

B Y T . A L L A N T U R N E R

Not Willing That Any Should Perish

A critical examination of the doctrine of Determinism as taught by Augustine, Calvin, Luther et al., but particularly as set forth by Calvinism's Five Points: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints.

© Allanita Press



CONTENTS

An Introduction	1
God's Sovereignty	3
Man's Free Will	11
The Foreknowledge Of God	14
The Five Points Examined	18
Calvinistic "Sugar-Sticks"	28
Conclusion	31

An Introduction

John Calvin, the brilliant systematic theologian of the Reformation, in explaining Predestination, said:

Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal death for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestinated either to life or to death (*Institutes*, Book III, Chapter XXI, section 5).

According to Loraine Boettner, the well-known interpreter of Calvinism, Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation, “was as zealous for absolute predestination as was Calvin” (*The Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination*, page 15). To prove his point, Boettner quotes Luther’s commentary on Romans, where Luther said: “All things whatever arise from, and depend on, the divine appointment; whereby it was foreordained who should receive the word of life, and who should disbelieve it; who should be delivered from their sins, and who should be hardened in them; and who should be justified and who should be condemned.” To further make his point, Boettner even quotes Melancthon, Calvin’s student, who is reported to have said: “All things turn out according to divine predestination; not only the works we do outwardly, but even the thoughts we think inwardly”; and again, “There is no such thing as chance, or fortune; nor is there a readier way to gain the fear of God...than to be thoroughly versed in the doctrine of Predestination.” Furthermore, Benjamin B. Warfield, who in the opinion of some Calvinists is the most outstanding Reformed theologian since Calvin himself, makes his belief in absolute predestination very clear. In an article entitled “Predestination,” Warfield said that Predestination was “broad enough to embrace the whole universe of things, and minute enough to concern itself with the smallest details, and actualizing itself with inevitable certainty in every event that comes to pass.” (*Biblical Doctrines*, pages 13,22).

What Calvinists Teach Is Clear

Calvinists believe that absolutely nothing happens that God has not foreordained or predestined to happen! If an individual goes to heaven, it is because God predestined that he would, independent of anything this individual would do of his own free will; on the other hand, if an individual goes to hell, it is because God predestined that he would, independent of anything this individual would do of his own free will. This point is clearly stated in the *Westminster Confession*:

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere grace and love, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace (Chapter III, sections III-VII).

It is against such error that this study is dedicated.

What I Believe The Bible Teaches

I believe the Bible teaches that Christ died for all people, for those who perish no less than for those who are saved; that the election of the saints is not an unconditional act of God; that saving grace is actually extended to every man, which he may then receive or reject; that man may resist the Holy Spirit’s invitation to be saved, if he so chooses; that God’s grace, once accepted, can then be rejected, and is, therefore, not necessarily permanent, but that those who are ransomed by the precious blood of Christ can, if they are so disposed, throw away all God has so graciously given them and perish eternally. This statement is not a creed to be implemented in all the churches; it is, instead, my own systematic theology. It is my conviction that all these things are taught in the Bible. I stand ready to give a reason for the hope that is

in me by citing book, chapter, and verse for what I believe. Actually, the design of this study is to do exactly this! As I examine the cardinal arguments of Calvinism, I will be refuting each argument the Calvinists make with a “thus sayeth the Lord.” This is only as it should be, for the final authority by which any doctrine or theological system is to be judged must always be God’s word.

Put On Your Thinking Cap

When it comes to Calvinism, many Christians continue to be “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14). This is not because the Bible is somehow unclear on the subject. The Bible clearly and emphatically denies Calvinism. If God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9), then Calvinism simply cannot be true. The problem for many is that the Bible is not a book on systematic theology. For example, the Bible teaches, but does not systematically set forth, the doctrines of the triune nature of God, the deity of Christ, the personality of the Holy Spirit, the reality of future rewards in heaven and condemnation in hell, all of which are questioned by some who claim to be Christians. The Bible is God’s special revelation to man. As such, it has a beginning and an end. When one has studied this revelation from beginning to end, he then knows what it is God wants him to know about the myriad subjects contained therein. Only then can one begin to systematize these subjects. Although systematization is an essential process of theology, it is at this very point that men begin to go astray (by *theology* I mean *only* the legitimate study of God and His revelation). This problem is dealt with by the apostle Paul, who said, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). God’s word always accomplishes what He intends; in other words, it never re-

turns void (Isaiah 55:11). Therefore, how we interpret or “rightly divide” the Scriptures is extremely important. It is at this point that sheep begin to be separated from goats (John 10:16,27; Revelation 3:20). There is no excuse for getting caught up in the error of Calvinism, none except ignorance of God’s word! Unfortunately, ignorance is a major problem among God’s people today. Some are ignorant because they are still babes in Christ. Others are ignorant because they lack someone to teach them. Still, other Christians are ignorant through no fault but their own. They do not like to study God’s word. Studying is hard work. It requires one to think and, quite frankly, these folks just do not want to think. However, if we are not ready to study the word of God, thinking it out and thinking it through, then we will, quite naturally, wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). If you are not willing to “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Peter 1:13), then this study is not for you. Consequently, your lot in this life is to be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Ephesians 4:14, KJV). On the other hand, if you, like a new born babe, “desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (2 Peter 2:2), then I believe you will appreciate this study.

Search The Scriptures

Remember, this study represents the thinking of the author, who has endeavored to “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). He could be wrong! Ultimately, it is your responsibility to “search the Scriptures” for yourself (John 5:39) to see whether these things are so (cf. Acts 17:11). The author has cited passages he believes authenticate his arguments. As you engage in this study, please read these passages for yourself. Make sure they are used correctly and not taken out of context. May God richly bless you as you study His word.

God's Sovereignty

In an over-reaction to Calvinist extremes, many Christians have shied away from a study of God's sovereignty. This is a serious mistake. The sovereignty of God is a thoroughly biblical subject. Although the words "sovereign" or "sovereignty" are not found in the KJV, one or both of these words appear in the NKJV, ASV, NIV, and NRSV. Nevertheless, the idea of God's sovereignty is clearly taught in both the Old and New Testament. "Sovereignty," according to the American Heritage Dictionary, means, "Supremacy of authority or rule as exercised by a sovereign." This idea is applied to God by such words as "dominion," "rule," "ruler," "Lord," "King," and "Potentate." As Jack Cottrell points out in his outstanding book *What The Bible Says About God The Ruler*, "The sovereignty of God may be concisely summed up as absolute Lordship." Sovereignty, then, is equal to lordship, lordship is equal to ownership, and ownership is equal to control. It is precisely at this point that Calvinism strays. We will have more to say about this farther along; but before proceeding on, let us make sure we understand the ramifications of Sovereignty.

The Ramifications Of Sovereignty

If God is truly the Sovereign of the universe, then whatever happens, we are told, is the will of God. A young baby dies of cancer or a young mother or father is seriously injured in an automobile accident and this is said to be God's will. We pray earnestly for a fellow Christian's recovery from a serious illness and in closing our prayer we say, "Not our will but Thine be done." But, recovery does not take place and death occurs. Has God's will really been done? Invariably, at funerals, if one listens to what is being said to the bereaved, one will be heard saying, "It is God's will." Are these things truly God's will, and if so, in what sense?

Repelled by the thought of a loving God being responsible for the death of the innocent and those we love, many Christians have concluded that God is not yet Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Unlike now, one day, they say, God's will is to be done in all things. As sympathetic as we are to their reasons for coming to this conclusion, we are nevertheless convinced that those

who hold such a position are terribly wrong. From a biblical standpoint, the sovereignty of God is simply not open for debate. If God is not sovereign, He is clearly not God! Therefore, when I answer "yes" to the question, "Is it true that whatever happens is the will of God?," I must make sure that those who hear me understand that my answer is not an unqualified "yes." Failing to do so would be theologically misleading and personally devastating.

My "yes" is qualified by the fact that there are at least three different senses in which the "will of God" is used in the Bible. When we understand the different ways in which this phrase is used, then we can understand that God is not personally nor directly responsible for the many things people want to either credit or discredit Him with, even though it remains true that everything that happens ultimately falls within His sovereignty.

God's Decretive Will

There are things that God decrees to happen. He causes these things to happen by His own omnipotence. These can be described as God's decretive will. A biblical description of God's decretive will is found in Psalm 33:11, which says: "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart from generation to generation," and again in Isaiah 14:27, which says: "For the Lord of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?"

It was God's decretive will that was at work in His scheme to redeem mankind through His Son Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:28; Colossians 1:4). For the Bible believer, it is a given that whatever God purposes cannot be thwarted. For example, in Romans 8:28-30, we learn that God has decreed that He will justify, and one day glorify, certain foreknown individuals (viz., "whosoever will") on the basis of a foreordained Christ (cf. Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:19, 20), a foreordained gospel plan (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:7), and a foreordained life (cf. Ephesians 2:10). With this fact firmly established, the apostle Paul joyously affirms, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

In like manner, the doctrine of the resurrection rests firmly on God’s decretive will. In John 6:40, Jesus said, “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” Again, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Whatever God proposes, and Himself carries out, will, in fact, happen. This is the reason why God can assert He declares “the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isaiah 46:10), which is God’s decretive will.

God's Preceptive Will

But there is a second way in which the “will of God” is used in the Bible. This has to do not with what God purposed to do Himself, but with what He desires for man to do. This can be described as God’s preceptive will and is primarily concerned with man’s obedience to His word or precepts. The writer of Hebrews speaks of the “will of God” in this sense when he writes, “For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36). It was in this sense that the Lord used the expression in Matthew 7:21: “Not every who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” When Jesus said “the will of My Father,” He was speaking of God’s precepts, statutes, or commandments. Consequently, it is in connection with God’s preceptive will, and not His decretive will, that man is commanded to “work out [his] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12).

Furthermore, it is in connection with God’s preceptive will that we understand that the Lord is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Actually, God’s desire (i.e., His will) for the salvation of all men is reflected many places in His word (cf. I Timothy 2:4; Luke 7:30; Matthew 23:37), but such must be kept distinct from His decretive will. A failure to make such a distinction will cause one to land squarely within the Calvinist camp.

God's Permissive Will

There is a third sense in which the “will of God” is used in the Scriptures. It can be described as God’s permissive will. Perhaps it is with God’s permissive will that men have the most trouble. In this category are to be found all

those things which God neither purposes nor desires, but which he allows man, in his freedom, to bring about. *(There is a sense in which this third category is related to the second, God’s preceptive will. With a strict use of the word “permissive,” it can be seen that man’s response to God’s desire or preceptive will is not decreed or purposed by Him, and is, therefore, permitted. In other words, God does not make someone obey His laws; but, in the strictest sense, He simply permits one to do so.)* That which makes this third category different from the second is not the presence of God’s permission, but the absence of a stated desire on God’s part that these events or circumstances should happen. In this category are events God neither purposed nor desired, but, nevertheless, permits, including some things that are clearly contrary to His stated desire (will), such as man’s sins. Therefore, when, in Jeremiah 19:5, God said, “They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into my mind,” He made it plain that it was not His will they were doing, whether decretive or preceptive. In other words, it was not the mind (will) of God that they should do such a thing. Nevertheless, the Lord permitted His people to exercise their free wills and do those things clearly contrary to His counsel (will). Things such as this are within the “will of God” only in the sense that He permits them to happen (cf. Acts 17:24-30; 14:16; Romans 1:18-32).

God’s permissive will allows both bad and good things to occur. It is used by Paul in this latter sense in 1 Corinthians 16:7, when he writes: “For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.” Again, he uses it this way when, in Acts 18:21, he writes: “I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem; but I will return again to you, God willing.” The writer of Hebrews put it this way: “And this we will do if God permits” (Hebrews 6:3).

Of course, sometimes the Lord does not will (permit) something to happen that His creatures desire to happen. As Sovereign, He has the perfect right to do so. For example, in Acts 16:7, Luke writes: “After they had come to Mysia they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them.” And, according to James, the height of man’s prideful arrogance is manifested by the one who does not take into consideration the fact that his desires may be, and sometimes are, superseded by the Sovereign Ruler of the universe (cf. James 4:13-15).

