaneously be a member of Calvinism's *unholy* non-elect? How would such a one be said to "belong" to God if they are non-elect?

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[523] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 364.
[524] For more on that point, see the discussion on *Assurance*.

Luke 6:46
"'Why do you call Me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say?'"

The question comes across sincere, in which fault is placed upon those who fail to do as they ought, and who could and should have done otherwise. However, if God had secretly decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," so that people are helpless to do anything other than that which they are meticulously decreed to perform, then wouldn't this question amount to divine teasing? If Calvinism was true, then the question itself would seem cruel. This is why divine predestination should not be taken to mean that God predestines everything, but rather that God only predestines those things which are consistent with His holy character.

Luke 7:30
"But the Pharisees and the lawyers **rejected God's purpose for themselves**, not having been baptized by John."

Their purpose was to repent and be baptized along with everyone else in Israel so as to aid the ministry of John the Baptist in preparing the way for Christ. Instead of complying, they actively worked to derail God's purposes.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Surely it is part of modern evangelical tradition to say, 'God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,' but providing a meaningful biblical basis for this assertion is significantly more difficult."*[525]

Our reply:

It sure seems like the "modern evangelical tradition" is vindicated at Luke 7:30, in which the Pharisees and lawyers had rejected the good "purpose" that God had for them.

Luke 8:11-15
"'Now the parable is this: the seed is the word of God. Those beside the road are those who have heard; then **the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they will not believe and be saved**. Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, **receive the word with joy**; and these have no firm root; **they believe for a while**, and in

[525] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 265.

time of temptation fall away. The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity. But the seed in the good soil, these are the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.'"

In Calvinism, the unregenerate cannot respond *positively* to the gospel. Recall from the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity and Total Inability in which the non-elect do not receive an Irresistible Grace, and thereby remain in their hopeless and helpless condition from birth. And yet we learn from Luke 8:13 that there are those whom Jesus metaphorically compares to "rocky soil" who eventually fall away due to the cares and temptations of this world, but not before *first* showing initial "joy" in hearing "the word of God" and who "believe for a while." As members of Calvinism's non-elect (required by Calvinism since they ultimately fell away), where would they get such ability, given that Total Inability guarantees and assures us that they have none?

One solution for Calvinism is what John Calvin advocated, namely, a doctrine of "Temporal Grace" which gives the non-elect temporary ability.[526] He taught that God gives some of the non-elect a "temporal grace" [like an Irresistible Grace to overcome Total Inability] as a "taste of His grace" with "some glimmerings of His light" and "some knowledge" such as to "affect them with some sense of His goodness," though which God [according to Calvinism] "illumes only for a time," which "afterwards proves evanescent." These "reprobates" that "fall away" "take root in appearance" as if they "were of the predestined," so as to be "considered for a time to be children of God" and "afterwards depart to their own place." Clearly, John Calvin believed that this special class of the non-elect are given a temporary gift of faith which is later rescinded. However, this is a rarely held view among Calvinists. Instead, most Calvinists simply reject that those of Luke 8:13 ever *really* believed, despite the *fact* that Jesus said that they did.

What do Calvinists believe?

Those with a true faith or a saving faith, that is, a genuine living faith will persist because that is a special type of faith that God gives only to His elect, while those who fall away supply evidence that they only had man's temporary, false common faith that does nothing except fade away.

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[526] For more, see the topical discussion on *Evanescent Grace*.

Our reply:

This parable doesn't make a distinction between common faith vs. saving faith. It also doesn't negate the fact that they genuinely believed. What it does show is that these people faced competing-loves, and they chose to love the world more than God, and on that account ultimately fell away. Hence, this would serve as a warning for those who would seek to follow God.

Often in these types of discussions, we will use the same words but not mean the same things. In other words, an effectually gifted "faith" that is offered up as a *special* kind of faith, denoted as a true faith, or a saving faith, or a genuine faith, or a living faith, are really just euphemisms for Calvinism's "Irresistible Grace." However, you won't find a dichotomy between common faith vs. saving faith presented in the parable.[527]

Luke 8:25

"And He said to them, '**Where is your faith?**' They were fearful and amazed, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey Him?'"

If saving faith exclusively came from God, why would He rebuke people for not having it? Mark 6:6 states: "And **He wondered at their unbelief**. And He was going around the villages teaching." Jesus seems to reflect an *expectation* that they could and should believe: "'If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, **believe the works**, so **that you may know** and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.'" (John 10:37-38) Moreover, the apostle Paul tells us where faith comes from, and the answer is quite simple: "So **faith comes from hearing**, and hearing by **the word of Christ**." (Romans 10:17) So, then, anyone who hears the gospel preached can derive faith from it. That's what would make perfect sense of Jesus' expectation. It's up to the individual whether they are willing to place their trust in God, and Jesus said of those who refuse: "'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that testify about Me; and **you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life**.'" (John 5:39-40) "Life" was there for the taking. All that stood in the way was the individual's own stubbornness. God was willing, though Calvinism says that God was ultimately *unwilling*, withholding the secret ingredient that would enable them to believe.

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[527] For more, see the topical discussion on *Irresistible Grace*.

Luke 9:51-56

"When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?' But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, 'You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for **the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them**.'] And they went on to another village."

Similarly, Luke 19:10 states: "'For the Son of Man has come to **seek and to save that which was lost**.'" John 12:47 also states: "'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to **save the world**.'" These verses convey a universal salvific intent on God's part, and which by no means requires Universalism, since John 3:16 makes it plain that even though God has loved the world and given the world the gift of His Son, only those who believe in Him are promised eternal life.

Luke 10:2

"And He was saying to them, 'The **harvest is plentiful**, but the **laborers are few**; therefore **beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers** into His harvest.'"

This is a call to action. There are plenty of people who *could* be saved but are not, due to a lack of evangelistic participation to reach them with the saving message of the gospel. However in Calvinism, if the laborers are few, then the few in number is precisely by divine design, and moreover, the harvest of the elect is equally rendered certain.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God has ordained the means as well as the ends: the prayer of Luke 10:2 is that the Lord would send out workers into the harvest."*[528]

[528] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 264-265.

Our reply:

In Calvinism, all of the elect *will* be saved by Irresistible Grace, and that exactly enough laborers will be dispatched to get the elect saved. Therefore, Calvinism seems to rob this passage of any sense of urgency with its "God has ordained the means" explanation, thus implying that no one is lost that otherwise could have been saved. However, compare with Ezekiel 33:7-9 which indicates that spoilage can and does take place: "'Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and you do **not speak to warn** the wicked from his way, that **wicked man shall die in his iniquity**, but **his blood I will require from your hand**. But if you on your part warn a wicked man to turn from his way and he does not turn from his way, he will die in his iniquity, but you have **delivered your life**.'"

The purpose of the laborer is to make a warning so that people won't perish, but if they *are* warned and yet *still* perish, then that's their own fault. From the Calvinist perspective, though, if this is really happening, then it means that God is running things poorly. However, God is not accepting blame, but "will require" that an account be given by believers, who by their labor in giving warning, have "delivered" their own life. That means Christians have an awesome responsibility.

Luke 10:30-37

"Jesus replied and said, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among **robbers**, and they **stripped him and beat him**, and went away **leaving him half dead**. And by chance a **priest** was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a **Levite** also, when he came to the place and saw him, **passed by** on the other side. **But a Samaritan**, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, **he felt compassion**, and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you." Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?' And he said, 'The one who showed mercy toward him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same.'"

Dave Hunt asks: *"God is not as kind as the Samaritan?"*[529] According to the Calvinist doctrine of **Preterition**, God is said to "pass by" the alleged "non-elect" when it comes to the mercy and compassion of saving grace. Perhaps unintentional, Calvinists nonetheless use similar "pass by" terminology in their own theology on the doctrine of Preterition:

What do Calvinists believe?

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death." Additionally, it states: "VII. The rest of mankind, God was pleased, according to the unreachable 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."*[530]

Our reply:

At best, Calvinism's doctrines of Preterition and Unconditional Reprobation portrays God with the *casual indifference* of the priest and Levite, and at worst, the *criminal inhumanity* of the thief and robber who left the man wounded in the first place, and it seems that the primary Calvinist response is that this parable is not about *God's* obligations but *man's*, as if God is not beholden to His own stated moral standards, which would seem to make God vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy.

> Laurence Vance: *"The God of the Calvinist is like the priest and the Levite who 'passed by' the 'half dead' man in the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:31-32). And worse yet, God would also be like the thieves who 'stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead' (Luke 10:30). To say that because God came back and 'had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds' (Luke 10:33-34) that he should be praised for his grace and mercy is absurd. Concerning the Samaritan who 'went to him' (Luke 10:34), the*

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[529] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 262.
[530] The Westminster Confession of Faith, *III. Of God's Eternal Decree*, emphasis mine. Additional examples of "pass by" terminology in Calvinism are found in the following website link. http://www.examiningcalvinism.com/Preterition.html

> *Lord enjoined: 'Go, and do thou likewise' (Luke 10:37). Certainly the Lord practices what he preaches."*[531]

> Robert Shank: *"But we must protest that a god who, while rescuing some, simply 'passes by' others in the same lost circumstance is so little like the Good Samaritan in our Lord's parable and so much like the priest and the Levite that he cannot be the God who desires to have all men saved and none perish."*[532]

Calvinist objection:

This suggests that God is required to take care of everyone based on the parable of the Good Samaritan, leaving off that God is not our 'neighbor', and leaving off that God is not obligated to show grace to anyone for anything.

Our reply:

While it's agreed that God is not our neighbor, but instead our Judge, the problem of hypocrisy looms large, and which is something that God hates. Jesus said of the Pharisees: "'Therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.'" (Matthew 23:3) So does Calvinism portray God as something that He hates? Here are God's standards:

> **James 2:15:** "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, '**Go in peace, be warmed and be filled**,' and **yet you do not give them what is necessary** for their body, **what use is that?**"

> **1st Timothy 5:8:** "But if anyone **does not provide for his own**, and especially for those of his household, he has **denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever**."

> **1st John 3:17:** "But whoever has the world's goods, and **sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?**"

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[531] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 300.
[532] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 193.

Would the doctrine of "pass by" Preterition compare favorably with such texts? Acts 17:28-29 declares that we are all God's children by creation, and so would Preterition reveal God to be a good or bad parent? The alternative view is that God meets His own stated standards to an exponential degree, and is completely genuine about it, through the gift of His Son in a well-meant offer of the gospel. According to Matthew 5:43-48, God tells us to love our enemies, not because He is a hypocrite who doesn't do the same, but because He *does* do the same, and He wants for us to do likewise in order to be *like* Him.

Luke 12:4-7

"'I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; **you are more valuable than many sparrows**.'"

We are valuable to God because He values us as His children, just as any child is valuable to their parents. However, in Calvinism, we must ask: Are the *non-elect* "more valuable than many sparrows"? How valuable to God would they be if He were to exclude them from a Limited Atonement, in which they were denied a loving Savior who died for them, and if God never intended for the non-elect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven? If their only real value was in how they could be created as clay vessels to demonstrate the various divine attributes of wrath and justice, then that would be a rather cruel value.

Luke 12:47-48

"'And that slave who **knew his master's will and did not get ready** or act in accord with his will, will receive **many lashes**, but **the one who did not know it**, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but **few**. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.'"

The implication is that for those who could not *do* their master's will, because they did not *know* their master's will, is a mitigating factor in God's justice system. This is a significant problem for Calvinism since in Calvinism, inability is most certainly not a *mitigating factor*. In Calvinism, those who suffer from totally inability to repent and who are fitted by God to destruction are responsible, regardless. So why does Jesus' justice system contradict Calvinism's justice system?

Luke 23:34 states: "But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; **for they do not know what they are doing**.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves." So despite being well-deserving of condemnation for what they did, their ignorance prompted Jesus to beg His Father for their forgiveness. Their ignorance was a mitigating factor. It was the same with Paul: "…yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief…." John 9:39-41 records: "Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Those of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these things and said to Him, 'We are not blind too, are we?' Jesus said to them, '**If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains**.'" In other words, if they were blind, they would not have the penalty of their sin imputed to them, but since they admit that they see, the penalty of their sin will indeed be imputed to them. John 15:22 records: "'**If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse** for their sin.'" The implication is that with knowledge there is ability, and with ability there is accountability. In God justice system, inability is a mitigating factor, but not so in Calvinism. Why the discrepancy?

So why is there not an even distribution of grace to all? The amount of grace given is proportionate to the amount of grace received. When people act positively upon the grace they are given, they are given more, while those who spurn grace, progressively receive less. God is infinitely fair-minded, though Calvinism is infinitely unfair.

Luke 13:2-5

"And Jesus said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were **greater sinners** than all other Galileans because they suffered this fate? I tell you, **no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish**. Or do you suppose that those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them were **worse culprits** than all the men who live in Jerusalem? I tell you, **no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish**.'"

Whenever calamity strikes, its direct victims are not necessarily the worst of humanity, but rather the calamity itself serves as a reminder to everyone that God seeks our repentance so that He can redeem us. Similarly, 2nd Peter 3:9 states: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to **perish** but for all to come to **repentance**." The point in texts such as this is that God's salvific desire for repentance is indiscriminately for all, whereas with Calvinism, God's salvific desire falls only to a predetermined class.

Luke 14:23

"'And the master said to the slave, "Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and **compel them** to come in, **so that my house may be filled**."'"

However, according to Calvinism, fallen man is totally disabled and cannot be compelled into the Kingdom of God. In Calvinism, only Irresistible Grace effects conversion. The entire implication of compelling indicates free-will.

Notice God's desire. He wants a full house. Of course, God also has standards, and He wants people to discover Him on His terms, that is, through a genuine relationship. Conversely, God's motivation in Calvinism is to display various divine attributes, such as by creating an elect class to display the attributes of mercy and grace, while creating a non-elect class to display the attributes of wrath and judgment. Both paradigms involve very different motivations and objectives.

Luke 16:19-31

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you **send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them**, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' But he said to him, '**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead**.'"

Notice how the "rich man" in Hell was ignorant of Calvinism. He asked Abraham to send someone back from the dead in order to prevent them from joining him someday in Hell. But why should he worry? After all, if they are among Calvinism's elect, then they'll receive an Irresistible Grace, while if they are non-elect, then there is nothing that can be done to change their *fate*. Yet, the rich man deemed his brothers to be *reachable*. So are those in Hell blocked from knowing about Calvinism? Abraham's answer resembled nothing from Calvinism, either. He replied that the rich man's brothers already had the testimony of the prophets, and that's all they were going to get. So why didn't Abraham mention anything about Total Inability, Irresistible Grace and Unconditional Election?

Luke 17:11-19

"While He was on the way to Jerusalem, He was passing between Samaria and Galilee. As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered and said, '**Were there not ten cleansed?** But the nine—**where are they?** Was no one found who returned to give glory to God, except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Stand up and go; **your faith has made you well**.'"

According to Calvinism, the one who showed gratitude is because they were irresistibly and unchangeably caused to do so. In Calvinism, then, it seems that God would be thanking Himself through others. If gratitude was possible only by irresistible and unchangeable divine causes, then why would Jesus ask of the other nine, "where are they?" as if they could have done otherwise? Moreover, why would Jesus refer to the faith of the one as "your faith" if their faith was none of their own, but instead an irresistible and unchangeable gift? First and foremost, Calvinists love and warmly embrace determinism, and so whatever the consequences are, they can live with it. So these matters are inconsequential to Calvinists.

Luke 19:9-10

"And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because **he, too, is a son of Abraham**. For the Son of Man has come to **seek and to save that which was lost**.'"

Similarly, Ezekiel 34:11, 16 states: "'For thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. … **I will**

seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment.'"'" 1st Timothy 1:15 also states: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to **save sinners**, among whom I am foremost of all." John 12:47 states: "'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to **save the world**.'" Ultimately, Jesus has come to seek and to save the sinful, lost sheep of the world. That doesn't mean that everyone will be saved. God gives people a choice.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Does He accomplish His purpose? Does He actually save, or only make savable? If He actually saves, does this not limit the scope of the 'lost'?"*[533]

Our reply:

Non-Calvinists do not believe that God ever promised to save anyone unconditionally or irresistibly. The angels were given a choice. So is humanity. In context, why would Jesus say, "because he, too, is a son of Abraham"? Jesus had visited the Jews and was a fellow Jew (on His mother's side), immersed in a Jewish culture. Therefore, given that everyone in that context was a son of Abraham, it seems reasonable that Jesus' meaning was that even he, Zaccheus, was significant. It was a way of saying that everyone matters to God, even the despised among them, such as a crooked tax collector. So, in a theology like Calvinism, where not everyone has salvific value to God, here Jesus shows that everyone does, in fact, matter to God, even the least of them, and God, for His part, desires to save them.

What do Calvinists believe?

So, do you believe that God's ability to save us is limited to our willingness to allow Him to save us?

Our reply:

God is omnipotent. If He wished to save people unconditionally and irresistibly, He certainly has the power to do so. The issue is not in His

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[533] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 176.

ability, but rather in His choice for how He wishes to grant salvation. So, pointing to God's power and ability is a "Red Herring."[534]

Luke 22:31
"'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.'"

So, if Calvinism was true, would that mean that the devil is afforded a wider sphere of influence than the Holy Spirit? *Anyone* is fair game for the devil to try to tempt, including Jesus Himself, but according to Calvinism, the Holy Spirit can only target for saving grace just a "certain number" of predetermined "elect." Therefore, according to Calvinism, wouldn't it be fair to say that where grace abounds, Preterition much more abounds?

Luke 23:34
"But Jesus was saying, '**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing**.' And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves."

On what basis would God the Father be able to answer Jesus' prayer to forgive His crucifiers if they were excluded from a Limited Atonement? Hebrews 9:22 states: "And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and **without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness**." So apart from the blood covenant of Calvary, how could any excluded, non-elect person in Calvinism be eligible to receive Jesus' forgiveness? When all put together, the following syllogism emerges:

> **If** there is no forgiveness of sins apart from the shedding of blood, **and if** the forgiveness of sins is ultimately tied to the blood covenant of the cross at Calvary, **and if** the atonement at Calvary was somehow *limited* to only Calvinism's elect (as per the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement), **then** Jesus would not have had the requisite basis upon which to forgive any random person's sins who happened to appear in the crowd of Luke 23:34 that day, but instead, Jesus would be restricted to forgiving the sins of only members of Calvinism's elect.

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[534] "A **red herring** is something that misleads or distracts from a relevant or important question. It may be either a logical fallacy or a literary device that leads readers or audiences toward a false conclusion." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_herring

Matthew 9:6 states: "'But so that you may know that the Son of Man **has authority on earth to forgive sins**'--then He said to the paralytic, 'Get up, pick up your bed and go home.'" Since Jesus has the authority to forgive sins, and since there can be no divine forgiveness apart from the blood covenant of Calvary, and since Jesus indiscriminately prayed for the forgiveness of all who took part in His crucifixion, how could anything other than an Unlimited Atonement emerge?

Luke 23:39-43

"One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, 'Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!' But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' And he was saying, '**Jesus, remember me** when You come in Your kingdom!' And He said to him, 'Truly I say to you, **today you shall be with Me in Paradise**.'"

Who does Jesus let into Heaven? Those who sincerely ask Him. The thief had given an implied question, awaiting affirmation, and which Jesus delivered. The repentant man issued his confession of guilt, and plead for Jesus' acceptance, and he got it, and so too will anyone else, simply at the asking, be provided when we also forgive others in turn.

Now, did the thief merit or deserve forgiveness? Did the thief effectively save himself by asking Jesus to save him? Asking for forgiveness neither merits nor earns forgiveness. Granting forgiveness is a choice made solely by the injured party who fully bears the cost of the offense, thus making the granting of forgiveness a matter of complete grace by the giver. Hence, the penitent thief did not save himself.

Imagine the prodigal son, after returning home in his humiliation, and being received by that warm welcome from his father, who ran to him and embraced him and gave him the golden ring and killed the fatted calf for a celebration party, and then the prodigal son hung out in the corner of the party and bragged to his friends, "Well, you know, I did come home, after all. I just want to brag about me coming home out of my pigsty. Look how great I am." It's just silliness. It was totally and completely the choice of the father to run to him, to embrace him and to reinstate him. He didn't owe that to his son, simply on the basis of returning home. He chose to do that because he is a gracious father, and that alone is what saved the son. He deserved to be stoned upon his return, probably, because of what he did

to his father. But he was received in grace because the father is gracious.[535] So when Calvinists assert that we effectively save ourselves or become our own savior when we *freely* come to Christ, it is preposterous. The choice of salvation is God's alone, and He alone sets the condition for salvation.

Luke 24:15-18

"And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they were talking with each other about all these things which had taken place. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. **But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him**. And He said to them, 'What are these words that you are exchanging with one another as you are walking?' And they stood still, looking sad. One of them, named Cleopas, answered and said to Him, 'Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?'"

> **Luke 24:15:** "While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself approached and began traveling with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him."
>
> **Luke 24:25:** "And He said to them, 'O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!'"
>
> **Luke 24:31:** "Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him; and He vanished from their sight."

Calvinists wish for you to envision that God can actively prevent people from seeing the truth (divine veiling) and simultaneously hold them responsible for their failure to see what they are prevented from seeing (human culpability), and then unveil the truth when He sees fit (divine revealing), which would presumably be for Calvinism's elect. However, the following true/false question shows the basic flaw in the Calvinist logic:

True or False:

> *Luke 24 states that the men were kept from seeing "Scriptural truth" and then were scolded for their failure to see it?*

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[535] *Dr. Michael Brown with Leighton Flowers on Soteriology101*, 43:04-43:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVuT2FkxE1w

False. If that was the case, then you'd have a very definite tension. However, what does the text really say that they were kept from seeing? Through His resurrection body, Jesus hid His identity. He was not keeping them from recognizing Scriptural truth, for which they were then scolded. Instead, they were scolded for their failure to process all that the Scriptures had said about the Messiah. Thus, any alleged tension disappears.

True or False:

> *The passage of Luke 24 specifically says that "God" veiled their eyes on the road to Emmaus, and that "God" opened their eyes during the prayer?*

False again. Although it's not the main issue (as the main issue is shown above), it is still worth pointing out that God may not have veiled them at all. Realize that Mary Magdalene also did not readily recognize Jesus (John 20:15) and neither did the disciples (John 21:4), and they all had a much closer relationship than did the two men on the road to Emmaus. One simple explanation is Jesus' new, never-dying resurrection body. This has a nice benefit for Jesus' conversation with the men along the road to Emmaus, because this way Jesus could anonymously challenge these men about their failure to process everything that Jesus had said about Himself, and everything that the Scriptures revealed about the Messiah (things they should have known), whereas if they had immediately recognized that it was Jesus, they wouldn't have processed anything about the Scriptures at all, but simply made His presence their only focus, which of course is what anyone would do in that situation. But Jesus wanted for them to process the things that they should have already processed, and hence His gentile rebuke, and remember, they were the ones who gently mocked Him first. (Luke 24:18) Jesus was merely giving it back to them. So the bottom line is that Jesus had veiled His identity, but He did not veil Scriptural truth, and hence there is no deterministic sovereignty/responsibility tension.

Chapter 9: Gospel of John

John 1:4-11

"In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, **so that all might believe through him**. He was not the Light, but he came to testify about the Light. **There was the true Light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man**. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."

John testified about the Light, namely Jesus Christ, not just so that *some* might believe but rather that indiscriminately "all" might believe. Moreover, notice that Jesus is the true Light who "enlightens every man." So, would Calvinists restrict "every man" to only Calvinism's elect, or insist that the described enlightenment is completely non-efficacious?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"But since fanatics eagerly seize on this verse and twist it into saying that the grace of illumination is offered equally to everyone, let us remember that it is only referring to the common light of nature, which is far inferior to faith. No man will penetrate into the kingdom of God through the cleverness and perspicuity of his own mind. Only the Spirit of God opens heaven to his elect. We must also remember that the light of reason which God imparted to men has been so darkened by sin that scarcely a few meager sparks still shine unquenched in this thick darkness or rather dreadful ignorance and abyss of errors."*[536]

Our reply:

This answer takes the "completely non-efficacious" route. So, then, why would John even bother to mention Christ's enlightenment if it only added up to an irrelevant, "few meager sparks"?

[536] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 21.

John 1:11-13
"He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But **as many as received Him**, to them **He gave the right to become children of God**, even to those who believe in His name, who were **born**, not ***of*** blood nor ***of*** the will of the flesh nor ***of*** the will of man, but *of* God."

God extends the offer of life freely to all, and those who receive Him by faith are given His special gift of new life. What is God's new life? It is something that overcomes the old life. Why is God's new life needed? It is because man is corrupted by sin which steers him away from God. Specifically, what does God's new life accomplish in the believer? It places within the heart of the believer the instructions and guidance to walk with God in a personal relationship with Him.

John 1:12 indicates *how* we become children of God. It is by faith. Being *born* of God, according to John 1:13, modifies having become the *children* of God. It is a blessing from God to all who believe in Him.

> **Galatians 3:26:** "For you are all **sons of God through faith** in Christ Jesus."

However, in Calvinism, a spiritually dead person is incapacitated and cannot receive the gospel, and therefore must be given an Irresistible Grace in order to be able to believe in the gospel. So, in Calvinism, John 1:12 and Galatians 3:26 cannot be taken on face value.

Being born "of blood" or "of the will of the flesh" or "of the will of man" are all inferior to what God does for the believer. None of those things accomplishes what being born of God's Spirit accomplishes. While they may be highly honorable in a temporary, earthly sense, such as being born into money, or born into athletics, or born into royalty, they all fall short because they are not truly unique, in that they do not convey anything of eternal significance, in that they do not lead to a truly changed life, whereas God's infused, re-blown life does.

> **Genesis 2:7:** "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**; and man became a living being."

> **John 20:21-22:** "So Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.' And when He had said this, **He breathed on them** and said to them, '**Receive the Holy Spirit**.'"

God is a God of Life, and so, just as Adam received *life* from God in the Garden of Eden, believers in Christ receive *new life* from God, resulting in no longer merely having a temporary, earthly perspective, but having an eternal, heavenly perspective, whereby the indwelling of the Holy Spirit teaches and guides us to become what God intended for us all along. The privilege of the sonship of God, given only to believers in Christ, is the highest attainable human status because it opens the door to true spiritual growth in living out God's purpose for our life, and He wishes this privilege upon every human soul, if they will only come to Him through His Son.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"…a general doctrine can be learned from this verse: we are reckoned the children of God not on account of our own nature, nor from our initiative, but because 'he chose to give us birth' (James 1:18), from undeserved love. Hence, it follows, first, that faith is not produced by us but is the fruit of spiritual new birth."*[537]

Our reply:

When Calvinists read "of blood," "of the will of the flesh," "of the will of man" and "of God," they infer that unbelievers are not converted by their own will-power, but instead converted by Irresistible Grace. However, the nature of being "born of God" is not about how *unbelievers* come to God, but about how *believers* benefit from being Born Again. In other words, as many as receive God and become children of God are then *born into something better than anything else this world can offer*. So, the *quality* of births is what is being contrasted, highlighting the advantage of being a Christian.

John 1:29

"The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, **the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**'"

The Passover Lamb for Israel is now Lamb of God for the whole world, Jews and Gentiles alike. Similarly, 1st John 2:1-2 states: "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

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[537] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 24.

righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and **not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world**."

> Adrian Rogers: *"Can you imagine John the Baptist standing there on the banks of Jordan saying 'Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the elect'? No, the sins of the world. … He was talking about you there. We are in this world. Our redemption is prophesied."*[538]
>
> Hal Lindsey: *"The Israelites thought He came to take away the sin of Israel. He says that He came to take away the sin of the world."*[539]

What do Calvinists believe?

Does He *actually* take away the sin of the world, or does He only *hypothetically* take away the sin of the world, provided that people fulfill a condition of believing? If He actually *does* take away the sin of the world, then aside from Universalism, doesn't it logically follow that we have to limit the scope of "the world"?

Our reply:

Rather than to reinvent the term "world" so that it means one thing at John 1:29 and the opposite at John 17:9, a more consistent approach is simply to understand that salvation is only for those who believe, and everyone in the world has an atonement available to them. Second, Jesus' atonement at Calvary does not automatically save, or else people would be saved without faith. Calvary is a provision, and one must believe in Christ in order to personally experience salvation. If one perishes without believing in Christ, then they have perished despite what otherwise would have saved them. As an analogy, consider the illustration for Calvary that Jesus indicated at John 3:14, as it related to the events of Numbers 21:6-9. The people had murmured against God, resulting in God punishing them by sending fiery serpents to bite them, and many in Israel died. So the people acknowledged their sin to Moses and begged him to intercede on their behalf to have God remove the snakes. The result was that God had Moses set a bronze serpent on a standard so that anyone who was bitten may live. In this way, provision was made for their sin, but unless or until one looked upon it, it did them no good. Similarly, with Jesus' atonement

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[538] *Jesus - Our Redemption Provided*.
[539] *The Gospel of John*, http://www.hallindsey.com/store/gospel-of-john-cd-series/56/.

at Calvary, a provision for the forgiveness of sin is made for the whole world, but which is not actualized in any person unless or until they look to Him, and if they fail to do so, then they will have perished despite what would have saved them. This is also a very important concept with respect to Hell. If Jesus didn't die for everyone, then how can anyone in Hell be told that they didn't have to be there, or that they could have believed in Jesus and gone to Heaven instead? The byproduct of Calvinism is the notion that those in Hell never had a Savior and were born with no other possible future but to end up in torment.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Instead, for the sake of argument we will assume that 'takes away' means 'makes forgiveness available' and that 'world' means 'all persons.' Even then Arminianism would not have proved universal prevenient grace because once more there is no mention of God's preceding grace granting sinners the ability to believe."*[540]

Our reply:

If Calvary's atonement makes *forgiveness available to all persons* then all that is left is for anyone to just come and claim their free gift. That point alone is enough to stand on to refute Calvinism.

John 3:3-8

"Jesus answered and said to him, '**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God**.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot **enter into the kingdom of God**. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, "**You must be born again**." The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.'"

Similarly, Matthew 18:3 states: "'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not **enter the kingdom of heaven**.'" The idea is that you must do something very important, or

[540] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 181-182.

else you're not going to Heaven when you die. Of course, you can't make yourself "born again," as only God can do that, but you have to do something before He will do it, and that *something* is turning to the Lord and being converted, meaning hearing and believing in the gospel.

In Calvinism, though, no one can turn to the Lord and be converted unless they are first secretly made born again without their knowledge. It is called pre-faith regeneration. However, what would be the point of alerting someone that there is something *really* important that must happen to them but there is absolutely nothing they can do about it? In Calvinism, there is nothing anyone can do to become born again. A person can only reflect back on their life and assume—based upon their good works—that's something that must have happened to them, and if they do something really morally wrong, then they can question whether they were secretly born again after all.

What do Calvinists believe?

Seeing the kingdom of God means being able to understand it, resulting in repenting and believing in the gospel, and since one must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, one must be born again in order to repent and believe in the gospel. Being made born again must come first, or else you can't see the kingdom of God.

Our reply:

Firstly, regeneration is irrelevant to an unbeliever since they do not qualify for it. Regeneration is a spiritual blessing, and Ephesians 1:3 makes it clear that all spiritual blessings are only just for Christians, and thus the spiritual blessing of "regeneration" is blocked—to all except Christians. The purpose of regeneration is so that *believers* can walk with Christ in a growing relationship.

Secondly, seeing (3:3) or entering (3:5) the kingdom of God refers to entering Heaven itself. Luke 13:28 states: "'In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets **in the kingdom of God**, but yourselves being thrown out.'" In this sense, the kingdom of God is a place. It's Heaven. No one can get there unless they are born again. Keep in mind that Nicodemus was already a Jewish believer. So, rather than conveying the idea that one must be made born again in order to *believe*, a better interpretation is that it is necessary to become born again in order to be allowed *entrance* into Heaven. Moreover, if the meaning was that unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God—in terms of just understanding it—then why would Jesus criticize Nicodemus? In other words, "It's not your fault.

You haven't been made born again yet. It may still happen for you, and if it does, it will all make sense to you."

Jesus is giving Nicodemus a universal truth, and the message is that despite whatever level of righteousness he had achieved in life through the Law, it wasn't good enough to get into Heaven, just as Jesus stated of John the Baptist: "'Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is **least** in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'" (Matthew 11:11) In the New Covenant, one must be born again to see or enter Heaven. Prior to that, the Old Testament saints went to paradise when they died, which was not the same as Heaven where God dwelled. That paradise was just a temporary location until the resurrection of Christ when they could finally then be taken to Heaven. (Compare with Luke 16:19-31) New Covenant believers who die in Christ go straight to Heaven. (2nd Corinthians 5:8)

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"In this context, 'seeing' and 'entering' the kingdom of God is not believing or even Regeneration, but the actual realization of salvation on that last day, which comes as the ultimate result of that second birth which is according to the Spirit and not as Nicodemus presumed upon, which is according to the flesh."*[541]

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"If Jesus was referring to a total inability to perceive the things that relate to the kingdom of God then He would be wasting His time telling Nicodemus, as Nicodemus would have needed to be born again before he could perceive anything that Jesus would have to say to him! Jesus' desire was to see Nicodemus enter that very Kingdom of God that he falsely presumed upon. It was not Jesus' purpose to confuse Nicodemus with a Calvinistic understanding that he cannot become a believer in Him unless he is first regenerated. Jesus is working with Nicodemus' expectation of the Jewish hope about the Kingdom of God and seeking to correct that false assumption."*[542]

Jesus says, "You must be born again." The gospel is both personal and an imperative, but what would be the point of a universal *imperative* without a universal *opportunity* to receive it? Moreover, if Jesus didn't really love everyone and was unwilling to die for everyone, then why mandate that everyone must become what they cannot be? In Calvinism,

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[541] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 152.
[542] Ibid., 153.

the elect are made born again without consenting to it, and the non-elect are warned to become what they are excluded from ever receiving.

John 3:16

"'For **God so loved the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes** in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'"

Who does the verse say that God loves? It is "the world" or "whoever believes"? Obviously it is "the world" and certainly God loves believers, which we know from John 16:27, but the point is that God indeed loved the world *in such a way* so as to provide the world with a Savior, so that the world did not have to perish but could have eternal life.

Compare with John 17:6. Speaking of the disciples, Jesus states: "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me **out of the world**; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word." Obviously, the disciples were not the *totality* of the world. They came *from* the world. So, I perceive John 3:16 similarly:

> Paraphrased: "'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever [**out of the world**] believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'"

Jesus' prayer was that through the disciples, the world may believe: "'That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, **so that the world may believe that You sent Me**.'" (John 17:21)

The Calvinist argument focuses on the fact that only believers will be saved, so as to make *only believers* into the object of God's love, but it ignores a key fact, which is that God did something good and loving for every person in the world, that is, by giving them a Savior, so that whosoever in the world believes in the Savior (that God lovingly gave them) will not perish but have eternal life. That's what Calvinism misses.

Everyone in the world has a Savior, or else if anyone was excluded, then they would fall outside the scope of "the world." Imagine telling someone that they are not in the world. It's an absurd concept. That's also how absurd it would sound to try to tell someone that Jesus might not have died for them. God loved the world *in such a way* that He provided the world with a Savior, which Savior, took upon Himself *the world's* sins, so that whosoever in the world can be saved by believing in Him and not perish but have eternal life.

Ask Calvinists this question: How did God demonstrate His love for the world? Didn't He give the world a *gift*? And what gift was that?

The answer is that it was the gift of a Savior, His Son. Moreover, Jesus provided an illustration of Calvary by citing Numbers 21:6-9:

> **John 3:14-15:** "'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; **so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life**.'"
>
> **Numbers 21:6-9:** "The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, **when he looks at it, he will live**.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."

At Numbers 21:6-9, God gifted all of the snake-bitten murmurers with an atonement, which if they looked upon it, would live. In the same way, "the world" has been gifted a Savior, so that if the world similarly looks to Him—parallel to Numbers 21:6-9—they can be saved.

What about the Double Jeopardy argument which poses the dilemma about how unbelievers could possibly end up in Hell for their sins if Jesus died for those same sins? Well, just like Numbers 21:6-9, the snake-bitten murmurers had an atonement *available* to them, but none of them would have its healing properties actually *applied* to them until they looked upon it. If they didn't, then they would have perished despite what otherwise could have saved them. So, the available/applied explanation resolves the Double Jeopardy matter. One must look to Christ in faith, or else His atonement will never be applied to the individual sinner.

The Calvinist answer to the question of how God demonstrated His love for the world was by saving only the "believing ones," since only believers—not unbelievers—experience the actual benefits of the atonement. (This is how Calvinists convince themselves that their theology has no problem with John 3:16.) However, the fact that only believers ultimately *benefit* from Calvary doesn't negate the fact that unbelievers had an atonement made available to them by God, just like the snake-bitten murmurers of Numbers 21:6-9 had an atonement made available to them by God.

As an additional analogy, if a doctor learns that a certain village contracted a rare and deadly disease, and feels moved to save them by

producing a life-saving medicine, his genuine love for the whole village is *demonstrated* by producing enough medicine for all of them. If, however, some villagers feel that it is against their customs and traditions to accept the help of outsiders, and ultimately refuse the medicine that is graciously offered to them and perish, their unwillingness does not negate the *fact* of the doctor's sincere love and genuine intentions of desiring to save them all. The doctor could have had everyone tranquilized so that they would be unconsciously forced to take the medicine, but the doctor's own principles (or prime directive) may preclude such unilateral, strong-arming tactics. So, the fact that only those who accepted the doctor's help had recovered, does not negate the doctor's sincere love and desire to see the entire village become rescued. This is exactly the type of conclusion that Calvinists are seeking to avoid from John 3:16, since it demonstrates sincerity and love beyond just those who are ultimately helped.

Calvinist objection:

> James White: *"Will God truly save the world through Christ? Inserting the concept of '**universal individualism**' into world in verse 16... **raises real problems**."*[543]

Our reply:

Calvinists feel that if "the world" at John 3:16 really means everyone, then it necessarily becomes a proof-text for **Universalism**, and since Universalism is false, "the world" at John 3:16 must mean something different (such as only Calvinism's elect). So, why do Calvinists feel that way? It's because of a key *presupposition* they hold—which non-Calvinists do not.

So what is a presupposition? It's an underlying, foundational rule that governs how something is interpreted. So, Calvinists have a particular presupposition that, if followed, would then turn an honest reading of John 3:16 into Universalism, and since Calvinists reject Universalism, they have a choice: Do they **(a)** reject their presupposition and take an honest view of John 3:16 or **(b)** do they keep their presupposition and take a dishonest and twisted view of John 3:16? The answer is that Calvinists choose **(b)**. They keep their presupposition and take a dishonest and twisted view of John 3:16, which also then shows that Calvinists do not really believe in the authority of Scripture. They instead believe in the overriding authority of their own traditions which produce their presuppositions.

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[543] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 378, emphasis added.

So, what are the presuppositions of Calvinists and non-Calvinists that affect the reading of John 3:16?

Non-Calvinist presupposition: Just because the atonement is *available* to you, doesn't mean that it is automatically going to be *applied* to you. One must believe in Christ in order for the atonement that is *available* to them to also be *applied* to them. If a person refuses or rejects the atonement that is available to them, then that atonement never gets applied to them. It's similar to Numbers 21:6-9. Just because healing is made *available* to all who were bitten, it doesn't mean that they will all automatically be healed, since a *condition* was established by God that only those who look upon it will have the healing properties *applied* to them. It's the same with Calvary. Just because Christ's atonement (which provides salvation and the forgiveness of sins) is made *available* indiscriminately to all men, it doesn't mean that everyone indiscriminately will all automatically be saved, since a *condition* was established *by God* that only those who believe in Jesus will have "eternal life" *applied* to them. Hence the expression: **Available to all but applied only to believers.**

Calvinist presupposition: Christ's atonement is a definite atonement made specifically for an elect people. God showed loving mercy to "the world" by making the death of His Son into an atonement that is both *available* and also *applied* to the world.

So, do you see where the Calvinist's presupposition automatically takes them? It takes them straight into Universalism. So, instead of adopting the non-Calvinist's presupposed "available/applied" dichotomy of "available to the world but applied only to believers," Calvinists retain their presupposition and simply redefine the meaning of "the world" so that it means the world of Calvinism's elect. All Calvinists have to do is drop their presupposition and there is no longer an issue of Universalism, but Calvinists refuse because their doctrine of a Limited Atonement is at stake.

Calvinists feel that God's love is ultimately directed toward only "the elect" (meaning Calvinism's elect) because only the *believing ones* are ultimately saved, while the rest perish in condemnation:

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If some people are not elected unto salvation then it would seem that God is not all that loving toward them. For them*

it seems that it would have been more loving of God not to have allowed them to be born."[544]

Our reply:

That presupposition is exactly what drives the Calvinist conclusion about John 3:16. In other words, how could God genuinely love those who ultimately perish? He can't, according to the Calvinist, and therefore He ultimately doesn't.

Adrian Rogers: *"Does God love everyone? Did Jesus die for a certain few?, for the chosen ones? Friend, can I walk up to any man on the face of this earth and tell him without stutter-stammer, apology or equivocation that God loves you? I can do that, without qualification."*[545]

Billy Graham: *"In all of life there is nothing more wonderful than discovering peace with God. Step one to this discovery is realizing God's plan—peace and life. God loves you and wants you to experience peace and life--abundant and eternal."*[546]

What do Calvinists believe?

Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"We agree, therefore, with Arminians that John 3:16 and similar texts speak of God's love for every person. We understand these passages to teach that God assumes a saving posture toward his fallen world. When asked how we reconcile these passages with those that teach God's special love for the elect, we admit that our theology contains rough edges."*[547]

Our reply:

Does that "saving posture" include the meaning that God desires that every person come to know Him, or does it mean something else? (In Calvinism, God only desires the salvation of the *elect*, and never intended for the non-elect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven.) The takeaway is

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[544] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 32.
[545] *Let The Earth Hear His Voice, 2 Corinthians 5:13-20, 2004.*
[546] *The Enduring Classics of Billy Graham: The Secret of Happiness, Happiness Through Peacemaking* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2002), 125.
[547] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 212.

that Hyper Calvinists are more straight-forward in their beliefs than conventional Calvinists who mask their theology with ambiguous terminologies such as a "saving posture."

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"This new Reformed group will walk up to anybody on the planet and say: 'Christ died for sinners so that if any of you believe on Him, you will have your sins forgiven, and will have eternal life and not perish, so that the death of Christ warrants a total offer of the Gospel to everybody on the planet, and God, in John 3:16, really loves the whole world.'"*[548]

Our reply:

The point of John 3:16 is not merely that the verse warrants a universal *offer*, but also that it accompanies a universal *gift*, in which everyone has been gifted the provision of a Savior's Atonement. In other words, Jesus did something for every person. As a result, they can either accept what He did for them at the Cross for the forgiveness of sins, or they can reject it for the prospect of wearing their own cross in Judgment throughout eternity.

The biggest difficulty facing Calvinists at John 3:16 is the scope of those involved, meaning the world. In other words, "...God so loved the world...." We know that the love involved is salvific because salvation is the subject matter. Moreover, the manifestation of God's professed love comes in the form of a gift of a Savior, so that anyone in the world who believes in the Savior, Jesus Christ, will not perish but have eternal life. What becomes embarrassing for Calvinists is when they suggest that the "world" described is only an "elect world," which is total nonsense. As soon as Calvinists try to invoke an "elect world," you know that they have a major problem here.

So, you can tell anyone in the world that they have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for them, so that if they believe in Him, they will not perish under the judgment of their sins but will instead receive forgiveness from God and the gift of eternal life. "Do you know that you have this gift from God?" That's the question to pose to unbelievers in evangelism. "Do you know why you needed this gift?" This question reveals the underlying need for a Savior, given the peril facing all unbelievers. People love the idea of having a gift, and they have a really good one—an eternally good

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[548] John Piper, *Q&A with Reporters*, 25:44-16:12. http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/on-the-new-calvinists

one, but they have to act upon it in order to receive any benefit from it. That expresses the time-sensitive nature of God's gift.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"We do not deny that all men are the intended beneficiaries of the cross in some sense. 1 Timothy 4:10 says that Christ is 'the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.' What we deny is that all men are intended as the beneficiaries of the death of Christ in the same way. All of God's mercy toward unbelievers—from the rising sun (Matthew 5:45) to the worldwide preaching of the gospel (John 3:16)—is made possible because of the cross. This is the implication of Romans 3:25 where the cross is presented as the basis of God's righteousness in passing over sins. Every breath that an unbeliever takes is an act of God's mercy withholding judgment (Romans 2:4). Every time the gospel is preached to unbelievers it is the mercy of God that gives this opportunity for salvation."*[549]

Our reply:

How are the non-elect given an "opportunity for salvation" if they are excluded from a Limited Atonement, in which the Atonement is the only basis to receive forgiveness? How would that be *merciful*? Calvinists will say that they do not know who are among the secret elect and thus they preach to everyone, but if Calvinism was true, then God would know who the elect are, and so the question is how would God be merciful to offer salvation to those He knows are born excluded? Moreover, Calvary is not merely about *temporal* blessings but is about a person's *eternal* soul. Additionally, the reason why God withholds judgment from immediate execution is because He is patiently giving people time to repent: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2nd Peter 3:9)

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[549] *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"...we must define God's love in accordance with the total teaching of Scripture, which includes the doctrine of election and God's ultimate purpose for man."*[550]

Our reply:

In other words, the doctrine of Unconditional Election is scriptural and therefore God's love must be understood through that lens. But, if the doctrine of Unconditional Election is instead wrong, then any extrapolation from that doctrine must also be wrong. So, Calvinists may be defining God's attribute of love from an erroneous presupposition. Here is what Scripture says about God's love:

> **Matthew 5:43-48:** "'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, **love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you, **so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven**; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For **if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?** Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the **Gentiles do the same?** Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'"

However, if God only salvifically loved Calvinism's elect, then how would He be differentiated from the Gentiles?

Calvinist objection:

If any should perish that God wishes to save, then wouldn't that make God and His plans largely a failure?

Our reply:

God never promised to save every person *unconditionally*. God wishes to save people *freely*. The reason would be simple. If God desires a loving relationship, then you would have to have freedom, just as much as love requires freedom either to love or not to love. Therefore, God cannot

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[550] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 215.

be deemed a "failure" for not complying with Universalism since He never promised it. As is evident with the Parable of the Marriage Feast at Matthew 22:1-14, experiencing the blessings of Heaven is conditional upon receiving it. As such, the gospel is a well-meant offer that is extended to every person, so that whosoever-will may receive it and enjoy its blessings, and God, for His part, is willing that everyone does.

Calvinist objection:

This isn't talking about *salvation* for everyone who has ever lived.

Our reply:

But, it is talking about an *Atonement* for everyone, so that by it, anyone *can* be saved if they will believe in the Savior.

Calvinist objection:

God's love is demonstrated *not* by every person being saved, but by *believers* being saved, and therefore it is the believing ones who are the true recipients of God's love. In other words, for God so loved His elect, who are comingled throughout the world, that He gave His only Son so that by Him, the elect might be saved.

Our reply:

Actually, God's love has been demonstrated upon every person in the form of a gift of a Savior, Jesus Christ, whom they can either accept or reject, but they cannot say that they were never given a Savior. Rejection of *the Savior's forgiveness* is what ultimately condemns an unbeliever: "…judged already, because he has not believed…." (John 3:18) Notice that it does not say: "…judged already, because he has no Savior to believe in." If there was a Limited Atonement, in which Jesus did not die for everyone, then no one in Hell can be told that they could have believed in Jesus and have gone to Heaven instead. In Calvinism, they would literally be born for Hell.

Calvinist objection:

> James White: *"He gave His only begotten Son, and here's the purpose why He gave: The Son is given by the Father so that every believing one, notice not everyone, it's every believing one, there is a limitation here, there is a particularity here, the Father*

did not give the Son for any other reason than for those in regard to those who believe. …that's why the Son is given."[551]

Our reply:

The purpose for why the Father *gave* is because He so loved the world and therefore provided it with the means of rescue by virtue of His Son who would take upon Himself *their* sins, so that whosoever among them believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. Calvinists are really twisting in the wind on this passage, and frankly, any theology which results in John 3:16 becoming a problem-verse should be subject to automatic rejection.

The limitation is not with respect to the pool of candidates, but with respect to eternal life. The fact that only the believing ones experience the benefits of His gift in no way proves that God did not desire for the rest of the world to freely believe and receive the benefits of the Savior's atonement. The Calvinist interpretation seeks to say, "You have to read it this one particular way only," when yet you really don't, and in fact, a plain reading suggests the following instead: "For God so loved the world, that He gave the world a Savior, so that whosoever in the world believes in the Savior that God has given, will not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:17-18

"'For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that **the world might be saved through Him**. He who believes in Him is not judged; **he who does not believe** has been **judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.'"

Which of the following accurately reflects the reason why a person is "judged already"?

a) Because God excluded them from a Limited Atonement.
b) Because God didn't give them the gift of faith.
c) Because the person has not believed in the Son.

The text suggests an answer of "c." So, it's not a matter of God being ungracious. It's not a matter of, "Well, God didn't reveal it to them," or "God didn't first regenerate them." Jesus is pointing the finger of blame upon the individual who does not believe in Him.

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[551] James White, *Does John 3:16 Debunk Calvinism?* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFZjsfaO2kc

Regarding the word "might," John 1:7 similarly states: "He came as a witness, to testify about the Light, so that all **might** believe through him." Obviously, *not* all "believe" in Christ, just as *not* all have been "saved" through Him, but that is clearly the intended will of God.

If we were to equate the "world" in John 3:16 with Calvinism's elect, as some Calvinists are accustomed to doing, then it would strangely follow from vv.17-18 that the world of the elect are "judged already." Moreover, for Jesus to say that "the world might be saved through Him" indicates God's universal salvific desire for the world, meaning that God, for His part, wants everyone to believe in Him and become saved.

> Adrian Rogers: *"There are some people who will tell you that Jesus only died for the elect. But that's not what the Gospel of John says. It says that the only reason men are not saved is not because Jesus did not die for them, but because they didn't believe in Him."*[552]

So that proves that the world does, in fact, have a Savior, and the only thing that separates the world from salvation is *believing in Him*.

John 3:19-21

"'This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and **men loved the darkness rather than the Light**, for their deeds were evil. For **everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed**. But **he who practices the truth comes to the Light**, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"Man is so depraved, so set on mischief, and the way of salvation is so obnoxious to his pride, so hateful to his lusts, that he cannot like it, and will not like it, unless he who ordained the plan shall change his nature, and subdue his will."*[553]

Our reply:

This passage is not connecting the dots between Total Depravity and Irresistible Grace. The real issue is competing-loves, and the effect of

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[552] Adrian Rogers, *Faith: What it is and how to have it: Romans 10:17-21*, 1998.
[553] Charles Spurgeon, *God's Will and Man's Will*, 4/8/2010.

sin upon the human conscience, in either driving people back to God in repentance or driving people away from God in resentment. This is why when those who walk away from God to Atheism, typically do so for the sake of one particular sin or another. Sin causes a natural wedge (i.e. enmity) between people and God, and so when people let go of sin, they are free to come back to God. Jesus' message would only take hold when people repent—and hence the importance of a message of repentance.

John 4:39-42

"From that city **many of the Samaritans believed in Him because of the word** of the woman who testified, 'He told me all the things that I have done.' So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they were asking Him to stay with them; and He stayed there two days. **Many more believed because of His word**; and they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for **we have heard for ourselves** and know that **this One is indeed the Savior of the world**.'"

Notice that they believed "because of the word of the woman who testified," which makes sense in light of Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." However, from the Calvinist perspective, faith does not come from hearing testimonies, but from regeneration, that is, by involuntarily and unconsciously being made Born Again simply because one is elect.

Notice that the Samaritans declared Jesus to be "the Savior of the world." Calvinists would be hard-pressed to suggest that the Samaritans understood Him as being the Savior of *just Calvinism's elect*. It is more plausible that the Samaritans understood Him to be the "the Savior of the world" *in the sense of everyone*. Similarly, John 12:47 states: "'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to **save the world**.'" 1st John 4:14 also states: "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the **Savior of the world**." For clarification, simply because Jesus is the Savior of the world doesn't mean that everyone will be saved. One must believe in Him in order to receive the eternal life He promises at John 3:16.

John 4:48

"So Jesus said to him, 'Unless you people see **signs and wonders**, you simply **will not believe**.'"

However, according to Calvinism, unless they are *regenerated*, "they simply will not believe," as "signs and wonders" would make no difference at all, and yet Jesus says that it *would*. So, then, why didn't God give them signs and wonders? The answer is because that is not how God

wants for people to come to Him. Although on occasion, God will provide signs and wonders, it seems that He receives more honor when people believe in Him without physical proofs. Jesus states: "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed**." (John 20:29) Hebrews 11:6 also states: "And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." (Hebrews 11:6)

John 5:39-40

"'You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and **you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life**.'"

People who were spiritually "dead" in their sins (Ephesians 2:1) were being told by Jesus that if they "come" to Him, they could receive spiritual "life." So, you don't have spiritual life and *then* come to Jesus; you have to come to Him in order to *get* spiritual life, which is the exact opposite of Calvinism, and which is why this verse presents such a huge problem for Calvinists. In fact, it also shows that just because a person is spiritually dead (i.e. cut off, separated from God), doesn't mean that they are unable to respond to Jesus' *clear invitation*. How much worse can this get for Calvinism? So, here is the question to ask Calvinists:

> **What must the spiritually dead do, in order to be made spiritually alive?**

They have to come to Jesus, and Calvinists surely know the correct answer from John 5:40, but you'll be hard-pressed to get a Calvinist to answer the question because they will want to say,

> *"Nothing! I can't do anything to be made spiritually alive. The Holy Spirit has to first regenerate us to spiritual life. We don't make ourselves spiritually alive."*

Obviously, we don't make ourselves spiritually alive, but Jesus said that when we come to Him, He will give us spiritual life. But still, the Calvinist will resist,

> *"No, I was dead and in need of a resurrection, like Lazarus in the tomb. I had to have spiritual life in order to come to Jesus."*

But, that's the opposite of what Jesus actually says. Calvinists have it backwards, which is why John 5:40 is so damaging to Calvinism.

1. If Jesus knew that these people were suffering from Calvinism's doctrine of **Total Inability**, would it mean that He was teasing them about the hope of "life," knowing that they couldn't actually come to Him?

2. If these were excluded from Calvinism's doctrine of **Unconditional Election**, then wouldn't it mean that the Father was the One who was "unwilling" to have them?

3. If Jesus knew that these people were excluded from Calvinism's doctrine of **Limited Atonement**, then how could He offer "life" to those with no Savior and no Atonement, which is the only basis for salvation?

4. According to Calvinism's doctrine of **Irresistible Grace**, if they already have "life" (in order to come to Him), then why would they need to come to Him in order to get what they already have?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Charles Spurgeon: *"A man is not saved against his will, but he is **made willing** by the operation of the Holy Ghost. A **mighty grace** which he does not wish to resist enters into the man, disarms him, makes a new creature of him, and he is saved."*[554]

Our reply:

Would Calvinists deem that "mighty grace" to be "life"? It seems that Calvinists are running up against a verse which holds out "life" for those who come to Christ, when yet their theology teaches them that one must already be given "life" in order to come to Christ.

> Dave Hunt: *"...Christ's statement would be meaningless unless they could of their own will repent and come to Him."*[555]

According to Calvinism, *God was unwilling*, since the non-elect are created without the hope of spending eternity with Him in Heaven, and in fact, the non-elect are also purposely excluded from a Limited Atonement by design.

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[554] https://www.azquotes.com/quote/606159, emphasis mine.
[555] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 221.

John 6:35-45

"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. **All that the Father gives Me will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.' Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, "I have come down out of heaven"?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. **No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day**. It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me**.'"

Often in theological controversies, the true dividing line is missed and then both sides end up talking past one another. One needs to correctly identify the true fork in the road, so to speak, in order to effectively communicate a difference of opinion. So, then, where do Calvinists and non-Calvinists differ on John 6:37-65? It has to do with the *identity* of those who are given, drawn and granted by the Father to come to Christ.

> **Fork-A:** Those given, drawn and granted by the Father to come to His Son are Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers* being regenerated.
>
> **Fork-B:** Those given, drawn and granted by the Father to come to His Son are the *believing*, faithful Jews.

If non-Calvinists take the Calvinist fork, but then try to find a subtle nuance along the way in order to differentiate themselves, they will have a difficult time remaining coherent. Meanwhile, Fork-B is best able to explain John 6:45 and 6:65, while offering a *sensible reason* for *why* Jesus would mention God's drawing in the presence of His critics.

Jesus' objectors deemed themselves the disciples of Moses (John 9:28), and felt that their strong relationship with the Father was the reason why they were not falling for Jesus' claims about Himself, unlike the ignorant masses who were beholding His miracles and listening to His messages and being swept away. So, Jesus' reference to God's drawing meets their claim head-on, *and makes the exact opposite point*—it is

because His critics do *not* have a relationship with the Father, that they are subsequently not following after Him. If, instead, they truly had heard and learned from the Father (John 6:45), that is, if they truly *did* have a relationship with God, then they would be following Him, because His Father is drawing all such true believers in Israel. So, while it is true that non-Calvinists agree with God's drawing of lost sinners to the gospel for salvation, such as what is foretold at John 12:32, this specific context appears to instead address God's drawing of *faithful Jews* (i.e. believers, not unbelievers) for the reason just mentioned, that is, to contradict and shame the grumblers.

So, here are the clues we are given about those who are coming to Jesus, within this context:

- Those who come to Christ are *given* by the Father. (6:37)
- Those who come to Christ are *drawn* by the Father. (6:44)
- Those who come to Christ are those who have "heard and learned from the Father." (6:45)
- Those who come to Christ are *granted* so by the Father. (6:65)

> **John 6:37:** "'**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'"
>
> **John 6:44:** "'**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him**; and I will raise him up on the last day.'"
>
> **John 6:45:** "'It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me**.'"
>
> **John 6:64-65:** "'But there are **some of you who do not believe**.' For Jesus knew from the beginning **who they were who did not believe**, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, '**For this reason I have said** to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father**.'"

Those who "did not believe" were not being "granted" by the Father to come to the Son, with a notable exception, in contrast with those who have "heard and learned from the Father" who were indeed coming to the Son. So, it seems pretty clear that those who were given, drawn and granted by the Father to come to the Son were the faithful Jews, in contrast to the grumblers who didn't have the *great relationship* with the Father that they had supposed, and that's why Jesus kept emphasizing the role of

the Father. The Father sent Him and told Him everything to say. (John 8:42) So, His critics cannot suppose they are right with the Father, while rejecting the person and message of the One whom the Father had sent.

By saying that the unbelieving grumblers did not know God, He is challenging them to reconsider the real reason for why they were refusing to come to Him: They didn't truly have a relationship with the Father. Jesus says that they had not "heard" God's voice. (John 5:37) They did not have God's word "abiding" within them. (John 5:38) They did not have the "love of God" in them. (John 5:42) They did not "know" God. (John 7:28) They are from "below" and "of this world." (John 8:23) They will "die" in their "sins." (John 8:24) They do not do the "deeds of Abraham." (John 8:39) God was not their "Father." (John 8:42) They were of their father "the devil." (John 8:44) They were not "of God." (John 8:47) That's the context of John 6:37-45.

Conversely, if they had been in right relationship with the Father, Jesus says that they *would* be coming to Him: "**If God were your Father**, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me." In other words, the Father was increasing Jesus' ministry by directing the faithful in Israel to His Son, similar to how John the Baptist remarked that "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30) So, the thrust of Jesus' message to the grumblers was that they were not right with God, but *if they were*, then they would see clearly that Jesus was indeed sent by God as their long-awaited Messiah.

> **John 5:45-47:** "'Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope. For **if you believed Moses, you would believe Me,** for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?'" (So, if the grumblers really were followers of God and students of Moses, then they would have been more receptive to Jesus' message.)
>
> **John 6:45:** "'It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught of God." **Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me**.'" (Jesus is directly challenging their claim to know God and to be taught by Him, and therefore they cannot claim to reject Jesus on the basis of their enlightened background.
>
> **John 7:17:** "'**If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching**, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself.'" (Get right with God, and you'll see the Father in the Son.)

> **John 8:19:** "So they were saying to Him, 'Where is Your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me nor My Father; **if you knew Me, you would know My Father also**.'"
>
> **John 8:42:** "Jesus said to them, '**If God were your Father, you would love Me**, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.'"
>
> **John 8:47:** "'**He who is of God hears the words of God**; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.'"
>
> **John 12:44-45:** "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. **He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me**."
>
> **John 14:10:** "…**the Father abiding in Me does His works**."

The whole purpose for this was to get the grumblers to understand the true nature of their rejection of the Son, all for the purpose of *evangelizing* them. In other words, for those whom Jesus specifically said were "not of My sheep" (meaning: not His followers) as per John 10:26, Jesus patiently uses sound logic and wisdom to persuade them by pointing to the compelling evidence of His miracles: "'If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, **so that you may know and understand** that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.'" The Jews were fully expecting the coming of the Messiah. Even the Samaritans anticipated it: "The woman said to Him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us.'" (John 4:25) The unbelieving Jews saw Jesus' miracles and were already expecting the coming of the Messiah, but they refused to believe that it was Jesus, and denied the divine origin of His miracles.

What do Calvinists believe?

Rejection of the teaching that God draws *unbelievers* to come to faith (in which people are instead able—in and of themselves—to come to Christ) is Pelagianism.

Our reply:

God indeed draws *unbelievers*, and the verse for that is John 12:32, which Jesus said would occur ***after*** His resurrection: "And I, if I am

lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself." However, that should not be conflated with the Father's *pre-Calvary* drawing of *believers* according to John 6:37-45, in terms of those who had "heard and learned from the Father" (6:45) that were now being directed to follow God's Son who was carrying God's message.

What do Calvinists believe?

The fact that *everyone* who is given and drawn by God *comes to Christ* is proof enough of God's effectual work in Irresistible Grace.

Our reply:

Calvinists believe that their doctrine of Irresistible Grace is illustrated at John 6:37-44 due to the parallel between those who are given and drawn, together with those who come to the Son. However, the reason why all of the Old Covenant believers were coming to the Son with *perfect consistency* is precisely because they were *already believers* in covenant relationship with the Father, who was giving, drawing and granting them to follow His Son. The reason why "no one" who loves the Father will dislike the Son is because *their message is the same*: "'My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me.'" (John 7:16) "'For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak.'" (John 12:49) The purpose of Jesus raising the issue of [*the Father's drawing of His faithful remnant in Israel to follow His Son*] is to show the grumblers the real reason *why* they were rejecting Him, and it wasn't because they loved God so much. It was the exact opposite, and that's what they needed to hear, because God indeed wanted them, and Jesus was showing them the way. (*Meanwhile, the meaning in Calvinism is that God never wanted them. Even if that was true—which it is not—why would Jesus say such a thing to them? What purpose would it serve except to antagonize them?*)

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"If the overall discourse is ignored, an improper interpretation of individual texts can be offered. This is one of the most oft-missed elements of correct exegesis, normally due to the presence of traditions in the reader's thinking."*[556]

[556] *Scripture Alone* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 87.

Our reply:

John 6:37-45 is a prime example of the overall discourse being ignored *by Calvinists*.

