

# Calvinism -- Ten Little Caveats\*

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*We have treated Greek ideas about God, too much like scripture. "Ten Little Caviats" explains why Calvin's view of God's sovereignty must not reject God's sovereign freedom to control all ultimate things notwithstanding one's indeterminate faith.*

*An ancient axiom, "Ecclesia semper reformanda est." (the church always needs to be reformed) is often quoted in Reformed circles to point out how the church needs to be vigilant against the sin and error that would challenge her foundational truths. Calvinism as well as Arminianism needs reformation.*

*Dr. John Piper says, "Faith, more than any other human act, glorifies God and humbles man." "Ten Little Caveats" explains why this is true, even though Dr. Piper is opposed to the point of view presented here.*

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\* *Caveat: a warning or explanation to prevent misinterpretation.*

## FOREWORD

### *THE OCCASION FOR THIS WORK*

Among others, doctors R.C. Sproul, with his Ligonier Ministries; James Kennedy, with his Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church TV ministry; James Boice, John MacArthur, and John Piper, with their media outlets, are doing an excellent job of presenting the Calvinist position of the Christian faith.

Friends and children of mine have changed their thinking to conform to this position. I have been challenged to do so as well. If God was really sovereign in the way they say He is, I had to change my view of Him and I thought I had a pretty good understanding of what God was like. My Calvinian friends argued that my resistance came from feeling that my supposed autonomy was threatened. Was I not wanting to be the one who determined whether or not I was saved? I had to answer, "No, that's not my problem; I am convinced that to God alone belongs the glory for my salvation."

So, I thought about leaving the situation as an agreement to disagree. After all, the Calvinist and I both believe we are responsible to believe God and persevere in our faith, so on a practical level we live our lives the same way. We both believe that we have personal responsibility with regard to our salvation. We both are tempted to wrongly fret about problems. And, we are both tempted to wrongly believe that God is not in control of things in our lives. This being the case, why not leave things as is?

I'm not concerned for my family and friends, that they are Calvinian. In fact, I think they are in a good place in the Christian faith. The history of conservative Calvinism has produced many individuals of great faith, love, character and maturity having brought much glory to our Lord. I would much rather these friends be good, solid Presbyterians than theologically loose-thinking Arminians.

I have not written, therefore, to press my friends for a conversion back to their former positions\_ but, it is hard to leave things as they are, especially if you consider the possible harm there might be of living your life with false understandings. I know Calvinists think the same way. We both might think of the illustration of the Mad Hatter in ALICE IN WONDERLAND. Hatters became "mad" because they lived their lives unaware of the harm involved in not knowing the truth about mercury poisoning in the materials they used. Not everything is that drastic, of course, but it behooves us to believe the truth as much as it lies within our power to be discerning of it.

Sproul and the others believe this too; that's why they have tapped into the media to get the word out. Non Calvinists certainly are using the media, but in the lectures or books I have read I haven't seen a satisfying presentation that shows how God's way of saving individuals differs from the Calvinian view. I thought I would try to do this on the Internet with a downloadable book.

The "problems" dealt with by me in this book have been studied and expounded on by specialists a thousand times over. Every argument on whichever side has its reasonable rebuttals, but I intend to approach the matter in a different way. I will start with presuppositions that Calvinists have and show how these lack the ability to support their position. Toward the end of the book I'll deal with what I consider a major Bible-text argument used by Calvinists (Romans 9). But of the less weighty texts on both sides, I'll try to refer you to some authors whom I think do a fair job of explaining things.

I realize that the job of "explaining away" difficulties often looks like, and often is, "special pleading". I'm thinking, for example, of treatment I've seen on ("Not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance", et. al.) from the Calvinist camp. Or, Jn. 6:65b ("\_no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father.", et. al.) from Arminian camps. However, once a person has the correct presuppositions about God's revelation, the explanation of scripture becomes a little easier.

In contrasting the Calvinist, Arminian, and what I take to be a third, distinct, Biblical view of the way God effects salvation, I hope to do two things. First, I would like to espouse a higher view of God's sovereignty than Calvinists have done, and second, I would like to urge that a vision of Christian unity be built that will enable us to "speak the same thing" , "that they may all be one\_that the world may believe\_" But more about these purposes as I proceed.

Just a note on gender-specific usage: Please forgive my penchant for use of the male gender to represent both male and female. In my view it is a much more fluid style than that of jerking around our consciousness with alternating usages. Using one person to represent others also has the backing of the Bible and our form of government. I have seen bumper stickers that say, "She who laughs last...". I have thought it would be witty to add: "She who laughs last humbly acknowledges the wisdom of representative government", but then, who would get it?

**CHAPTER ONE --an introduction--**

*The Early Church Fathers Were Arminian-like; Augustine Made Corrections That Overcompensated*

The early church (AD 100-400) was partly right about the doctrine of the way God saves individuals. "Calvinists", beginning with Augustine, made some corrections to the position of the early church Fathers while at the same time making new errors in the process. Since the time of John Calvin, Arminians have shown valid differences between the true Biblical view of the salvation doctrine and Calvin's view. But, since much of the Arminian view falls back on the mediocre view of the post-apostolic church, I have tried to show where continuing reform of both theologies is necessary to be close to the Biblical teaching.

My strategy is to reveal the problems encountered as a result of a Calvinistic commitment to certain Greek philosophical ideas. My ten little reasons for advocating reform of both Calvinism and defective Arminianism will detail these weaknesses in these ten little chapters and finally suggest a direction for us both to head.

TO GET STARTED, A QUICK REVIEW OF THE TULIP DEFINITION of Calvin's Doctrine of Salvation:

Actually from their opponents, Calvinists have adopted a summary of the terms of their salvation doctrine, as they understand it, in the acronym, TULIP. Like other systems of belief, Calvinists have seen the "support" of their doctrine on the lips of Jesus, St. Paul, and others; and from the beginning to the end of the Bible have been able to discount, to their satisfaction, the difficulties that various texts might present.

T.	Total	Depravity	(total	inability)
U.		Unconditional		Election
L.		Limited		Atonement
I.		Irresistible		Grace
P.	Perseverance of the Saints			

Briefly, this is what they mean. Total depravity is the teaching that man is so affected by the fall that he is totally unable to do any spiritual good and it is therefore impossible for him to do anything on his own to contribute to his salvation. They say an unbeliever is an "unregenerate" (not made spiritually alive) man who, because he is dead spiritually, cannot understand spiritual truth. He, therefore, has no capacity to choose God; meaning thereby that he cannot have faith in God until God "regenerates" him and then gives him faith.

Unconditional election: The term "elect", seems, by definition, to refer to someone who is chosen by another. Consequently, they say membership of those who are in this group of chosen ones is not conditioned on the free actions of men.

Limited Atonement states that Christ did not die for the sins of all men, for if he did then supposedly everyone would make it to heaven. Christ's death, they say, was not meant for other than those particular individuals whom He had decided beforehand to save.

Irresistible Grace is their doctrine which maintains that a sinner has no capacity to refuse the special grace of God in bringing him to salvation.

Perseverance of the Saints teaches that no true Christian will fall away and be lost. Or, at the least, it means that those Christians who wind up in the end as Christians, were the ones who persevered and were the only ones meant to be perseverers by God.

## HOW DID CALVINISM ORIGINATE?

After Jesus and the apostles gave to us God's complete revelation of Himself, it was recorded in what we have as the New Testament. As the next few generations began to comment on the New Testament, they began to write things about God's foreknowledge, man's free will, election, and so on. The writings that came forth between about AD 100 and 400 tended to explain that men make totally free moral choices (undetermined by God) and that God elects them (chooses them for His own) based on His ability to foresee the choices that they would make.

Texts such as Romans 8: 29, 30 seemed to support such a doctrine, but given the influence of the Greek-like philosophy of the Jewish intellectual, Philo, during this period, I suspect that the "free" aspect of men's choices became over-emphasized in the teachings of the church fathers. It wasn't until much later that Calvinists explained "freedom of the will" in a way that allowed for God's determination of an individual's free choice. Back then, however, Philo, had written that

man is possessed of a spontaneous and self-determined will whose activities for the most part rest on deliberate choice.... the soul of man alone has received from God the faculty of voluntary movement, and in this way especially is made like to Him, and thus being liberated, as far as might be, from that hard and ruthless mistress, necessity, may justly be charged with guilt [or commended with praise]. [as cited in Benjamin Writ Farley, THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids)]

And on God's foreknowledge Philo leans in the direction of making God's activities dependent on His foreknowledge of all events:

For a mere man cannot foresee the course of future events, or the judgments of others, but to God as in pure sunlight all things are manifest. For already He has pierced into the recesses of our soul, and what is invisible to others is clear as daylight to His eyes. He employs the forethought and foreknowledge which are peculiarly His own, and suffers nothing to escape His control or pass outside His comprehension. For not even about the future can uncertainty be found with Him, since nothing is uncertain or future to God. [Ibid.]