Control Not Causation

Calvinists have thought that the key to sovereignty is causation. They are wrong. The key to sovereignty is ultimate control. Through His absolute foreknowledge of every plan of man's heart, and through His absolute ability (omnipotence) to either permit or prevent any particular plan man may have, God maintains complete control (sovereignty) over His creation. The power to prevent means that God ultimately has the final word in everything that happens. To deny this is to deny the sovereignty of God!

It is true, then, that whatever happens is God's will. Everything that transpires falls within the sovereign will of God in one sense or another. However, it is absolutely crucial to understand that there are three different senses in which this may be true:

- Sometimes a thing occurs because God decides it will happen, and then He makes it happen. This we have called God's decretive will and it seems to be limited mostly to His working out the “scheme of redemption.”
- Sometimes a thing occurs because God desires it and man decides, of his own free will, to do what God desires. This we have identified as God's preceptive will and has to do with God's commandments or precepts.
- Sometimes a thing occurs because of the agency of an individual or group of individuals, and God permits it to happen. We have called this God's permissive will. Included in this category are sinful or careless acts like murder, or the death of one caused by the actions of a drunken driver. Even tragedies that occur through the natural processes would fit in this category. All three of these categories can be classified as “God's will,” but only the first category is God's will in any causative sense. And even though God is Sovereign Ruler of the universe, categories two and three remind us that we must allow the Sovereign Ruler to respect the integrity of the freedom He has so graciously accorded His creation. As His creatures, we must learn to trust God's wisdom in knowing what good can be drawn from the tragic episodes He permits to take place in category three.

Does God Have An Individual Will For Each Person's Life?

Those who ask this question assume an individual, specific will for every person. They assume that God has an ideal, detailed blueprint already drawn up for each person's life. They assume that for any decision we face there is a specific choice (in the most restrictive sense) that God wants us to make. This applies to the school we should attend, the occupation we should choose, and the specific individual God wants us to marry. In his book, *Knowing God's Will, And Doing It!*, J. Grant Howard, Jr. expressed it this way:

Scripture teaches us that God has a pre-determined plan for every life. It is that which will happen. It is inevitable, unconditional, immutable, irresistible, comprehensive, and purposeful. It is also, for the most part, unpredictable. It includes everything, even sin and suffering. It involves everything, even human responsibility and human decisions (Page 12).

A good summary of this view is given by Garry Friesen in his book *Decision Making & the Will of God*:

God's individual will is that ideal, detailed life-plan which God has uniquely designed for each believer. This life-plan encompasses every decision we make and is the basis of God's daily guidance. This guidance is given through the indwelling Holy Spirit who progressively reveals God's life-plan to the heart of the individual believer...” (Page 35).

Although this view is very popular, we are convinced that the idea of an individual, specific will of God for every detail of a person's life is not taught in God's word. Calvinists and other determinists argue that the Bible is filled with examples of individuals for whom God had a specific plan, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, John the Baptist, Paul et al. But each of these examples was highly unusual and was related to God's working out of His plan of salvation for fallen mankind, that is, the Scheme of Redemption. Furthermore, the specific plan that God had for each of these individuals was revealed to them by special revelation and, therefore, cannot be seen as normative for ordinary believers today.

Those who affirm God's individual will for each person usually cite passages like Psalm 32:8; Proverbs 3:5,6; Isaiah 30:20,21; Colossians 1:9 and 4:12; Romans 12:1,2; Ephesians 2:10 and 5:15-17. But when these passages are considered in their context, a much stronger case can be made for these passages in terms of God's preceptive or moral will (which we have

already discussed at some length) and not His decretive will.

Being Led By The Spirit

But someone will say, “How about being ‘led by the Spirit?’” In Romans 8:14, the Scriptures say, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God,” and in Galatians 5:18, it says, “But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under law.” The Calvinist thinks the Holy Spirit influences him through some mysterious inward guidance. The Bible does not teach such a doctrine, these two passages included, and we are firmly convinced that when one begins to listen to some inner voice, he is headed for trouble. In fact, Romans 8:26-27 does not say anything about the Holy Spirit speaking to us at all. What it says is: “...the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” Being led by the Spirit of God has to do with one’s obedience to God’s word (i.e., God’s preceptive or moral will), which is, according to Ephesians 6:17, the “sword of the Spirit.” Being led by the Spirit in a direct way, like was promised to the apostles (cf. John 16:12-14), was never intended to be understood as being available to all Christians. In other words, direct guidance by God’s Holy Spirit was promised specifically to the Lord’s apostles, not Christians in general, and was for the specific purpose of revealing the Bible, not for inner guidance for all Christians (cf. Ephesians 3:3-5).

We find it ironic that those who are waiting to know God’s will for themselves through some inner guidance or miracle apart from the Word are the very ones who miss God’s will for their lives by not obeying His preceptive or moral will. I have personally taught the gospel to those caught up in this deceptive doctrine and have had them tell me that if God wanted them to be baptized for the remission of sins, He would have told them directly through a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. As they erroneously wait for a direct revelation of God’s decretive will, they fail to obey His preceptive will. As one can see, this is a most damnable doctrine!

But, in rejecting such a doctrine, one must not jump to another equally extreme position which says that knowing the will of God is irrelevant to daily decision making. The will of God (particularly His preceptive will as revealed in the Scriptures) is always applicable to our daily lives. God’s Word is to be the reference point for

our decision making. This means that the most sophisticated technique for knowing the will of God in our lives is: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16). This means that whatever God instructs us to do in His Word, either through commands or general principles, is His will for our lives. In other words, if God wants us to do it, then it is in the book! Thus, when the question is asked, “How can I know God’s will for my life?,” we answer, “Read the Bible.”

Not As Many “Thou Shalts” And “Thou Shalt Nots” As You Might Think

Contrary to what a lot of people think, God’s preceptive will for man has very few “thou shalt” and “thou shalt not.” Most of what God would have us do is learned from principles taught in His Word. This is why Bible study is so important. Unless we are thoroughly familiar with God’s Word, we will not know the principles that allow us to make the right decisions in our lives. For example, when we are familiar with the sanctity of life ethic taught throughout the Bible, we are able to make the right decisions concerning the many pressing issues of our day, namely, abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc. In times past, God’s people perished because they were ignorant of His Word (cf. Hosea 4:1), and the same thing can happen to us today if we are not careful.

But, and this is very important, many of the decisions we face every day are neither required nor forbidden. The key to understanding this point is to be found in the idea that it is not our task to know if a particular decision is God’s will, but rather if it is within God’s will. For example, the inspired apostle wrote, “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” (Timothy 5:8). This is God’s preceptive will and it requires, among other things, that a parent provide nourishing food for his children. As long as this general principle is met, the specific decision of whether to have liver and onions or steak and green beans for dinner does not really matter. Whether one eats in the kitchen or the dining room, or whether the beans are fresh or frozen, or whether one has a hamburger for breakfast, lunch or dinner, does not matter to God. Once again, as long as the general requirements of this passage are being met, God is not really concerned about the specific choices that

are made. Understanding this point can be liberating for those who have thought God wanted them to make a specific choice in every decision.

To be pleasing to God, everything we do must fall within His preceptive will (cf. Colossians 3:17), even those things that are not specifically required by it, such as matters of opinion and indifference. For instance, we have the right (i.e., it falls within God’s will) either to eat or not eat meat; but, and this is terribly important, we have no right to bind either of these on anyone else (cf. Romans 14:1-13). Likewise, we have the right (i.e., it falls within the umbrella of God’s preceptive will) to send our children to either a public or private school; but we have no right to bind either of these on someone else. Furthermore, we have the right (i.e., God grants permission) to marry within or outside our own race; but we have no right to bind our personal convictions on another person. There are, of course, many other things that could be listed here, but you see the point, do you not?

God is not nearly as judgmental as some people think. When someone insists on making his personal convictions the judge and jury of other men’s consciences, he becomes much more judgmental than God Himself. The Bible teaches it is just as wrong to bind where God has not bound as it is to loose where He has not loosed. The apostle Paul warned against the former when he said, “Who are you to judge another man’s servant?” (Romans 14:4).

Making Right Choices

Within the liberty we have in Christ, our desire is to make the best choice among the many different options we have been given. Unfortunately, our experiences tell us that we do not always make the best choices. After the fact, we realize that the exercising of an alternative option would have been a much better choice, although the choice we actually made was not sinful. Nevertheless, having seen how our choice turned out, we now know it was not the best choice. As we are often told, “Hindsight is better than foresight.” What, then, is our problem? In truth, ours is a lack of wisdom!

The Bible says, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). If the lack of wisdom is what keeps us from making the best choices, and it is, all we need to do is ask the Lord for wisdom, He’ll give it to us, and then we will always make the best choices in life, it’s as simple as this! Or is it? Although this wisdom comes from God as a direct response to our prayer, and is, therefore, some-

thing other than just a knowledge of God’s preceptive will, it must not be thought of as either a magic formula or instant omniscience. Neither should we think of it as something totally divorced from one’s knowledge of the Scriptures. Yes, we are assured that if we ask the Lord for wisdom, He will give it to us, but Proverbs 4:5 commands us to “Get wisdom, get understanding,” implying that wisdom and understanding must be acquired, and, consequently, not something to be received passively. Proverbs 4:5 qualifies James 1:5, that is, it tells us that wisdom is not going to be given without some effort on our part. Furthermore, wisdom has to do with how we use the knowledge we already have. Within the context of Proverbs 4, wisdom, which is identified as the “principle thing” (verse 7), is connected to “instruction,” “doctrine,” “commandments,” and being “taught,” and by application to the subject at hand, a knowledge of God’s word. In fact, even a casual reading of the “Wisdom Literature” will demonstrate the connection between instruction and wisdom. In addition, Moses, at the beginning of the Law, said: “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deuteronomy 4:5-6). Again, wisdom and understanding are associated with God’s instructions and commandments. In 2 Timothy 3:15, being “wise unto salvation” is connected with “the holy scriptures.” Therefore, a man who is not studying to show himself approved (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15), cannot be asking for wisdom “in faith, nothing wavering,” as James 1:6 requires, and will not, therefore, be receiving anything from the Lord! Nevertheless, for those who desire and pray for wisdom, willingly cultivating it with God’s help, I have no doubt they will receive it.

In seeking wisdom, the following suggestions are offered:

Know as much about God as possible. Proverbs 1:7 teaches, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” In Psalms 111:10, it is said, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments.” Although the fear mentioned in these passages is not totally unaware of the “terror of the Lord” (cf. 2 Corinthians

5:11), contextually, the word indicates reverence for and respectful awe of God’s divine nature. What this means is that without reverence for and awe of God we cannot know what we ought to know and, further, we cannot ever hope to properly utilize the little knowledge we do have. For as long as I can remember, my regard for God has always moved me to think about His characteristics and attributes. Now, the more I have learned about Him, the more I have stood in awe and veneration of Him. In addition, the more I have learned about Him, the closer I have actually felt to Him. My fear of God has not just allowed me to know more about Him, it has actually allowed me to know Him, that is, to have an intimate, loving relationship with Him. As a result, loving God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength has become the consuming passion of my life. I love Him more than my own wife, and I love her more than I do my own life. Consequently, I have never known greater love than His love for me, and, as a direct result of His great love for me, I have never loved more than I love Him. Although it at first seems ironic, as my “fear of God” (i.e., my reverence, veneration, and awe of God) has increased over the years, almost without me realizing it, my “fear” of Him has actually disappeared. How can this be? According to the apostle John: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18). The relationship I now have with the heavenly Father, “in Christ,” no longer involves the fear of torment. In Christ, I no longer have an adversarial relationship with God the Father. I am no longer antagonistic of His commandments, but joyfully and enthusiastically keep them from a heart filled with love (cf. John 14:15). All this has produced in me a careful “boldness” (cf. Ephesians 3:12; Hebrews 10:19; 1 John 4:17). Without the remission of my sins, which has been provided by the grace of God, and accomplished as a result of my faith in the blood of Christ, I would be absolutely terrified to go into the presence of the Lord (cf. Hebrews 10:31; 2 Corinthians 5:11). But now, “in Christ,” with the fear of His wrath having been taken away, I possess a boldness and confidence to enter into the very presence of God. I emphasize the idea of “careful boldness,” because until I finish my course in this life, I could, through moral neglect, lose (cf. Hebrews 3:6,14) that which God’s faithfulness guarantees (cf. Philippians 1:6). As I have had the opportunity to preach and teach God Almighty over the years, I have noticed this same effect produced in others. Truly, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of

knowledge and wisdom. If, though, the only time we think about God is when we ask Him for wisdom, we might as well not waste our time. I remain confident that as we continue to learn more about God, our love for Him will only increase.