> Walls and Dongell: *"…the Calvinist reading likewise fails to account fully for the context. Jesus is locked in strenuous debate with religious leaders who claim special knowledge of and standing with God. From this privileged position, they seek to discredit Jesus completely. Their implied charge essentially involves an attempt to sever Jesus from God, affirming the latter while rejecting the former. In doing this, they wish to establish the right to claim, 'We know God intimately, but you are utterly alien to us! We stand in right relationship to God, but we completely reject you.' Jesus' countercharge strikes directly at the root of their authority: the presumption that they knew God in the first place! 'You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwelling in you' (Jn 5:37-38). Far from knowing God, then, Jesus' opponents had already rejected not only the testimony of John the Baptist but also of Moses: 'If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?' (Jn 5:46). In this question posed by Jesus we discover the key principle: rejecting God's first offerings of truth will utterly block further illumination. God will not offer more truth or manifest his full glory (the eternal Son) while light at hand is being spurned. In other words, we can't actively reject the Father and at the same time have any chance of accepting the Son."*[557]

> Walls and Dongell: *"Had they received Moses fully, thereby coming to know the Father to the degree possible at that time, they would have belonged to the Father's flock, and the Father would have drawn them to the Son. But in rejecting Jesus, they demonstrated that they never surrendered to God in the first place, that they had set their faces like flint against all of his continued overtures. Since they did not belong to the Father's own flock, they wouldn't be part of the transfer of sheep already trusting the Father into the fold of the Son (Jn 6:37, 39)."*[558]

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[557] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 74-75.
[558] Ibid.

Notice the contrast. On the one hand, *covenant-believers* among the faithful remnant of Israel who had "heard and learned from the Father" (v.45) were being drawn by the Father to believe in His Son as part of an *ingathering* to prelude to what would ultimately become the formation of a worldwide Jewish and Gentile Christian church. On the other hand, Jesus' *unbelieving-objectors* were being told that God was not their God after all, which served as the basis for their rejection of His messenger. Nonetheless, Jesus still encouraged them to believe in Him, by pointing them to the compelling evidence of His miracles, which served to confirm His identity as the Messiah. (John 10:37-38)

The problem for the unbelieving Jews is that they felt they needed an *earthly* savior to rescue them from Rome, and not necessarily a *spiritual* savior to rescue them from their separation from God due to sin, since after all, they were sons of Abraham and covenant-secure. John the Baptist dealt with this issue: "'Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.'" (Matthew 3:19) Moreover, rather than reinforcing their presumption to birthright salvation, Jesus called them "slaves." (John 8:34-38) So, it is precisely these *unbelievers* who were not being given, drawn and granted by the Father to come to His Son.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Jesus is more to the point. He says that they cannot hear them because they are not 'of God.'"*[559]

Our reply:

Regarding John 8:43, they could *physically* hear what Jesus was saying, but they couldn't *bear* to hear what He was saying because they didn't *like* what He was saying. They indeed were not "of God" and hence were not granted by the Father to come to Christ, in contrast to the believing remnant. (John 6:45)

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"All those God regenerates will believe (John 6:37)."*[560]

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[559] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 72.
[560] Ibid., 217.

Our reply:

Since the text doesn't mention anything about "regeneration," it makes Calvinists vulnerable to the accusation of committing *eisegesis*.

> R.C. Sproul: *"Reformed Theology does not teach that God brings the elect 'kicking and screaming, against their wills,' into his kingdom. It teaches that God so works in the hearts of the elect as to make them willing and pleased to come to Christ."*[561]

But, R.C. Sproul had just quoted James 2:6 to introduce his meaning of *draw* as *drag*, in which Sproul states: "The first passage is in James 2:6: 'But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag [*elko*] you into the courts?'"[562] So, then, why doesn't Sproul consistently apply his meaning of *draw* as *drag* and say, "Reformed Theology does not teach that God brings the elect 'kicking and screaming, against their wills,' into his kingdom, but instead just works in the hearts of the elect [*like the rich oppressing the poor so as to drag them into court against their will so that they would*] to come to Christ"? So, for the Calvinist, there is an element of cognitive dissonance. The reality is that the context defines the meaning of terms, and since the context is about God's drawing of Israelite *believers* to come to His Son, the drawing does not require any dragging of individuals against their will, whatsoever.

> Brian H. Wager: *"The Calvinist indeed has trouble fitting his fantasy regeneration into John 6:44. If drawing is after this fantasy irresistible change of will, why does the Father need to still "drag" the person? If the drawing is before this fantasy irresistible change of the will, wouldn't that be a waste of time dragging someone supposedly dead and with total inability? Why drag them and with what does God supposedly drag someone before regeneration?"*[563]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...John 6:45 is describing the drawing that the Father does of those that He gives to the Son, and that's why they come to the Son, infallibly. All that the Father gives to the Son*

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[561] *What is Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1997), 159
[562] Ibid., 154.
[563] Lesson provided by Brian H. Wagner, member of *Soteriology 101 Discussion* on Facebook.

> *comes to the Son. All that are drawn by the Father and Son come to the Son. That is a powerful act of God. In John 6:45, He explains how that works. … There is a teaching—there is an effective act of the Father. … From John 6:45, that teaching is given to a specific people. It's given to the elect."*[564]

Our reply:

Notice how Calvinism's "elect" is inserted into the text, even though Jesus didn't introduce that concept. The best way to understand the difference between the Calvinist versus non-Calvinist interpretations of the text is that whereas Calvinists interpret the Father's giving and drawing to be of *unbelievers* (who are among Calvinism's elect), non-Calvinists interpret the Father's giving and drawing to be of *believers*, that is, those in Israel who had heard and learned from God, signifying the faithful remnant who loved God, in order that by the Father's giving, drawing and granting, the true believers in Israel would all coalesce around the long-awaited ministry of the Messiah, just as the followers of John the Baptist were also leaving him to follow Jesus.

Calvinist objection:

Calvinists read 6:44 and 6:45 *sequentially* because it is believed that there is a purpose in how the verses are ordered, so that 6:45 is the *effect* of 6:44. By contrast, non-Calvinists reorder the text by reading 6:45 backwards into 6:44.

Our reply:

At John 6:45, Calvinists interpret having "heard and learned from the Father" as a *future* act, resulting from the Father's giving and drawing, rather than being a *present* condition for why some were coming to Him but not others. So, that is a key distinction between the two interpretations.

Does 6:45 indicate what happens *afterward* to those who come to the Son, as some form of chronology, meaning that those who are drawn then get taught? No, that is not what the text is saying. Instead, 6:45 provides an additional fact on the *identity of those who come to the Son*. In other words, both 6:44 and 6:45 describe **who comes to the Son**, explaining *why* a certain segment of unbelieving Jews were not coming to Him whereas another segment was. Nonetheless, the failure of the

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[564] James White, *John 10: Becoming a Christ Follower (Sheep)*, 52:36-53:26. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IHexeZnIzE

unbelieving Jews could be remedied, which is why Jesus continued to *persuade* them, such as at John 10:37-38 by telling them to reconsider the compelling evidence of His miracles.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"In John 6, I would say that the…drawing of verse 44 becomes the teaching, which is really what happens in regeneration, the revelation of Jesus Christ in verse 45."*[565]

> John Calvin: *"Every one who has heard and learned of My Father comes to Me. In this He teaches the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, that God inwardly addresses His disciples by His Spirit, so that He may deliver them into the possession of Christ."*[566]

> John Calvin: *"When therefore the Father is inwardly heard, He takes away the stony heart and gives the heart of flesh. Thus He makes sons of promise and vessels of mercy prepared for glory."*[567]

Our reply:

Calvinists argue that John 6:45 is not a *literal* teaching, but rather a *figurative* teaching, indicative of Calvinism's Irresistible Grace upon being regenerated. But consider a similar statement by the apostle Paul: "The things you have **learned and received and heard and seen in me**, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you." (Philippians 4:9) So, should we assume that this, too, means an "inward address," figuratively in reference to the dispensation of Irresistible Grace, *or is Paul simply referring to what people had literally heard and learned from him?*

Calvinist objection:

> James White: *"Why must the Father draw men to Christ if they are able in and of themselves to come to Christ?"*[568]

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[565] James White, *Arminianism vs Calvinism, Day three: Dr. White's Show*, 23:34-24:18, emphasis mine. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBxvJRo0WMk
[566] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 73, emphasis mine.
[567] Ibid., 74, emphasis mine.
[568] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 296, emphasis mine.

> James White: *"…People do not have the capacity in and of themselves to come to Christ for salvation until something divine happens; i.e., the drawing of the Father…."*[569]

Our reply:

The underlying Calvinist premise is that the giving, drawing and granting was of elect-*unbelievers*, who need the giving, drawing and granting to enable unbelievers to believe, whereas the context indicates that the giving, drawing and granting was of covenant *believers* in order to *follow* His Son, as part of an ingathering, so that the faithful remnant would coalesce around the ministry of His Son. So, what Calvinists are doing is assuming Fork-A, and then asking questions from the presumption of that particular fork. If we instead assume Fork-B (namely that those being given, drawn and granted are covenant believers, as per 6:45), then the Calvinist inquiry is exposed as first assuming their own narrative.

There is an even bigger problem with the Calvinist argument articulated above because we learn from Chrysostom that it was *identical* to the argument that the Gnostics employed.

> John Chrysostom (349-407): *"The Manichæans spring upon these words, saying, 'that nothing lies in our own power'; yet the expression shows that we are masters of our will. 'For if a man comes to Him,' saith some one, 'what need is there of drawing?' But the words do not take away our free will, but show that we greatly need assistance. And He implies not an unwilling comer, but one enjoying much succor (assistance)."*[570]

So, when Chrysostom says that "some one" from among the Gnostics taught from John 6 that "that nothing lies in our own power," he might as well have been quoting Calvinist, James White, who similarly echoed that we "do not have the capacity." Additionally, when Chrysostom says that "some one" from among the Gnostics asked from John 6 "what need is there of drawing?" he might as well have been quoting Calvinist, James White, who similarly asked, "Why must the Father draw men to Christ if they are able in and of themselves to come to Christ?" This is very problematic for Calvinists because they envision themselves as being among the glorious legacy of a Reformation, but the more troubling reality

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[569] Ibid., 84, emphasis mine.
[570] John Chrysostom, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Homily XLVI*.
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf114.iv.xlviii.html

is that they may actually be the legacy of a far darker heritage, namely that of the Gnostics. However, that is not to say that Calvinists are Gnostics, in terms of a 1:1 ratio for everything that they had ever taught, but there could be a correlation with their beliefs specifically in relation to free-will and determinism, which is particularly odd when considering 1st Corinthians 2:12-14 which states: "Now we have received, **not the spirit of the world**, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, **not in words taught by human wisdom**, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words." So, *if the Gnostics were correct* about rejecting free-will and affirming determinism, then the "spirit of the world" and "human wisdom" would have served the Gnostics perfectly fine for understanding the deep things of the Spirit of God concerning these matters. The question, then, is how would Calvinists account for that?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"I'm leaving you. You have resisted Me; I'm backing away from you; I'm not going to draw most of you."*[571]

Our reply:

That comment is agreeable since the giving, drawing and granting of John 6:37-65 was of the faithful remnant, whereas unbelievers were being denied. A *global* drawing is later reflected at John 12:32. Hence, they are not the same drawings, or else if they were, then John 12:32 would be (a) redundant, and (b) unable to make sense of the fact that Jesus states that His drawing would not occur until later after His resurrection.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The drawing of the Father is in fact limited to the elect, those who are given by the Father to the Son."*[572]

Our reply:

He meant "elect" *unbelievers*, drawn to believe, versus the non-Calvinist interpretation of a *believing* remnant being giving, drawn and granted to follow Christ, unlike those who did not believe.

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[571] John Piper, *Skeptical Grumbling and Sovereign Grace*, 11/29/2009.
[572] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 294-295.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"I just also believe the undisputed and unrefuted fact that I come to Christ daily because the Father, on the sole basis of His mercy and grace, gave me to the Son in eternity past."*[573]

Our reply:

This passage doesn't mention anything about a pre-temporal giving and drawing from eternity past. (Since Calvinists insist that this passage represents the giving and drawing of Calvinism's elect, they are therefore theologically committed to inferring that the John 6 exemplifies the standard operating procedure *extending all the way from Genesis*.) For Calvinists, the *eisegesis* continues to stack up. Calvinists merely need to take Fork-B and everything will make perfect sense with the context, though at the cost of losing a key proof-text.

What do Calvinists believe?

Do you agree that the people were grumbling at Jesus' teaching on the doctrine of Election?

Our reply:

No. They were grumbling over Jesus' claim of being "the bread that came down out of heaven" whom the Father was giving, drawing and granting for true believers to follow, portraying the grumblers as out of sync with the Father. Moreover, no one in this context elaborated on any type of predestinarian decree. Often, both Jesus' critics and also His disciples would follow up on His sayings, yet in this case, no one followed up with any type of inquiry about a controversial, secret election, as espoused by Calvinists, which otherwise would have been enormously controversial.

What do Calvinists believe?

So you agree that *not* everyone is drawn?

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[573] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 306.

Our reply:

Not in this context. John 6:64-65 makes it clear that those "who did not believe" were not being granted to follow Christ, with the notable exception being Judas.

What do Calvinists believe?

Christ has told us how it goes at all times in John 6:44. The only way anyone can come to Christ, pre or post-Calvary, is if the Father draws them. I do not accept the Sheep Transfer idea. When we read things like "no one can come unless," it would seem to apply to mankind in general, rather than being restricted in scope to a certain set of Jews.[574]

Our reply:

Jesus said "for this reason" that He told them that "no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." (John 6:65) So, what was the "reason" He just gave? He said that there were some who did "not believe," of which Judas was the notable example. (John 6:64) God wasn't allowing the unbelievers to come to Jesus. They were already subject to a judicial hardening (Isaiah 6:9-10) and the parables concealed God's truths to the hardened unbelievers while conveying truth to believers who took His statements to heart. So, the identity of those who were given, drawn and granted to come to Jesus were those who had "heard and learned from the Father" as the faithful Jews. (John 6:45) Nonetheless, Jesus still encouraged the grumblers to believe in Him anyway, by considering the evidence of His miracles. (John 10:37-38)

> Laurence Vance: *"First and foremost is the misapplication of a verse with a decidedly Jewish context as a doctrinal statement on salvation in this age."*[575]

Indeed, it cannot be ignored that the audience in John 6 is exclusively Jewish, and who had grown hardened (ever seeing but not perceiving) "otherwise they might see, hear, understand and turn so as to be forgiven." (John 12:39-41; Acts 28:23-28) They were "cut off in their unbelief." (Romans 11:20) Despite God's love and longing for Israel

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[574] *Dialogue on John 6:44 with oldtruth.com.* http://examiningcalvinism.blogspot.com/2006/12/jim-fromoldtruthcom-offers-feedback-on.html

[575] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 511.

(Matthew 23:37; Romans 11:21; Luke 19:41-42; Ezekiel 18:29-31; Hosea 3:1; Romans 9:1-3; etc.), they had rejected His teaching for so many years that they had grown blind to it and thus couldn't even recognize their own Messiah. To suggest that the reason many people will not come to Christ is because God salvifically hated and rejected them before the world began is far from the intention of Jesus' words and the overall teaching of Scripture.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...there is no meaningful non-Reformed exegesis of the passage available."*[576]

Our reply:

Let the reader decide:

> Michael Brown: *"I see it as the fulfillment of the promise. In other words, up until now, the distinction was that there were people that were right with the God of Israel, and those who were not, and now Jesus becomes the full reflection of the God of Israel among the people, so those who were truly His, will be identified as the ones that will follow Jesus. It's not that He now creates a whole new people, because there were those longing for His coming, like Simeon and Anna that were ready to receive Him when He came."*[577]

In terms of the unbelieving, Michael Brown explains: "They looked to be just like everybody else, 'We're devoted followers of God.' 'No,' He says, 'You're really not, because if you believe Moses, you'd believe Me. If you were listening to the Father, then by all means you would come to Me. The proof that you're not listening to the Father is that you won't come to Me.'"[578]

> Robert Shank: *"Jesus' words 'no man can come to me except the Father who sent me draws him' are especially significant in the context in which they appear. He had spoken repeatedly of God as His Father, claiming that the Father had sent Him into the world--*

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[576] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 153.
[577] *James White vs. Michael Brown*. http://www.lineoffireradio.com/2013/02/18/reflections-on-thecalvinism-debate-with-james-white/
[578] Ibid.

a claim which most of His hearers rejected (vs. 41f). Affirming that 'no man can come to me except the Father who sent me draw him' and that 'every man who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me,' Jesus implied that the coming of every man who comes to Him constitutes a certification of His divine Sonship, a Sonship of which men must be persuaded before they can come to Him in the true sense of the term."[579]

Laurence Vance: *"...we have here the separation of the Jewish sheep from the goats and the drawing of them to the Messiah. The ones given are Jewish disciples. They are said to be his sheep. (John 10:27). John baptized that Christ should be manifest to Israel (John 1:31). Although Israel as a whole received him not (John 1:11), he was known of his sheep (John 10:14), the epitome of which can be seen in Simeon, who was 'just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him' (Luke 2:25)."*[580]

James McCarthy: *"Jesus was speaking to unrepentant Jews....Had they repented, the Father would have given them as sheep to his Son. ... 1. The Spirit convicts. 2. A Sinner repents. 3. The Father enlightens. 4. The person believes and is born again. ...This explains...why Jesus taught that no one can come to him unless the Father draws him. It also clarifies what he meant when he said, 'All that the Father gives me will come to me.' When the Father opens a person's heart to understand the gospel, he readily believes and is saved...."*[581]

Steven Hitchcock: *"It strikes me as ironic that Calvinists of such high caliber, possessing extensive abilities of intellect, and who are widely esteemed for their skill in the exegesis of the Scriptures, can be so reckless and unwilling to examine these texts carefully. Has it occurred to anyone that we should seek to understand the context in which these texts are found as they are only in the Gospel of John and fairly close to one another in proximity?"*[582]

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[579] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 177.
[580] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 510.
[581] *John Calvin Goes to Berkeley* (San Jose, California: City Christian Press, 2010), 279.
[582] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 187.

Steven Hitchcock: *"If we fail to appreciate the significance of being 'given' followers from God, as indicating Jesus' validity of claiming to be the bridegroom, we can very easily attach a Calvinistic understanding to these texts. Imagine Jesus starting His ministry and He had no followers at all. Followers were rather important to being a Rabbi and especially important to being the Messiah of Israel. … When we come to John 6, Jesus is already facing a question of no small significance as to the validity of His claim to being the Messiah. There was an undercurrent of doubt because Jesus was already experiencing a lack of support from the religious leaders, created by His cleansing of the temple, and as He was about to introduce teaching that would further divide His followers, about eating His flesh and drinking His blood."*[583]

Steven Hitchcock: *"Certainly no one can come to Jesus unless God is granting, leading, and drawing, but these statements by Jesus say more than that. They assert a particular election of Jews at a time when there was a unique hardening of the Jews. In regard to the Jews, Jesus would have them to know that they needed a special election to believe in Him. Foreign to Jesus' intention for these passages, the Calvinist mistakenly thinks that these particular verses are to be universally related to the world. Quite the contrary, Jesus is making an emphatic point that had a particular audience in mind that is specifically explained by John in chapter 12. During the time of Jesus' ministry there was a special hardening upon Israel and this was why Jesus did not have the expected unity that would have automatically provided a certain legitimacy to His claim of being the Messiah."*[584]

Steven Hitchcock: *"To solidify this corrective in our interpretation, here is a text of great significance that Calvinists do not seem to want to know about, that expressly relates to these important verses. In John 18:8, 9, when Jesus is being seized, Jesus says, 'I told you that I am He; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,' to fulfill the word which He spoke, 'Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one.'" Those whom the Father had given to Jesus had their fulfillment at that time and therefore the 'given Me' passages of John 6, 8, and 10, do not relate to the universal church. They specifically relate to those believers at that*

[583] Ibid., 188.
[584] Ibid., 191.

time in contrast to the majority of Israel that did not believe in her Messiah. These verses in John 18 show that the context relates to the disciples that God gave to Jesus during the time of His ministry for the express purpose that they might validate His claim to being the Messiah and that they might continue on as witnesses of everything that would happen to Jesus. It was imperative that they not be killed, so that they might witness His death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and then as those who must give personal testimony of being the recipients bodily of the promise of the Spirit that occurred upon Jesus' Glorification at Pentecost."[585]

Robert Hamilton: *"The crux of my argument will be that the set of individuals who are said by Jesus to 'belong' to God as Christ's 'sheep,' to 'listen to the Father and learn from him,' and to be 'given' by the Father to the Son, refers not to a pretemporally determined set of elect persons as conceived of in the Calvinist Reformed view, but instead primarily to the faithful sons of Abraham who were God's children under the covenant as it was revealed in the Old Testament, and who were already prepared by their voluntary faith and repentance to embrace the promised Messiah at the time of his long-awaited appearance to the nation of Israel. These included the ones whom God had nurtured to repentance under the ministry of John the Baptist, who was appointed to 'prepare the way for the Lord' (Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 3:3)."*[586]

What do Calvinists believe?

We can produce example after example of both classic and modern commentary works, going back centuries, giving the same basic explanations of John 6. Where are your commentaries from within church history which bears similar teachings as your own?[587]

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[585] Ibid., 192.

[586] *The Order of Faith and Election in John's Gospel: You Do Not Believe Because You Are Not My Sheep,* http://evangelicalarminians.org/robert-hamilton-the-order-of-faith-and-election-in-johns-gospel-you-do-not-believe-because-you-are-not-my-sheep/.

[587] *Dialogue on John 6:44 with oldtruth.com.* http://examiningcalvinism.blogspot.com/2006/12/jim-fromoldtruthcom-offers-feedback-on.html

Our reply:

Actually, the Calvinist interpretation of John 6 is traceable to almost two millenniums ago, namely to the Manichæan Gnostics:

> John Chrysostom (349-407): *"The Manichæans spring upon these words, saying, 'that nothing lies in our own power'; yet the expression shows that we are masters of our will. 'For if a man comes to Him,' saith some one, 'what need is there of drawing?' But the words do not take away our free will, but show that we greatly need assistance. And He implies not an unwilling comer, but one enjoying much succor (assistance)."*[588]

> John Goodwin (1594-1665): *"They are said to have been the Father's i.e. as it were, the Father's disciples, or persons 'taught by the Father,' John vi. 45, and so, after a sort, appropriable unto the Father, (as those that believe and are taught of Christ are said to be Christ's, or to belong to Christ) before they became Christ's apostles, or were chosen by him upon this account; and are said to have been given unto him out of the world by the Father, because they were peculiarly qualified, and as it were, characterized and marked out by the Father to be formed into apostles by his Son."*[589]

> Richard Watson (1781-1833): *"Those who truly 'believed' Moses's words, then, were under the Father's illuminating influence, 'heard and learned of the Father;' were 'drawn' of the Father; and so, by the Father, were 'given to Christ,' as his disciples, to be more fully taught the mysteries of his religion, and to be made the saving partakers of its benefits for 'this is the Father's will which sent me, that of all which he hath given me (thus to perfect in knowledge, and to exalt in holiness,) I should lose nothing; but should raise it up again at the last day.' Thus we have exhibited that beautiful process in the work of God in the hearts of sincere Jews, which took place in their transit from one dispensation to another, from Moses to Christ. Taught of the Father; led into the sincere belief, and general spiritual*

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[588] John Chrysostom, *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Homily XLVI.*
http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf114.iv.xlviii.html

[589] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 80.

understanding of the Scriptures as to the Messiah; when Christ appeared, they were 'drawn' and 'given' to him, as the now visible and accredited Head, Teacher, Lord, and Saviour of the Church. All in this view is natural, explicit, and supported by the context; all in the Calvinistic interpretation appears forced, obscure, and inapplicable to the whole tenor of the discourse."[590]

Daniel Whedon (1808-1885): *"Every one who freely yields to the teachings and drawings of the Father, is, by the Father, given, and comes to Christ. Such a person coming to Christ will be accepted. For the Father gives none but such as will freely come. The giving by the Father is consequent upon the obedient learning; not the learning upon the giving."*[591]

So to recap, here are the problems with the Calvinist interpretation:

1. Calvinists cannot harmonize the two drawings, that is, the Father's drawing of the faithful remnant of Israel (John 6:45), and the Son's drawing of "all men" post-Calvary. (John 12:32) Calvinism would otherwise make the Son's drawing redundant.

2. The Calvinist interpretation logically requires that the Father's drawing be something taking place since Genesis, even though the context isn't talking about anything taking place from Genesis.

3. Calvinists run into the well-recognized problem of John 6:45, in which they must infer a *figurative* "hearing and learning" by an Irresistible Grace, rather than what is more *literally* depicted at John 5:37-38. What Jesus was saying is that those who really are God's people, that is, those who truly belong to the Father (who really have heard and learned from Him) come to the Son, and therefore, why aren't these? Well, it's because they weren't right with God. In essence, Jesus challenged them to reconsider their relationship with God. It was as if Jesus was telling them that they were not saved.

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[590] Richard Watson, *An examination of certain passages of Scripture, supposed to limit the extent of Christ's redemption*. http://wesley.nnu.edu/other-theologians/richard-watson/theological-institutes-by-richard-watson/theological-institutes-by-richard-watson-part-second-chapter-27

[591] *Wesleyan Heritage Collection CD*, 324, https://arminianperspectives.wordpress.com/2009/11/10/daniel-whedon-on-john-6/.

4. Calvinists often say that they don't discuss the "hard truths" of Calvinism to the alleged non-elect, but reserve it only for the spiritually mature. However, the Calvinist interpretation requires that Jesus is telling the otherwise "hard truths" to unbelievers.

5. No one present had picked up on any alleged Calvinist interpretation, that is, not the unbelieving Jews, not the disciples and Jesus didn't go on to elaborate His words in a Calvinistic way, and perhaps that was because John 6:45 was clear enough to demonstrate the meaning. So the Calvinistic interpretation requires a special meaning not present in the actual text.

6. The Calvinist interpretation requires that Jesus is mocking people for not being elected, which is totally against God's character.

7. The Calvinist interpretation raises literally the same exact arguments raised by the Manichæan Gnostics.

John 6:63
"'It is **the Spirit who gives life**; the **flesh profits nothing**; **the words** that I have spoken to you are **spirit and are life**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

Salvation is monergistic. It is performed without the cooperation of man's fallen, unregenerate nature.

Our reply:

The Spirit gives life to those who believe in Him—not unbelievers.

> **John 5:40:** "'…you are unwilling to come to Me so **that you may have life**.'"
>
> **John 3:16:** "'...that whoever **believes** in Him shall not perish, but have **eternal life**.'"
>
> **John 20:31:** "'...and that **believing** you may have **life** in His name.'"

Where in John 6:63 does it say that God gives life to *unbelievers*? It doesn't, and Calvinists know this. The reason why they make this

conclusion is because of logical deduction. They figure that anything without an Irresistible Grace must *necessarily* rely on the flesh, and since the "flesh profits nothing," Irresistible Grace must then be necessary. So, it's clear that Calvinists do not rely on the text itself, but rather *logical deductions* that stem from circular reasoning, after having first assumed the principles of Calvinism.

John 6:64-65
"'It is **the Spirit who gives life**; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.' For **Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe**, and **who it was that would betray Him**. And He was saying, '**For this reason** I have said to you, that **no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father**.'"

Similarly, John 6:70-71 states: "Jesus answered them, '**Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?**' Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him." The audience is now the *disciples*, and the context shows that Judas did not sneak in under the radar. Similarly with Pontius Pilate, Jesus stated: "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been **given you from above**; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin." (John 19:11) So, Judas' place among the disciples was "granted" to him by God despite being an *unbeliever*.[592] The others who were *given* and *drawn* to come to follow Jesus, conversely, were believers.

John 8:34
"Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, **everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin**.'"

Calvinists believe this disproves free-will and reinforces the concept of Total Inability, in which the lost cannot believe in Christ apart from an Irresistible Grace. However, while it is true that the children of Adam inherited a fallen nature with a proclivity to sin, how does that prove that the lost cannot admit their fallen state and accept the help offered to save them, especially since God sincerely offers His help to all men?

As an analogy, a drunk is a slave of alcohol, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they cannot admit to their addiction and welcome help when it is graciously offered? Why can't a sinner admit and confess their sins to God when presented with the gospel message? According to the parable of the "Prodigal Son" of Luke 15:11-24, even the morally

[592] See also the topical discussion on *Judas*.

depraved prodigal son—who was described by his father as "lost" and "dead"—was nonetheless still able to return home to confess his sin before his father and humbly request to be made into a slave.

John 8:43

"'Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because **you cannot hear My word**.'"

Similarly, John 8:47 states: "'He who is of God **hears** the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are **not of God**.'" The unbelieving Jews were "not of God," having rejected God's message. In fact, Jesus tells us who they were "of," and it was their father the devil. (John 8:44) Meanwhile, those who listened to the Father were more than willing to listen to the Son because it was clearly recognizable to them that they were "of" the same thing.

So, what does it mean that the unbelieving Jews could not "hear" Jesus? Whereas they had the physical capacity to hear Jesus, they couldn't emotionally *bear* to hear Him because sometimes having "ears to hear" means having ears *willing* to hear, and they were indeed *unwilling*. As an analogy, it is like having to listen to someone of an opposing political party. One cannot *bear* to hear them if you are not *of* their party, and in fact, strongly oppose their policies. So, in the case of the unbelieving Jews, their inability to hear Jesus was plainly due to their choice to reject the source. They would not believe because they suppressed the truth in unrighteousness. It's clearly not because they were born incapable, as in Calvinism's doctrine of Total Inability. It's purely a matter of choice, as they *grew* hardened and calloused to God's word.

John 8:44

"'You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar and **the father of all lies**.'"

If God ordains sin, as Calvinism teaches, then who is the real "father of all lies"? In other words, if all sin exists for a divine *purpose*, in which all sin is rendered *certain*, including the created beings who will be born to commit those sins, then Calvinism has a difficult task of explaining how God is not the author of sin.

John 10:14-16

"'I am the good shepherd, and **I know My own and My own know Me**, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and **I lay down My**

life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.'"

When Jesus says, "I know My own and My own know Me," He is referring to a mutual and intimate, interpersonal relationship. "The Lord knows who are His," (2nd Timothy 2:19) and "if anyone loves God, he is known by Him." (1st Corinthians 8:3)[593] Either this is something that we are born with, or it is something that we grow into. Since no one is born as a believer, it would stand to reason that being one of Christ's sheep (or follower) is something that results from conversion rather than birth.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"In John 10, Jesus twice says that he lays down his life for the sheep (Jn 10:11, 15). And yet, he declares to the Jewish leaders, 'You do not believe because you are not my sheep' (John 10:26). That is, Jesus follows his statements about dying for his sheep by a stark denial that some are his sheep. It would be difficult to maintain that he lays down his life to save them, for he just excluded them form the number of his sheep."*[594]

Our reply:

However, Jesus went on to *encourage* those same unbelievers to consider the evidence of the miracles so that they would know the truth. (John 10:37-38) So, just because they are presently not His sheep, does not mean that they cannot *become* His followers. Ironically, the same writers cautioned the following:

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"It only stands to reason that Scripture, when talking about Christ's sheep or his church, would say Christ died for them. That does not mean that he did not die for others."* [595]

Exactly! And one would certainly hope that Jesus died for them because He encouraged those who He specifically said were *not* His sheep to become His sheep. (John 10:37-38) Why do that if they were hopelessly

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[593] See also the discussions on Matthew 20:28, Galatians 4:9 and 2nd Peter 2:1.
[594] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 205.
[595] Ibid., 202.

lost? Essentially, what the writers are describing is a Syllogism error called an **Illicit Affirmative** (or **Negative Inference Fallacy**), in which the conclusion of a categorical syllogism is negative, even though the premises are all positive. A categorical syllogism asserting a negative conclusion requires at least one negative premise.

Example:

1. Joe is Frank's son.
2. Bobby is Frank's son.
3. Therefore Frank has only two children.

That is a logical fallacy! Frank might have other sons as well.

1. Christ died for the church.
2. Christ died for the sheep.
3. Therefore Christ didn't die for anyone else.

The second conclusion is just as much of a logical fallacy as the first one.

Ron Rhodes: *"If it is legitimate for particular redemptionists to cite certain verses in isolation to 'prove' that Christ died only for the elect, then it could be argued with equal logic from other isolated passages that Christ died only for Israel (cf. John 11:51; Isaiah 53:8), or that He died only for the apostle Paul (for Paul declared that Christ 'loved me, and gave himself for me'--Galatians 2:20, emphasis added)."*[596]

John 10:24-28

"The Jews therefore gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.' Jesus answered and said to them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. But **you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice**, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand.'"

[596] *The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement Versus Unlimited Atonement (Part Two),* http://chafer.nextmeta.com/files/v2n3_rhodes.pdf.

Similarly, John 18:37 states: "'Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'" John 8:43 states: "'Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear My word.'"

"My sheep" is an idiomatic metaphor used in the first century to indicate "one who follows me." Sheep were followers. And this is Jesus' way of simply saying, "You do not believe because you are not following Me, just as you were not following my Father before Me." Had they been followers of the Father, He would have *gladly* given and drawn to His Son. The objectors were not right with God, and Jesus was calling attention to that fact in order to truly help them, and which is because Jesus really does love His enemies. Jesus came to save the condemned, not to condemn those who are already condemned.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"One must belong to God, be one of Christ's sheep, to hear His word and therefore believe."*[597]

Our reply:

While it's true that they were not of God and were not of Christ's sheep, *what did Jesus tell them*? He said of those who were "not of My sheep" to consider the evidence of the miracles so that they can *become* one of His sheep: "'If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do them, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.'" (John 10:37-38) So people who do not believe in Jesus and who are declared by Him to *not* be one of His sheep (followers), still can be. Their predicament was not fixed and unchangeable.

> Robert Shank: *"That their unbelief did not derive from some eternal, irrevocable decree of God is evident from the fact that to the same men Jesus appealed, 'believe [my] works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him' (v.38)."*[598]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God alone chooses His sheep."*[599]

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[597] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 72.
[598] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 179.
[599] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 380.

Our reply:

That statement presupposes that God does not want everyone to become one of His sheep, but is that consistent with what Jesus said at John 12:47? "'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.'" But, of course, Calvinists will tell us that that just means the world of Calvinism's elect.

Prior to Christ's arrival, some people had listened and learned from the Father, long before hearing from the long awaited Messiah (i.e. Cornelius). These individuals would have been considered "sheep" and for obvious reasons—they had heard and learned from the Father and thus *willingly* followed His Son. John 6:45 states: "'It is written in the prophets, "AND THEY SHALL ALL BE TAUGHT OF GOD." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me.'" Compatibly speaking, followers of the Father will also follow the Son, just as objectors of the Father will also object to the Son. Calvinists teach that Jesus' rebuke in John chapter 10 is made against those who God had rejected before the foundation of the world for no reason we know of (i.e. unconditionally) and who are born "goats" (not sheep). In Calvinism, these individuals who are "not of My sheep" never could have "listened or learned from the Father" or His Son because they were rejected by the Father and the Son before the world began. These individuals, according to Calvinists, had absolutely no control over the condition in which they were born, nor the doomed fate which God had predestined for them in eternity past. They were born hating a God who first hated them (salvifically) so that apart from a divine irresistible change of their fallen nature, they are only able to hate and reject the Son's appeal for reconciliation. So according to Calvinists, the goats (i.e. the non-elect) are rebels due to an imputed guilt and nature of Adam resulting from The Fall. These goats are born helpless and hopeless in a fallen condition they cannot fully recognize or acknowledge, even in light of God's revelation by the law or the convicting work of the Holy Spirit through the Word. Therefore, Calvinism logically undermines the weight of Jesus' actual rebuke in John chapter 10 by putting the ultimate responsibility of the Jewish rejection of their Messiah back onto God's pre-temporal rejection of them. In reality, though, they are the ones who *freely* chose not to "listen and learn from the Father" when they could have willingly done otherwise (like Cornelius did—see Acts chapter 10).

We must understand that these people being rebuked by Christ are "goats" principally *because* of their refusal to listen and learn from the Father, rather than for something with which they had absolutely no control over (i.e. Total Inability from Birth). Those who did willingly

listen and learn from the Father would desire to follow the Son as well (be His sheep), which is why they believe the Son. So if it helps, just exchange the word "sheep" with the word "follower" at John 10:25-27 and the result is that Jesus' intent becomes quite clear: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not [a follower]. My [followers] hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me….'" "Sheep" are followers, first of God the Father, and then His Son. It is our obligation and responsibility to follow Him. God will not irresistibly cause that to happen.

John 12:31-32

"'Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, **if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself**.'"

Similarly, John 3:14-15 states: "'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must **the Son of Man be lifted up**; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.'"

> John Hagee: *"Jesus called a Gentile woman, a dog. He never called the Gentiles His brethren. Let me remind you of something. We did not get plugged in until the cross. We had no basis of standing with God until the cross. There's where we were in Galatians 3 when Paul said you were outside the covenance of Israel, without hope and without God. That's very important. Then at the cross, we were plugged in, and we received the riches of Abraham, and we received healing, and we received adoption, and we received all the cornucopia of the blessings of God. But before the cross, we were castoffs. You need to understand that."*[600]

What do Calvinists believe?

Jesus draws all *kinds* of men. He does not draw every single person.

Our reply:

Calvinism makes Jesus' post-Calvary drawing superfluous, since according to Calvinism, the drawing of Calvinism's elect was *already*

[600] Unidentified sermon by John Hagee.

taking place, even from Genesis, and hence there is no purpose for Jesus' statement unless Calvinists wish to suggest that this was a unity statement. In contrast to Calvinism, whereas the *pre*-Calvary drawing of John 6:44-45 was the Father's drawing of the faithful remnant of Israel to His Son, the *post*-Calvary drawing of John 12:32 was the Son's drawing of both Jews and Gentiles in transition to a global Christian Church. The significance is the inclusion of Gentiles, which more adequately reconciles the nature of the two drawings.

Calvinism Objection:

Proof that all *kinds* of people are intended, namely the elect kind, is demonstrated in the succeeding verses which indicate that God had actively blinded certain people, so as to prevent them from being "healed." Hence, God didn't want everyone there to be saved.

Our reply:

Actually, Jesus told those who He said were not His sheep (John 10:26), that even though they didn't believe in Him, to consider the testimony of the miracles anyway, so that they *would* believe in Him. (John 10:37-38) So it's not that God didn't want them. Israel rejected God's call to them (Jeremiah 18:1-13) and were subsequently hardened (Isaiah 6:9-10), and now find themselves rejecting His Son.

The basis for the hardening was the fact of Jesus being the "stumbling stone" (Romans 9:32), who did not meet the Jew's messianic expectations of a warring conqueror, and moreover, Jesus' use of parables would still reveal truth to those who wanted it and who were willing to submit themselves to God. Nevertheless, Jesus was pointing to a future time after Calvary that He would draw everyone, Jew and Gentile alike. This is partly evidenced in the fact that after Calvary, even those who crucified Jesus were being convicted, and who asked how they too could be saved: "Now when they heard this, **they were pierced to the heart**, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, '**Brethren, what shall we do?**' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.'" (Acts 2:37-39) Furthermore, the fact that "all men" at John 12:32 meant everyone, and not just Calvinism's elect, is evidenced at John 12:47 in terms of "the world."

John 12:46-47
"'I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to **save the world**.'"

There is no need to "judge the world" when it is "judged already." (John 3:18) There is only a need to "save the world." Moreover, the "world" cannot equate to the world of Calvinism's elect since "anyone [who] hears My sayings and does not keep them" cannot be indicative of Calvinism's elect. Calvinists who wish to make such an equivocation must ultimately relegate much of the Gospels into being an exclusive conversion between Jesus and the elect-world of Calvinism.

What do Calvinists believe?

Did Jesus do what He came to do? In other words, does Jesus, in fact, save the world, or does He only make it savable? If the whole world is not saved, then are we not thus compelled by the force of logic to limit the scope of the term "world"?

Our reply:

For Jesus' part, He accomplished what He came to do, insomuch that John 19:30's reference to "It is finished" meant that everything Jesus needed to do in order to become a propitiation for the sins of the whole world was complete. (1st John 2:1-2) The whole world has now been set free by Jesus, as there is nothing left for God to do in order to complete the way to bring us back into favor with Him. The work is complete, the price is paid and the gift is free. Everyone in the whole world is now free to come and receive their free gift of grace and mercy. No one is excluded.

John 14:6
"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me**.'"

The problem with Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election is that Calvinism's elect are already safely elected in the Father for salvation before they ever come to Christ, and yet Jesus' statement indicates that only faith in *Him* is the means toward reconciliation with the Father.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"First he points out the eternity of election, and then how we should think of it. Christ says that the elect always belonged to God. God therefore distinguishes them from the reprobate, not by faith, nor by any merit, but by pure grace; for while they are far away from him, he regards them in secret as his own."*[601]

> John Calvin: *"This way of speaking, however, may seem to be different from many passages of Scripture which attribute to Christ the first foundation of God's love for us and show that outside Christ we are detested by God. But we ought to remember, as I have already said, that the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us is the first love given to us."*[602]

Our reply:

It does seem "different" and that's indeed a problem.

What do Calvinists believe?

Do Calvinists secretly believe that God chose them for some reason other than their need for salvation? Would I, as a Christian, believe that God chose me for some other reason than my need for salvation? Yes, I do. God chose me for His glory, for His pleasure, for His purposes. Sure I had a need for salvation. But that is not why He saved me primarily. In the Bible, God does not say He chose us because of our desperate need. He chose us before our need ever arose.

Our reply:

Hence, in Calvinism, Calvary is the formality of Unconditional Election. Going into Calvinism, a person discovers that they are *special*, unlike others, and were never at any time in danger of the fires of Hell. Conversely, exiting Calvinism, a person discovers that they were *not* better than others, and that like everyone else, they too must come by way of the Cross in order to be reconciled to God, and that what Jesus did for them at

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[601] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 393.
[602] Ibid., 76.

Calvary literally *was* salvation, in terms of being rescued from a future in Hell. Such a perspective really restores Calvary as an authentic saving act.

> Neil Anderson: *"Jesus is the door; He is the access through whom we have the right to come to the throne of grace. Our only right to be there is because of the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and His grace."*[603]

> Robert Shank: *"Thus Christ's 'redemptive' career--the incarnation, His death and resurrection, His ascension and intercession--are seen as incidental and symbolic, divine pageantry rather than authentic saving acts."*[604]

> Robert Shank: *"The atonement wrought by Christ was by no means symbolic. It was an authentic saving act made necessary by the holy character of God Himself, a saving act whereby God can adopt into sonship and into His kingdom men who have transgressed His righteous laws, outraged His holiness, and of themselves are sinners. The death of Jesus Christ was not pageantry. It was a decisive saving act in which Jesus Christ was truly instrumental in the election of men to salvation and the everlasting kingdom of God."*[605]

John 15:16, 19

"'**You did not choose Me but I chose you**, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. … If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but **I chose you out of the world**, because of this the world hates you.'"

Similarly, Luke 6:13 states: "And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and **chose twelve of them**, whom He also named as apostles." Jesus' emphasis to His disciples that He is the caller was not meant to demean them but to emphasize His own purposes, which He had to do since their messianic expectations were not in line with what God had in store.

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[603] *Who I am in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 82.
[604] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 32.
[605] Ibid., 36.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"And in John 15:16, that wonderful statement of Jesus to the disciples in which He says: 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit.' We didn't choose Him. He chose us. We didn't decide for Christ—in the truest sense—He decided for us."*[606]

Our reply:

Calvinists know that John 15:16 refers to an election to discipleship, rather than salvation, especially since Judas was included, but yet *strangely* insist that this is how it must also go with salvation as well.

> Lawrence Vance: *"Judas was chosen as one of the twelve, ordained, and called with the other eleven disciples. Was he one of the 'elect' chosen and ordained to salvation by a sovereign, eternal decree and called by Irresistible Grace? The result of reading Unconditional Election into these verses is a sovereignly election, irresistibly called, ordained devil (John 6:70)."*[607]

John 16:7-11

"'But I tell you the truth, it is to **your advantage** that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, **when He comes, will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.'"

Calvinism teaches that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including all sin. So, if God decreed all sin, then why would the Holy Spirit convict someone for doing exactly what God decreed? Moreover, what would be the point of convicting those who are intentionally eliminated from a Limited Atonement and cannot be saved? Certainly, Calvinists will rationalize these types of paradoxes, but non-Calvinists find it to be more than just a small problem.

If one understands "the world" to signify everyone indiscriminately, then this passage shows the Holy Spirit operates upon the hearts of the *unregenerate* as well, and with salvific intent, which then

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[606] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.
[607] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 351.

creates the opportunity for a response in repentance resulting in salvation. So, even if one believed that the lost suffered from Total Inability, as Calvinism defines it, the mere fact of the Holy Spirit's intervention becomes a game-changer.

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"The Holy Spirit convicts the world for its sin so long as they do not believe in Jesus. By this we can be certain that all men are convicted by their sins, for only those in Christ are the ones with true peace."*[608]

John 16:27

"'In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for **the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me** and have believed that I came forth from the Father.'"

God the Father has a special love for Christians because they love His Son. It's not that He doesn't love the whole world because He does, manifested at Calvary. As an example, a father may have a special love for his own children, but that alone does not prove that he loves *only* them and none else.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"'The Father has loved you because you have loved Me'? I couldn't find that one. I'd like to know what text is being paraphrased at that point, because that would make the Father's love of us dependent upon something that we're doing, and I something was misstated there."*[609]

Our reply:

There was no misstatement. The verse reference is John 16:27.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"But if God only begins to love us when we have loved Christ, it follows that the beginning of salvation is from*

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[608] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 129.
[609] James White, *Radio Free Geneva: Ephesians 1 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2:50-3:17*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M35SY6_ntCA

ourselves, because we have anticipated the grace of God. But many passages of Scripture contradict this idea."[610]

Our reply:

God doesn't just *begin* to love us at the moment when we become Christians since God's love was *already* expressed at Calvary for the whole world. Instead, God loves us *more* when we love Christ, just as any human parent may also naturally come to love their children *more* when their relationship with them deepens. It's also incorrect to say that the origin of our salvation is from *ourselves* since Christ takes the initiative of first seeking us and knocking upon the door of our heart, seeking to save us from an eternity of being separated from Him.

For Calvinists, the verse might have made more sense if it had instead stated: "For the Father Himself loves you, because the Father has irresistibly caused you to love Me." However, how would Irresistible Grace deepen God's love for someone?

John 17:7-10

"'Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me. I ask on their behalf; **I do not ask on behalf of the world**, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.'"

Although Jesus indeed indiscriminately prayed for people in other prayerful petitions, such as praying for the forgiveness of His crucifiers at Luke 23:34, in this particular petition, Jesus specifically said that He does "not ask on behalf of the world," but rather asks on behalf of those whom God had given to Him, which—based upon the context—was evidently referring to His disciples, with the intent that through them, "the world may believe that You sent Me." (John 17:21) By virtue of the disciples that God had given to Jesus, this shows that God uses determinative means to ensure that His message is *sent*, even if it takes miracles, blinding lights or

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[610] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 385.

a big fish, indeed, whatever it takes to ensure that His message is delivered.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Now, since Christ prayed only for the elect, belief in election is necessary for us if we want him to plead with the Father for our salvation. Therefore, people who try to blot out the knowledge of election from believers' hearts do them great harm, for they deprive them of Christ's support."*[611]

Our reply:

Those "given" were not in reference to Calvinism's elect, but instead in reference to the Lord's *disciples* whom He was "with," among whom included Judas. (John 17:12) Would Calvinists really wish to count Judas among Calvinism's elect? Here are the facts concerning those whom Jesus said were given to Him by God. Notice the past-tense references:

- "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world" (v.6)
- "they were Yours and You gave them to Me" (v.6)
- "they have kept Your word" (v.6)
- "they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You" (v.7)
- "the words which You gave Me I have given to them" (v.8)
- "they received them" (v.8)
- "they believed that You sent Me" (v.8)
- "I have been glorified in them" (v.10)
- "While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name" (v.12)
- "I guarded them" (v.12)
- "not one of them perished but the son of perdition" (v.12)

The disciples were facing imminent threat from the devil in their impending ministry of the gospel to the world, and so the objective of Jesus' prayer was for their protection in bearing witness of Him to the world, so that through their ministry, the world may believe: "'I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in

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[611] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 395.

You, that they also may be in Us, **so that the world may believe that You sent Me**.'" (John 17:20-21)

If Calvinists wish to maintain that "the world" in v.9 signified a *non-elect* world, then Calvinists will still have to admit that the intent of Jesus' prayer was for reaching the *same* non-elect world, or else Calvinists would have two diametrically opposed definitions of "the world" within the same context, that is, one at John 17:9 and another at John 17:21. Moreover, the reference at John 17:9 of "those whom You have given Me" and who are "Yours" cannot refer to the totality of Calvinism's elect, particularly since Jesus also said at John 17:20 that He does "**not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also** who believe in Me through their word." So, it is evident that Jesus is praying for *more* than just those who had been given to Him. Jesus does not say the world was given to Him, but only that "the world may believe that You sent Me" through those that were given to Him, obviously signifying the ministry of His apostles in reaching the world with the gospel. So, Calvinists have misconstrued the identity of those whom the Father had given to Son, all for the purpose of creating an erroneous proof-text for Calvinism.

John 20:29

"Jesus said to him, '**Because you have seen Me**, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed**.'"

Thomas believed because he had "seen"? According to Calvinism, the elect believe because they have been regenerated with Irresistible Grace. Moreover, why would those who believe *without* seeing be deemed *more* blessed, if both those who have and haven't "seen" all likewise come to faith in *identical* manner through Irresistible Grace?

John 20:30-31

"Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been **written so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

The purpose of the Book of John is "so that you may believe," conveying the possibility for the reader to make a free choice to believe and be saved. Similarly, John 5:33-34 states: "'You have sent to John, and he has **testified to the truth**. But the testimony which I receive is not from man, but I say these things **so that you may be saved**.'" 2nd Corinthians 5:20 also states: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**." The gospel message, therefore, is sufficient to allow

and enable a lost person to respond to that appeal. Otherwise, we might instead say with Calvinists that "[Irresistible Grace] has been given so that you may believe" and that "[Irresistible Grace] has been given so that you may be saved."

At the time of the writing of the Book of John, there were already the other written accounts by the disciples, including Paul's letters, not to mention the Scriptures. Would Calvinist regeneration need more help? In other words, why would John's book be necessary to aid a hypothetical, Irresistible Grace? Outside of a Calvinist paradigm, however, additional powerful testimonies such as John's message can greatly impact people, persuading the lost to place their trust in Christ and to become saved.

Chapter 10: The Book of Acts

Acts 4:23-28

"When they had been released, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, 'O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples devise futile things? **The kings of the earth took their stand**, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ." For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur**.'"

Similarly, Luke 22:22 states: "'For indeed, the Son of Man is going **as it has been determined**.'" The controversy with Calvinism is not whether God predestined for Calvary to occur, but *what was involved* in God's predetermination of this event. Acts 2:23 provides an essential clue: "This Man, delivered over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." So, what does the reference to God's "foreknowledge" tell us?

> Dave Hunt: *"God foreknew the evil in everyone's hearts and the actions they would take and that He used them to fulfill His preordained purpose. It does not say that God decreed or caused the evil intentions and actions of Pilate and Christ's crucifiers."*[612]

> Ken Wilson: *"The early church viewed God as relational and responsive to human choices. The Christian God incorporated foreknown human choices into his prophecies and plans. … Pagan determinism rejected divine foreknowledge because they preferred a non-relational unilateral divine foreordained decree of all future events."*[613]

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[612] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 52.
[613] *The Foundation of Augustinian-Calvinism* (Regula Fidei Press, 2019), 86, 88.

So, God plans according to the circumstances. Although He *planned* for Calvary to occur, He didn't *cause* the murderous intentions of the evildoers involved. He knew of it, and used it to His own advantage, but He didn't make them do anything. This type of explanation has the benefit of maintaining God's holiness.

Calvinists insist that the reference to God's "foreknowledge" does not imply *prescience*, but only reinforces determinism, in so much that God must necessarily know what He decreed. By contrast, the non-Calvinist interpretation indicates that God's determinism is based upon His foreknowledge. For instance, at Genesis 50:20, God may have planned to bring the Ishmaelite traders at the perfect time, knowing the intentions of the brothers, in that they would sell Joseph for profit, rather than kill him. In this way, God meant the *same act* of slavery of Joseph, but not for the same reason. The brothers wanted to dispatch a problem, while God wanted to rescue Joseph. Similarly, then, Israel meant the crucifixion of Jesus to rid themselves of a threat, while God meant the crucifixion of Jesus as a means of a sacrifice to save people from their sins. Both God and Israel meant the same thing, but for totally different reasons. God did not cause anyone's evil intentions, but He did foreknow their evil intentions, and determined His plan accordingly, in order to take advantage of the situation to further His own objective, thus redeeming good from the independently conceived evil intentions of others.

What do Calvinists believe?

James White: *"Where does foreknow appear in the text?"*[614]

Our reply:

It's found in the parallel verse of Acts 2:23. Surely, we would not ignore relevant facts, would we?

What do Calvinists believe?

R.C. Sproul: "He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it."[615]

Our reply:

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[614] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 57.
[615] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 172.

In other words, then, God's "predetermined plan" resulted in God knowing the event with certainty. That represents the Calvinist teaching that "God knows it because He decreed it." From the Calvinist perspective, divine foreknowledge is simply a transcript of God's decree in having determined whatsoever comes to pass.[616] However, if God can *only* infallibly know that which He has determined by Himself to occur, then that is not prescience but simply "Open Theism with a decree."[617] Why would there ever be a reason to speak of God foreknowing something if that which He foreknows is merely what He unchangeably causes? As an analogy, imagine if I said, "I foreknow that a certain bank is going to be robbed tomorrow," but that I only know this because I secretly planned to be the one to rob it. Or, imagine that your neighbor comes over and says, "Someone shot my dog," and you act outraged and say, "Well, I knew that your dog was going to get shot in this neighborhood because it's a really bad area," when in reality, you are the one who shot the dog. How is this type of omniscience any better than that of a normal man? How would it represent such a glorious attribute to God?

Calvinist objection:

Did the crucifiers have a choice *not* to sin? Yes, they did. Was it possible that they would not choose to sin? No! God didn't *force* them to do it, but it was *predetermined* that they should.

Our reply:

God did not predetermine the sinful *intentions* of Israel. Recall that the corrupt religious leaders tried to throw Jesus down a cliff (Luke 4:29), to stone Him (John 8:59) and to seize Him. (John 10:39) God frustrated all of their attempts. However, in Jerusalem, God stopped frustrating their attempts and let them succeed, using Roman law to crucify Jesus. So, in planning Calvary, God acted contingently on their murderous desires, so that whereas they *spontaneously* tried to kill Jesus, God directed those who did not know Him (in a saving, spiritual sense) to do in *precise manner* (in the form of Calvary) what they had already fixed, set and determined in their own hearts to do. As such, God simply organized their independently conceived evil desires to His own advantage, so as to use their intentions of *death* to effect God's means of *redemption*. John 11:51-

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[616] "Boettner maintains that God's 'foreknowledge is but a transcript of His will' and that it 'rests upon His pre-arranged plan.'" Laurence Vance, "The Other Side of Calvinism" (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 388.

[617] See the topical section on Open Theism.

53 states: "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.' Now **he did not say this on his own initiative**, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. **So from that day on they planned** together to kill Him." Hence, what they previously attempted in haphazard fashion was now crystalized with logic and reason.

If Calvary was predestined apart from being a *contingency* of the Fall of Man, then God purposed the Fall, and if God purposed man's first sin, how would God maintain a claim to holiness? Certainly, God allowed Adam to both have and make his own choice, but that no more necessitates God *wanting* Adam's failure any more than the father of the prodigal son *wanted* for his son to leave home when the father allowed him to do so.

What do Calvinists believe?

> *"The Almighty Trinity decreed in eternity past that Christ would suffer a horrendous death to save his people. The most wicked, heinous crime ever committed was decreed by God, and it was for a glorious purpose and reason. So yes, God decrees that evil happens, and He decrees it for a purpose -- and He doesn't owe us an explanation. The Holocaust, the killing fields of Cambodia, the multiple genocides that seem to happen frequently in Africa -- they all have a purpose in the eternal plan of God. All that matters is that He gains glory by it somehow, just like He gained immense glory in the suffering and brutal execution of His Son."*[618]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, God does nothing contingently, which is a primary source of disagreement. Calvinism holds that God scripted and decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including every thought, word and deed ever conceived, both human and angelic, so that through a decreed cast of characters, an immutable and eternal decree of crucifixion would be brought to pass and rendered certain. However, in contrast to Calvinism,

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[618] *Customer Discussions Theology forum: Calvinism vs. Arminianism*, 121, http://www.amazon.com/forum/theology?cdForum=Fx2X0JYEUAQXHJN&cdMessage=Mx3TTQMGF8I33K5&cdPage=121&cdSort=oldest&cdThread=TxFJD2OPQY4XHW.

God, from all eternity, looked ahead to a world of lost and rebellious sinners, and *contingently* planned Calvary, by organizing evildoers to carry out their own wishes, resulting in the crucifixion, in which God accomplishes His own plan of redemption both through them and in spite of them. All that God had to do in order to bring this about was to allow Jesus to be handed over to the authority and power of those depraved individuals who already wanted to kill Him. God did not have to control their wills to hate Christ or want Him dead in order to accomplish that. God simply had to give these people the power and opportunity to carry out their intentions, which intentions, God in no way either caused or decreed. God chose the time of Christ's coming, which was during a time of Gentile rule over Israel by wicked and godless idolaters. God also chose for Christ to come during a time where the high priesthood of Israel was controlled by the basest of men—Annas and Caiphas. These were no different from mafia bosses controlling a lucrative economic franchise in selling licenses to money changes and animal vendors on temple grounds to fleece the public and get immensely wealthy in the process. Could Christ control His own destiny? Of course. Twice, He went into the Temple and disrupted this lucrative and corrupt economic system. Not only did He disrupt this physically, by overturning tables and releasing the animals for sale, He did it intellectually by exposing to all those gathered that what had been taking place was robbery, and exposed the perpetrators as thieves. This made those in power in the religious system hate Him and wish to murder Him all the more, simply because He was threatening their business operations. Did Christ force them to respond by murdering Him? No, their own wickedness caused them to sin, but God knew what they wanted do, and He did not cause them to be that way. He also attacked the theological religious system of the Pharisees and exposed their hypocrisy by healing people on the Sabbath, leading them to hate Him and conspire with the ruling Sadducees to have Jesus murdered. He also turned off many who were unrepentant and not truly seeking God, who instead had sought a political Messiah who would free them from Roman rule, by having His Son preach a message about Himself being the Bread of Life, in which His body was the true food and His blood the true drink. God also spurned Judas' hopes of political and economic gain through Jesus when Jesus praised Mary for anointing Him with an expensive perfume that was worth 30 pieces of silver, and thus Judas, for the sake of his love for money, conceived to betray Him. In this way, God did not cause anyone to kill Christ. They killed Christ out of their own free will. God set the stage and used their own wicked intentions for His own purposes, but that is not the same thing as making someone wicked or compelling them to sin. It was predetermined by God that Christ would die, but each person who participated would be responsible for his own actions due to his own self-

determined intentions. There is no contradiction with this, and it is a very simple way of understanding this event without having to complicate matters in the way that the Calvinist system does.[619]

So, there are two choices before us. Either God decided to kill His Son and create mankind to justify it, or God's plan was based upon the people involved, by taking what they meant for bad and using the same thing for good, instead.

> Lawrence Vance: *"If God determined the crucifixion of his Son by a sovereign, eternal decree, with no foreknowledge at all involved (it was unconditional), then we are left with the ghastly, draconian thought that God decreed the death of his Son and then created man so he could fall and God could bring about his decree of crucifixion."*[620]

> Daniel Whedon: *"God wills that his son should lay down his life to redeem lost men. There are thousands of methods, from heaven above, or from earth below, in which it can be accomplished. But God foreknows that at that period and juncture the worst of men are living and ready to betray and to crucify him. It was fitting that God should permit the world to show how wicked men could be, as well as how good is God. There is a traitor in the twelve who is ready and foreseen to be willing, to be the undecreed, unnecessitated betrayer. The Jews and Gentiles are both at Jerusalem, foreseen to be ready and willing to be the unobliged crucifiers. Jesus has but to take his position at that central point and bide his time. Freely, responsibly, without decree, participation, or sanction on the part of God, the traitor and the murderers accomplish the work. Thus God's end, that his Son should lay down his life, is accomplished. It is done by wicked men; yet neither are they to be thanked, or God to be implicated."*[621]

Calvinist objection:

If Israel had repented then Christ would not have been crucified, and we would not have had a Savior who died for our sins. But since Calvary was predestined, so must have been the sin and unbelief of Israel.

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[619] Helpful explanation provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.
[620] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 266.
[621] *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 249.

Our reply:

No, God did not predestine Israel's sin and unbelief. What God predestined was how He would make use of it, that is, to use it for His own advantage, in order to redeem good from evil. God never causes the evil intentions of others. People self-determine that for themselves.

Calvinist objection:

So God did not purpose for Jesus to die at the hands of Pilate, but only intervened in the plans of the Jews?

Our reply:

That's was God's **Consequent Will**. God's **Antecedent Will** was Israel's righteousness and prosperity. However, on account of their lack of repentance, He *consequently* willed their judicial hardening and their role in Calvary.

Calvinist objection:

Did the ones who killed Jesus, sin? Did they thwart God's plan by their sin or fulfill it?

Our reply:

Yes, they sinned against God and His purpose for their life. (Luke 7:30) No, they did not thwart God's plan of Calvary, but by their sin, consequently fulfilled it. Visit the topic for the "Will of God," in order to see the nature of the **Antecedent Will** and **Consequent Will** of God.

Acts 7:51
"'You men who are stiff-necked and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears are **always resisting the Holy Spirit**; you are doing just as your fathers did.'"

Similarly, Isaiah 65:2 states: "'I have **spread out My hands all day long** to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts.'" John 16:8 states: "'And He, when He comes, **will convict the world** concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

The doctrine of Irresistible Grace has nothing to do with the fact that every day, sinners resist the Common Grace of God and the Holy Spirit, or the fact that the elect do not live perfectly holy lives at all times in light of God's grace, but instead has to do with God regenerating His elect at the appointed time with the gift of faith so that belief in Christ is guaranteed for all whom God wills to convert.

Our reply:

Since Calvinists admit that the grace of the Holy Spirit is indeed resisted, they will need to explain why the Holy Spirit evangelizes those for whom Calvinists believe that (a) God never intended to spend eternity with in Heaven, (b) God does not will to convert, and (c) God excluded from a Limited Atonement. The Holy Spirit's actions contradict what Calvinists say is God's intentions for them.

Acts 10:28
"And he said to them, 'You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet **God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean**.'"

I take this to mean that I should not call "any man" non-elect. In other words, for me as a Christian, I feel forbidden from calling any man "unholy or unclean" as an unwanted, untouchable since God loves them and Jesus died for them. No one is born "non-elect," as a supposed, sub-class of humanity. Jesus desires that everyone to come to know Him. No one is excluded.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"'Any man.' He made the purpose of the vision clearer by transferring to people what was said about food. No one is unclean, he said in effect; but we must not understand this of every individual, for unbelievers are polluted with impurity of conscience and pollute otherwise pure things when they touch them. Paul also says that their children remain unclean until they are cleansed by faith (1 Corinthians 7:14). Finally, if faith alone purges and purifies people's hearts, unbelief makes them unclean. But in this passage Peter was simply comparing Jews with Gentiles. Because the dividing wall has been pulled down, and the*

> *covenant of life and salvation belongs to both alike, we are not to regard as outsiders those who share God's adoption."*[622]

Our reply:

At Acts 10:28, Peter is speaking of the scope of those with whom God *desires* to save, whereas at 1st Corinthians 7:14, Paul is speaking of the *condition* of man in a saved or unsaved status. When Calvinists (like John Calvin's aforementioned commentary) attempt to make this only about God not being partial to the Jewish and Gentile nations in general, or in the abstract, they run into a problem at Acts 10:28 which mentions "any man" and at Acts 10:35 which mentions that "in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him," which clearly indicate an *individualistic* sense and not just a national sense. Moreover, when Calvinists insist only upon a generalized understanding of corporate Jews and corporate Gentiles, they are essentially admitting that God is indeed partial towards some, which contradicts Peter's whole point. Meanwhile, non-Calvinists can easily explain the text by affirming that God is partial towards no one since He has provided an atonement for everyone, so that anyone can turn to Him and be saved, which is exactly what He wants, but will not force it on anyone.