## VIEWS OF THE CHURCH FATHERS BEFORE AUGUSTINE

Justin Martyr, a defender of the Christian faith during the mid 100's, comments in his writings that he draws upon his training in Platonist-type philosophy. Justin taught that

... unless the human race have the power of avoiding evil and choosing good by free choice, they are not accountable for their actions... [Ibid.]

Justin also "touches on the issue of God's foreknowledge. He understands it to be the means whereby God foresees what actions and choices mankind exercises, in light of which God then distinguishes the elect from the non-elect. Thus God delays the final act of history until the number of those foreknown by Him as good and virtuous is complete .... For the reason why God has delayed to do this, is His regard for the human race. For He foreknows that some are to be saved by repentance, some even yet that are perhaps not born." [Ibid.]

A few years later in the same century, Irenaeus writes basically the same thing claiming that in the Bible is set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion. For there is no coercion with God .... And in man, as well as in angels, He has placed the power of choice .... But if some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good; and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it, -- some do justly receive praise...; but the others are blamed.... [Ibid]

Origen, during the same time period assures his readers that one's fate is always determined by the use of one's will and that God is the knower of all choices but never their cause. [Ibid.]

## AUGUSTINE'S REACTION TO PELAGIUS

Just before AD 400 Ambrose was continuing to emphasize man's free will in his work, Jacob and the Happy Life. In this milieu came the teachings of Pelagius around AD 400. He taught that men are born essentially good and are capable of doing what is necessary for salvation. Augustine confronted the Pelagian idea in what amounted to a change in his own views. From scripture he saw that the traditional "free moral choices" which the church fathers and Pelagius had presented as self-determinedly free, were not nearly as free as they were making them out to be. Augustine recognized that his predecessors had not adequately explained how the will is in bondage and a slave to lusts and ignorance and not free to choose God apart from the grace of God.

Augustine decided that the old view where God "elected" souls on the basis of foreseeing their free moral choices was inadequate. That view seemed to make man the

determiner of his own salvation and God the one who "passively" put his stamp of "elect" on the ones who would choose to be saved. This view, thought Augustine, failed to grasp the depths of corruption of human nature (caused by original sin) and it did not seem to require much of God's grace in the matter.

In responding to all this Augustine argued that God's role in salvation is total. Election, he said, is not based on what God foresees\_ but is based on the mystery of His unsearchable will. The omnipotent Creator simply decides to graciously redeem some of Adam's posterity, while allowing the rest to suffer the punishments of sin which they justly incur as a fitting consequence of Adam's fall and in which they continue willfully to concur by virtue of their own free will.

Man's inability, Augustine derived from scripture, but the doctrine of a God uninfluenced by the actions of men probably owes its origin to the "Unmoved Mover" of Aristotle whom Augustine had studied in Carthage before his conversion. Scripture itself would not evoke Augustine's conclusion that God does not actually respond to man. I will treat this more in depth in chapters to follow.

At that time, we, the Church, condemned Pelagius' view as heretical but backed off a bit from accepting Augustine's view in its totality.

#### FROM AUGUSTINE TO CALVIN

For the next 1100 years the church taught a semi- Augustinian view of things. The church believed (as I do in a certain sense) that God's predestination and calling were rooted in God's foreknowledge. This teaching, strengthened by Thomas Aquinas (c. 1270), seemed to be a continuation of the view of the second and third century fathers. We also believed during this 1100 year period that those under the influence of the church (usually initiated by infant baptism) would be given the grace to believe and that, if they believed, God's "efficacious" grace cooperating with our wills, would enable us to obey God.

As the length of time we held this view seems to indicate, it was probably a view very close to the truth. However, because of the influence of semi-Pelagian views in the church there was an erosion of the justification-by- faith view. Much was taught about salvation that required the initiative of man. The grace of God and the will of man were both involved in salvation, but in a sense where good works were becoming a necessary part.

In response, the church was reformed beginning with the challenges of men like Thomas Bradwardine, Gregory of Rimini, John Wycliffe, and John Huss of the 14th century and culminating with men like Luther and Calvin of the 16th century. Calvin accomplished a swing away from semi- Pelagianism that brought his followers all the way back to Augustinianism.

#### CONCLUSION

Because some of Augustine's philosophical training seems to have wrongly influenced his ideas about God, he was moved to introduce a new basis for the reason of the election of Christians; that is, election not based on what God foresees, but based on the mystery of His unsearchable will. I will urge in chapter seven that the post-apostolic fathers did have a slight misunderstanding regarding God's foreknowledge of believers, and, I will also show why Augustine's attempted correction of the post-apostolic fathers was misleading.

The post-apostolic fathers' apparent reliance upon Philo's equation of "foresee" with the Biblical word, "foreknow" gave undue precedence to one particular meaning (among other meanings) of that New Testament word. It implied that the future existed, somehow, for God to observe it, yet without God having determined it. It favored God's all-knowing over His all-powerfulness (as if one might dominate the other). This may have been what roused Augustine to reverse the prominence; favoring God's all-powerfulness as the determinant in the election of believers. Thenceforth the Calvinists have thought of God's foreknowing and all-powerfulness as virtually synonymous. As we proceed through the chapters ahead I will lead up to another, more Biblical reason why believers are elect according to the foreknowledge of God (1 Pet. 1:2).

What I intend to do in the following chapter is to demonstrate that the Calvinist has gotten a distorted idea of what God is like because his idea is based on listening to what uninspired man has had to say about God. It has served to skew his concept of God in non-biblical ways. If we limit ourselves to hearing what God has to say about Himself we will learn what He is really like.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Calvinism's View Of God Is Not Completely Right*

I have not joined the Calvinists because they have taken something for granted that they should not have. They presuppose some things about God that they have no authority for doing. They are not completely right about God.

It's true that we all have been wrong about him and even as believers we continue to get things in our thinking cleared up about God. Even my Christian brother, the Calvinist, may be able to show me aspects of my thinking that are even now wrong about God. If he does and if I find my whole system of belief hangs on these beliefs, then I will have to change and believe the truth.

Until that happens, I intend to show why Calvinists should reform their essential view of salvation because so much of it hangs on wrong presuppositions about God.

### PRESUPPOSITIONS

Everything that we believe and take action on is based on something that we take for granted as true; on something that we don't necessarily have to prove; on something that we presuppose. For example, I believe God has created an orderly world, therefore, I can make plans. If I presupposed a chaotic world I would have no reason to make plans.

For the Christian, the things that we presuppose are first, that there is a God and second that the Bible is true; that it is God's decisive way of revealing the truth about himself. There is no necessity for you to have to prove the first things you presuppose. You just operate on the assumption that is made until (if ever!) you find that it is inconsistent to continue basing your beliefs and actions on that assumption. And the fact is that everyone begins by believing in God (and consequently His authority over us), but everyone immediately and wrongfully suppresses this truth ( Rom. 1:18,19).

I and the Calvinist have the same first presuppositions. First, that there is a God, and second, that the Bible is true. We both believe that what the Bible says about God is true. But, we both interpret what the Bible says about God and come up with two exclusive meanings. If the interpretations exclude one another, then at least one of them is wrong. [1]

The presuppositions that guide our interpretation of the Bible should themselves be taken from the Bible. If you don't do this then you're making your interpretation independently of the Bible and what you believe is then built upon something other than the Bible. I think my interpretations about God as revealed in the Bible are more nearly based on Bible-derived presuppositions. And, I think there are presuppositions that have guided the Calvinist that are not Biblical presuppositions. The presuppositions one has about God will serve as a pattern or paradigm for basing the interpretation of all other scripture. That is why I will deal with specific "problem" texts last; after we have sifted through our presuppositions. One extreme example (not a Calvinist example) of how a wrong, non-

Biblical presupposition affects the interpretation of other scripture is seen in Mormonism. They take it as a given (giving priority to Joseph Smith's revised visions which are a rejection of Bible teaching) that God, the Father, has a body like humans. Because they presuppose this non-Biblical notion they interpret scripture which says "God is a spirit ... " to mean that the Father's spirit is clothed in a "personage", with the Holy Ghost being the shared mind of the Father and Son. [2]

## ORIGIN OF PRESUPPOSITIONS

Certain ideas invite acceptance because they seem to have great explanatory powers. When we hear our perplexities explained in a manner that relates cause and effect handily, we may be prone to believe such ideas. In the first chapter I showed how that Augustine was perplexed over the problems that seemed to arise over the traditional view of election based on foreknowledge. In response Augustine decided that election was based on the mystery of God's unsearchable will rather than on His foreseen choices of men. [3] Augustine, it appears, saw that certain non- Biblical ideas of the Greek philosophies would enable him to explain things.