Know as much about God’s word as possible. Because knowledge is a requirement for wisdom, we should pray for wisdom while learning as much about God’s word as possible. In other words, praying for wisdom is not a substitute for Bible study!

Know as much about life as possible. This is a mighty big job, and one that, more often than not, comes with experience. The Hebrew writer makes this point when he says, “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). For example, if one did not know that most “birth control pills” actually prevent a fertilized egg from implanting on the wall of the mother’s uterus, thereby receiving nourishment, it would be difficult to make a biblically informed proper decision about what method of birth control one might wish to use. Furthermore, unless one knew that in vitro fertilization routinely involved the destruction of fertilized ova, it would be almost impossible to make the right decision about this procedure. But, knowing about life is more than the accumulation of facts, it is also the cultivation of the knowledge of how these facts affect life. This is why respect for and consultation with our elders is so important for one seeking wisdom (cf. Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31; 1 Peter 5:5). Quite simply, they have seen more of life than we have and, therefore, should be wiser than we are.

Finally, know as much about wisdom as possible. As we said previously, praying for wisdom does not result in instant omniscience. It is unfortunate that when many are faced with a decision, they say a prayer for wisdom; then, no matter what they decide, they assume that this particular decision was supplied by God. But, as we have indicated already, wisdom does not work this way. Wisdom is not specific answers to specific problems. Rather, wisdom is the ability to discern the best decision from those that are only better. We recognize that wisdom applies general knowledge and understanding to specific situations with excellent results. This means it is a skill! Consequently, as we pray for it, we realize it grows and increases with not just study, but the exercise of what we have studied and learned. Unfortunately, even a wise person sometimes makes a poor or even a bad decision. Nevertheless, trusting the Lord to give us wis-

dom, we continue to learn as much about God, His word, life in general, and wisdom as we can. Only in this manner will we become acquainted with and enlightened by true, worthwhile wisdom.

The Mistake Of Trying To Interpret Providence

The Christian has the assurance of God’s special providence. This assurance compelled the apostle Paul to say, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). And again, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). With this said, is it possible to know the will of God in and through circumstances that take place in this life? I believe the answer to this question is an emphatic “No!” When an event takes place, we have no way of knowing, short of actual inspiration, whether it falls within the decretive or permissive will of God. Previously, God’s decretive will was described as that which God desires and Himself makes happen, and His permissive will as something which originates apart from His desire but that He permits because of man’s free will, etc. In other words, an event can happen because God wants it to happen and causes it to happen, or it may happen for various other reasons. Consequently, an event cannot communicate a message apart from special revelation. Additionally, we have no way of knowing whether an event has taken place because of God’s general providence, which encompasses all creation, or as a result of His special providence, which is directed toward the church of Christ exclusively.

As has already been noted, Calvinists erroneously believe that everything that happens is God’s decretive or purposive will. Others, some of whom are Christians, believe they can actually interpret God’s will (or providence) by events that take place in their lives, or the lives of others. For instance, a good man prospers and a bad man suffers hardship. Some are convinced that God is blessing the good man and punishing the bad man. But is this really the case? What happens when a good man suffers and a bad man prospers?

The Gamaliel Fallacy

If the book of Job teaches us anything, it is that circumstances or events, apart from revelation, cannot convey God’s decretive will. Job was not suffering because he was an evil man, as his friends supposed; he was suffering because

he was, in fact, a good man. Job’s friends, and even Job himself, had fallen victim to what has come to be called the “Gamaliel fallacy,” after the principle offered by the great Jewish teacher Gamaliel, who said, “And now I say to you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to fight against God” (Acts 5:38,39). Although what Gamaliel said is ultimately true (ultimately, in the end, God’s cause will be vindicated), in actuality, it does not translate into very practical advice. One must keep in mind that this is Gamaliel’s opinion and advice, not the Holy Spirit’s. For instance, the Roman Catholic church, with its universal bishop (viz., the Pope or Papa Father), is an apostate church that has existed basically in its present form since A.D. 606. Does this mean that God is blessing Catholicism? Of course not! But, if you were to apply Gamaliel’s advice to the Catholic church, you could not stand or fight against it spiritually. Likewise, there are many other false religions that seem to be enjoying great success, especially when measured by the world’s standards. Does this mean that they, too, are being blessed by God? Again, the answer is obvious. Worldly success is not necessarily a sign of God’s blessings. John the Baptist’s ministry did not end in success according to the world’s standards, he ended up in prison and eventually had his head cut off. But according to God’s standards, he was completely successful. By man’s standards, the ministries of the apostles were miserable failures. However, we know they were successful in God’s sight. Therefore, from our limited and finite perspectives, we must accept Gamaliel’s pronouncement as the fallacy it really is.

Is Private Speculation Necessarily Wrong?

Does this mean that it is inappropriate for a Christian to entertain his own private speculation about God’s providential care, along with the various circumstances that seem to point in that direction? No, I do not believe this is wrong. But I do believe that, even in one’s own private speculation, one must be very careful about thinking a certain event definitely means that God has done this or that, or even that He desires this or that to be done. This kind of carelessness was exhibited by Mordecai, who said to Esther, “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). Mordecai’s statement must not be construed as a lack of faith in God’s providential care for the Jews, for, in the same verse, he ad-

vised Esther that if she did not help, “deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place.” It seemed to Mordecai that Esther was in the right place at the right time, and that the hand of God might be providentially involved in her being queen; but, without special revelation, he could not know for sure. Let us all learn to be as wise and trusting as Mordecai. Believing in the sovereignty of God, and based upon the promises God had made to His people, Mordecai was willing to trust God for deliverance, and so should we.

Undoubtedly, we can all recount the marvelous things that have happened to us in our lifetimes which we believe were providential. However, we should be careful not to cite these things as proof of God’s special providence. Our proof is found in the promises contained in God’s word. In the case of special providence, the apostle Paul declared by inspiration, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). In other words, because of God’s special providential care for us, every circumstance or event that

happens to us will have either a good purpose or a good result, so long as we continue to love and obey Him. How do we know this? The Bible, God’s preceptive will, tells us so! Consequently, our faith in God, the Sovereign Ruler of all creation, and His solemn promise that “all things work together for good to them that love God,” relieve us of the burden of trying to figure out whether a particular event happened because of God’s decretive or permissive will, and directs us to a thorough study of His preceptive will, which has been revealed to us in the Bible.

As we conclude this section on the sovereignty of God, let us think of Him as “the Lord, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth” (Genesis 14:22). Let us acknowledge that He “has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all” (Psalm 103:19). With the psalmist, let us say: “Bless the Lord, you His angels, who excel in strength, who do His word, heeding the voice of His word. Bless the Lord, all you His hosts, you ministers of His, who do His pleasure. Bless the Lord, all His works, in all places of His dominion. Bless the Lord, O my soul!” (Psalm 103:20-22).

Man's Free Will

Calvinists give lip-service to man's free will, but they do not really believe in it. They say that man, in order to have free will, needs only to voluntarily choose his acts in accord with his own desires and motives; it matters not that God, as Sovereign, has foreordained these desires and motives, along with the choices themselves. Now, does this sound like free moral agency to you? According to Calvinists, a person may have only one course of action open to him and still be free. "For example," they say, "a man may be locked in a room, but not want to get out. He therefore cannot get out (that is certain), but equally he does not want to get out (he is not there against his will)" (D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty And Human Responsibility*, page 207). In other words, even though God has foreordained every single choice one makes, every choice is still free because God has also foreordained that each choice man makes will be made voluntarily. Carl F. H. Henry, the founding editor of *Christianity Today*, noted theologian, educator, lecturer, and author of more than twenty-five books, explains (?) it this way:

To be morally responsible man needs only the capacity for choice, not the freedom of contrary choice.... Human beings voluntarily choose to do what they do. The fact that God has foreordained human choices and that His decree renders human actions certain does not therefore negate human choice (*God, Revelation And Authority*, VI:84-85).

As the famed Calvinist Loraine Boettner asserts, "God so controls the thoughts and wills of men that they freely [?] and willingly [?] do what He has planned for them to do" (*op cit.*, page 222). In an attempt to bolster his flawed theology, Boettner observes, "It is very noticeable, and in a sense it is reassuring to observe the fact, that the materialistic...philosophers deny as completely as do Calvinists this thing that is called free will" (*ibid.*). How anyone who claims to believe in the Bible could feel reassured because materialistic philosophers had come to the same conclusion as he is absolutely shocking to me. It is apparent that although Calvinists are disposed to citing their "free will" shibboleths, they do not, for a moment, believe that man ac-

tually has free moral agency.

Man Possesses Free Will

There are myriad Bible passages that present the reception of God's blessing or cursing as contingent upon human choice. This is epitomized in Deuteronomy 11:26-28, which says: "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known." When Joshua challenged the people to "choose you this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), he was addressing individuals who were free to make a moral decision. This is no place made clearer than in Matthew 23:37, where Jesus cried: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" The Bible teaches conclusively and emphatically that man has free will.

God's Will Can Be Rejected

As the passages cited above teach, not only does man possess free will, but he can actually exercise this free will in a way that defies God's will. In other words, although God is Sovereign Ruler, He does not always get everything He wants. To the Calvinists, such a statement is totally unthinkable and completely contrary to their concept of God's sovereignty. Even so, in Isaiah 65:12, God said, "Therefore I will number you for the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because, when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not hear, but did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight." Again, in 2 Peter 3:9, it is plainly stated that God is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." If, as the Calvinists claim, God decrees everything that happens, and if, as the apostle Peter claims, God is not willing that any should perish, then all mankind will ultimately

be saved. But even Calvinists reject the idea of Universalism. What, then, is their solution? Simply this: They must come to understand that Calvinism is not just anti-scriptural, which is certainly bad enough, but is anti-God as well. Calvin's god (with a little "g") is not the God (with a capital "G") who has revealed Himself in the Bible. Calvin's god, apart from anything the creature may or may not do, predestines some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. However, the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible actually pleads with His creatures to obey His preceptive will so they can be saved. This God, as opposed to Calvin's god, "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Why Does God Permit Men To Reject His Will?

When men begin to say that God can force a man to freely do His will, they are talking meaningless nonsense. Citing a passage that says, "with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), does not provide these folks any help. The "all things" that are possible with God are actually qualified by other scriptures and the law of non-contradiction. For example, the Bible says God cannot lie (cf. Titus 1:2). Therefore, it is not possible for God to lie. This means that the "all things" that are possible with God must be those things consistent with His divine nature. Further, God cannot make $2 + 2 = 5$. He cannot make it to be raining and not raining in the same place at the same time. He cannot give a hydrogen atom and a helium atom the same atomic structure. Finally, even God could not make man free and not free at the same time in the same way. In order for man to be free, God had to give him the opportunity to rebel.

But there is much more to this story. In Psalm 32:1, David says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." In verse 5, he continues: "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." In verses 8-9, the Lord replies: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you."