Acts 10:34-35
"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that **God is not one to show partiality**, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'"

Similarly, Romans 2:9-11 states: "There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man **who does evil**, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone **who does good**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is **no partiality with God**." So, the apostles praise God for His virtuous impartiality in terms of wealth, rank, reputation, appearance, race and occupation. One would think, then, that the opposite, namely, *partiality* would be a shameful vice. Correct?

What do Calvinists believe?

> Sam Storms: *"So, does the Calvinistic doctrine of unconditional divine election and monergistic regeneration make God 'a respecter of persons, arbitrary, and morally ambiguous'? Or*

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[622] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 179.

> *again, God is not impartial, say many Arminians, if he favors some with life but not all. He is guilty of showing partiality toward the elect. Of course he is! That is what unconditional election is all about. But we should refrain from saying that God is 'guilty' of being partial toward the elect because this kind of partiality is a virtue, not a vice. It is a divine prerogative for which God should be praised, not vilified."*[623]

Our reply:

Calvinists candidly admit that their doctrine of Unconditional Election *requires* partiality in spiritual matters. However, are we to believe that God is praise-worthy for His *impartial* dealings with mankind in terms of *earthly* matters, such as race, rank and reputation, while conversely praise-worthy for His *partial* dealings with mankind in terms of *spiritual* matters such as salvation? That seems contradictory. So, instead of letting theological pre-commitment tell us that the biblical perspective of Acts 10:34-35 is incomplete or shallow, why don't we instead conclude that the biblical perspective is right and Unconditional Election is wrong?[624]

> Adrian Rogers: *"God did not say that some people can be saved and other people cannot be saved, that some are in a select group. No! There is no respect of persons with God. None whatsoever. The Lord is not willing that any should perish. If you go to hell, a broken-hearted God will watch you drop into hell. It is not God's plan that you die and go to hell. The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*[625]

> Adrian Rogers: *"The door to salvation is very wide. There is no respect of persons. Whosoever will may come."*[626]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Friend, the inequities in life will not continue after death. There are inequities in life; there are not inequities in destiny."*[627]

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[623] *Does Unconditional Election Make God A 'Respecter of persons'?*, emphasis mine, http://www.samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/does-unconditional-election-make-god-a-respecter-of-persons.
[624] Also see the discussion on *Favoritism*.
[625] *The Christ of the New Testament: Acts 10:43*, 2001.
[626] Ibid.
[627] *Five Minutes After Death: Luke 16:19-31*, 2000.

> Dave Hunt: *"Surely love is the most important and most thrilling subject of all--and nothing is so beautiful as God's love manifest in Jesus Christ. Tragically, Calvinism robs us of what ought to be 'the greatest story ever told.' It reduces God's love to a form of favoritism without passion, and it denies man the capacity of responding from his heart, thereby robbing God of the joy of a genuine response from man and the glory it alone can bring."*[628]

> Dave Hunt: *"In fact, man's God-given conscience and Scripture cry out in protest against this doctrine. God is entirely 'without partiality' (James 3:17), is 'no respecter of persons' (Acts 10:34), and all men are equally worthy of His condemnation and equally unworthy of His grace. Calvinists admit that the 'elect,' like all mankind by their view, were once totally depraved, incurably set against God and incapable of believing the gospel, with no more to commend them to God's grace than the 'non-elect.' Then why did He select them to salvation and damn all the rest? No reason can be found either in God or in man, or anywhere in Scripture. There is no escaping the haunting question: Why did Calvin's God choose to save so few when He could have saved all? Without apology, James White informs us, 'Why is one man raised to eternal life and another left to eternal destruction...? It is "according to the kind intention of His will."' So it is God's kindness that causes Him to save so few and damn so many! We are aghast at such a concept, and we are offended on behalf of our God."*[629]

Acts 13:44-48

"The next Sabbath nearly the **whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord**. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming. Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, '**It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life**, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the end of the earth."' When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and **as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed**."

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[628] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 255.
[629] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 247-248.

Calvinists frequently cite Acts 13:48 as evidence for the doctrine of Unconditional Election, essentially saying: See, these people believed *because* they were appointed to eternal life, meaning that election is the *reason* why some people believe the gospel. "Indeed, only those who are elect will believe…."[630] However, the text never mentions Calvinism's "elect," and therefore to insert it means that one must *already* believe it. That's a problem because your own presumptive beliefs could then cause you to miss what the text is actually saying. Calvinism is like an enchanted forest. Once you presume Calvinism—with absolute certainty—then you will always naturally see Calvinism in Scripture, even when it is not there.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"Notice, it does not say that as many believed were chosen to be ordained to eternal life. The prior election of God is the reason some believed while others did not."*[631]

Our reply:

However, notice the subtle assumptions Calvinists add to the text: "…and as many as had been [unconditionally] appointed [before the foundation of the world] to eternal life believed."[632] Calvinists often don't fully realize the assumptions they make. The context shows that the hardened, unbelieving Jews had rejected the gospel, whereas the Gentiles were more receptive to the gospel. Notice the text does not say that these Gentiles are believing in God for the very first time:

> **Acts 13:16:** "Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said, 'Men of Israel, **and you who fear God**, listen.'"

> **Acts 13:26:** "'Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and those among **you who fear God**, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.'"

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[630] Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 17.
[631] John Piper, *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*. http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism
[632] Leighton Flowers, *Acts 13:48 De-Calvinized*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bt3qh2MVvvg

This chapter of the Book of Acts covers a unique period in Church history, in which the Old Covenant was transitioning to the New Covenant Church. As such, the apostles would frequently encounter receptive, God-fearing worshippers who had not yet grown calloused in the religiosity of the Pharisaical teachings. No one could rightly describe these God-fearing Gentiles as totally disabled, hardened, God-haters in need of some sort of supernatural grace to effectuate faith. They already had faith in God. They simply did not know about the Messiah yet. The text shows that the Gentiles are believing the truth about Jesus and their inclusion into the covenant by faith alone.

Cornelius of Acts 10:1-3 was an example of one of these Gentiles: "Now there was a man at Caesarea named **Cornelius**, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort **a devout man and one who feared God with all his household**, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually. About the ninth hour of the day he clearly saw in a vision an angel of God who had just come in and said to him, 'Cornelius!'" Cornelius had not yet placed his faith in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit, but he did believe in God. So, one might say that God appointed Cornelius to eternal life, by sending him the gospel through Peter.

Notice, also, that the appointing is not done arbitrarily before creation for some mysterious reason. The angel tells him plainly why he is sending him the gospel: "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." (v.4) So, it is unconditional based upon his morality, because Cornelius is a sinner, after all, but it is conditioned upon his faith—his trust in God. So, we come to Acts chapter 13, and we see Gentiles, who like Cornelius worshipped God, are learning the truth about who Jesus was, and their inclusion based upon faith, not upon works. One might even say, they are "disposed" (Greek: *tasso*), even open and inclined to hear the truth being brought to them on this day. In other words, they are willing to listen, unlike the unbelieving Jews who have grown calloused and hardened to the gospel of Jesus Christ. These worshipping Gentiles, like Cornelius, are ready to receive the mystery of the gospel first being brought to light by inspiration through the holy apostles. (Ephesians 3:1-10)

Antithetical to the *believing* Gentiles were the *unbelieving* Jews who had repudiated the gospel and hence were judged "unworthy of eternal life." (v.46) That doesn't fit Calvinism's doctrine of Unconditional Election, because worthy or unworthy, the alleged non-elect would be born without any hope of eternal life, period, having been born excluded and cut off from Calvinism's "Limited Atonement." Moreover, Paul says of the unbelieving Jews, "you repudiate it and **judge yourselves** unworthy of eternal life," meaning that it was because of *themselves*, due to their unbelief, and not necessarily God, that they are excluded from eternal life.

Meanwhile, according to Calvinism, God didn't want *them*, the unbelieving Jews, to come to faith. That would be awfully strange since Matthew 23:37 states: "'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.'" God longed to gather Israel. Obvious, He did want for them to believe in Him.

To summarize, here are the problems with the Calvinistic interpretation of Acts 13:48:

1. Even Calvinists admit that the context isn't teaching Calvinism, as James White explains: "Acts 13:48 shows us how much of a 'given' God's sovereign work of election was to the apostles. Luke did not have to expand the thought or explain the meaning: The person who understands the power of sin that binds the unregenerate heart knows well the necessity of God's work to 'open the heart' and 'draw' one to Christ."[633] Such phrases as "a given" and "does not need to expand" unwittingly concede the fact that the context offers no direct support for Calvinism.

2. Moreover, if Calvinism was already naturally understood by the early Church, then why was there no one in the early Church who was teaching it until 300 years later when Augustine arrived on the scene? If it was already so well understood by the early Church, then why is Augustine noted for his revolutionary teaching on the subject? Calvinists cannot say that it took the Pelagian controversy to bring out the Free Will debate, since Free Will was vigorously defended by the early Church in opposition to the deterministic Gnostics.

3. Mention of an *eternal* foreordination is absent from the text, which John Wesley comments on: *"As many as were ordained to eternal life. Luke does not say 'foreordained.' He is not speaking of what was done from eternity, but of what was then done, through the preaching of the gospel."*[634]

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[633] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 381.

[634] *John Wesley's Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1990), 483. http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/wen/view.cgi?book=joh&chapter=17&verse=9#Joh17_9

4. The Calvinist interpretation is that not one, not two, but all of Calvinism's foreordained elect had believed, which then would mean that no one who left the sermon on the day as an unbeliever would have any future opportunity to be saved, as they would be non-elect by default, which would not be indicative of any known event in the history of the Church. Even those who crucified Jesus had a second chance to be saved. (Acts 2:37-39) Robert Shank comments on this point: *"All who assume that tetagmenoi in Acts 13:48 implies that those who believed the Gospel at that particular time and place did so as the consequence of an eternal decree of unconditional particular election unwittingly embrace a second assumption, completely absurd: all present in the synagogue who ever were to believe the Gospel did so at once; there could be no further opportunity to consider the Gospel, and no man who failed to believe that moment could ever subsequently believe. A preposterous assumption! Such a pattern fits neither the case of Paul himself nor the universal experience of the Church through all generations."*[635]

5. The text doesn't say that these Gentiles worshipers were appointed to *believe*, but rather, appointed to *eternal life*. Like Lydia, they were already receptive believers to the level of revelation that they had been given.

6. If faith was only possible by foreordination, then why would it be significant for Paul to declare that the gospel should be preached to the Jews first? In Calvinism, would it amount to mocking their alleged non-election so that their damnation would be greater? Conversely, going to the Jews first matches the parable of the Wedding Feast: "'Then he said to his slaves, "The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast." Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.'" (Matthew 22:8-10)

7. The fact that "as many as been ordained to eternal life believed" is given without any indication of a secret bifurcation of humanity into elect and non-elect camps, also knowing how controversial that might be, lends support to the notion that the author had a simple intention in mind, as James Leonard points out: *"Is it*

[635] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 187.

> *really valid to think that Luke is delving into some deep theological issue here, as if he were assuming some great element in the Calvinist-Arminian debate? Why not assume the more mundane statement that these Gentiles were really eager in their hearts to have a share in eternal life, in contrast to the Jews who chafed at the good news?"*[636] This is suggestive of an **Occam's Razor** solution, in which the simplest explanation is likely to be the correct one.

There is also another perspective on the conclusion that these converts "believed." The author may be reflecting back upon the results of Paul's sermon, suggesting that it was a fruitful conversion of sustained believers. Acts 17:34 states: "But some men **joined him and believed**, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them." Notice it does not say that they believed and then joined him. It's other way around. They joined him and believed. Perhaps that is meant to be reflective of the type of people who joined him, that is, genuine believers.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"This verse teaches that faith depends on God's choice. Since the whole human race is blind and stubborn, those faults remain fixed in our nature until they are corrected by the grace of the Spirit, and that comes only from election. Two people may hear the same teaching together; yet one is willing to learn, and the other persists in his obstinacy. They do not differ in nature, but God illumines one and not the other."*[637]

Our reply:

That's why the Calvinist interpretation doesn't fit the context. These Gentiles were not blind, stubborn and fully obstinate, according to the Calvinist doctrine of Total Inability, but appear to have been receptive, God-fearing, sanctified worshipers of God.

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[636] James Leonard, *Treasures Old & New*, http://treasuresoldandnewbiblicaltexts.blogspot.com/.

[637] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 229.

Acts 14:1
"In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and **spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed**, both of Jews and of Greeks."

Similarly, Colossians 4:2-4 states: "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; **that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak**."[638]

What was the "manner" in which Paul had spoken? It did not refer to "cleverness of speech" since Paul himself stated: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, **not in cleverness of speech**, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." (1st Corinthians 1:17) Paul also stated: "And when I came to you, brethren, **I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom**, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were **not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God**." (2nd Corinthians 2:1-5) The reason why a large number of people believed was not because of oratory skill, but because Paul faithfully presented the gospel, and let the "power" of the Gospel (Romans 1:16), that is, the "living and active" word of God (Hebrews 4:12), through which we are made "born again" (1st Peter 1:23), simply do its thing, which is to produce faith in its hearers ("So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"—Romans 10:17), while the Holy Spirit convicts lost sinners: "'And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.'" (John 16:8)

> Dave Hunt: *"So spake? Isn't that misleading? Calvinism says that the listener's salvation had nothing to do with the apostles' preaching but with God sovereignly regenerating and giving faith to believe. In hundreds of places the plain words of Scripture must be changed to accommodate a man-made theory."*[639]

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[638] See also Acts 18:27-28.
[639] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 315.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"We would hope that it is not being suggested that the quality of the apostle's speech is being credited with the faith of the multitude: men are not converted by words of wisdom or the persuasive abilities of any man. Men are converted when God changes their hearts and draws them unto Christ."*[640]

Our reply:

How would it make sense to say that the apostle "spoke in such a manner" that God was moved to *regenerate* them with Irresistible Grace? Instead, would it not make more sense to say that the gospel was presented in such a manner that the people were *persuaded* by its compelling message to place their trust in Christ?

Acts 14:16
"In the generations gone by He **permitted all the nations to go their own ways**."

Similarly, Isaiah 65:1-2 states: "'I **permitted** Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I **permitted** Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, "Here am I, here am I," to a nation which did not call on My name. I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk in the way which is not good, following their **own thoughts**.'" How would it make sense to say that God permits the nations to go their "own ways" and Israel to follow its "own thoughts," if all of their own ways and thoughts are meticulously and exhaustively determined by Calvinism's purported decree?

God's kind intention for the nations is that "having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, **if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him**, though He is not far from each one of us." (Acts 17:26-27)

In regard to Calvinism, the question to ask is whether God is permitting something that may or may not happen, or whether He is permitting only what is meticulously and exhaustively decreed because the latter is not genuine permission at all. If God had decreed whatsoever comes to pass, as the author of everything, then can you imagine any human author *permitting* certain characters in his story to act as they do? Permission acquiesces to the will of another. For instance, the father of the Prodigal Son permitted his son to leave with his demanded share of the

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[640] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 186-187.

inheritance, but that didn't mean that the father either designed or intended for his son to leave. That's what real permission is, and which has no real place in the fixed decree of Calvinism.

Acts 16:13-15
"And on the **Sabbath** day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a **place of prayer**; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled. A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a **worshiper of God**, was listening; and **the Lord opened her heart to respond** to the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay.' And she prevailed upon us."

God aided Lydia with Paul's message so she could respond to it, but that should not necessarily be taken to mean that God had to overcome her resistance, especially since she was already a *receptive* "worshiper of God," as opposed to one of Calvinism's totally depraved, totally unable, haters of God. Moreover, the text doesn't say she was only *claiming* to have been a "worshiper of God." It is simply presented without challenge. So, alleging that she was a false worshiper has no contextual support.

Here are examples where God opened people's eyes:

> **Genesis 21:19:** "Then **God opened her eyes** and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the skin with water and gave the lad a drink."
>
> **Luke 24:32:** "Then **their eyes were opened and they recognized Him**; and He vanished from their sight. They said to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?'"
>
> **Acts 26:15-18:** "And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, **to open their eyes** so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they

> may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'"

It's likely that God simply drew their attention to the clear truth, as with Lydia.

> John Mason: *"She was already a 'worshiper of God.' That God must be involved in a spiritual transformation is not in dispute, as we all have a sin nature and are lost. What is at stake is whether or not this verse shows that God forced this individual to move from a position of disbelief to belief. It definitely does not attest to such a fundamental change."*[641]

> Lawrence Vance: *"...God opening Lydia's heart didn't guarantee her salvation any more than all Gentiles being saved because God 'opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles' (Acts 14:27)."*[642]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God had to take out that heart of stone and put in Lydia a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26) so that she would respond to the message of the Cross."*[643]

Our reply:

The text makes no mention of God taking out her old heart of stone, which otherwise would be inconsistent with the fact that she was already a "worshiper of God."

Calvinist objection:

> James White: *"If we have libertarian free will, why would God have to open Lydia's heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul? Is that not a violation of 'free will'? And if God can open Lydia's heart, why does He not open every person's heart in the same way? Shouldn't the text say that she opened her own heart?"*[644]

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[641] *Calvinism: The Road to Nowhere* (Xulon Press, 2010), 184.
[642] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 505.
[643] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 289.
[644] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 204.

Our reply:

Enabling and granting opportunity does not violate our will. Moreover, it certainly would not be a violation of her free-will if she was already a receptive "worshiper of God," and as for why she needed God's aid, the text does not say. As a worshiper of God, perhaps all she needed was a preacher who could faithfully articulate the gospel in a clear and concise manner, precisely because 1st John 5:1 states that "whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him."

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"If Lydia's mind had not been opened, Paul's preaching would have been mere words."*[645]

Our reply:

How do we know that the Holy Spirit didn't open her understanding through the same Word of God? Perhaps this was the first time she had ever heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. Calvinists really run with their assumption, assuming a pre-faith "regeneration" of Irresistible Grace. John Calvin downplays the power of the gospel because he sees the *real* power being in an application of Irresistible Grace.

Acts 16:25-34

"But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer awoke and saw the prison doors opened, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Do not harm yourself, for we are all here!' And he called for lights and rushed in, and **trembling with fear** he fell down before Paul and Silas, and after he brought them out, he said, '**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**' They said, '**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household**.' And they spoke the word of the Lord to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his

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[645] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 278-279.

household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, having believed in God with his whole household."

The Jailer naturally understood that he had to *do* something: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" So, which of the following reflects the true nature of the Jailer's question?

(a) Sirs, what must I do for God to save me?
(b) Sirs, what must I do to save myself?

The answer would seem to be (a), but apart from Calvinism, Calvinists seem to think the Jailer would be asking (b). See the following exchange between an atheist and a Calvinist [646] to see this thinking unfold:

Atheist, Doug from Pinecreek: "How do I become a Christian?"
Derek Murrell: "You believe. You repent of your sins...."

Doug: "I don't believe, so how would I ever become a Christian?"
Derek: "You have to be regenerated."

Doug: "How do I get regenerated?"
Derek: "By the Holy Spirit?"

Doug: "How do I get the Holy Spirit to regenerate me?"
Derek: "You don't."

Doug: "You're right. You gave the right answer."
Derek: "Do you want me to lie to you and say, 'Well, you have to believe in your heart....'"

Doug: "Is there something I can do to get salvation?"
Derek: "Not of your own will."

Non-Calvinists believe that regeneration (including the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) is a spiritual blessing only for believing Christians. So, only after you've turned to Christ, is one eligible for regeneration. (Ephesians 1:3, 13) In Calvinism, though, one must first be regenerated (as an Irresistible Grace) in order for faith in Christ to be possible. So, if Calvinism was true, then a more complete answer Paul could have given to the Jailer is: You must first be chosen for salvation, from before the

[646] *Atheist grills Calvinist on Salvation*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_a3eMTy4mAw.

foundation of the world, in which case—at some point in your life—you will receive the gift of faith to believe and to become saved, so that if you think you might believe, right now, that could be evidence that you were pre-temporally chosen and have already received the gift of faith. If one is a Calvinist, then they'd have to think that Paul's (alleged) short answer was simply a way to hold off on the "hard truths" until later, after they've already become emotionally invested.

In Calvinistic thinking, if you *accepted* God's offer of salvation, then *you decided to be saved*, and hence you had a hand in your own salvation, as your own Savior. However, a real world analogy seems to contradict this perspective. For example, if I'm drowning and someone throws me a life preserver and pulls me into a boat, can I really say that I saved myself? Any normal person would immediately correct my claim by making the obvious point that someone else intervened.

The Jailor was moved by fear, and that was simply for the sake of his *physical* life. The gospel moves people to fear based upon a peril of the *after-life*, namely, an eternity in Hell separated from God. Fear can be a powerful motivation and can have a profound effect on the *unregenerate*. Compare with Acts 24:24-25: "But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became **frightened** and said, 'Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you.'"

> Charles Spurgeon: *"I further believe, although certain persons deny it, that the 'influence of fear' is to be exercised over the minds of men. I also believe it ought to operate upon the mind of the preacher himself."*[647]

Paul's answer confidently offered the man **total assurance** that a *willing* Savior stood ready to receive him, including his whole family *whom Paul had never met*, which is only possible if Jesus indiscriminately died for all men, as in an "Unlimited Atonement."

What do Calvinists believe?

> Jay Adams: *"As a Reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died. But the counselor's task is to explain the gospel and to say very plainly that God*

[647] *The Soul-Winner*, Aneko Press, 2016, p151.

> *commands all men to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus Christ."*[648]

Our reply:

So, the Calvinistic presentation of the gospel clearly does not offer anyone **total assurance** that a willing Savior stands ready to receive us. (High Calvinists tend not to believe in an *offer* of the gospel, but rather a *command* of the gospel, which only the *regenerated* among Calvinism's elect will heed and become saved. So, it would have to be inferred by Calvinists that Paul didn't mean to intend the certainty of hope that the Jailer, in particular, could have been saved—not knowing if he was secretly elect or not—but those who happen to believe in Jesus Christ will be saved. In this way, Calvinism does not have a personal invitation of the gospel to give but instead offers the hope that *you might be elect*, or not. Nonetheless, even a *command* of the gospel to repent and believe in Christ is a tacit admission of an Unlimited Atonement, insomuch that it implies that there is some *benefit* in doing so.

> John Goodwin: *"Again, neither can God, nor any minister of the gospel, say with truth to every particular man, if thou believest thou shalt be saved, unless it be supposed that there is salvation purchased or in being for them all."*[649]

> George Bryson: *"Calvinists would have us believe that this suicidal jailer, by asking this question, was manifesting the new birth. This is because Calvinists teach that no one will (or even can) want Christ until after they have been born again. If so, the proper Calvinist rendering should be something like: Since you are asking the question you must already be born again. Since you are already born again, you already have faith in Christ. Since you already have faith, which is the result of regeneration and necessary to justification, you need not do anything. You do not even need to be saved. Your very question, assuming you are sincere, makes clear that you are already saved."*[650]

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[648] *Competent to Counsel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970), 70.
[649] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 74.
[650] *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing (CCP), 2004), 366.

Acts 17:24-31

"'The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having **determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God**, if **perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him**, though **He is not far from each one of us**; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children." **Being then the children of God**, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having **overlooked the times of ignorance**, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent**, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.'"

In a message to *lost* Athenians, the apostle Paul said they were "the children of God," at least by creation, and indeed, all men are created in the image of God. Moreover, since God values Himself, it stands to reason that He would value those whom He created in *His* own image: "So do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:31)

Paul encouraged these "children of God" to "seek God" and to "find Him," which means that God perpetually makes Himself *available*. God *wants* to be found, but only on His terms, and He positions Himself as "not far from each one of us" in order that, by faith, we may discover Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The assumption is that if God commands all men everywhere to repent, then that must mean that all men everywhere are morally neutral creatures with free wills who are not enslaved by sin. But this does not follow. God commands all men everywhere to love him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, but sin does not allow any of the fallen sons of Adam to do so."*[651]

[651] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 108.

Our reply:

Wouldn't the call to repentance presuppose some benefit in doing so? Otherwise, [syllogism] if forgiveness requires an atonement, and Calvinism's hopeless non-elect class are excluded from Christ's atonement, then how are they supposed to benefit from answering God's call? The fact that God calls all men to repent shows that He desires all men to repent, or else otherwise God would be deceitful in calling people to receive something which He never intended. Moreover, the non-Calvinist position does not require that fallen man is "not enslaved by sin." Of course fallen man is enslaved by sin, but it takes a leap in logic by Calvinists to presume that one who is enslaved to sin cannot also admit their defect and accept God's free offer of salvation. After all, why can an alcoholic be able to admit their addiction and seek help, but *somehow* a sinner cannot do the same when confronted by the gospel and accept Christ's help? Calvinism defies our own human experience.

In recognizing their worship of an "unknown God" (Acts 17:23), Paul prepares to share the gospel so that his listeners would turn and place their *already existing faith* in God. So, it was not that they didn't have faith. Their problem was *misplaced* trust—in all the wrongs things.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"We frequently hear evangelical Christians say that their non-Christian friends are 'seeking God' or 'searching for God.' Why do we say this when Scripture so clearly teaches that no unregenerate person seeks after God?"*[652]

Our reply:

But isn't that God's expectation, having positioned Himself near? Moreover, the parable of the Sower shows that some lost, unregenerate people do indeed seek after God, having received the gospel "with joy" and who even "believe for a while," though "in time of temptation fall away." (Luke 8:13) The problem in such cases is a matter of competing-loves, rather than not seeking God at all. Moreover, anyone who has spent any amount of time with "Jehovah's Witnesses" knows that they have faith in God and are absolutely sincere in their love and desire for God. Their problem, though, is misplaced trust, in having placed their faith in the Watchtower Society instead of in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

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[652] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 125.

What do Calvinists believe?

In speaking of creation, Paul states that God has "determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation," which is in terms of where we live and our genetic makeup, indicative of God having decreed whatsoever comes to pass.

Our reply:

This is one of the misconceptions Calvinists have of non-Calvinists, which is that since non-Calvinists do not hold to exhaustive, theistic determinism, non-Calvinists therefore do not believe that God has determined *anything*. Certainly, God has determined many things, but that alone does not mean that God has determined everything. Notice what else the text says that God determined: "…that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." So, God has also determined to position Himself near to all of us so that we can all seek and find Him. God didn't determine people to go to Hell. Rather, God determined for people to have access to Him so that they could be saved. While God indeed determined the time and location of our birth, that doesn't necessarily mean that God determined all that we do in life. The Calvinist objection, therefore, succumbs to a leap in logic.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Jeff Noblit: *"…any preacher who tries to dumb down the doctrine of sin, the depravity of man, and the necessity of repentance is not preaching the true gospel. This approach is not new or clever but wicked—dooming men's souls and leading millions to false assurance."*[653]

Our reply:

Would such Calvinists conclude that Paul's sermon to the Athenians was "not the Gospel" but a "wicked" counterfeit which "dooms men's souls" by leading the Athenians into false security? Furthermore, how can any human "doom" a member of Calvinism's non-elect? Recall that these are said to be born excluded from a Limited Atonement, which is the only means by which anyone can be forgiven by God. S this is a prime

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[653] *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 102.

example of how Calvinists sometimes fall into a pattern of cognitive dissonance. Also, notice the concern of "false assurance" that Calvinists have in regard to the alleged, non-elect. Why is that, if Calvinism's elect will be saved, no matter what, while the non-elect will remain lost, no matter what? So what difference would it make whether the non-elect have a false sense of assurance? Are Calvinists suggesting that the non-elect could be saved, if not for their false sense of assurance? Or, is the whole matter simply an annoyance to Calvinists? Is it not enough that the non-elect have no opportunity for salvation?

Acts 18:7-10
"Then he left there and went to the house of a man named **Titius Justus**, a **worshiper of God**, whose house was next to the synagogue. **Crispus**, the leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household, and **many of the Corinthians when they heard were believing and being baptized**. And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, '**Do not be afraid any longer**, but go on speaking and do not be silent; for **I am with you**, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, **for I have many people in this city**.' And he settled there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."

Similarly, Acts 16:9-10 states: "A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, '**Come over to Macedonia and help us**.' When he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go into Macedonia, **concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them**."

This was a unique time period in history where the Old Covenant was transitioning into the New Covenant Church, and so the "many people in this city" could refer to God's followers, who although were not yet Christians, were worshippers of God like the Cornelius of Acts 10:1-2 and Lydia of Acts 14:16, and who would be receptive to the gospel.

> **Acts 10:1-2:** "Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was called the Italian cohort, a devout man and one who **feared God** with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually."

> **Acts 16:14:** "A woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a **worshiper of God**, was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul."

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Even though these people might then reasonably be counted outsiders, the Lord calls them his own because they were written in the book of life and were about to be admitted into his family. We know that many sheep wander outside the flock for a time, just as there are many wolves among the sheep."*[654]

Our reply:

In other words, the "many people in this city" would refer to Calvinism's unregenerate-elect who were due for their Irresistible Grace.

> Lawrence Vance: *"The '**much people**' are defined in the chapter as Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:2), Sila and Timotheus (Acts 18:5), Justus (Acts 18:7), Crispus and his family (Acts 18:8), and '**many of the Corinthians**' (Acts 18:8). There is no such animal as an 'elect unregenerate' child of God."*[655]

> Doug Sayers: *"This does not necessarily mean that those people were unconditionally chosen for salvation and would need to be saved, by irresistible force. Those would not have to be unconditionally elect in order for God to know their hearts. This could simply mean that God knew that there were souls in Corinth who would believe the gospel when they heard it. Some, like Cornelius, may have already belonged to the Father by faith, but they still needed to hear about the Son. They may have been 'God fearing' or they may have been raunchy unbelievers, who would become believers through the preaching of the cross. It seems that there were both kinds of sinners in Corinth. 1 Cor 6:9."*[656]

> Robert Shank: *"Who were these 'many people' whom God considered His? Obviously they were people as yet unknown to Paul and therefore not among those already won to faith in Christ in Paul's initial labors in Corinth. We must therefore conclude that they were people who, not having heard and believed the Gospel as yet, already were positively disposed toward God--*

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[654] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 312.
[655] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 336.
[656] *Chosen or Not? A Layman's Study of Biblical Election & Assurance* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 398-399.

> *people in whom the Gospel would find ready acceptance. Peter's words in the house of Cornelius are pertinent at this point: 'Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him' (Acts 10:34f. RSV) The point is not that such people do not need the Gospel, but rather that such people are disposed to believe the Gospel even before they hear it because they are positively disposed toward God, a fact of which God takes account, as the Scriptures imply."*[657]

Acts 18:27-28
"And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had **believed through grace**, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ."

The "grace" here described is likely in the manner of their instruction by a godly minister in answering Jewish objections to Christ as Lord and Messiah, likely also similar to Acts 14:1: "In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and **spoke in such a manner** that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks." Of course, Calvinists may take this to mean a secret illumination of Irresistible Grace, especially since the reference to "grace" is unspecific. However, non-Calvinists do believe in grace, but only that it is not made irresistible upon the unwilling or that regeneration is forced on to unbelievers, simply because a particular unbeliever happens to be among Calvinism's elect.

Acts 20:28
"Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased with His own blood**."

See the discussions on Matthew 20:28, John 10:15 and 2nd Peter 2:1.

Acts 26:14
"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is **hard for you to kick against the goads**.'"

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[657] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 195-196.

In other words, using the analogy of an oxgoad, the more that Paul resisted God, the more he was only hurting himself. This proves that the Holy Spirit interacts within the heart of the *unregenerate* in evangelism, without first regenerating them, and which is the opposite of what Calvinism teaches, since Calvinism teaches that the Holy Spirit first "removes the old stony heart" and instantly regenerates Calvinism's elect so that they will believe. So, if Paul is one of Calvinism's elect, then why go through this unnecessary process of goading him and instead just instantly regenerate him?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"The conversion of the apostle Paul was abrupt, startling, shocking, the man was on his way to persecute Christians. He was supernaturally, divinely converted on the spot, transformed and called to be an apostle because God had chosen him to that before the world began."*[658]

Our reply:

How would an *external* revelation of God along the road to Damascus in appearing before Paul prove an *internal* regeneration as alleged by Calvinists? In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that Paul was automatically "regenerated" on the spot. Acts 9:9 states: "And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank." It wasn't until after the three days later that Ananias visited him so that he would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The problem with Calvinists is that they often assume the very thing they set out to prove.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"The struggle between the spirit and the flesh is the struggle of the regenerate person. The unregenerate, natural man has no such struggle. He is in bondage to sin, acting according to the flesh, living according to the flesh, and choosing according to the flesh."*[659]

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[658] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.
[659] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 134.

Our reply:

Not only *was* there such a struggle within the unregenerate heart of Saul of Tarsus, but Jesus also maintains that it is difficult to *continue* struggling in light of internal convictions. This evidences what is sometimes seen as a gradual *process* of conversion, and in which we as Christians participate in that transition through our intercessory prayers. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, that goading likely started when he approved of Stephen being stoned to death in Acts chapter 7. Saul was a student of Gamaliel, who according to Acts 5:33-40 kept the disciples from being killed by stating that if they spoke falsely, then they would come to nothing in due time, while if they spoke on behalf of God, then trying to stop them would be both futile and also amount to "fighting against God," which fight against God is exactly what Jesus described at Acts 26:14: "'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'"

> Steven Hitchcock: *"While sinful men may respond to these pricks of the conscience by suppressing and distracting the soul with other things, they cannot really get away from those seeds that have made their mark. It is particularly when men fall in great distress, experience calamity, or know some powerful life experience, in which the reality of their mortality and their sinfulness becomes undeniable that they become 'open' to those seeds hidden in their consciousness. Many have testified how God spoke to their hearts when He took away their idols or when they came close to death. God's Spirit humbles a soul in a variety of ways, not just by the Law's exposing of sin, though this is always present to some degree."*[660]

Acts 26:15-18

"And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, '**I am Jesus** whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to **appoint you a minister** and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, **to open their eyes** so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that **they may receive forgiveness of sins** and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'"

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[660] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 77-78.

How would those Jewish and Gentile persecutors be able to receive "forgiveness of sins" unless there was an Unlimited Atonement which indiscriminately included any one of them? Furthermore, Jesus explains that the path of their salvation involves Paul helping to "open their eyes." However, in Calvinism, salvation is monergistic, in which God alone involuntarily regenerates the sinner.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"In arrogating to himself what is God's own, Paul seems to be placing himself too high. We know that it is only the Holy Spirit who opens our eyes. We know that it is only God who destroys our sins and adopts us with the saints. But God frequently gives his ministers the honor that is due only to him, in order to commend the power of his Spirit working through them."*[661]

Our reply:

Paul is *not* placing himself too high since he wasn't quoting himself, but quoting Jesus. So the problem for Calvinists is that Jesus is contradicting their theology. In Calvinism, only Irresistible Grace opens eyes, and so for Paul to be appointed to open eyes, means that there is something that Paul *does* which opens eyes, in which the preaching of the gospel produces faith in its hearers, as per Romans 10:17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." The worshiper, Lydia, had her heart opened according to Acts 16:14, and which would reasonably also be through the same means, namely through the preaching of the faith-producing word of God.

Acts 26:27-29

"'King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa replied to Paul, '**In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian**.' And Paul said, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, **not only you, but also all who hear me this day**, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'"

Either Paul was speaking from the flesh, or he was speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Calvinists need to decide. Paul wanted conversion from all who heard him preach that day. But how could that happen unless Jesus died for all of them, as in an Unlimited Atonement?

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[661] *Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 393.

What do Calvinists believe?

No one can be *persuaded* into the kingdom of God. The unregenerate remain spiritually *dead* and thus unpersuadable until those who are elected are effectually called from their spiritual tomb.

Our reply:

Then why did Paul *agree* with Agrippa? Why, also, did Paul elsewhere affirm that he persuades the lost? 2nd Corinthians 5:11 states: "Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, **we persuade men**, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences." 2nd Corinthians 5:20-21: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; **we beg you** on behalf of Christ, **be reconciled to God**. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Why would those with an Irresistible Grace need to be persuaded and begged? Compare also with Acts 24:24-27 in which Paul was trying to persuade Felix: "But some days later Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became **frightened** and said, '**Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you**.' At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him. But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned."

What do Calvinists believe?

Even if Felix was being persuaded out of fear, real conversion would never take hold, since only the elect are truly regenerated, and who on that account, endure to the end.

Our reply:

If Felix, or anyone else, sincerely submitted to the Holy Spirit in fear, then why would the Holy Spirit withhold regeneration from them? The problem for Felix is that he did not respond to his fear correctly. His choice was to say, "Go away…." Rather than God being stingy with regeneration, God was being generous in offering him the grace that could have been his.

Acts 27:21-26
"When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, 'Men, **you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail** from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, saying, "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, **God has granted you all those who are sailing with you**." Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that **it will turn out exactly as I have been told**. "But we must run aground on a certain island."'"

God indeed granted their safety, but it was implicitly conditional, as the passage goes on to reveal: "But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, '**Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved**.'" (vv.30-31) Such conditionality is also evident in the matter of King Zedekiah of Israel, when God sent the prophet Jeremiah to instruct him on how things may go well: "Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, "If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive. But if you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand."' Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, 'I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for they may give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.' But Jeremiah said, 'They will not give you over. Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live. But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word which the LORD has shown me: "Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say, 'Your close friends Have misled and overpowered you; While your feet were sunk in the mire, They turned back.' They will also bring out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand, but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned with fire."'" (Jeremiah 38:17-23) The situation involving Jeremiah was the matter of the *siege*, the promise of good news and warning of ramifications for disobedience. The situation involving Paul was the matter of the *shipwreck*, the promise of good news and warning of ramifications for disobedience. Both cases demonstrate possible futures,

depending on whether people are obedient in what God has granted. God certainly knows what people will ultimately do, but it's the individual's own self-determination which both determines their future and also establishes their accountability.

Chapter 11: The Book of Romans

Romans 1:5-6

"Through whom we have received grace and apostleship **to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles** for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ."

When Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, He gave him specific instructions: "…for this purpose I have appeared to you" (Acts 26:16), indicating that Paul was to be a "minister" and a "witness" for the evangelization of "the Jewish people" and "the Gentiles" in order to "**open their eyes** so that they may **turn from darkness to light** and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may **receive forgiveness of sins** and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me." So where in that divine mandate do we find anyone who is excluded? Is there anyone who falls outside the camp of either Jew or Gentile? Moreover, the meaning of "all the Gentiles" would reasonably reference an unqualified, indiscriminate number of Gentiles. The problem with Calvinism, though, and its associated doctrines of Unconditional Reprobation, Preterition and Limited Atonement, is that it would require a meaning of "all the [elect] Gentiles," and such inferred substitution is difficult to justify.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"It was not enough for Paul to have been appointed an apostle, unless his ministry had reference to the making of disciples. He therefore adds that his apostleship extends to all the Gentiles."*[662]

Our reply:

Regarding "all the Gentiles," the *New Living Translation* paraphrases: "And now, through Christ, all the kindness of God has been poured out upon us undeserving sinners; and now he is sending us out around the world to tell all people everywhere the great things God has done for them, so that they, too, will believe and obey him."[663] And what has God done? Calvary. This is confirmed at 1st Corinthians 15:1-3.

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[662] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 18.

[663] *New Living Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1971), 896.

Romans 1:6-7
"Among whom you also are **the called of Jesus Christ**; to all who are **beloved of God** in Rome, **called as saints**: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

By stating "among whom **you also** are the called of Jesus Christ," Paul compares *his* own calling of apostleship to *their* appointed calling and vocation within the Body of Christ.

> Steven Hitchcock: *"…when the Scriptures refer to Christians as 'The Called,' it is a way of referring to those who have identified with the call of the gospel. 'The Called' is another way of referring to the people of faith."*[664]

For Calvinists, however, the calling is a subtle reference to Irresistible Grace, in which God takes the initiative in effectually calling Calvinism's elect to believe in the gospel to become saved.

Romans 1:16
"For I am not ashamed of **the gospel**, for it is the **power of God for salvation to everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Similarly, 1st Thessalonians 2:13-14 states: "And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, **the word of God**, which also **performs its work in you who believe**."

> Norman Geisler: *"…it is God's power to those who 'welcomed' it."*[665]

Calvinists don't believe in the power of the gospel—they believe in the power of REGENERATION, so that only when accompanied by the power of Irresistible Grace does the gospel have any spark of life. So, in Calvinism, the real power of the gospel rests in an irresistible calling for those who *disbelieve*, that is, those who are born total haters of God, so that they can and must believe, as members of Calvinism's secret elect.

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[664] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 269.
[665] *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 195.

> *For I am not ashamed of the **decree**, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who was unconditionally chosen and secretly predestined to life, to the Jew first and also the Greek.*

As a non-Calvinist, however, there would be shame in a gospel which limits God's love and denies that Jesus died for everyone, depicting God like the priest and the Levite of Luke 10:30-32, passing by the vast majority of mankind for grace (i.e. Preterition), simply because not all are marked as elect.

Romans 1:18-21

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for **God made it evident to them**. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly seen**, being understood through what has been made, so that they are **without excuse**. For even though **they knew God, they did not honor Him as God** or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

Calvinism's non-elect would sure seem to have a good "excuse," if they are born helpless and hopeless, and cannot do any different than what they are forced to perform by Calvinism's unchangeable decree. In other words, if by decree, there is some kind of condition from birth that men have no control over, which makes them unable to assent or respond to God's Word or His General Revelation, then that seems to be the very "excuse" that Paul says that they don't have at Romans 1:20. What better excuse is there for the reprobate than saying, "I was unable to believe from birth, inescapably predetermined by the absolute power of God's decree"?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Paul is not addressing the truth of the gospel message in Romans 1. So while the unsaved man knows the truth of God's existence, this is clearly not the same thing as asserting that he is able to embrace and obey the gospel."*[666]

Our reply:

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[666] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 102.

Why would Calvinists think that the unregenerate *can* positively respond to God's **general revelation** (Romans 1:19) but *can't* respond to the **gospel**?

> Braxton Hunter: *"Now that is a strange set-up. I'm giving them good reasons to believe? Or, I'm not. I am giving them good reasons to believe, but because God hasn't regenerated them, they can't accept it and believe it, but I am increasing their culpability, even though they can't believe it and accept it. This makes no sense."*[667]

This is why Calvinism is logically not relatable. Nonetheless, the Bible addresses the question of why the lost do not possess a legitimate "excuse" before God:

> **John 9:41:** "Jesus said to them, '**If you were blind, you would have no sin**; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains.'"

> **John 15:22:** "'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have **no excuse** for their sin.'"

So, the fact that they had *heard* Jesus' gospel and acknowledged their *moral ability* meant, in God's mind, that they no longer had a legitimate excuse for rejecting what otherwise could have saved them. Hence, God shows that both opportunity and moral ability serve as the basis for whether or not He can legitimately justify imputing the charge of sin. Therefore, to suggest mankind *lacks* such ability (without some prior supernatural work of God) gives back the very excuse that Paul removes in Romans 1:20 (i.e. "I couldn't believe because God didn't give me the faith to believe, and I was born in a condition by which I could only hate and reject God.").

That, of course, raises the question about those who have never heard the gospel. How does God justify holding such people responsible? The question itself presumes that people have not seen and heard enough about God in order to respond positively to His general revelation. The reason why such a general revelation of God leaves people without "excuse" is because if one acknowledges the truth revealed about God through His general revelation (i.e. His nature and a person's own conscience, etc.), then God is faithful to bring them *more* light. So while a

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[667] *James White Argues Like an Atheist When it Comes to William Lane Craig*, Youtube, 57:20-57:39, no longer available online.

general revelation of God *alone* is not sufficient to save, what it does do, if received, is prompt God to deliver greater revelation, simply because He does indeed love all people, and therefore will grant those who are faithful with a little, even more.

> **Matthew 13:12:** "'For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.'"

> **Luke 16:10:** "'He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.'"

We see this principle evidenced in the lives of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25-40), Cornelius (Acts 10:1-48) and Lydia (Acts 16:14-15) who were all worshippers of God but yet who hadn't heard the gospel yet, and so God sent messengers to speak with them.

Romans 3:11-12
"As it is written, 'There is **none righteous**, not even one; there is none who understands, there is **none who seeks for God**; **all have turned aside**, together they have become useless; there is **none who does good**, there is not even one.'"

Similarly, Romans 3:23 states: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In quoting Psalms 14:1-7, Paul is showing from the Scriptures that no one is perfect, and no one has earned their way to Heaven, particularly in terms of the works of the Law. Through Christ, though, there is a goodness being revealed, which is not of the law, in the area where we all fall short, but is of faith in Christ, who forgives—on the basis of the Cross—anyone who humbly asks Him. So, the good news of the gospel is that we can be *declared* good by God, despite our failings, simply by placing our trust in Christ to save and redeem us.

What do Calvinists believe?

People cannot come to God because sin has darkened their eyes. No one seeks after God. All have gone astray. Therefore, God must change man's will through regeneration. God does this for the elect.

Our reply:

While it's true that fallen man does not seek after God, God seeks after us, positioning Himself "not far from each one of us," all for the purpose that mankind "would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him." (Acts 17:26-28) The apostle Paul taught this in a sermon to evangelize lost, unbelievers. So, clearly, he thought that lost people *could* seek and *find* God, based solely on the principle of God positioning Himself near, so that He may be sought and found, and Paul didn't mention anything to them about first needing a secret regeneration to change their will, nor did he say that God only desired the salvation of a secret society of "the elect" among them.

The fact that none seeks after God is an indictment on humanity since God has made Himself accessible. So, even if someone were to claim that God has tried really hard to hide Himself, it would only be so that people would try really hard to find Him, and God has promised that He will allow Himself to be found by those who seek Him with all of their heart: "'You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.'" (Jeremiah 29:13)

Despite the general revelation of God according to Romans 1:20, it's also true that God hasn't appeared to every person as He had with Saul of Tarsus—now known as the apostle Paul. (Acts 9:3-6) There is a good reason for this. God's eternal intention for His created beings is a sorting and ordering. (Matthew 13:24-30) God wants for people to make a spiritual choice on whether to receive Him. If God were to simply appear to everyone in the manner that He appeared to Saul/Paul, then no one would have a real choice. Acknowledging God would be perfunctory and superficial. In such an event, even His enemies would "choose" Him, but not out of love but due to a lack of options. So, for God to hide Himself to the degree that He has, allows those who have chosen to love Him, the joy of finding Him and having a meaningful relationship with Him, while those who have chosen to reject God and essentially become their own god, the sufficient basis to deny that He even exists.[668]

What do Calvinists believe?

Is believing in Christ righteous? Yes, it is. But none are righteous. Therefore, none can believe in Christ. Apart from the regenerating power of God's gift of faith to the elect, no one can receive the gospel message.

Our reply:

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[668] Daniel Kolenda, *Slaying Dragons: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2019), 25-26.

Calvinists are engaging in extra-biblical, logical deduction. Their goal is to portray mankind as one million times more evil than Satan, and then ask, "How could such a person ever freely receive Christ? They can't. Hence, the only thing left is Irresistible Grace," even though Paul never arrives at that conclusion. Instead, Paul's conclusion from mankind's depravity is that since we are morally imperfect, we cannot be saved by our performance under the Law, and so the solution, then, is to place our trust in a perfect Savior who can. For those who do confess their sins to God and place their trust in Him, God credits righteousness, since they are relying on Him to save them. Our only hope, therefore, is to believe.

Saying that mankind does not seek God on its own is not proof that one cannot reply or respond positively to a God who seeks to save the lost. Moreover, pointing out that mankind are enemies of God, does not mean that we cannot confess our fallen state and reply to His message of reconciliation. There is nothing about being an enemy that implies or necessitates an inability to be reconciled to your enemy, just like there's nothing about being a slave to sin which implies that you're incapable of admitting that you're enslaved when confronted. Just because you are a slave to sin, doesn't mean that you cannot respond to God who offers to free you.

Romans 3:11 has a strong parallel to Isaiah 53:6:

Ask the Calvinist: At Romans 3:11, who does it say that "seeks for God"? (Calvinists will correctly answer "no one.")

Ask the Calvinist: Do you mean "no one" of the elect, or literally no one? (Calvinists will correctly answer "no one at all.")

Ask the Calvinist: At v.12, who does it say that have "turned aside"? (Calvinists will correctly answer "all.")

Ask the Calvinist: Do you mean "all" of the elect, or literally *all*? (Calvinists will correctly answer, literally "all.")

Ask the Calvinist: For whom did Jesus die? (Calvinists will insist that the answer is "the elect.")

So now have Calvinists turn to Isaiah 53:6: "**All of us** like sheep have gone **astray**, each of us has **turned** to his own way; **but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him**."

> Ask the Calvinist: Given that there is literally "no one" who seeks after God, and that literally "all" we like sheep have turned aside, and that literally each of us has turned to his own way, whose iniquity has fallen on Christ? (Calvinists will *incorrectly* answer "the elect.")

So, Calvinists had agreed with each step of the way through Romans 3:10-12, in that the universal terms pointed to mankind in general, though when Isaiah 53:6 invokes similar universal terms, it must reference Calvinism's elect *exclusively*, especially at the conclusion where it identifies the scope of the Unlimited Atonement. So, literally "no one" seeks after God and literally "all" we like sheep have turned away, but yet, *not* literally "all" whose iniquity has fallen on Christ?

Romans 4:4-5

"Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who **does not work, but believes** in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Notice how faith is *contrasted* from works. They are not in the same column. They are in separate columns. However, Calvinists believe that only that which is received by an Irresistible Grace can be contrasted from works. In other words, Calvinists believe that faith absolutely would become a meritorious work—for which we may boast—if we come to think of it as something that we came up with on our own, apart from being received as a gift by Irresistible Grace. But notice that the apostle Paul made no such qualification in his contrast between faith and works. In other words, he never said that faith is not a work, only under the condition that faith is secret gift by Irresistible Grace. Calvinists simply insist (and assume) that's how he must have understood the nature of faith.

Calvinist paraphrase: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him [through Irresistible Grace as a secret gift of God] who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." But if that was what the apostle meant, why didn't he say what he meant, unless that was not what he meant at all?

Romans 5:1-2

"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our **introduction by faith into this grace** in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God."

Similarly, Romans 4:16 states: "For this reason it is by **faith**, in order that it may be **in accordance with grace**, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Notice that faith is our introduction to grace. Calvinism, however, teaches that grace (namely Irresistible Grace) is our introduction to faith.

> James Leonard: *"All salvific benefits are 'in Christ.' And to be in Christ, one must believe. Rom 5:2 is extremely important but often overlooked. ... V.2 is one of the most overlooked passages. I can guarantee you, if its wording supported Calvinism like it explicitly supports Arminianism, it would be one of the most quoted scriptures ever."*[669]
>
> Steven Hitchcock: *"The grace of God has not superimposed itself upon us to the end that we might have faith, but rather, by faith we have obtained our very introduction into the grace of God."*[670]

So, when we come to Christ, we enter a place of grace.

> **1st Corinthians 1:21:** "For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, **God was well-pleased** through the foolishness of the message preached **to save those who believe**."
>
> **Hebrews 11:6:** "And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."

Prior to faith in Christ, Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers* have the following:

1. Atonement applied.
2. Born Again, Regenerated, New Creation, In Christ.
3. Effectually given the faith to believe.
4. Secretly loved, secretly embraced by God.

In Calvinism, Irresistible Grace would have already provided reconciliation and peace with God before faith ever enters the picture.

Romans 5:6

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[669] Commentary by James Leonard of **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.
[670] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 137.

"For while we were still helpless, at the right time **Christ died for the ungodly**."

Similarly, 1st Timothy 1:15-16 states: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, among whom **I am foremost** of all. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an **example** for those who would believe in Him for eternal life." Christ died for the "ungodly," of whom Paul considered himself chief, since he killed Christians, and therefore by highlighting the grace shown toward him, he could demonstrate God's willingness to save anyone. However, just because Calvinists echo the fact that Christ died for sinners, does not automatically mean they believe Jesus died for *all* sinners, but rather only *elect* sinners.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Christ died for the ungodly. The elect, until they are regenerated, are fallen sons of Adam as are all others. They are ungodly. Hence, the statement 'Christ died for the ungodly' is perfectly true. Further, all the elect, until they are brought to faith in Christ, are enemies of God, walking in the rebellious ways of the world (Eph. 2:1-3). Hence, saying Christ reconciled those who were enemies of God by His death is perfectly true and harmonious with the biblical teaching of particular redemption. There is nothing in the context that demands us to believe that the statement 'Christ died for the ungodly' means 'Christ died for every single ungodly person who has ever, or will ever, live.'"*[671]

Our reply:

That is precisely the reason why nothing can be assumed when reading from Calvinists. Anything is subject to having "elect" inserted.

Romans 5:12-15

"Therefore, just as **through one man sin entered into the world**, and death through sin, and so **death spread to all men**, **because all sinned**—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the

[671] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 252.

transgression. For if by the transgression of the one **the many died**, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the **grace** of the one Man, Jesus Christ, **abound to the many**."

Notice the proportionality with regard to "the many." Just as death spread to all, through Adam, grace spreads to all, through Jesus, and which then begs the question of "in what way" does grace spread to all?[672]

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Paul makes **grace common to all men**, not because it in fact extends to all, but **because it is offered to all**. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him."*[673]

Our reply:

That is indeed consistent with Matthew 20:28: "'Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a **ransom for many**.'" Christ suffered for the sins of the world, though not everyone receives the grace that He freely offers. God certainly could have forced His grace on everyone, as in a universal Irresistible Grace, but God didn't choose that. Instead, the gospel is presented as a gift for the asking. While our fallen nature dictates that we did not have a real choice on whether not to sin, we do have a real choice on whether to confess our sin and accept Christ's gift of salvation.

> Adrian Rogers: *"One man sinned and got us into trouble; one Man died on the cross and got us out, plus He forgave every sin and promises us eternal life."*[674]

> Adrian Rogers: *"I had rather live in Romans 5 than in the Garden of Eden! You gain much more in Jesus than you ever lost in Adam. That's the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."*[675]

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[672] See also the commentary on 2nd Corinthians 5:14-15.
[673] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 117-118, emphasis mine.
[674] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 17.
[675] Ibid., 13.

> John Goodwin: *"The persons upon whom the gift of justification cometh by Christ, are made equal in number unto those upon whom the judgment of condemnation came by Adam. For as the offense of Adam is here said to have come upon all men unto condemnation, so also is the gift of justification of life...."*[676]

> Ron Rhodes: *"This is the same meaning as in Romans 5:15: 'For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!' It is critical to note that the 'many' of verse 15 is clearly defined in verse 18 as 'all men': 'Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.' Notice also that in verse 15 Paul speaks of Adam's sin, and of the resultant death that comes upon all his descendants. But then the apostle goes on to speak of the grace of God and its resultant gift of life abounding to the same company. This is clear from the fact that 'the many' in the second clause of the verse is coextensive with 'the many' in the first clause."*[677]

The primary verse used by Calvinists to infer that mankind is not only born with a sin-nature but is also born guilty of Adam's sin is Romans 5:12-13, which states: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law." Calvinists believe that when Adam sinned, his progeny became guilty of his sin, just as if they were doing it. However, this is not necessarily so.

> Adam Harwood on Romans chapter 5: *"Sin entered through one man. So sin came into the world, and we understand that to be at the time of Adam's disobedience. So that's when sin entered into the world, and death came through sin, and then it spread to all. Why did it spread to all people? Because all sinned. ... Now notice the text doesn't say we sinned in Adam. It just says 'death spread to all because all sinned.' ... Romans 5 never says we're guilty of Adam's sin. In fact, there's no Bible verse that says we're*

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[676] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 65.

[677] Ron Rhodes, *The Extent of the Atonement: Limited Atonement Versus Unlimited Atonement.* http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Atonement.html

> *guilty of Adam's sin. … So the contrast [in vv.18-19] is between the work of Adam and the work of Christ, and if a person takes the position that because of the work of Adam, all are condemned, then it seems, in this parallel, that because of the work of Christ, all would be made righteous. … So if it's the case that we're not automatically saved because of what Christ did, then why would we be automatically guilty because of what Adam did?"*[678]

The answer is that we are not automatically guilty of Adam's sin, any more than we are automatically righteous because of what Christ did. Just as we must participate in sin to be guilty of Adam's sin, so too we must participate with faith in Christ in order to be made righteous by Him.

Romans 6:11

"Even so consider yourselves to be **dead to sin**, but alive to God in Christ Jesus."

If the lost being dead *in* sin implies an inability to respond to God, then does the Christian being dead *to* sin imply an inability to respond to sin? In other words, Calvinists cite Ephesians 2:1-2 which states that "you were dead in your trespasses and sins" in order to prove an inability to positively respond to God, and so for consistency, why would Calvinists not similarly use the same corpse analogy at Romans 6:11, in order to suggest that Christians being "dead to sin" implies an inability for the Christian to respond to sin? Of course, Christians *can* respond to sin, evident in times of moral failure, and that's the whole point—the corpse analogy doesn't fit.

A correct interpretation is that, as Christians, we should "consider" ourselves to be dead to sin, not that we are physically incapable, but that we should strive to go without sinning because we are a new creation and have been supplied the way of escape to avoid to sin. (1st Corinthians 10:13) So, for consistency, being dead in trespasses and sins would not signify an inability to respond to God but rather a status of alienation from God until remedied by turning to Christ, and which is perfectly consistent with the context of Ephesians 2:11-22.

Romans 8:28

"And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those **who are called according to His purpose**."

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[678] *Dr. Adam Harwood on Original Sin - Part 1*, 18:09-26:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ETajCNdPBI.

Not *everything* that happens is God's will, but God is able to use *anything* to redeem good from evil, so as to be used by Him for a good purpose, if people will engage Him and ask Him for help.

Paul makes a present-day case for why believers can have assurance in difficult times, not based on something pulled out of thin air, but based upon all that Scripture has testified about God being faithful in delivering those who love Him. Since this is not about working out good for *everyone*, godly and ungodly alike, but specifically about those who "love God," it is, therefore, illegitimate to use this verse as a proof-text for universal determinism. So this is an instance of a *qualified* "all things," with respect to what God does in relation to Christians.

A good example of what is meant by working things out for good is found at Genesis 50:20. What men intended for evil, God intended for good. In other words, God can take the sinful intentions of others in order to use it to bring about a redemptive good. While Joseph's brothers intended the evil of slavery as a convenient alternative for disposing of a rival sibling, God meant slavery as a way to rescue Joseph from imminent execution and to save his family (and perhaps countless others) who would have perished in the impending famine. God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-wise, knowing all possibilities and every conceivable scenario so that He can use any given situation to work together for our good, thus guaranteeing that we too can trust Him in any difficult situation.

Romans 8:29-30

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

Who are "those whom He foreknew"?[679] Romans 11:2 is the only other occurrence of "foreknew" in the Book of Romans, and which clearly refers to the Old Testament saints. So, why not consider that as a way to interpret Scripture with Scripture?

> **Romans 10:21-11:2:** "But as for Israel He says, 'All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate

[679] A common non-Calvinist interpretation is that, "For those [in Christ] whom He foreknew, He also predestined [all that comes with being a Christian]…." It would address all that God has predestined for His Church, the Bride of Christ. By contrast, the interpretation outlined above instead deals with "foreknew" as *prior knowledge*, in identical manner to Romans 11:2.

> people.' I say then, **God has not rejected His people**, has He? May it never be! For **I too am an Israelite**, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected **His people whom He foreknew**."

So, if those foreknown at Romans 8:29 are identical to Romans 11:2 (with such foreknowledge being indicative of prior knowledge, such as with Acts 26:4-5; 2nd Peter 3:17), then the net effect of Romans 8:28-31 would be that *since* we know of God's faithfulness toward believers of old, we can trust that He will do *the same* for believers in the present and future who also love Him and are called by Him, and thus conclude, "who can stand against us?" Therefore, that which "we know" at v.28 is supported in v.29 as the reason *why* we know it, which is based upon what we've observed in the past of God's dealings with His people. The *past tense* references of "predestined," "called," "justified" and "glorified" works well with this interpretation.

By the time of the writing of Paul's letter, those forerunners would have *already* been sealed in eternity with the incorruptible nature of conformity to the image of Christ, in having been called, justified and by then, glorified, so that by their *example*, believers of today who receive the same benefits may be emboldened by God's providence in the midst of their own trials to declare: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Romans 8:18) So, it's not that this passage is *only* about Old Testament saints, but rather about how they can be cited as object lessons of God's faithfulness in order to encourage those of us today.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God is sovereign over all events in human history, otherwise when you think of all of the freewill acts of mankind, God would not be able to make the promise that in the lives of His chosen people, who are the people who love God, that all things work together for the good."*[680]

> James White: *"It refers to the choice to enter into relationship with someone. In this case, in eternity past God chose to enter into personal relationship with His elect people, even before bringing them into existence. The relationship is so personal, so intimate, that it is proper to speak of it in the sense of foreloving. God's*

[680] *James White Calvinism Debate: Watch Party*, 41:00-41:18. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3M55otqA_A

> *eternal choice was to enter into a loving, intimate relationship with the elect. This results in His predestinating them to adoption as sons, His calling them into relationship with Him in time, His justifying them by declaring them righteous, and His glorifying them in His presence for all eternity."*[681]

Our reply:

This reflects the Calvinist teaching that God has predestined to save some people and leave the rest without hope. However, Calvinists are having to assume the following into the text:

> "For those [*chosen unbelievers who will be born totally depraved and hate God as dead rebel sinners but are nonetheless chosen beforehand for salvation*] whom He foreknew [*fore-loved in eternity past before bringing them into existence*], He also predestined [*to salvation*]."

That's quite a bit of theological baggage to have to import into the text. A far more straight-forward interpretation builds upon the context and allows Scripture to interpret Scripture by comparing those foreknown at Romans 8:29 with those foreknown at Romans 11:2.

Romans 8:28 states: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Paul is not merely saying this his readers should intuitively know how God works things out for good but instead that we know what is true of God today by reflecting on how He has treated those in the past. Earlier in the chapter, Paul reflects on the whole of creation groaning and suffering under the pains of childbirth together even until now, awaiting the time when God will set everything straight, and then in v.28, Paul shifts to providing comfort for those in suffering by reminding them that God always works out good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Romans 8:29 states: "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." Notice that Paul shifts to past tense verbs, which likely indicates that He's now talking about those in the past. The term "foreknow" conveys the idea of knowing someone or something before. Here are some examples in Scripture:

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[681] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 146.

> **2nd Peter 3:17:** "You therefore, beloved, **knowing this beforehand**, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness."

> **Acts 26:4-5:** "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; **since they have known about me for a long time**, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion."

As an example, God had a relationship with Elijah and many of the prophets of the Old Testament. Reflecting upon this acquaintanceship, Paul might say that God foreknew them, that is, He knew them previously, which is similar to what we find at Romans 11:2: "God has not rejected **His people whom He foreknew**. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel?" Therefore, by citing God's *consistency* with how He dealt with many faithful historical characters that He formerly knew in *past* generations, Paul can confidently assert what God would similarly do for faithful individuals in the *present* and *future*. In other words, because we have seen how God worked all things for good for those whom He knew before, we know that He will do the same for those who love and are called by Him now.