## AUGUSTINE'S PRESUPPOSITIONS

The case with respect to Augustinianism and Calvinism is not merely one of guilt by association with "isms", but like the adulterous preacher who constantly preaches against immorality, the Augustinian and Calvinist writers continually warn against the dangers of accepting any teaching as our authority, outside of the Bible, while at the same time letting classical Greeks like Plato, the Stoics, or Aristotle help shape God's revelation of himself. The Calvinist is supposedly committed to "sola scriptural" (only scripture) and "sola gratia" (only grace), but so subtle has been the Greek influence in Calvinist thought, that most do not recognize it as such. Some who do understand the sway the Greeks had, fail to see that it has reshaped their interpretation of the Bible. Benjamin Writ Farley, for example, says that, the rudiments of a reformed doctrine of the providence of God lie deeply embedded in the western philosophical tradition. There is little point in debating this. Wisdom and truth consist in acknowledging the fact and in showing how Christian and later Reformed doctrines differ significantly from the older, inherited, philosophical views.

Farley reflects further,

Has Reformed theology wed itself too closely to the classical world's concepts of God's perfection, omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability in its attempts to witness to the God of Scripture? To be certain, such concepts have their place in guiding the church's reflection on the biblical God of providential activity. They enable the church to avoid the pitfalls of defining God in ways that make him subservient to other factors in the universe; they call the church's attention to glaring inconsistencies in its assertions about deity. But they need not 'control' our understanding of God's interaction with his world. [5] The unadmitted fact is that "classical" definitions of God when accepted, of necessity do control our understanding of God's interaction with His world.

## FROM PLATO

In the following brief examples of Greek philosophy we will see the likely source of some present day Calvinist teachings: From Plato comes the concept of "the forms" or perfect ideals. This gave students of philosophy (one being Augustine) the notion that God does not change in any way because he is perfect. What is perfect, it is argued, does not change because by definition "perfect" means the level beyond which nothing can exceed. Nothing is more perfect than flawless, A+, or 100%. For a Platonist, things which change are inferior to things which do not change.

The Bible presents God as changeless, but the Christian tradition being shaped by Augustine and others, had to interpret what that meant. They had to decide if it meant that God did not change in character or if it meant that he did not change in some stronger sense. I shall argue in due course for the former sense alone.

Calvinists, however, chose to interpret God's changelessness as Aquinas, Augustine and the Greeks had defined it. Aquinas argued that God is totally unchangeable because "anything in change acquires something through its change, attaining something not previously attained. Now God...embracing within himself the whole fullness of perfection of all existence cannot acquire anything. [6] "Being perfect already he can lack nothing," seems to be his argument. I will show later how perfection may not consist of being in a static condition, but for a perfect being, His perfection does have a place for a certain process of change. I don't mean to imply just any process of change; certainly not an "evolutionary-type" process of becoming! Part of what makes God flawless, all good and complete is His ability to change other than in His character. I will expound more on this in chapter four.

## FROM ARISTOTLE

Plato inspired Aristotle's thinking about the superiority of things that do not change. We see it expressed in Aristotle's idea of the "Unmoved Mover." God is thus "the eternal self-mover; pure actuality, for any potentiality and change would suggest imperfection; hence this god must also be incorporeal and without perishable qualities. Thus the Prime Mover is without sensation or desire." [7]

From ideas such as this Augustine and others took the Biblical concept of God's immutability (unchangeableness) and gave it new non-Biblical meanings. From the Bible comes the revelation that God cannot change in character. From the Greeks came the idea that God cannot change at all.

## FROM THE STOICS AND PHILO

Besides the nature of God's changelessness, other things about the way God had ordered things seemed to have been given non-Biblical senses because of Greek influence. The Stoic philosophy among other influences may have given rise to the notion that no action in man can arise uncaused. The Stoics were predeterministic in their thinking. They

reasoned that every event had its set of causes. To them there were no uncaused events; every event was predetermined by preceding events. They taught that chance was only a name for undiscovered causes, and that God was the only uncaused thing. [8]

In opposition to this philosophy the Bible seems to imply that man was created with the ability to act in response to God in some uncaused or self-caused ways. A Jewish student of the Greek philosophies, Philo of Alexandria, promoted the idea that though God causes all things that happen; things that do happen have a primary and a secondary cause. Since God is good, he reasoned, and causes no evil, God is not at fault for some things that result from a secondary cause. From something like this seems to have come the Calvinist rhetoric concerning "proximate" (near) and "remote" (further removed) causes with remote causes being less blameworthy than proximate causes. This may not be the way the Calvinist says it, but the meaning cannot be far from what I have written. In the need to resolve the problem of removing God's responsibility for appointing the origin of sin, Calvinists have looked to the Greeks for help.

It's plain to see that even if a man freely does something by a choice that is caused by factors over which he does not have final control, he cannot be held responsible for doing the action; the controller is responsible. That man could not, as a matter of necessity, have made other than the choice he made. The case is like one hitting billiard ball A which then hits B, and then B hits C. We cannot say that B is really blameworthy for hitting C. [9]

## CONCLUSION

The Bible does not teach that God appointed that Adam should sin, but because of certain presuppositions about God the Calvinist must cast about for a suitable explanation for holding that everything that actually happens is caused by God. Non-Biblical concepts seem to have been chosen to find ways of minimizing the emphasis on God's responsibility for moral evil and of maximizing the emphasis on man's responsibility for having faith.

In the following chapters I will try to show where non- Biblical presuppositions about God have worked to undermine the correct view of other doctrines. To begin with I will show how their faulty assumptions cannot help but give them a wrong view of me.

## NOTES

It might occur to you that they are both right as in light being modeled by waves and by particles, or by reason of the "antinomy" argument of which, in due course, I will urge discounting.

Doctrine and Covenants, 1835 edition, pp53,54

In later chapters I will urge that the truth of "election" is based on slightly different circumstances than either of these.

Benjamin Writ Farley, *The Providence of God* (Baker, Grand Rapids) p.47,226

*Summa Theologiae*, vol. II, 1a.9.1

Op. Cit., Farley

To the extent that their concept of "the word" was an impersonal force, to that extent was their view fatalistic.

John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, p.166)

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Calvinism's View Of Man*

One reason I have not joined the Calvinists is because they are not completely right about me. I don't say that with indignity, but simply as a fact. I have no grounds for any dignity of my own other than the fact that I was created in the image of God (Jas.3:9). When I was an unrepentant sinner the Calvinists had categorized me correctly as one who, in my pride and revolt, had refused to accept the fact that I could not in my fallen state choose God on my own initiative. But, those who know me as a Christian who has considered but not joined the Calvinists, categorize me as one they suspect of having a lingering pride that wants to take some meritorious credit for having had faith to believe.

"You did not choose Christ," they say, "He chose you.," My humanistic thinking, they say, is the reason that I have not joined their view.

I will confess that I am still a sinner who often overestimates my own importance and on occasion have been in prideful revolt against my Lord. But even in those times I have not really been disposed to reject Christ. The point I am making is this: It is not some lingering boastfulness that keeps me from crossing the Calvinist threshold. I am not convicted by the Spirit of doing such boasting and I am confident that a child of God would be convicted of such a thing at some point in his life if it were part of his stance.

My stance is that whoever has not heard the gospel is disposed to reject faith in God because of his sinful nature, but because of the image of God, that lingers in every man's make-up, he is also capable of believing it when he hears the gospel. He is capable of being enlightened as John 1:9 indicates: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." This act of belief, of course, is not a consequence of man's initiative, but is one possible response to the grace of the gospel proclamation which is God's initiative. I am dependent on God who gave me the grace (because I had no will to have his grace) to be able to respond to him (Romans 9:16). God's initiative in bringing the gospel shows ("enlightens") a man that he is deceiving himself, which allows him to rightly place his faith if he will (Jn. 7:17).

By the gospel, God's grace grants us freedom. Faith is the act of receiving that freedom. At times, when the Bible speaks of "the faith" as being a gift of God, I understand it as a figurative way (metonymy) of alluding to the "granting" being done. I understand it this way because of the numerous times that faith is referred to as a condition for salvation. Grace awakens us to the possibility of believing. But, believing is our responsibility; faith is our responsibility. Otherwise we could not be chided by the Lord; "O, ye of little faith!"

It is God, for example who says to sulking Cain, "Do thou rule over it; [sin]." Cain is made responsible. It is God who initiates things. What God speaks to Cain is the gospel. [1] Cain is informed by God about what is good for him and he then has the possibility of knowing that he can do the good because it is God Himself who would add the power for Cain. Will Cain have faith?

In this incident (Gen. 4:6,7), to "rule over it" is to stop being angry at God, to put an end to resulting despair and to master evil. Cain did not accept God's decision to recognize Abel's sacrifice and not his own. Cain did not accept the will of God so expressed. He does not believe that God loves him anyway. He thinks God is unjust. The good, then, is to accept the decision of God whatever it might be, including the will which gives preference to Able. If Cain will by faith be in agreement with that will he would find the strength from God to master anger, despair and evil.