Why did God allow David to sin? Why did He not simply stop David from sinning in the first place? The answer seems obvious: God did not want his servants to serve Him because they are forced to do so. He wants those who will

serve Him to do so freely, willingly accepting His instructions and counsel. He wants a relationship with His creatures based on mutual affection and love, and not because of some kind of force. The Almighty God, if He so desired, certainly had the power to bridle His creatures, forcefully manipulating their minds and hearts and turning them into robots (or mules), so that they are forced to do His will. But if He did this, He would not be able to achieve His purpose of developing free relationships, like the one He desired with David, with His creatures. He wants all men to repent and enter a free love-relationship with Himself. If He forced them to do this, as Calvinists allege, their allegiance could not be freely given, that is, they would no longer be men but mules. God, who made man in His own image, wants him to be conformed to the image of His Son (cf. Romans 8:29). Unless man is a free moral agent, this simply cannot be done.

What Man's Freedom Cost God

Man's free moral agency is a unique gift from God Almighty. Without it, we could not be what and who we are. No other earthly creature has been given this special freedom. Furthermore, it should almost go without saying that only God could have made a creature with free moral agency. Therefore, man's free will is a constant reminder of God's omnipotence. But for many, and this includes Calvinists, the opposite is true. As the secular philosopher J. L. Mackie says, "There is a fundamental difficulty in the notion of an omnipotent God creating men with free will, for if men's wills are really free this must mean that even God cannot control them, that is, that God is no longer omnipotent" ("Evil and Omnipotence," *God and Evil: Readings in the Theological Problem of Evil*, ed. Nelson Pike, page 57). In his book, *The Inexhaustible God*, Royce Gruenler says that man's free will, which necessitates a future that is open and indefinite, is "logically incompatible with the doctrine of a sovereign God" (pages 43-44). In other words, Calvinists believe that if man has free will, then God is actually impotent. The fallacy in all this will be more completely exposed in the section to follow on foreknowledge. At this point, suffice it to say that it is God's foreknowledge which permits Him to maintain complete control of His world in spite of man's free will, because foreknowledge gives God the option of either permitting or preventing man's planned, free will choices, and as we pointed out in our previous discussion on God's permissive will, prevention is really the ultimate in control.

“Not Willing That Any Should Perish”

© 2002 by Allan Turner

Therefore, man’s free will does not render God impotent. Nevertheless, it does, in fact, limit Him. But if God is really limited, then how can He continue to be omnipotent? Are not these two concepts mutually exclusive? Only in the mind of the determinists! As we have already pointed out, the “all things” that are possible with God are qualified by both Scripture and the law of non-contradiction. God can do all things consistent with His nature and that are not, in and of themselves, illogical. Therefore, if God, of His own free will, chooses to create creatures with free moral agency, and in order to do so, He must limit Himself, such self-limitations are not a denigration of His omnipotence, as the determinists think, but are, instead, a powerful demonstration of it, which is exactly the point I

made at the beginning of this subsection.

In order to insure man’s autonomy, God, of His own free will, was willing to pay a tremendous price. Although He did not have to do so, the Almighty God was willing to limit Himself in relation to His creation. This gives us some idea of just how important man is to God. Furthermore, and this ought to humble us greatly, the final measure of God’s concern for man is to be found in the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. Praise God, the Sovereign Ruler, for His willingness to give us our freedom, even though it ultimately cost Him the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. “Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!” (Revelation 19:6).

The Foreknowledge Of God

Psalm 147:5 says that God's understanding is infinite. Infinite in this verse is the Hebrew *micpar* and means the same thing as it does in English, that is, "having no boundaries or limits." Now, if God's understanding has no boundaries or limits, and understanding is predicated on knowledge, then it follows necessarily that God's knowledge has no boundaries or limitations. Such knowledge would be "unsearchable" by mere finite creatures, and this is exactly what the Bible says (cf. Romans 11:33). In other words, the Bible teaches that God "knows all things" (1 John 3:20). This kind of knowledge is what the theologians call "omniscience." By definition, omniscience or "all-knowingness" encompasses the present, the past, and the future, and undoubtedly includes genuine foreknowledge (by *genuine*, I mean that God actually has the ability to foreknow the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women). This is proved by many Bible passages. In the space that follows, we will notice a few of these.

Just before he died, Moses was told by God of the coming apostasy of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 31:16-21). In doing so, God was not just declaring what He planned to do in the future, He was making it clear that He knew what human beings would be doing in the future of their own free wills. In Acts 2:23, the apostle Peter taught that Jesus was delivered up "by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." He went on to say to the Jews, "...you have taken [Jesus] by lawless hands, have crucified [Him], and put [Him] to death." This clearly teaches that God's plan to deliver up His Son was made in view of what He foreknew the Jews and Romans would do, that is, He knew that given the right circumstances, they would cause Jesus to be crucified. Again, in Romans 8:28-30 and 1 Peter 1:1-2, we are told that God foreknew certain individuals, of their own free wills, would obey the gospel and be conformed to the image of His Son, that they would become the "elect" in their connection with Jesus Christ. This means that God's foreknowledge of those who would be conformed to the image of His Son predates their election and predestination. Since God chose them "in Christ" before the creation of the world (cf. Ephesians 1:4), it seems clear

that they and their free will actions were foreknown by God before the world began. Therefore, there is absolutely no reason for the Bible believer to ever doubt God's genuine foreknowledge of the future, contingent, free will choices of His creatures.

Calvinists assert that God's foreknowledge and man's free will are completely irreconcilable. Again, they are wrong! The Bible teaches that God has foreknowledge (and we will look at some biblical examples of these momentarily), therefore, God's foreknowledge is a fact. Likewise, the Bible teaches that man has free will (and we have already examined some of these passages), therefore, man's free moral agency is a fact. Consequently, Calvinists, or anyone else, who claim that God's foreknowledge and man's free will are incompatible are teaching that which is contrary to God's word.

A Little Simple Logic

Notwithstanding, Calvinists and other determinists attempt to vindicate their position by arguing as follows:

- Necessarily, whatever God foreknows comes to pass
and
- God foreknew that x would come to pass,
therefore, it follows that
- Necessarily, x will come to pass.

And so, the determinists argue, if God foreknows the future, then all things come to pass necessarily, and this means that man's free moral agency and true contingency are eliminated, and were never more than a non-determinist's illusion. But, and this seems difficult for some, the above reasoning embraces a logical fallacy. According to the rules of logic, the conclusion of an argument can be necessary only if both of the premises are necessary. But in the above argument, only the major premise is a necessary truth. The minor premise is not a necessary truth because it is not necessary that God know x. He could have known y instead. Consequently, the proper conclusion to the above syllogism is:

- Therefore, x will come to pass.

Now, from the fact that God foreknows that

x will occur, we may be sure that x will, in fact, occur; but, and this is my point, it is not necessary that x occur. It is, indeed, possible (because man is a free moral agent) that x might not occur. This having been said, we do know, according to the above syllogism, that x will actually occur because God foreknew it would occur. (*It is extremely unfortunate that when we begin to talk about logic some people's eyes begin to glaze over. Many seem convinced that logic is very difficult, but it is really not as hard as they think. Without the rules of logic, we could not understand anything. Without logic, God would be unable to communicate His will to us. Even if He were to directly inspire us, we would still need to follow the rules of logic in order to understand and apply His words.*) The fact that God knows I will act a certain way does not mean His knowledge causes me to act this way. If, as a free moral agent, I chose to behave differently, God's knowledge about this behavior would also be different. In other words, if God foreknew that I should do x, then I will do x. But, as a free moral agent, I have the power not to do x, and if I were not to do x, then God would not have known that I will do x. This means that although God's foreknowledge is chronologically prior to my action, my action is logically prior to His foreknowledge. What this all means is that the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women are not settled by God's foreknowledge; instead, God's foreknowledge is settled by the reality of the future events themselves. The fact that God, from His viewpoint in eternity, sees them “ahead of time” does not mean these events will happen because God sees them; rather, they are going to happen because of the genuine free moral agency of those involved. Again, the fact that God sees them ahead of time does not make them happen in any causative sense.

I want you to notice that the Bible does not say that God has the capacity to know all things, which He certainly does; instead, the argument is that God actually “knows all things.” Now, if God knows all things, what is it that He does not know? Remember, the Great Intelligence of the universe is writing to His intelligent creatures. Consequently, not only does He teach us through direct statements and approved examples, but He also expects us to come to necessary conclusions about what He has written. By direct statement, the Bible teaches that God “knows all things” (1 John 3:20). By direct statement, the Bible teaches that God's understanding is without boundaries or limits (cf. Psalm 147:5). Therefore, if God's understanding is infinite, and understanding is established

through knowledge, then it follows necessarily that God's knowledge is also infinite. In other words, based on the direct statements of Scripture, the only conclusion one can arrive at is that there is nothing God does not know and this encompasses the then, the now, and the not yet!

Some Claim God Cannot Know The Future

Calvin's starting point was that God's foreknowledge and man's free will are mutually exclusive. Calvin opted for God's foreknowledge at the expense of man's free will. Others, while rejecting Calvin's false system, have believed his premise. Consequently, they have opted for man's free will at the expense of God's foreknowledge. Presently, there are New Testament Christians who are taking this position. Giving lip-service to the omniscience of God (they acknowledge that God knows the past and present perfectly), they claim that because the future does not yet exist, God cannot know what does not yet exist, unless He, by His decretive will, intends to bring these events to pass. They claim that passages that depict God as knowing the end from the beginning (cf. Isaiah 46:10; Romans 4:17) are really examples of God's omnipotence, not His foreknowledge. God, they claim, simply cannot know the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women. These brethren are just as wrong as the Calvinists they condemn. All the Bible passages that show God foreknowing the future, contingent, free will choices of individuals and groups (and we have mentioned some of these earlier) testify to the error these brethren espouse.

On the other hand, there are brethren who believe that God has the capacity to know all things, but for reasons known only to Him, He chooses not to know some things. Unlike those who say God cannot know, this group does not take their position for philosophical reasons. Instead, they take their position because the Bible does seem to be saying there are things God does (did) not know (e.g., Genesis 18:21 and 22:12), and as they are wont to say, “We all know the Bible does not contradict itself.” True, the Bible does not contradict itself. Therefore, if the Bible teaches that God knows all things, then passages like Genesis 18 and 22 must be interpreted in light of this truth. In fact, a fundamental rule of Bible interpretation says that we must understand Scripture in its normal sense unless a literal interpretation contradicts other clear teaching found in God's Word. Not doing this, in my opinion, is the error one makes in thinking these passages negate the all-knowingness of God. (If you disagree with me, I

would be very interested to know what you think Psalm 147:5; Romans 11:33; and 1 John 3:20 are saying about God's omniscience.)

Mixing Apples And Oranges

In their defense, many who take the above position argue that just as God being all-powerful does not mean He has to be doing everything He has the capacity to do, being all-knowing does not mean that God must actually know everything He has the capacity to know. What to many seems like iron-clad logic is, in fact, a non sequitur, that is, it is simply an argument that does not logically follow the premise or evidence. Therefore, comparing omniscience with omnipotence is like confusing apples and oranges. Yes, it is true that being all-powerful, definitionally, does not mean one has to be engaged in doing all things. On the other hand, by definition, knowing all things means knowing all things. Being all-powerful infers ability only, while being all-knowing infers not just ability but the actual knowledge itself, which, in the case of God, is universal in scope. In other words, God is not claiming that He could know all things; He's claiming He does know all things! Those who wrongly believe Genesis 18 and 22 to be teaching that God has chosen not to know some things are explaining away, by their literal interpretation of these passages, the plain teaching of those scriptures I have cited which clearly teach the all-knowingness of God. Evidently, they must think the passages I have cited mean something other than what they literally say. But, whether one agrees with me or not, the task before us is to harmonize two seemingly contradictory teachings—God knows all things; God does not know some things—and do it in a way that does no harm to the integrity of either set of scriptures.