The text goes on to say that those He formerly knew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that Jesus would be the "firstborn among many brethren." Since Paul is speaking about what Christ *would become*, this goes to show that Paul still has the saints of old in focus. By now, those "called" and "justified" (v.30) saints of old would already have become "glorified" in Heaven (though not yet receiving their resurrection bodies, which won't take place until Jesus returns to earth). Our similar relationship with God, therefore, informs us that He will do the same for us and future generations as well. So, Paul refers to those of the past, in order to make a case for what must also be true today. Rhetorically speaking, then, if God has worked all things together for good of those whom He knew previously, then how much more can we know that He will work all things out for good for us today, and accomplish in us what He has already accomplished in them? This is exactly why Paul asks what we must conclude of these things. For if God is for us, who can be against us? In other words, as we reflect on God's goodness throughout the generations of old, with those formerly loved and called, we can know that God stands with us today. The rest of this passage

falls right in line, as it teaches that no one can separate us from the love, for those who love Him and are called to His good purposes.

Romans 8:31-34
"What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who is against us?** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."

The conclusion of vv.29-30 is "who is against us?" (v.31) and "who will bring a charge against God's elect?" (v.33), which would be based upon what is observable in God's dealings with His people in times past. As for the identity of "God's elect," the context, once again, is of believers, rather than unbelievers (such as Calvinism's elect-unbelievers).

> Lawrence Vance: *"There is no such animal as an 'elect unregenerate' child of God."*[682]

The New Covenant elect are Christians, and must exclude unbelievers since the elect are redeemed and free from condemnation (Romans 8:1, 33) while unbelievers remain judged already. (John 3:18) So an unregenerate, elect-unbeliever would be simultaneously redeemed and condemned while awaiting their appointed Irresistible Grace. That's the paradox that the concept of Calvinism's elect would otherwise create.

Romans 9:1-5
"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have **great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart**. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, **separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren**, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are **Israelites**, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."

Jewish evangelism—that's the underlying theme of Romans chapter's 9 through 11, and 9:1-5 sets the tone with Paul's heart-felt desire to see his fellow Jewish brothers come to know Christ.

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[682] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 336.

> Adrian Rogers: *"The apostle Paul made one of the most profound statements recorded in all of Scripture in Romans 9:3. There he states his willingness to be cut off from Christ and be cursed if it would result in the salvation of his Israelite kinsmen. While that is a rhetorical expression only (Paul could in no way 'die' for the salvation of his Hebrew brothers), it still raises important issues: his passion for the lost, and the question of God's plan of salvation for all men."*[683]

> Adrian Rogers: *"In verse 2 he says, 'I have continual sorrow.' That is, he didn't blow hot and blow cold. Night and day, everywhere, the thing that drove him and impelled him and gave him no rest, was his concern for the lost, and he even had a sacrificial concern. He says in verse 3, 'I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ.' … What Paul is saying is that I would be willing to go to Hell if they could be saved. That was impossible. Jesus had already died for them. Jesus had already baptized His soul in Hell. But this is the Spirit of Christ that was in this man. He's concerned, and what he is primarily concerned about are his brothers and sisters in the flesh."*[684]

In other words, Paul was not speaking from the flesh. These sentiments came under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These are God's thoughts because Jesus literally lived it. In summary, Paul was content to live with the consequence of imprisonment and death because he was discontent with the consequence of his lost Jewish brothers facing an eternity separated from God.

Indeed, Paul's sacrificial concern was for *all* of Israel, and not just for a select few. So, if Calvinism's doctrine of Limited Atonement was true, then one would have to conclude that Paul was more mercifully-minded than God who inspired these very words.[685]

> Mike Winger: *"It is an odd feature within Calvinism that it seems to imply that Paul wanted people saved that God doesn't want saved, because if you have the choosing of God, saying 'No, I want them saved and you I don't,' then those unsaved Israelites are simply out of God's election, unsaved, whereas I think the*

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[683] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 115.
[684] Adrian Rogers, *Predestined For Hell? Absolutely Not!, Romans 9:1*, 1998.
[685] See also *John MacArthur on Romans 9 contrasted with Traditionalism*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG8ourHD9IM.

> *biblical teaching would be God loves everybody, He wants all people saved, but He leaves this path through Christ and lets people make choices, and that is His predestined will to do that."*[686]

John Calvin picked up on that thought-process as well, and he concluded that Paul simply put the election of God out of mind.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"It is no objection that he knew that his salvation was founded on the election of God, which cannot by any means fail. The more passionate emotions plunge impetuously on, without heed or regard for anything but the object on which they are fixed. Paul, therefore, did not add the election of God to his prayer, but put it out of mind, and gave all his attention on the salvation of the Jews."*[687]

Our reply:

However, that would suggest that Paul's prayers for his fellow unbelieving Jews were not *due* to Calvinist principles but was *in spite of it*. By suggesting that Paul was impetuously contradicting the very topic he was about to embark upon shows just how *disjointed* Calvinists must see verses 1 through 5 from the rest of the chapter.

So, the question to ask Calvinists is this: What is the implication of Paul's stated passion for all of the lost Jews to become saved, as a *preface* to his following remarks in Romans chapter 9? Paul is not more gracious than God for desiring everyone to be saved since God, too, desires everyone to be saved, having made it possible for *anyone* to be saved through what He accomplished at the Cross.

Romans 9:6-15

"But **it is not as though the word of God has failed**. For **they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants**, but: 'through Isaac your descendants will be named.' That is, it is **not the children of the flesh**

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[686] Mike Winger, *Non-Calvinist interpretation of Romans 9*, 18:17 - 18:48. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7y4yjSwEkfY

[687] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 192.

who are children of God, but the **children of the promise are regarded as descendants**. For **this is the word of promise**: 'At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.' And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the **twins** were **not yet born** and had not done anything good or bad, so that **God's purpose according to His choice** would stand, **not because of works but because of Him who calls**, it was said to her, '**The older will serve the younger**.' **Just as** it is written, '**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated**.' What shall we say then? There is **no injustice** with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, '**I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion**.'"

The following questions will be explored:

1. How does Paul's preface (9:1-5) relate to the ensuing passage?

2. When Paul states that God's word has not failed, who does he think might suppose otherwise?

3. Why does Paul's dialogue *begin with* a discussion on who the *true* descendants of Abraham are, and *why point out* that they aren't necessarily all of his *physical* descendants, but instead the children of *promise* through his son Isaac?

4. Regarding God's purpose and choice involving the unborn twin son's of Isaac, in whom was declaration fulfilled that the older would serve the younger, and likewise, in whom was the declaration fulfilled that God loved Jacob but subsequently hated Esau?

5. Who did Paul suppose might object that God was being unjust?

Paul wants his fellow, unbelieving Jews to know that he has their best interests at heart in what he is about to say, and so that's the reason for his prefaced his remarks in Romans 9:1-5 about his love for them, and it is they who will suppose that his conclusion ultimately violates God's covenant promise to them. The unbelieving Jews felt that they had an unconditional, birthright assurance of salvation as children of Abraham, which would therefore render Paul's gospel about salvation in Jesus as utterly meaningless to them, and so if Paul is going to win them for Christ, he will have to disprove assurance through works and bloodlines. To disprove assurance through works, Paul points out that the election of

Israel was not according to works since the election of their father was made before their father was born, and to disprove assurance through bloodlines, Paul points out the Scriptures which shows that their brother nation of Edom had a common ancestry, and even a superior genealogy since their father Esau was the firstborn, and yet was shown to be condemned, according to the Malachi 1:2-5 prophecy, which really wasn't supposed to be possible if the children of Isaac were born with a birthright assurance. The conclusion drawn from these facts then anticipates a negative reaction from the unbelieving Jews who hold to an assurance through works and bloodlines, which then opens the door to explain the nature of God's mercy obtained through His purposes, choice and calling, which provides an opening for the Christian gospel of assurance in Christ.

So, did God *literally* or only *idiomatically* hate baby Esau from before he was born? The answer is *neither*, since the question contains a false premise. God never told Rebekah: "I hate one of your unborn babies." What He actually told her is that the older will serve the younger, which of course only came true with regard to the descendants, just as the famous quote of "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" is not from Genesis, but from Malachi 1:2-4, long after the two individuals, Jacob and Esau had passed in eternity. **What gets people confused is that the Malachi source quote references the nations of Israel and Edom *by their tribal heads*, "Jacob" and "Esau," which is common in Scripture, and then readers mistakenly think God hated baby Esau, when yet it was a conditional condemnation of the nation of Edom for devious acts against Israel.** For instance, Jeremiah 30:7 states: "'Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it.'" That refers to end-time prophecy for the nation of Israel by citing their tribal head.

So, in terms of the context of Malachi 1:2-4, as well as the Book of Obadiah, we find that God *literally* (not just idiomatically) hated the treacherous *adult* Edomite descendants for their betrayal against Israel during the Babylonian invasion, but of course we also know from the Book of Jonah, and others, that God's wrath is *conditional* upon repentance.

The next major question is this: What is the relevance of the famous Malachi quote for being cited at Romans 9:13? The answer has to do with the issue Paul raised at Romans 9:6 in terms of who the true "descendants" of Abraham really are. Paul was laying out a critical aspect of his Jewish evangelism by pointing out that the true descendants are not those physically born of Abraham, but instead those who do what Abraham did, which can then also include the Gentiles, but if the Jews fail to do what Abraham did, then it leaves them out of their own inheritance. This was necessary because the unbelieving Jews didn't think they needed a Savior like Jesus, since after all, they were Jews, descendants of

Abraham, and guaranteed an unconditional birthright assurance. By citing the fate of the Edomites, who had a common, and even *superior* ancestry over Israel (i.e. Esau was the first-born of Isaac), conclusively refutes unconditional birthright assurance, which then serves an ideal opportunity to share a *real basis of assurance* in the Messiah, and that's how Paul led Jewish people to Christ. You have to first move a person off of a false basis before introducing them to a new idea.

The anticipated negative reaction at Romans 9:14 is what Paul anticipates as the reaction of the unbelieving Jews. Neither the unbelieving Jews nor Christians would naturally think that the "word of God has failed." So, Paul only brings that up because the *unbelieving Jews* will reflexively come to think that the word of God has failed, once they hear what Paul is about to say, in terms of their mistaken perceptions for what the word of God does and does not promise. Paul's Jewish evangelical approach contains the following steps:

1. Let them know that he has their best interests at heart, in terms of what he is about to say. Reaching his fellow Jews is his *passion* (Romans 9:1-5), *motivation* (Romans 10:1) and *objective* (Romans 11:14).
2. Refute the false basis for assurance that keeps the unbelieving Jews from seeing any need for the Christian gospel. The unbelieving Jews assumed as a given that they had an unconditional birthright assurance, simply on the basis of being children of Abraham in the flesh. Paul's refutation is twofold: (a) show that Israel's own election did not regard birth order, and (b) show the reality of Edom's condemnation who had a common—and even *superior*—ancestry with Israel, thus definitively proving that not all children of Abraham in the flesh are automatically born saved. Consideration of those two facts are what draws Paul's anticipated reaction of the unbelieving Jew at Romans 9:14, in that God would be unfair for breaking His word, even though God did not break His word at all, but only that the unbelieving Jews trusted in something that God never promised—and it's not the first time that Israel was told this. John the Baptist stated: "Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham." (Matthew 3:9)
3. Present the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Romans 9 is actually fairly straightforward when viewed from the perspective of a Jewish evangelical strategy to reach the very people Paul mentioned from the start. Often when commentators explain Romans 9, they seem to immediately forget verses 1-5, and seem not to notice how those sentiments permeate throughout the text. As a result, they can get lost in the weeds and go on tangents and start asking completely unrelated questions, speculating on the reason why most Jews have not received the Messiah and then concluding that perhaps it is due to God's ultimate choice, never intending to save most of them. But, the real reason why *not* all of Abraham's descendants are deemed the "children of God" (9:8) is because not all have done as Abraham did, that is, by embracing a faith-based assurance, but instead embracing assurance through works and bloodlines, which problematically makes the gospel pointless.

The substance of **Step 1** in Paul's evangelical approach is that he genuinely loves them and wishes their salvation, not merely out of racial pride, but also because they are family and because he sees its fulfillment as resulting in a blessing for the whole world, and therefore desires that the Christian church participate with him in this godly endeavor:

> **Romans 9:1-5:** "I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have **great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart**. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are **Israelites**, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."
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> **Romans 10:1:** "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for **their salvation**."
>
> **Romans 11:14:** "If somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and **save some of them**."
>
> **Galatians 2:7-9:** "But on the contrary, seeing that **I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised** [i.e. the Gentiles], just as Peter had been to the circumcised [i.e. the Jews] (for He who effectually worked for **Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles**), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave

> to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, **so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised**."

Yet, Romans 9:1-5, 10:1 and 11:14 shows that Paul still loved his Jews and sought to win their salvation:

> **1st Corinthians 9:19-23:** "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, **so that I might win those who are under the Law**; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, **so that I might win those who are without law**. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

Step 2 in Paul's Jewish evangelical approach is necessary before **Step 3** is possible, because if people think they are already born saved, then why the gospel? In other words, if the unbelieving Jews were placing their trust in an unconditional birthright assurance, through their ancestry as children of Abraham, and trusting in their performance under the works of the Law to deliver them human perfection so that they could be in right standing with God, then the whole idea of Jesus dying on the cross seems needless. As a result, the only savior that the unbelieving Jews thought they needed was one who could deliver them from their earthly enemies.

Consider an analogy to the Jehovah's Witnesses. They trust in the authority of the "Watchtower Society" organization's leaders. So, you can trade Bible verses with them all day long but not likely not see much progress because their trust is not so much in the Bible verses you are quoting, but in the authority of the Watchtower leaders who tell them what those verses must mean. So, to reach the Jehovah's Witnesses for Christ, one former member recommends that you first expose the Watchtower Society as a false prophet organization. Once the false basis for assurance is removed, then the individual will be freed to consider something else instead, such as salvation in Jesus:

> David A. Reed: *"The JW can't learn Christian doctrine until he first sees that Watchtower doctrine is wrong. And he can't learn that Watchtower doctrine is wrong until he first sees through the organization's claim to divine authority as God's spokesman. If you don't first prove the organization unreliable (documenting its*

> *false prophecies and back-and-forth changes) and then second reason verse-by-verse through the arguments the JW previously learned to support Watchtower doctrine, you can't expect much success with the third step of teaching Christian doctrine from Scripture."*[688]

Similarly, before Paul can ever be able to successfully present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unbelieving Jews, first he would have to deal with their current basis of assurance. Afterward, he can then go through the Scriptures with them about the mission of the foretold Messiah.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Until Arminian scholars are willing to step up and explain the passage as a whole, their efforts will remain unconvincing."*[689]

Our reply:

So, Calvinists demand a holistic explanation to the text—not just a response to individual verses, and the answer is that when Romans 9 is understood from the lens of Jewish evangelism, Romans 9, 10 and 11 holistically makes perfect sense.

> Walls and Dongell: *"If we fail to see that Paul from the start identifies Israel's unbelief as the cause of his anguish and the issue he wishes to pursue, we will likely misread many statements throughout these chapters and mistakenly build a theology on a single verse."*[690]

So, Paul's interest is clearly in Jewish evangelism. The matter at Romans 9:6, in terms of whether "the word of God has failed" is *not* the central issue, but is instead a *supporting* argument in an evangelical appeal, in which the unbelieving Jews supposed—even assuming as a given—that God's word *promised* them a seat in God's kingdom, simply on account of being born as a child of Abraham—as being "the children of promise"—and thus if it came to be that they were ultimately condemned,

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[688] *Answering Jehovah's Witnesses Subject by Subject* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), 229.
[689] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 218.
[690] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 85.

then they, the unbelieving Jews, would conclude that God was being unfair for breaking His promise.

> Walls and Dongell: *"But standing in the way of Paul's teaching were the strong presumptions of many Jews that Abraham's descendants were assured salvation and that any theology which allowed that an Israelite might be 'lost' would render God's promise to Abraham a failure (see Rom 9:6). To counter this view, Paul shows that a genealogical approach to salvation has never been valid, even in Israel's own history."*[691]

> John Parkinson: *"The individual Jew had come to believe mistakenly that, since he was a part of Israel's national election, he was already personally justified by God as of right. Just as the eldest son receives the family inheritance as his natural right, so the law-keeping Jew thought he was naturally entitled to personal salvation. It is Paul who enlightens us that those who share in Israel's national election are not automatically justified (ie. declared righteous by God), notwithstanding their national covenants, law, promises and descent."*[692]

> John Parkinson: *"In other words, not all Jews were automatically saved because they were natural descendants of Abraham."*[693]

> John Parkinson: *"It is difficult for us to fully appreciate what a painful experience it must have been for the Jew to be told that in spiritual terms he bore more resemblance to Ishmael and Esau than he did to Isaac and Jacob."*[694]

There was a couple on vacation in the Amazon. While walking along the nature path, the couple accidentally wandered on to an animal path until it narrowed and then ended. Instead of doubling back, the couple decided to take a shortcut through the jungle back to their camp. However, they memorized their map exactly backwards, and instead wandered directly into hundreds of thousands of square miles of virgin rain forest. Eventually, they were miraculously rescued. If a person reads Romans 9

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[691] *Ibid.*, 90.
[692] *The Faith of God's Elect - a comparison between the election of Scripture and the election of Theology* (Glasgow, Scotland: Gospel Tract Publications, 1999), 21.
[693] Ibid.
[694] Ibid., 25.

without considering Paul's evangelical pursuit of the Jews, then, figuratively speaking, they will end just as lost as that couple.

> **Romans 9:6-8:** "For they are **not all Israel who are descended from Israel**; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: '**through Isaac your descendants will be named**.' That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."

It's one thing for Paul to *allege* that not all who are among the children of Abraham are truly Abraham's descendants, but now he must prove it, and he does so by pointing out three key facts. The first is the mutually held understanding that through Isaac—not Ishmael—the "descendants will be named." (9:8) So, already we find that the promises of God are not necessarily tied to being physical descendants of Abraham.

> **Romans 9:9-11:** "For this is the word of promise: 'At this time I will come, and Sarah shall have a son.' And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the **twins** were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that **God's purpose according to His choice would stand**, not because of works but because of Him who calls."

Now we hear about God forsaking birth-order in His "purpose," so that the descendants would not be named through the elder firstborn son, Esau, but through the *younger* son, Jacob, which is very relevant to those who were placing such great weight on works and bloodlines. In other words, when Paul points out the fact that God made His choice for the descendants to be named through the younger Jacob, rather than the older Esau, as well as *not on the basis of human perfection* (being that it was a choice made before either of the two babies were born), He is effectively disregarding the two things that the unbelieving Jews relied upon the most, that is, the significance of physical ancestry and the works of the Law to establish human perfection in the flesh.

Ask Calvinists: Does the text say that God determined the good or bad that either of the twins would do? It doesn't. God saw the twins as "two nations" (Genesis 25:23) and made His choice for which one would be the most suitable for the descendants to be named. Of course, Calvinists may also ask whether faith is good, if God made His choice based upon His foreknowledge of Israel being a more faithful nation than Edom, and the answer is that while faith is indeed good, it is not a *meritorious* good,

any more than if a drunk were to admit to his addiction and welcoming help would suddenly make him good. Faith in God amounts to trusting in someone other than yourself, in terms of *their* good, not your own.

Paul's third, and most definitive point is in regard to the Edomites, which is evidently the climax to Paul's argument, since he immediately afterward anticipates the objection of the unbelieving Jew upon hearing their perceived basis for assurance getting totally crushed.

> **Romans 9:12-13:** "'The **older will serve the younger**.' Just as it is written, '**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated**.'"

Both of those Old Testament quotes pertain to the *descendants, not the babies*. The Edomites, not Esau himself, were placed in servitude to Israel[695] and the quote regarding Jacob and Esau is taken from Malachi 1:2-5, also in regard to the *descendants*. The silver bullet, so to speak, in Paul's argument against unconditional birthright assurance is the simple reality of the Edomites, who shared a *common* ancestry with Israel (and in fact a *superior* ancestry), even as the "children of promise" through Isaac, and yet the Edomites were not unconditionally saved. In fact, the quote from Malachi 1:2-5 shows that God literally—though conditionally—hated the Edomites as being "greatly despised" (Obadiah 1:2), and as "the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever" (Malachi 1:4), on account of their betrayal against Israel during the Babylonian invasion, as documented in the Book of Obadiah.[696] Hence, the word of God did not fail, but rather what failed was the erroneous *expectation* of thinking that one is born saved simply by being a physical descendant of Abraham. So, by first clearing up that misconception, Paul is now able to introduce real salvation through the gospel.

> **Romans 9:14:** "What shall we say then? There is **no injustice** with God, is there? **May it never be!**"

Who would think there is injustice with God over these remarks? Consistent with Paul's narrative up until this point, it would be the *unbelieving Jew* upon hearing definitive proof that being born as a child of Abraham (as well as being a descendant of the "child of promise") is not a guarantee of salvation after all. (The objections will expand once they hear Paul point out the historical impact of Jewish unbelief, resulting in Israel

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[695] 2nd Samuel 8:14: "He put garrisons in Edom. In all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became servants to David. And the LORD helped David wherever he went."

[696] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4ogCrEoG5s

receiving a judicial hardening from God, in which Israel receives its own Pharaoh-like hardening.) However, there is no injustice with God, but only instead mistaken expectations about the promise of God.

> **Galatians 3:21-22:** "**Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be!** For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that **the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe**."

Notice how Galatians 3:21-22 mirrors Romans 9:14, and Paul's answer for why there is no injustice with God is to *clarify the nature of God's promise*, which is not according to works and bloodlines but by faith in Christ. Galatians 3:9: "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." Galatians 3:29: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

So, Paul is not disparaging his own Jewish heritage "to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises" (Romans 9:4), but instead his point is that to truly be a child of Abraham and be included in his inheritance requires doing the things that he did, namely faith, which then becomes Paul's segue into the gospel.

Calvinists think the Romans 9:14's objector is the non-Calvinist, but that may be a factor of Calvinists just overlooking Paul's narrative.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"My guess is that Paul anticipated the very objection that Calvinists hear because he taught the same doctrine of election that Calvinists teach. When our doctrine of election is assailed, I take comfort that we are in good company, that of Paul himself, when we must bear the cavils of those who oppose unconditional election."*[697]

Our reply:

How does one read the text and miss seeing the Jewish evangelical narrative? The answer is that it's called a "Confirmation Bias."

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[697] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 149-150.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"No matter how one understands 'JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED' (Romans 9:13), this verse alone should be enough to refute such an errant view of God's love."*[698]

Our reply:

In terms of "Jacob" and "Esau," it is important to remember that sometimes such references implies their progenies. For instance, "the time of Jacob's distress" (Jeremiah 30:7) references the tribulation of *Israel*, his descendants. The descendants of Esau are similarly termed Esau or Edom: "These are the chiefs of **Edom** (**that is, Esau**, the father of the Edomites), according to their habitations in the land of their possession." (Genesis 36:43) In the case of "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated," the source material is Malachi 1:1-5, *rather than anything in Genesis*. In other words, God did not tell Rebekah that He hated one of her unborn babies. The matter has to do with God's conditional condemnation of Esau's descendants, Edom.

> **Malachi 1:2-5:** "'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But you say, 'How have You loved us?' 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares the Lord. '**Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau**, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.' Though Edom says, 'We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins'; thus says the Lord of hosts, 'They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the **people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever**.' Your eyes will see this and you will say, 'The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!'"

Did God truly *hate* Edom or just *love them less*? The context indicates a legitimate sense of wrath. They are "the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever." (Malachi 1:4) However, such sentiments should be balanced with Jonah's observation: "I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity." (Jonah 4:2) God warns of calamity for disobedient nations, but clearly also shows that it is indeed *conditional*: "'If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.'" (Jeremiah 18:8) The backdrop is explained in the Book of Obadiah.

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[698] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 268.

> **Obadiah 1:2, 10-14:** "'Behold, I will make you small among the nations; **You are greatly despised**. … **Because of violence to your brother Jacob**, you will be covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever. On the day that **you stood aloof**, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth, and foreigners entered his gate and cast lots for Jerusalem—**You too were as one of them**. Do not gloat over your brother's day, the day of his misfortune. And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah in the day of their destruction; Yes, do not boast in the day of their distress. Do not enter the gate of My people in the day of their disaster. Yes, you, do not gloat over their calamity in the day of their disaster. And do not loot their wealth in the day of their disaster. Do not stand at the fork of the road to cut down their fugitives; and do not imprison their survivors in the day of their distress.'"

> **Ezekiel 35:15:** "'As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, **so I will do to you**. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, **and all Edom**, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'"

Recall that God had encouraged Israel not to mistreat Edom: "You shall not detest an Edomite, for he is your brother." (Deuteronomy 23:7) But, that's what Edom did to Israel. They mistreated Israel, with respect to the Babylonian invasion, and thus earned God's wrath. Therefore, how can Edom, sharing common ancestry with Israel, be *born saved* if the nation largely perished? Birthright salvation hence falters, and that is Paul's point. Expose what is false in order to highlight what is true.

The objective of many Calvinists is to try to get you to think that God hated *baby* Esau—not the Edomite descendants for the betrayal against Israel—as if at Romans 9:13 Paul was quoting Genesis instead of Malachi. In other words, if Calvinists can get you to think that God hates certain babies, before they are ever born and before they have ever done anything good or bad, then you will be more likely to accept the idea that all humanity fits in one of two camps, that is, those who are *born loved* as chosen and those who are *born hated* as passed by. Even though the "just as" connection between Romans 9:12 and 13 shows that Paul was referring to the descendants, Calvinists argue that you should understand v.13 as referring to the babies, anyway. Here is an example.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Consequently, in the Old Testament, God's declaration 'Jacob I loved' speaks of*

> *the service of the nation Israel that God would bring from Jacob (Mal 1:2). In the New Testament, the same declaration speaks of God's electing love for Jacob as an individual (Rom 9:11-13).*"[699]

Our reply:

This is what Calvinists term an "apostolic interpretation," meaning a *new inspired truth*. In other words, even though Paul may be quoting Malachi in terms of the descendants, Paul is said to apply it to a Genesis context, meaning "[baby] Jacob I loved, but [baby] Esau I hated." (Romans 9:13) However, *if* Paul was teaching a "new truth" that deviated from the original Old Testament texts in which they were quoted, then:

> (a) Why would Paul bother to cite the Old Testament text at all, if he was just going to alter its original meaning?
> (b) Why wouldn't he be explicitly clear in what he intends to change?
> (c) How would Paul reasonably be able to defend himself from the charge of his critics that he was inventing a *new religion* if he indeed had deviated from the meaning of the original texts?
> (d) Why would Romans 9:13 mention what is "written," if a different application is intended?
> (e) How would that interpretation account for the "just as" connection between the two Scripture references cited at verses 12 and 13, given that the individual, Esau, never *personally* served the individual, Jacob, though the *nation* of Edom certainly did serve the nation of Israel?

Point (e) is perhaps the most conclusive argument. Notice that Paul connects the two Old Testament texts in v.12 and v.13 together with the words "just as":

> "It was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'
> **Just as** it is written,
> 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

Here's an example of the point in saying "just as": "You can never trust anything Joe says, **just as** I recently caught him lying again." The phrase "just as" connects the relationship between the two clauses, that is, Joe's untrustworthiness and an example of a recent lie of his. Similarly, the "just as" connection between Romans 9:12 and 13 is that ***both relate to the***

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[699] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 47.

descendants, in terms of Paul's central argument from 9:6-8 on the identity of the true descendants of Abraham, namely that "not all Israel who are descended from Israel; nor are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants," and "not the children of the flesh who are children of God."

From the evidence of 9:13, the Jews would have to agree with Paul that whereas the Edomites are children of Abraham in the flesh, they are nonetheless not the children of God, and Paul adds that in the same way, not all who are descended from Israel (their ancestor Jacob) are truly the children of Israel. So, Paul is refuting the erroneously assumed, Jewish presumption to an unconditional birthright assurance—the very thing the unbelieving Jews were trusting in the most for assurance. This is what draws the charge of the unbelieving Jew that God was being unfair for breaking His word. Paul argues back that they don't correctly understand God's promise and of the principle of God's righteousness itself, which does not come from within, in terms of our flesh and our performance under the works of the Law, but comes from God who gives righteousness and mercy to those who believe in Him like Abraham, rather than believing in themselves through their fleshly lineage and their works. Then Paul goes on to show the historical impact of Jewish unbelief, resulting in a judicial hardening of the Jews, also mentioned at Romans 11:25.

What do Calvinists believe?

Most ethnic Jews were not coming to Christ, and the question then becomes why not? Why does it seem like God's word has failed? God's word has not failed because in His sovereign plan, He has always maintained a faithful remnant. He never promised to effectually save all Jews but only the elect among Israel whom He sovereignly wills to show mercy while passing by the rest who are not elect.

Our reply:

In other words, Calvinists are saying that God's word has not failed because His "sovereign plan" never intended for most ethnic Jews to come to Christ for salvation, but only those who are secretly chosen from before they were born, like how God chose Jacob over Esau. However, that's not Paul's argument. If most ethnic Jews were not coming to Christ then it's because they deemed themselves "Israel" and as "the children of God" simply on account of being "children of the flesh." Paul cannot win them for Christ, as is his stated *passion* (Romans 9:1-5), *motivation* (Romans 10:1) and *objective* (Romans 11:14), if they are trusting in the self-sufficiency of their own bloodlines. God's promise hasn't failed, but

only their erroneous expectations. Paul is trying to win them to Christ by first exposing their false assurance.

What do Calvinists believe?

Unless one's interpretation of Romans chapter 9 can account for why the unregenerate would see these difficult truths as being in some way *unfair*, then one has not properly accounted for the text.

Our reply:

The *unbelieving Jews* would consider it *unfair* that God broke His promise to unconditionally save all children of Abraham in the flesh. So, to win the Jews, Paul must show that God never promised what they expected.

> Walls and Dongell: *"The justice Jews were demanding from God was not equal treatment of all human beings (in the spirit of modern liberals or humanists who demand 'fairness' from God on their own terms); rather, they were demanding the guarantee of salvation to every individual Israelite. In effect, the accusers were demanding that God's mercy be given only to the descendants of Abraham and that Gentiles first transform themselves into Jews before receiving salvation (cf. Gal 2:14)."*[700]

What do Calvinists believe?

God is a potter and humans are clay. Jacob and Esau serve as examples, where God loved the one and hated the other. Before either was born and had done anything good or evil, God chose to love Jacob and to hate Esau. All who are born represent one or the other. Either one is born loved like Jacob or born hated like Esau. God sovereignly chose to hate baby Esau, not according to anything he had done good or bad since the choice was made before he was born, all due to the Potter's unconditional freedom to consign him to being a vessel of dishonor. So, to apply this text to *nations* does not remedy the problem but only further extends it.

Our reply:

Incorrect. Non-Calvinists are not *extending* the idea of God hating a baby to hating a nation, which is because God never told Rebekah that

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[700] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91.

He hated one of her unborn babies. The quote of, "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau" is not made in *Genesis* about the babies but is made in *Malachi* about the descendants. **So, there is no *extension* of hate from an individual to a nation, but rather, the Malachi quote deals *exclusively* with the nations**, which is reinforced by the fact that Romans 9:12's connection to v.13 are exclusively about the descendants, which is key to Paul's climactic point about whether the children of the flesh are the true descendants. Calvinists tend to see only what they want to see and discard the rest,[701] just as they also do at John chapter 6 and Ephesians chapter 1.

> Norman Geisler: *"…God's 'love' for Jacob and 'hate' for Esau is not speaking of those men before they were born, but long after they lived. The citation in Romans 9:13 is not from Genesis when they were alive (c. 2000 B.C.) but from Malachi 1:2-3 (c. 400 B.C.), long after they died! The evil deeds done by the Edomites to the Israelites are well documented in the Old Testament (e.g., Num. 20). And it is for these that God is said to have hated them as a country. Here again, this did not mean that no individuals from that country would be saved. In fact, there were believers from both Edom (Amos 9:12) and the neighboring country of Moab (Ruth 1), just as there will be people in heaven from every tribe, kindred, nation, and tongue (Rev. 7:9)."*[702]

> Norman Geisler: *"John Piper, widely held by extreme Calvinists to have the best treatment on Romans 9, makes this mistake. Piper claims that 'the divine decision to "hate" Esau was made "before they were born or had done anything good or evil" (9:11).' But, as shown on the previous page, the reference here is not to something said in Genesis about the individuals Jacob and Esau before they were born. What Genesis 25 says is simply that the older would serve the younger. What is said in Malachi 1:2-3 about the nations of Jacob and Esau (Edom) is not only centuries after their progenitors had died, but it is also in regard to what the nation of Edom had done to the chosen nation of Israel…."*[703]

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[701] The technical term for that is called a "Confirmation Bias."
[702] *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 85.
[703] Ibid., 85.

What do Calvinists believe?

Before either child was born, God sovereignly elected the descendants to be named through the individual, Jacob, over the individual, Esau. Now, why would God do that if He loved both, equally?

Our reply:

As an analogy, suppose I have ten children and I choose only one to be the family heir, so that the family estate is preserved rather than sold off and subdivided into small portions. Does that mean that I don't love the other children? No, it simply means that I have a purpose for choosing the estate to go to a single child in order to preserve a family legacy. I can still leave something to the other children for their benefit and welfare. This "purpose" certainly would not necessitate that I hate the other children.

What do Calvinists believe?

If the issue were about God's choice of either Jacob or Esau as to who would carry the message of redemption to the world, then why is Paul so distraught? This was an issue of eternal salvation, in terms of those who are passed over as vessels of wrath.

Our reply:

Paul was indeed distraught over Israel largely being lost, and distraught in trying to win their salvation, but Paul never said that he was distraught over God allegedly, unconditionally reprobating them so that most of them were born beyond saving. If that were the case, why was he trying to drive them to jealousy (11:14), and why did he imagine a time when Israel finally would be reconciled back to God? (11:15) Paul speaks of a partial hardening of Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in." (11:25)

One thing that you will see time and again from Calvinists is their attempt to squeeze the *Malachi* quote into a *Genesis* context. They want for you to imagine that God is telling Rebekah that He loves one of her babies but hates the other—before either had done anything good or bad—thus pointing to the Calvinist doctrines of Unconditional Election and Unconditional Reprobation. They will even declare that despite Paul's quote from *Malachi*, the "apostolic interpretation" means that it refers to a *Genesis* setting. Calvinists can get quite imaginative in creating this image. The fact is, though, God never said that He hated baby Esau. It just didn't happen. But, Calvinists want for you to think that it did. Those who God

hated were the Edomite descendants who betrayed Israel, but even then, God's feelings are absolutely conditional, which Jonah knew well to be the case, and which is why he didn't want to preach to the Ninevites, knowing that God would forgive them *if* they repented. So, while it is true that God chose one of the brother nations over the other to serve as His witness nation—before either had done anything good or bad—that choice does not mean that He automatically hated the one that He did not choose, no more than if God should choose one of your sons to be a pastor, means that He hates your other son. Now, of course, if the other son should grow up to become a bank robber, God might indeed hate him on that account—conditionally—meaning that upon repentance, he can still be saved. Again, it is a certainty that you will see Calvinists creatively and imaginatively trying to force the Malachi quote into a Genesis context. They will absolutely try their best—since it is key to their whole argument. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the following quote from an ex-Calvinist who recalls a portion of Romans chapter 9 from memory, by merging 9:11a with 9:13:

> Megan Phelps-Roper: *"There's this passage in Romans 9 that talk about, it gives this analogy of God as 'potter' and humans as 'clay' in his hands, and it uses the example of 'Jacob' and 'Esau' who—in the Bible, Jacob and Esau were twins—and says, 'While yet in the womb, before either of them had done good or evil, God loved Jacob and hated Esau.'"*[704]

Notice how the aforementioned, memorized quote from a former Calvinist removes key text from Romans 9:11-13:

> **Romans 9:11-13:** "**For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad**~~, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written,~~ **'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'**"

So, whenever Calvinists ask questions about Romans 9, in order to argue that God unconditionally hated baby Esau from before he was born, expect this type of textual splicing going on. The fact is that Romans 9:12 and 13 are *only about the descendants, not the individuals*, and hence it is incorrect to push v.13 into v.11.

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[704] *How Calvinism Distorts the Nature & Character of God*, 29:25-29:47, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6J7rqlXOnA&t=1785s

What do Calvinists believe?

Does the context indicate that Paul is speaking about the Edomites having betrayed Israel, or is it is speaking about individuals being chosen from before they were born?

Our reply:

Again, notice the attempt to squeeze the Malachi quote into a Genesis context! Romans 9:12 and 13 are connected with "just as," and therefore since the two Old Testament quotes are shown in relation to one another, we have to ask Calvinists when Esau ever personally served the individual Jacob? The nation of Edom did, but not Esau, just as the nation of nation of Edom was hated by God, not baby Esau, all of which serving the larger point to refute unconditional birthright assurance, given that Edom had a common ancestry with Israel.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"We grant that in this passage Paul does not come right out and say that God's decision was not based on their future good or evil. But he did not need to say that. The implication is clear in light of what he does say. He places the accent where it belongs, on the purpose of God and not on the work of man. The burden here is on those who want to add the crucial qualifying notion of foreseen choices."*[705]

Our reply:

How could foreknowledge not be involved, given that God speaks of the two babies as "two nations"? Genesis 25:23 states: "The LORD said to her, '**Two nations** are in your womb; and **two peoples** will be separated from your body; and one people shall be stronger than the other; and the **older shall serve the younger**.'" To speak of them as "two nations" requires the foreknowledge that either baby would even have a resulting nation of descendants, including the fact that one nation would serve the other. Also, the text never says that God caused their respective nations to become what they did. The wisdom of God's choice of Israel over Edom (defying natural birth order) would be owed to God's foreknowledge.

Paul's larger point in Romans 9 is to show that God's purposes (with respect to Israel and Edom) are not tied to *bloodlines* (evident by the

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[705] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 150.

fact Esau/Edom was stepped over), being exactly what Israel had been mistakenly trusting in for assurance as the children of promise by *birth*, and thus preventing them from seeing their true need for a savior, and thus closing the door for Paul to be able to introduce the necessity of the gospel.

Romans 9:15-16
"For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then **it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy**."

Consistent with Paul's narrative on Jewish evangelism, "the man who wills or the man who runs" would reflect the false assurance of salvation through works and bloodlines, that is, the perception of the unbelieving Jews who thought that they were essentially born saved as a child of Abraham and are justified by their performance under the Law, which contrasts with the Gentile believers who successfully attained God's righteousness simply by faith, and Paul's summary in 9:30-32 concludes with exactly that point.

> **Romans 9:30-32:** "What shall we say then? That **Gentiles**, who **did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness**, even the righteousness which is by faith; **but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness**, did not arrive at that law. Why? Because they did **not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works**."
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> **Romans 10:1-4:** "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. **For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God**. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."
>
> ***What do Calvinists believe?***
>
> R.C. Sproul: *"The apostle declares: It is not of him who wills. The non-Reformed views must say that it is of him who wills. This is in violent contradiction to the teaching of Scripture. This one verse is absolutely fatal to Arminianism."*[706]

[706] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 151.

Our reply:

God's mercy clearly is *not* "of him who wills," since such willing and running, pursuing and seeking, are characterized at Romans 9:30-32 and Romans 10:1-4 as the "works" of the Law by unbelieving Israel, in contrast to the "faith" of the believing Gentiles. God's mercy is instead achieved by "the one who does not work" but instead "believes in Him who justifies the ungodly" in which "his faith is credited as righteousness." (Romans 4:5)

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The interpretation that attempts to limit Romans 9 to 'nations' cannot begin to explain how nations 'will' or 'run.'"*[707]

Our reply:

Yet, Romans 9:30-32 specifically contrasts the nation of Israel from the Gentiles *in exactly that manner*. The Gentiles who believed, received the righteousness of God, whereas all of the willing and running through the works of the Law by unbelieving Israel failed to obtain righteousness.

Putting it all together: Divine mercy does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, that is, like Israel which pursued righteousness through the works of the Law, but on God, who freely gives grace to whosoever comes to Him in simple faith, like the believing Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness through the works of the Law, but simply believed in God.

Romans 9:17-18

"For the Scripture says to **Pharaoh**, 'For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.' So then **He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires**."

According to the context, who does God show mercy and who does He harden? The context shows that the believing Gentiles received God's mercy while unbelieving Israel received a judicial hardening—which hardening was forewarned at Isaiah 6:9-10 and Jeremiah 18:11.

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[707] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 210.

> **Romans 11:7-11:** "What then? What **Israel** is seeking, it has not obtained, but **those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened**; just as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not, Down to this very day.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, And a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever.' I say then, **they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!** But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to **make them jealous**."
> **Romans 11:20:** "Quite right, they were **broken off for their unbelief**, but you stand by your faith."

> **Romans 11:25:** "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation--that a **partial hardening has happened to Israel** until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in."

God never hardens anyone who hasn't first hardened themselves. What is "judicial hardening"?

Judicial hardening is when God strengthens one's resolve to do as their heart desires, in their self-determined rebellious condition, in order to bring a matter to a conclusion, so as to accomplish a good outcome.

In the case of Pharaoh, God said that He knew that Pharaoh would not release the Jews except upon being compelled to do so. (Exodus 3:19-20) So, Pharaoh had already grown self-hardened. The way that God hardened him further was to let him think that he was standing up to God and could resist Him, which was by allowing Pharaoh's sorcerers to temporarily be able to mimic some of Moses' miracles: "Then Pharaoh also called for the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same with their secret arts. For each one threw down his staff and they turned into serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. **Yet Pharaoh's heart was hardened**, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said." (Exodus 7:11-13)

> Ron Rhodes: *"Pharaoh hardened his own heart seven times before God first hardened it, though the prediction that God would do it preceded all. The whole of Scripture seems to indicate that God hardens on the same grounds as showing mercy. If men will accept mercy, He will give it to them. If they will not, thus*

> *hardening themselves, He is only just and righteous in judging them. Mercy is the effect of a right attitude; hardening is the effect of stubbornness or a wrong attitude toward God. For example, imagine some clay and some wax sitting in the sun. The same sunshine hardens one and softens the other. The responsibility is with the materials, not with the sun."*[708]

Unbelieving Israel received a judicial hardening through the stumbling stone, which was Jesus Christ Himself, because God's Messiah was deliberately inconsistent with unbelieving Israel's expectations. The Messiah came as a Lamb God to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29) which unbelieving Israel didn't think they needed, because after all, they already had works and bloodlines to give them assurance. However, the judicial hardening of Israel was not permanent and uncorrectable, since the objective in focus was to drive Israel to *jealousy* so that through faith and repentance, they could once again become grafted back in.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God is indeed saying that He will mercy some and harden others. This is the unquestionable teaching of Romans 9:18."*[709]

Our reply:

Indeed, but the question is *who* and on *what* basis? Israel came under divine hardening for the sake of their unbelief, rather than due to an arbitrary, eternal decree of Unconditional Reprobation. In other words, just because God acts with respect to His own purposes, that is, either to mercy or to harden, does not necessarily require that He act unconditionally or arbitrarily.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"God says that Pharaoh had proceeded from Him, and that his character was given to him by God. The words I have raised up suit this interpretation very well."*[710]

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[708] *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 31-32.
[709] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 351.

Our reply:

A better meaning is found in the example of Pilate. Jesus states: "'You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above.'" (John 19:11) Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that God raised up Pharaoh in the same way that He raised up Pilate, that is, to power and prominence, rather than creating Pharaoh as a devil from birth.

> Walls and Dongell: *"Pharaoh's story helps us make sense of Israel's hardness. God did not create Pharaoh's initial hostility any more than he caused Israel's initial unbelief. Rather God reinforced their tendencies to bring about a greater proclamation of his truth around the world."*[711]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Pharaoh was the king, the most powerful man upon the face of the earth, and he was raised up to sit upon that throne. Now here it's not talking about God raising him up from childhood. It's talking about God raising him up in power and authority. Sometimes we get all upset when we see powerful people in high places who are not doing right. Isn't that right? Let me tell you something, God is sovereign. ... He says, 'For this purpose I hath raised thee up, that I might show My power in thee, and that My name might be declared throughout all the earth.'"*[712]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Lest we think that God just created Pharaoh, set him on a throne, hardened his heart, and then threw him into hell, we need to read the record carefully. About half of the times in the Exodus account where it refers to Pharaoh's hardened heart, it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. The other times it says that God hardened it. Pharaoh's heart was set against God from the beginning, and God simply 'gave him over' (remember Romans 1?) to that which was his persistent desire. In Pharaoh's case, he was intent on disregarding the word of God, and God simply allowed Pharaoh's obstinance to run its course. Psalm 18:26 says, 'With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with*

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[710] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 207.
[711] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 89.
[712] *Predestined For Hell? Absolutely Not!, Romans 9:1*, 1998.

the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward.' With a froward Pharaoh, God responded in kind."[713]

Adrian Rogers: *"Don't get the idea that God just raised up Pharaoh to send him to hell. God warned Pharaoh but he wouldn't take the warning."*[714]

What do Calvinists believe?

R.C. Sproul: *"Suppose ten people sin and sin equally. Suppose God punishes five of them and is merciful to the other five. Is this injustice? No! In this situation five people get justice and five get mercy. No one gets injustice. What we tend to assume is this: If God is merciful to five, He must be equally merciful to the other five. Why? He is never obligated to be merciful. If He is merciful to nine of the ten, the tenth cannot claim to be a victim of injustice. God never owes mercy. God is not obligated to treat all people equally. Maybe I'd better say that again. God is never obligated to treat all people equally. If He were ever unjust to us, we would have reason to complain. But simply because He grants mercy to my neighbor, it gives me no claim on His mercy. Again we must remember that mercy is always voluntary. 'I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy."*[715]

Our reply:

Suppose ten people sin, and suppose Jesus died for all ten of them, so that any of the ten who place their trust in Him, will not perish but have eternal life. Why are we being asked to assume the Calvinist system whereby God allegedly, deliberately intended to reprobate five? Challenge Calvinists to think outside of Calvinism.

Romans 9:19-21

"**You will say** to me then, '**Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?**' On the contrary, **who are you, O man, who answers back to God?** The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? Or does not **the potter** have a right over the clay, to

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[713] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 119-120.
[714] Ibid., 120.
[715] *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1998), 127-128.

make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use?"

The *entire debate* rests on the identity of Paul's interlocutor. Non-Calvinists believe that Paul is anticipating response of the unbelieving Jews upon hearing of their own judicial hardening, which was already forewarned in Scripture at Isaiah 6:9-10 and Jeremiah 18:1-13, all based upon the nation's failure to heed God's call to repentance.

> Walls and Dongell: *"...the chief objectors to Paul likely are Jews!"*[716]
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> **Isaiah 6:9-10:** "He said, 'Go, and **tell this people**: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand. **Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim**, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and return and be healed."'"
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> **Jeremiah 18:6:** "'**Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?**' declares the Lord. 'Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.'"
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> **Jeremiah 18:11-13**: "'So now then, **speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem** saying, "Thus says the Lord, 'Behold, **I am fashioning calamity against you** and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.'" But **they will say, "It's hopeless!** For we are going to follow our own plans, and **each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart**." Therefore thus says the Lord, "Ask now among the nations, Who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done **a most appalling thing**."'"
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> **Romans 9:19:** "**You will say** to me then, '**Why does He still find fault?** For who resists His will?'"

Additionally, the statement of "You will say to me" is reminiscent of earlier verses in Romans which similarly engage a Jewish audience:

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[716] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 90.

> **Romans 2:17:** "But if **you** bear the name '**Jew**' and rely upon the Law and boast in God…."
>
> **Romans 3:1:** "Then what advantage has the **Jew**? Or what is the benefit of circumcision?"
>
> **Romans 3:5-6:** "But if our unrighteousness demonstrates the righteousness of God, **what shall we say?** The God who inflicts wrath is not unrighteous, is He? (**I am speaking in human terms**.) May it never be! For otherwise, how will God judge the world?"

What do Calvinists believe?

Paul has created a hypothetical exchange between the Creator and His creature, not between the Creator and a hardened Jew.

Our reply:

Who did Paul reference in Romans 9:1-5? Was it creation in general or was it the unbelieving Jews that Paul wanted to see become saved? Calvinists have a big problem with Romans 9:1-5 because it doesn't fit their narrative. Meanwhile, non-Calvinists maintain perfect continuity, not only from 9:1-5, but also continuing through 9:30-33, 10:1 and 11:11-12.

What do Calvinists believe?

You are raising the same objection as the objector.

Our reply:

No, non-Calvinists are not objecting to God's authority to engage in judicial hardening—especially since it was *conditional*—as God's judicial hardening of Israel is not permanent and uncorrectable:

> **Romans 11:23-25:** "And they also, **if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again**. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree? For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be

> wise in your own estimation—that a **partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles** has come in."

How would that make sense in Calvinism? If there is a class of non-elect, they can never be "grafted in" to Calvinism's elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"If Arminianism were correct, we should expect Paul to answer 'God finds fault because men have a free will and therefore could have chosen to be obedient.' Here is the opportunity to set the record straight. But Paul said nothing about free will. Rather, he said, 'On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, 'Why did you make me like this,' will it? (v.20) The potter has power over the clay to make one vessel unto honor and another to dishonor. God's purposes in salvation history are being fulfilled."*[717]

Our reply:

Paul rebukes unbelieving Israel for asking the sort of things that doubt God's justice, including His *right* of enforcement as a divine parent in having determined their punishment for disobedience, especially since God had been patient with them and kept warning them.

As an analogy, a father may say to his children, "Kids, make sure to eat your vegetables!" The children may respond: "But we don't like it. Why do we have to eat our vegetables?" A mother may respond, "**Because your father told you to.**" Well-disciplined children would certainly understand the authority of their father, and so in that case, the mother would have appealed to the *highest* reason. However, secondarily, she could add, "**What if** your father wishes that you kids grow up healthy? You'll need your vegetables to do so." Both answers are true, and the second answer provides the underlying basis for the original answer, which is similar to what we find next.

Romans 9:21-24

"Or **does not the potter have a right over the clay**, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? **What if God**, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His

[717] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 214.

power known, **endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?** And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

So, after appealing to the strongest principle of God's authority, much like our aforementioned analogy, now comes the underlying basis for God's morality in His judicial hardening of Israel, which is His patience, in giving them time and opportunity to repent: "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known [on unrepentant Israel, consigned to "common use" as "vessels of wrath"], **endured with much patience** vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" So, the judicial hardening of Israel came only after God's patience with Israel had been exhausted, and yet is still not fixed and permanent, unlike Calvinism's fixed caste of elect vs. non-elect.

Can the unbelieving Jews who were judicially hardened still become saved? Yes, according to 2nd Corinthians 3:14-16: "But their minds were **hardened**; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same **veil remains unlifted**, because it is **removed in Christ**. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but **whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**." So, in other words, the veil is not taken away and then afterwards a person turns to the Lord, but the other way around. The hardened person must first turn their own heart to the Lord before the veil is taken away. Moreover, the same people who are hardened at Romans 9 are the same people who Paul holds out will be grafted back in at Romans 11, by being provoked to envy, when possibly they leave their unbelief, which then proves that they cannot be the unconditional, non-elect reprobates that Calvinists assume them to be in Romans 9.

> Adrian Rogers: *"When Paul says that the vessels of dishonor are 'fitted' for destruction, he simply means they are ready for destruction. And the middle voice of the word 'fitted' implies that they fitted themselves for destruction, not that they were fitted by God. The potter is longsuffering with vessels who are bent on destroying themselves. The potter, by contrast, '...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4). That is why the apostle Paul spent time reasoning*

> *and persuading those, especially in the synagogues, who might appear to be vessels 'fitted for destruction' (see Acts 18:4).''*[718]

Calvinist objection:

The vessel for "honorable use" in v.21 is the same "vessels of mercy" in v.23, and which are identified as both Jews and Gentiles in v.24, all as part of the "same lump" from in v.21, which *lump* cannot be inferred to mean national Israel only, as if Paul had been exclusively addressing judicially hardened Israel up until that point.

Our reply:

By saying "even us, whom He also called, **not from among Jews only**, **but also** from among Gentiles" proves that up until that point, Paul had been addressing the Jews only. A similar example is found at Romans 4:16: "For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, **not only to those who are of the Law** [i.e. the believing Jews], **but also** to those who are of the faith of Abraham [i.e. the believing Gentiles], who is the father of us all." So, in terms of Paul's reference at 9:24 to the "same lump" which had previously been referring to the Jews only, he again develops his point further to show that what is true of *us*, that is, the portion of *believing Jews* who are the vessels of mercy and who are the true descendants of Abraham, *now* also includes the *believing Gentiles* who are *grafted in* among the believing Jews and have become a "partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree." (Romans 11:17)

In terms of the vessels of destruction, "if they do not continue in their unbelief, **will be grafted in**, for God is able to graft them in again." (Romans 11:23) So, again, for the hardened vessels of destruction, it is not a permanent condition. Knowing that they can be grafted in again, Paul is trying to move them to jealousy to try to win them back. This is completely unlike the narrative of Calvinism, which has fixed castes.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Over all His creatures His is sovereign. He uses them as He pleases, and does for them or to them all that He wills."*[719]

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[718] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 121.
[719] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 35.

Our reply:

In non-Calvinism, God uses the righteous and unrighteous to accomplish good things. God used Moses to deliver Israel from slavery. God used Pharaoh to become an object lesson for God's ability to help His people overcome any difficult situation. However, when Calvinists talk about God "using" people, it is much darker and more ominous. In other words, with exhaustive, meticulous determinism, people are created evil and used accordingly. It would be one thing for God to use evil people to accomplish something good, but to create someone evil, and to then use them for evil, seems like cruel manipulation. In that sense, the God described by Calvinism gets glory at their expense. By contrast, if someone was independently evil, and didn't have to be that way, and then God used their evil to accomplish something good, then that would be fine, especially if the evildoer could learn from their experience and turn back to God. According to Ezekiel 18:23, that's exactly what God wants: "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, 'rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?'"

Romans 10:17-18

"So **faith comes from hearing**, and **hearing by the word of Christ**. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'"

Similarly, John 20:31 states: "But **these have been written so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." Ephesians 1:13 also states: "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also **believed**, you were **sealed** in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise." So, the Bible says that faith comes from hearing the "word of Christ," which reasonably means the "message of truth," that is, the "gospel of your salvation." When the gospel is heard or read, people discover something truly compelling about it. Perhaps it speaks to our conscience. The fact is that we all have faith in something. What the Bible does is convinces us to place our trust in God. The parable of Luke 8:4-15 shows that this is not difficult. The problem is when people choose the world over God, and then become hardened in self-justification to reject what they know is true, until finally their conscience becomes seared.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith is a relational way of knowing, and is the deepest way that we can connect with God. Like love and hope, faith is entirely dependent upon interpersonal relationships. Faith is the

means by which the Holy Spirit makes spiritual matters intelligible, often resulting in something that we can sense, though not necessarily explain.

> Steven Hitchcock: *"Contrary to the Calvinistic notion of faith, the issue is not whether or not one can have faith, but rather, what the object of our faith is."*[720]
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> Stovall Weems: *"Faith comes from hearing the word of God. Life-change comes from obeying the word of God."*[721]
>
> John Mason: *"However, there is nothing here to suggest that the 'word of Christ' is selective, or anything other than scripture itself."*[722]
>
> Adrian Rogers: *"Look in chapter 14 and verse 6, the last part. 'Thou knowest the thing that **the Lord said**. Now Caleb is speaking, and He says, "Do you remember what **God said**?' Just underscore **the thing that the Lord hath said**. Look in verse 10: 'And now behold **the Lord** hath kept me alive as He said.' Just underscore as **He said**. Then look in the last part of verse 10: '**The Lord spake** this word unto Moses.' Underscore **the Lord spake**. And then notice again if you will, look in verse 12: 'Now therefore give me this mountain whereof **the Lord spake**.' Just underscore **the Lord spake**. Then look in the last part of verse 12. Again, 'as **the Lord said**.' Do you see it? Over and over again, 'God said, God said, the Lord spake, God promised.' Do you know where Caleb's confidence was? Caleb's confidence was in the word of God. Caleb's battle axe was the word of God. Caleb had a mountain he needed to conquer. God had given him that mountain, and I want you to know that as he went up that mountain with the sword in his hand, he also went up that mountain with the title deed in his pocket, because God had already given it to him. The Lord had promised it to him, and his confidence came out of the word of God. Ladies and gentlemen, listen to me, 'Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.'"*[723]

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[720] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 82.
[721] Stovall Weems, *Miracles*.
[722] *Calvinism: The Road to Nowhere* (Xulon Press, 2010), 185.
[723] Adrian Rogers, *Give Me This Mountain*, 1977.

Romans 10:21 - 11:1-11

"But as for **Israel** He says, '**All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people**.' I say then, **God has not rejected His people, has He?** May it never be! For I too am an **Israelite**, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. **God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew**. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about **Elijah**, how he **pleads with God against Israel**? 'Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.' But what is the **divine response** to him? '**I have kept** for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' **In the same way then**, there has also come to be at the present time a **remnant according to God's gracious choice**. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? **What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened**; just as it is written, 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day.' And David says, 'Let their table become a snare and a trap, and a stumbling block and a retribution to them. Let their eyes be darkened to see not, And bend their backs forever.' I say then, **they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!** But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, **to make them jealous**."

In this context, who God "foreknew" was the nation of Israel.

What do Calvinists believe?

God has chosen spiritual Israel, evidenced by the fact that Romans 11:26 states that "all Israel will be saved," which could only refer to the *elect* within Israel.

Our reply:

Israel, mentioned here, represents *national* Israel whom God had reached out to "all the day long," as quoted from Isaiah 65:2 at Romans 10:21, who largely had *rejected* God's kindness and consequently languished spiritually, prompting Paul's question as to whether or not God might have given up on Israel, and Paul's emphatic answer was that God's promise toward national Israel was irrevocable. Just as God had preserved the lives of a remnant of 7,000 *faithful* prophets in Elijah's day, so too God had preserved the lives of a believing remnant in Paul's present day.

> John Parkinson: *"Israel had not obtained the blessing it was seeking for, but the elect had obtained it. A number of Jews had been saved, and Paul emphasises that they were saved by grace and not by works. The elect in this context is therefore the believing Jew."*[724]

Indeed. God chose the *believing* Jews as a remnant to rescue and preserve. In Calvinism, however, God's choice is often subtly portrayed as God choosing elect-*unbelievers* in order to become believers, rather than God choosing believers for salvation and service.

In Romans chapter 11, despite the temporary "rejection" (v.15) of Israel in having been given over to being "hardened" (v.7) through a "partial hardening" (v.25), Israel could later be accepted (v.15), after having been driven to jealousy by the faith of the Gentiles (v.11) and ultimately grafted back in if it does not persist in unbelief (v.23), which is precisely the reason why it is erroneous to read a fixed and unchangeable caste of elect vs. non-elect into the text. Also notice that the text never says that anyone was chosen to believe, but rather implies that on account of the right response "were chosen" and received "acceptance."

> Walls and Dongell: *"Though some (if not most) Israelites have fallen, Paul insists that the nation still functions as God's chosen vessel, serving as God's instrument in extending his gospel to the world (Rom 11:11-12, 15)."*[725]

> Walls and Dongell: *"Israel's hardness is temporary because this hardness may be reversed; it is conditional because it will last only so long as unbelief persists (Rom 11:23)."*[726]

The nature of the partial hardening of unbelieving Israel is further illustrated at 2nd Corinthians 3:14-16: "But **their minds were hardened**; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; **but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**." 2nd Corinthians 4:3-4 also states: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has **blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the**

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[724] *The Faith of God's Elect - a comparison between the election of Scripture and the election of Theology* (Glasgow, Scotland: Gospel Tract Publications, 1999), 27.
[725] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 86.
[726] Ibid., 88.

glory of Christ, who is the image of God." So, those who knew the truth but rejected it were subjected to a judicial hardening (or strengthening of their resolve), which is consistent with their own established choice, though it is not permanent, and hence we're not dealing with fixed classes. In other words, they can still be saved.

- They've stumbled but not beyond recovery. (v.11)
- They may be provoked to envy and saved. (v.14)
- They may be grafted back in if they cease unbelief. (vv.20-23)
- They may be shown mercy. (v.32)

The condition upon which some Jews were chosen was on account of their faith, demonstrated by their unwillingness to bow a knee to any other god. Moreover, since the rest who were hardened can still receive recovery, can still become saved, can still be grafted back in and can still be shown mercy, they cannot therefore, comprise Calvinism's "non-elect" class which is beyond hope of reconciliation.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Paul, however, attempts to prove here that it is not those whose wickedness has earned it who are blinded, but those who were rejected by God before the foundation of the world. We may solve this difficulty briefly in the following way. It is the perversity of our nature when forsaken by God that is the source of the ungodliness which thus provokes His fury. In speaking, therefore, of eternal reprobation, Paul has intentionally referred to the consequences which proceed from it as fruit from the tree or the river from its source."*[727]

Our reply:

If "the rest were hardened" signified Calvinism's non-elect who were "rejected by God before the foundation of the world," then:

- How are those "hardened" still able to *become* saved? Recall that for the hardened Jews, Paul turned to the Gentiles so as to make these very same ones jealous *so that they may be saved*: "I say

[727] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 244.

then, **they did not stumble so as to fall**, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, **to make them jealous**." (Romans 11:11) "If somehow I might **move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them**." (Romans 11:14)

- What would driving them to "jealousy" accomplish?
- Why speak of their opportunity to be later grafted back in? "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for **God is able to graft them in again**." (Romans 11:23)
- How would their hardening be just "partial"? (Romans 11:25)
- How could they still be in God's election? (Romans 11:28-29)
- How could God still show them mercy? (Romans 11:20-32)

What do Calvinists believe?

Israel can be grafted back in, but only the *elect* among the Jews.

Our reply:

The elect in this instance are the "chosen" and accepted remnant of *believing* Jews, and *if* any of the corresponding "hardened" of Romans 11:7 are later indeed moved to jealousy and come to *no longer be defined by their unbelief*, and are grafted back in, and are saved, when "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), *then* they (the hardened of Romans 11:7) cannot be said to represent a fixed caste of Calvinism's "non-elect" reprobates, and therefore any elect vs. non-elect distinction made at Romans 11:7 is necessarily a false dichotomy. This is also consistent with the unbelieving non-sheep of John 10:37-38, whom Jesus encouraged to believe in Him anyway, despite their unbelief so that they can *become* His sheep and be saved.

Romans 11:30-32

"For just as **you** once were disobedient to God, but now have been **shown mercy because of their disobedience**, so these also now have been disobedient, that **because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy**. For **God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all**."

Similarly, Galatians 3:22 states: "But the Scripture has **shut up everyone under sin**, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be **given to those who believe**." Mercy is shown to all by sending the good news of the gospel to all, and eternal life is given to those who believe.

> Walls and Dongell: *"In other words, as wide as the problem of sin reaches (universally), so wide has God's mercy spread in granting the possibility of salvation (universally)."*[728]

Jewish unbelief served as an opportunity to spread the gospel to the Gentiles, and the faith of the Gentiles served as an opportunity to drive the Jews to jealousy as a motivation to return back to God, so that all together, God may show mercy to all. God did not cause Jewish unbelief. Their calling was to reach the world with the message that the seed of Abraham would be a blessing to all the families of the earth, and when they failed to live up to their calling, God used the Gentiles to finish their mission, and ultimately to bring Israel back around again.

> Adrian Rogers: *"Again, don't get the idea that God only wants some people saved. God says all are unbelievers, and God says, 'I want mercy upon all.'"*[729]

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"If God is not pleased to dispense his saving mercy to all men, then I must submit to his holy and righteous decision."*[730]

Our reply:

Conversely, though, if the Bible *affirms* that God is indeed pleased to "show mercy to all" (Romans 11:32), will you submit to His holy and righteous decision?