#### MINIMIZE THE FALL--NOT

Everything of which a man is capable of from birth is a gift of God. Paul says (1 Cor.4:7), "what have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?" Even the capacity, when faced with God's word to have faith in God or to keep trying to put faith in some other object, is a gift from God in which I do not boast. There is in all men an essential part of their humanity that may be touched by the proclamation of the gospel. [2] In this sense all of us have within ourselves (by God's gifting) the capacity of responding to the gospel in true faith.

There is no "method" for obtaining grace. Grace cannot be grace and be subject to our control. But when the Spirit blows where it wills and God's good news comes to us, as it did to Cain, it is not an opportunity for "obtaining" grace; it IS grace!

I am sometimes accused of wanting to preserve an autonomy before God; that I am following the age old heresy of human pride which cannot tolerate everything being dependent upon the grace of God, including the predetermination of my response. It seems clear to me, however, that my response is dependent on the grace of God. There is nothing in me that has escaped the "fall" unharmed. God's grace is needed to restore me.

#### BOASTING IS FOR THE DECEIVED

An unbeliever indeed thinks that on his own initiative he is able to choose to believe Christ. By scripture we know that is not the case. At one point even I, a believer, thought that on my own initiative I had chosen Christ, but as I reflected on scripture (John 15:16) I had to admit the true nature of the case. I am aware of the hideous thought that I might have resisted and rejected the gospel call but that does not become a boast for me. It is only the hollow boast of those on Satan's side who would resist the creator and celebrate instead that remaining withered and perverted aspect of the divine image that is left in them: that is, the self-caused choice in the face of God's initiative.

We know that what the unbeliever does is to suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). To suppress the truth, men must know it. But a man deceives himself into thinking that life is in himself. This is what Darwinists do. Not wishing to believe that life comes from God they have devised a theory that exchanges the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man.

Even the unbeliever was created with knowledge of God as a natural function because it is natural to believe in God (Romans 1:19). But, because of the break with God in Adam, we all suppress the truth about God. As Solomon says, "Behold, this alone have I found, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices (Eccl. 7:29)."

When I became a believer I saw that this had been my nature; there came a renewing of my mind; I forsook the thinking that life was of my choosing; that my freedom included choosing life on my own. I didn't have to join the Calvinists to see this, but I did have to respond to God's initiative.

## CHARGES OF IDOL MAKING

There remains an aspect of the wrong opinion about me that is acutely alarming to me and that has caused me to consider very carefully the Calvinist position. It is the charge that I don't join because I want to have a god in my image; a god who is limited and smaller. Calvinists claim that I am rejecting their glorious, unlimited God for a much less glorious, limited god. By not joining them they say I am insisting on reducing the kind of God that really exists.

It is true that men make idols so that they can limit God. God judges us. He speaks to us and challenges us about our sins and calls us to repentance whereas idols do no such speaking. Idols are dumb; silent! They are convenient and controllable and allow us to go on in our sins because they are made after our image.

Calvinists say that by rejecting their doctrine I am constructing in its place a god who is limited in power, limited in knowledge, and reduced to one who changes like a human who changes by maturing or by fickleness. They say it is my idolatrous tendency to make God more like me and less like the way they say He really is.

This is a very frightening charge because I know Man has this tendency and I'm not excluded. The sinful heart of an unbeliever tends to linger on in the believer. It is called the "flesh" in the Bible. It hates God and wants to serve a manmade god. So I know that in me is both a desire to have God be less than He is and under my control, and a desire to be surrendered to Him and under His unlimited control. I am thankful that the latter is the stronger in me.

Although my heart cannot be trusted or discerned by me directly, I can assess myself by certain outward signs: Am I persisting in sins or am I turning from them? Am I aloof or am I loving the brethren? Am I swallowed up in my own thoughts or am I listening to God and reading His word and conversing with Him? If I am doing the latter of these things it is not likely that I am making a false god of my own invention. I am grateful to the Calvinists for their charge because it has made me careful not to put manmade limits upon God. But, I have often wondered if this fear of idol making has wrongly been the motivating influence in some people's conversion to Calvinism.

Those who do convert to Calvinism usually don't have to abandon one Arminian concept that is not completely correct, and that is the concept of time. Both Augustine and much of today's Church have a different view of God and time than that had by people of Bible times. In the next chapter I will try to show how the earlier view of God and time is the correct view that should change the way both Calvinists and Arminians view time.

## NOTES

Although there are circumstances where God does mock and laugh at unrepentant sinners (Ps.2),

He is not doing this with Cain. I owe the commentary on Cain to Jaques Ellul, *To Will & To Do*, Pilgrim Press.

In the parable of the sower and the seed, even those who are illustrated by hard ground might

be touched by the gospel. These, however, have hardened themselves. They have rejected a

response of faith and have let their hardness leave the seed for Satan to remove. Others who

have initial faith do not continue in faith, but let the testings of life overcome their faith (Jas. 1:21).

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### *Calvinism's View Of Time*

In the second chapter I tried to chronicle how wrong presuppositions about God were taken to explain some perplexing things in the Bible. I now intend to develop what further consequences will occur when the beginning assumptions are wrong. If God does not really change at all then notions that involve change may become slanted. If God does not change at all then things for Him like time, life, action, and response would be totally different than the way we ordinarily understand them. I don't mean "largely different"; I mean totally different.

Before Augustine's time the church traditionally believed that time was not foreign to what God is in Himself apart from creation. Just as God is the beginning and the end; the alpha and the omega, so He creates things that have an alphabetic-like sequence. He even takes time in doing it; six days! God lives through His own time (in some sense) and what He created He made to live through time. Time is a part of God's nature and our nature. If we were to paraphrase 2 Pet 3:8 we might say, "one of our short periods of time is with the Lord like a long period of time and one of our long periods of time is with the Lord like a short period of time." Nevertheless, in each case it is a period of time with the Lord.

God was seen to have been "the ancient of days in Daniel 7, which is to say that He has lived an infinitely long time or eternally ( Ps. 102:27). The early church thought of God's eternity as His having always existed and the fact that He would continue to exist forever. During this existence He acts to become man. This is something that is not eternally true of God; His incarnation! It indicates a before and an after even in His own existence.

That's pretty simple. Augustine, however, seems to have introduced a different idea about God and time that defined God's eternity as time-less (not having time). Having defined God as totally changeless, a doctrine of timelessness was also adopted for support. A timeless God would be unchangeable. If God were timeless we would think of Him as existing outside the "stream" of time. His actions would be timeless; His thoughts, His reactions to things in time, His knowledge of things in time would all be timeless. We would have to think of God's knowledge, thoughts, and reactions as being had in only one instant since there would be no temporal succession of states with God. Everything which would ever be true of God would be true of Him at that instant. For example, His knowledge, although timeless, would include knowledge of things in time; His reactions, although timeless, would be the one instant reaction to things in time. His grief at having made man ( Gen. 6:6,7), for example, would have been a timeless reaction (if possible) to something occurring in time. God would be seen as present to all times at once just as He is present to all places at once. Nothing would be able to occur to Him (in time).

Many church traditions these days, including many Calvinist churches have gone back to the earlier way of seeing God and time. This seems to be more in line with the way Bible writers presented God as doing first one thing and then another. Were it not for Augustine

we would have thought of "the counsel of God's will" ( Eph 1:11) as the result of an active mind, deliberating and considering possibilities. Augustine, however, promoted the view of "the counsel of God's will" as one in which God brings about in time all that He has chosen "from all eternity" to bring about. God has always meant, he would say, to bring about ,certain things at certain times. There was no time, for instance, when God did not intend to send Judah into captivity. Or, there was no time when God intended to punish Ninevah of Jonah's era.

## DECISION AND TIME

If God were time-less, then nothing, including His own future activities would be indefinite to Him. But this would make it impossible for God to make "decisions". Richard Rice spells out the consequences:

Knowing the entire course of the future, God [would] also know the content of all His decisions. But to know exactly what one will decide is nothing other than to have made the decision already. Nothing is left to be decided. Indeed, since the very meaning of "decision" implies a transition from "undecided" to "decided" and thus requires a temporal distinction, the concept of "divine decision" is inherently contradictory according to the conventional view. If, however, God's experience is sequential in some sense, then we can think of God as really making decisions, as choosing between alternatives, as making definite something that was previously indefinite. [\[1\]](#)

## OTHER CONSEQUENCES OF TIMELESSNESS

If God had actually fixed all His intentions "from all eternity" He would be a very lifeless thing as we know life. He would not be a person as we know persons. Granted that there are major differences between the persons of the trinity and other persons that we know, there is a lot else that we have in common. If God were life-less we would have nothing in common.