Resolving An Apparent Dilemma

Here is how I resolve what otherwise appears to be a dilemma. In Genesis 18:21, we are dealing with an unusual circumstance. God, who is omnipresent, which means He is equally present to all of space simultaneously, has, on occasion, entered space at specific points and become present in it for a specific purpose. The theologians call these occurrences “theophanies.” This seems to be the case in Genesis 18:21. In verse 1 of the chapter, it says, “Then the Lord appeared to him by the terebinth trees of Mamre, as he was sitting in the tent door in the heat of the day.” In verse 2, it mentions “three men.” Whether these three men are mani-

festations of the triune nature of God, or whether the other two were angels, is not clear. What seems clear is that this is, in fact, a theophany. In entering the time/space continuum, God, who is infinite in His being, willingly, and somehow, without ceasing to be who He is, allowed Himself to be subject to the finite. It's mind-boggling, I know. Nevertheless, this appears to be the clear import of Scripture. Let us now look at the Genesis 18:21 with my interpretation interjected in brackets:

I, [who have somehow subjected Myself to the time/space continuum] will go down [not from heaven, but down the way geographically] **now** [not in eternity, but right now at this moment, subject to time and space] and see [i.e., learn experientially in time and space] whether they have done [and, more importantly, continue to do “now”] altogether according to the outcry against it that has come to Me [in eternity, not limited by time and space]; and if not [i.e., if they are no longer doing what I knew they were doing before I allowed Myself to be subject to time and space], I [God subject to time and space] will know [experientially].

Notice that I have emphasized the word “now” by putting it in bold letters. This is because I believe this word to be the key to understanding this passage. God, who knows the past, present, and future, confines His knowing to the “now” of the time/space continuum. Are we supposed to think that the self-existent, eternal, infinite Spirit who is God did not really know everything that had been happening in Sodom and Gomorrah? 1 John 3:20 makes it absolutely clear that God is greater than our heart (He knows our heart as well as every other heart) and knows all things. Consequently, whatever Genesis 18:21 means must be understood by the context, and the context clearly indicates a theophany. And so, the theophany must be taken into consideration when trying to understand this passage. When I debated a brother who teaches that there are some things God cannot know, he at least admitted that God knew the past and present perfectly. Now, some are wanting me to believe that the all-knowing God does not even know the past and present perfectly. This, of course, is the only conclusion one may come to if Genesis 18:21 is to be understood literally and apart from the “now” context. Consequently, this conclusion is not — indeed, cannot be — true.

I now call your attention to what I consider to be the more difficult passage. In Genesis

22:12, the angel of the Lord says to Abraham, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Although the “angel of the Lord,” who some think may be the pre-incarnate Christ, is involved in this episode, the unusual circumstances associated with a theophany are not a part of the context. Even so, as has already been pointed out, the Bible teaches that the self-existent, eternal, and infinite Spirit who is God “knows all things.” So, once again, citing a fundamental principle of Bible interpretation, the current passage cannot be interpreted in a way that would negate clear and unequivocal passages which teach that God knows all things.

As we think about this situation, it is interesting to note what the self-existent, eternal, infinite Spirit who is God knew about Abraham before He ever “tested” him. In Genesis 18:18-19, the Lord said: “...since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.” In other words, God knew that Abraham would pass the “tests” of faith, which included the one mentioned in this passage. To disregard this information, as well as the truth about God’s “all-knowingness,” is to make a serious mistake when trying to understand this passage. Yes, taken literally, the passage does appear to be teaching that God learned something about Abraham that He had not previously known. But, if God really does know all things, and if He therefore knew Abraham would pass all “tests,” then Genesis 22:12 cannot be teaching what it seems to be teaching. I admit to feeling just a little bit uncomfortable making this kind of statement. Nevertheless, I am confident this is the correct way to view this passage. Paul was not the only inspired writer who wrote things difficult to understand, which, if we are not careful, can be twisted to teach something completely contrary to truth. (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). Our responsibility is to “Be diligent to present [ourselves]

approved to God, [as workers] who [do not] need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). This is not always easy, but if we work hard at it, then we, too, will pass the “test.”

I believe the key to understanding Genesis 22:12 is to be found in places like Deuteronomy 29-30, where God promises to give life or death and blessings or cursings, depending upon one’s obedience to His Word. Do what is right and one is blessed; do what is wrong and one is cursed. This is a principle taught many places in the Bible, and although we do not expect to hear the voice of the “angel of the Lord” today, nevertheless, if we serve the Lord faithfully, He will bless us; if we disobey Him, He will curse us.

God is all-knowing. However, He has graciously agreed to deal with us in the time/space continuum. In Genesis 22:12, I have once again emphasized the word “now.” This is because I believe the key to understanding this passage, like the key to understanding Genesis 18:21, is the “now” context. In the now of Abraham’s time and space, the voice of the angel of the Lord could be heard audibly, and God is acknowledging His blessing on or appreciation of Abraham at a very critical time and place in his “walk of faith.” In fact, the word “know” in this passage is sometimes translated “to recognize, admit, acknowledge, confess, declare, or tell.” So, in harmony with the rest of Scripture, and without doing any violence to the words of this passage, Genesis 22:12 is not teaching that the all-knowing God of the universe did not really know whether Abraham would pass this critical test. He is, instead, acknowledging His appreciation of Abraham’s faithfulness to Him. In other words, He is declaring, “Abraham, I have been testing you...and you have passed the test!”

As has been demonstrated, there is nothing in God’s word that limits His knowledge, not even the free moral agency of man. Therefore, with the apostle Paul, we say: “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Timothy 1:17).

The Five Points Examined

There are five main pillars upon which the superstructure of Calvinism rests. These are technically known as “The Five Points of Calvinism” (these *Five Points* can be readily remembered if they are associated with the acrostic T-U-L-I-P, which stands for: T, Total Depravity; U, Unconditional Election; L, Limited Atonement; I, Irresistible Grace; and P, Perseverance of the Saints). In this section, we will make a critical examination of each of these, holding them up to the light of Scripture. It should be understood that the Five Points are not random, isolated, nor independent doctrines. Rather, they are “so inter-related that they form a simple, harmonious, self-consistent system” (Boettner, *op. cit.*, page 59). Calvinism, although terribly flawed, is amazingly logical in its parts. If one were to concede that the first point of Calvinism (*viz.*, “Total Depravity”) were true, then all four of the following points would necessarily follow. Of course, the opposite is also true. Prove any one of the Five Points of Calvinism wrong and the entire system must be surrendered.

Total Depravity

In the Westminster Confession, the doctrine of Total Depravity is stated as follows: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto” (Chapter IX, Section III). For obvious reasons, many Calvinists call this the doctrine of “Total Inability” or, as we will see in a moment, the doctrine of “Original Sin.” In his book, *The Bondage of the Will*, which argues that man’s will is bound as a result of the fall of man and its effect, Martin Luther said that man is born with a “total inability to will good” (Page 199). According to this position, all mankind is totally depraved. The essence of this false doctrine is the total inability of man to do anything truly good in God’s sight, especially the inability to do anything toward receiving salvation. Again, this total depravity is not acquired, as non-determinists teach, but innate. Therefore, “to become sinful, men do not

wait until the age of accountable actions arrive. Rather, they are apostates from the womb” (Boettner, *op. cit.*, page 66).

Although the doctrine of Total Depravity is crucial to all forms of determinism, whether Augustinian, Lutheran, or Calvinistic, it is not really as important to the general system of Calvinism as it is to the Five Points. As we observed previously, if the doctrine of Total Depravity is defeated, all of the other Points are defeated. Nevertheless, the more important concept to Calvinism is the Sovereign’s “Eternal Decree.” In other words, contrary to what Calvinists want us to believe, Calvinism does not have as its “starting point the fact that all mankind sinned in Adam” (*ibid.*, page 61). Calvinism starts with the Eternal Decree, which the Westminster Confession explains thus: “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (quoted in Boettner, *op. cit.*, page 13). In other words, the essence of Calvinism is its doctrine of Predestination. About this, Calvin said: “Predestination we call the eternal decree of God, by which He has determined in Himself, what He would have to become of every individual of mankind. For they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal death for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say is predestined either to life or to death” (*Institutes*, Book III, Chapter XXI, Section 5). Therefore, the supposed bondage of man’s will is the direct result of an alleged Eternal Decree, and only secondarily the result of an argument for Total Depravity. This point was made earlier in the sections on sovereignty and free will, and I do not intend to rehash it here. I mention it only because the problem of Total Depravity causes some real sticky problems for determinists, particularly when the salvation/damnation of infants is raised. The Augustinians handle it one way, and the Calvinists handle it another. The way the Calvinists deal with the problem proves that Calvinism does not begin with the doctrine of Original Sin.

The Thorny Issue Of Infant Salvation

In formulating the doctrine of Original Sin,

Augustine taught that, since the fall, all men are born totally depraved. According to him, a child who died before reaching the age of accountability was lost because of the “sinful nature” he inherited from Adam. Believing, as he did, in the idea of baptismal regeneration, Augustine believed only a “baptized” infant could be saved. He said, “As nothing else is done for children in baptism but their being incorporated into the church, that is, connected with the body and members of Christ, it follows that when this is not done for them they belong to perdition” (*On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, A.D. 417). Thus, the practice of infant baptism was begun. Roman Catholicism, which proudly claims Augustine as its own, has been instrumental in keeping this erroneous doctrine alive down through the centuries. Of course, the idea of infants being eternally lost in hell was so repugnant to most people that it was eventually “determined” by the Roman Catholic Church that unbaptized infants did not really go to hell at all. Instead, they went to a special place called “Limbo,” which was not heaven, but it certainly was not hell either. In this way, when it came to the subject of dear, precious infants dying and going to hell, the shocking and horrifying consequence of Total Depravity was lightened somewhat by the doctrine of Limbo, which was never more than the figment of some Catholic cleric’s imagination.

On the other hand, Calvinists “solved” this problem by appealing to the doctrine of Predestination. Yes, they said, infants inherit Adam’s sin all right, but if God has predestined or eternally decreed that an infant would be saved, and this apart from anything the infant would or would not do, then the infant would be saved by the same unmerited grace that saves an adult. Remember, unlike all determinists, Calvinists believe that all men, apart from anything they will or will not do, are predestined or foreordained to be eternally saved or eternally lost. Speaking to this, Dr. Benjamin B. Warfield said:

Their destiny is determined irrespective of their choice, by an unconditional decree of God, suspended for its execution on no act of their own; and their salvation is wrought by an unconditional application of the grace of Christ to their souls, through the immediate and irresistible operation of the Holy Spirit prior to and apart from any action of their own proper wills...This is but to say that they are unconditionally predestinated to salvation from the foundation of the world (*Two Studies in the History of Doctrine*, page 230).

The Westminster Confession says, “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ” (Chapter X, Section 3). This left the impression with some that there are non-elect infants, who, dying in infancy, are lost, and that the Presbyterian Church teaches this as their doctrine. In denying this, some have said: “The history of the phrase ‘Elect infants dying in infancy’ makes clear that the contrast implied was not between ‘elect infants dying in infancy’ and ‘non-elect infants dying in infancy,’ but rather between ‘elect infants dying in infancy’ and ‘elect infants living to grow up’” (Dr. S. G. Craig, *Christianity Today*, January 1931, page 14). In order to correct any misunderstanding, in 1903, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A. adopted a *Declaratory Statement* which reads as follows:

With reference to Chapter X, Section 3, of the Confession of Faith, that it is not to be regarded as teaching that any who die in infancy are lost. We believe that all dying in infancy are included in the election of grace, and are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who works when and where and how He pleases.

Calvin's view of this is explained by Dr. R. A. Webb in the following paragraph:

Calvin teaches that all the reprobate ‘procure’ — that is his own word — their own personal and conscious acts of ‘impiety,’ ‘wickedness,’ and ‘rebellion.’ Now reprobate infants, though guilty of original sin and under condemnation, cannot, while they are infants, thus ‘procure’ their own destruction by their personal acts of impiety, wickedness, and rebellion. They must, therefore, live to the years of moral responsibility in order to perpetrate the acts of impurity, wickedness, and rebellion, which Calvin defines as the mode through which they procure their destruction...Consequently, [Calvin’s] own reasoning compels him to hold (to be consistent with himself), that no reprobate child can die in infancy; but all must live to the age of moral accountability, and translate original sin into actual sin (*Calvin Memorial Addresses*, page 112).