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Was God's purpose to make salvation for all possible, or to make salvation for the elect certain? The ultimate aim of God's plan of redemption was to redeem his elect."*[731]

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"All plainly means both Jews and Gentiles. It will not do to claim that Paul is*

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[728] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 91.
[729] Adrian Rogers, *Is God through with the Jews?, Romans 11:1*, 1998.
[730] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 38.
[731] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 174.

> *speaking of every human being. He speaks, rather, of the class of Jews and the class of Gentiles, though not necessarily of every person within those classes."*[732]

Our reply:

God's purpose was to *provide* salvation for all through the Cross, and not just for the elect within the classes of Jews and Gentiles, since God very much does indeed love the whole world, and salvation is *applied* to whosoever meets His stated condition for eternal life, namely, by believing in His Son Jesus Christ. It is not a very compelling argument for Calvinists to continually infer "all" and "world" to mean "Calvinism's elect."

Calvinist objection:

In your view, how is it meaningful for God to show mercy to those whom He *knows will reject His offer* and ultimately perish?

Our reply:

If God indeed makes a legitimate, well-meant offer of the gospel to *both* those who do and don't receive Him, without God forcing anyone into either direction, then those who do receive Him, do so when others had rejected the same offer, and which gives rise to the basis of genuine fellowship, that is, choosing to love and desire to be with God, when others choose the opposite. This is how God can come to receive greater glory, by gaining a kingdom of those who choose Him when others did not. There is meaningful fellowship that can arise from this. The fact that there are some who freely reject it, makes those who freely receive it, all the more genuine. Moreover, the fact that God knows who will choose to reject Him does not mean that He is the One who excluded them, as the mercy of Calvary was indiscriminately offered to all without exception. Each individual is "part of the whole" for which mercy is graciously provided. For example, I know that God wants for me to be saved because, for His part, He desires that all repent and become saved, and I am part of the whole.

As an analogy, suppose that I decide to buy lunch for everyone in my office. If I know that one particular person always brings their own lunch, then my knowledge of their preference doesn't change the fact that they have as much right as anyone else to come and join us. They merely exclude themselves. But Calvinists may say, "What if they are allergic to

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[732] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 180.

anyone else's food but their own? How would it be kind or gracious to offer something to someone that you know in advance *cannot* eat it?" Although that alteration of the analogy would fit perfectly with Calvinism's doctrine of Total Inability, it would not fit a non-Calvinist's perspective, given that non-Calvinists do not accept that some people *cannot* accept God's well-meant offer of the gospel, except perhaps those that have made themselves allergic to it, and perhaps on account of prior rejections of grace have been judicially hardened by God. This is why someone in Hell can be told that they didn't have to be there, in that they could have instead believed in Jesus and gone to Heaven. However, if God had never shown them salvific mercy (which they in turn rejected), then they cannot be told that they didn't have to be there in Hell. In Calvinism, the non-elect *must* go to Hell because that is their one and only option, in having been excluded from the only means possible for forgiveness, namely, the atonement of Calvary. Therefore, the Calvinist view that only the elect are shown "mercy" causes significant problems when viewed from an eternal perspective.

Romans 11:36
"For from Him and through Him and to Him are **all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

Similarly, Colossians 1:16-20 states: "For by Him **all things** were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things** have been created through Him and for Him. He is before **all things**, and in Him **all things** hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have **first place in everything**. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile **all things** to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven." Much like Ephesians 1:11, these instances of "all things" are *qualified*, rather than unqualified, in terms of that which is consistent with what the context indicates that God does. There is no mention of God determining people's desires, but rather of people being placed in submission to Him, that is, "thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." For God, everything is proceeding toward an ultimate divine objective, though it would be a leap in logic to then infer that God is the source of all human thoughts and motives.

What do Calvinists believe?

All things have their source in God's eternal decree.

Our reply:

Calvinists infer that God's providential governance of "all things" necessarily entails absolute determinism, such that that God decreed every person's own moral desires, though such an inference is absent from the texts which address God's providence.

Romans 12:3-8

"For through the **grace given to me** I say to everyone among you **not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think**; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as **God has allotted to each a measure of faith**. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the **grace given to us**, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

The context is of Christians. This is not talking about *unbelievers* being given an Irresistible Grace in order to become believers. What we know from Ephesians 1:3 is that every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is in Christ, meaning only for Christians. So, in context, Paul is talking about the body of Christ, in terms of each person being given their own unique spiritual gift for their assigned function within the body.

Romans 14:12-17

"So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if **because of food** your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. **Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died**. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

This is in reference to how some Christians became bothered by seeing other Christians eat meat that was sacrificed to idols.

> John Goodwin: *"That the destruction here spoken of, whereunto the strong Christian is so earnestly admonished and dehorted by the apostle from exposing the weak, is not any temporal destruction, but that which is of body and soul forever, is more clear than to require proof."*[733]

In other words, a Christian who has genuine concern for the lost would not wish to do anything that would knowingly drive a lost person to reject Christ. For instance, Paul indicated that he would be willing to be all things to all people so that some might be saved. (1st Corinthians 9:12-23) So, consideration of hindrances is considered for the sake of the lost.

What do Calvinists believe?

This is in regard to temporal destruction, rather than eternal destruction, since none of the elect for whom Christ had died could ever eternally perish, but instead will always endure to the end.

Our reply:

If that is true, then John Calvin did not get the memo: "...the price of the blood of Christ is wasted when a weak conscience is wounded, for the most contemptible brother has been redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is intolerable, therefore, that he should be destroyed for the gratification of the belly."[734]

> John Goodwin: *"I trust that henceforth, no man that shall read these passages from his pen will say but that Calvin clearly held a possibility of the destruction of such men for whom Christ died, and consequently, that Christ died for more than shall be saved: and if so, for all, as we formerly argued."*[735]

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[733] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 83-84.
[734] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, translated by Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 298.
[735] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 85-86.

Chapter 12: 1st and 2nd Corinthians

1st Corinthians 1:18

"For the **word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

The lost certainly do understand and comprehend the message of the gospel, but the problem is that they do not *value* it for what it is and take the appropriate action. They rely on human wisdom rather than divine wisdom brought through inspired revelation. The problem is that they do not live with an *eternal* perspective, but only with a *temporary*, earthly perspective.

Consider an example. Acts 26:24 states: "While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, '**Paul, you are out of your mind!** Your great learning is driving you mad.'" Festus concluded that Paul's message and mission was foolishness. However, notice the difference in what King Agrippa concluded. Acts 26:25-29 states: "But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. **King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do**.' Agrippa replied to Paul, '**In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian**.' And Paul said, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.'" This is what happens when people seriously contemplate eternal matters. Even those who participated in the crucifixion began to have second thoughts. Acts 2:37 states: "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, '**Brethren, what shall we do?**'" After witnessing a miracle, the Philippian jailer asked: "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" (Act 16:30)

What do Calvinists believe?

The gospel is not seen as convicting for those who are perishing, but instead just foolishness.

Our reply:

The lost and perishing Gentiles were indeed said to have concluded that the gospel is "foolishness" (1st Corinthians 1:18), but that may be a learned behavior, for the purpose of self-justification, in order to

shut down the *conviction* of their own conscience from "accusing" them. Romans 2:15 also states of the Gentiles: "…in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, **their conscience bearing witness** and their thoughts alternately **accusing or else defending them**…."

Consider the parable of the Sower at Luke 8:4-15. Those compared to a "rocky soil" had received the Word with "joy" and believed "for a while," until in times of temptation they fell away. So, they surely did not *initially* consider the gospel as foolishness, but they may have gravitated toward that view, if they wished to silence the accusations of their conscience for choosing the things of this world over God. With only a few questions, the lost will often readily admit that they are lying, adulterous blasphemers. Some won't care, but at least their conscience is speaking to them, which an evangelist can use to win them for Christ.

1st Corinthians 1:21

"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, **God was well-pleased** through the foolishness of the message preached **to save those who believe**."

Similarly, Hebrews 11:6 states: "And **without faith it is impossible to please Him**, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Notice that God is pleased to save those who believe—not "pleased to make them believe."

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"The Reformed view of predestination teaches that before a person can choose Christ his heart must be changed. He must be born again."*[736]

> R.C. Sproul: *"A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: 'Regeneration precedes faith.' Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ."*[737]

Our reply:

If in Calvinism, regeneration precedes faith (i.e. elect people are made Born Again in order to welcome the gospel message), then it must please God to regenerate *those who do not believe*, by giving the faithless

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[736] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 72.
[737] Ibid., 72-73.

the faith they otherwise lack, simply because God elected them, all for reasons unstated, and therefore what truly pleases God is the unstated reason for why He was pleased to elect one from eternity but not another.

1st Corinthians 1:22-29

"For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to **those who are the called**, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For **consider your calling, brethren**, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but **God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise**, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and **the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen**, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God."

God chose the foolish, meek, weak, base and despised things of the world in order to "shame" and "nullify" the wise and strong. By shaming and nullifying, perhaps the lost may be driven to humility and see the gospel for what it truly is. A similar approach is described in Romans 11:11-14, in which Paul envisions the gospel's impact upon the believing Gentiles as ultimately driving the unbelieving Jews to "jealousy" so that he may "save some of them."

Pride and repentance repel one another. Repentance involves humility, whereas pride leads to a dismissal of the gospel. Essentially, God convicts people in order to break down their pride so that they might repent, believe and be saved.

Similarly, Romans 1:6 speaks of "the called of Jesus Christ" and Romans 8:28 refers to "those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." What is this calling? Does it mean that God invites some to follow Christ and not others? Calvinists do not teach that. Instead, what Calvinists teach is that God does not invite everyone with the same *intent*, that is, Calvinism's elect receive an irresistible invitation, referred to as an "Effectual Call," while Calvinism's alleged non-elect receive an invitation which is always resisted, referred to as a "General Call." The latter is peculiar, though, given that the non-elect are being graciously invited to receive a Savior who *never* died for them, in which they are purposely excluded from a Limited Atonement. However, the calling in the context of 1st Corinthians 1:18-31 is not referring to a unique calling of elect-unbelievers, but rather pertains to the various callings specific to believers, i.e. "not many wise according to the flesh, not many

mighty, not many noble," in which God uses their humble status to spurn that which the world values as more important than what God values.

1st Corinthians 1:30-31
"But **by His doing you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

Similarly, 1st Peter 1:3 states: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Jesus did all the work. He died on the cross in our place so that we don't have to pay for our own sins. When we receive the message of this gospel, the Holy Spirit gives us new life and makes us Born Again.

> Neil Anderson: *"You are not who you are in Christ because of the things you have done; you are in Christ because of what He has done. He died and rose again so that you and I could live in the freedom of His love."*[738]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"By whose doing is anyone in Christ Jesus? Every evangelical will say, 'Oh, it is God's doing, surely,' but if such a person denies that God's grace saves powerfully and without the addition of human actions, even the autonomous action of faith, does that person truly believe it is by God's doing that they are in Christ? Did not God do the same for every lost person, and yet for some reason they are still lost, but that person, due to some difference, some goodness, on his part, accepted God's 'offer,' while others did not?"*[739]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, it is by God's doing that we are in Christ, in the sense that when God calls out to a lifeless corpse, we are made alive as a believing Christian. It's like going to bed as an Atheist and waking up in the morning as a believing Christian, all caused by an Irresistible Grace. However, two questions must be asked: (1) What does it mean to be spiritually dead, and (2) who does God make alive?

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[738] *Who I am in Christ* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2001), 15.
[739] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 204-205.

A spiritually dead person is not a lifeless corpse. Spiritual death speaks of separation. For instance, when the expression, "you're dead to me" is used, it implies something similar to spiritual death. It implies being cut off, and that's precisely what sin does to mankind—it cuts mankind off from God. Next, the answer to the question of "who does God make alive" is the sinner who confesses their sin and appeals to Christ's sacrifice at Calvary. That is why Colossians 2:12 says that we are "raised up with Him through faith" and why Ephesians 2:8 says that we are "saved through faith." It is through faith that we confess the guilt of our sin and it is through faith that we appeal to Christ's sacrifice at Calvary to pay for our sins. When we do this, we become alive, in the sense that we are no longer under the condemnation and separation of the Law, meaning that we cease being dead to God and cease being cut off from God.

> Dave Hunt: *"Of course salvation is not our doing; but that does not prove that we cannot freely receive the salvation Christ wrought as a gift of God's love."*[740]

> Dave Hunt: *"God has set the rules for entering heaven. Man either accepts or rejects the salvation God offers in Christ--but he is certainly not in charge."*[741]

1st Corinthians 2:12-16

"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. But a **natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them**, because they are spiritually appraised. But **he who is spiritual appraises all things**, yet he himself is appraised by no one. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE WILL INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ."

What does Paul mean by a "natural man"? Does it mean an *unregenerate lost person*? Not in this context. In this context, Paul uses that term to describe the immature Corinthian believers, whom he calls "infants in Christ" (3:1), and whom he says are not ready for "solid food" but only metaphorical "milk."

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[740] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 228.
[741] Ibid., 221.

> **1st Corinthians 3:1-4:** "And I, brethren, **could not speak to you as to spiritual men**, but as to **men of flesh**, as to **infants in Christ**. I gave you **milk** to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for **you are still fleshly**. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not mere men?"

Paul raises a dichotomy between a "natural man" (1st Corinthians 2:14) and "spiritual men" (1st Corinthians 3:1), and he says that he cannot speak to the Corinthian *believers* as "spiritual men." (3:1) Being indicative of the "natural man," he calls them "men of flesh" (3:1) and "fleshly." (3:3) However, that is not to say that they are unsaved, since he also calls them "infants in Christ." (3:1) As infants in Christ, they are only able to handle what a natural man can handle, which is spiritual "milk to drink," such as the gospel, but "not solid food" such as the deep things of God or the "depths of God" (1st Corinthians 2:10), potentially indicative of what Paul alluded to at Ephesians 1:15-19.

Ultimately, the "natural man" simply means anything *other than* the spiritual man, which can include unbelievers or immature believers (as this context shows). However, if Calvinists persist in insisting that the natural man of 1st Corinthians 2:14 can only mean *unregenerate unbelievers*, then consider the following syllogism: If the natural man is exclusively unregenerate, and if the natural man can at least handle the milk of the gospel (as it is said that the natural men of the Church of Corinth could at least handle), then it follows that the unregenerate can handle the milk of the gospel—which would then contradict the Calvinist doctrine of Total Inability. If the natural man can handle the elementary principles of the milk of the gospel, as the context shows, then the doctrine of Total Inability is contradicted.

As a caution, Paul mentioned that the fruit of these natural men was "jealousy and strife." So, putting it all together, what particular class of Christians are (a) known for jealousy and strife and (b) repudiate and mock the deep things of God in Christian theology? Calvinists, who are well-known for (and actually advocate and instruct how to perform) their infamous church splits, also refer to the non-Calvinist depiction of God as an impotent sap, a cosmic bellhop, a lovesick 16 year-old girl, and a great grandfather in the sky. Let the reader do the math.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"He is explaining why unsaved persons don't believe the apostles' message—because they don't have the Spirit of God and therefore can't understand that message."*[742]

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Paul's contrast between the unsaved and the saved is acute."*[743]

Our reply:

If Calvinists are indicative of the jealous and divisive "natural man" that Paul describes, then for Calvinists to insist that the natural man is unsaved is akin to calling themselves unsaved, which I don't necessarily agree with. I think Calvinists have simply misunderstood what Paul was saying about the unspiritual "natural man," all because they are trying to manufacture a proof-text for Calvinism's doctrine of Total Inability.

1st Corinthians 4:7

"Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, **so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other**. For **who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive?** And if you did receive it, **why do you boast as if you had not received it?**"

All our abilities, including the ability to make choices, is given to us by a good and gracious God. Mankind's existence, sustenance and natural abilities are dependent upon God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Faith therefore from beginning to end is the gift of God; and that this gift is given to some and not to others, no one can at all doubt, unless he wish to contest the most manifest testimonies of Scripture. But why it is not given to all ought not to disturb the believer, for he believes that all came under most just condemnation by the sin of one; and why God delivers one man*

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[742] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 169.
[743] Ibid.

and not another are matters constituting His inscrutable judgments and His uninvestigable ways."[744]

Our reply:

Faith is common to all mankind, as part of the human experience. The question is what we place our faith *in*. Some people place their faith in science. Some place it in their religions or religious leaders. However, what Romans 10:17 tells us is that when we read Scripture, we find compelling evidence to place our faith in God: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." God does exempt anyone from the opportunity to believe in Him, and all will have to give an account for whether they placed their trust in God. (John 3:18)

Based upon John Calvin's remarks, one would conclude that in the fall of man, God punished mankind by rendering it unable to respond willingly to God's well-meant offer of the gospel, and then blaming mankind for their divinely implemented inability. When God was explaining the curse of labor pains and toiling the soil, did He forget to mention the worst curse of all: "You now are morally incapable of responding willingly to my appeals or commands"? There is no biblical indication that, due to the fall, mankind has lost its moral ability to respond willingly to God's out-stretched hand of mercy, as per Isaiah 65:2. To suggest otherwise, by alleging inability in the face of God's initiative, unwittingly promotes the teaching of unrepentant Israel at Jeremiah 18:12.

1st Corinthians 7:37-38

"But he who stands firm in his heart, **being under no constraint**, but has **authority over his own will**, and has **decided this in his own heart**, to keep his own virgin daughter, he will do well. So then both he who gives his own virgin daughter in marriage does well, and he who does not give her in marriage will do better."

This verse, and many others like it, demonstrates human free-will, such as "being under no constraint" and having "decided this in his own heart." If God directly controlled and exhaustively predetermined all human choices, so that mankind unknowingly operated from divine strings, then what would be the point of portraying the illusion of a father, in this example, as having and making his own choice and deciding his own things, with respect to his daughter?

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[744] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 63-64.

1st Corinthians 7:37-38
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1st Corinthians 9:19-23
"For though I am free from all men, **I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more**. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that **I might win** those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that **I might win** those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; **I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some**. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

When Paul makes himself a slave to everyone, it is because he believes that it makes a *difference*, in order to maximize the victory in evangelism. Paul also believes that the Gospel can be hindered: "If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but **we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ**." (1st Corinthians 9:12) Paul believes that the success of the Gospel can be impacted when taught "not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void." (1st Corinthians 1:17) If, however, Paul believed in Irresistible Grace, in which people were unconsciously regenerated against their depraved will, simply because they were one of Calvinism's elect, then how would Paul's efforts of accommodation have any meaningful impact on monergistic regeneration? Calvinists often use a "means" defense, so as to imply that Paul's efforts may coincide with a predestined method, but by such thinking, would a Calvinist believe that Paul's actions could then *trigger* regeneration, or in

any way *negate* it? If the answer was no, then how would the "means" defense be in any way irrelevant?

> Dave Hunt: *"'He that winneth souls is wise' (Proverbs 11:30) becomes meaningless; there is no persuading the damned, and the saved are regenerated without believing anything. 'Come now, and let us reason together' (Isaiah 1:18) is meaningless for the same reasons. The 'great white throne' judgment is also meaningless if God has willed every thought, word, and deed. The Bible's call of hope for all--'Choose you this day whom ye will serve' (Joshua 24:15); 'Seek ye the LORD while he may be found' (Isaiah 55:6); 'Come unto me, all ye that labor' (Matthew 11:28); 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink' (John 7:37)--all this and more is made meaningless by Calvinism!"*[745]

> Adrian Rogers: *"You have been called to minister. You have been called to bring souls bound in the golden chains of the Gospel and lay them at Jesus' feet. Don't you boast about your salvation; don't you boast about your piety; don't you boast about your spirit-fullness, don't you tell me about your spiritual gifts if you are not endeavoring to bring souls to Jesus Christ. What right do you have to call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ if your business is not His business? And what is His business? The Son of God has come to seek and to save that which is lost. ...Would you pray, oh pray it, mean it, mean it, don't just say it, 'Lord, lay some soul upon my heart, and win that soul through me.' If you can't win an adult, win a child. If you can't win your neighbor, win somebody else's neighbor. If you can't win somebody in your family, win somebody in somebody else's family. If you can't bring a soul to Jesus, help somebody else to bring a soul to Jesus."*[746]

1st Corinthians 10:13

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God** is faithful, who **will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation **will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it**."

Similarly, 2nd Peter 2:9-10 states: "Then **the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation**, and to keep the unrighteous under

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[745] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 334.
[746] Adrian Rogers, *Saved To Serve: Romans 15-16*, 9/20/1998.

punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority." This passage successfully reconciles divine sovereignty and human free-will, and not by appealing to an "inscrutable mystery," but by showing how God can still remain in control, establishing the parameters and setting the boundaries, while allowing man to make their own self-determined choices, as to whether to take the way of escape or not. Sovereignty over creatures without a string requires an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-wise God.

So why does one take God's "way of escape" and another not? The answer is not in God, as if His grace was insufficient, but in man, who utilizes God's tools for victory or not, and that being the case, sin can no longer be seen as a fatalistic inevitability, as God has provided a way out.

Unrepentant Israel supposed that since God decreed their destruction, it must be *unavoidable*. (Jeremiah 18:11) However, that is exactly the opposite way the king of Nineveh thought about it: "'Who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish.'" (Jonah 3:9) And he was right. (v.10) But, unrepentant Israel went in the opposite direction, using fatalistic inevitability to justify not changing their behavior. (Jeremiah 18:12) In reality, God's conditional warnings decisively prove that destruction is *avoidable*.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Why do some stumble and fall while others persevere? Is it that some are better, stronger, than others? No. The reason lies in the difference between having saving faith and a faith that is not divine in origin or nature."*[747]

Our reply:

Calvinists refuse to accept the answer of free-will, even though it is found several times in the Bible. Calvinists will only accept the answer of divine determinism, and then their logic meanders accordingly.

What do Calvinists believe?

1st Corinthians 10:13 doesn't apply to everyone. It only applies to believers.

Our reply:

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[747] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 293.

If that were to mean that only believers had autonomous, libertarian free-will, then a Calvinist's exhaustive determinism would turn into partial determinism, and the result would be a cascading effect on other Calvinistic doctrines. It's hard to see how that could be a viable alternative unless Calvinists meant free-will in a compatibilistic sense, but which then would be no different from anyone else, and amount to just a distinction without a difference.

What do Calvinists believe?

God has a purpose for sin. All sin occurs for the ultimate glory of God, in whatever way that sin serves to glorify God. The alternative would mean that sin is out of God's control.

Our reply:

Calvinists have no choice but to insist that all sin has a purpose, because Calvinism teaches that all things are decreed, and so for Calvinists, if sin had no purpose, then their decree would have no purpose. So, Calvinists are simply arguing from necessity. Non-Calvinists, however, who reject the notion that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," are perfectly free to say that sin does not have to have a divine purpose behind it, and that God can establish His will and His glory, with or without it. He doesn't need it; man simply chose it. This way, non-Calvinists can agree with various places in Scripture where God denies having any part in sin, such as the child sacrifice of Jeremiah 32:35. Moreover, for the non-Calvinist, just because God *permits* someone to take His way of escape or not, doesn't mean that God wants whatever people happen to choose. As an example, the father of the prodigal son permitted his son to leave with his share of the inheritance, but that doesn't mean the father wanted for his son to make the wrong choice. God doesn't want any of us to make wrong choices. It's rather hard to imagine that there could be a Christian theology whereby some advocated the view that God needed or wanted sin, in order for God to be glorified, but that's Calvinism.

1st Corinthians 13:4-7

"**Love** is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it **does not seek its own**, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

"Love…does not seek its own," and yet in Calvinism, that's all God is doing with the reprobates. He is seeking His own by damning them from the time they are born until the time they die, and they have absolutely no control over it, whatsoever. He is damning them to Hell for His own edification, for His own glorification and for His own praise. How in the world can anyone define that as love, in any way, shape or form?[748]

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"God is the one Being in all the universe for whom seeking his own praise is the ultimate loving act. For him self-exaltation is the highest virtue."*[749]

Our reply:

Ways in which God seeks His own glory is through showing mercy, sacrificial giving and general expressions of His virtues. It is primarily *not* through exercising superior power over the weak or by maintaining meticulous control.

What do Calvinists believe?

The most important aspect of God's love is that it's not about you! It's all about God's glory.

Our reply:

If that's the most important aspect of love, then why did Paul forget to list the most important thing about love in the greatest definition of love in the Bible? Nowhere in Scripture do we ever hear God, or anyone else, ever saying: "It's not about you; it's all about God's glory."

Furthermore, is God's genuine love and provision for all humanity the true reflection of His glory, or is it God seeking His own glory at the expense of most of humanity? If it is truly "more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), then Christ's *giving* of Himself for all humanity amounts to a greater self-blessing than for God to *receive* glory at the expense of humanity.

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[748] *Does God REALLY Love His Enemies: Response to John Piper*, 28:00-28:24. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2-j_HIFa10

[749] John Piper, quoted in *Self Serving Grace?*, 3/24/2017. https://soteriology101.wordpress.com/2017/03/24/self-serving-grace/

1st Corinthians 14:31-33
"For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for **God is not a God of confusion but of peace**, as in all the churches of the saints."

So if there *exists* confusion, then who is its author? Outside of Calvinism, it is fallen man—not God—who is the author of confusion, but in Calvinism, God is necessarily the author of confusion, and everything else as well, since Calvinism teaches that God has decreed *whatsoever* comes to pass.

Outside of the Church, God may indeed judge and punish people with confusion, such as at Genesis 11:7-9, in which God confused the language of the people, and also at Exodus 23:27 and Judges 7:22 where God sent confusion among the adversaries of Israel. However, *inside the Church*, God is not the author, source or origin of confusion, which therefore contradicts exhaustive determinism.

1st Corinthians 15:1-4
"Now I make known to you, brethren, **the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received**, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For **I delivered** to you as of first importance **what I also received**, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

> David Allen: *"The gospel contains the message of Christ's death for all sins according to 1 Cor 15:1-3."*[750]

Paul's source material states: "Surely **our griefs** He Himself bore, and **our sorrows** He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for **our transgressions**, He was crushed for **our iniquities**; the chastening for our well-being **fell upon Him**, and by His scourging we are healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5) So, what did Paul mean by "Christ died for our sins"? Could he have meant "our" in terms of *only believers*? The Old Testament source material references "our griefs," "our sorrows," "our transgressions" and "our iniquities," which is mutually inclusive language. In other words, do only believers have griefs, sorrows, transgressions and iniquities? Of

[750] *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 222.

course not. Moreover, the onus is on those asserting a limitation to prove it in the text.

What do Calvinists believe?

Paul is writing to believers, stating that Christ died for our sins. So this is indeed a message applicable to believers.

Our reply:

However, Paul is *recalling* what he told them *before they were saved*, which included telling them that Jesus died for them. That's the gospel that he "preached." They "received" it, and were "saved."

> David Allen: *"Here Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the message he preached to them when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:1-18). He clearly affirms the content of the gospel he preached in Corinth included the fact that 'Christ died for our sins.' Notice carefully Paul is saying this is what he preached pre-conversion, not post-conversion. Thus the 'our' in his statement cannot be taken to refer to all the elect or merely the believing elect, which is what Calvinists who affirm definite atonement are forced to argue."*[751]

So, are Calvinists willing to preach *that* gospel? If Calvinists refuse, then can it be said that they are truly preaching the gospel?

> David Allen: *"When we fail to preach the gospel of 1 Cor 15:3, which includes preaching the fact of Christ's death for the sins of all people, we diminish the glory of the cross and the glory of grace and the glory of God—and the glory of God's love."* [752]

What do Calvinists believe?

We preach to every creature, and while we don't know the identity of the elect, we affirm that Jesus' death positively secured their salvation.

Our reply:

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[751] Ibid., 709.
[752] Ibid., 762.

Non-Calvinists can tell the unsaved, "Jesus Christ died for you." Calvinists have to add, "if you happen to be one of the elect," or say in a more coded fashion, "Jesus died for sins," meaning perhaps not yours sins, if you are not one of the elect. Calvinists are not even upfront about it, withholding that information from their converts until they are deemed spiritually mature enough to handle the "hard truths" of God, and which ultimately renders the gospel into a "bait and switch" scheme.

> David Allen: *"One wonders if a reluctance to say 'Christ died for you' implicitly expresses a reluctance to tell unsaved people that God is willing to save them all and is prepared to do so as well if they will repent and believe."* [753]

Indeed. The Calvinist message implies: God might not want you, and worse yet, the odds are not in your favor! By contrast, the non-Calvinist has a far more confident message: I know that Jesus died for me, because Jesus died for everyone, and I am part that "everyone," and so I can know for certain that God wants for me to be saved and to be with Him in Heaven someday.

1st Corinthians 15:20-22
"But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. **For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive**."

Adam is the parent of all who are *born*, and who suffer death as a consequence of their parent's one act of unrighteousness, namely his disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Christ is the parent of all who are *reborn*, and who enjoy eternal life as a consequence of their parent's one act of righteousness, namely His obedience at Calvary. Therefore, one must be reborn in Christ in order to have the promise of being made alive.

Why is it that "in Adam all die"?

> **Romans 5:12-15:** "Therefore, just as **through one man sin entered into the world**, and **death through sin**, and so **death spread to all men**, **because all sinned**—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam,

[753] Ibid., 779.

> who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many."

We are not automatically guilty of Adam's sin, any more than we are automatically righteous because of what Christ did. Just as we must participate in sin to be guilty of Adam's sin, so too we must participate with faith in Christ in order to be made righteous by Him.

2nd Corinthians 2:14-16

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For **we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing**; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"

Numbers 29:36 similarly states: "'But you shall present a **burnt offering**, an offering by fire, as a **soothing aroma to the LORD**: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect.'" As a living sacrifice to God, Paul's ministry is described as a "fragrance of Christ to God." For believers, the preaching of the gospel brings *confirmation* while for unbelievers it brings *conviction*, that is, a confirmation to believers of the certainty of salvation and the forgiveness of their sins if they accept the gospel, and a conviction to unbelievers of the certainty of judgment for their sins if they reject the gospel. However, for the Calvinist, the preaching of the gospel is to serve as the *secret* means of Irresistible Regeneration delivered to Calvinism's elect (i.e. to quicken souls by the fragrance of salvation, that is, recreated to salvation), and also to torment Calvinism's non-elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"It was because many opposed him and hated him that some in Corinth were beginning to despise him. But his reply to this is that faithful and sincere ministers of the Gospel have a sweet savour before God not only when they quicken souls by the fragrance of salvation but also when they bring death to unbelievers; thus the fact that the Gospel is opposed should not make us value it any less. Both savours, he says, are agreeable to God, both that by which **the elect are recreated unto salvation and that by which the reprobate are tormented**. This is a notable*

> *passage from which we may learn that whatever the results of our preaching may be, it is pleasing to God provided only that the Gospel is preached and our obedience is acceptable to Him. The good name of the Gospel is in no way brought into disrepute by the fact that it does not profit all. For* ***God is glorified when it brings about the ruin of the reprobate*** *and so this must happen. And if anything is a sweet savour to God it ought to be so to us also, that is, we should not be offended if the preaching of the gospel does not result in the salvation of all who hear it, but should think it quite enough if it* ***promotes God's glory by bringing to the reprobate a just condemnation****."*[754]

Our reply:

So, Calvinism's "Doctrines of Grace" may also be called the "Doctrines of Torment," since that is what John Calvin is saying is part of the intention of Calvinism's gospel. As such, God must be pleased by the death of the wicked, despite the fact that God said exactly the opposite: "'Say to them, "As I live!" declares the Lord God, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?"'" (Ezekiel 33:11) God's purpose in the gospel is not to condemn (or torment) those who already stand condemned (John 3:18) but to *rescue* lost sinners. When sin causes enmity between man and God, God is not causing it but rather the human desire to choose sin over God is causing the enmity. So, the gospel does not cause unbelievers to hate God. Unbelievers harden themselves against God due to their immoral choices.

If Calvinists feel that it is their duty in preaching the gospel to "torment" unbelievers, then it means whenever they teach that certain people are "predestined certain for Hell," it means they are doing it trying to antagonize. It is indeed sad for Calvinists to think God gives grace that He secretly intends to be rejected, all so that He can feel justified in tormenting—even more—those whom He already eternally and immutably predestined for everlasting torment! By contrast, non-Calvinists believe that God's grace is intended for something good, that is, something truly gracious and merciful, whereas in Calvinism, God's "grace" intends, in part, something mischievous.

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[754] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: II Corinthians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, translated by T.A. Smail (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 34-35, emphasis mine.

2nd Corinthians 3:14-16
"But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but **whenever a person turns to the Lord**, **the veil is taken away**."

Isn't it the opposite in Calvinism? In other words, in Calvinism, the veil of Total Depravity and Total Inability must first be taken away, as part of a pre-faith regeneration of an Irresistible Grace, and only then can a person turn to the Lord. But, the text seems to suggest the opposite, in terms that the condition of the veil being taken away, first requires turning to the Lord. Until a person turns their heart to the Lord, the veil stays.

As a backdrop, as long as the unbelieving Jews find assurance in works and bloodlines, they will stick with their Confirmation Bias, in mistakenly thinking that the Scriptures promise something that it never did. So, the "veil" is effectively the unbelieving Jews' own Confirmation Bias. Once false assurance is broken, and then transferred to Christ, then serious focus can be placed on what the Scriptures actually do promise.

2nd Corinthians 4:3-6
"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the **god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel** of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has **shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God** in the face of Christ."

The devil uses lies to darken the understanding of those who are ignorant and hard of heart, in order to remain belligerent towards God. The solution is to *turn to the Lord* (2nd Corinthians 3:16), and then any veil over the gospel is taken away.

> **Ephesians 4:17-19:** "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being **darkened in their understanding**, excluded from the life of God because of the **ignorance** that is in them, because of the **hardness of their heart**; and they, having become **callous**, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."

> **2nd Corinthians 3:14-16:** "But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is removed in Christ. But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; **but whenever a person turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**."

However, if as Calvinism teaches, some people are going to be saved, no matter what, and some people are going to be lost, no matter what, then it really wouldn't matter what the devil does with his lies. The same people will remain elect or non-elect, no matter what the devil does. In fact, in Calvinism, dead is dead. So for a Calvinist, how would blinding a corpse make any sense? (Calvinists often conflate physical death with spiritual death, so for a Calvinist, being spiritually dead does not merely mean being lost or cut off, but something that signifies a total inability to respond to God, which then leads non-Calvinists to ask why, according to Calvinism, the devil would make it harder for a person to respond to God who already has total inability to respond?)

Consider God's system of accountability and justice:

> **Luke 12:48:** "'But the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.'"

> **John 9:41:** "'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains.'"

If what some Calvinists say about part of the purpose of the gospel serving to bring greater condemnation on the "non-elect" is true, then the devil's work to blind them is merciful while God's work to bring them the gospel and make the truth known, isn't. The solution is that no one is born "non-elect" and therefore it is indeed merciful to bring everyone the gospel so that they can become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

Arminians must explain why God, in their theology, allows Satan to have "blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ," if God (a) desires to preserve

their freewill and (b) desires that they become saved. This shows that God does not have a universal salvific will.[755]

Our reply:

2nd Thessalonians 2:10 explains this by saying that since they "did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved," God consequently turns them over to the devil's lies. Obviously, their reprobation is not God's *antecedent* desire for them, but only a *consequent* desire, on account of rejecting the grace that was meant to be theirs.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"For as in His creation of the world God has poured forth upon us the brightness of the sun and has also given us eyes with which to receive it, so in our redemption He shines forth upon us in the person of His Son by His Gospel, but that would be in vain, since we are blind, unless He were also to illuminate our minds by His Spirit. Thus his meaning is that God has opened the eyes of our understanding by His Spirit to make us able to receive the light of His Gospel."*[756]

Our reply:

In other words, people are blind from birth, so the preaching of the Gospel is in "vain" unless given a secret illumination of Irresistible Grace to open their eyes. But again, if people are blind from birth, as per Calvinism, then it would seem that the devil blinding people a second time would be redundant and unnecessary. Calvinists need to explain that.

2nd Corinthians 5:11

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, **we persuade men**, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences."

If Calvinists agree with the Bible that we should "persuade" lost people to believe in Christ, then what is wrong with having Gospel

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[755] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 171, 214, 215.

[756] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: II Corinthians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, translated by T.A. Smail (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 57, emphasis mine.

Invitations and Altar Calls? Calvinists are concerned that it might result in what they term, "Decisional Regeneration," whereby the lost choose to regenerate themselves, though which is odd since no one regenerates themselves, but rather people do what John 3:16 says, which is believing in Jesus, and then God does the work of giving eternal life, because that's what pleases Him: "God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." (1st Corinthians 1:21) We don't make God want to save believers. That motivation comes from within Himself. We just do what He says, and He gives what He promises.

What do Calvinists believe?

It is as though, once quickened, they have no other recourse but to accept His way in their lives. Free will is no longer a player in any decision-making with respect to their salvation. Paul's use of 'persuade' merely means that he should lay out a logical case, which for the elect, will be an acceptable argument, assisting the Holy Spirit by breaking down rational defenses, whereas for the non-elect, the persuasive argument simply makes no rational sense, and without the Spirit's drawing they remain reprobate.

Our reply:

When Paul persuaded the lost, he sensitively accommodated their cultures and traditions (1st Corinthians 9:19-23) and made sure to speak in such a way that placed maximum focus on God and not on his own oratory abilities. (1st Corinthians 1:17) Paul knew that those things all mattered, but if he had thought like a Calvinist, in terms of the operation of Irresistible Grace in *monergistic* regeneration, in which certain elect people must be saved by decretal necessity, no matter what, while the rest must remain lost under the same decree, no matter what, then Paul's efforts would seem more like vanity, and a Calvinist's "this is the means defense" explanation would seem awfully stretched.

2nd Corinthians 5:14-15

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all**, therefore **all died**; and **He died for all**, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

Similarly, Romans 5:12-13 states: "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so **death**

spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law."

What do Calvinists believe?

The "all" refers to all *of the elect* who have been spiritually buried with Christ and have died to this world. Christ died for "all" of the elect so that all of the elect might no longer live for themselves, but live for Christ who exclusively died for them alone.

Our reply:

The correlation between Jesus dying for everyone, and everyone dying, as in, "one died for all, therefore all died," points to the fact that a universal fall required a universal atonement. Everyone needs Jesus, and Jesus met that need for everyone, though not everyone has received Him. For those who receive Him, they are no longer to live for themselves, but for Christ who died to set them free, just as 1st Corinthians 6:20 also states: "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." This reflects the divine expectation.

Calvinists will immediately charge "Universalism," and the reason why is because Calvinists believe that if Jesus died for you, then you are *automatically* saved, in which the gift of "saving faith" effectually flows from the atonement. So from the Calvinist perspective, a universal atonement guarantees universal salvation, thus resulting in Universalism. The obvious problem is that Calvinists are *projecting* their unique concept of the atonement on to others who do not share their view. Once Calvinists acknowledge the difference (i.e. the atonement must be *received* in order for it to be *applied*), then the accusation of Universalism evaporates. This will not satisfy Calvinists, though, since they do not want anyone to accept a view of the atonement that differs from theirs. However, their problem is not with non-Calvinists, but with Jesus who illustrated a different type of atonement than theirs, when He cited Numbers 21:6-9 at John 3:14, as His model of the atonement. So Calvinists can take it up with Jesus!

> Daniel Whedon: *"How it is here that all died commentators differ. We think the correct reference is to that death which all died in Adam (Rom. v, 15) for which Christ's death is a divine substitute. Paul's reasoning is, that nothing less than our death could require Christ's death. If he died, it was because we all died."*[757]

[757] *Commentary On the New Testament, Vol. IV: I. Corinthians - II. Timothy* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 165.

> Adrian Rogers: *"One man sinned and got us into trouble; one Man died on the cross and got us out, plus He forgave every sin and promises us eternal life. In Adam we sin and collect our wages (death), but in Christ we are forgiven and collect our free gift (eternal life). This the much more of God's grace."*[758]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Now what Paul is saying is, 'This is what motivates me. I'm not crazy.' They were all dead, and Jesus died for all. He died for all. And if you don't say that Jesus died for all, you might as well just (with the same logic) say that all were not dead, that in Adam, all did not die. But the Bible says that in Adam all died, even so in Christ, are all made alive. ... Now the Hyper Calvinists, the Ultra Calvinists, will say, 'No, if you say that Jesus' death was for all, and all don't get saved, then that makes His death ineffectual; it means that He is not sovereign.' Well, I'd like to ask you a question: When God fed the children of Israel with manna in the wilderness, and some was eaten, do you think that some of it lay on the ground and did not get picked up? Of course. Does that mean that God didn't do it, or that God was not showing love and mercy just because some manna was not taken?"*[759]

So just because some squander the grace that could have been theirs, doesn't mean that God never really showed them any grace, because He did, and that is where accountability is derived: "'From **everyone who has been given much, much will be required**; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.'" (Luke 12:48)

> John Goodwin: *"...Christ died for as many as were dead, and consequently for all, without exception, inasmuch as all, without exception or difference, were dead."*[760]

> John Goodwin: *"If only the elect, so called, be recovered, this is no recovery of Adam's fall, but only of a small or less*

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[758] *Foundations for our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 17.
[759] *Dr. Adrian Rogers on Reformed Theology*, http://bradwhitt.com/2012/06/dr-adrian-rogers-on-reformed-theology-2/.
[760] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 57.

> *considerable part of it, or rather of some few persons only who fell thereby."*[761]

2nd Corinthians 5:18-21

"Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though **God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God**. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

So when Paul preached the gospel, it was a matter of God making His appeal through him, and so when He encouraged Paul to go on speaking and not be silent, it was so that God could go on speaking.

> Adrian Rogers: *"The reason for the cross is that you and I might come to God. Did you know the Bible says we're reconciled to God by the death of His Son. God is not reconciled to you. We're the sinners. We're reconciled to God."*[762]

Additionally, "be reconciled to God" cannot mean that we are *already*, secretly reconciled to God, by virtue of secret election. If that were the case, then the gospel would instead be: "Discover how you may already be reconciled to God and not even know it." The other issue is this: How can God be speaking through Paul to offer the hope of the gospel to people who are non-elect? Even John Calvin candidly recognized this problem: "That Christ, the redeemer of the whole world, commands the Gospel to be preached promiscuously to all does not seem congruent with special election."[763]

> David Allen: *"You cannot offer to someone that which doesn't exist for them, and that's the problem with Limited Atonement. You can't offer salvation. Obviously, salvation is based on the work of Christ on the cross, so if someone that God knows is non-elect, even though you don't know they're non-elect, on a Limited Atonement platform, there's no gospel to offer them, because they*

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[761] Ibid., 313.
[762] Adrian Rogers, *Why the Cross?: 1st Peter 3:18*, 1999.
[763] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 102.

> *can't be saved, because there's simply no atonement. Therefore, to offer them something that doesn't exist for them is disingenuous. Your High Calvinist will say, 'Well, yeah, but we don't know who the elect are,' but that totally misses the point. God knows who they are, and it's not you offering—you're just the delivery boy—God is the One who is doing the offering, and so it creates a problem for the character of God. In fact, what it does, it creates a situation where God is offering to people something that He Himself knows does not exist. That is a disingenuous offer and that impugns the character of God."*[764]

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God has not only elected a people unto salvation but has chosen to use particular means to accomplish His purpose. Specifically, He uses the preaching of the gospel to bring His elect unto salvation. Since we do not know who the elect are, we are to preach the gospel to every creature, trusting that God will honor His truth as He sees fit in the salvation of His people."*[765]

Our reply:

As already mentioned, the matter of Calvinists not knowing who the elect are is irrelevant to the problem at hand, and which ultimately damages God's character by offering what He would know is an illegitimate offer. Furthermore, a Calvinist is rendered incapable of positively telling any random sinner that the gospel is for them, personally, but only that the gospel is available to those who happen to be elect.

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"The impediment the Calvinist faces in evangelism is that the faith that is required for salvation is a faith that believes that God loves him or her as a sinner and yet the Calvinist does not believe that God loves anyone, but the elect. So how can a Calvinist tell an unbeliever to believe that God loves him, with personal meaning, if the Calvinist cannot know if it is true or not? The Calvinist cannot proclaim God's promise, which is the gospel, to an unbeliever that God does certainly love him and that the sinner can know without a doubt that if he believes in*

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[764] David Allen, *Unlimited Atonement: 1 John 2:1-2 with Dr. David Allen*, 35:00-35:58. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGGl9NWBbOQ

[765] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 321.

> *Jesus, God will save him. At the very best a Calvinist can say that God has a 'benevolent lovingkindness' toward those who are not the elect, but not that God so loves them that He actually wills their salvation. 'He loves me not' becomes a real possibility because of Calvinism. According to his doctrine, the Calvinist is unable to preach the gospel, because he cannot proclaim the certainty of God's promise in such a way that an unbeliever can be encouraged to lay hold of it by faith. When a 'Calvinist' does seek to persuade sinners to come to Christ based upon God's love for them it is only because he is not allowing his Calvinism to get in the way of the gospel."*[766]

2nd Corinthians 6:1-2

"And working together with Him, **we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain**—for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' **behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'**"

Similarly, Paul states: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and **His grace toward me did not prove vain**; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me." (1st Corinthians 15:10) Set in the context of salvation, Paul urges the Corinthians "not to receive the grace of God in vain," which Calvinists would need to explain in light of Irresistible Grace. Could one really receive an Irresistible Grace in vain, and if so, how?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Why does the day of salvation come? It is because it is the accepted time which God in His undeserved favour has ordained. In the meantime we must hold fast to Paul's purpose which is to teach the need for undelaying urgency, so that we may not miss the opportunity, for it is displeasing to God when His proffered grace is received with coolness and indifference. … This is a beautiful passage that has great comfort for us, since we know that as long as the Gospel is preached to us, the door into the kingdom of God is open to us, and there is raised up before us a sign of God's kindness to invite us to accept salvation, for when we are called to receive it, we may be sure that we have an opportunity of doing so. But unless we grasp this opportunity, we must fear Paul's implied threat that soon the door will be closed*

[766] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 181-182.

to all who have not entered at the right time. For retribution of this kind always follows contempt of the Word."[767]

Our reply:

How can one "miss the opportunity" to receive a unilateral, involuntary, irresistible regeneration? How can Irresistible Grace be "received with coolness and indifference"? Ironically, one Calvinist attempting to denounce free-will once shouted from the pulpit: "You think you had a *hand* in your salvation!" and yet here is an example of John Calvin using such a phrase as "unless we *grasp* this opportunity…."

2nd Corinthians 8:16-17
"But thanks be to God who **puts the same earnestness on your behalf in the heart of Titus**. For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest, **he has gone to you of his own accord**."

The Bible uses various phrases for free-will, such as "self-will" (Genesis 49:6; Titus 1:7), "own initiative" (Luke 12:57), "authority over his own will, and has decided this in his own heart" (1st Corinthians 7:37), "voluntarily" (1st Corinthians 9:17) and "own accord" (2nd Corinthians 8:17), not to mention the seventeen Old Testament references to "freewill" offerings. (Ezra 7:13)

What do Calvinists believe?

Here God "puts the same earnestness" as theirs "in the heart of Titus," which resulted in him going of his "own accord." This illustrates how God can *cause* someone to come of their *own* accord. It is not contradictory. It did not make Titus a robot. And God didn't send him kicking and screaming. For those of you who have a hard time understanding this concept that Calvinists espouse as the Biblical method of salvation, does this passage clear anything up?

Our reply:

Is Titus an unbeliever? If not, then it is an apples-to-oranges comparison to use an illustration on the motivation of a willing *believer* to illustrate how an unwilling *unbeliever* is "made willing." Moreover, "puts

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[767] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: II Corinthians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, translated by T.A. Smail (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 84.

the same earnestness" cannot be an example of regeneration if Titus was already regenerated. There's simply no evidence of Irresistible Grace in this passage for which Calvinists to base their appeal.

2nd Corinthians 9:6-7

"Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, **not grudgingly or under compulsion**, for **God loves a cheerful giver**."

God wants for people to give to Him *freely*, based upon what is in their heart to give to Him, which is something that He "loves." However, in Calvinism, it works exactly the opposite in salvation, in which God makes coming to Him in salvation something that is *compulsory* through an Irresistible Grace. Calvinism is, therefore, inconsistent with the general principle of what God loves. It stands to reason that if God loves for us to give to Him freely, then He would also love for us to come to Him and reciprocate His love in the same manner, meaning freely.

Chapter 13: The Book of Galatians

Galatians 1:6-9

"I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a **different gospel**; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to **distort the gospel of Christ**. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, **if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed**!"

Similarly, 2nd Corinthians 11:4 states: "For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which **you have not received**, or a **different gospel** which you have not accepted, **you bear this beautifully**." To avoid preaching a false gospel, simply follow the documented examples found in the Bible, such as at Acts 17:22-31, Romans 10:8-13, 1st Corinthians 15:1-11, ect.

> **Acts 17:22-31:** "So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." **Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you**. The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, "For we also are His children." Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.'"

Romans 10:8-13: "But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart'—that is, the **word of faith which we are preaching**, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

1st Corinthians 15:1-2: "**Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you**, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures**, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also. For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, **so we preach and so you believed**."

If this is the biblical gospel, and if there is no Calvinism to be found in it, then to demand belief in Calvinism as comprising the gospel, or demand it as a test of fellowship, perhaps even including salvation, therefore risks introducing a very real sense of Galatianism into the church, along with Paul's forewarned "curse."

What do Calvinists believe?

Charles Spurgeon: *"I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what nowadays is called Calvinism. It is a nickname to*

> *call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel, if we do not preach justification by faith, without works; nor unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel, unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called, and suffers the children of God to be burned in the fires of damnation after having once believed in Jesus. Such a gospel I abhor."*[768]

Our reply:

Since Acts 17:22-31, Romans 10:8-13 and 1st Corinthians 15:1-11 are all missing the Five Points of Calvinism, was Paul guilty of failing to preach the gospel? Equally alarming is the absence of the aggressive passion of Calvinism in the writings of the apostles. In other words, Calvinists make it abundantly clear what they believe about Calvinism, as the comment from Charles Spurgeon demonstrates, and Calvinists can be very insistent and confrontational about Calvinism, and so that begs the question of why the apostles did not share the same trait? That fact alone is one of the most important red flags against Calvinism. Their spirit does not match that of the apostles.

Does the Bible show that the apostles often ridiculed free-will, as Calvinists do? Did the apostles ever warn us about the peril of when faith can become a work, in the absence of Irresistible Grace? Did they ever tell us that humanity is born completely unable to receive God's free gift of grace? Did they ever tell us that Jesus did not die for everyone? Did they ever tell us that humanity is composed of those who are born "elect" with a birthright for Heaven versus those who are born "non-elect" as predestined for Hell? Did they ever push a version of "sovereignty" necessitating God having to determine whatsoever comes to pass, though without making Him culpable for the sin that He ordains, due to first and second causes? Calvinists will insist that every one of these things is clearly in Scripture, even though it is completely assumed in the texts provided. Equally worrisome is the fact that the Gnostics affirmed much of these things, that is, the same Gnostics whom the apostles rebuked.

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[768] *A Defense of Calvinism by Charles Spurgeon.* http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols7-9/chs002.pdf

As an illustration, a strong argument can be made against the "theory of evolution" on the grounds of missing transitional species in the fossil record, which should otherwise be *predominant*. In the same way, if the apostles bore the same spirit of modern Calvinists, then Calvinism should be predominant in the pages of the Bible and in the writings of the early Church fathers. Yet, this is not so—another serious red flag.

If Calvinists wish to claim that someone in the early Church, prior to Augustine, was preaching proto-Calvinism in any sort of comprehensive fashion, then who is it? We cannot accept it as proof if someone simply wished to cite quotations from the early Church using words like "elect," "election," and "predestination" because those are biblical terms that Jacob Arminius used plenty. Election doesn't necessarily mean Unconditional Election, and predestination doesn't necessarily mean everything is predestined.

So, is Calvinism a heresy? Are Calvinists heretics? For the most part, Calvinists are *inconsistent*. Consistent Calvinists are typically Hyper Calvinists, "flattening out" the deterministic logic of Calvinism and following it to its dreadful, logical conclusions. Sometimes we run into such individuals and their comments leave us aghast. The reality is that most Calvinists affirm the core principles of the gospel, even if they sometimes contradict themselves privately by affirming that Calvinism is the gospel, or that coming to the "Doctrines of Grace" is akin to a "salvation within salvation."

Galatians 1:15-16

"But when God, who had **set me apart even from my mother's womb** and **called me through His grace**, was **pleased to reveal His Son in me** so that I might **preach Him among the Gentiles**, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood."

Similarly, Jeremiah 1:5 states regarding the prophet Jeremiah: "'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and **before you were born I consecrated you**; I have **appointed you a prophet** to the nations.'" For Jeremiah and Paul, this was a call to service, one as a prophet and the other as an apostle. For God to raise up such individuals for the greater blessings of reaching mankind should be seen as a reflection of God's care and concern for a lost world whom He mercifully wishes to reach. Texts such as these do not advance Calvinism because they do not establish a limited elect body, such as Calvinism's fixed upper caste of elect vs. Calvinism's fixed lower caste of non-elect.

Why did God show mercy to Paul? Paul answers: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer

and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet **I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief**; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus." (1st Timothy 1:12-14) So there was a reason why God showed mercy on Paul, and it wasn't due to an inscrutable mystery, and moreover such grace could be squandered: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and **His grace toward me did not prove vain**; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." (1st Corinthians 15:10-11) Therefore, there may be those, *unlike* Paul, who indeed rendered the grace of God in vain, as Paul warns at 2nd Corinthians 6:1-2 states: "And working together with Him, **we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain**—for He says, 'At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you.' Behold, now is 'the acceptable time,' behold, now is 'the day of salvation.'" So Paul didn't think in terms of an Irresistible Call.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"If anyone knew that the idea of 'free will' was a myth, it was Paul. It was not free will that knocked Paul to the ground on the road to Damascus. It was not free will that blinded him. Paul was not 'seeking after God' nor the Savior, Jesus Christ on that day when God chose to reveal His Son to him. No, God determined the day and the hour, and Paul was only happy to oblige. He preached a powerful grace, a grace that saves rebel sinners hard of heart, a grace that stops the elect in their tracks and changes them."*[769]

Our reply:

Proof that God used *externally* persuasive means to ensure His message was sent, does not prove that God uses *internally*, irresistible means to ensure that some will believe that message.

Galatians 3:1-6

"You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: **did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?**"

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[769] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 290.

In Calvinism, the answer is *neither*, in that the Spirit is not received by the works of the Law, nor by hearing with faith, but rather, the Spirit is received by regeneration, through election, resulting in both faith and works. This shows that Calvinism's doctrine of pre-faith regeneration is out of sync with Scripture. We receive the Spirit by hearing with faith, exactly as Ephesians 1:13 also states.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The same objection applies here that was stated above: if a person can have saving faith without the new birth, then what does the new birth accomplish? Evidently, one does not need the new birth to obey God's commands or have saving faith."*[770]

Our reply:

Turning to Christ confesses our sinful condition, acknowledges our need for transformation and welcomes Christ's promise of eternal life, in which God gives us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a changed nature.

As an analogy, for someone with a drug addiction to admit that they need help, does not require that they already be transformed. They simply have to hit rock bottom and acknowledge their need for help. For many who had hit rock bottom, spiritually speaking, their testimony has been that Jesus was the last person that they were seeking, but when they had nowhere else to turn, with no hope in anything else, they finally turned to Jesus Christ and allowed Him to work His miracle in their life, and the result was that they had become a changed person. That's what regeneration accomplishes, and God does this for those who are willing. God, for His part, always stands willing and desires to help, because He really does love us.

Galatians 4:9

"But now that **you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God**, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"

A few verses are similar to this:

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[770] Ibid., 185.

> **John 10:14**: "'I am the good shepherd, and **I know My own and My own know Me**.'"
>
> **1st Corinthians 8:2-3**: "If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but **if anyone loves God, he is known by Him**."
>
> **2nd Timothy 2:19**: "Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, '**The Lord knows those who are His**,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.'"

So, who does God know that are His? The answer is "anyone who loves God." That is who is "known by Him." So, the connection is by a mutual and intimate, interpersonal relationship with God. Either this is something that we are born with, or it is something that we grow into. Since no one is born as a believer, it would stand to reason that being one of Christ's sheep (or follower) is something that results from conversion rather than birth.

Chapter 14: The Book of Ephesians

Ephesians 1:3-4
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every **spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places **in Christ**, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

Similarly, 2nd Corinthians 1:20 states: "For **as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes**; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us." Calvinists teach that Ephesians 1:4 indicates that some people were born chosen, from eternity past, to become believers by effectual means (i.e. Irresistible Grace), such that some people were *predestined to become believers*. This forms the Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Election. As a result, many Calvinists incorrectly recall Ephesians 1:4 as stating: "God chose us from before the foundation of the world." The problem is that they've left off "in Him." Why does that happen? The answer is because that is *extraneous information* for their Confirmation Bias. In a Confirmation Bias, a person will essentially see only what they want to see, and then just discard the rest. That's exactly what happens to the Calvinist at Ephesians 1:4.

Key Fact #1

Ephesians 1:4 is only *half of a sentence*. The complete sentence begins with v.3, which ends up becoming an essential point that Calvinists overlook because they already got everything they wanted from v.4.

Key Fact #2

Ephesians 1:4 begins with the words, "just as."[771] The relevance of this fact is that it means v.4 modifies v.3. So, in order to properly understand v.4, one needs to understand the point made in v.3, which v.4 illustrates. To properly understand the significance of "just as" at Ephesians 1:4, imagine if you received the following company announcement: "…*just as* you and your whole family will be invited to make the trip to Alaska as well." **How would you know whether this is good news or bad news, without knowing the prior clause?** Imagine if the prior clause had stated: "Given the merger, all remaining employees will be relocating to the new parent company's headquarters in Alaska, *just*

[771] That is true of the *NASB* which translates it is as "just as."

as you and your whole family will be invited to make the trip to Alaska as well." If you can't uproot your family and move to Alaska, then that might be bad news. However, imagine if the prior clause was this instead: "Given this year's record growth, our company is sponsoring a company-wide, all-expenses-paid Alaskan cruise, *just as* you and your whole family will be invited to make the trip to Alaska as well." That might be significantly better news. The whole point of saying this is to show the importance of considering the clause preceding "just as," so that we in a proper position to correctly understand what comes after "just as." (See Romans 9:12-13 for the same point.)

Key Fact #3

The principle of v.3 is that God has blessed "us" (more about that in a moment) "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." In other words, "every spiritual blessing" is for believing Christians, that is, those who are in Christ. So, if Irresistible Grace or Regeneration constituted a spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, then it would only be available for those who are "in Christ." We are not blessed apart from Christ, but rather we are blessed "in Christ," which is how God the Father honors His Son. The Father's spiritual blessings for the bride of Christ necessarily blesses Christ Himself because the *bride* of Christ is in the *body* of Christ. Christ is made the gateway to any reconciliation with God, though in Calvinism, elect-unbelievers are already secretly reconciled to God. While unbelievers have the **Common Grace** of Christ's Atonement made available to them, but the **spiritual blessing** of redemption (v.7) is only actualized in Christ for Christians.

Key Fact #4

Ephesians 1:1 defines "us" as "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus" and the "saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus," and more generally as believers, in which v.19 defines "us" as "us who believe," meaning that "us" is to be understood as believing Christians. In fact, v.3 refers to "our" Lord Jesus Christ. How could that apply to anyone except Christians? So, it is Christians, not unbelievers (key point), who are the recipients of God's eternally predestined spiritual blessings.

Key Fact #5

If v.3 contains the *principle* and v.4 contains the *example* of the principle, what is v.4's example? The example (of a spiritual blessing in Christ that Paul gives) is that God predestined those in Christ to stand holy

and blameless before God, which is 1:4b, and Paul further describes this particular spiritual blessing for the church at Ephesians 5:27: "…that He might present to Himself **the church** in all her glory, having **no spot or wrinkle** or any such thing; but that she would be **holy and blameless**." Notice how closely this *mirrors* Ephesians 1:4b: "that we would be **holy and blameless before Him**." It becomes abundantly clear that Paul was speaking of the spiritual blessings that God predestined for "the church." In one act of Adam and Eve's *unrighteousness* in the Garden of Eden, by depending upon their own wisdom and losing faith in God, they disobeyed, causing them to stand guilty before God. Conversely, in one act of Christ's *righteousness* at Calvary, by depending upon God's wisdom and maintaining faith in God, Jesus overcame the world, causing all who believe in Him to stand holy and blameless before God.

Key Fact #6

Believers are chosen "in Him" for all of the spiritual blessings that God predestined for the church. Hence, it is a *qualified* choice—meaning that we are chosen "in Him" as Christians. So, when Ephesians 3:11 speaks of God's "eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord," it pertains to Christians. Calvinists, on the other hand, insist that we (meaning Calvinism's elect-unbelievers) are chosen "to be" or "to become" in Christ, which is not what the text states, but that's the message that Calvinists are trying to get across with their theory of *chosen unbelievers*.

Key Fact #7

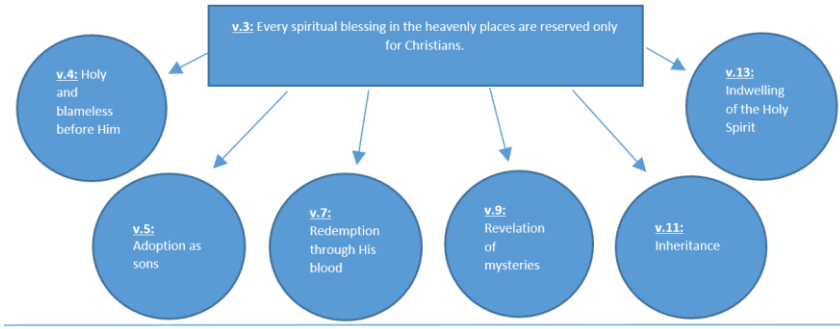
From verses 4 through v.14, Paul gives six examples of a "spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."

Principle Statement:

V.3: Every **spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places is only for Christians.

Examples:

V.4: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **holiness.**
V.5: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **adoption.**
V.7: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **redemption.**
V.9: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **revelation.**
V.11: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **inheritance.**
V.13: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's **indwelling.**



Additional spiritual blessings in Ephesians for believers are as follows:

2:4-5: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's eternal life in God.
2:10-11: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's holy calling.
3:11-12: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's access to God.
3:17-20: The spiritual blessing of a Christian's knowledge of God.

It's clear that Paul is speaking of spiritual blessings for believers, and not Calvinism's elect-unbelievers.

> Doug Sayers: *"This chapter of Ephesians is a wonderful listing of the many spiritual blessings, reserved for believers, in the heavenly places in Christ."*[772]

The essence of Ephesians chapter 1 is an explanation for what God has "brought about in Christ." (Ephesians 1:20) Recall when Esau asked his dying father, Isaac, for his blessing. When Esau realized that Jacob had tricked his father into already giving his blessing, he asked: "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." (Genesis 27:38) But, that was it. There was no more blessing, and Jacob got it. For unbelievers, there is no more blessing. It is only in Christ. Unbelievers will be left weeping like Esau.

What do Calvinists believe?

> William MacDonald: "*The Bible teaches definitely that God chose some before the foundation of the world to be in Christ."*[773]

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[772] *Chosen or Not? A Layman's Study of Biblical Election & Assurance* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 97.
[773] *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 1623.