To be a person is to be one who goes through a process of relating to others (or to your own reasoning process, perhaps). It is to be one who reacts with joy ( Zeph.3:17), grief ( 1 Sam. 15:11,35), pleasure ( Heb. 11:6), sympathy ( Jer 31:20), forgiveness ( 2 Sam 12-13), anger ( Hos 13:11), flexibility ( Ezk 4:15), or even astonishment ( Is 59:16).

If God were outside of a temporal process (even if we are speaking of only His own temporal process), He would be lifeless. I am able to say this first of all because of Romans 1:20 which teaches that God made His nature to be clearly understood by us through what He has made. What He has made is the universe which is full of change. We observe some change to be mechanistic and other changes to be apparently free. Cosmic changes, chemical changes, etc. seem to be mechanical. Living beings, however seem to be in a process that we can't entirely explain mechanistically. The more complex the life; the more apparent freedom is involved. From this we would tend to "understand" that God would be much more alive, complex, and free than anything He has made.

Continuing with Romans 1:20, God has filled our earth with life. It is teeming with that which is in a process of multiplication, diversification, complexity, vicissitude, action, and reaction. These things that God has made help us to understand something of His divine nature. I am able to say, secondly, that "... the Father has life in Himself" ( Jn. 5:26 & 6:57). From this and from Romans 1:20 we can "understand" and comprehend that a temporal process is of the essence of this life. From cover to cover the Bible reveals God as the "living God"; the acting God. Nothing that we know of that is living exists apart from involvement in processes (c.f. Deut. 5:26, Josh. 3:10, Ps. 42:2, Jer. 10:10, Matt. 16:16, Jn. 1:4, Jn. 14:6).

Now days; or at least since Einstein, people talk about the space-time continuum as being a created thing. I have no problem with that. It does not mean that God is timeless just because He created a space-time universe. The truth of this can be inferred from the reasoning that says God does not have to be lifeless just because our life is a created thing.

### TIME OF INTENTIONS

Calvinists don't officially proclaim a timeless God but they do have a tendency to place all of His intentions as originating prior to our created space-time. This tends to make their understanding of God the same as timeless.

The Bible clearly reveals that some of God's intentions were made "before the foundation of the world" ( Eph 1:4), but it begs the question to assume that His every single intention shares the same instant of origin. God forms intentions on some things during our lives. St. Paul, for example, was set apart from his mother's womb ( Gal. 1:15); interestingly, not from the foundation of the world. God sometimes forms intentions in response to us ( Ezk. 4:15). Other things He intends from the foundation of the world ( Heb. 4:3), and still other things from before the foundation of the world. And, even if God decided a thing before the foundation of the world, it is not necessary to think that His decision was timeless. It may be merely that it was made before the time of our universe.

As I noted above (on the fault of Geocentrists) the Bible shows the earth as having been built as we would conceive of building a house; beginning with a foundation. We would picture the forming of the foundation as going through a process of time. Bible authors do not think that "from the foundation of the world" necessarily means from eternity past. To them it denotes a period of time when the earth and its structure is being established. Not only would it include the six days of creation, but it would also include the time it took for the trial period of human stewardship in Eden (the human structure). I cite as evidence Hebrews 9:26 ( and 4:3). Offering is needed only where cleansing is needed ( 9:22,23), but we see that had Christ's offering been needed for each time man sinned, He would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world. Not from eternity past; not during the six days of creation; not during the trial period; but since the time of man's fall would Christ have had to be often offered were His one offering not sufficient.

The predetermined plan of God to deliver up His Son to crucifixion ( Acts 2:23) may have been a determination of a contingent nature before man's fall into sin. In other words it is not explicit in the Bible that God from eternity past or from one timeless instant decided that man should fall into sin and that Christ should be crucified. The timeless way of looking at it, however, seems to be the Calvinist way.

## GOD'S PURPOSE OF THE AGES

Ephesians 3:11 [interlinear version] does speak of God's "purpose of the ages." Whatever that purpose was, it has a "before-the-foundation-of-the-world" aspect and it has been accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. 2 Timothy 1:9,10 reveals that what was accomplished in Christ was by reason of grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

As I see it, God's before-the-foundation-of-the-world purpose is, through the work of His Son, to have a people for Himself who would be to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1), whom He would possess by means of His grace through faith. The Calvinist thinks that God's purpose necessitates man's fall since from all eternity God's "grace" is involved in His purpose. It is clear to me, however, that even though greater grace is necessary to achieve His purpose after the fall, that even if man had never fallen, it would still be by God's grace through man's faith, that man would continue in life with God. But, "where sin does abound grace does even more abound ( Rom 5:20). " The fact that God's Son is the vehicle of this greater grace in lieu of our lapse into sin does not mean that there would be no gracious purpose for the Son had there been no fall. I believe that a spiritual husband/wife union was in view regardless ( Eph 5:32) and a taking up of humanity into the Godhead. The Son's role, had there been no fall, may not have included the sacrifice of His life (as we know it), but it would have included the creation of the people of God. God's purpose would have been achieved through His Son even in that case.

God's will is characterized as "holy" which means set apart. If Adam was not originally holy, it would take the Son to teach him who alone it is who conforms to the holiness of God. Adam could not totally know or be brought into total conformity to God's will apart from the Son of God and His grace, because God's will is a holy (set apart) will.

The grace of God in Christ is granted from eternity in at least three senses: First, it is grace that He created all things ( Col 1:16). Second, it is grace that we could be united with Him and third, He is grace in reserve. By "grace in reserve" I mean to say that He is like money in escrow. Escrow money is a formalization that does not come into actual effect until some specified condition has been fulfilled. In God's purpose the sacrifice of His Son is granted on the condition that there is sin to be punished. In that it is granted in Christ, the "escrow account" has Christ's signature on it, so to speak. The account was signed before the foundation of the world.

Ephesians 1:4 speaks of the choosing of God's Son "before the foundation of the world" to be the vehicle of God's grace to all those united with Him. It says, "For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight." Key to the

"in Christ" passages is the understanding that the elect are viewed as the elect when they are seen in union with Christ. Just as individuals could join the chosen covenant community in the OT, so in the NT individuals can become united with the chosen One and also be considered chosen. [2]

It seems that Augustine's case for a totally changeless and timeless God is a case of special pleading to solve what otherwise seemed to him to threaten the "right view" of God.

We might well ask if God is subject to viewing His creation as we creatures view it; that is, the past and present only? I will urge in the next chapter that God does see more than we do by virtue of knowing all future possibilities and all possible responses to them. He thus is able to bring about His designs.

**THE ERROR OF PROCESS THEOLOGY** One modern day reaction to the Calvinist's adoption of the Greek ideas of God's unchangeable and uninfluenced nature has been called "process theology". [3] Process theology, however, reacted in a non Bible-based way. Its promoters apparently thought that the Calvinist God was made to be too external to the world. This God, they thought, had been conceived of as too arbitrary in His methods of determining and foreseeing all future events; too unfeeling and unresponsive. Instead of believing that the Bible gives satisfying answers to these conceptions, the process theologians derived explanations for a life-view that were very similar to Darwinist explanations for life. In their theology, God does change and grow or become something that He was not before. Instead of presupposing the God revealed by the Bible, their founding presupposition became "change". Change or process becomes a god. It is the basic rule or principle for their view of reality. There seems to be two gods in their thinking: an acting agent and process itself. Regardless, God, in their view, has an aim to make novelty and enjoyment increase forever through the involvement of self-determinism influenced by the past.

once again wrong presuppositions result in bad consequences. For us, the Bible teaches that God controls the process of things He has created; for process theology both God and man are subject to the phenomenon of process. For us, the Bible speaks of God upholding His righteousness and as having an unchanging law with judgment to which we must be accountable; for process theology, enjoyment becomes the main principle which ends up re-defining righteousness and making sin not serious for our destiny.

#### CHANGING OR CHANGELESS?

In the Bible we learn of God's unchangeableness. It is revealed, for instance, that " ... the Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind" ( I Sam. 15:29).

From this we learn that God can be counted on to be faithful. He does not change in the sense that men do. Men may promise one thing and even though external conditions

remain the same they may arbitrarily change their minds. God is not like that. He remains faithful to His nature even when responding to the faith (or lack thereof) of His creatures.

Numbers 23:19,20 is another example that shows God's changelessness to be superior to man's. Balaam is being tempted to change his oracle but cannot due to the fact that God, unlike men, cannot be bribed to change.

## SUMMARY

Augustine and Aquinas taught that God was without time. This gave support to their belief that He is totally changeless. The Bible, however, portrays God as One who acts. If everything that is true about God has been true, is true, and always will be true about Him, then God becoming man would make this teaching not coherent. Being without time would rule out having life; time being of the essence of life. Since the Father has life in Himself, we must conclude that God has some of those things that are associated with life; including time and process in a certain sense. The Bible shows that God's very broad intentions are, from our point of view, always intended. But, when it comes to the particulars involved in achieving those broad intentions, the Bible shows more narrow intentions emerging in time. St. Paul, for instance, does not tell us that God set him apart from before the foundation of the world even though he uses this language for some of God's other intentions. God's eternal purpose as it relates to us is made explicit in Ephesians 1; 2 Timothy 1:9,10; and elsewhere in the Bible. If we were to give it definition it might read something like this: God's eternal purpose is to have, through the work of His Son, a people for Himself who would be to the praise of His glory, whom He would possess by means of His grace through faith.