So, there you have it, any child who dies in infancy is saved! With this, Calvinists avoid the heart-rending idea of little babies dying in sin and going to hell. Therefore, Total Depravity is really not the starting point for Calvinism. However, it is now time to turn our attention to a critical examination of the doctrine of Total De-

pravity.

Total Depravity

The Doctrine Stated And Refuted

The doctrine stated: Calvin, as had Augustine and Luther before him, argued that all mankind sinned in Adam. In one of their catechisms it is stated like this: “All mankind...sinned in him [Adam], and fell with him in that first transgression... The sinfulness of that estate wherinto man fell, consisteth in the guilt of Adam’s first sin” (*The Larger Catechism*, Questions 22, 25).

The doctrine refuted: But, the Bible teaches that everyone bears the guilt of his own sins, not the sin of Adam:

The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:20).

The Bible makes it clear that one obeys the gospel in order to have his own sins blotted out, not the sin of Adam, “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Furthermore, when we all “appear before the judgment seat of Christ,” we will give an answer for what we have done in the flesh, not what Adam did (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10). Finally, it is our own sins, not Adam’s, which separate us from God (cf. Isaiah 59:1-2).

The doctrine stated: “Fallen man...lacks the power of spiritual discernment. His reason or understanding is blinded, and the taste and feelings are perverted” (Boettner, *op. cit.*, page 64). Denying that man has free will, and affirming that he cannot, without having been predestined by God, choose to do good or evil, Loraine Boettner went on to say:

Hence we deny the existence in man of a power which may act either way, on the logical ground that both virtue and vice cannot come out of a moral condition of the agent... He is incapable of understanding, and much less of doing, the things of God (*ibid.*, page 65,67)

The argument is that unregenerate man is “dead in sin,” and like anyone who is physically dead is unable to perform anything physical, the spiritually dead man is completely unable to perform anything spiritually.

The doctrine refuted: Yes, the Bible teaches that before we are regenerated, born again, raised, or made alive, we are “dead in trespasses

and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). But the Bible just as clearly teaches that the unregenerate man can indeed “obey from the heart” the form of doctrine that he has been taught, that is, the gospel (cf. Romans 6:17). In Colossians 2:12-13, the apostle Paul said it this way:

Buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Faith, of course, comes by hearing the gospel (cf. Romans 10:17). Then having heard the gospel, one must:

- *believe* it (cf. Mark 16:16),
- *repent* of his sins (cf. Acts 17:30), and
- *confess* with his mouth that he believes Jesus is Christ (cf. Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10).

But in doing all this, one has done that which the Calvinists teach an unregenerate man cannot do. That baptism is clearly under discussion in Colossians 2:12-13 cannot be denied. That this passage teaches that one is not “raised” (verse 12) or “made alive” (verse 13) until he has submitted to baptism also cannot be denied. That the expressions “raised” and “made alive” refer to being regenerated should be just as clear. In fact, there seems little doubt that the “washing of regeneration” mentioned in Titus 3:5 is referring to baptism. The fact that one could be doing something “through faith,” as Colossians 2:12 clearly teaches, before being regenerated flies in the face of Calvinist claims. This, no doubt, is why Calvinists deny that water baptism has anything to do with being regenerated or born again.

The doctrine stated: Speaking of the “depth of man’s corruption,” Boettner argues: “It is wholly beyond [man’s] own power to cleanse himself. His only hope of an amendment of life lies accordingly in a change of heart, which change is brought about by the sovereign recreative power of the Holy Spirit who works when and where and how He pleases” (*op. cit.*, page 68). Without this direct operation of the Holy Spirit, man “cannot be convinced of the truth of the Gospel by any amount of external testimony” (*ibid.*).

The doctrine refuted: The “gift” or “renewing” of the Holy Spirit comes *after* water baptism (cf. Acts 2:38; Titus 3:5), which, again, goes against the theological grain of Calvinism. Furthermore, the Bible says the Holy Spirit is given to those who “obey” the Lord (Acts 5:32), some-

thing the Calvinists say cannot occur without a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, it should be clear that what Calvinists teach about Total Depravity is totally false.

Unconditional Election

If the doctrine of Total Depravity be admitted, the doctrine of Unconditional Election *necessarily* follows. Of course, we no more admit the doctrine of Unconditional Election than we do that of Total Depravity. In fact, by their own admission, which says that if the doctrine of Total Depravity be disproved, all the other Five Points crumble, we have already proven Calvinism to be a reprobate system. Nevertheless, we now proceed to demonstrate the total inconsistency of any and all parts of Calvinism with the truths taught in God's word.

The Doctrine Stated And Refuted

The doctrine stated: If man is born totally depraved and does not have free will, which is what Calvinists clearly teach, then he does not have the ability to do those things God has commanded him to do. Therefore, if a man is going to be saved, God, totally independent of any foreknown choices man will make, chooses (elects) him to salvation. This means, “A man is not saved because he believes in Christ; he believes in Christ because he is saved” (Boettner, *op. cit.*, page 101). In other words, “The elect of God are chosen by Him to be His children, in order that they might be made to believe, not because He foresaw that they would believe” (*ibid.*). Incidentally, this also was the view espoused by Augustine and Luther. Accordingly:

Foreordination in general cannot rest on foreknowledge; for only that which is certain can be foreknown, and only that which is predetermined can be certain... God foreknows only because He has predetermined. His fore-knowledge is but a transcript of His will as for what shall come to pass in the future... His fore-knowledge of what is yet to be, whether it be in regard to the world as a whole or in regard to the detailed life of every individual, rests upon His pre-arranged plan (*ibid.*, page 99).

The doctrine refuted: First of all, the doctrine of Unconditional Election was defeated when Total Depravity was demonstrated to be false. Second, it is clear that Calvinists do not believe God actually has foreknowledge (*viz.*, *prescience*). According to them, God “foreknows” what is going to happen because He has deter-

mined it will happen. We would be fools to deny the reality of this statement. This kind of statement is what the logicians call a *tautology*, that is, a needless repetition that cannot be anything other than logically true. For example, to say that God has predestined whatever is going to happen, therefore, He foreknows whatever is going to happen is similar to saying, “God knows He is going to do something, therefore, He knows He is going to do something.” Such would be needless and foolish repetition. Nevertheless, this is how Calvinists interpret all references to God's foreknowledge.

Although it is true that there are passages that declare God can speak of future events as definite because of His decretive will (*cf.* Isaiah 46:10), this is not the way foreknowledge is usually used in the Scriptures. Furthermore, it is ironic that one of the most favorite passages of the Calvinists states unequivocally that God's predestination of certain future events was dependent upon His foreknowledge, and not the other way around, as they claim. In Romans 8:29-30, the apostle Paul says:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Now, there may be legitimate disagreement with reference to all the ramifications of this passage, but there seems to be no legitimate reason to reject the idea conveyed here that God's predestination was dependent upon actual foreknowledge. It is not insignificant that the apostle Peter, under the same inspiration that guided the apostle Paul, makes precisely the same point when he mentioned those who were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:2). We can find no hint in the Scriptures, or among the so-called “Church Fathers” before Augustine, that foreknowledge, which in the Greek is *proginsko*, was used in any way other than to mean “knowledge in advance.” In other words, the Bible teaches that God's “knowing in advance” allowed Him to choose, predestinate or elect those who would be saved in connection with His Son Jesus, that is, those who would, of their own free wills, be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29).

God indeed has foreknowledge, even of the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women. This allows Him to choose, foreordain,

predestine, or elect individuals without violating their free will. This view of foreknowledge agrees perfectly with Acts 2:23, which says, “Him [Jesus Christ], being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God [the Father], you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” This means that the Father designed His plan to deliver up His Son with a view as to what the Jews and Romans would do — that is, if given the opportunity, they would crucify Him. If this is not what this passage is teaching, then it is reduced to a needless tautology that says, “God determined to offer up His Son, therefore, He knew He would offer up His Son.”

The doctrine stated: Calvinists teach that God’s plan not only deals with mankind *in toto*, but that He also has a plan for particular individuals whom He unconditionally elects to salvation and eternal life. As proof, they cite passages like 2 Thessalonians 2:13, which says, “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,” and Acts 13:48, which says: “Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.”

The doctrine refuted: Calvinists teach the unconditional election of particular individuals to eternal salvation. As a result, some have thought that in rejecting Calvinism they must deny the election of particular individuals. I believe this to be a serious mistake in that it makes Calvinism more difficult to refute, and, even more important, it appears to be a denial of what the Scriptures teach on this subject. The problem with Unconditional Election is not that it deals with particular individuals, but that it alleges these individuals are elected unconditionally. This last point, the Bible clearly denies. Individuals are elected, predestinated, or foreordained, and these are all scriptural terms, to eternal salvation based upon God’s foreknowledge of their free will choices to “obey the gospel,” thus being “conformed to the image of His Son” (cf. Romans 8:29-30; 1 Peter 1:2). This does not, as Calvinists claim, make man’s will sovereign. It was God, of His own free will, who decided to extend His plan of salvation to man. Therefore, even though His foreknowledge informed Him there would be those who would be conformed to the image of His Son and, therefore, be saved, it was entirely up to Him whether He tendered the plan. Without God’s plan, man could have done nothing to effect his own salvation. Therefore, in one sense, we are saved by

God’s grace and not our works. This is precisely what Paul was talking about in Ephesians 2:4-10, where he says:

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Salvation, then, is an undeserved, unmerited gift from God, for this is the meaning of the word “grace.”

But in another sense, and this because man has free will, salvation is something man must work out for himself. About this, the apostle Paul said, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Elsewhere, the apostle Peter said, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40, ASV). In these passages, the Bible teaches that a man, of his own free will, must, in order to be saved, respond, and continue to respond, to the demands of God’s preceptive will. As such, faith and works *work together* to produce salvation (cf. James 2:14-26). Man working out his own salvation and thereby saving himself does not mean, as Calvinists erroneously think, that God is forced to give up His sovereignty. God forbid! In the verse immediately following the command for Christians to work out their own salvation, Paul said, “for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). In other words, just because God grants man free will does not mean He has relinquished control of the scheme of redemption. This is further illustrated by Paul’s prayer for the Christians at Ephesus, in which he asked God to grant them, “according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16). The “gift” of the Holy Spirit to obedient believers (cf. Acts 2:28; 5:32) functions as God’s “guarantee” that He is still in control of man’s redemption (2

Corinthians 5:5), which, in turn, causes us to be confident that He is able to finish the work He has started in us right up to the day of Jesus Christ (cf. Philippians 1:6). Consequently, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

The Scheme of Redemption was “predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). Therefore, it was not a plan that would or could fail. Even so, the plan would be no small undertaking. It would ultimately take the sacrifice of the heavenly Father’s only begotten Son (cf. John 3:16-18), the divine Logos (cf. John 1:1), who would sooner or later have to leave heaven, take upon Himself the mantle of flesh (cf. John 1:14), and finally shed His blood on the cruel cross of Calvary for the remission of our sins (cf. Matthew 26:28). As such, this was not simply a plan, it was, instead, *the* plan! It was the plan that would work because God’s foreknowledge would allow Him to not just design a plan that could, under certain circumstances, work, but it would also allow Him to carry out this plan with absolutely impeccable precision (please consider what is actually taught in Acts 2:23). As the result of this perfect plan, God would be able to “bring many sons unto glory” (Hebrews 2:9-10). These “many sons” were foreknown by the Father (Romans 8:29), and this allowed him to design and put in motion a plan that would ultimately end in their glorification with Jesus in heaven (cf. Romans 8:30). Hence, in the mind of God, and this is a mind that knows the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women, the Scheme of Redemption is a “done deal.”

According to *Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Lexicon*, the Greek word *proorizo*, translated in the KJV as “predestinate,” means to “predetermine,” “decide beforehand,” or “foreordain.” As already noted, this does not mean that God in eternity made a choice of those He would save independent of anything they would do of their own free wills. Rather, God ordained or decreed in eternity (i.e., He predestined) that those who were going to be saved would have to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). This means that God did not choose individuals to be saved *unconditionally*, as Calvinists teach. On the contrary, based upon His foreknowledge of the future, contingent, free will choices of His creatures, God predestined (i.e., determined beforehand) those who would be saved *conditionally* (the *condition* would be their free will conformity to the image of God’s Son). This is what the apostle Paul was referring to when he

wrote: “...just as He [the Father] chose us in Him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:4-5).