> John Calvin: *"Scripture teaches us (Eph. 1:4-5) that we were freely adopted by God before we were born."*[774]

Our reply:

This is a clear reflection of a Confirmation Bias. Calvinists incorrectly recollect the verse without "in Christ" because for them it is just extraneous information. The only thing that matters to the Calvinist is that they are chosen...from before the foundation of the world, or at least they presume.

Calvinists have a selection of tools at their disposal from which to defend Calvinism from potential contradictions with Scripture, such as by invoking a mystery, or a Secret Will, or an anthropomorphism, or inserting "of the elect." So, what will Calvinists need to do at Ephesians 1:3-4 in order to address the fact that only Christians have access to God's spiritual blessings?

When it comes to Ephesians 1:4, Calvinists tend to generalize, while straying from the text. They'll ask things like, "Did God have people in mind while doing the choosing?" God is omniscient and cannot help but know everything, but such matters stray from the text itself. That's why it's important to get Calvinists to *focus on the text*, especially v.3, and for a very good reason, since the text doesn't teach the Calvinist narrative, at all, and in fact, directly contradicts it.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"I just also believe the undisputed and unrefuted fact that I come to Christ daily because the Father, on the sole basis of His mercy and grace, gave me to the Son in eternity past."*[775]

> John Calvin: *"First he points out the eternity of election, and then how we should think of it. Christ says that the elect always belonged to God. God therefore distinguishes them from the reprobate, not by faith, nor by any merit, but by pure grace; for*

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[774] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. III, and the Epistles of James and Jude*, translated by A.W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 270.
[775] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 306.

> *while they are far away from him, he regards them in secret as his own."*[776]

> John Calvin: *"This way of speaking, however, may seem to be different from many passages of Scripture which attribute to Christ the first foundation of God's love for us and show that outside Christ we are detested by God. But we ought to remember, as I have already said, that the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us is the first love given to us."*[777]

Our reply:

In this view, God has a spiritually blessed "elect class" from eternity, and as such, God never considers these "elect" individuals apart from their position "in Christ." These "elect" persons are never actually *outside* of being "in Christ." However, that would also imply that they were *born* "in Christ." But that creates another problem because Paul mentioned that some people were "in Christ" *before him*? So, how could he say that, if all of Calvinism's elect were in Christ from eternity past?

> **Romans 16:7:** "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, **who also were in Christ before me**."

> **Ephesians 2:13:** "But **now in Christ Jesus** you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

The only way for Calvinists to salvage Calvinism would be by interpreting Paul's comments to reflect merely an outward, visible manifestation of having previously been separate from Christ, in contrast to a *deeper sense* of Calvinists having been secretly hidden away in Christ all along, specifically from eternity. However, the Bible never mentions the idea of a half-way status with God. It's just the opposite:

> **Ephesians 2:12-13:** "Remember that you were at that time **separate** from Christ, **excluded** from the commonwealth of Israel, and **strangers** to the covenants of promise, **having no hope** and **without God in the world**. But now in Christ Jesus you who

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[776] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 393.
[777] Ibid., 76.

> formerly were **far off** have been **brought near** by the blood of Christ."

Calvinists would have to insist that Ephesians 2:12-13 doesn't refer to the secret-arrangement that God has with Calvinism's elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"In Christ, God has chosen a people to believe in his Son and receive eternal life."*[778]

Our reply:

No, God did not chose a people *to believe* in Christ. He chose to save a people who *do believe* in Christ, namely Christians. God has chosen to redeem only Christians, as a factor of every spiritual blessing being only for Christians, as stated in the previous clause of v.3. Ask Calvinists this question: Do you believe that God has predestined certain spiritual blessings for Christians? Congratulations! That's what Ephesians chapter 1 is all about. It has nothing to do with *preferred un-believers*.

> George Bryson: *"According to Reformed Theology, these individuals are not chosen in Him but chosen to be in Him. This distinction is crucial. To be chosen in Him is to be chosen as a believer."*[779]

Exactly! Being chosen "in Christ" means being chosen *in connection with* Christ. By contrast, being chosen "to be" in Christ, as per Calvinism, means being chosen to become something that you previously were not, and that is a significant difference.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"What dominates this wonderful section of Scripture is the idea that God has brought about salvation by His own will, and His own purpose, and His own design and to the praise of His own glory."*[780]

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[778] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 126.
[779] *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing (CCP), 2004), 123.
[780] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

Our reply:

And God has done it all in Christ, as there is not a single salvific benefit apart from actual union with Christ.

> J. Vernon McGee: *"In Christ is the high word of this epistle. The wonderful counterpart of it is that Christ is in us. In Christ--that is our position. Christ is in us--that is our possession. That is the practical side of it."*[781]
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> J. Vernon McGee: *"God chose believers in Christ before the foundation of the world, way back in eternity past."*[782]
>
> J. Vernon McGee: *"I cannot repeat often enough that election is God's choosing us in Christ."*[783]
>
> J. Vernon McGee: *"God sees the believer in Christ and He accepts the believer just as He receives His own Son. That is wonderful. That is the only basis on which I will be in heaven. I cannot stand there on the merit of Vernon McGee. I am accepted only in the Beloved. God loves me just as He loves Christ, because I am in Christ."*[784]
>
> J. Vernon McGee: *"It is the overall purpose and plan of God that believers should have a part in Christ's inheritance. They are going to inherit with Christ because they are in Christ."*[785]

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"We are chosen unto salvation. We are chosen to belong to Him. When you look at your salvation, then thank God. Thank God! Because you are a Christian because He chose you. I don't understand the mystery of that. That's just what the word of God teaches. That is the most humbling doctrine in all of Scripture. I take no credit, not even credit for my faith. It all came from Him. He chose me. He selected people to be made holy in*

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[781] *Thru the Bible commentary series: Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 103-104.
[782] Ibid., 27.
[783] Ibid., 33.
[784] Ibid., 38.
[785] Ibid., 50.

> *order to be with Him forever. Why he selected me, I will never know. I'm no better than anyone else. I'm worse than many. But He chose me."*[786]

Our reply:

In other words, God chose certain unbelievers to believe, and then Calvinists are left trying to figure out the mystery of *why* God would choose one unbeliever over another. The entire premise of Calvinists is mistaken because Paul is not talking about unbelievers. This passage is all about God's predestined spiritual blessings for *believing Christians*.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God the Father chose a particular and personal people in Christ Jesus before time itself. It was God's choice. God was the active agent. The direct object of His eternal choice is 'us.' Why emphasize this? Because many try to circumvent the passage by saying that God has simply chosen to save or to make salvation possible, but the passage nowhere teaches this. He chose a people, not a plan. He chose us in union with Jesus Christ."*[787]

> James White: *"The direct object is us. The realm of that choice is in Christ. But we are the direct object."*[788]

> James White: *"So the 'us' in the next verse—'the elect' just as to the whole thing—'just as He chose us that we might be holy and blameless before Him in love.'"*[789]

Our reply:

God indeed chose a people. They are called Christians! God chose Christians, which honors His Son. Christians are the beneficiaries of all of God's predestined spiritual blessings, and God has invited everyone, indiscriminately, to become a Christian, as God is not wishing for any to

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[786] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.
[787] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 92.
[788] James White, *Reaction: Kevin Thompson views Debunked by Ephesians 1:4*, 4:38 – 4:47, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxWejVuH2Z8.
[789] Ibid., 6:34 – 6:48.

perish, but for all to come to repentance. The "us" is "us who believe" (v.19), meaning *believing* Christians.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"You can try to break this up all you want. You can try to import other theological concepts into it all you want. The text says what the text says.*"[790]

Our reply:

That is a breath-taking display of hypocrisy. Calvinists frequently *break up* the text by omitting "in Christ" from their quotations of Ephesians 1:4[791], and then take v.4 out of context from its key relationship with v.3. Moreover, it's Calvinists who *import theological concepts*, such as by inferring Calvinism's "elect" into the word "us," in which "us" actually refers to believing Christians, not Calvinism's elect-unbelievers.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"In other words, God, the Triune God, in eternity past, chose to save a particular people."*[792]

Our reply:

And who are those "particular people"? Non-Calvinists believe that it is a people "in Christ," namely, Christians. In other words, the eternal plan and purpose of God is to redeem Christians, that is, believers, all for the purpose of honoring God's Son. The "particular people" would not be "preferred-unbelievers," as Calvinism depicts. The text never even mentions a concept of Calvinism's preferred unbelievers.

First and foremost in Calvinism, you are not supremely blessed because you became a Christian, but instead you were supremely blessed because you were a preferred-unbeliever. In other words, in Calvinism, being a Christian is neither pivotal nor the turning point, in order to access God's spiritual blessings. Rather, being secretly loved and chosen from eternity as a preferred-unbeliever is the tipping point. Such a person's specialness to God is thus derived from something *other than* knowing Christ, but is instead derived from a special, secret relationship hidden in

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[790] Ibid., 6:59 – 7:09.
[791] See the list shown at http://www.examiningcalvinism.com/files/Paul/Eph1_4.html
[792] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxWejVuH2Z8, 11:50 – 11:59.

God the Father. So, although we typically speak of being "in Christ" as the source of all of our spiritual blessings and privileged status with God the Father, the paradigm of Calvinism depicts one secretly being hidden "in the Father" as the *true origin* of all of our divine spiritual blessings. Obviously, this would circumvent and undermine the mediatorship of Christ, and render the Cross as little more than a rubber stamp of Calvinistic secret Election. Thus, what Calvinism brings to the table is the demotion of the Cross, replacing it with a deeper sense of hidden Election, captured in the alleged secret "purposes" of God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"If God from all eternity purposed to save one portion of the human race and not another, the purpose of the cross would be to redeem these chosen ones to himself. We can know whether we belong to that number."*[793]

Our reply:

God purposed from all eternity to save *believers*, but in Calvinism, God purposed from all eternity to turn Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers* into believers—and to save them alone.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Sam Storms: *"Divine election is not merely corporate, but also of individuals. Whereas it is true that Christ is himself the Elect One, and whereas it is true that the Church is the chosen or elect people of God, individuals are themselves chosen by God to believe in Christ in order that they might become members of the church. In other words, God didn't simply choose the church. He chose the specific individuals who would comprise the church."*[794]

Our reply:

If God chose which individuals would become believers, as per Calvinism, then that would become tantamount to a choice of preferred-unbelievers, and then Calvinists would be left trying to figure out why some are preferred in the first place. Moreover, how could there be

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[793] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 187.
[794] Sam Storms, *10 Things You Should Know about Election*, 4/19/2016.

preferred-unbelievers if God excludes spiritual blessings from unbelievers and only gives them to Christians instead?

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Conditional election is usually based on God's foreknowledge of human actions and responses. This is often called the prescient view of election or predestination. The term prescience or pre-science simply refers to foreknowledge. The idea is that from all eternity God looks down the tunnel of time and knows in advance who will respond to the gospel positively and who will not. He knows in advance who will exercise faith and who will not. On the basis of this prior knowledge, God chooses some."*[795]

Our reply:

That is the **Wesleyan Foreknowledge Model of Election**, and it is not shared by all non-Calvinists. Conversely, in the **Corporate model of Election**, election is for the package of spiritual blessings accompanying being in Christ. As such, Jesus is the elect One, and saved Christian believers are called "elect" solely on account of being identified with Him. As an analogy, if a husband wins a mega-millions lottery, the wife who is married to him is also a winner because she is identified with him as part of a legal union. So when we enter spiritual union with Christ, we become part of His election, including the spiritual blessings that come with it.

> Walls and Dongell: *"It is in him that we have been chosen and predestined (Eph 1:4-5), just as it is in him that we have been seated in heavenly places (Eph 2:6-7). This means that Jesus Christ himself is the chosen one, the predestined one. Whenever one is incorporated into him by grace through faith, one comes to share in Jesus' special status as chosen of God."*[796]

> John Parkinson: *"In our consideration of Christ as God's elect, chosen and beloved, we have the key to understanding our election. Christ is the chosen of God and we are chosen in Him*

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[795] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 142.
[796] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 76.

(v.4). Christ is the beloved of God and we are accepted in the Beloved. (v.6)"[797]

Calvinist objection:

If this passage is about Christians being elected, then why would Christians, who are already saved, even need to be unconditionally elected to salvation?

Our reply:

Christians are *not being elected to believe*. Rather, Christians are being elected to receive the exclusive set of spiritual blessings promised in Ephesians 1:3, which Paul then exemplifies in Ephesians 1:4-13 (i.e. of Christians being spiritually blessed to stand holy and blameless before God, to receive adoption as sons, to receive redemption in Christ's blood, to receive revelation of mysteries, to receive an inheritance and to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit).

Calvinist objection:

Arminians believe that when Ephesians 1:4 says "chosen in Him," it doesn't mean "elected unto salvation," but instead God choosing those [He foreknows someday would be willing to believe] to get "into Christ."

Our reply:

The text has nothing to do with God choosing *unbelievers* (or foreseen believers) to get "into Christ." Being "chosen in Him" indeed means "elected unto salvation," in as much as God elected for *believers* in Christ to uniquely receive God's predestined array of spiritual blessing, including "election unto **salvation**," which is plainly evident at Ephesians 1:7 which states that "in Him we have **redemption** through His blood, the **forgiveness** of our trespasses." In other words, one must be a believer "in Christ" or "in Him" in order to be eligible to receive God's predestined spiritual blessing of "election unto salvation." The text has nothing to do with unbelievers, meaning that it's not about getting unbelievers "into Christ" but what all God has predestined in Christ for the believer.

Consider the following analogy of a commercial airplane and its flight plan. The person who gets on the plane is the believer in Christ, and

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[797] *The Faith of God's Elect - a comparison between the election of Scripture and the election of Theology* (Glasgow, Scotland: Gospel Tract Publications, 1999), 30.

the destination of the plane, or flight plan, is to receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, specifically including salvation. The problem with Calvinists is that they conclude that: *God chose me before the foundation of the world, both before I believed and in order to believe*. Then, certain pious platitudes trap themselves into that type of thinking by saying: *In no way do we initiate salvation by our will or are we saved by our decision to receive Christ*. It's difficult to free a person from their own Confirmation Bias if they really like it, a lot. Sometimes a good question can help unlock a closed mind. For instance, you can ask: Do you believe that God chose and predestined—before the foundation of the world—all of the spiritual blessings that He intended for the Church? Calvinists will generally acknowledge this, and that's important because it can help them to see that that's what Ephesians 1:3-14 is really all about. It's not about unbelievers. It's about what all God has prepared in advance for believers.

Calvinist objection:

> James White: *"And, of course, unless one inserts some concept into the passage from outside, it is clearly the author's intention to place this decision completely outside the realm of human activity by placing it in the timeless realms of eternity. This election unto salvation is plainly unconditional, for how could those who do not yet exist fulfill the necessary conditions for their election?"*[798]

Our reply:

What is in the timeless realm of eternity is God's preparation for how He will spiritually bless those who believe in His Son, and naturally this honors His Son because it means that all must be in Him in order to get into any favored status with God the Father. Again, God is not choosing from eternity who will or who won't believe in Him.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"God's choosing us 'in him before the creation of the world' (Eph 1:4, 11) refers to union with Christ before creation. The words cannot speak of actual union with Christ because we didn't exist before we were created. Rather, they speak of God's planning to join us to Christ."*[799]

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[798] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 93.
[799] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 58.

Our reply:

If God is "planning" to join any *unbeliever* to Christ, then wouldn't that *effectual plan to join them to Christ* constitute a spiritual blessing, of which, Ephesians 1:3 informs us is completely unavailable to all except believing Christians alone? Moreover, it is agreed that no one was in Christ *from eternity*, which is reinforced by the fact that not everyone becomes in Christ *at the same time*: "Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, **who also were in Christ before me**." (Romans 16:7) So, if people become in Christ *at different points in time*, then Calvinists cannot claim that Calvinism's elect existed in Christ perpetually from all eternity, which otherwise would be necessary, in order to remain consistent with Ephesians 1:3, as the basis for claiming a single spiritual blessing.

Calvinist objection:

Ephesians 1:4 represents a very *personal* election of specific individuals to salvation, whereas the alternative interpretation would be an empty-set election, as an *impersonal* plan for whosoever *just so happens* to become a Christian, without any thought or regard as to who might actually be included.

Our reply:

By "specific individuals," the implication is specific *unbelievers*, and yet the passage is not about unbelievers, but about the predestination of spiritual blessings unique to believers. The eternal plan of God in Christ is to save and bless Christians, and for God's part, He desires that everyone become a Christian.

So it comes to this: Has God decreed for certain individuals to be placed in Him? Or, has God decreed for all who are in Him to receive a predestined inheritance? If one follows the principle of Ephesians 1:3, the latter is found to be the correct answer.

Ephesians 1:5-6

"In love **He predestined us to adoption as sons** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, **which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved**."

"Us" who? "…us who believe." (v.19) God predestined for us [who believe] to receive adoption as sons. That's a spiritual blessing, and we know from Ephesians 1:3 that all spiritual blessings are exclusive to

those who are in Christ. So, this is *not about lost people* being adopted to become believers, but rather about *believers* being adopted by God to receive all that God has brought about in Christ. Galatians 3:26 states: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus."

Romans 8:23 shows that Paul sees such adoption as a *future* hope for believers: "And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons**, the redemption of our body." Regardless of whether one interprets "adoption" as present or future, it is nonetheless a "spiritual blessing" (v.3) exclusive to *believers* in Christ.

Since I'm a Christian, I'm predestined to receive an adoption as a son, as are all Christians. Being "in Christ" is the place of spiritual privilege, which is consistent with the driving principle of v.3, in which all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places are reserved in Christ. Moreover, God indiscriminately invites all men to take part in this unique privilege. However, by contrast, Calvinists perceive themselves as "elect," not in the sense of being a Christian (or depending on the context, being a Jew), but being "elect" in the sense of being predestined to become a Christian. Non-Calvinists, however, do not believe that anyone is predestined to become a Christian, but rather that Christians are predestined to all spiritual blessings. That's the fundamental difference.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"He predestines us to adoption as sons. Again, all believers are adopted into the family of God: Any person who is not a child of God has not experienced redemption."*[800]

Our reply:

That's exactly the point. The context deals with believers. It has nothing to do with the assertion of God adopting *elect-unbelievers*.

> Dave Hunt: *"This is not predestination of certain sinners unto salvation but of the redeemed to 'all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ'—a bonus added to salvation."*[801]

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[800] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 93.
[801] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 102.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Upon what basis does God choose one and not another? 'According to the kind intention of His will.' It is God's will, God's purpose, God's intention that determines the issue. How else could it be in light of the next phrase, 'to the praise of the glory of His grace'?"*[802]

Our reply:

The context is not about God choosing one but not another. Instead, it deals with God's desire to be extravagant in His predestined spiritual blessings for the body of Christ "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:7)

Therefore, to parlay that into speculation on whether God desires some but not all to become members of the body of Christ would be an unwarranted leap of logic. Moreover, we already know from the parable of the Wedding Feast that God desired to be both generous to His banquet guests and also to be omnibenevolent toward all who may wish to attend, in his indiscriminate invitation of anyone and everyone.

Ephesians 1:11-12

"**In Him also we have obtained an inheritance**, having been predestined according to His purpose who **works all things after the counsel of His will**, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory."

Similarly, Romans 8:28 states: "And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God**, to those who are called according to His purpose." This reflects a *qualified* reference to "all things," consistent within the theme of how God works in Christ, specifically in the lives of believers. However, Calvinists *unqualify* "all things" to argue that God causes everything, both holy and sinful, even though the first chapter of Ephesians never speaks of God causing sin. So, Calvinists have misapplied a text in order to prove Determinism.

The key to understanding Ephesians 1:11 is to understand it in relation to the principle statement of 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ**." Verses 4-14 discuss spiritual blessings that are "in Christ." God's spiritual blessing stated in v.11 is an

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[802] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 93.

"inheritance." In order for anyone to *access* God's spiritual blessing of a predestined inheritance in Christ, one must obviously become in Christ. No one is predestined to become in Christ, but whenever anyone does become in Christ, they can access what God predestined in Christ. In other words, there is a predestined treasure chest in Christ. One must become in Christ in order to access the treasure chest. Exactly how one becomes "in Christ" is stated in vv.13-14.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The apostle describes God as working 'all things after the counsel of His will.' This is a truth that human religion cannot abide. Surely the Scriptures do not mean all things! Surely this just means that God created all things but now sort of lets them run on their own, does it not? No, God is the one who works all things after the counsel of His will. Let the questions come, the God of the Bible is more than able to answer the most difficult ones men can ask."*[803]

> Theodore Zachariades: *"The main reason why I became a Calvinist, if that's the term, is because I recognize that in Ephesians chapter 1 (and this is one of those few places, gentlemen, where 'all' means all) God works all things after the council of His will, even keeping those kings who want to commit adultery from committing so, and when He wants to, He orders those to commit adultery, when He wants to."*[804]

Our reply:

The referenced king is Abimelech of Genesis 20:1-7, and the text tells us why God kept him from taking Sarah as his wife, which is because he was innocent, given that he was lied to, and that Sarah was not Abraham's sister but his wife, and after having been properly informed, God warned him that he would be a dead-man, should he continue to try to take Sarah as his wife. So the narrative is not teaching that God is behind all acts of adultery.

Whenever one encounters a biblical text mentioning "all," it first needs to be determined whether it is a *qualified* or *unqualified* reference. For example, Romans 3:23 states: "For **all** have sinned and fall short of the

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[803] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 94-95.
[804] *Free Will Debate: What is the Biblical View of Free Will?, 43:42-44:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfyOmkaDtMg.*

glory of God." That is an *unqualified* "all," since literally everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, have succumbed to sin.[805] 1st Timothy 4:10 states: "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of **all men**, especially of believers." This is also an *unqualified* "all," meaning everyone, since believers are spoken of as a subset, indicated by the word "especially." Philippians 4:13 states: "I can do **all things** through Him who strengthens me." This, conversely, is a *qualified* "all things," since it is implicit that it refers to those things which pertain to godly financial integrity, and surely does not mean that one can do all things inclusive of sin and evil. Jesus stated at Matthew 19:26: "With people this is impossible, but with God **all things** are possible." Obviously, sin is not possible with God, so this particular reference is reasonably *qualified*.

So the principle of qualification needs to be kept in mind when interpreting Ephesians 1:11's reference to "all things." The passage never mentions God causing sin and evil. Instead, it refers to all that which God has accomplished in Christ and predestined for the believer, such as the "summing up of all things in Christ" (v.10), in terms of a believer's predestined "inheritance." (v.11) So, rather than this being about God's determination of all things, inclusive of sin, this is about what God has accomplished in Christ: "Seeing that His divine power has **granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." (2nd Peter 1:3)

Considered further, as an analogy, if I told you that a certain woman I know accomplishes everything according to the counsel of her will, would you suppose that I meant that she causes all things that happen in the universe? Or, would you instead think I was simply saying that she does everything that she does, just the way that she wants to? Perhaps she manages to get her way in everything that she asserts herself in. "All things" in such a context with God is unlikely to mean all things *without qualification*, but all things *with qualification* (as in, all things that God does). This would indicate God's sovereign freedom to accomplish whatever He chooses, such as guaranteeing our "inheritance," and that's exactly what the context is talking about. The context assures us that we Christians will certainly obtain the inheritance that God has promised us, just as God accomplishes everything according to the counsel of His will, and He has made known His will, concerning giving believers a glorious inheritance.[806]

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[805] However, Romans 3:23 is also reasonably a *qualified* reference with respect to adults, since only adults are the subject of the context—not babies and infants.

[806] Helpful illustration provided by **The Society of Evangelical Arminians**.

Ephesians 1:13-14
"In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also **believed**, you were **sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory."

Similarly, 2nd Corinthians 1:21-22 states: "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God, who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge." Being sealed in Christ means being established in Christ, marking our entrance into the Body of Christ, whereupon the believer is made "one spirit" with God through the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as two become one. (1st Corinthians 6:16-17) 2nd Corinthians 5:17 also states: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

> Dave Hunt: *"Clearly, believing the gospel precedes the sealing with the Holy Spirit."*[807]
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> Doug Sayers: *"The Calvinist teaches that they heard because God irresistibly gave them ears to hear, but that is not stated here in Ephesians. It is an inference. Unbelievers can hear the truth but that does not guarantee a positive response of trust."*[808]
>
> George Bryson: *"The Calvinist contends that the elect believe because they are in Christ, while Scripture makes it clear that we are in Christ because this is where God places the believer when he believes."*[809]

Since Calvinism's doctrine of Irresistible Grace teaches that "regeneration *precedes* faith," a conflict occurs at Ephesians 1:13, which shows that the sealing of the Holy Spirit comes *after* faith, not before. So, Calvinists therefore interpret the sealing by the Holy Spirit as *distinct* from regeneration, in so much that Calvinism's elect are first regenerated by the Holy Spirit as new creations in Christ (Part I), and then after "listening" and having "believed" in the gospel, they are then sealed in Christ (Part II), which comes as a form of personal confirmation.

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[807] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 114.
[808] *Chosen or Not? A Layman's Study of Biblical Election & Assurance* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 97.
[809] *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing (CCP), 2004), 121.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"But here he seems to subject the sealing of the Spirit to faith. If so, faith precedes it. I answer, the effect of the Spirit in faith is twofold, corresponding to the two chief parts of which faith consists. It enlightens the intellect (mens) and also confirms the thinking (aminus). The commencement of faith is knowledge; its completion is a firm and steady conviction, which admits of no opposing doubt. Each, I have said, is the work of the Spirit. No wonder, then, if Paul should declare that the Ephesians not only received by faith the truth of the Gospel, but also were confirmed in it by the seal of the Holy Spirit."*[810]

Our reply:

Even a proposed two-fold operation of the Holy Spirit still does not solve the Calvinist dilemma since Ephesians 1:3 makes it clear that "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" is only "in Christ" for the believing Christian, and so, any such two-fold operation of the Holy Spirit would still constitute a spiritual blessing that is only available to believers. In other words, even if there was such a thing as an Irresistible Grace, then like regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, it would only be available to Christians, rather than Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers*, thus depriving Calvinism of a key mechanism to overcome Total Inability.

Ephesians 2:1-3
"And you were **dead in your trespasses and sins**, in which you formerly **walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, even as the rest."

Similarly, Isaiah 59:2 states: "But **your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God**, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." Being "dead in your trespasses and sins" means "separation," in terms of being *under God's wrath in disobedience*, as "children of wrath." However, Calvinists infer that it means an inability to believe the gospel apart from an Irresistible Grace.

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[810] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, translated by T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 132.

What do Calvinists believe?

We are "dead" in our trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1) *Dead* people cannot make choices, and although we are dead in sin, God made us "alive." (Ephesians 2:5)

Our reply:

But the spiritually dead do make choices, having "**walked** according to the course of this world." (Ephesians 2:2) What must the spiritually "dead" do, in order to receive spiritual life? Calvinists will instinctively answer: "Nothing. There's nothing we can do to bring ourselves to life. The Holy Spirit must first give us life." However, Jesus provides the correct answer at John 5:40: "And you are unwilling to come to Me **so that you may have life**." Jesus offered "life" to those who come to Him. So, it's not a matter of already having spiritual life, and then coming to Him to get spiritual life, again, perhaps as a second time. Moreover, Luke 15:24 uses the same "dead" vs. "alive" dichotomy, but where does it mention anything about an unconscious corpse? It simply meant being cut off or separated from the family: "'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was **dead** and has come to **life** again; he was **lost** and has been **found**.' And they began to celebrate." (Luke 15:22-24)

Calvinist: Dead means "corpse."

Non-Calvinist: Where does Ephesians 2:1 say "corpse"?

Calvinist: Well, that's what "dead" means.

Non-Calvinist: Not *spiritual* death.

Calvinist: So, what do you think "dead" means? Just sick?

Non-Calvinist: Spiritual death conveys being *cut off*.

What do Calvinists believe?

In Arminianism, the lost possess the power to bring themselves back to life, unlike Lazarus who first required a resurrection.

Our reply:

Calvinists conflate *physical* death with *spiritual* death, in order to argue that someone who is spiritually dead is unable to come to Christ, but by using that same comparison to a dead person, such as Lazarus in the tomb (John 11:17), such a person wouldn't be able to do anything else, either, like walk or talk or breathe. Meanwhile, the way that Ephesians 2:1-2 describes spiritual death, people are indeed active, unlike a corpse: "And you were **dead** in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly **walked** according to the course of this world." Will Calvinists be consistent and claim that a pre-raised Lazarus "walked according to the course of this world"?

Even the context of Ephesians chapter 2:11-22 points to separation, describing "you" Gentiles (Ephesians 1:13; 2:1, 11) as having been formerly "separate from Christ," "excluded," "strangers," "having no hope and without God in the world," "formerly were far off," "far away" and "strangers and aliens." Nowhere in the chapter did Paul say that people were "dead" in the sense that they didn't have free-will, or couldn't change their mind and believe in God. It's like saying to someone, "You're dead to me!" Obviously it doesn't mean that they are literally dead, but rather metaphorically dead, in terms of being *cut off*, which can be restored through reconciliation. Another example at 2nd Samuel 9:8 implies being *dead meat*, in which Mephibosheth exclaims: "What is your servant, that you should regard a **dead dog** like me?" Hell is also called the "second death" (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8), and that doesn't mean being a corpse either, but instead means being cut off from the presence of God.

> J. Vernon McGee: *"Spiritual death is a separation from God. After man sinned, he could go on living physically and mentally, but he was spiritually dead, separated from God."*[811]

If a person lets *spiritual* death catch up with *physical* death, then the result will be *eternal* death, or what the Bible describes as the second death: "'But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the **second death**.'" (Revelation 21:8)

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[811] *Thru the Bible commentary series: Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 69.

Ephesians 2:4-7
"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, **even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Similarly, Colossians 2:11-14 states: "And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also **raised up with Him through faith** in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He **made you alive together with Him**, having **forgiven us all our transgressions**, having **canceled out the certificate of debt** consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Notice how as Christians that God "made us alive together with Christ" in which He has "forgiven us all our transgressions." Speaking of regeneration and salvation synonymously in this way presents a significant challenge to Calvinists who claim that regeneration precedes faith, because if so, then salvation must also precede faith, which Calvinists would not wish to affirm. So, this serves as a strong argument to conclude that regeneration/salvation come after faith in Christ.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"In this passage Paul speaks of the Spirit's work in 'quickening' us or regenerating us from our fallen condition. He uses the image of being 'made alive.' This is set in stark contrast to our former condition of being 'dead' in trespasses and sins."*[812]

Our reply:

Firstly, Paul elaborated on his meaning of spiritual death by describing it in terms of separation from God (Ephesians 2:11-22), not unconsciousness or annihilation.

Secondly, Paul did not say that we are raised up and made alive in order to gain the faith necessary to be able to believe in the gospel, but rather that we are "saved" and "raised up" with Him "through faith" (Ephesians 2:8; Colossians 2:12), meaning that faith is something that is

[812] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 129.

already present. Everyone has faith in something. What the gospel message does is that it gives us a compelling reason to place our faith in Christ. Being made alive *spiritually* simply means restoration. The problem with Calvinism, though, is that it conflates *spiritual* death with *physical* death, in order to make it seem that one cannot have faith if they are a dead corpse in a tomb. A better comparison would be with the expression, "You're dead to me." That implies conscious separation, which can be remedied through reconciliation. Obviously, we don't make ourselves alive (or reconciled). As with the Prodigal Son, the son submitted himself to his father, and his father graciously extended restoration. God doesn't need reconciliation with us. Rather, we need reconciliation with Him.

Thirdly, Ephesians 1:3 makes it clear that every "spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" is in Christ for believing Christians. Therefore, it follows that the spiritual blessings of being made "alive" together with Christ, and "raised" up with Christ and "seated" with Christ in the heavenly places would only be for believing Christians, and hence Calvinists would be wrong to appropriate such spiritual blessings to Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers* as a mechanism to overcome Total Inability.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"The corruption of sin extends to his mind as well as his will; consequently, no one seeks God. Because man is dead in trespasses and sins, God must regenerate him and even grant him the faith to believe."*[813]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Thus the doctrine of total depravity leads directly to that of unconditional election--a dead man cannot respond to the gospel's appeal."*[814]

Our reply:

Where in Ephesians chapter 2 does Paul link the concept of spiritual death with an *inability to positively respond to the gospel*? It's just not there. So, why are Calvinists concluding things that Paul did not say?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"But obviously Paul intends something more than 'separation' when he contrasts the horrific state of the 'spiritually*

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[813] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 179-180.
[814] Ibid., 181.

> *dead' with the glorious position of the person who is alive in Christ. The very use of the imagery of resurrection shows us this."*[815]

Our reply:

The Second Death of Hell is a "horrific state" of the spiritually dead, and yet, the Second Death does not imply either annihilation or of unconscious, lifeless corpses, but rather simply conveys the meaning of eternal *separation* from the love of God. This is, of course, besides the fact that Calvinists are ignoring the contextual meaning of spiritual death, as Paul describes in Ephesians 2:11-22.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"If men are dead in sin at all, it follows that they must have spiritual life restored to them before they can do spiritually good things."*[816]

> James White: *"Are we to believe that such a person who is totally separated from God can come up with righteous desires, love for truth, repentance toward God, ect., simply from the themselves?"*[817]

Our reply:

That is precisely the problem with conflating *spiritual* death with *physical* death. Spiritual death implies separation (see Ephesians 2:11-22) which can be reconciled through faith in Christ. To a Calvinist, though, spiritual death implies a corpse-like state of unconsciousness, and in that case, how would an unconscious corpse perform a conscious activity of faith? Yet, that is exactly what Colossians 2:12 says when it states that we are made alive or raised up "through faith"?

Ephesians 2:8-10
"For by **grace** you have been **saved through faith**; and that **not of yourselves**, it is the **gift** of God; **not as a result of works, so that no one may boast**. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

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[815] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 101.
[816] Ibid., 105.
[817] Ibid., 102.

Similarly, Galatians 3:26 states: "For you are all sons of God **through** faith in Christ Jesus." A person is saved by being persuaded that what God says about Jesus is true—persuaded that God has offered to every person a free gift, and all they have to do is accept it. We are saved by grace "through" faith Jesus Christ. A salvation by "grace" through faith is the *corollary* to salvation by the works of the Law—which never saved anyone because no one has ever kept it, at least not up to the standard of perfection that God requires, which standard of perfection was only achieved through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ at Calvary. God has chosen "faith" in Him as the only *means* of salvation, because nothing but Himself could ever save us. So, it's not about trusting in *our* works, but about trusting in *someone else's* work, and hence by having to trust in *someone else*, there is no basis to "boast" of *yourself*. You're not getting the job done—someone else is—and your trust is in them, and that someone else is God, and what He accomplished through His Son.

> David Allen: *"One of the problems endemic to discussions of Calvinism is the fact that people sometimes make use of the same vocabulary but employ a different dictionary."*[818]

Indeed. The word "grace" at Ephesians 2:8 means something quite different to a Calvinist: "For by [irresistible] grace you have been saved through [the gift of] faith, and that not of your [own free-will], [faith] is the gift of God, not as a result of works [in which faith can become a work when we come to think of it as something that we produce of ourselves], so that no one may boast [of their free-will]."

Similarly, Calvinists will acknowledge that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, but what they really mean is "all men of the elect," rather than just everyone, indiscriminately. Calvinists will acknowledge that Jesus died to save sinners, but by sinners, they really just mean *elect* sinners. Calvinists will acknowledge that they believe in divine omniscience, but it is omniscience grounded in exhaustive determinism, in which God decreed everything and therefore He must necessarily know His own actions. So it's important to decode and understand what Calvinists really mean, especially at Ephesians 2:8.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"He says his readers have been saved by grace through faith, not 'made savable.' They have already entered into*

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[818] *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), xxi.

> *the state of salvation and continue therein. The means of their salvation is said to be grace, free grace. They have been saved through faith."*[819]

Our reply:

By rejecting the concept of "made savable," Calvinists reveal their underlying belief that the grace of Ephesians 2:8 is an Irresistible Grace, which they feel is necessary if spiritual death means total inability.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"Paul is declaring what every Reformed person affirms, that faith is a gift from God. Faith is not something we conjure up by our own effort, or the result of the willing of the flesh. Faith is a result of the Spirit's sovereign work of regeneration."*[820]

Our reply:

Calvinists insist that *faith* is the gift at Ephesians 2:8, but it's actually salvation that is the gift, in which salvation is a gift freely received by faith rather than being obtained through one's performance under the Mosiac Law. Romans 6:23 indicates the same: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free **gift** of God is **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord." The gift is clearly salvation, in terms of receiving eternal life through faith in Christ. For Calvinists, though, the free gift of God is Irresistible Grace for Calvinism's elect.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Seemingly the assertion being made is the person who has faith in the power of God is an unregenerate, spiritually dead person."*[821]

Our reply:

In Calvinism, *unbelievers* are regenerated—of the elect kind. Why are unbelievers *entitled* to receive the New Birth? That's something that

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[819] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 295.
[820] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 156.
[821] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000),104.

only believers in Christ are entitled to. From the Calvinist perspective, they're entitled because they're chosen. But if that's the case, then it's not faith in Christ that makes them special to God, but instead something secret that has nothing to do with Christ, and that's how Calvinism demotes and reduces the role of Christ as Savior. The Cross ultimately becomes a rubber stamp of Unconditional Election.

Second, Calvinists confuse the meaning of spiritual death. It does not mean *unconsciousness* but *separation*, perfectly illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in which deadness is also mentioned, but not in a way that supports Calvinism. The prodigal son was declared "dead" (spiritually speaking, *while conscious*) and "lost" (Luke 15:32), but that did not preclude him from returning home in disgrace to humbly admit his error. Calvinists often like to echo fallen man being spiritually dead but rarely, *if ever*, cite the prodigal son as a *prime example* of spiritual deadness. It's fairly obvious why. Clearly, he could still admit his error and welcome his father's gift of full restoration. Moreover, the father's decision to be gracious was all 100% his choice alone, not 50/50 or 90/10, as he had *no external obligation* whatsoever to take his son back. This illustrates how salvation is both gracious and not of ourselves—it is the free gift of God of His own choosing to bestow—because He is gracious.

> J. Vernon McGee: *"Paul is not talking about faith when he says, 'And that not of yourselves.' He is talking about salvation. Salvation is a gift that eliminates boasting. It is all of God and not of us. It is God's gift."*[822]

The fact that God's grace is "not of yourselves" means that the freeness of salvation is solely at God's discretion and prerogative, in setting things up in the way that He has. In other words, we don't dictate the terms of salvation to God. God dictates His own terms and makes salvation freely available, simply at the asking. The thief on the cross, according to Luke 23:42, comes to mind. The contrast between salvation and discipleship is that whereas salvation is free, discipleship is costly.

The fact that "no one may boast" points to the fact that faith, unlike works, excludes boasting, as Paul indicated at Romans 3:27-28: "Where then is **boasting**? It is **excluded**. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but **by a law of faith**. For we maintain that a man is **justified by faith apart from works of the Law**." From the Calvinist perspective, if one person believes in Christ, while another does not, then the one who chose to believe in Christ can boast of being better and wiser than others.

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[822] *Thru the Bible commentary series: Ephesians* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 80.

However, while it is indeed both good and wise to place one's trust in Christ, realize that placing one's trust in God to save us does not point to our own merits, but rather points to the one in whom trust is being placed, and hence, for that reason, God gets all of the glory. In fact, God actually encourages us to boast, so long as we are boasting of our relationship with Him, as God gets the glory. Jeremiah 9:24 states: "'But let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,' declares the LORD."

Ephesians 5:15-17
"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then **do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is**."

The admonition to avoid being "foolish" and to "understand what the will of the Lord is," reveals that God has a plan for our life and that we need to be wise in order to discern it, or else we may miss out on what God has in store for us. However, if we have no free-will and ultimately fulfill Calvinism's "decreed will," no matter what we do, then we cannot miss out on anything, and what will be, will be, as in Fatalism. Moreover, an additional implication is that God's will is not always done here on earth as it is in Heaven, though one day it will be when Jesus returns.

Ephesians 5:25-27
"Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her**, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"But does the Bible actually teach that Christ died only for the elect? … Christ came for the specific purpose of paying a ransom only for those whom God had chosen … Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her. (Eph. 5:25, emphasis mine) Husbands should be willing to die for their wives, just as Christ died for the church. Neither would die for spurious lovers. …*

> *Christ came not to pay a ransom for all, but to 'save His people from their sins.'"*[823]

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"Weak Calvinist arguments. Calvinists have not always argued well for limited atonement. For example, Calvinists have adduced passages of Scripture that say Christ died for the church (Eph 5:25), the sheep (Jn 10:15) and others as evidence for limited atonement. But this line of reasoning is not persuasive. It only stands to reason that Scripture, when talking about Christ's sheep or his church, would say Christ died for them. That does not mean that he did not die for others."*[824]

Our reply:

Indeed, such a contended restriction would be a weak argument, as it involves the "negative inference fallacy."[825]

> David Allen: *"Some passages do teach that Christ died specifically for the elect, such as John 10:11-15; Acts 20:28; and Eph 5:25. But while these statements affirm a clear truth, they do not assert anything concerning the extent of the atonement being restricted only to these groups. This is merely begging the question. The affirmation of a wider extent is clearly made in the many positive statements concerning such in Scripture."*[826]

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[823] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 185-186.
[824] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 202.
[825] See the topical discussion on the *Atonement* and the commentary on John 10:15.
[826] *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 426.

Chapter 15: The Book of Philippians

Philippians 1:27-30

"Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents--which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. For **to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake**, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"'To believe' and 'to suffer' are perfectly parallel in the passage: if the one is a matter of a mere opportunity to believe based upon our own free will actions, does it not follow that the suffering is likewise viewed as something we can choose, or not choose, to endure? No, the 'simple meaning' of the passage is that God has granted faith to his elect people and that those people well know the path to glory: it is the path of suffering, trod by their Savior."*[827]

Our reply:

While it is agreed that believing and suffering are parallel in this verse, it is absurd to suggest that suffering persecution is somehow not a choice. For instance, Paul's friends begged him not to go up the Jerusalem where it was made known that he would be persecuted: "As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, 'This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles."' When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began **begging him not to go** up to Jerusalem. 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.'" (Acts 21:10-13) Certainly, Paul's friends thought he had a choice, or else why would they try to convince him not to go? Moreover, it is indeed a privilege for the Gentiles to be able to be given this opportunity, that is, to

[827] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 319.

hear and believe in the gospel, considering all that it had cost God to provide it, namely, Christ's suffering at Calvary and also each apostle's own suffering in having to overcome so many obstacles in order to bring it.

Being granted the privilege of believing in Christ is similar to (a) *Israel* being granted repentance (Acts 5:30-31) and (b) the *Gentiles* being granted repentance (Acts 11:17-18), which comes about by the opportunity to hear and believe in the gospel. Obviously, not all Jews and Gentiles took advantage of that opportunity—and which makes us all the more accountable. Just ask yourself which of the following passages mentions anything about receiving an Irresistible Grace to believe?

> **Acts 5:30-31:** "'The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross. He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to **grant repentance to Israel**, and forgiveness of sins.'"
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> **Acts 11:17-18:** "'Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?' When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has **granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life**.'"
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> **2nd Timothy 2:24-26:** "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be **kind to all**, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, **if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth**, and **they may come to their senses** and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

Philippians 2:12-13

"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure**."

Similarly, Ephesians 2:10 states: "For we are **His workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which **God prepared beforehand** so that we would walk in them." 2nd Timothy 4:7 states: "I have fought the **good fight**, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." When we are made Born Again by the Holy Spirit, we are given a unique calling and vocation within the body of Christ, which instills within each of us a sense

of strength, conviction and purpose to complete the task entrusted to us, which God also oversees by guiding, protecting and keeping us resolute.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"Verse after verse in the Bible teaches that my willing, which is real, responsible, accountable is not decisively and ultimately my own creation. It is God's decisive governing."*[828]

Our reply:

Just because God has a plan for your life does not mean that you don't have self-determination and a free-will. Ephesians 5:15-17 reminds us not to be foolish so as to miss out on God's will for our life.

Philippians 3:17-19

"Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. For many walk, of whom I often told you, and **now tell you even weeping**, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, **whose end is destruction**, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things."

This kind of passion for the lost is reminiscent of Romans 9:1-3, in which Paul laments of "great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart," in terms of the spiritual plight of his unsaved, fellow Jews. But if Paul had thought that their destruction would bring God more glory, then would he really lament the greater glorification of God? It would seem instead, though, that God gets more glory when people repent and become saved rather than when they perish. (Ezekiel 18:23; Luke 15:7)

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[828] John Piper, *Does God Get Glory If People Have Free Will?*, 3:56-4:13. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YbOXdL4y2Y

Chapter 16: The Book of Colossians

Colossians 1:25-28

"Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom **God willed to make known** what is the riches of the glory of **this mystery among the Gentiles**, which is **Christ in you**, the hope of glory. We proclaim Him, admonishing **every man** and teaching **every man** with all wisdom, so that we may present **every man** complete in Christ."

Similarly, Romans 1:5-6 states: "To bring about the **obedience of faith** among **all the Gentiles** for His name's sake, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ." Again at Acts 26:29, we see the apostle's evangelical passion shown toward every man: "'King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.' Agrippa replied to Paul, 'In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.' And Paul said, 'I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, **not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am**, except for these chains.'" The gospel invitation to the Gentiles is indiscriminate.

What do Calvinists believe?

It is perfectly logical to work within an objective that every man *should* become complete in Christ, even though you also know that not every man *will* become converted to Christ, since when you work within such an objective, God may use your diligence to serve as the means of His conversion of a member of the elect.

Our reply:

There is a big difference between knowing that not every person *will* receive Christ vs. teaching that not every person *can* receive Christ. In Calvinism, not every person *can*, since most persons have allegedly been excluded from a Limited Atonement. By contrast, Paul's objective was something for "every man" among all of the Gentiles, which the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement otherwise makes impossible.

Colossians 3:9-13

"Do not lie to one another, since **you laid aside the old self** with its evil practices, and **have put on the new self** who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him--a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. So, **as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved**, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

What do Calvinists believe?

> William MacDonald: *"First of all, he addresses the Colossians as the elect of God. This refers to the fact that they had been chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world. God's electing grace is one of the mysteries of divine revelation. We believe the Scripture clearly teaches that God, in His sovereignty, has chosen men to belong to Christ. We do not believe that God has ever chosen anyone to be damned. Such a teaching is directly contrary to Scripture."*[829]

> William MacDonald: *"Election refers to His sovereign, eternal choice of individuals to belong to Himself."*[830]

Our reply:

In other words, according to Calvinism, election refers to God's sovereign choice of [*unbelievers*] to belong to Himself, and that's precisely the nature of the debate with non-Calvinists who, instead, argue that Election refers to God's sovereign choice of *believers* to belong to Himself, which frankly is well-supported by Colossians 3:9-13. For instance, notice that the text is specifically about Christians in terms of the type of godly attitude that God expects of Christians. Clearly, that's not talking about unbelievers. Also notice that the text links being "chosen of God" and being "holy and beloved." (Elsewhere, believers are referred to as redeemed (Romans 8:33), which is because, as believers, we are "*in* the

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[829] *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 2010.
[830] Ibid., 2290-2291.

beloved" (Ephesians 1:6), who have "laid aside the old self" and "have put on the new self," reflective of having been made Born Again by God.)

It would seem, then, that the reference to those having been "chosen by God" would be in reference to chosen *Christians*. This makes sense because when God sees the believer in Christ, He sees their *identity* with Christ, and therefore the believer being deemed "holy and beloved" would stem from God deeming Christ as holy and beloved. In fact, God called Jesus, "My beloved." (Matthew 3:17)

The problem for Calvinism is if Unconditional Election was true, then being unconditionally "chosen of God" and being "holy and beloved" would be linked, and the unconditionally-elect people would no longer be deemed holy and beloved simply on account of their identification with Christ, but account of their identification with an Unconditional Election. Notice that John Calvin does not dispute this, even though he remarks that it seems unbiblical:

> John Calvin: *"This way of speaking, however, may seem to be different from many passages of Scripture which attribute to Christ the first foundation of God's love for us and show that outside Christ we are detested by God. But we ought to remember, as I have already said, that the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us is the first love given to us."*[831]

John Calvin initially seems to correctly indicate that identification with Christ is the first foundation of God's love for us. That, of course, would make perfect sense with John 16:26-27: "'In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for **the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me** and have believed that I came forth from the Father.'" In other words, for the believer to be deemed "holy and beloved" is "because you have loved" Jesus. Obviously, from John 3:16, God also loves the whole world, as evidenced by Him giving Jesus as a Lamb to be an atonement for the sin of the world (John 1:29), with a view and desire towards everyone receiving Him and benefiting from His atonement. That love is spurned whenever people reject God's gift and thus perish in unbelief. But, the point to this is that Colossians 3:12-13 bears similarity, in principle, with John 16:26-27—**the foundation of a believer being deemed holy and beloved by God stems from our identification with Christ**. The problem for Calvinism is that Unconditional Election means that Calvinism's unconditionally-elect are "holy and beloved" by a reason deeper, and more

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[831] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 76.

secret, than simply because they love and are identified with Christ, but rather because of "the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us" as the "first love given to us." In other words, Calvinism's elect are "holy and beloved" first and foremost because God willed to secretly love and embrace them, which Calvinism's creeds and confessions tell us is not due to anything foreseen in them, but simply because God chose to set His electing love upon them. In Calvinism, those who are the "[unconditionally] chosen of God, holy and beloved," have their identity established purely in election, rather than being established from having loved Christ, as John 16:26-27 otherwise indicates. As a result, Calvinism often seems at odds with the Bible because its foundation does not seem to rest on the explicit statements of the Bible, but rather rests on the philosophical presuppositions of TULIP Calvinism, where the Bible is then read through that philosophical lens. When non-Calvinists read the Bible, without those special glasses, we naturally do not see the same doctrines that Calvinists insist that are there in plain sight. So, it's all about the glasses that people wear. It's all about the presuppositions that people bring to the Bible, before they read it.

Chapter 17: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians

1st Thessalonians 1:2-7

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father; knowing, **brethren beloved by God, His choice of you**; for **our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

Paul's introductions to the Churches frequently recalled their appointed stewardship in the Gospel to which they were entrusted. They are addressed to Christians, "brethren beloved by God," to remind and encourage them in their service to the Lord, especially given how God had worked in their own lives, and pointing to what is needful, due to Paul's absence by imprisonment for similar service.

> **Romans 1:6**: "Among whom you also are **the called of Jesus Christ**."
>
> **1st Corinthians 1:2:** "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, **saints by calling**, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours."
>
> **Galatians 1:6:** "I am amazed that you are so quickly **deserting Him who called you** by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel."
>
> **Philippians 1:6:** "For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it** until the day of Christ Jesus."
>
> **Colossians 3:12:** "So, as those who have been **chosen of God, holy and beloved**, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

2nd Timothy 1:9: "Who has saved us and **called us with a holy calling**, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity."

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

What do Calvinists believe?

Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"How do people know that they are chosen for salvation? Not by trying to discern the eternal counsels of the Almighty, for he has not revealed them to us. Rather, it is when people turn to Christ in faith that they know God has chosen them for salvation."*[832]

Our reply:

Is the context teaching about how people can know they are saved, that is, by an Irresistible Grace prepared for an elect vs. non-elect bifurcation of humanity? Calvinism's proof-texts often require a meaning that it was already so well understood, no further elaboration was needed.

The "brethren beloved by God" are *Christians*, noted for their "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father" who "became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia" in which "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything." Therefore either "His choice of you" references God's choice of them as Christians for the evangelistic service described or it references God's choice of them when they were unbelievers so that they could become Christians. Which would the context better support?

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[832] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 65.

What do Calvinists believe?

Paul distinguishes between the gospel coming merely "in word only" versus coming "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction," the latter of which signifying one first receiving regeneration.

Our reply:

Regeneration is being assumed into the text. The gospel becomes merely "word only" unless mixed with faith. Only then does the Spirit indwell us, which it did for those who turned to the Lord in faith. Hebrews 4:2 states: "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but **the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard**." There was nothing wrong with the Word, such as missing a special grace. The problem is that people failed to believe, as they ought to have done. The Word accomplishes its power in those who believe: "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but **to us who are being saved it is the power of God**." (1st Corinthians 1:18)

1st Thessalonians 2:14-16

"For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, **hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved**; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost."

Similarly, Matthew 23:13 states: "'But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, **nor do you allow those who are entering to go in**.'" Luke 11:52 also states: "'Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter, and you **hindered those who were entering**.'" This cannot apply to either Calvinism's elect or non-elect, since in the former, Calvinism's *elect* cannot be hindered since they are recipients of forcible regeneration, absent of their conscious consent to either accept or reject it, while conversely Calvinism's *non-elect* would not even need to be hindered since they are said to suffer from Total Inability, which is also besides the fact that they would be cut off from an exclusively Limited Atonement,

which is otherwise the only way that anyone can be saved. So then in Calvinism, who could these verses refer to?

2nd Thessalonians 2:10-12
"And with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because **they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved**. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, **in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth**, but took pleasure in wickedness."

> Adrian Rogers: *"They heard the truth. They knew the truth. They turned from the truth. They had pleasure in their filthy dirty rotten sin, and God says, 'Alright, that's what you want? You want your sin, and with that sin is baggage, delusion, a lie and damnation.'"*[833]

Given that they did not believe and receive the love of the truth "so as to be saved," that means they originally *could* have been saved, and since they *could* have been saved, they couldn't be one of Calvinism's non-elect who are born unchangeably predestined for Hell and *excluded* from a Limited Atonement—which is the only basis for God's forgiveness of any sin. The fact that they rejected what otherwise could have saved them leads to a rational basis for human responsibility and human accountability. The "deluding influence" would constitute a judicial hardening, conditionally given to those who rejected the grace that was meant to be theirs.

What do Calvinists believe?

In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to obey His laws, even though He knew that mankind was born fallen and could not. So, the reprobate is commanded to repent, even if they ultimately cannot. The text references judgment, not any offer of salvation.

Our reply:

However, the verse also mentions the condition under which they could have been "saved." That's the problem. Why mention anything about the non-elect in the same context of what they could have done to be "saved" if they were predestined for Hell and born excluded from anything that could have *ever* saved them? What would be the point in that?

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[833] Adrian Rogers, *No Other Way to Heaven Except Through Jesus*, 1996.

Mentioning Calvinism's non-elect and "saved" in the same sentence is basically like a fantasy island which ponders all that could be, if God had decreed things differently. (Why would the God described by Calvinism want for the "predestined to Hell" non-elect to feel remorse over rejecting a grace that was never *intended* to be theirs in the first place? Conversely, if they were never non-elect to begin with, and legitimately could have been "saved," then there would be a real reason for God's righteous indignation and resulting judgment by means of a judicial hardening.)

2nd Thessalonians 2:13-14

"But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because **God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth**. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Calvinists often cite this passage as a proof-text to support the doctrine of Unconditional Election. However, before proceeding, it first needs to be pointed out that there are two distinct non-Calvinist interpretations of this text that will be explored.

Being chosen in connection with "the Spirit and faith in the truth" shows the type of *condition* that is inconsistent with Calvinism's doctrine of *unconditional* election. Similarly, Ephesians 2:8 states: "For by grace you have been **saved through faith**; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

> Adrian Rogers: *"The ones that are chosen for salvation the ones that **the Holy Spirit of God convicts, they believe the truth**. You see it's 180 degrees. It's not that they believe because they were chosen, it's that they are chosen through sanctification of the spirit and belief in the truth."*[834]

God's choice was of *believers*, not Calvinism's elect-*unbelievers*. Being chosen for salvation "through" something, indicates the presence of *two conditions already being met*, that is, (a) the work of sanctification by the Holy Spirit and (b) an individual's belief in the gospel, meaning that this is an election of sanctified believers—not unbelievers. The fact that the Holy Spirit is given to believers on condition of their faith in Christ is profoundly supportive of conditional election. As for those remaining as unbelievers, 2nd Thessalonians 2:10 shows that they, too, could have been

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[834] Adrian Rogers, *Why I Am Not A Five Point Calvinist*, 11/10/1997, emphasis mine.

saved, except that "they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

The fact that the order of "sanctification by the Spirit" precedes "faith in the truth" is not necessarily significant, but only that they function together in the criteria for God's choosing. Otherwise, how would Calvinists explain 2nd Peter 1:10, which states: "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His **calling** and **choosing** you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble." Notice the order that has the calling preceding the choosing. So, would that mean that we are called before we are chosen? A Calvinist would say No! But that's the order listed in the verse. So, the real significance may not be in the order but only in how they operate together.

Additionally, "the beginning" doesn't necessarily mean something from eternity past. This phrase is used multiple times and is not always indicative of eternity, which makes even more sense given the fact that the Thessalonian believers were chosen in connection with their faith. In other words, it may refer to the beginning of Paul's ministry in Thessalonica, in which he founded the church in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. (Acts 17:1-9) Paul was there only briefly after being driven out by Jewish opposition to the gospel.

> **Philippians 1:5:** "In view of **your participation in the gospel from the first day** until now."
>
> **Philippians 4:16:** "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the **first preaching of the gospel**, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs."
>
> **Acts 26:5:** "**Which knew me from the beginning**, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee." [*KJV*]

Each of these expressions, "your participation in the gospel from the first day," "the first preaching of the gospel," and "knew me from the beginning," shows that Paul invokes recognition and recollection of mutually common bonds in the ministry in order to emphasize his points, and again, which was for the purpose of encouraging the churches toward further evangelistic work in the ministry. That's what drove him.

To further illustrate that "the beginning" sometimes indicates a relevant starting point within time, consider the following verses:

John 6:64: "'But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus **knew from the beginning** who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him."

John 8:25: "So they were saying to Him, 'Who are You?' Jesus said to them, 'What have I been saying to you **from the beginning**?'"

John 16:4: "These things I did not say to you **at the beginning**, because I was with you."

What do Calvinists believe?

James White: *"The text shows that the work of the Spirit and our faith in God's truth are the result of that eternal choice."*[835]

Our reply:

There are two points in dispute: (1) The text does not mention something from eternity, and (2) the text does not state that God's choice to bestow salvation *results* in faith, but rather is *through* faith in Christ.

What do Calvinists believe?

Sam Storms: *"…this glorious act of God's grace in electing some is unto eternal salvation and not simply to temporal service. Paul gave thanks for the Thessalonians because 'God chose' them 'as the firstfruits to be saved' (2 Thess. 2:13)."*[836]

Our reply:

The fact that the text refers to God's choice of sanctified believers, nullifies the point that Calvinists wish to raise. Nowhere is it being said that God is choosing unbelievers to be saved. It's quite the opposite.

There is, however, another non-Calvinist interpretation of this passage which harmonizes the context with a more *eschatological* focus, inferring that the "salvation" in mind refers to being spared from the wrath to come, meaning being rescued from tribulation perils. The supporting text is 1st Thessalonians 5:9-11 which states: "**For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus**

[835] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 110.
[836] Sam Storms, *10 Things You Should Know about Election*, 4/19/2016.

Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing."

> James McCarthy: *"It was part of God's original plan to deliver the body of Christ from end time evil and the great tribulation."*[837]

The context is that the Thessalonians mistakenly thought that they were going through the Great Tribulation (2nd Thessalonians 2:1-10), and Paul clarifies that such was not the case, indicating that the Hinderer must first be removed (which some infer as either being Christians or the Holy Spirit, or both), but the point is that they were not in the Great Tribulation, and moreover, that it was not its purpose to test the Church, but rather to test the world which had rejected the gospel and warmly received the "deluding influence." (2nd Thessalonians 2:11)

> James McCarthy: *"He will accomplish their deliverance 'through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth' (2 Thessalonians 2:13). Believers must yield their lives to the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit and trust the truths and promises of God's Word. Through these means, God will deliver them from evil. This would be true of Paul's targeted readers—the Thessalonian Christians, who were already facing considerable evil—and true of all Christians after them, especially those living in the last days."*[838]

So in this alternate interpretation, it is held that the meaning of "salvation" at 2nd Thessalonians 2:13 is meant to indicate deliverance from the wrath to come, for which God had not destined Christians.

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[837] *2 Thessalonians 2:13, Did God Choose Whom He Would Save?*
[838] Ibid.

Chapter 18: 1st and 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 1:12-16

"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because **He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer** and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet **I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief**; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners**, among whom **I am foremost of all**. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an **example** for those who would believe in Him for eternal life."

Similarly, 1st Corinthians 15:10-11 states: "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and **His grace toward me did not prove vain**; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed." God chose to use Paul as an apostle because (a) God knew that Paul had previously acted in ignorance, and (b) God could use the mercy shown to Paul as an example of God's will to show mercy to all.

However, in Calvinism, Jesus came into the world to save only Calvinism's *elect* sinners, whom He alone intended for Heaven. Paul is therefore held up as the foremost among Calvinism's *elect* sinners, in which Jesus had only died for Calvinism's *elect* sinners, and so what remains unclear is how choosing the worst in Calvinism's secret fraternity would be an effective example of a wider display of divine mercy, since such a choice would still not be made *outside* of Calvinism's elect. Alternatively, for God to choose to use Paul, and also to extend grace all throughout the Gentile world, would more effectively show the wideness of God's grace.

> George Bryson: *"I take this to mean that if you are a sinner, He came to save you."*[839]

> J. Vernon McGee: *"Under the Law the best man in the world is absolutely condemned, but under the gospel the worst man can be justified if he will believe in Christ."*[840]

[839] *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing (CCP), 2004), 167.

James Leonard: *"Paul seems to delimit sinners as the object of Christ's saving by pointing to himself as the worst possible example of them. The implied argument is that if Jesus came to save Paul, then surely Christ came to save everyone. The point is emphasized by Paul's employment of the faithful saying refrain, with the additional qualification that it is worthy of all acceptance. In retrospect, it is easy to imagine that Paul felt his point needed this additional emphasis precisely because a certain element within Ephesus was posing some sort of soteriological elitism. Perhaps this may also explain Paul's enigmatic appeal to his ignorance as the basis for God's outpouring of his grace, an excuse which is otherwise rejected elsewhere in his writing. The point then, would be that even those who do not have knowledge have access to the free grace of God—and this might have been posed polemically against the shipwrecked teachers of Ephesus."*[841]

What do Calvinists believe?

John Calvin: "*When Paul turned from being a wild attacking beast into a shepherd and pastor, Christ showed his grace in a special way. It demonstrated that the way of salvation is open to everyone, no matter how notorious sinners they might have been previously."*[842]

Our reply:

But yet salvation and mercy within Calvinism are *not* open to everyone, unless "everyone" is redefined to mean *only Calvinism's elect*.

1st Timothy 2:1-6

"First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, **for kings and all who are in authority**, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and

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[840] *Thru the Bible commentary series: First and Second Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1991), 27.
[841] *Soteriological Elitism in the Pastoral Epistles*, http://treasuresoldandnewbiblicaltexts.blogspot.com/2007/12/soteriological-elitism-in-pastoral.html.
[842] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 28.

dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, **who desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a **ransom for all**, the testimony given at the proper time."