This intention of God could apparently have been achieved without the fall of man, but in lieu of his fall is achieved by further grace.

It is important to be scrupulously accurate about God's unchangeable essence to avoid the errors of unbiblical "process theology " God does not, nor does His law (which is a transcription of His will and character), become different than what they were as their existences proceed.

I have not joined the Calvinists nor the "process" theologians because of their views of time and change.

## NOTES

Richard Rice, *\_God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will\_* (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, pp.44,45)

c.f. Robert Shank's *\_Elect in the Son\_* (Westcott Publishers, Springfield, MO)

For an assessment of it c.f. Langdon Gilkey's *\_Reaping the Whirlwind\_* (NY: Seabury 1976)

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Calvinism's View Of Bible Language*

The Bible describes God in human terms, using human characteristics. We read, for example, that the "arm of the LORD" (Is.51:9) does something, or that "the LORD smelled the pleasing odor" (Gen.8:21). This kind of language is called "anthropomorphism" which means that we are ascribing human attributes to God.

The Calvinist tends to soften the revelational content of such Bible-language because of his commitment to his particular presuppositions about God. When the Bible uses anthropomorphisms it reveals something about God, but Calvinists sometimes so restrict what is really revealed, that it makes the anthropomorphism meaningless. I will give some examples shortly.

We should avoid the temptations of idolatry which is to make God in our own image and in corruptible forms and for that reason Christians have emphasized the radical differences that exist between God and man. His thoughts are higher than ours and too wonderful for us to fully understand (Is.55:8,9). There is so much that is too difficult for man, but "nothing is too hard for God" (Gen.18:14, Lk.1:37). Man can predict so little, but God "declares the end from the beginning" (Is.46:10). Man is only one place at a time, but God is everywhere at once; some men have done honorable things, but God is a source of total moral obligation and worthy of all honor and praise; and so on.

Even though God is so radically different, He is a person (in some sense) as man is a person. But since He is a person with qualities to such unusual degrees we pause to consider the differences when texts liken His life to ours. Calvinists, though, have emphasized the radical difference between God and man and have tended to discount what God has taught about Himself in anthropomorphic language. There are ways, however, to arrive at the meaning of anthropomorphisms without imposing non-Biblical presuppositions on them and thereby deciding in advance what they must and must not say.

#### ARRIVING AT THE MEANING IN ANTHROPOMORPHISMS

The Bible teaches us that God speaks. What we normally understand the word "speak" to mean is to communicate by means of the vocal cords. The Bible, however, teaches us that God speaks and that He is also a spirit without human bodily form (Deut.4:15) and thus without vocal cords as humans have them. This seems to be a contradiction. The idea of vocal cords in the anthropomorphism seems to prevent the meaning of "speaks" from being applied to God. But, if we subtract the vocal-cords element and have any meaning left that makes sense, then we apply that sense to God. That is, God effects communication. we have cut off the uniquely human element of vocal cords to arrive at the real meaning. This method is generally good but there is a danger to it. For one thing, God may use the vocal cords of one of His people to speak; for another, He may have vocal cords in some other spiritual sense. We may not know what is uniquely human in a given anthropomorphism.

Actual human vocal cords may give us a dim, shadowy indication of some greater, concrete reality about God. We have with the word "speak", images of air movement causing vibrations in other elements producing sound transmissions, etc. All these things reflect the divine being. Air reflects the idea of spirit; movement intimates life; sound suggest word, etc. Much that we might initially think to be unique to man may, upon reflection, give uncanny insight into the nature of God. He, after all, said, "Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen.1:26,27). Man, it seems, is a "Theomorphism"; a God-form. That is very close to being a copy in some way.

Our eyes and our seeing, for example, are used as a form of what God does. God monitors His creation and works it after the counsel of His will. "In Him all things hold together" (or "endure" Col.1:17). God looks after His creation and keeps it going. our eyes are a microcosm-like representation of what God's eyes are. Our eyes may be created and named after something in God which their function is like. In the same way, our earthly fatherhood derives its name from the heavenly Father. Ephesians 3:14,15 says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father, of whom every fatherhood [patria] in heaven and on earth is named." Our physical hands, our feet, ears, nostrils, etc. all are really only a semblance of a much more solid spiritual reality of what would be God's hands, ears, etc. I'm not implying that God has a body. I am suggesting that the organs and functions that are man's suggest to us something in God that is like them.

2 Chron. 16:9 says, for instance, "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His ...." Certainly our conception of this illustration will be anthropomorphic. That is to say, we may have a mental image of God scanning humanity in a search that, were it like our own searches, might involve overlooking things. The movement of "to and fro" may suggest that when the gaze is in one direction, action occurring in an opposite direction might be missed by God. From our knowledge of God in all the Scripture we know that these faults would not be true of God. What we can't deny is that God finds out about our faith.

We assume too much of our own intellectual superiority to OT people if we think they did not conceive of God as far more than the anthropomorphic image presented them. It's not that OT people had to have crude illustrations to understand God whereas we, with greater intellectual awareness, can relegate anthropomorphisms to less weighty positions. Those who do so will have to guard themselves from thinking they have better notions of God that are more in harmony with Platonic-like ideals. The ancients understood that God monitored all of His cosmos instantaneously ("all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Heb 4:13 cf. Prov.15:3).

#### THE CORRECT INTERPRETATIONAL PRINCIPLE

Man-forms (i.e. anthropomorphisms) appear to limit God, which fact tempts those with Calvinist presuppositions to favor the so-called "unlimiting" Bible passages over the "limiting" Bible passages. A hermeneutical (interpretational) principle is employed which at first seems good: Statements about the "unlimited" extent of God's knowledge and power, for example, must control the anthropomorphic statements and not vice versa. If,

on the other hand. anthropomorphisms controlled our understanding of God, they say, we would be reducing Him to idolatrous, human proportions. We would be giving precedence to a language of ignorance, indecision, and change over an all- powerful and all-knowing type of language.

But, when I give what is considered too much credence to anthropomorphisms that tend to modify "unlimiting-type" Bible passages, I am faced with Calvinistic accusations that are defamatory and libelous. They would accuse me of maintaining that God is ignorant; that He capriciously changes His mind; that His purposes of goodness are thwarted; that He is vacillating; and so on.

I maintain that something is lost if either principle of interpretation is used in exclusion of the other and I plead what D. A. Carson would call a "disjunctive fallacy" which is false logic. It is the wrong exclusion of what might be an acceptable "in-between" in certain supposedly either/or situations. [1] If the idea that God is changeless, for example, takes precedence over anthropomorphisms that show God making changes, then the total changelessness of the Greek philosophy begins to dominate. If anthropomorphisms are given undiscerning precedence, then our view of God becomes dominated by the ever-changing emotional life of the Pagan deities. We might then tend to think that perhaps God has a body and is located somewhere in particular.

The unexcluded middle position gives the correct hermeneutical principle which teaches us that God reacts to man without loss or change of His character.

#### CALVIN'S ACCOMMODATION VIEW

Calvin said that God often describes [reveals?] Himself in a way that "accommodates" our limited capacity to understand Him. So at times He represents Himself to us not as He is in Himself, but "as He seems to us". [2] Calvin believes that because God wants people to respond to Him that He must represent Himself as one who is also responsive; that He reacts to human action. [3] Calvin apparently thinks that God represents Himself as responsive but with the truth being that He is not; that it is really eternal decrees that are made to look like responses so that man will act towards God in apparent freedom. So, for example, when God reveals that "He regretted that He had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Sam. 15:11,35), Calvinists would say that God is revealing "what it seems to us that He did." Such would be a false revelation if God in actuality did not want Saul and his descendants to be kings (c.f. 1 Sam. 13:13).

#### SPECIFIC ANTHROPOMORPHISMS OFTEN DISCOUNTED

An arrogant attitude toward the worth of anthropomorphisms would tend to empty their content of didactic use. Of what, for example, are we to learn about God from the following revelation?

Gen.6:5-7; "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD

was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. And the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

If we dismiss that God reacts to man, what is left of this crude portrayal of disappointment; this being touched with deep feelings of hurt? If nothing unexpected happens with God, this revelation is meaningless. What an inappropriate way to teach that corruption has been appointed to reach a level where it will have to be totally dismantled. God, on the contrary, was distressed to the core (v.6). He was not so from eternity past. God's grief is incomprehensible if not temporal in nature (as when we grieve the Holy Spirit). To truly know God's deep feelings about His unrequited love (c.f. Lk. 19: 10, 41) makes our own repentance more grievous.