In the context of 2 Timothy 2:19, the apostle Paul says that although the faith of some had been overthrown by false teachers, “Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.’” This is not just true now, but we are assured that even in eternity the Lord knew those who were His (cf. Ephesians 1:4). Further, He knows now, just as He did in eternity, who will eventually be glorified in heaven (cf. Romans 8:30). Is God sovereign? Yes. Is the Scheme of Redemption His plan? Yes. Is He continuing to work this plan? Yes. Does man have free will? Yes. Does God know the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women? Yes. The plan and its result (i.e., the bringing of many sons to glory) is certain not because God has predestined these many sons to salvation “without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance ...or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto” (*The Westminster Confession*, Chapter III, Section 3), but by God’s “determined counsel and foreknowledge” (cf. Acts 2:23). Even so, as free will creatures, we must be “even more diligent to make [our] call and election sure, for if [we] do these things [we] will never stumble” (2 Peter 1:10). Once again, Calvinism has shown itself to be seriously flawed theology.

Limited Atonement

Did Jesus offer Himself as a sacrifice for the whole human race, or did He die only for the elect? Calvinists teach that the Lord died for the elect only. This doctrine necessarily trails Unconditional Election. Therefore, it is already demonstrated to be false. Nevertheless, we will now proceed to examine the doctrine from a biblical perspective.

The Doctrine Stated And Refuted

The doctrine stated: *The Westminster Confession* says:

...Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed in Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season; are

justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only (Chapter III, Section 6).

About this, Boettner says:

If from eternity God has planned to save one portion of the human race and not another, it seems to be a contradiction to say that His work has equal reference to both portions, or that He sent His Son to die for those whom He had predetermined not to save, as truly as, and in the same sense that He was sent to die for those whom He had chosen for salvation (*op. cit.*, page 151).

The doctrine refuted: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Again, “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for *all*, then *all* died; and He died for *all*, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” [emphasis mine, AT] (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Now, as if these two passages were not enough to refute the idea of a Limited Atonement, the Bible teaches unequivocally that it is God’s will that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4). In 2 Peter 3:9, He is described as being “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” These passages ought to be sufficient to demonstrate the error of Calvinism.

Irresistible Grace

If man is totally depraved and in this condition unable to do what is right, if he is unconditionally elected by God to salvation, and if Christ died only for the elect, then man, if he is to be saved, must be saved by Irresistible Grace. This is the logical progression exhibited in Calvinism. The problem with Calvinism is that it starts in the wrong place (*viz.*, the Eternal Decree) and then proceeds to logically end up in all the wrong places (*i.e.*, the Five Points of Calvinism). In the space that follows, we will examine and then refute the already disproved doctrine of Irresistible Grace.

The Doctrine Stated And Refuted

The doctrine stated: In pontificating this doctrine, the *Westminster Confession* says:

This effectual call [to salvation] is of

God’s free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed by it (Chapter X, Section 1 and 2).

In his book *The Sovereignty of Grace*, Arthur

C. Custance elaborates:

The only defense against Synergism [*i.e.*, the idea that man works with God to some degree in coming to salvation] is an unqualified Calvinism ascribing all the glory to God by insisting upon the total spiritual impotence of man, an election based solely upon the good pleasure of God, an Atonement intended only for the elect though sufficient for all men, a grace that can neither be resisted nor earned, and a security for the believer that is as permanent as God Himself (page 364).

Therefore, it is clear Calvinists believe that God’s saving grace cannot be resisted and is, therefore, irresistible. It is clear they believe that if grace can be resisted, then this “places God in the unworthy position of being dependent upon His creatures” (Lewis S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 1:230). If grace can be resisted, then Calvinists believe this would mean God is no longer Sovereign.

The doctrine refuted: “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish* but that all should come to repentance” [italics mine, AT] (2 Peter 3:9). “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: In truth I perceive that God *shows no partiality*. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” [italics mine, AT] (Acts 10:34-35). Would the God identified in these scriptures choose some to be saved apart from anything they would do of their own free wills, and then irresistibly bestow (force) His grace upon them so that they will be saved even when they might not want to be? Not hardly! Furthermore, the necessary inference of 1 Thessalonians 5:19 is that the Spirit of God can be quenched. This cannot mean that the Holy Spirit Himself can be extinguished. Rather, it means that the influence the Holy Spirit exerts and urges upon us can be suppressed or stifled. Therefore, contrary to Calvinist doctrine, the Bible teaches that the God who wills (wants or desires) that all men come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved (cf. 1 Timothy 2:4), sends His Spirit into the world to convict men of their

sins (cf. John 16:8), but that they can still, of their own free wills, reject His plan for them (cf. Luke 7:30). In other words, the Bible teaches the Holy Spirit can be resisted: “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51).

As far as anyone knows, the first theologian to teach that God’s will is always done and is never impeded by the will of any creature was Augustine (A.D. 354-430). Much later, the Reformers (viz., Luther, Calvin *et al.*) continued to tinker with Augustine’s idea, rejecting some things here, modifying other things there, but generally refining it into a grand theological scheme. Calvin, of course, was the popular systematizer of that which now wears his name. Today, millions upon millions of religious people are held captive by the dogma of this false system. Even New Testament Christians have not been immune. Over the years, many have gotten caught up in the tentacles of Calvin’s insidious system. Others, rightfully rejecting the Calvinism, have, nevertheless, espoused equally false ideas in their efforts to counter it. The Christian must always be very careful (cf. Ephesians 5:15). Those of us who think we are standing on the truth of God’s word must be careful “lest we fall” also (1 Corinthians 10:12). This warning is never more important than when we are standing against the “wiles of the devil.” If we fail to put on the “whole armor of God,” we can be destroyed (cf. Ephesians 6:10-18). We must always fortify our defenses with book, chapter, and verse (cf. 1 Peter 4:11).

Calvinists argue that in order for God to be Sovereign, He cannot be limited in what He would do by the pitifully insignificant wills of His finite creatures. In a sense, God is limited. The Bible says God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2). In other words, “it is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18). Nevertheless, this in no way affects His sovereignty. Even Calvinists would have to agree with this. Why? Because, they know that God’s sovereignty, power, might, rule, *et cetera*, is not affected by self-limitations. God cannot lie because it is inconsistent with His nature, a nature that includes holiness, justice, righteousness, to name but a few. Therefore, things that are impossible with God because of who He is, do not mitigate either His Almightyness or Sovereignty. As we stated in the section on the Sovereignty of God, the key to Sovereignty is not *causation*, as the Calvinists believe, but *control*. God’s permissive will allows Him the right to intervene in the decision-making process if His purposes demand it. Although He does not do this very often, allowing

man, in most cases, to go his own way, nevertheless, He can and does intervene if necessary. This prerogative allows Him to exercise ultimate control over the life of every man and woman. By deciding of His own free will to make a creature who would himself possess free will, God agreed to limit Himself. This self-limitation does not destroy nor degrade His Sovereignty, regardless of what Calvinists think. Even so, it is just here that we must be very careful. The concept of self-limitation does not apply to the being of God, but only His actions. When it comes to who, what, and that God is, God cannot be anything other than who He is, that is, when God said to Moses, “I Am Who I Am” (Exodus 3:14), He was saying He *was*, *is*, and *always will be* who He is! Jesus, in addition to being a man, was also the “I Am” (John 8:58). Therefore, in taking upon Himself flesh, He did not quit being who He is! It was only in this sense that it could be said about Him that He “is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Therefore, by His own definition of who, what, and that He is, God, as Deity, can never be anything other than who, what, and that He is. Therefore, He cannot limit or change His being, nor can He limit Himself by refusing to do something His nature requires. For example, God, although He is all-powerful, could not have saved man any number of ways. If He simply overlooked sin and forgave man, He would not be just, for justice demands that every sin receive a just recompense (cf. Hebrews 2:2; Galatians 6:7-8). Therefore, in order for God to extend His mercy to man without violating His own just nature, He sent His Son to pay the price for our sins on the cruel cross of Calvary (consider Romans 3:21-26, particularly verse 26). Without Christ paying the full price of our sins, reaping what He had not sown, God could not have saved us, for in doing so, He would have violated His own nature, which, when it comes to God, is impossible.

God can only limit Himself by choosing not to do those things which are not required by His nature. And since His nature does not require Him to be the direct cause of everything, whether natural events or human actions, He is free to limit Himself with respect to these. Without this ability, you and I would not exist as we do, and even if we did, we could not be saved from our own sinfulness. Thank God we serve a Sovereign Ruler who can and has limited Himself.

The Perseverance Of The Saints

Like the others, this point does not stand

alone, but follows logically the other four points of Calvinism.

The Doctrine Stated And Refuted

The doctrine stated: “They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved” (*Westminster Confession*, Chapter XVII, Section 1). As Boettner says, “If God has chosen men absolutely and unconditionally to eternal life, and if the Spirit effectually applies to them the benefits of redemption, the inescapable conclusion is that these persons shall be saved” (*op. cit.*, 182). He elaborates further:

Though floods of error deluge the land, though Satan raise all the powers of earth and all the iniquities of their own hearts against them, they shall never fail; but, persevering to the end, they shall inherit those mansions which have been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The saints in heaven are happier but no more secure than are true believers here in this world” (*ibid.*, 182-183).

The doctrine refuted: Becoming a Christian is the most important decision one can make. When we obeyed the gospel, Jesus Christ became the absolute Lord of our lives. As a result, our past sins were graciously washed away by our Lord’s precious blood, and we have been spiritually born again. There is, therefore, a crown of “glory” or “righteousness” now awaiting us in heaven (cf. 1 Peter 5:4; 2 Timothy 4:8). Nothing, nor no one, can take away from us the salvation we now possess in connection with Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul, in Roman 8:35-39, drives this point home:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In other words, because we are now “in Christ Jesus,” there is no longer any condemna-

tion (cf. Romans 8:1). God, who is all-powerful, cannot fail to provide the heavenly home He has promised to all those who exercise trust and faith in His Son Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Timothy 1:12).

Although God’s omnipotence effectively assures our salvation, the fact remains that we can live our lives here on this earth in such a way as to lose that which God’s faithfulness guarantees. For example, in Revelation 2:10, the Lord assures a “crown of life” only to those who remain “faithful unto death.” In 1 Corinthians 4:2, the apostle Paul makes it clear that “faithfulness” is the true test of our stewardship to Christ. In his letter to the Ephesian church, Paul addresses the “saints which are at Ephesus” and the “faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1). These are not two different groups. The saints are those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. The same is true at Colosse (cf. Colossians 1:1). This is why Paul exhorted Christians everywhere to “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). The word of God makes it clear that eternal salvation in heaven is dependent upon our continued faithfulness to Christ (cf. Colossians 1:20-23). “If you continue in the faith” implies that turning from the faith is certainly possible. In fact, in Galatians 5:4, the apostle Paul makes it clear that a child of God can fall from grace, something Calvinist teachers, who tout the doctrine of “once saved, always saved,” flatly deny. As disciples of Christ, we are more than willing to let God be true, but every man a liar (cf. Romans 3:4). When it comes to religious truth, only God, who cannot lie (cf. Titus 1:2), is to be trusted.

In Philippians 2:12, the apostle Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” The apostle is not saying that every man is left to his own devices with regard to salvation, as if salvation were totally dependent upon man. On the contrary, salvation is, first and foremost, dependent upon the grace of God. Man, in spite of anything he might do, cannot, without God’s unmerited favor, save himself. The provision of salvation is totally of God. Nevertheless, man, in order to be saved, is under obligation to do something. Consequently, when man does whatever it is he is required to do, he is said to be saving himself (cf. Acts 2:40, KJV). What, then, is man required to do? Quite simply, he is required to obey God! On the first Pentecost after Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, those who had heard and believed the gospel were required to repent and be baptized by the authority of Christ in order to have their sins remitted (cf.