Similarly, 1st Timothy 4:10 states: "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the **Savior of *all men*, especially of believers**." Notice that the term "all men" at 1st Timothy 4:10 means *more than just believers*, and also notice that the same term also appears at 1st Timothy 2:4. It is simply unreasonable to think that the term "all men" means one thing at 1st Timothy 2:4 and then a completely different thing at 1st Timothy 4:10. Consistency demands that the term "all men" be understood the same. Ultimately, prayers are encouraged indiscriminately for our political leaders, even the bad ones, so that (a) we can live peaceful lives, and (b) since God desires for even them to become saved, as a factor of God desiring "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

> Adrian Rogers: *"That doesn't mean that all men are going to be saved, but it means that God makes their salvation possible through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now to say that all doesn't mean all here, it would be to do as much damage if I were to come to Romans 3:23 which says 'for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,' and say well 'some have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' No, you can't do that. Now, I can tell you that I can see any person, and I can tell that person, number one, of the unbounded love of Christ. He loves you. I can tell him of the unlimited atonement of Christ: He died for you. And I can tell him as an ambassador: He invites you. He wants you to be saved. He gave him Himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time. Friend, that lights the evangelistic fire."*[843]

Moreover, God does not merely love *all* of us—He loves *each* of us, meaning that God does not love everyone *equally*, but everyone *uniquely*, such that everyone is special to God. The fact is that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings—made on behalf of kings and all who are in authority—*exemplifies* God's desire for all men to be saved, meaning *even them, too*. Both contextually and on face value, this verse is problematic for Calvinism, which otherwise holds that God never *intended*

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[843] Adrian Rogers, *Our House A Lighthouse: II Corinthians 5:13-21*, 2000.

what this verse states that God *desires*. To counter this view, Calvinists have offered at least two contrasting interpretations:

- Calvinism A: "all men" means everyone *categorically*, as in some of each type, rather than all men *distributively*, as in each individual person. The impact is that God desires the salvation of Jews and Gentiles, generally speaking, but not every Jew and every Gentile. God desires the salvation of the predetermined elect within these two racial groups.
- Calvinism B: "all men" does indeed mean every person, but that the sentiment expressed is merely a *weak* desire, rather than a *stronger* desire expressed elsewhere for the elect.

Addressing the former view, by cross referencing other instances of "all men" in the Bible, we learn that "all men" certainly can imply the distributive, *individual* sense:

- For "all" have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)
- Death spread to "all men." (Romans 5:12)
- Never pay back evil for evil to anyone, but for your part, be at peace with "all men." (Romans 12:17-18)
- While we have the opportunity, let us do good to "all people." (Galatians 6:10)
- Prayers are made for "all men." (1st Timothy 2:1)
- God is the Savior of "all men," *especially* of believers. (1st Timothy 4:10)
- Christians are to be kind to "all." (2nd Timothy 2:24)
- The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to "all men." (Titus 2:11)

Addressing the latter interpretation, if this text were merely indicative of a *weak* desire, then the following contrast would emerge:

- **Non-Calvinism**: God desires all men to be saved…by believing in His Son.
- **Calvinism**: God desires all men to be saved…just kidding.

What do Calvinists believe?

Both Calvinists and Arminians agree that God does not desire to save everyone but only *those who believe*.

Our reply:

But God does indeed desire to save everyone, conditioned on them believing in Him. As an analogy, a salesmen may truly desire that everyone receive their product, conditioned on them paying for it, of course. God desires that everyone meet His condition for eternal life because He loves everyone, and has provided an Unlimited Atonement in order to make it possible for anyone to become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

When God desires for Jews and Gentiles to become saved, it does not mean He desires for every person become saved, but rather for every *kind* of person, such as various people from among "the elect" within every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

Our reply:

In terms of whether **Jew** and **Gentile** implies a limitation, consider an analogy of a teacher who announces the following: "Ok children, I want all of you to line up in the schoolyard, the **boys** and the **girls**." So, is the teacher saying that they want only *some* of the boys and *some* of the girls to line up, or rather that all of the students to line up?

> Dave Hunt: *"A merchant advertises, 'Giant Sale! All merchandise half price.' Eager customers, however, discover that certain items are excluded from the sale. When they complain that the ad read all merchandise, the merchant says, 'I didn't mean all "without exception," but all "without distinction." All kinds of products are indeed on sale, but not every item of every kind.' This would be misleading advertising, and customers would have a legitimate complaint. Yet the Calvinist insists that God uses this same kind of deception in offering salvation to 'whosoever will.'"*[844]

What do Calvinists believe?

Prayers "made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority" (1st Timothy 2:2-3) represents a categorical *limitation*. This

[844] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 319-320.

shows that God's desire (for all men to be saved) is naturally to be understood as limited.

Our reply:

That prayer demonstrates a *wideness*, rather than a *limitation*, of God's desire to save all men, insomuch that God desires that *even they*, the godless rulers, become saved. Hence, our politicians (i.e. "kings and all who are in authority") are to be made subjects of our prayers to God, *firstly* because God desires that, under their authority, we "may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1st Timothy 2:3), and *secondly* because God desires to see "all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1st Timothy 2:4) In other words, this prayer should not be used to imply a categorical limitation of *merely* rulers, or even just *certain* rulers, such as only these *types*, but rather that we should pray for *even* such as these, as being examples, knowing that God desires that everyone, *including them*, repent, believe and become saved.

So, do Calvinists wish to say that Christians should restrict their prayers to only "all men" *of Calvinism's elect*? How would they do that, given that Calvinists admit that they don't know who Calvinism's elect are? Furthermore, when considered in context with the provision of the atonement for "all" (1st Timothy 2:6), it's clear that for God's part, He genuinely desires for every person to believe in Him and become saved. However, if God only desired for different *kinds* of men to become saved, then why didn't He just say so? Surely, the Holy Spirit who authored the Scriptures was more than capable of making such a distinction, if that was what was meant.

Calvinist objection:

If God should desire that every individual person believe in Him, but His wishes do not come true, then God would be frustrated and unhappy, and clearly not sovereign.

Our reply:

God does indicate His preference that the wicked turn from their sins and live (Ezekiel 18:23), and Jesus expressed His sorrow for those who refuse. (Matthew 23:37) Such is the downside of free-will. However, there is a positive side. By giving mankind free-will to either accept or reject God means that for those who do believe, when they otherwise didn't have to, means that God gains a kingdom of people who freely

chose to love and to want to be with Him, despite the adverse circumstances and temptations of this world.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Simply put, [Martin] Luther would say that God may desire the salvation of all men but had chosen to forgo those desires for a higher, hidden purpose. If the salvation of all men was his overriding priority, he could prevent Satan from blinding the eyes of the unconverted so that more would believe. He would work toward the softening, not the hardening, of all men."*[845]

Our reply:

Universalism was never God's overriding priority. God "desires all men to be saved" *freely*, by believing in His Son through willing participation, rather than desiring for all men to be saved *irresistibly*. As for judicial hardening, that is for those who reject the salvation that could have been theirs but was spurned.

Calvinist objection:

In passages such as Ezekiel 18:33 and 1st Timothy 2:4, where the Greek word *thelo* is used, it reflects a weak desire, in contrast to the other word, *boulomai*. Therefore, God desires that all be saved, but His *stronger* desire is that some go to Hell to further His glory.

Our reply:

For such arguments, I. Howard Marshall addressed the appeal to a difference between *thelo* and *boulomai*.[846]

Calvinist objection:

If God truly does desire something, then it must happen.

Our reply:

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[845] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 171.
[846] *Exegeting 1 Timothy 2:4: God Our Savior, Who Desires All People To Be Saved*. http://evangelicalarminians.org/exegeting-1-timothy-2-4-god-our-savior-who-desires-all-people-to-be-saved/

Several verses show the opposite, such as Proverbs 1:24-30; Isaiah 5:1-7; Jeremiah 13:15-17, Jeremiah 18:11-13; Hosea 7:13; Matthew 23:37. God always means what He says, though some things are conditional. For instance, God meant what He said about destroying Nineveh, but the king correctly inferred that the threat was conditional, so that sincere repentance would stay God's judgment, and he was right. Rather than deferring to weak vs. strong desires, we would instead say that the desire to punish Nineveh was authentic, though conditional upon repentance.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The God of Scripture is able to save perfectly and completely all He desires to save: the fact that not all are saved leads inexorably to the truth of divine election."*[847]

Our reply:

The fact that not all are saved, despite God's desire that they be saved, leads inexorably to free-will, in which God gives people a choice, without forcing His choice upon them. The advantage for non-Calvinists is that they can accept 1st Timothy 2:4 on face value, without supposing a weak desire, and without restricting "all men" to only Calvinism's elect.

> Charles Spurgeon, cited as a hostile witness: "*What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. 'All men,' say they,—'that is, some men': as if the Holy Ghost could not have said 'some men' if he had meant some men. 'All men,' say they; 'that is, some of all sorts of men': as if the Lord could not have said 'all sorts of men' if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written 'all men,' and unquestionably he means all men. I know how to get rid of the force of the 'alls' according to that critical method which some time ago was very current, but I do not see how it can be applied here with due regard to truth. I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon*

[847] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 99.

> *the text if it had read, 'Who will not have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth.'"*[848]

Calvinist objection:

The Greek word *pas* for "all" does not always mean "every single individual" or "all without exception," and so to advocate such a meaning at 1st Timothy 2:4 is disingenuous.

Our reply:

The same Greek word is used at Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Do Calvinists wish to use that same argument there as well? Moreover, 1st Timothy 4:10 defines "all men" unfavorably to the view that *only* believers are intended: "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the **Savior of all men, especially of believers**." Obviously, then, "all men" cannot mean *only* believers, since believers are just a *subset* of "all men" rather than its totality.

Calvinist objection:

The context is about *believers*, and so all that we may glean from this verse is that God desires that all *believers* to become saved.

Our reply:

That's not true since the "kings and all who are in authority" (1st Timothy 2:2) are not necessarily believers, and yet we are urged to pray for them as well, which is a function of the fact that God desires that even those wicked rulers become saved, given that God desires that *everyone* repent, believe and become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"If he should reply that God, so far as He is concerned, wills all to be saved, in that salvation is offered to the freewill of each individual, then I ask why God did not will the Gospel to be preached to all indiscriminately from the beginning*

[848] Charles Spurgeon, *Salvation by Knowing the Truth*, January 16, 1880.

of the world. Why did He allow so many peoples for so many centuries to wander in the darkness of death?"[849]

John Calvin: *"For if He willed that His truth be known to all, why did He not proclaim His law also to the Gentiles? Why did He confine the light of life within the narrow limits of Judaea? ... When He had lit the light of life for the Jews alone, God allowed the Gentiles to wander for many ages in darkness (Acts 14:16)."*[850]

Our reply:

Yet, in the next verse quoted, Acts 14:17 goes on to say that God "did not leave Himself without witness." Indeed, God sent Jonah to the Ninevites. Abraham and Lot were witnesses to Sodom and Gomorrah. Moreover, if God knows of someone who is receptive to His general revelation of Himself, He will send a messenger, just like how He sent Phillip to the Ethiopian Eunuch. (Acts 8:25-40) God is willing.

1st Timothy 4:10

"For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men, especially of believers**."

All men will be raised from the dead, both the righteous and the wicked. Jesus said: "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28-29) So, Jesus will reverse the first death, but salvation is also possessing an active relationship with God, and hence "all men, *especially* of believers." Therefore, "all men" cannot mean *only* believers, but believers and unbelievers combined. (That means everyone has a Savior, and what they do with the Savior determines their eternal destination.) Factoring that into 1st Timothy 2:4 results in a meaning whereby God, for His part, desires that every person accept His free gift of salvation and be saved.

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[849] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 149.
[850] Ibid., 108.

What do Calvinists believe?

Calling Jesus the "Savior" of the perishing is logically ridiculous. How would Jesus be the Savior of those in Hell? Does He try His best to save them and then fail?

Our reply:

If God had promised to unconditionally save all men, regardless of whether or not they believed, and then if someone perished, the Calvinist argument would hold weight, but as we know, God never made such an unconditional promise of salvation, as John 3:16 is explicitly conditional, and Calvinists know that. God certainly is the Savior of all men, and those who perish in rejection of the gospel, forfeit the grace that could have been theirs. The offer of the gospel is a limited-time offer. Today is the day of salvation. (2nd Corinthians 6:2)

Consider the following analogy: If you are given a gift card which carries a one year expiration date, does it mean that if you fail to use the card within the one year that there never really was any money on the card? Of course not. The card was legitimate and was fully-funded but expired due to non-use. The same point may be made with regard to Calvary since it is a valid offer, though has an expiration date, should a person remain in unbelief and perish. Moreover, God is not a failure because He is the One who set the criteria in the first place.

What do Calvinists believe?

God is the Savior of all men, *essentially* just believers.

Our reply:

Whether the meaning is *especially* or *essentially*, consider two other instances of "especially" in Paul's letters:

> **2nd Timothy 4:13:** "When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, **especially** the parchments."
>
> **Galatians 6:10:** "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and **especially** to those who are of the household of the faith."

So, then, do these verses reflect a meaning of *especially* or *essentially*? In the former case, the parchments were not all that they were

asked to bring, but rather it was one of the especially important items, and in the latter case, the household of faith was not indicative of all people but just the believing portion. Jesus is the Savior of all men "especially" of those who believe because the potential exists for anyone to be saved, while salvation is only actualized in those who do believe.

Calvinists Objection:

All are beneficiaries of Christ's death in *some* sense, though not for all in the *same* sense.[851]

Our reply:

In this view, Calvinism's non-elect benefit from Calvary in a more superficial, *temporal* sense, irrespective of salvation, in a way that loosely would make God their Savior, despite having not intended them to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. While this view interprets 1st Timothy 4:10 as unrelated to salvation, the context addresses eternal matters, in respect to the benefits of spiritual discipline for "the life to come." (v.8) So to make this passage instead about temporal matters would seem detached from the context.

1st Timothy 5:8
"But **if anyone does not provide for his own**, and especially for those of his household, he has **denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever**."

Similarly, James 2:15-16 states: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, '**Go in peace, be warmed and be filled**,' and **yet you do not give them what is necessary** for their body, **what use is that?**"

For the ineffectual "Common Grace" of Calvinism, given to the non-elect (perhaps in order to maintain an outward appearance of graciousness), we might similarly ask "what use is that?" for God's "children" by creation (Acts 17:29), who are not provided what is needed for the hope of salvation. A Calvinist would object, stating that the non-elect do not *want* salvation, but it must be asked *who* determines what they want? (Calvinists often seem to conveniently forget their own doctrine of exhaustive determinism, which determines whatsoever comes to pass.)

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[851] John Piper, *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*, http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The wonder of God's act of predestination is not that He justly condemns rebel sinners who love their sin and spit in His face on a daily basis. The wonder is that He actually quells the rebellion in the hearts of innumerable rebel sinners and solely from grace works the miracles of regeneration, removing their hearts of stone and given them hearts of flesh."*[852]

Our reply:

God willingly obligates Himself to care for all mankind, who are His "offspring" or "children" (Acts 17:28-29), and therefore given His opinion of any man who would abandon his own children as being worse than a heretic (1st Timothy 5:8), it must be concluded that God absolutely would not "pass by" people or predestine people to Hell, or else He would be defining Himself as worse than a heretic.

1st Timothy 5:21

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of **His chosen angels**, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality."

The "chosen angels" likely references the holy angels (Matthew 25:31, Mark 8:38, Luke 9:26 and Revelation 14:10), or perhaps signifies archangels, such as Michael who rebuked Satan (Jude 9) and Gabriel who announced the birth of Christ. (Luke 1:19, 26) Seven angels were appointed to hold the seven last plagues of Revelation (Revelation 21:9), and one was assigned to show the apostle John "The New Jerusalem," whom John mistakenly worshiped. (Revelation 22:8-9) Notice that Christians are similarly referenced as a "chosen race" and a "holy nation," according to 1st Peter 2:9: "But you are a **chosen race**, a royal priesthood, a **holy nation**, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light."

What do Calvinists believe?

> Westminster Confession of Faith: *"By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated*

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[852] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 19.

> *unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death."*[853]

Our reply:

In other words, Calvinism for humans works the same way as for angels. However, not all Calvinists are in agreement, since there is no applicable TULIP system that would apply to the angels, given that the angels were not "Totally Depraved" and in need of "Regeneration" from a fallen state of "Total Inability."

John Calvin commented that for Paul to refer to the angels as elect angels was not meant to contrast them from reprobate angels, but rather to distinguish them as "excellent angels."[854] Indeed, the Bible never mentions non-elect angels or reprobate angels. However, at the same time, John Calvin also commented that the faithful angels stood fast because they were elect, while the revolt of the other angels proved that they were abandoned.[855]

> Ron Rhodes: *"All the angels were originally created good and holy, just as God made and pronounced all His creation good (Genesis 1:31; 2:3). For God to create anything wicked would be inconsistent with His holy character. Jude 6 affirms that originally all the angels were holy creatures. God did not create Satan and the fallen angels (demons) in a state of wickedness. Though all the angels were originally created in a state of holiness, Scripture indicates that they were subjected to a period of probation. Some of the angels remained holy. Others did not—following Lucifer's lead, they rebelled against God and fell into great sin. Once the angels were put to the test to remain loyal to God or to rebel with Lucifer, their decision seems to have been made permanent in its effect. Those angels that passed the probationary test will now*

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[853] Westminster Confession of Faith, *III. Of God's Eternal Decree*.

[854] "Paul calls these angels elect, not to differentiate them from the reprobate angels, but because they are such excellent angels, whose testimony may stir up deeper reverence." John Calvin, *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton: IL, Crossway Books, 1998), 93.

[855] "Paul gives the name of elect to the angels who maintained their integrity. If their steadfastness was owing to the good pleasure of God, the revolt of the others proves that they were abandoned. Of this no other cause can be adduced than reprobation, which is hidden in the secret counsel of God." John Calvin, *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book 3, Chapter 23, section 4 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, translated by Henry Beveridge, 1845), 793, https://ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.

> *always remain holy. Those who failed the probationary test are now confirmed in their evil state. This is the reason the good angels are called elect angels in 1 Timothy 5:21. They are not called elect because they sinned and then were elected unto redemption (they never sinned during the probationary period). Rather, they are called elect because God intervened to permanently confirm (elect) them in their holiness so they could not sin in the future. Good angels are now incapable of sinning. The lines have been drawn, and the lines are now absolute."*[856]

In other words, the angels are deemed elect, holy and chosen as God's designation for an approved status.

> Lawrence Vance: *"God 'chose' the angels that didn't fall, hence they are denominated as 'elect angels.' The use of the term elect as applied to angels parallels that of Christ. The significance is not of selection but of appraisal or assessment. This is why they are also denominated as 'holy angels' (Mat. 25:31)."*[857]

The correlation for Christians is that we are "elect," not from the standpoint of being preselected to believe, but elect from the standpoint of God's appraisal or assessment of the believer who is in Christ.

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"The necessary conclusion for the Calvinist is that God created many angels and humans without real love for them, because His love is exclusive to election. Would God create what He does not love? Never! For God to create one who bears His image whom He does not love is for God to not love Himself. Consequently, everything that God has created He has done so with everlasting love that is uniquely personal. Every human and angel is a marvelous miracle of God's creation, created in love, and for the greatest purpose imaginable."*[858]

> John Goodwin: *"...if God loves no more men than those who come to be actually saved, he might properly and truly be said to be...a lover of angels, rather than a lover of men. Because if we shall restrain his love towards men only to those comparative few who*

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[856] *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 255-256.
[857] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 367.
[858] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 183.

> *will be actually and eventually saved, he will be found to love a far greater proportion of angels than of men.... "*[859]

However, if we define God's love based upon an Unlimited Atonement, that is, a provision for salvation made indiscriminately for all men, so that absolutely no one has any excuse for why they ended up in Hell, then we might legitimately call God a lover of men, since by contrast, God made no such atonement for the redemption of the fallen angels.

2nd Timothy 1:8-11

"Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has **saved** us and **called** us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but **according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher."

Ephesians 1:1-13 similarly indicates that according to God's eternal predestination, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places is in Christ. In other words, spiritual blessings do not exist for an unbeliever. There are, of course, temporal blessings, but this text is not about temporal blessings, but about the spiritual blessings of salvation and the ministerial calling. In summary, the Bible sometimes speaks of God's predestinated plans for the Church, and what believing Christians can look forward to, both now and in eternity. This passage is just such a text.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Paul opposes to all human works! As if in the term good pleasure there were not in this passage a more express commendation of grace! As if God were not said to have purposed His good pleasure in Himself alone, because finding no cause in us He made Himself the cause of our being saved! As if it was in vain that Paul repeats five times that our salvation is wholly the effect of that decree and purpose and good pleasure! As if he*

[859] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 135.

> *declared without any purpose that we were blessed in Christ because we were elect!"*[860]

Our reply:

In other words, Calvinism's elect are spiritually blessed in the Father, even while as an unbeliever, and while alienated from Christ, and then upon receiving the spiritual blessing of Irresistible Grace, they then enter union with Christ, in which the body of Christ is the sole location of all spiritual blessings. However, it is a contradiction to assert one location as the sole source of all spiritual blessings, and then assert it elsewhere as well. So if all spiritual blessings are in Christ, then one cannot assert possession of spiritual blessings apart from union with Christ, which is precisely what Calvinists do indeed assert.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"In the final analysis, I have peace with God because God in eternity past chose this undeserving sinner and placed His grace and love upon me. There can be no other consistent, biblical, and God-glorifying answer."*[861]

Our reply:

This statement asserts possession of spiritual blessings apart from actual union with Christ. That is why Calvinism logically malfunctions.

> Jacob Arminius: *"This doctrine is highly dishonorable to Jesus Christ our Savior. ... It denies that Christ is the meritorious cause who again obtained for us the salvation we had lost, by placing him only as a subordinate cause of that salvation which had been already foreordained, and thus only a minister and instrument to apply that salvation unto us."*[862]

In Calvinism, God obtains the spiritual blessing of salvation for elect-unbelievers. The problem is that Calvinism eliminates the possibility that salvation begins in Christ, and therefore Christ's role as mediator, central to reconciliation with the Father, necessarily becomes diminished

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[860] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 141.
[861] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 95.
[862] *Arminius Speaks* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 47.

as nothing more than a subordinate cause of prior election, due to spiritual blessings possessed directly with the Father. However, if Calvinism taught that elect-unbelievers were eternally, *mutually* in God the Father and also in Christ, then there would not be a contradiction. The problem for Calvinism, though, is that no unbeliever can ever be said to be in Christ. Unbelievers are condemned, while those in Christ are redeemed. So to assert that one can be in Christ while as an unbeliever is also to assert that one can be condemned and redeemed, simultaneously. Calvinists can try to assert a secret relationship with the Father while as an unbeliever, but the inherent logical problems cause Calvinism to collapse upon itself.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"God's choice of a people unto salvation is free, based solely in His own will and purpose."*[863]

Our reply:

And God's "will and purpose" is to place the spiritual blessing of salvation in no other place than in Christ. The problem is that Calvinists envision God's "people" as being inclusive of unbelievers, who in secret possess spiritual blessings directly from the Father, where at an appointed time are caused to enter the body of Christ, which is the sole source of all spiritual blessings. However, once a Calvinist realizes that no one possesses spiritual blessings directly from the Father, Calvinism becomes logically untenable. We get our spiritual blessing from actual union with Christ, and nowhere else. A secret path with the Father that circumvents the mediatorship of Christ simply does not exist.

2nd Timothy 2:8-10

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

In this context, "those who are chosen" would likely refer to the unbelieving Jews (whom he still loved and desired to see become saved), since he is currently in custody with the Romans because of the false accusations of the Jews. There are two key facts to consider:

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[863] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 99.

1. The Jews are sometimes indirectly referenced. They are sometimes called "the elect" (Deuteronomy 7:6; Matthew 24:22-31), "the circumcised" (Galatians 2:7, 9) and "the circumcision." (Colossians 4:11)
2. Paul introduces another category of people (besides the Gentiles to whom he is an apostle) that he wants to see become saved, which are his "kinsmen according to the flesh, **who are Israelites**, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-5) who fought to undermine his ministry to the Gentiles and caused his imprisonment with the Romans.

So, in this context, Paul would be saying that he suffered greatly on account of the Jews, so that yes, even they too, may "also" obtain the salvation that he is bringing to the Gentiles and for whom he was appointed minster. This is supported by the fact that Paul said that when he is with the Jews, he is like the Jews, just as when he is with the Gentiles, he is like the Gentiles, all for the purpose of removing any hindrance from anyone to receive the gospel and become saved. Paul wants to see it happen, in part, because he sees it benefiting the entire Christian world.

> **Romans 11:12-13:** "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, **how much more will their fulfillment be**! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if **somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen** and **save some of them**."
>
> **1st Corinthians 9:12:** "If others share the right over you, do we not more? Nevertheless, we did not use this right, but **we endure all things so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ**."
>
> **1st Corinthians 9:19-23:** "For though I am free from all men, I have **made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more**. **To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews**; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; **to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I**

> **might win those who are without law**. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

The text says nothing about a secret class of people who were chosen from eternity past, as per Calvinism's doctrine of an Unconditional Election. Moreover, how would it make sense to say that Paul suffers so much for certain secret select people who will be inevitably saved—no matter what—by an Irresistible Grace?

> Kevin Thompson: *"Kevin Thompson: "What you're going to see is buzzwords, and Calvinists have a lot of baggage that they attribute to buzzwords, and if you see a buzzword, Calvinists bring with that buzzword an entire system and way of thinking, and that blinds the Calvinist to the context. Calvinism and context never go together. ... 2nd Timothy 2:10: 'I endure all things for the elect's sake.' So, as soon as a Calvinist sees that word, whatever Paul is talking about is completely gone—they have no idea, nor do they care—and whatever Calvinism says about the word 'elect' is now what that verse is talking about."*[864]

2nd Timothy 2:24-26

"The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be **kind** to all, able to teach, **patient** when wronged, with **gentleness** correcting **those who are in opposition**, if **perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth**, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

Also see the discussion on Philippians 1:29 and Acts 11:18. Paul is giving a young pastor advice on how to evangelize those in opposition, which is by stressing the importance of gentleness and patience. It's a lesson of practicality. If the evangelist is "not quarrelsome," but "kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged" and "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition," then it is more likely that people will listen. Conversely, if you treat "those who are in opposition" as an enemy, then they will likely remain that way.

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[864] Kevin Thompson, *2 Timothy 1:9; 2:10, 25-26 De-Calvinized, 8:38-9:29*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APw1rEWPCPU&feature=youtu.be.

> **Proverbs 15:1-2:** "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly."

For those who are receptive, the way in which "God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth" is by Him bringing them even greater revelation of Himself through further preaching of the gospel, so that if they "come to their senses and escape" and act on the gospel message, they will become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Since the conversion of a person is in God's hands, who can say whether those who today seem to be unteachable may be suddenly changed through God's power into different people?"*[865]

Our reply:

"Changed through God's power" is a Calvinist's subtle way of describing Irresistible Grace. It also undermines the main point of the apostle's instruction to young pastors. In other words, if there are some people who are going to be irresistibly saved, no matter what (i.e. Calvinism's elect), *then why the need for special instructions?* Calvinists will answer that such gentleness may be the "means" by which an Irresistible Grace is administered, but that is simply an assumption.

The reality is that "granted" does not mean "effectually caused." For instance, you can grant a woman a gift, but that doesn't guarantee that she will accept it, especially if she is at odds with you.

> **Colossians 4:2-4:** "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; **praying** at the same time for us as well, **that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ**, for which I have also been imprisoned; **that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak**."

For God to grant repentance simply means that God is answering your prayers, so that His evangelists may send out the gospel, in order that the lost will know the truth, and so that they can find forgiveness and

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[865] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: 1, 2 Timothy and Titus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 145.

salvation, which increases in possibility whenever the evangelist engages the lost with an attitude of patience, love and gentleness, so that the recipient is not automatically put off in a hostile, defensive mindset.

2nd Timothy 3:15-17
"And that from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that **leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work."

The apostles noted that Scripture is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), being that which is "spirit" and "life." (John 6:63) In Calvinism, though, the "sacred writings" only "leads to salvation" when accompanied by an Irresistible Grace. So, why would the Word of God be commended if the real power, according to Calvinism, is in Irresistible Grace?

2nd Timothy 4:7-8
"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will **award** to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing."

Notice what Paul is saying about an "award" or reward. This is interesting in light of 1st Corinthians 9:16-18 which states: "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am **under compulsion**; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For **if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me**. What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel." So, for there to be a "reward" of a crown of righteousness, then for "all who have loved His appearing," it has to be done "voluntarily." The conflict with Calvinism is that the effectual calling of election (i.e. Irresistible Grace) would be exactly like the "stewardship entrusted" that Paul described, and which would make all of Calvinism's elect *ineligible* for the reward that Paul describes.

Chapter 19: Book of Titus

Titus 1:1-3

"Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, **for the faith of those chosen of God** and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, even His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior."

Similarly, Colossians 3:12 states: "So, as those who have been **chosen of God, holy and beloved**, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Paul frequently describes *Christians* as being called and chosen: "…knowing, **brethren beloved by God, His choice of you**." (1st Thessalonians 1:4) So is this an election of *unbelievers* to *have* faith or is it an election of *Christians* to *service and blessing*? Missing from these references is any mention of a fixed and predetermined elect vs. non-elect class, or that God's choice was irresistible and unconditional, or that God prefers some *unbelievers* over others.

Another way to understand these references is in the same way that the angels are also described as "chosen angels." 1st Timothy 5:21 states: "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of **His chosen angels**, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality." Rather than being chosen *to be faithful*, one can say that this represents God's choice *of the faithful angels*, thus implying a title or designation. Paul was chosen to be an apostle. Christians also have various callings, as designated by the Holy Spirit. So in this context, God's choice is not necessarily of the unfaithful unto faithfulness, but from the standpoint of the faithful *for* service.

> John Parkinson: *"Here Paul is again using the term as a collective title of dignity for the saints. The faith of God's elect is that trust in Christ which brings an individual to be numbered among God's elect, and is echoed in Paul's greeting to Titus, whom he addresses as 'mine own son after the common faith' (v.4). It must have been a great joy for Paul, a converted Jew, to remind Titus, a converted Gentile, that they both shared in common, the faith of God's elect."*[866]

[866] *The Faith of God's Elect - a comparison between the election of Scripture and the election of Theology* (Glasgow, Scotland: Gospel Tract Publications, 1999), 33.

Titus 2:11-13
"For the **grace of God** has appeared, **bringing salvation to all men**, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

What do Calvinists believe?

Since the salvific grace spoken of at Titus 2:11 is efficacious in nature, it cannot refer to all people in an unqualified sense, unless one wishes to embrace the heresy of Universalism. Therefore, the implied meaning of "all men" must mean all *elect* men.

Our reply:

It is Circular Logic to assume what one intends to prove. If Calvinists wish to assert that the text refers to an efficacious, Irresistible Grace, they need to prove it first, before performing logical deduction to arrive at a restrictive meaning for "all men."

Calvinists should also cross-reference 1st Timothy 4:10 which comparably demonstrates that God is the Savior of all men, "especially" of those who believe:

> **1st Timothy 4:10:** "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the **Savior of all men, especially of believers**."

As such, believers are a *subset* of all men, rather than the *totality* thereof. Hence, "all men" must be taken in an unqualified, unrestrictive sense. This comports well to the understanding that "bringing salvation to all men" according to Titus 2:11 is not irresistible in nature, but simply reflects a well-meant offer given indiscriminately to anyone and everyone. Hence it follows that God has done everything necessary to clear the way so that anyone can come and receive the salvation that He has provided through His Son's death, burial and resurrection.

> Walls and Dongell: *"Given the unqualified use of all in these passages to identify those whom God desires to save, the burden of proving otherwise is on those who hold that biblical writers assumed a limitation on those who would be saved."*[867]

[867] *Why I Am Not A Calvinist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 52.

> John Goodwin: *"Now, certain it is, that the saving grace of God, held forth and proffered unto all men in the gospel, teacheth, inviteth, persuadeth, obligeth all men without exception, as well one as another, to deny ungodliness, &c., to live soberly, &c. Otherwise we must say that there are some men who ought not, who are no ways bound, to learn any of these things from the gospel, nor to practise them upon any account of grace or love tendered herein from God unto them: which, I suppose, is a saying too hard for any considering man to digest."*[868]

Titus 3:4-7
"But when the kindness of God our Savior and **His love for mankind** appeared, **He saved us, not on the basis of deeds** which we have done in righteousness, **but according to His mercy**, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being **justified by His grace** we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Similarly, Romans 4:5 states: "But to the one who **does not work**, but **believes in Him** who justifies the ungodly, his **faith is credited as righteousness**." Romans 9:30-32 also states: "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but **Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law**. **Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith**, but **as though it were by works**." Putting it all together, salvation is not based upon one's performance under the Law, but rather according to God's mercy who saves people by faith. Moreover, justification by grace is akin to justification by faith, since faith introduces us to grace: "Therefore, having been **justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained **our introduction by faith into this grace** in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." (Romans 5:1-2) As an example, the thief on the cross next to Jesus had no deeds that he could point to as a basis for deserving mercy (Luke 23:40-43), but rather, simply asked Jesus for mercy on the basis of being an undeserving beggar. Fortunately for the thief, Jesus is indeed merciful, and granted salvation simply at the asking.

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[868] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 132-133.

> Robert Shank: *"He does not save any man on the basis of any merit of his own (Titus 3:4-7), but rather by His grace and by the merits of Jesus Christ, His Son."*[869]
>
> Dave Hunt: *"Furthermore, that righteousness cannot come by works is also irrelevant to free will. Those who believe in free will also affirm that man is 'justified freely by His grace.' But grace cannot be forced upon anyone or it would not be grace. Thus, it takes the power of choice for man to assent to God's grace and to receive the gift of salvation God graciously offers."*[870]

Philemon 1:12-14:
"I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, **so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will**."

So, no Calvinist can claim that "free will" is a pagan term. Instead, it's a *biblical* term that Paul used at Philemon 1:14.

What do Calvinists believe?

Calvinists do believe in free will! It is not to willfully pursue Jesus Christ, but to pursue desires only according to our nature.

Our reply:

However, Paul described "free will" in a *positive* sense at Philemon 1:14. Paul is saying that he wants Philemon's "goodness" (in taking back Onesimus) to be according to his voluntary "free will," and not by strict "compulsion," as if he had no choice in doing the right thing.

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[869] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 198-199.
[870] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 233.

Chapter 20: Book of Hebrews

Hebrews 2:1-3

"For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we **do not drift away from it**. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, **how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?**"

Unbelievers won't escape judgment, and in Hell, they will be told that they rejected the chance to escape their fate. As with Matthew 5:27-30 and Matthew 16:25-26, Hebrews 2:1-3 cannot apply to anyone in Calvinism, elect or non-elect, or else how would Calvinism's elect "neglect" or "drift away" from an irresistible, involuntary and monergistic salvation that is unconditionally guaranteed, or how would the non-elect either "neglect" or "escape" a "salvation" in which they were excluded by a Limited Atonement and had no Savior who loved and died for them?

> Doug Sayers: *"That statement is nonsensical for the reprobate, according to the Calvinistic view, because they are not chosen for salvation. It would not be genuinely offered to them, yet it must be genuinely offered…in order to be neglected."*[871]

> Dave Hunt: *"Surely this is addressed to all mankind, and not just to the elect, unless the Calvinist is willing to admit that the elect can neglect their salvation and thus be lost."*[872]

> John Goodwin: *"'How shall we escape,' asketh the inspired writer, 'if we neglect so great a salvation,' &c. Heb. ii.3, clearly implying, that if they did not neglect it, but seriously and diligently mind and look after it, they would escape, (viz., the wrath of God and the vengeance of hell fire), and, consequently, be saved."*[873]

> John Goodwin: *"When he saith, 'If we neglect so great a salvation,' he expresseth or points at unbelief in the ordinary and*

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[871] *Chosen or Not? A Layman's Study of Biblical Election & Assurance* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 382.
[872] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 347.
[873] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 233.

> *most proper cause of it, viz. negligence or contempt of the gospel, and of the grace therein offered by God unto the world; which neglect or contempt are sins highly offensive and displeasing unto him. This appears yet more plainly in the parable of the marriage-feast or great supper, where, upon the report of the servant sent forth to invite the guests, of their slight pretenses for their not coming, the master of the feast is said to have been angry, and, in the heat of his anger, to have said, that 'none of those men which were bidden should taste of my supper.' Luke xiv. 24."*[874]

> John Goodwin: *"For if they be not enabled by God to repent and to believe the gospel, they must needs be subjected to an absolute necessity of despising or neglecting it; there being no medium between accepting the great salvation brought unto them therein, which is done by faith, and the neglecting of it, which is always accompanied with unbelief. Now a neglect of the gospel, and of the great salvation tendered therein by God unto men, is the first-born of provocations in the sight of God, and maketh men seven-fold more the children of wrath and of death, than otherwise they would have been."*[875]

Hebrews 2:9-10

"But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God **He might taste death for everyone**. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing **many sons** to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings."

Similarly, John 1:29 states: "The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who **takes away the sin of the world**!'" If "everyone" and "world" have a special meaning that implies only Calvinism's elect, then biblical authority is forfeited, and true authority rests with the theologian who can tell us when plain words mean something *completely different.*

What do Calvinists believe?

Jesus tasted death for "everyone" (v.9) of the "many sons" (v.10) of the elect, of whom He is the author and perfecter of their faith.

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[874] Ibid., 249.
[875] Ibid., 259.

(Hebrews 12:2) If Jesus died for every person, then everyone must be saved or else there would be people in Hell whose sins Jesus paid for and that would result in Double Jeopardy. So, if you hold to the meaning that Jesus died for everyone, then the result is necessarily Universalism.

Our reply:

There is no need to limit "everyone" to only "many sons" (as in Calvinism's elect) since just because Jesus died for everyone, doesn't mean that anyone is automatically saved. Calvary does not save without faith, no more than the "serpent on the standard" of Numbers 21:6-9 healed anyone without first looking upon it. The *availability* of the atonement does not automatically translate into an *application* of the atonement. Jesus died for everyone, but unless we place our trust in Him, we cannot benefit from His atonement, and we will have ended up forfeiting the grace that could have been ours. One must believe in Jesus in order for the transaction of salvation to be complete. Those in Hell never had a completed transaction, and that's why God can tell them that they didn't have to go to Hell, and that they could have believed in Jesus and have gone to Heaven, instead. Calvinists, though, can't say that. In Calvinism, people in Hell never had a Savior and never had an Atonement.

> John Goodwin: *"The inspired writer attributes his death to the grace of God, i.e. the love and gracious affections of God, not towards some, or a few, no, nor yet towards all men collectively taken or in the lump, but towards all men distributively taken, i.e. towards every particular and individual man."*[876]

> Norman Geisler: *"First of all, 'everyone' is used generically of humans, as is indicated not only by the contrast of humans with angels (v.7) but also by the reference to human 'flesh and blood' (i.e., enfleshed human nature). This generic use is almost always universal. Furthermore, since the result of the death (and resurrection) of Christ destroys death and defeats the devil (v.14), it must have reference to all of Adam's race. Otherwise, Christ was not victorious in reversing what the devil did. In short, His victory would not have been complete."*[877]

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[876] *Redemption Redeemed: A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 257.

[877] *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 211-212.

Hebrews 4:12
"For **the word of God is living and active** and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to **judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart**."

According to Calvinism, God decreed whatsoever comes to pass, including every thought, word and deed, and as well as all "thoughts and intentions of the heart," and so when God judges such thoughts and intentions, then in Calvinism, He must be judging Himself and His own decree.[878] Conversely, if man independently self-determines his own thoughts and intentions, based upon his own moral character, formed by the sum total of his own life's choices through either obedience or disobedience to God's Word, then for God's Word to judge such matters would be judging something outside of Himself, whereas Calvinism has God's Word judging God.

Similarly, John 6:63 states: "'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.'" The "power" of the word of God (Romans 1:16), which is the "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12), "spirit" and "life" (John 6:63), through which we are made born again (1st Peter 2:23), is able to produce "faith" in its hearers. (Romans 10:17) Hence, there is enough power in God's word so that anyone can hear, believe and become saved.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"The minister's teaching and speaking does no good unless God adds his inward calling to it. ... Preaching alone is just a dead letter, and we must beware lest a false imagination, or the semblance of secret illumination, leads us away from the Word on which faith depends."*[879]

> John Calvin: *"Now let Pighius asseverate that God wills all to be saved, when not even the external preaching of the doctrine, which is much inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, is made common to all."*[880]

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[878] See also the discussion on 1st Chronicles 28:9.
[879] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: Acts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 278.
[880] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 109.

John Calvin: *"In a word, Paul indicates that all clamorous sounding of the human voice will lack effect, unless the virtue of God works internally in the heart."*[881]

Our reply:

However, if this was so, then why would the devil be so concerned about stealing an alleged "dead letter" unless it really wasn't dead after all? Luke 8:12 states: "'Those beside the road are those who have heard; then **the devil comes and takes away the word** from their heart, **so that they will not believe and be saved**.'" Certainly, Calvinists cannot say that the devil is stealing regeneration or Irresistible Grace. So it is the word, not regeneration, that is being stolen, and which would otherwise be the means of them becoming saved. The question would naturally be asked why God would allow the devil to steal the word which could otherwise be for their salvation, and the answer is found at 2nd Thessalonians 2:10-12: "And with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved**. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." So they could have been saved but rejected that which was meant for their salvation and thus were given up to their own desires.

Are the mere words of the gospel ineffective without the "inward calling" of the Spirit? The words of the gospel are never "mere" anything. The words of the gospel are the words of the Spirit. The Spirit speaks through *means*, and those "means" mean something. In other words, the means that the Spirit uses have the sufficient power to do what the Bible says that they were meant to do. So, if the Spirit speaks with David, as David says in 2nd Samuel 23:2 that "the Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue," and if I hear David's words, and if it brings conviction to my heart, piercing through—not just bone and marrow—but through soul and spirit, as the word of God says it would do in Hebrews 4:12, then who do I give credit to for that conviction of David's words which were made through the Spirit?[882] The point is that one cannot separate God's word from the Spirit since the Spirit is the originator of the inspired word of God.

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[881] Ibid., 104.
[882] *How to KNOW TRUTH?*, 1:16:57 – 1:48:10.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My196P8HXuA

Hebrews 6:4-6
"For in the case of those who have once been **enlightened** and have **tasted of the heavenly gift** and have been made **partakers of the Holy Spirit**, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have **fallen away**, it is **impossible to renew** them again to repentance, **since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame**."

From the onset, believers (presumably Jewish believers) are to "press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works." (v.1) Having been "enlightened" and "tasted of the heavenly gift" and have been "partakers of the Holy Spirit" and have "tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" (v.4) are all "things that accompany salvation." (v.9)

Those who "fall away," in which it is "impossible to renew them again to repentance," could not be indicative of Calvinism's *elect* class who are irresistibly saved and unconditionally preserved. So, if these are not ultimately saved, then they would have to be representative of Calvinism's *non-elect* class of eternal reprobates. However, in Calvinism, why would they be given "things that accompany salvation" (v.9), that is, those who were never intended to spend eternity with Christ in Heaven? Moreover, what does it mean that they "again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame" if Calvinism's doctrine of a Limited Atonement *excluded* them from Christ's atonement to begin with? This is just a metaphor, since no one has literally crucified Christ a second time, but one wonders how there could be a re-crucifixion by Calvinism's *non-elect* class of eternal reprobates/apostates if Christ was never crucified for them in the first place. (2nd Peter 2:1 refutes the notion that Jesus never died for apostates.)

Saying that these people were on the cusp of salvation, and were never saved to begin with, doesn't help Calvinism's argument because it leaves open the question of why they had been monergistically toyed with by God in the first place over matters pertaining to salvation. Do they represent a special class of Calvinism's damned? Speaking of what *they* did or didn't do, only dodges the central issue involving what *God* is allegedly said by Calvinism to be doing. There comes to mind a metaphor of a killer whale tossing its prey into the air.

Calvinism aside, the implication is that we, who Jesus died for, can get close to the "things that accompany salvation" (v.9) but never end up reaching it. The writer of Hebrews has higher hopes for these "beloved" individuals, that is, "better things concerning you." (v.9)

Hebrews 10:10-14
"By this will we have been **sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all**. Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. For **by one offering** He has **perfected for all time those who are sanctified**."

What do Calvinists believe?

Christ's offering perfects and sanctifies those for whom Christ died, namely only the elect, and which is performed on their behalf, apart from their voluntary choice to receive it.[883]

Our reply:

Christ's offering perfects those who are sanctified, namely believers. While the atonement is available to all, salvation is only applied to believers. The atonement itself does not save without faith, as it neither perfects nor sanctifies anyone in the absence of faith. One must look upon Christ in order to receive the benefits of His atonement, illustrated at John 3:14 and Numbers 21:6-9.

In summary, it is evident that the "offering" which has "perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14) refers to believers "who draw near." (Hebrews 10:1) It is evident that we are "sanctified by faith" in Christ. (Acts 26:18) It is evident that the Old Covenant offerings were for all Israel, but did not redeem the unrepentant. Only when we receive God, do we receive the benefits of His atonement.

> Dave Hunt: *"Calvinism rejects faith as a human 'effort,' so the elect must be saved the moment Christ paid the penalty for their sins. Yet if Christ actually saved all of the elect at Calvary, they could never have been lost and would not need to be saved later. Scripture doesn't say that a man is 'saved already.' It says that he is 'condemned already,' and not because Christ didn't die for him but 'because he hath not believed' (John 3:18). Repeatedly we read that those who believe are saved and those who believe not 'shall not see life' (John 3:36). If Christ's death in itself saved, the elect wouldn't need to believe."*[884]

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[883] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 245.
[884] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 182-183.

Hebrews 10:31
"It is a terrifying thing to **fall into the hands of the living God**."

How is it possible to "fall" into God's hands, if that's exactly where God allegedly, predetermined the vast majority to end up? If the Calvinist doctrine of Unconditional Reprobation was true, then the verse should have stated: "It is a terrifying thing to be 'predestined for Hell' and born unwanted for salvation."

The fault does not lie with God, as it is not His intention that people reject His well-meant offer of the Gospel. He is "patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance." (2nd Peter 3:9)

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

According to Calvinism, however, God is pleased to unilaterally and involuntarily regenerate some, namely Calvinism's elect, simply because they are elect, *apart from the basis of their faith*. So then in Calvinism, faith is not the *primary* factor which pleases God, but rather, that which pleases God must be His own will and decree by which He was moved to elect some and not others.

> **John 16:26-27:** "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for **the Father Himself loves you**, because **you have loved Me** and have **believed** that I came forth from the Father."

Notice the reason for the Father's love. What pleases Him is our faith and love for His Son, Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 12:2
"Fixing our eyes on **Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith**, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Similarly, Hebrews 2:10 states: "For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to **perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings**." 1st Peter 1:20-21 states: "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times **for the sake**

of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

This text encourages Christians on how to grow their faith, not about how an elect class of unbelievers are regenerated into believers. The emphasis is on the race for *believers* to run unencumbered, fixing our eyes on Jesus, as the perfect *example* of who and how we, as believers, are to *imitate*, based upon how Jesus ran the race "for the joy set before Him," with an endurance that perseveres through suffering and shame. Jesus is described as the highest example of how to start, endure and complete the race of faith.

In context, Hebrews 12:2 follows the "faith chapter" of Hebrews 11 which highlights the faithful believers of the Bible. Turning to Jesus, highlighting what He did, shows that not only is He the greatest of all of the aforementioned examples, but that He is also the One in whom they had all believed. Starting and authoring, finishing and perfecting, Jesus provided the ultimate example *of* faith and *for* faith. In other words, this isn't necessarily about Jesus authoring the faith of unbelievers, in terms of a secret Irresistible Grace, but about Jesus being the *role model for believers to grow in their faith*. Nowhere in this text are we taught how Jesus is the author of a predetermined number of unbelievers to irresistibly be made to become believers.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Consider what this means: Jesus is the origin and source of faith, the goal of faith, the one who completes and perfects faith. It surely does not seem that much room is left for the pot to boast about contributing his free will act of faith, does it?"*[885]

Our reply:

Does the text rebuke "free will"? If not, then why are Calvinists raising an extra-biblical argument? Moreover, Calvinists simply assume that Jesus being the "author" of our faith is a dog whistle for the "I" in TULIP (aka "Irresistible Grace") and assume that being the "finisher" of our faith is a dog whistle for the "P" in TULIP (aka "Perseverance of the Saints"). Calvinism survives on assumptions confirming their own bias.

The Faith Chapter is meant to illustrate the heroes of the faith, so that our faith would be strengthened, and who better than Jesus being the primary example? Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith because His

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[885] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 293.

life serves as the ultimate example and reason for why anyone should believe. As a result, by faith, we too can overcome our own will. Compare with Matthew 26:39, similarly regarding Jesus enduring the Cross: "And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; **yet not as I will, but as You will**.'"

> Steven Hitchcock: *"Both of these texts of Scripture, which deal with Jesus' travail of soul about the cross, address the issue of faith and the will. Jesus was not even tainted by sin and yet He did not 'will' to go to the cross. The cross was not something to be desired, so to not will it, was not indicative of a sinful disposition of the heart. He said in His prayer to the Father that it was not His will, but He still went to the cross. According to Hebrews, He went to the cross by faith, not by His will. His will and His faith were in opposition to one another. So it says that Jesus despised the shame of the cross, meaning that it was in conflict with His will, but that by faith He looked ahead to the joy that was set before Him. Jesus overcame the conflict of His will, and a sinless will at that, by faith. Jesus is our leader and the perfecter of our faith because He overcame His will by His faith. So as we fix our eyes on Jesus, which is to look to Him in faith, our enslaved wills are defeated. Therefore, in the sinless example of the Lord Jesus Christ we can observe that when faith is exercised it is not governed by the disposition of the will or even arises out of the will, but rather, the exercise of faith governs the will."*[886]
>
> Steven Hitchcock: *"Jesus is our leader and the perfecter of our faith because He overcame His will by His faith. So as we fix our eyes on Jesus, which is to look to Him in fact, our enslaved wills are defeated."*[887]
>
> Gordon Robertson: *"Take heart in that Jesus is your faith. You don't even have to come up with it, and drum up with it, on your own. This isn't some, 'Let's hype it up' and 'get all emotional.' This is, 'Look to Him, the author and finisher of your faith.' And if He is the 'author,' then He begins it. And if He is the 'finisher,' that means that He finishes it. And all that we have to do is look to Him. So instead of me trying to come up with it, I just have to look at Him, and the more that I look at His Word, the more that I'm*

[886] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 229-230.
[887] Ibid., 230.

> *looking at Him, because whose 'the Word'? Jesus. Jesus. 'Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word.' Hearing by Jesus."*[888]

This is speaking of faith in the context of the believer, that is, of the Christian seeking to have faith, just as the Faith-Chapter of Hebrews chapter 11 encourages believers in reaching such a faith.

> Gordon Robertson: *"We do have Free Will, and we can choose to obey and believe, or we can start doing things our way."*[889]

> Gordon Robertson: *"The earth says, 'Seeing is believing.' The Bible says, 'Believing is Seeing.' Believe that you already have it. Start thinking about how many times you've prayed, and you believed that you didn't have it. How many times did you repeat that same thing, 'I have to face reality.' Even though you've seen plenty of evidence of His power and His faithfulness, and He's seen you so far, and He's walked with you so far, but you start saying, 'I don't have that yet.'"*[890]

[888] Gordon Robertson, *The Life-Changing Power of Prayer*.
[889] Ibid.
[890] Ibid.

Chapter 21: Book of James

James 1:13

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and **He Himself does not tempt anyone**."

Similarly, 1st Corinthians 10:13 states: "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful**, who **will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**, but with the temptation **will provide the way of escape** also, so that you will be **able to endure it**." The devil tempts people, desiring that they *fail*; God tests people, desiring that they *pass*.

Notice the contrast between something of "God" and something of our "own." The whole point was to *separate* something of God from something of man. The idea is that temptations have nothing to do with God. It's not what He does. He takes no part in it, though He can defeat evil by using something man meant for bad and using that very same thing to accomplish good, and obviously Calvary is a perfect example. God took man's instrument of death, namely crucifixion, and used it as God's instrument of salvation. However, Calvinists point to that very same thing, namely Calvary, to argue in favor of determinism. They say God predestined it. While that's true, what else does Acts 2:23 say? It says that God's "foreknowledge" was involved. So, then, we can reasonably argue that God predestined Calvary to be used as God's means of salvation *knowing* that it was also man's means of execution. So, God predestined Calvary based upon what He knew of the people involved and their culture. Hence, God didn't need to be the mastermind of their evil. All God needed was to know what they intended and then plan Calvary around it.

> Adrian Rogers: *"Now God will test you, and God will prove you, but God will never induce you to do evil. God gives us tests to make us stand; Satan gives us temptations to make us stumble."*[891]

> Dave Hunt: *"God allows evil and can prevent, control, or use it, even for good (Genesis 50:20), but He doesn't even tempt anyone to evil (James 1:13), much less decree it."*[892]

This creates a theological challenge for Calvinists. On the one hand, Calvinists insist that God has decreed "whatsoever comes to pass,"

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[891] Adrian Rogers, *Flawed Appetites and Fatal Attractions: James 1:12-15*.
[892] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 327.

while on the other hand, God clearly states that there are some things He *does not do*, such as tempting people or authoring confusion.

What do Calvinists believe?

God does not need to tempt because He is the ultimate cause of all things. God uses secondary means to tempt, i.e. Satan and our own lust.

Our reply:

The Calvinist solution relies on contradictory wills, that is, the alleged Revealed Will vs. Secret Will. So, in Calvinism, the Revealed Will is that "He Himself does not tempt anyone," at least not *directly*. Instead, He does that *indirectly* through secondary agents such as the devil, which then would comprise the Secret Will, for those hidden things God allegedly does behind the scenes that are unknown to us.

Non-Calvinists acknowledge that while God allows others to *independently* make temptations, He just as independently designs the way to ultimately defeat it. However, Calvinists insist that if God allows something, then He decreed to allow it, or else why would He allow one thing but not another? In this way, divine permission in Calvinism becomes wrapped up in determinism. Hence, for God to *allow* a temptation, God must have a hidden *purpose* in that temptation, all of which being part of an exhaustive decree. To counter this view, one can cite examples where things are permitted that are *not desired*, but allowed solely for the purpose of giving people choices that they must make. For instance, the father of the "prodigal son" allowed his son to leave, but that doesn't mean that that's what the father wanted or intended. The narrative implies that the father simply didn't want to hold his son against his will. God similarly allows people to have their own way, and ultimately then to experience the consequences of their choices, either for good or for bad. By allowing people to have a choice to freely love God or not, God creates the possibility of genuine love and fellowship, and so free-will, then, yields a direct benefit to God to bring Him true glory.

Calvinists want to envision God as sovereign over all things, including sin, and then trying to soften the difficulties with 1st and 2nd causes, but which only ends in declaring "mystery." The alternative view simply acknowledges God as sovereign within a paradigm of free-will.

James 1:17

"**Every good thing** given and **every perfect gift** is **from above**, coming down from the **Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow**."

Similarly, 1st John 1:5 states: "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that **God is Light**, and **in Him there is no darkness at all**." Habakkuk 1:13 also states: "**Your eyes are too pure to approve evil**, and You can not look on wickedness with favor. Why do You look with favor on those who deal treacherously? Why are You silent when the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they?"

> George Bryson: *"If the Calvinist is right, then James could and perhaps should also have said: Every good and bad gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights and darkness."*[893]

How could a Being who is utterly absent of any sense of spiritual darkness, somehow also be the creative mastermind behind every single act of darkness ever perpetrated, as per the meticulous determinism of Calvinism? God, from whom is "every good thing" and "every perfect gift" and One who is "too pure" to approve evil, simply cannot be evil's sole creative origin. So, something has to give.

What do Calvinists believe?

It is agreed that good and perfect gifts come from God, but Scripture also reveals that things which are not so good, also come from God, as Isaiah 45:7 attests: "'I am the Lord, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these.'"

Our reply:

However, both Amos 3:6 and Isaiah 45:7 refer to calamity and judgment, *not moral evil*. So, Calvinists are misapplying those texts.

What do Calvinists believe?

In a world that is spinning out of control, where evil occurs on a regular basis, it is a great comfort to know that God is in charge and that everything is happening precisely by His design.

Our reply:

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[893] *The Dark Side of Calvinism* (Santa Ana, CA: Calvary Chapel Publishing (CCP), 2004), 372.

Would it not be more comforting to envision God as being *in control* over evil, rather than *controlling* all evil?

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"But how is it that God remains perpetually identical with Himself, without any shadow of turning (Jas 1.17), while yet willing something different from what He manifests? I reply that it is no wonder if God in speaking to men should accommodate Himself to their measure. Who will say that God appears in visions as He really is? For the splendor of His glory is such that its mere appearance would rob us of all our senses. He therefore manifests Himself as men are able to comprehend. For either God prattles with us, or He veils what He knows to be incomprehensible to us, though I deny that there is any pretence or deception in His word."*[894]

Our reply:

That is the transcendence defense, in which divine complexity is rendered beyond human understanding. However, it is overlooked that God might actually *not* be the father of darkness and that God might *not* be the author of sin. Calvinists ought to reconsider their fundamental presupposition that God has decreed "whatsoever comes to pass" because it would logically make God the *father* and *author* of things the Bibles says are not from God.

James 1:18

"In the **exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth**, so that we would be a kind of **first fruits among His creatures**."

Addressed to the "twelve tribes who are dispersed aboard," we find a statement somewhat reminiscent of John 15:16: "'You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.'"

First of all, for God to raise up one group of people as evangelists for the greater benefit of mankind, does not establish a bifurcation of humanity between fixed classes of elect vs. non-elect. It, instead, only

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[894] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 183.

speaks to what God was doing among those particular individuals, for the purpose of blessing others, which mirrors the election of Israel to service as well, in terms of being a blessing to all of the families of the earth.

Secondly, a similar expression appears at Ephesians 1:1, which states: "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the will of God*." In the case of Paul's conversion, we are never told that he was "regenerated prior to faith in Christ," as per Calvinism. In fact, God's *external* miracle on the road to Damascus, in appearing to Saul of Tarsus, does not prove an *internal* regeneration. God simply used a miracle to humble Saul of Tarsus, who then embraced Christ through the experience. That, itself, does not prove anything in relation to Calvinism. All it demonstrates is God's prevenient grace, either in General Revelation or through the gospel, for which God raises up people into the ministry.

What do Calvinists believe?

The elect herein described are brought forth by means of regeneration and an effectual call.

Our reply:

The inference of Irresistible Grace seems forced.

> Norm Geisler: *"Here again, there is no question that God is the source of salvation. Had he not chosen to save, then no one would be saved. But the question remains as to the means by which we receive salvation. That is, does God save us apart from our free choice or through it? Nothing in this text, or any other for that matter, declares that God chooses to save us against our will."*[895]

Indeed in Calvinism, God takes "total haters of God" (i.e. the doctrine of Total Depravity) and regenerates them with Irresistible Grace, against their will, that is, against their totally depraved will, simply because they happen to be elect, so that they are "made willing." Nothing of the kind is being taught at James 1:18. Calvinists must import it.

James 2:13

"For **judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy**; mercy triumphs over judgment."

Notice the *conditional* nature of divine judgment.

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[895] *Chosen But Free* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 96.

> **James 3:17:** "But the **wisdom from above** is **first pure**, then **peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy** and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

So, how does the conditional nature of divine judgment make sense in light of Calvinism, which teaches that God has allegedly decreed "whatsoever comes to pass"? If that had been true, then God would have predetermined all acts of mercilessness that He then judges. This is one of the many logical dilemmas with Calvinism. In Calvinism, God *warns* against doing certain things, but has also secretly, eternally and unilaterally decreed *every single instance* of the things He warns against, and not just the acts themselves, but also the thoughts and intentions behind the acts, so as to determine whatsoever things people may *want* to do.

James 2:15-16

"If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, **what use is that?**"

Similarly, 1st John 3:17 states: "But whoever has the world's goods, and **sees his brother in need** and **closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?**"

Here we find rhetorical questions that demonstrate the principles of God, for which we can apply to Christian theology. So we should ask of Calvinism's General Call, Common Grace and Evanescent Grace, "what us is that?" if no one is saved by any of them? We can also ask, "how does the love of God abide" in One who could create a class of untouchables—that is, the "non -elect" who are created in a lower caste, with whom God (according to Calvinism) closed His heart from saving, and who were born without an atonement (being excluded from a Limited Atonement), and whom God never intended to have spending eternity with Him in Heaven, and yet simultaneously says to them, "I love you," and "I desire that you be saved"? *What good* would be such a profession? *What use* is Calvinism's General Call to the non-elect, which saves not one of them? It seems that the principles of God would forbid any consideration of divine providence within the paradigm of Calvinism.

James 2:17-26

"Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and **I will show you my faith by my works**.' You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith

without works is useless? Was not **Abraham** our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the **altar**? You see that **faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected**; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,' and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not **Rahab the harlot** also justified by works when **she received the messengers and sent them out by another way**? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also **faith without works is dead**."

Atheists often cite this passage as evidence of contradictions in the Bible, such as James 2:26 contradicting Ephesians 2:8-9. However, while the passage in Ephesians is speaking of salvation, in terms of being saved by grace through faith, apart from the *works of the Law*, the context of James is about people who are already believers, in which the works are *tests of faith*, necessary to grow faith. So, the texts cannot contradict one another if they are talking about two completely different types of works.

Commentators often suggest that true faith produces works, which is true, but that is actually the *opposite* point that James is making, in which he argues that trials strengthens faith. In other words, he is talking about "works" in terms of an *experience* with God. He is speaking of faith "as a result of the works," in which faith is being "perfected." He is talking about believers *growing* in their faith after having it *tested*. In context, Abraham was tested with regard to Isaac at Genesis 22:10-14, further discussed at Hebrews 11:17-19. Abraham was "tested," in which he took a leap of faith, reasoning within himself that God could raise Isaac from the dead in order to keep His promise about Isaac, since God always keeps His promises. Rahab believed that God was coming to judge her city, and when the opportunity presented itself, she took a leap of faith to side with God, even against her own city. What they both did was to step out in faith, resulting in changed lives.

What do Calvinists believe?

> R.C. Sproul: *"James is asking what kind of faith is saving faith. He makes it clear that no one is justified by a mere profession of faith. Anyone can say he has faith. But saying it and having it are not the same thing. True faith always manifests itself in works. If not works follow from faith, then the alleged faith is 'dead' and useless."*[896]

[896] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 69.

Our reply:

That reflects the common interpretation. However, this is not about what *proves* faith, but about what *produces* faith, namely, trials and tribulations. Faith *tested* equals faith perfected. Faith *untested* (meaning no trials) just leaves one with blind faith. "Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial...." (James 1:12) Faith without experience is just pretending.

> Adrian Rogers: *"The faith that can't be tested, can't be trusted."*[897]

Anything that constitutes a step of faith, that is, by going out on a limb and trusting in God, always results in a person being changed. So if you want to become changed, or to grow in faith, one must experience what it is like to trust in God and to see Him come through for you. Again, the result is that a person will never be the same. Faith is the deepest level upon which man can experience God. When Abraham met Melchizedek, he found someone with whom he could identify, and community of Christians, such as a church, is a community that can identify with one another, having shared experiences in a journey of faith, that is, of stepping out in faith and seeing God deliver in times of trouble. A testimony becomes a permanent part of who we are. As an example, when David took the battlefield against Goliath and experienced God giving him the victory, there is no way he could have walked away the same person as before. It had to have changed him. That doesn't mean that he became impervious to sin. The matter involving Uriah proved that. However, the trials of faith do provide us with a firm faith for which to turn back to God, whenever we do happen to stumble and make mistakes, just as David had done when he was confronted and ultimately repented and was restored back into a right relationship with God.

James 4:2

"You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. **You do not have because you do not ask**."

Similarly, Matthew 7:7 states: "'**Ask**, and it will be given to you; **seek**, and you will find; **knock**, and it will be opened to you.'" Matthew 21:22 states: "'And all things you ask in prayer, **believing**, you will receive.'" Mark 11:24 also states: "'Therefore I say to you, all things for

[897] Adrian Rogers, *In Jesus there is so much more: Romans 5:6-9*, 1998.

which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.'"