Calvin's accommodation view, because it appeals to God's level of understanding as being superior to ours (which I readily grant), insists that "anthropomorphisms" such as Genesis+6:5-7 to be a case of God in His grace, coming down to our level to converse with us in our own speech. It insists that the meaning is not "regret" on God's part, but the abhorrence of a holy God at the awful wickedness and corruption into which man had fallen. I agree that it means this too, but it is not as though Moses (or his sources) could not have expressed what I have just expressed. He, in fact, expresses God's abhorrence several places including Leviticus 26:44 which states, "... neither will I [God] abhor them [Israelites] to destroy them [actually] ...."

Man's wholesale rejection of faith in the face of God's grace was apparently worse than what God's prognosis had been. Interestingly, the NT word for foreknowledge (proginosko) was sometimes used by the Greeks in the medical sense that I have just employed: "a prediction based on a diagnosis." [\[4\]](#)

I know the way I am interpreting anthropomorphisms here urges the question of God's sovereignty and majesty and for that reason I need to make a short digression. The simple answer is that a Sovereign may self-limit His sovereignty in a way that will not transgress His overall will. For example, the Calvinist friend of mine (prior to becoming a Calvinist) gave me this illustration of God's sovereignty and man's freedom. He had been an excellent basket ball player in high school and college. He told me that when he played his little brother at home that his abilities allowed him to "declare the end from the beginning." He said, "I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it" (Is. 6:10,11). Instead of merely looking into a virtual future to see what would happen and then make his announcement, my friend was actively involved in bringing events to the place where he could fulfill his announcements. By his superior power he could have the game end with any point values that he wanted to predict at the beginning. This he could do by regulating his brother's progress by limiting himself in some ways. When God made man, He also had made a creature who, by the nature of the case, demonstrated God's action of self-limitation without the loss of His sovereignty. This is a higher view of God's sovereignty than the view espoused by the Calvinist.

As Jack W. Cottrell has said, "Such limitations as these in no way contradict God's sovereignty, simply because they are self-limitations. They are part of the sovereign decree, not a violation of it. If they were limitations imposed on God from outside God, then his own sovereignty would indeed be compromised. But they are God's own choice, and as such are not the negation of sovereignty, but the very expression of it. The sovereign God is free to do as he pleases, and this includes the freedom to limit himself". [5]

If I were to say, "I don't think of my God as being a wrathful or just, but a loving and merciful God." And I proceeded to strip off something of what God is, then I would be making an idol for myself. Now, from the Calvinist's point of view, this is what I am doing with the concept of God's sovereignty. They say that I am making an idol when I describe God's sovereignty in a way that shows God freely limiting Himself. They think I am making an idol whereas the truth is that they are making God out to be the way they imagine He should be. That is to say, they are the ones who have made an image from their imagination -- an idol! My conception of God is closer to what He has revealed Himself to be in His written word. The Calvinist, on the other hand, has taken a concept represented by the word "sovereignty" and has made God conform to their notion of the concept.

Thus (getting back), through Bible anthropomorphisms, we may be touched with the feelings of God's "infirmities" so to speak; His self limitations. God knows ours and we His by virtue of there being a correspondence between object and image. God truly grieves (Eph.4:30), rejoices (Zeph.3:17), is pleased or displeased (Heb. 11:6), etc., but He has not lost control of what He wants to control.

#### ANALOGICAL LANGUAGE

Calvinists have tried to salvage their unresponsive notions of God by reference to what is called the "analogical" nature of descriptive terms. When men use words to describe a thing and then use the same word to describe something else, the meaning intended for each use might have 1.) no difference, 2.) have some difference, or 3.), it might have a high degree of difference.

Meanings that don't change when used are precise. They call this kind of word usage "univocal". If a word's meaning does not remain precise when used of two different things they call its usage, "analogical". A large difference in usage they call "equivocal". [6]

The point Calvinists try to make is that man's language is incapable of being precise about God but is capable of being understandable and useful because we can imagine things proportionately. [7] For example, because I am the father of my children, I can know quite precisely what it is for others to be fathers of their children. By analogy I can know what it would mean to say that I am the father of several generations of Moores. There are some differences introduced when I begin speaking of "generations" but the meaning is still understandable. By analogy I can understand what it means to say that

Jubal was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe, that Abraham was the father of all those who are having faith, that Einstein was the father of the theory of relativity, or that the Church Fathers were instrumental in guiding the Church through the early stages. But, the Calvinist would say that my understanding of the fatherhood of God would be useful but much less precise than all of these examples because of the "great" proportionate differences between God and man.

This is how they invariably account for texts that would otherwise give the idea of God as a responsive person. Because God's insight, for example, is proportionately so much greater than man's, the volatile reaction we may have to things (of which we have little insight) is so much greater than that of Him who has unlimited insight. [8] In fact, they would say, God would have no reaction because the proportionality is carried out infinitely.

How does the "analogical" understanding of language, then, help one to understand texts like Genesis 6:6 where God grieved in His heart and was sorry that He had made man? If one has already decided that God is unmoved then even the "analogical" description of word meanings here is useless.

We ought not operate on the assumption of the univocal validity of language for both God and man, because it is clear that things like the Father to Son relationship of God is not exactly the same thing it is for me and my son. It is also clear that we cannot impose the same limitations on God's grief that are implicit in man's grief, but, as I have shown, the difference is not totally beyond our understanding.

Calvinists make a point of saying that analogical language introduces not just quantitative differences, but qualitative differences. For example, they say God's knowledge is not just many times greater than our knowledge, but of a different quality. By this they mean to show that although we can understand something of one whose knowledge is quantitatively greater than ours, we might not grasp the significance of a knowledge that is qualitatively different than ours. Although they say analogical language gives us an understanding of God, they imply that because words are not used precisely in the same way with us and with God, we may be susceptible to misunderstandings. I agree with that possibility, but would like to give an illustration that shows the effectiveness of analogical language for communicating truth.

Building upon the note above, concerning the analogical nature of the Flatland story, I would like for you to imagine what the Square would think of a Cube. Having never been able to see a Cube in his two dimensions, the Square would probably be focused on the quantitative differences between himself (one square) and a Cube (six square faces). To us three dimensional creatures, we know that the Square's thoughts can't really take in the qualitative difference of perpendicularity of the Cube's square faces to each other (except to believe it to be true in some mysterious way because of lower dimensional relationships). The Square on Flatland might imagine that when he sees one square face of a Cube resting on his Flatland, that the five other alleged faces are somewhere else on Flatland so far removed that they are out of sight. The Square is susceptible to

misunderstandings because of tendencies to think quantitatively. Nevertheless, when the Square is transported out of his Flatland and given the ability to see in three dimensions, he must marvel at what he did understand about the Cube's squareness and yet, what more there was to it qualitatively (c.f. 2 Thes 1:10; 1 Jn 3:2; Jn 20:19).

I believe that it will be the same with us and God. We know that God reacts to men, but we will be astonished at the quality of that reaction. That God "reacts", makes sense just as the fatherhood of God makes sense (Eph. 3:14-15). God does not make man His pattern, but rather, since we are in the pattern of God, we are able to understand Him in a very important and loving way.

### UNNECESSITATED KNOWLEDGE

We, ourselves, may understand how an all knowing agent can experience disappointment or surprise and delight by considering the following: Reflect for a moment on the way you felt, for example, when several of you and your friends began to play a game involving the throw of dice. If your first throw was sixes, you were shocked and elated; if snake eyes, the opposite unbelief. Intellectually, one throw is as likely as another (we would be all knowing in the sense of knowing all possibilities in this case), but the odds against any particular throw are remote for us.

Much of our revelation concerning God tends to show that the all knowing (omniscient) attribute of God is to be understood, in part, in the sense of His knowing all possibilities. This is my view of what I call "unnecessitated knowledge". It is unnecessitated in the sense that this kind of knowledge does not have to be actualized but it may be actualized with God remaining sovereign. First of all, though, God knows all that is (i.e. all that has existed or is now existing -- Prov. 15:3) and all that He will cause to come into being (Acts 15:18). This kind of all-knowing has to do with all that is actual. God knows the future truths in willing them (not unlike my basket ball playing friend). But, second, the Bible teaches that there are some things that may come to pass apart from God making it necessary even though He made it possible (e.g. Ex. 4:8,9; Is. 54:14,15). The fall of man is the first and best example of this. Because He knows all possibilities, He has what I call "unnecessitated knowledge." This is one view of God's omniscience that is rejected by the Calvinist.

### ANTHROPOMORPHISMS THAT TEACH THE NATURE OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING MAN'S FAITH

If God has created in Man an agent that may bring something uncaused into being (uncaused by God), then God may not know the actuality of its being; merely the possibility. The Scriptures plainly teach that God learns of the actuality of our faith and love coming into being (or, being rejected) whereas He knew them only as possibilities beforehand. The nature of what God learns does not change God's nature at all. He does not learn in the sense that He adds to what makes Him God.