Acts 2:38). In other words, Christ is the author of eternal salvation unto all those who obey Him (cf. Hebrews 5:9). If we acknowledge Jesus as Lord and obey Him, He will save us from our past sins. In addition, in order to stay saved, we must continue to serve Him faithfully. As we do this, we are said to be working out our own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). “For,” as the next verse says, “it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” The Christian works out his own salvation by reverently and carefully following the Lord’s preceptive will. In doing so, he “proves what is that good and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2).

The idea that one cannot be cast off forever is not taught in the Scriptures. In his wise counsel to his son Solomon, David warned:

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever (1 Chronicles 28:9).

Then, in Ezekiel 18:24 it is said:

But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die.

Then, in Matthew 10:22, Jesus said, “But he who endures to the end will be saved.” Why did He say this? Is not the clear implication that if we do not endure we will be lost? Do Jesus’ words not imply that it is possible not to endure to the end? The answer to these questions appears to be obvious: One who has been saved can fail to endure to the end and, if he does, he will be lost! This is exactly the same message Jesus taught in Matthew 24:13. For sure, Jesus

was no Calvinist. In John 15:2, He said, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” In verse 6, He continues, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Now, does this sound like the saved cannot be lost? Again, the answer is obvious. Of course, this is exactly what the apostle Paul taught:

For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off (Romans 11:21-22).

The apostle Paul was not a Calvinist either! In fact, the apostle Paul was very much aware that if he did not discipline his own body and keep it under subjection that he himself could be a “castaway,” and this after having preached the gospel to others (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27, KJV). And listen to what Paul said to the church at Corinth: “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1-2). Paul said they heard the gospel, believed it, stood in it, and were saved by it, but that they needed to continue to hold fast, unless they had believed in vain, in which case they would, by implication, become unsaved or lost.

It is clear that the Bible does not teach Calvin’s system. I could continue to cite passage after passage refuting the idea of “once saved, always saved” or “the Perseverance of the Saints,” but the ones cited above are sufficient to prove Calvinism wrong.

Calvinistic “Sugar-Sticks”

In this section, we are going to look at some Calvinistic “sugar-sticks” or proof texts. Admittedly, some of these passages are a little difficult for a non-determinist. Trying to deal with these passages without having a thorough biblical understanding as to why determinism is wrong could make one feel compelled to make a misapplication of these scriptures. Nevertheless, these so-called “sugar-sticks” can be satisfactorily interpreted from a non-determinist point of view. This list appears at the end of this study so that with a clear understanding as to why Calvinism is anti-biblical, we can together give these passages a more thorough treatment. Therefore, if you have not already read what has been written in this study, you need to do so. Having said that, let us now proceed to an examination of these Calvinistic “sugar-sticks.”

Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned” (KJV). In the Latin translation of this passage, the Greek phrase *eph’ ho* is rendered “in him,” so that the last part of the passage reads, “for in him all men sinned.” Therefore, in making his argument for “Original Sin,” Augustine, who, as has already been pointed out, was the father of this doctrine, repeatedly made reference to this verse in his many writings, thinking it to be clear and unequivocal. Even so, in their *Commentary on Romans*, which is recognized as one of the great modern textual authorities on the book of Romans, Sanday and Headlam wrote, “Although this expression (*eph’ ho*) has been much fought over, there can now be little doubt that the true rendering is ‘because’” (pages 133-134). According to them, the Greek classical writers used this phrase to mean “on condition that.” In their consideration of the idea that the apostle meant to imply, “because all sinned in Adam,” they wrote: “The objection is that the words supplied are far too important to be left to be understood. If St. Paul had meant this, why did he not say so? The insertion of *en Adam* would have removed all ambiguity” (*ibid.*).

Consequently, Romans 5:12 neither says nor implies that all sinned in Adam, as Augustine and, later, Luther and Calvin thought and taught. Nevertheless, this passage and its

context is not easy to understand. First of all, what kind of death is under consideration in this passage? Was Paul writing about physical death or spiritual death? Most commentators seem to be in agreement that Paul is referring to spiritual death. This seems clear from his statement that death passed upon all men because all have sinned. This echoes the words of Ezekiel, who said, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4,20), and Paul’s words in Romans 3:23, which say, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Little children do not themselves sin, and even most Calvinists agree that this is true, therefore little children do not die spiritually. This can only mean that little children are not the subject of Romans 5:12 and 3:23, anymore than they are of Ezekiel 18:4,20, which falls within the immediate context of the statement:

Yet you say, ‘Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?’ Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself (Ezekiel 18:19-20).

Although Calvinism teaches that the son (viz., all the descendants of Adam) bears the guilt of the father (Adam), God says this is simply not so. Therefore, non-determinists have held that children are not in need of salvation, because if they have not sinned, they are not lost. Therefore, when Paul, referring to the atoning death of Jesus Christ, wrote “that if One died for all, then all died” (2 Corinthians 5:14), the death he was speaking of was spiritual death and the “all” did not include children.

Consequently, Romans 5:12, while associating the sinful condition (i.e., spiritual death) all men share with Adam, with whom the condition first started, does not say the fallen nature of all mankind (children excluded) is inherited from Adam. Here, and elsewhere, the Bible teaches that we do not share his sin or guilt (cf.

Romans 5:14), but ever since Adam, sin has spread like a cancer until all of us have sinned. Today, like in Adam’s time, the entire human race shares in the same sinful condition. But, someone says, “Eve sinned first, why is not she mentioned?” The answer is simple: Until Adam sinned, “all” the human race had not spiritually died; but, when Adam sinned, all mankind was fallen, and ever since that time, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

Why, then, do little babies die physically? Is not this because they share the guilt of Adam? No! Little babies do not share Adam’s guilt, nor the guilt of their own parents; nevertheless, they do share in the consequences of Adam’s sin and, many times, the sins of their own parents. AIDS babies are a vivid reminder to us today that innocent babies suffer the consequences of their parents’ sinful deeds. Likewise, a consequence of Adam’s sin was that neither he nor any of his descendants would have access to the “tree of life” on the purely physical plane (cf. Genesis 3:22-24; Revelation 22:14), which means it is now (ever since Adam’s sin) “appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27). Therefore, children die, not because they have inherited the guilt of Adam’s sin, but because they, as members of the human race, share in the consequences of the human race’s fallenness. Some hesitate to use the word “fallenness” because they are afraid it may connote a belief in Calvinism. As sensitive as I am to this position, I decided a long time ago to let the Bible, not Calvinists, dictate to me the use of biblical expressions. That man’s fallenness is an idea expressed in Scripture over and over again is quite clear (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:12; 1 Timothy 3:6-7; Galatians 5:4; Revelation 2:5). All have sinned means all are fallen (cf. Romans 3:23), consequently, I join my voice with that of the apostle Paul, who said: “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of [this self-inflicted spiritual] death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).

Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (KJV). Most agree that the scribal insertion at the beginning of this psalm is correct. This means the psalm was written by David after Nathan had told him, “You are the man!” (2 Samuel 12). Therefore, Psalm 51 is the bitter cry of one broken with guilt and pain. Now, although I realize David was a prophet, my question is this: Are all David’s words in this Psalm

to be taken as sober theological pronouncements? If you think so, then you believe that verse 4 is teaching that one can only sin against God, not man! But did not David also sin against Uriah? The answer seems obvious. Yes, David sinned against Uriah, but all sin is a personal affront to God, and He has the right to judge man for it. In other words, sin is always God’s business. Therefore, when it comes to verse 5, whatever David might have been saying about his parents, he said nothing about inherited sin or “sinning in Adam.”

Psalm 58:3, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies” (KJV). Surely the psalmist is to be granted some “poetic license.” Are we really to think that a baby, the moment it is born, begins to speak lies? The point here is not inherited total depravity, as Calvinists would like for us to believe, but the idea that it seems like almost from the time an individual is born, that is, “from his youth” (Genesis 8:21), he goes astray. In other words, people who are wicked usually get started very early.

Job 14:4, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (KJV). A woman who gives birth to a child, having reached the age of accountability, has sinned, and the child to which she gives birth, upon reaching the age of accountability, will sin. Consequently, this verse is just another way of saying that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23; 5:12).

Job 15:14-16, “What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? Behold, he putteth no trust in his saints; yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?” (KJV). Nothing said in this passage, or the one mentioned above, teaches man is born totally depraved. Furthermore, even if this passage did teach what Calvinists try to make it teach, it would be highly suspect in that these are words spoken by Eliphaz, of whom God said, “My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has” (Job 42:7).

Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (KJV). Yes, it most certainly is! Once we allow sin to enter in, our human hearts become corrupted and spiritually diseased. We can never again trust our own feelings or emotions. Consequently, many sins that are really very

“Not Willing That Any Should Perish”
© 2002 by Allan Turner

wicked “feel” like they are okay. In another place, Jeremiah said: “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jeremiah 10:23-24). As sinners who have gone astray, we need the Lord’s guidance, which is readily available in the Scriptures. This is why those of us who are in a right relationship with the Lord “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

I know I have not dealt with all the Calvinistic sugar-sticks, but our treatment of these ought to demonstrate that Calvinistic sugar-sticks are not what they may first appear to be. Many come to the wrong conclusions about these passages because they do not know how to properly interpret the Bible (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15). Being able to cite a few proof texts might make, and even keep, one a Calvinist, but learning how to rightly divide the Scriptures allows one to become, and stay, a Christian.

Conclusion

In concluding this study, I should like to quote once more the words of the Calvinists themselves. Commenting on the dark picture painted by the doctrine of Total Depravity, Boettner said:

This side of the picture is dark, very dark indeed; but its supplement is the glory of God in redemption. Each of these truths must be seen in its true light before the other can be adequately appreciated (*op. cit.*, page 80).

Unlike Boettner and his Calvinist constituents, I accept what the Bible says about the glory of God in redemption. Indeed, the eternal God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms (cf. Deuteronomy 33:27), but I totally reject the very dark picture of the crowning glory of God's creation totally unable to positively respond to Him with love and obedience. And what does this dark picture say about Calvin's God? Where is the glory in a God who must, by the constraint of His sovereign will, coerce love and obedience from those under His care? In truth, Calvin's God is nothing more than an ogre, a being of the most brutish sort, taking by force that which has not been freely given to Him.

Is this the picture painted of either God or man in the book of Job? Listen to and learn from the conversation between God and Satan:

Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the Lord said to Satan, "What a complete simpleton you are Satan. Do you not know of my Eternal Decree? Job serves Me because He has no other choice. Even if he had free will, and he does not, he could not curse Me even if

He wanted to, and all this because of My Sovereign Will and not because of anything in Job" (Job 1:8-12).

No, this is not what God said. What He said was: "Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person." So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord."

Of course, the lesson is this, a man, of his own free will, will serve God and, in general, remain faithful to Him even when he cannot understand why God is permitting terrible things to happen to him. Job was God's servant, and he served Him because he wanted to, not because God had shackled his will and coerced him. He served God with his own free will. He could have cursed God, and there were those who urged him to do so, but he did not, and this was not because he could not, even if he wanted to, because of God's Eternal Decree. No, he continued to serve God willingly even when it looked like God had become his own worst enemy. Now, what was the lesson Satan learned in all this? Was it that Job would continue to serve God because He had decreed that he would, or was it that a man would willingly continue to serve God even if all seems for naught?

Calvin was wrong, and all who espouse his doctrine are wrong. The God they serve is not the One who has revealed Himself in the Bible. They have bowed themselves down to an idol of their own making, created for their own destruction (cf. Hosea 8:4). Ironically, and the devil loves irony, Calvinists, who think they cannot be lost, will, if they do not turn from their false system, be cut off (i.e., eternally lost) as a result of their allegiance to a false religious system, a system that impugns both God and man.

It is my sincere prayer that this study will help you to help Calvinists see the error of their system. And, for those of you who have never imbibed this doctrine, it is my desire that this study will assist you in keeping yourselves from idols (cf. 1 John 5:21).

Other materials are available for free on the Web at <http://allanturner.com>