This works against Calvinistic determinism, unless Calvinists wish to say that we do not ask because God has *decreed* that we not ask, and then, of course, blaming some poor person for not asking. Calvinism puts everything back upon God and labels it "sovereignty" while the Bible instead shows how God puts things back upon individuals and challenges them on their shortcomings. God is saying that certain things would have happened if we did something, such as asking with the right motives, but if everything was already set in stone, by an immutable decree, then what is the point of mentioning what things could have been like?

James 4:6

"But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but **gives grace to the humble**.'"

If God gives grace "to the humble," then He is giving it based upon something that we are doing that pleases Him, namely by not being prideful. John 16:27 states: "For the Father Himself loves you, **because** you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father." So, God does not dispense grace *arbitrarily*, such as for no reason at all. In fact, the text shows that there is a very definite *reason* for why God gives grace, and it is because God perceives that certain people are humble, and then it's His sovereign choice to show such people "grace."

If God were to give grace to Calvinism's "elect" while being lost as "total haters of God"—as per the Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity—then what would be the basis for God to give them grace? Would it be based upon a principle that is the complete *opposite* of James 4:6?

James 4:14-15

"Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, '**If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Piper: *"You ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'" James 4:15. God's will decides when everyone dies. God's will decides whether anyone does this or that. This is what it means to be God, according to the Bible."*[898]

[898] John Piper, Twitter post October 10, 2019.

Our reply:

James 4:14-15 is not teaching *exhaustive determinism*. Rather, it is teaching *submission*. It challenges us to think as Christians ought. In our finite lives, we make our own plans and push to achieve our own goals, but James 4:15 reminds us to seek and to submit to whatever God may be doing in our lives. 1st Corinthians 4:19 states: "But I will come to you soon, **if the Lord wills**, and I shall find out, not the words of those who are arrogant but their power." Paul shows the right Christian attitude by remaining cognizant of God's plans.

James 5:16
"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The **effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much**."

According to the deterministic decree of Calvinism, prayer can only "accomplish" what is predetermined, and nothing more. This is what Calvinistic determinism necessarily produces.

What do Calvinists believe?

Prayer is the predestined means of God carrying out His sovereign decree. Prayer does not change God; prayer changes man. If God ever says that prayer changes His mind on something, it just means that He is condescending to the level of man, knowing full well what He had unchangeably decreed from all eternity.

Our reply:

In Calvinism, prayer changes *neither* God nor man, as *nothing could change* if everything was already set in stone. Non-Calvinists see life far more differently and do not believe that divine omniscience sets anything in stone, as God's knowledge does not cause things to be as they are, but captures the self-determined choices of others. Therefore, God knows and sees how humans impact their own lives, and that if they would only pray more, what life could be like for them.

God is unchanging in His character. Prayer doesn't change His character, nor does it necessarily change His mind, but rather, prayer may be seen as a condition that God sets before taking certain actions. As an analogy, I may have decided to take my son to the ballpark today, but I don't take him until he first asks. His asking didn't change my mind or my

character, but rather, I purposely chose not to act until that condition was present, when he demonstrated that he, too, valued something that I also valued. This is the type of dynamic universe, rather than static, that non-Calvinists have in mind, in contrast to the fully determined world-view of Calvinism. As humans, we constantly impact life, and though God knows what we will ultimately do, His knowledge doesn't make our choices for us. His knowledge may instead lead Him to plead with us to take another course of action, knowing what lays ahead. As such, God knows not only what *will* happen, but also what *could* happen, in any situation.

Chapter 22: 1st and 2nd Peter

1st Peter 1:1-2

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as **aliens, scattered** throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are **chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father**, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure."

The scattered aliens who are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" raises interesting theological questions. Who is being chosen? How were they chosen? What were they chosen to?

Peter, James and John were apostles to the Jews while Paul and Barnabas were apostles to the Gentiles. (Galatians 2:7-9) The greeting in James 1:1 states: "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the **twelve tribes** who are **dispersed abroad**: Greetings." It is possible that Peter may have had the same audience in mind, namely the scattered Jewish Christian believers. Being chosen "to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" likely refers to the physical toll of evangelism. The fact that they were driven out of their home land and "scattered" abroad as "aliens" would make them like Daniel, strategically placed, according to the "foreknowledge of God the Father" who knows best how to utilize His servants in the ministry of the gospel. The practical application is that whenever we face trials, we need to look to God, to see how He may be working in the midst of our challenges.

> Laurence Vance: *"Calvinists who appeal to 1 Peter 1:2 as a proof text for Unconditional Election normally make foreknowledge into foreordination exactly like we will see the Calvinists do in Romans 8:29."*[899]

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"For God looks at nothing outside Himself by which He is moved to elect us, for the counsel of His own will is the only and proper and (as they say) intrinsic cause of election."*[900]

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[899] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 377.
[900] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, translated by T.H.L. Parker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 130.

> John Calvin: *"Hence, when Peter calls them elect according to the foreknowledge of God, he is showing that the cause of it depends simply on God alone, because He of His own free will has chosen us. Thus the foreknowledge of God excludes every worthiness on the part of man."*[901]

Our reply:

However, saying that God foreknows whom He elected would reverse the order of the verse. It instead says that God elects those whom He foreknows, or chooses to use those whom He knows are fit for the job.

1st Peter 1:3

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has **caused us to be born again** to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Similarly, Ephesians 1:13 states: "In Him, you also, after **listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also **believed**, you were **sealed in Him** with the Holy Spirit of promise." 1st Corinthians 1:30-31 states: "But **by His doing you are in Christ Jesus**, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'" According to 1st Peter 1:23, we are "born again…through the living and enduring word of God." So, when we hear and believe in the gospel, God seals us in Christ with the Holy Spirit and makes us born again.

What do Calvinists believe?

"Caused" means to make something happen, such as to compel by command, authority or force.

Our reply:

God causes *believers* to be Born Again. Calvinists are assuming that God causes *unbelievers* (of the elect kind) to be Born Again. That's the difference.

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[901] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, translated by W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 230.

What do Calvinists believe?

God does not regenerate us on the basis of our works, not even our faith, in which even our faith becomes a work when it is something that is left up to ourselves and the strength of our own willpower.

Our reply:

There is no verse in the Bible which makes such a claim about faith and works relative to regeneration, and in fact, Romans 4:5 would seem to indicate that God's grace is for those who come to Him in faith, while turning away those who come to Him with works, claiming to have earned it: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." Moreover, if being made *alive* is akin to regeneration, then Ephesians 2:5-8 indicates that the grace of being made "alive" is "through faith," thus meaning that faith results in regeneration, in so much that God chooses to regenerate those who turn to Him in faith.

1st Peter 1:20-21
"For **He was foreknown before the foundation of the world**, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

All statements referencing "*before* the foundation of the world" are made with respect to Christ (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 1st Peter 1:20), while all statements referencing "*from* the foundation of the world" are made with respect to man, moving us forward from a previous point of reference in Genesis. (Matthew 25:34; Luke 11:50; Revelation 13:8)[902]

1st Peter 2:7-8
"This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,' and, 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense'; for they **stumble because they are disobedient to the word**, and **to this doom they were also appointed**."

Similarly, Romans 9:30-33 states: "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; but Israel, pursuing a law of

[902] Also see the discussion on Revelation 13:8.

righteousness, did not arrive at that law. **Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith**, but as though it were by works. **They stumbled over the stumbling stone**, just as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.'" Stumbling was a factor of how righteousness was pursued, whether by faith, like the Gentiles, or by the works of the Law, like Israel. God intended something better for Israel. Luke 7:30 states: "But the Pharisees and the lawyers **rejected God's purpose for themselves**, not having been baptized by John."

What do Calvinists believe?

God predetermined the doom of *disobedience* for the Reprobate and their consequent stumbling. God destined that they reject Christ.

Our reply:

God predetermined the doom of *stumbling* for those who are disobedient to the Word. God destined to punish those who reject Christ.

> **2nd Peter 2:17:** "These are springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the **black darkness has been reserved**."
>
> **Jude 4:** "For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were **long beforehand marked out for this condemnation**, **ungodly persons** who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

The "condemnation" of "doom" and "black darkness" that was "reserved," "appointed" and "long beforehand marked out" for "ungodly persons" was not *to* unbelief, but rather *because* of unbelief. In other words, God predestined Heaven for believers and the condemnation of Hell for unbelievers.

1st Peter 2:9-10
"But you are a **chosen race**, a royal priesthood, a **holy nation**, a people for **God's own possession**, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you **once were not a people, but now you are the people of God**; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Similarly, Deuteronomy 14:2 says concerning Israel: "For you are a **holy people** to the LORD your God, and the LORD has **chosen** you to be

a people for **His own possession** out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth." Amos 3:2 states: "'**You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth**; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'" (Amos 3:2) Through Israel, "all of the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:3) The corporate language describing God's covenant with Israel as His "chosen people" is now being used to illustrate how, through faith, the Gentiles have also come to be corporately grafted in as God's chosen people.

> **Romans 9:25-26:** "As He says also in Hosea, '**I will call those who were not My people, "My people,"** and her who was **not beloved, "beloved."** And it shall be that in the place where it was said to them, "You are **not My people**," there they shall be called **sons of the living God**.'"
>
> **Romans 11:12:** "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is **riches for the Gentiles**, how much more will their fulfillment be!"
>
> **Galatians 3:26-29:** "For **you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus**. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, there is **neither slave nor free man**, there is **neither male nor female**; for you are **all one in Christ Jesus**. And if you belong to Christ, then you are **Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise**."
>
> Mac Brunson: *"When you were born physically of your mom and dad, you reflect their race physically, but let me tell you something spiritually. You've been born again from the seed which is above. You are no longer white, black, or yellow. You are part of the elect race."*[903]

All are *physically* born into one race, in Adam, and those who believe in Christ are *spiritually* reborn into another race, in Christ. Whereas before—in which you had *no* choice in being physically born in Adam—you conversely *do* have a choice in whether you will be spiritually *reborn* into the "chosen race."

This election is (a) to *service*, "so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous

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[903] Mac Brunson, *The Flip Side of Hurt: The Hope for our Loneliness and Isolation; 1 Peter 2:4-10*.

light" (1st Peter 2:9) and (b) *conditional on faith*. Notice the following four conditional "if" phrases regarding God's symbolic olive tree described at Romans 11:17-24.

> **Romans 11:17-24:** "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but **if you are arrogant**, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for **if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either**. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, **if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off**. And they also, **if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in**, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?"

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"**He calls them an elect race, because God, passing by others, adopted them** as it were in a special manner. They were also a holy nation, for God had consecrated them to Himself, and destined that they should lead a pure and holy life; and a people for God's own possession, that they might be to Him a peculiar possession or inheritance. I take the words simply in this sense, that the Lord has called us, in order to possess us as His own people, devoted to Him. This meaning is proved by the words of Moses, 'If ye keep my covenant, ye shall be to me a peculiar treasure beyond all other nations' (Exod. 19:5)."*[904]

Our reply:

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[904] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, translated by W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 256-266, emphasis mine.

That's the problem. This text mentions nothing of people being *unconditionally chosen* while others are *unconditionally passed by*.

1st Peter 3:17-18
"For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For **Christ also died for sins once for all**, **the just for the unjust**, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit."

Similarly, Romans 5:6-8 states: "For while we were still helpless, at the right time **Christ died for the ungodly**. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that **while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us**."

The Bible says that Jesus died for "unjust," "ungodly" "sinners." Are only Calvinism's elect unjust, ungodly sinners? Of course not. Romans 3:23 states: "For *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So, without an explicit limitation, we should understand it to mean that Jesus died for all, and reject Calvinism's doctrine of a Limited Atonement. Jesus died for *everyone* so that *anyone* can be saved. The invitation is open and the opportunity exists while we remain alive. Whoever declines Jesus' atonement must then pay for their own sins.

> Laurence Vance: *"Are only the 'elect' lost? Are only the 'elect' ungodly? Are the 'elect' the only ones who were under the law? Are only the 'elect' sinners? Are only the 'elect' unjust? If Christ died for and came to save the lost, the ungodly, those under the law, sinners, and the unjust, then he must have made an unlimited atonement, for that is the condition of all men--not just the 'elect.' Therefore, Jesus Christ is 'the Saviour of the world' (John 4:42; 1 Johns 4:14), whether all men accept him or not."*[905]

2nd Peter 1:10-11
"Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to **make certain about His calling and choosing you**; for as long as you **practice these things**, **you will never stumble**; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you."

Notice the order of the "calling and choosing." No Calvinist would agree that we are first called and then chosen, or that being chosen is in some way dependent on whether we answer the call. This is useful to

[905] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 458.

point out at Acts 2:23 when Calvinists allege that there is a special meaning to the order of the "predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God," such as God's foreknowledge *arising* from the predetermined plan. Calvinists can't have it both ways.

What is God's "calling and choosing you" and how do we "make certain" of it? It is God's spiritual vocation for our life, regarding our purpose in Christ. God has given each us gifts and talents to serve Him, and when we "practice these things" (v.10), meaning that when we practice the fruits of the Holy Spirit, such as diligence, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (vv.5-7), we tap into our God-given potential, for the work that God has prepared for each of us, ultimately giving us a joyful "entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (v.11)

> Dave Hunt: *"Thus, to make one's election sure is to fulfill the responsibility that comes with election, not to somehow be sure that one is among the elect and thus eternally saved."*[906]

What do Calvinists believe?

> William MacDonald: *"We cannot make our call and election more sure than they already are; God's eternal purposes can never be thwarted. But we can confirm them by growing in likeness to the Lord. By manifesting the fruit of the Spirit, we can provide unmistakable evidence that we truly belong to Him. A holy life proves the reality of our salvation."*[907]

Our reply:

So the difference between the Calvinist and non-Calvinist interpretation is in making *election to salvation* sure vs. making an *election to service* sure. In Calvinism, one cannot make election to salvation any surer, nor can one make Irresistible Grace more certain, but by good works, one can attempt to justify their *presumption* to be one of Calvinism's elect. However, the problem with Calvinism is that it shifts focus away from trusting in the promise of God to save whosoever believes in Christ, to instead trusting in the presumption of whether one was secretly drafted in eternity. By contrast, the non-Calvinist view

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[906] *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (Bend, Oregon: The Berean Call, 2006), 285.
[907] *Believer's Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 2291.

involves Christians exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit so as to fulfill our assigned election to service within the body of Christ.

> Robert Shank on Calvinism: *"In other words, the only real evidence of election is perseverance, and our only assurance of the certainty of persevering is—to persevere!"*[908]

So, instead of looking to holiness in order to focus on doing what God has called us to do, Calvinists look to holiness as an *outward* sign of a *secret* election. True assurance should instead come from the confidence of knowing that God loves each of us and will keep His promise of John 3:16 to give eternal life to whoever believes in Him.

2nd Peter 2:1

"But **false prophets** also arose among the people, just as there will also be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even **denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves**."

1st Corinthians 7:23 similarly states: "You were **bought** with a price; do not become slaves of men." Having been "bought" implies that one has a Redeemer, but simply having a Redeemer no more means that one is automatically redeemed, than having a Savior means that one is automatically saved—one must *believe* in the Savior in order to receive redemption. So, this places the Calvinist doctrine of a "Limited Atonement"—limited only to Calvinism's elect—in a precarious position.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Collin Maxwell: *"If He did, then here is solid evidence that He died for those other than His own elect because these men (being damnable heretics) are in hell. How do Calvinists answer this objection to our doctrine of Particular Redemption i.e. that all for whom Christ died will eventually be saved and be in Heaven? Read on! ... In keeping with the general tenor of Scripture that God cannot know frustration in those things which He sets out to do (Isaiah 46:10 etc.,) we believe that their purchase was professed and not actual i.e. they denied the Lord whom they professed to have bought them. ... Do they actually make Him to be a liar...or do they (by their denial of His charges against them) profess Him to be a liar? Obviously the latter. No one can make*

[908] *Elect in the Son* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1989), 214.

anybody (never mind God) an actual liar - the only one who can actually make you a liar is yourself (i.e. when you tell lies). But anyone can profess you to be a liar - just spread the rumour and the deed is done. It was on this principle that Potiphar's wife got Joseph sent to prison for adultery - it was professed rather than actual. … So here in 2 Peter 2:1, these damnable heretics, professing to be redeemed by Christ's blood, are dealt with accordingly."[909]

Our reply:

So, the argument is that the false prophets *alleged* that Jesus died for them. However, their actual real crime is in introducing destructive heresies, which then has the effect of denying Christ...who bought them.

It would seem that Peter was warning about future Judas-like infiltrators, stealthily invading Christian leadership to betray and distort the mission of Christ for their own agenda. The reference to the "Master," as Jesus had been called by His disciples, in having "bought them," modifies something Christ had graciously done for them, thus rendering their sin all the more egregious. So, the implied charge is one of traitorous betrayal, and with a dire resulting punishment.

A potential example of a false prophet and false teacher is "Simon the Sorcerer" at Acts 8:9-24, who wrongly supposed that he could buy the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Peter. Notice, though, that Peter said that he could still repent and be forgiven: "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you." That would make the condemnation of 2nd Peter 2:1 *conditional*, thus still allowing time and opportunity to repent and to become saved. Peter's gracious offer of repentance to Simon could also have been because he, too, once denied Christ, though repented of it and received grace. (Matthew 26:69-75)

2nd Peter 3:9

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is **patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance**."

If Calvinists maintain that 2nd Peter 3:9 is just about Calvinism's elect, then they still have to deal with Ezekiel 18:23 which also shows that

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[909] Collin Maxwell, *Did Christ Purchase with His own Blood the Apostates in 2 Peter 2:1?* The article references 1st John 1:10 which states: "If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us."

God is patient toward the perishing, giving time and opportunity to repent, demonstrating that He would rather have it that they turn back to Him.

> **Ezekiel 18:23:** "'Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked,' declares the Lord GOD, '**rather** than that **he should turn from his ways and live**?'"
>
> **Acts 17:30-31:** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, **God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent**, because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."
>
> **1st Timothy 2:3-4:** "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who **desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth**."

Here are three *principles* that we learn from these verses:

- God is **patient** toward "you" because He is patient toward "all," not wishing for "any" to perish but for "all" to come to repentance.
- God's **intentions** for you are good, since "you" are part of the "any" and "all" that He desires to come to repentance. (He is a good Father to all of His "children" by creation, as per Acts 17:28-29, in which the opposite would be a bad father who doesn't really care about most of His children.)
- God **calls** all to repentance because He desires for all to repent. (Otherwise, if God called people to salvation that He never designed to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, then He would be calling people to receive something that He never intended for them to have.)

Here are three *problems* for Calvinism:

- If Jesus had not sacrificially given His life for everyone, as per the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement, then at most you could only *speculate* on what God's intentions for you are.
- Calvinism's elect are never truly perishing, and conversely none of Calvinism's non-elect can do anything other than perish, principally because they are excluded from a Limited Atonement.

- If God's words are just a *revealed* will, contradicted by a *secret* will, then we would have to be suspicious of anything God says.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"Why anyone would wish to say 'It is God's will that every single individual repent, but, alas, His will is constantly thwarted and refuted by the will of the creature' is hard to say."*[910]

Our reply:

God gives people the *dubious* privilege of rejecting Him since it also accompanies the *glorious* honor of choosing Him. So, we can thank God for giving us this choice. The fact that the majority of people make the wrong choice, no more negatively implicates God than the choice of the fallen angels in any way negatively implicates God.

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"The point of the passage is that God will bring the elect to repentance throughout the time period prior to the Parousia, the coming of Christ. At the point of Peter's writing, the repentance of every single individual reading this book was yet future."*[911]

Our reply:

Calvinists wish to link "any" and "all" to only Calvinism's elect. However, the text actually reminds the "beloved"—meaning Christians—that God is not "slow" in terms of the promise of His coming, but rather is deliberately patient in giving the *unsaved* time and opportunity to repent, just as He had given *them* time and opportunity to repent. So, if they would be opposed to God's patience, then they would be opposed to the very thing that led to their salvation as well. So, for that reason, we can take joy in God's patience as something that is a very good thing.

If Calvinism's elect were never in any real danger of Hell, then why mention the peril of *perishing*? Moreover, if God is only *patient for Calvinism's elect to repent*, and if they cannot repent apart from being regenerated against their totally depraved will, then the result would mean

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[910] *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 149.
[911] Ibid.

that God is being *patient with Himself* for the predetermined time to administer an Irresistible Grace. Moreover, the notion of God only being patient with Calvinism's elect to repent is contradicted by Revelation 2:21: "'I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.'" This seems to convey the idea that God is patient with more than just those who ultimately do repent, and based upon Acts 17:30, God calls everyone to repentance. In Calvinism, however, God never *intended* for the non-elect to spend eternity with Him in Heaven, and for that reason, Calvinism logically precludes a universal salvific *desire*.

> **Romans 2:4:** "Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the **kindness of God leads you to repentance**?"
>
> **Isaiah 45:22:** "'**Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth**; For I am God, and there is no other.'"
>
> **Lamentations 3:33:** "For **He does not afflict willingly** Or grieve the sons of men."
>
> **Ezekiel 33:11:** "'Say to them, "As I live!" declares the Lord God, "**I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live**. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?"'"

Calvinists believe that these texts, if reflected toward everyone, and not just Calvinism's elect, would imply an abhorrent weakness in God. However, what if God had a *purpose* in creating mankind with a free-will and autonomy of reason? If correct, then Calvinists would be arguing against both God's sovereignty and His purposes.

Calvinist objection:

If God is omniscient and knows the ultimate decision and destination of the perishing, then how could He be sincere in offering them something He knows they will never have?

Our reply:

The omniscience argument is a very common one raised by Calvinists. The answer is that although God knows the ultimate decision and destination of every soul—whether Heaven or Hell—His knowledge of the negative choice of the perishing does not mean that He wanted for

them to make the wrong choice. The perishing must live with their choice, knowing what they rejected—for all eternity. Moreover, God had to give people a free choice to choose Him or else how could anyone be in a position to make the right choice for Him? Irresistible Grace would rob mankind of the honor and privilege of being able to choose God and Irresistible Grace would also rob God of any truly reciprocated love.

Furthermore, for those who do end up in Hell, the simple fact is that they didn't have to be there, because they had a God who loved them, a Savior who died for them and a Holy Spirit who convicted and called them to repentance. It is not God's plan for anyone to spend eternity separated from Him, and anyone who does, will have absolutely no excuse when standing before God at Judgment.

Calvinist objection:

> R.C. Sproul: *"If God planned to redeem all men, did his plan fail?"*[912]

Our reply:

God planned to *provide* redemption for all men, which was a success at Calvary. God never planned Universalism. So, no, God's plan did not fail, and God receives honor from all who freely choose Him.

> Adrian Rogers: *"Now it takes nerve for somebody to change that to read, 'He is willing that many perish and only some come to repentance.' How can you do that?"*[913]

> Adrian Rogers: *"God did not say that some people can be saved and other people cannot be saved, that some are in a select group. No! There is no respect of persons with God. None whatsoever. The Lord is not willing that any should perish. If you go to hell, a broken-hearted God will watch you drop into hell. It is not God's plan that you die and go to hell. The Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."*[914]

> Adrian Rogers: *"Some people submit to the will of God, some people do not. All are called, but not all respond. Those who do not say to God, 'Not my will, but thine,' will one day in hell hear*

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[912] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 168.
[913] Adrian Rogers, *Our House A Lighthouse: II Corinthians 5:13-21*, 2000.
[914] Adrian Rogers, *The Christ of the New Testament: Acts 10:43*, 2001.

> *God say to them, 'Not My will, but thine be done.' What a terrible way to end, resisting God."*[915]

> Dave Hunt: *"He pretends to be sincere for repentance, while withholding the very grace men need to repent, having foreordained that man can't and won't repent without sovereign regeneration. Calvinism mocks God, His Word, and man himself!"*[916]

Ultimately, Calvinists offer two explanations for 2nd Peter 3:9. One is that God is only speaking to Calvinism's elect, and therefore "you," "any" and "all" must be understood from within the restriction of a secret group. However, the same logic could not work with Romans 3:23 which states: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Certainly, the New Testament was written to Christians, but that cannot mean that every statement must be restricted to only Christians, or else Romans 3:23 would mean that only Christians have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God—a point no Calvinist would agree with. The second Calvinist explanation of 2nd Peter 3:9 is that God has "two wills."

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? 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, but only of His loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel. There 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.*"[917]

> Erwin Lutzer: *"The revealed will was that all men be saved, but the hidden will was that the greater part of mankind be damned."*[918]

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[915] *Foundations For Our Faith: A Solid Word For An Unsure Age, Vol. II, A Study In Romans Chapters 5-9* (Memphis, TN: Love Worth Finding, 1998), 94.
[916] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 314.
[917] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: Hebrews and I and II Peter*, translated by W.B. Johnston (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), 364.
[918] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 195.

Our reply:

Unbelievers perish by their own choice, against God's will for their life, similar to how the "prodigal son" left home against his father's wishes. God loves His creation and gives time and opportunity to turn back to Him. The only time that He plans the destruction of the wicked is when it is in conjunction with their own self-determined choice to reject Him. 2nd Thessalonians 2:10-11 states: "And with all the deception of wickedness for **those who perish**, because **they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved**. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." So, they could have been saved, and the only reason why they were not saved is because they rejected the love of the truth, and for that reason, and that reason alone, God sent them a deluding influence so that they would be deceived and ultimately judged. So there is a contingency involved. God does not have contradictory wills. He sincerely desires all to be saved by freely receiving His Son. God does not pick people to love or reject Him. What He does is offer the hope of salvation to everyone, and pick believers to be saved. There is no scandal involved. God has good intentions for all men because He is a good and loving heavenly parent.

Chapter 23: 1st and 2nd John

1st John 2:1-2

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an **Advocate** with the Father, **Jesus Christ** the righteous; and He Himself is the **propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world**."

If God did not punish sin, then He would not be a just God. Imagine if a serial killer had taken hundreds of lives, only to take his own life just before being caught, in order to escape justice, and then upon death, simply ceased existence. Could God be just, in allowing such a person to escape? The righteousness of God would seem to obligate Him to ensure that the wicked face justice. The Bible also states: "For **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) All, therefore, face the judgment of a just God. So what Jesus did was to take upon Himself our deserving punishment, resulting in divine justice being served. Jesus' death at Calvary was the propitiation that God accepted to atone for the sin of mankind. Jesus took it for us—and not for ours alone—but for the sins of the whole world, so that anyone in the world who similarly turns to Him, may have their sins forgiven. That's Unlimited Atonement.

What do Calvinists believe?

If Christ's death actually appeased God's wrath, and if there are still some people who ultimately perish in Hell, then God's wrath could not have been satisfied for everyone. So, when Christ said, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He finished the work of redemption for the whole world of those who are elect, that is, those who do not experience God's wrath. In this way, Christ's propitiation is not for everyone, but for His elect.

Our reply:

This is a misunderstanding of redemption *accomplished* versus redemption *applied*.[919] In other words, Christ's death appeased God's wrath so that redemption has been *accomplished*, but did not automatically result in anyone's redemption being *applied* to them, or else Christ's death would effectively save without faith. So, what Christ's death accomplished is the finished work of the atonement's *provision* for salvation, so that now anyone who believes in Jesus can receive His free gift of eternal life. In

[919] See also the discussion on the *Atonement*.

other words, the "It is finished" statement deals specifically with the *provision* of salvation being finished.

A great comparison is with John 3:14, as it relates to Numbers 21:6-9. The people sinned and God sent fiery serpents to punish them. So, at their request, Moses interceded on their behalf, resulting in the provision of the "serpent on a standard." The provision for healing became finished. However, no one was automatically saved by the provision alone. Only when the people "looked" upon it, would healing occur, just as God said. So, too, with Calvary, no one is saved by the atonement itself. People must look to Jesus in faith, or else the atonement will not be applied to them.

The sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross satisfied God's requirement for the payment of sin, and answered the question once and for all, which lives matter—all lives matter to God. However, can the Calvinist doctrine of a Limited Atonement (only for Calvinism's elect) truly say that? That's the *cost* of the Calvinist position.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams: *"First John 2:2 means that Christ atoned for 'the whole world,' that is, for the world viewed as a whole, for Gentiles as well as Jews, but not necessarily for each and every Jew or Gentile."*[920]

Our reply:

The onus is on those who assert a limitation to prove it from the context. Calvinists are simply arguing out of theological pre-commitment.

> Jonathan Pritchett: *"Jesus is the propitiation for our sins, meaning believers, but not our sins only but sins of the whole world, and in context, that means the world of unbelievers."*[921]

> One person observed: *"Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world; and hence those who wish to exclude the reprobate from participation in Christ must place them outside the world."*[922]

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[920] *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 209.
[921] Johnathan Pritchett, *Free Will Debate: What is the Biblical View of Free Will?*, 6:34-6:44. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfyOmkaDtMg
[922] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 148.

What do Calvinists believe?

> Erwin Lutzer: *"Perhaps John meant that Christ was the propitiation for all in the world who believe, regardless of nationality or rank."*[923]

Our reply:

When Jesus says according to Matthew 24:14 that "this **gospel** of the kingdom shall be **preached in the whole world** as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come," did He mean that the gospel message should be preached to "all in the world who believe, regardless of nationality or rank," or did He mean that the gospel should be preached to the whole world, both believers and unbelievers alike? When we use the expression, "the whole wide world," we do not mean to express that there is a "partial world" in contrast to an "entire world," but rather the *breadth* of the world is intended. So, when Calvinists tussle over the meaning of the word "world," it is not a very compelling position, especially since they would have the term mean one thing at John 3:16, and then mean another thing at John 17:9, and again, another thing at Matthew 24:14. Why not just let it mean what it's naturally understood to mean?

Furthermore, the "whole world" appears elsewhere at 1st John 5:19: "We know that we are of God, and that the **whole world** lies in the power of the evil one." Ask a Calvinist whether that means "the whole world of the elect." That is why it is problematic for Calvinists to play around with the meaning of words, in order to suit the needs of their theological system.

Jesus died for *everyone* so that *anyone* in the world who believes in Him will be saved. God loved the world and gifted it with a Savior, so that if anyone in the world believes in Him, will not perish but have eternal life.

> Roy Ingle: *"Calvinists insist that the word 'world' in 1 John 2:2 cannot possibly mean 'the whole world' but instead they take 'world' and teach that John means 'Jews and Gentiles' or those from the world. They do this because to teach that 'world' means 'world' would deny limited atonement and they would be forced to embrace unlimited atonement which simply cannot happen otherwise the other four points of Calvinism would be in jeopardy. … I replied to the Calvinist brother, 'If I asked you if Jesus died for the church you would say yes and point to Ephesians 5:25. If I*

[923] *The Doctrines That Divide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998), 186.

> *asked you if Jesus died for the sheep you would say yes and point to John 10:11. If I asked you if Jesus died for Paul you would say yes and point to Galatians 2:20. But when I point out that Jesus died for the world in places such as 1 John 2:2, you turn and deny this simply because your theology will not allow it and not because of your conviction from Scripture.' Again, Scripture is clear that Jesus died for the sheep, the Church, Paul, us, the world, etc. but not once do we find that He died only for the elect. This must be implied through doctrinal positions instead of Scripture."*[924]

What do Calvinists believe?

Using an illustration of a town doctor, the town doctor may not *see* everyone in town, but he is the only doctor in town. Similarly, Jesus may not *save* everyone in the world, but He is the only Savior in the world.

Our reply:

It is implicit from that illustration that the "town doctor" is for everyone in town, or else he would not be the town doctor. Jesus is the "world's Savior" because He is for everyone in the world, and none are excluded except those who exclude themselves.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"That Christ, the redeemer of the whole world, commands the Gospel to be preached promiscuously to all does not seem congruent with special Election. ... But the solution of the difficulty lies in seeing how the doctrine of the Gospel offers salvation to all. That it is salvific for all I do not deny. But the question is whether the Lord in His counsel here destines salvation equally for all."*[925]

> R.C. Sproul: *"To be sure, Christ's propitiation on the cross is unlimited in its sufficiency or value. In this sense Christ makes an atonement for the whole world. But the efficacy of this atonement*

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[924] Roy Ingle, *1 John 2:2 and "the World".* http://evangelicalarminians.org/1-john-22-and/

[925] *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 102, 103.

> *does not apply to the whole world, nor does its ultimate design."*[926]

Our reply:

So, if anyone should perish in unbelief, they perished despite an atonement that was *sufficient* for their salvation. So, why was it not *efficient* for them? Either it was not efficient for their salvation because *God* excluded them, as per Calvinism's doctrine of a Limited Atonement, in which they were born never being intended for Heaven, or it was not efficient for their salvation because *they* excluded themselves through unbelief, despite God's otherwise good intentions and well-meant offer of the gospel, having not received what God certainly intended for them.

1st John 3:7-8

"Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. **The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil**."

However, if God had decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," as per Calvinism's immutable decree, including every thought, word and deed, then the works of the devil are the works of God's decree, and therefore when Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, it logically follows that He came to destroy the works of God.

> John Wesley: *"…one might say to our adversary, the devil, 'Thou fool, why dost thou roar about any longer? Thy lying in wait for souls is as needless and useless as our preaching. Hearest thou not, that God hath taken thy work out of thy hands; and that he doeth it much more effectually? Thou, with all thy principalities and powers, canst only so assault that we may resist thee; but He can irresistibly destroy both body and soul in hell! Thou canst only entice; but his unchangeable decrees, to leave thousands of souls in death, compels them to continue in sin, till they drop into everlasting burnings. Thou temptest; He forceth us to be damned; for we cannot resist his will. Thou fool, why goest thou about any longer, seeking whom thou mayest devour? Hearest thou not that God is the devouring lion, the destroyer of souls, the murderer of men? Moloch caused only children to pass though the fire: and*

[926] *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1997), 177.

> *that fire was soon quenched; or, the corruptible body being consumed, its torment was at an end; but God, thou are told, by his eternal decree, fixed before they had done good or evil, causes, not only children of a span long, but the parents also, to pass through the fire of hell, the "fire which never shall be quenched; and the body which is cast thereinto, being now incorruptible and immortal, will be ever consuming and never consumed, but "the smoke of their torment," because it is God's good pleasure, "ascendeth up for ever and ever."'"*[927]

1st John 4:8-14

"**God is love**. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent **the Son** to be the **Savior of the world**."

Similarly, John 4:42 states: "And they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the **Savior of the world**.'" John 12:47 states: "'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but **to save the world**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

How does a sovereign God express His love? "God is love," but only the elect are recipients of His saving grace.

Our reply:

Instead of asking how a sovereign God loves, we should be asking how a God, who "is love," expresses His sovereignty.[928]

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[927] John Wesley, *Free Grace*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYtoqvo9aYc
[928] *Jerry Walls: What's Wrong With Calvinism,* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Daomzm3nyIg#t%3D2616.

> Dave Hunt: *"Only a Calvinist could believe that God loves those He has predestined to eternal suffering!"*[929]

> Dave Hunt: *"How could God, who is love, predestine anyone to eternal torment, much less take pleasure in doing so?"*[930]

> Stephen Hitchcock: *"Calvinism directly undermines a love for all mankind, because it teaches that God does not really love all men."*[931]

If we are defined by the trait that we are most *associated* with, and if God had eternally preferred and designed to reprobate a greater number than He chose to elect, then God, according to Calvinism, would be more appropriately identified as a God of "wrath and reprobation" than being identified as a God of "love and mercy." Conversely, the reason why non-Calvinists can rightly characterize God as a God "of love" is because He genuinely desires that everyone come to know Him and designed to provide salvation to all, for that very purpose. People exclude themselves.

> Adrian Rogers: *"There are people like this who come to Church and they listen to a preacher preach, and they find themselves running from God, and fearing God, and afraid of God. 'God is love,' and God loves you, and God has made with His Son, the Lord Jesus, a blood covenant on your behalf."*[932]

The deepest desire and need in the soul of every human being is to know that they are loved and that they matter. Calvinism teaches the opposite. You may not matter, and you can never know until death whether you've won the spiritual lottery.

1st John 4:19
"We love, because He first loved us."

What do Calvinists believe?

That's the only reason why anyone loves God. Mankind is spiritually incapacitated to seek and love God, apart from His efficacious grace by which He first loved His elect.

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[929] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 49.
[930] Ibid., 255.
[931] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 61.
[932] Adrian Rogers, *The Blood Covenant: 1 Samuel 18:3*.

Our reply:

The "us" would seem to be humanity, since the context is of God's love for the *world*: "God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." (1st John 4:9)

> Steven Hitchcock: *"Did God cause us to love Him or did we respond in love to God, as unsaved sinners, when God personally spoke to us with His promise of salvation?"*[933]

The answer is that we responded in love to God, which means that whenever we love God, we are *reciprocating* His first love for us. Moreover, if it is not truly an independent reciprocation, then how is it any meaningful type of love? In other words, what kind of love is a totally one-sided love, in which God *makes* people reciprocate as yes-men?

God takes the *initiative* in reconciliation because He is love, and He loves His children, and we are all His children by creation. (Acts 17:28) Do you know what is missing from the context?—any mention of pre-faith regeneration in unilaterally making people willing to love God. We can respond to the gospel because God takes the initiative in reaching the lost, primarily because He is loving and merciful. While non-Calvinists may internally disagree on exactly *how* God takes the initiative, there is no dispute over the fact that God *does* take the initiative.[934]

Verse 10 states that it is "not that we loved God, but that He loved us," which love of God was manifested in Jesus being sent to be a "propitiation for our sins" as "Savior of the world." (v.14) In case anyone wishes to restrict the propitiation to a select group, 1st John 2:2 clarifies: "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." So, John was not trying to limit who God loves, but rather was emphasizing the *fact* of God's antecedent love.

1st John 5:1-5

"**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God**, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.

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[933] *Recanting Calvinism* (Xulon Press, 2011), 178.

[934] Non-Calvinist Traditionalists believe that God takes the initiative in evangelism primarily through the gospel, though there are occasions where God may use General Revelation such as in Paul's conversion, whereas Arminians believe that God takes the initiative in evangelism through Prevenient Grace in a special work of the Holy Spirit. Both camps are united in opposition to Calvinism's doctrine of pre-faith regeneration.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For **whatever is born of God overcomes the world**; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?**"

The passage is not necessarily about an order of operations with respect to conversion, but rather identifies the *mark* of a true believer. For an order of operations of salvation, see Ephesians 1:13.

What do Calvinists believe?

Anyone who believes in Jesus, does so because they were first regenerated and made Born Again by God. Rebirth doesn't come *after* faith. Rather, it *precedes* faith. Fallen man is spiritually dead and lacks the capacity to believe in the gospel until miraculously transformed from spiritual death into spiritual life.

Our reply:

The Bible speaks of spiritual life or eternal life coming *after faith*. For instance, according to John 3:16, God gives "eternal life" to whosoever believes in Jesus. At John 5:40, Jesus says to the unbelieving Jews that "you are unwilling to come to Me **so that you may have life**." So, in other words, if they would only come to Him, they *could* have life. Calvinism reverses the order, all because they believe that man is dead in such a way that precludes belief in the gospel, even though spiritual death is never described in the Bible under such terms. Figurative, spiritual death implies *separation from God* (Luke 15:32; Ephesians 2:11-22) and is never used to teach that people are unable to believe in the gospel. It is presumed that people are able to believe in the gospel because God is taking the initiative to make it possible, though not irresistible, as Calvinism teaches.

People in Hell are described as experiencing a "second death" (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8), but that doesn't necessarily mean that they are unconscious, but rather cut off and separated from the love of God. Furthermore, regeneration is a spiritual blessing, and Paul teaches at Ephesians 1:3 that all spiritual blessings are for Christians, alone. Therefore, regeneration can only be for Christians.

> Adrian Rogers: "*No unbeliever can have the Spirit of God in him.*"[935]

[935] Adrian Rogers, *Learning to Possess your Possessions: Romans 7:1-4*, 1998.

Calvinists take a passage on the defining *characteristic* of an authentic, reborn Christian, namely faith (contrasted with the unbelief of false converts), and then render rebirth as the cause of their characteristic of faith, all with the intention of establishing an "order of operations" with respect to faith and regeneration that is in their theological favor, even though such a supposed "order of operations" is nowhere present in John's statement. The meaning is better suited to imply that anyone who claims to belong to God, and who is truly in covenant relationship with the Father, will display faith in Christ, as a relationship with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ are *mutually inclusive*: "…whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." (1st John 5:1) Moreover, John 8:42 states: "Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.'" (John 8:42)

If Calvinists wish to suggest an "order of operations" on faith and regeneration, they could turn to Ephesians 1:13 which states: "In Him, you also, **after listening** to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—**having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit** of promise." Galatians 3:2 also states: "This is the only thing I want to find out from you: **did you receive the Spirit** by the works of the Law, or **by hearing with faith?**" So, in passages such as Galatians 3:2 and Ephesians 1:13 where an "order of operations" is clearly being described, we find that faith in Christ precedes being given the Holy Spirit.

2nd John 1:1-6

"The **elder to the chosen lady and her children**, whom I love in truth; and not only I, but also all who know the truth, for the sake of the truth which abides in us and will be with us forever: Grace, mercy and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. I was very glad to find some of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment to do from the Father. Now I ask you, **lady**, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it."

Similarly, 2nd John 1:13 states: "The children of your chosen sister greet you." This would refer to a Christian church and its congregants.

> Ron Rhodes: *"It is likely that this lady was not a human being but rather a church. The church is called a chosen lady because it is*

> *made up of God's elect believers. The lady's children are the individual members of the church. The reference to the chosen sister (verse 13) may well point to John's own church congregation. John probably called the church a lady because of the possibility that the letter could be intercepted by Roman authorities while en route. If that happened, the letter might give these authorities enough information to capture and imprison the Christians (or worse). Calling the church a lady was therefore a simple safety measure."*[936]

The term "elect" or "chosen" is used in the Bible as a *designation* to describe Jesus Christ (Luke 9:35), His angels (1st Timothy 5:21) and Christians. (Romans 8:33) It can also be used to describe Jews since the Jews are a chosen people. (Deuteronomy 14:2; Amos 3:2; Matthew 24:22, 24, 31; 2nd Timothy 2:10) When speaking specifically of the New Covenant believer, the elect are Christians. It never means a special class of unbelievers on schedule to be made into believers, as per Calvinism.

[936] *Commonly Misunderstood Bible Verses* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 279.

Chapter 24: The Book of Jude

Jude 3-4

"Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For **certain persons** have crept in unnoticed, those who were **long beforehand marked out for this condemnation**, **ungodly persons** who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ."

Jude 13 describes them as "wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever." This is also similar to 2nd Peter 2:1: "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves."

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"He speaks of the condemnation or 'doom' or 'reprobate condition' which lies at the end of those who subvert the teaching of the truth. It is an action no man can pursue, except to his own ruination. The metaphor derives from the fact that God's eternal purpose, wherein the faithful are ordained to salvation, is called a Book. When the faithful hear that these men are set on the path of eternal death, they should beware of being caught up in the same destruction, though (at the same time) James is wanting to anticipate the danger that they will be disturbed or shaken by the suddenness of the affair. If these men were long since 'written down', it follows certainly that, what the Church experiences, comes from the sure counsel of God."*[937]

Our reply:

Were "certain persons" who were "long beforehand marked out" predestined to "turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"? No. Instead, what "certain persons"

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[937] *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, A Harmony of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol. III, and the Epistles of James and Jude*, translated by A.W. Morrison (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972), 325.

were "long beforehand marked out for" is "this condemnation." God did not author their sin. He authored their *judgment*, similar to Matthew 18:7: "'Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but **woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!**'" God is not determining the stumbling blocks, but rather God determined the judgment that awaits those who cause it.

Jude 20-23
"But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; **save others, snatching them out of the fire**; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh."

One would need to be on a path to the fire of Hell in order to be snatched *from* that path. However, no Calvinist can view their evangelism of Calvinism's elect as "snatching them out of the fire," since the Calvinist doctrine of an Unconditional Election assures its elect that they were secretly embraced by God all along. They would never—at any time—be in any real danger of the fires of Hell, despite what the verse is otherwise saying.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John Calvin: *"Christ says that the elect always belonged to God. God therefore distinguishes them from the reprobate, not by faith, nor by any merit, but by pure grace; for while they are far away from him, he regards them in secret as his own."*[938]

> John Calvin: *"This way of speaking, however, may seem to be different from many passages of Scripture which attribute to Christ the first foundation of God's love for us and show that outside Christ we are detested by God. But we ought to remember, as I have already said, that the Heavenly Father's secret love which embraced us is the first love given to us."*[939]

Our reply:

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[938] *The Crossway Classic Commentaries: John* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 393.
[939] Ibid., 76.

So, Calvinism's "elect" don't really need a Savior. They just need a Calvinist to *enlighten* them that they were essentially already born saved.

Revelation 2:6
"'Yet this you do have, that you hate the **deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate**.'"

Calvinists believe that God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," which then begs the question of *why* Calvinists believe that God would have decreed something He "hates"? Could He really hate it if He planned and rendered it certain for His glory? It is this kind of strong emotion from God that would be puzzling under the framework of deterministic Calvinism.

What do Calvinists believe?

On balance, everything God has decreed is wholly good and beautiful, including sin and suffering. For instance, God hated Calvary, but on balance, Calvary is good and beautiful in the sense of rescuing lost sinners in a demonstration of God's grace. So, God can hate sin in one sense but love how He overcomes it in another sense.

Our reply:

There is a big difference between God *using* the sin of others vs. *causing* the sin of others. Certainly, it is good and beautiful to foil the sinful intentions of evildoers by taking their intended means of suffering and using that very same thing as God's means of redemption, but when Calvinism makes God into the mastermind behind *both* good and evil, then a more sinister plot unfolds. Consider the analogy of a wicked fireman who sets a building on fire, and then "graciously" chooses certain victims he wishes to rescue, all in a demonstration of heroism and grace. "On balance," is there really anything noble in that? No, because the wicked fireman is doing *both* good and evil. In terms of the cross of Calvary, non-Calvinists do not believe that God decreed the wicked intentions of Christ's crucifiers, and hence, through free-will, there is a sense of *independence* on the part of the evildoers. When God intervenes to save the day, He does so with *complete independence*, and hence He remains untouched by sin and evil. Deterministic Calvinism cannot really say that.

Revelation 2:20-22
"'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. **I gave her time to repent**, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation**, unless they repent of her deeds**.'"

Saying that God "gave her time to repent" and "unless they repent" speaks of expectation, in that they *could* and *should* have repented. However, in Calvinism, no one can repent, regardless of how much time or opportunity is given, unless first provided the Irresistible Grace of a pre-faith regeneration. What is the point of giving someone "time to repent" if they are excluded from Calvinism's Limited Atonement? In Calvinism, they are given *time* to repent but not the *ability*, which would be graciously ungracious. Calvinism would have the Bible being in conflict with itself.

Jesus describes accountability this way: "'If you were blind, you would have no sin; but since you say, "We see," your sin remains.'" (John 9:41) Similarly speaking, then, if they really did have total inability to *repent*, just as a blind person has total inability to *see*, then logic dictates that those suffering from Total Inability must similarly have no sin. Therefore, the only way for there to be a genuine imputation of *sin* is if there is a genuine *ability* to repent. The end result of Calvinism is that Calvinism's non-elect gain an excuse for rejecting God, while losing all accountability for their actions.

What do Calvinists believe?

God gave mankind the ability to do what is pleasing to Him, but that was lost in the Fall. It's not on God that men is born depraved.

Our reply:

In Calvinism, everything is on God, because according to Calvinism, everything has a "purpose" for being exactly as it is. It seems that in Calvinism, the right hand pretends to not know what the left hand is doing. In Calvinism, God wanted the Fall and rendered it certain, ensuring that Adam's offspring would be born totally disabled, apart from a special gift of grace that is denied to some but given to others, for reasons that Calvinists cannot explain but demand that we are not allowed to ask. Conversely, with non-Calvinism, God didn't predestine the Fall. God didn't want or need the Fall. Just because He knew and allowed Adam and

Eve to make a poor a free-will choice doesn't mean that's what He wanted. God allowed their bad choice but also helped them to survive and still have children and provide a way to redeem them back into His fellowship through Calvary.

Revelation 3:20-21

"'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; **if anyone hears My voice** and opens the door, **I will come in to him and will dine with him**, and he with Me. He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"Though this verse has been used in countless tracts and evangelistic messages to depict Christ's knocking on the door of the sinner's heart, it is broader than that. The door on which Christ is knocking is not the door to a single human heart, but to the Laodicean church. Christ was outside this apostate church and wanted to come in—something that could only happen if the people repented."*[940]
>
> R.C. Sproul: *"In the original saying, however, Jesus directed his remarks to the church. It was not an evangelistic appeal."*[941]

Our reply:

If something is evangelical, then its purpose is to reach the lost. So, then, if one thinks that Revelation 3:20 is *not* an evangelical appeal, then they must think that the subject of Revelation 3:20, namely the Laodicean church, must already be saved. Perhaps it was. However, if one believes that the Laodicean church was already saved, and if one believes in a "Lordship doctrine" (as many Calvinists do believe in that doctrine), then how would one square their "Lordship Doctrine" with the fact that Jesus described the Laodicean church as "lukewarm…wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked"? (Revelation 3:16-17) After all, that wouldn't say much of a "Lordship doctrine," would it? What good is a "Lordship doctrine" if the Laodicean church is living consistently with it? Something has to give.

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[940] *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 140.

[941] *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1986), 111.

Alternatively, if Calvinists say that it was a *lost* church, then Jesus' invitation at Revelation 3:20 would certainly become *evangelical*, and thus be suitable for gospel invitations to the lost. At least one Calvinist believes that the Laodicean "apostate church" was lost:

> Francis Chan: *"As I see it, a lukewarm Christian is an oxymoron; there's no such thing. To put it plainly, churchgoers who are 'lukewarm' are not Christians. We will not see them in heaven."*[942]

> Francis Chan: *"From other references in Scripture (Colossians 2:1; 4:3, 15-16), the church at Laodicea appears to have been a healthy and legitimate church. But something happened. By the time Revelation was written, about twenty-five years the letter to the Colossians, the Laodiceans' hearts apparently didn't belong to God-despite the fact that they were still active as a church."*[943]

If Calvinists agree, then why would they protest whenever the invitation of Revelation 3:20 is presented to the unsaved in evangelism?

Moreover, 1st Corinthians 3:16 states: "Do you not know that **you are a temple of God** and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you**?" So, the destination of God is *within the spirit/soul of the believer*. Similarly, John 14:23 states: "'If **anyone** loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and **We will come to him and make Our abode with him**.'" So, the invitation at Revelation 3:20 applies to *any* individual as well. Jesus stands willing—figuratively at the door of our heart—patiently waiting, and that's what *He sovereignly chooses to do*—no one makes Him do it. He just wants to, reflective of His amazing character. Jesus didn't have to be born in a manger. He should have been born in a mansion. But Jesus defies everyone's expectations with His amazing character, caring for the needs of lowly creatures above His own, and Jesus wants for us to imitate His character. If everyone did, then the world would be a paradise.

> Gordon Robertson: *"You can be that 'anyone'. All you have to door is open the door, and you will realize that Jesus has been looking for you all along."*[944]

When you preach the Gospel, man's ears may hear your voice, but in their heart, their conscience senses Jesus knocking. Revelation 3:20 is

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[942] *Crazy Love* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2008), 83-84.
[943] Ibid., 88.
[944] Gordon Robertson, *Life Beyond the Grave Part II*.

one of the most loving passages in the Bible. God takes the initiative, and He does not force Himself. Few verses are as treasured as this one.

> Gary Cohen and Salem Kirban: *"The promise of this verse applies to 'any man' (Greek: tis, 'any-man;' 'any-woman'—it is both masculine and feminine) and hence its offer goes beyond merely those who were at Laodicea at the turn of the 2nd century A.D. Christ is standing at the door (He is near to all, Acts 17:27); He is knocking (Greek Present Tense—He now is continually knocking—He is thus actively seeking us; He is making the initial overture). Christ's voice is calling—This is heard in the preaching of the Lord's Day, over the air waves, in the printed page, and from Christian's who tell others of the Good News. Man's part in salvation involves hearing Christ's voice and opening his heart's door. God's part involves the initial call and then upon the opening of the heart in trust, it involves God's entrance and continued abiding fellowship—'I will come in…and sup.' The promise is definite; if the door is opened the knocking one will certainly enter. This verse, in an allegory, puts for the identical truth found in Acts 16:31, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'"*[945]

> Billy Graham: *"We must trust Jesus Christ and receive Him by personal invitation. The Bible says, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock [Christ is speaking]: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him' (Revelation 3:20). 'But as many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name,' writes the apostle John (1:12)."*[946]

What do Calvinists believe?

> J.I. Packer: *"…the new gospel has in effect reformulated the biblical message….we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves, but as waiting in quiet impotence 'at the door of our hearts' for us to let them in."*[947]

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[945] *Revelation Illustrated* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1981), 80.
[946] *The Enduring Classics of Billy Graham: The Secret of Happiness, Happiness Through Peacemaking* (Nashville, Tennessee: W Publishing Group, 2002), 126.
[947] *Introductory Essay to John Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, http://www.all-of-grace.org/pub/others/deathofdeath.html.

Our reply:

Most Calvinists oppose using this passage evangelistically, primarily because they don't believe that salvation is available to just any random person, but is only available to Calvinism's elect, who are secret beneficiaries of a Limited Atonement. In other words, why should *you* give someone a choice to be saved when *God* hasn't given them that choice? So, what is driving the Calvinist interpretation is a theological pre-commitment to Calvinism's doctrine of an Unconditional Election of Calvinism's elect. If you were to take away the theological baggage of Calvinism, though, people would normally understand this to mean that God is kindly inviting "anyone" to salvation.

> Laurence Vance: *"It is here that we see the real plan of salvation according to the Calvinistic system. If men are unable to believe on Jesus Christ, yet God has elected some to salvation and atoned for their sin, then the only way any of them can and will be saved is by quietly waiting for God to overpower their will so they can believe the Gospel."*[948]

Revelation 5:9

"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and **purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation**.'"

What do Calvinists believe?

Christ did not purchase everyone, but only the elect from every people-group.

Our reply:

Christ actually did purchase everyone, and consequently holds the "keys of death and of Hades." (Revelation 1:18) Otherwise, if Jesus had not purchased everyone, then He would not have truly defeated death, and death would still reign in most. Of course, *redemption-available* is not the same as *redemption-applied*. God set a condition that one must believe in His Son in order to receive His free gift of eternal life. Without doing so, one forfeits Calvary's grace that could have been theirs and consequently must pay for their sins *on their own*.

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[948] *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, Florida: Vance Publications, 1999), 476.

Consider the following analogy: A boy emerges from a toy store, waving a pack of baseball cards before his friends, joyously discovering that he had just won Derek Jeter and Luis Pujols baseball cards. Technically, he bought the whole pack of cards (average players included), but the celebration is on account of the valuable cards. Similarly, at Revelation 5:9, the celebration is over what God's plan of salvation netted, that is, "whosoever" from throughout the earth who believed in Jesus and were saved. The whole world was purchased, just like the whole pack of cards, but the joy is over what Calvary produced in those that are saved.

Revelation 13:8
"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone **whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world** in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain."

Something that is "from" the foundation of the world implies something that is from the time of *Genesis* moving forward to present, while something that is "before" the foundation of the world implies something that is before Genesis, meaning from eternity. All statements where "before the foundation of the world" is used, are given with reference to *Christ*. (John 17:24; Ephesians 1:4; 1st Peter 1:20) All statements where "from the foundation of the world" is used, are given with reference to *man*, moving us from a point of reference forward. (Matthew 25:34; Luke 11:50; Revelation 13:8) The implication, therefore, is that names are recorded in the "book of life of the Lamb who has been slain" as people become saved, starting from the time of Genesis, and continually moving forward to the present.

> **Revelation 17:8:** "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, **whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come."
>
> **Matthew 25:34:** "'Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit **the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world**.'"
>
> **Luke 11:49-51:** "'For this reason also the wisdom of God said, "I will send to them prophets and apostles, and some of them they will kill and some they will persecute, so that the **blood** of all the prophets, **shed since the foundation of the world**, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the

> blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.""

Obviously, the blood of the martyrs was not shed before Genesis, but was shed *as they were martyred*, that is, from the time of Genesis [Abel] to its present day [Zechariah].

- *Before* the foundation of the world indicates a time prior to Genesis.
- *From* the foundation of the world encompasses a time span of Genesis to present.

The problem is that Calvinists have inexplicably inserted the word "before" at Revelation 13:8, so as to give the impression that all who will ever become saved was determined *before Genesis*, rather than being determined and recorded *as people become saved*, from Genesis to present.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"Seven times in the New Testament, believers are identified as those whose names are written in the book of life (cf. 3:5; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; Phil 4:3). The book of life belonging to the Lamb, the Lord Jesus, is the registry in which God inscribed the names of those chosen for salvation before the foundation of the world. (This phrase is used as a synonym for eternity past in 17:8; Matt. 13:35; 25:34; Luke 11:50; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; cf. 2 Thess. 2:13; and 2 Tim. 1:9.) … Believers are doubly secure, because the book of life belongs to the Lamb who has been slain. Not only the decree of election, but also the atoning work of Christ seals the redemption of the elect forever."*[949]

> John MacArthur: *"The Lord designed His kingdom from before the foundation of the world and He designed who would be in it from before the foundation of the world."*[950]

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[949] *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 50.
[950] *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (sermon 80-46T, 6/22/1980), https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-46/the-sovereignty-of-god-in-salvation.

Our reply:

Perhaps the reason why Calvinists feel justified inserting "before" into the text is because the English Standard Version [ESV] translates it that way, unlike the New American Standard Version [NASB]. So which is correct? The answer is that the ESV is verifiably wrong on this point.

- The Greek word *apo* = since or from.
- The Greek word *pro* = before.

Since the Greek word for "before" [*pro*] is not found at Revelation 13:8, it is therefore illegitimate for the ESV to arbitrarily insert it. The Greek word *apo* is used at Matthew 13:35, 25:34; Luke 11:50; Hebrews 4:3, 9:26; and Revelation 13:8, 17:8. When used with respect to time, *apo* can only mean "from" in the sense of "since", i.e., the point identified is the beginning point of the period in view.

So, while Christ the "Lamb" is indeed "before the foundation of the world" (1st Peter 1:20), in Revelation 13:8, "from the foundation of the world" is not modifying the Lamb, but *modifying the writing of the names*, and that is the key point to raise. (A likely Calvinist counter-argument would be to suggest that "before the foundation of the world" indeed references man, and not just Christ, insomuch that Calvinism's elect were chosen before the foundation of the world.[951] In reality, God predestined all spiritual blessings to be in Christ, so that when we become saved, we come to join in what God has predestined in His Son. So, again, "before the foundation of the world" modifies what is *in Christ*. It's not establishing *who* is in Christ, but *what* those in Christ are predestined to receive, and thus the Calvinist counter-argument is negated.)

Revelation 17:16-17

"And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For **God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose**, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled."

Whenever God does something like this, it is in response to His grace having been rejected.

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[951] See the discussion on Ephesians 1:3-4.

> **Romans 1:28:** "And just as **they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer**, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper."
>
> **2nd Thessalonians 2:8-12:** "Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, **because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved**. For this reason **God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false**, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness."

Any of those people could have been saved, but since they did not "receive the love of the truth so as to be saved," having no longer seen fit to "acknowledge God," they were given over to a "depraved mind." As for the way in which God deals with antichrist's followers, He strengthens their resolve to do as they had already determined, effectively confirming in them what they had already chosen, so that they would experience the full ramifications of their choice.

What do Calvinists believe?

> John MacArthur: *"Antichrist's self-serving, satanically inspired actions are, however, precisely in the scope of God's sovereign plan. In fact, it is God who will put it in the hearts of Antichrist's followers to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast. God's power is behind the destruction and consolidation of the evil empire; as always, Satan is the instrument of God's purposes."*[952]

Our reply:

For God to turn people over to such depravity, speaks not of God's original, *antecedent* intention for them, but God's *consequent* intention, stemming from their rejection of His grace. People who *could* have been saved, after being graciously *offered* salvation, cannot be indicative of a non-elect class that could *never* have been saved.

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[952] *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Revelation 1-11* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 172.

Revelation 20:11-15
"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were **judged, every one of them according to their deeds**. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Notice that it says they are "judged" for "their deeds." However, according to Calvinism, God decreed "whatsoever comes to pass," including what would be "their deeds" for which they would be "judged." If God had decreed their evil deeds, then what would be the legitimate *basis* for their judgment, that is, being held accountable for what someone else decided, namely in this case, God, as described in Calvinism?

What do Calvinists believe?

> James White: *"...since God judges on the basis of the intentions of the heart, there is in fact a ground for morality and justice."*[953]

Our reply:

Do people *independently*, *self-determine* their own thoughts and intentions, through autonomous, libertarian free will? If not, and instead God (according to Calvinism) causes those same thoughts and intentions of the heart, then what is there left to divine justice in Calvinism?

> Dave Hunt: *"Yes, God judges 'the intentions of the heart,' but Calvinism falsely says that He causes the intentions He judges."*[954]

Revelation 22:17
"The Spirit and the bride say, '**Come**.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

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[953] *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 2004), 320.
[954] *Ibid.*, 327.

This is an open-ended invitation, much the same as the invitation of Matthew 11:28 and Matthew 22:9:

> **Matthew 11:28:** "'**Come** to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.'"

> **Matthew 22:9:** "'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, **invite** to the wedding feast.'"

In other words, the invitation is *indiscriminately* made to any and all. However, in Calvinism, not all are indiscriminately *able* to respond, as one must be given a *special calling* in order to be able to respond.

What do Calvinists believe?

The invitation itself does not presuppose any ability to come. Fallen man is enslaved until regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Our reply:

Firstly, only Christians can access to receive the spiritual blessing of regeneration, since "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" is "in Christ." (Ephesians 1:3)

Secondly, does the Bible ever say that mankind cannot believe in the gospel until "regenerated"? Obviously not. Nonetheless, Calvinists assume that the invitation to "come" is some sort of secret dog whistle for Irresistible Grace, which means that being a Calvinist requires seeing Calvinism all throughout the Bible, even if it is not explicitly taught, such as at Revelation 22:17. So, in other words, Calvinists are not driven by the biblical text itself. Calvinists are driven to support Calvinism by *emotion*, and then they *find* Calvinism in the Bible where it does not exist.

Thirdly, if Calvinism teaches that pre-faith regeneration produces *life* so that *dead* rebel sinners are able to positively respond to the gospel, then Calvinism would have to place regeneration before being "thirsty" and before being "weary and heavy-laden," and which would then mean that people already *have life* before drinking the "water of life." Meanwhile, Jesus places living water only *after* believing in Him:

> **John 4:10:** "Jesus answered and said to her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, "Give Me a drink," you would have asked Him, and He would have given you **living water**.'"

> **John 7:38:** "'He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his **innermost being will flow rivers of living water**.'"

Yet, according to Calvinism, pre-faith regeneration already produces living water, even though that notion is contradicted by Jesus who places the water of life only *after* one places their faith in Him. So, what is the "water of life" that Jesus refers to? It would seem to be an indication of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit—given in regeneration. So, if "living water" signifies regeneration, and if living water is the gift of God given only after someone asks Jesus "Give Me a drink," then it logically follows that regeneration is *post-faith*.

Similarly, consider the parable of the Marriage Feast of Matthew 22:1-14, in which many of the initial invitees were "unwilling to come." For a Calvinist, this means that some were non-elect and received the type of invitation which did not include secret *life* that Calvinism's elect otherwise receive. The puzzling aspect of that would be that Calvinists would have Jesus saying "come" to people who were known to Him to be non-elect and as such, excluded from Calvinism's "Limited Atonement," thus making His invitation dubious.

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