The following are some examples of God learning actualities, and are "proofs" that there are some things that He does not know in the sense of knowing their actuality by virtue of causing them:

Deut 8:2 "And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not."

Deut 13:3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

2 Chron 32:31 "And even in the matter of the envoys of the rulers of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder that had happened in the land, God left him alone only to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart."

Gen 22:12 "And he said, 'Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.'"

Jer 3:7, 19-20 "I thought that after she had done all this she would return to Me, but she did not ...."

(I will omit discussion here of the many passages on God's repentance in response to something in man)

The deep, uncertain and wishful feeling of God is expressed again in Deut 5:29; "Oh, that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments ...."

This is an expression of God's will. It shows that God has granted the possibility of such a heart but not an irresistible necessity or actuality. Deut 29:4 says, "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear." This shows that the initiative in making faith a possibility lies in God's grace and in that respect, when they do have faith it is to God's credit. This point is not obvious to those steeped in the Reformed tradition. These scriptures teach us that God wants to give the Israelites a heart to know but they are refusing to have faith in Him. Deut 31:21 explains it further; "... for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore." God sees the developments of our faith or unbelief apparently as they develop.

Genesis 18:21 appears to be a case of God testing to know a people's faith response to His grace. It is sometimes dismissed too easily as crudely anthropomorphic. It says, "I [the LORD] will go down now, and see if they [Sodom] have done entirely according to its outcry, which has come to Me; and if not I will know." Superficially it tends to reveal that from afar God cannot discern what exists in our location. I suggest, however, that

what He will come to know is whether or not He will elicit any faith upon His special visitation. Up until this visitation, complete non-faith rejection has been Sodom's response to their knowledge of God. (On the other hand, God's visitation on Nineveh, through Jonah, elicited faith. c.f. Lu. 19:44)

An interesting aspect of this particular text is the revelation of God's deliberation about whether or not He would even share His intentions with Abraham (Gen. 18:17-19). This tends to support the notion that some of God's intentions are formed in our time.

Because I part with the Calvinist over accepting the Greek, "Unmoved Mover" description of God as an influence in my interpretation of Scripture, I hold a view of anthropomorphisms that reveals truths about God that the Calvinist rejects on non-Biblical grounds. In some sense, God actually waits on our response to Him (Is.30:18).

## ANTINOMY

Some Calvinists have tried to persuade me that some Bible truth is in the form of an "antinomy". An antinomy is defined as an apparent contradiction between two ideas; a paradox. In the case before us, these Calvinists say the Bible teaches both a), that God controls the occurrence of absolutely everything and b), man is responsible for what he does. As J.I. Packer puts it,

An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see that each must be true on its own, but you do not see how they both can be true together. [\[9\]](#)

Packer believes Bible antinomies to be only apparent and (hopefully) only unreconciled until the resurrection:

We may be sure that they all find their reconciliation in the mind and counsel of God, and we may hope that in heaven we shall understand them ourselves. But meanwhile, our wisdom is to maintain with equal emphasis both the apparently conflicting truths in each case, to hold them together in the relation in which the Bible itself sets them, and to recognize that here is a mystery which we cannot expect to solve in this world. [\[10\]](#)

If it were a given that God controls the occurrence of absolutely everything, I would be tempted to join the Calvinists. You know by now, however, that I don't believe the Bible teaches this view of God's control; so the antinomy argument doesn't persuade me. I don't see the Bible teaching both a) and b). I know some people who think that the case is similar to light being modeled by unreconcilable particles and waves. They say that mysteriously, both models are true of light. Even if the particle model and the wave model are both true of light I am not enjoined thereby to make the Calvinist's view of God's sovereignty true. Some Calvinists have urged me to look at the "problem" as one of the mysteries of God. This I would be willing to do if it were necessary, but the Bible

doesn't make it necessary. In fact, many of the Bible "mysteries" were temporal in nature; they were designed to be revealed.

A Calvinist might respond that Romans 11:36 definitely teaches a), above: "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." This is not a full, precise expression that makes definitive whether "all" refers to all possibilities or all actualities. We draw too much doctrine from this one source if we neglect to consider all that the Bible teaches on the subject. When everything is weighed, compared, and harmonized we see a God who does not cause the sin of man, but a man who is responsible for his own sin.

The antinomy argument tries to preserve both the God-caused and man-responsible notions together. I argue that the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of men are not logically contradictory, but I urge it from the Biblical view of the way God controls everything. Packer's view even when we consider it on its own presuppositions, for the sake of argument, may turn out to be holding to real inconsistencies and not just apparent contradictions.

## THE APPARENT INCONSISTENCY OF THE TRINITY ARGUMENT

I am told that I should be persuaded to hold both a) and b) above because the Bible reveals both that God is one and that He is three and these are consistent though apparently inconsistent. Although I have already begun to show that a) is not Biblical I would also respond by saying that I look at the Trinity as a truth whose nature is mysterious but as a case upon which I think I have some insight concerning its consistency. But, even if I had no such insight, I believe the concept to be consistent because it is Biblical.

Concerning my alleged insight: I see that the Flatlanders in Abbott's book [\[11\]](#) could call a three dimensional cube (or "super square" as they might say) both one and six. Flatlanders are two dimensional squares and, according to the scenario, if a cube rested on their plain they would perceive only the one square face of it that was in their dimension even though the cube would have five other faces. By analogy I can see where the Flatlander's apparent inconsistency (with the concept of a being that was both six and one) is similar to the apparent inconsistency of the Trinity. There are extra-biblical reasons for the idea of the Trinity to be consistent though it may not seem to be so on the face of it (pun intended).

I have not been persuaded, however, to see any similar consistency of a) and b). They are held by the Calvinist as a consequence of non-biblical presuppositions about God.

## SUMMARY

Much of what God reveals about Himself is in the form of anthropomorphisms (man-form language). This seems to be a natural way of getting us to understand Him since we are created in His likeness.

Eliminating the uniquely human element in anthropomorphisms seems to be a good way of arriving at an understanding of what God is like. But, this assumes that we already know enough of what God is like to know what is uniquely human and thus what is revealed about God in an anthropomorphism. We should be cautious about assuming too much here since we are explicitly made like God.

Many Bible statements about God seem to represent Him in an unlimited sense. For example, in Isaiah 46:10, God says that He declares the end from the beginning. We might infer from this that God's knowledge of everything that will actually come to pass is totally unlimited (in the sense that He always knows it as an actuality). On the other hand, from anthropomorphisms we might infer that God is limited in His knowledge of every future actuality. One initial approach to a guide for interpreting these apparent inconsistencies is to let the "unlimiting" notions about God overrule the "limiting" notions. Letting one notion exclude the other does a disservice to Biblical revelation. There is no reason to believe that God has lost control of the future if He limits Himself by creating a creature whose faith is not determined or known beforehand. Such a self-limit seems to be the teaching of much Bible revelation concerning God's knowledge about our faith.

Calvin's "accommodation" view does not account for the content of what is revealed about God in many situations, and in fact seems to allow for obscuring of truths about God.

From Bible language we learn that God knows a) all that is true now, b) all that He will cause to be true in the future, and c) all that is allowed to be possible but not necessarily true. The last of these I, myself, refer to as "unnecessitated knowledge".

The fact that the Bible uses "analogical" meanings when speaking of God will not serve to completely alter the sense of anthropomorphic texts. It is useful language for giving us a good understanding of many things we talk about including such things as God, mind, logic, goodness, etc.

The antinomy view of some Bible revelation allows that both divine appointment of all that occurs and human responsibility are taught in the Bible; that they are both divinely revealed truths and must be consistent since truth is one. The weakness of resorting to this view is the doubt that it leaves concerning whether or not all reasonable steps have been taken to reconcile the two conflicting claims. Not having to claim the absolute view of divine appointment is admissible once the Greek presuppositions about God are not allowed to dominate our thinking.

The next chapter deals with how it is that God limits Himself without losing control of what He wants to control.

NOTES

D. A. Carson; Exegetical Fallacies (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, pp.94-97

Institutes I,17,13

Helm, The Providence of God (IVP, Downers Grove, pp.51-54)

As referred to in God's Strategy, Forster& Marston, p.191

The Grace of God and the Will of Man, Clark Pinnock, ed., Bethany House Publishers, p. 110

e.g. "The glass was clear" vs. "That he ought to give thanks was clear". Or, "\_that You might be clear in Your judging." (Ps.51:4). These are "equivocable" usages.

An example of using analogous proportions in trying to imagine something that does not exist in our perceptions is found in Abbott's Flatland and in Dionys Burger's Sphereland. From these books we learn much about thinking by use of analogies and proportionalities. For example, as perpendicular and parallel lines are to a square, so are perpendicular and parallel squares to a cube\_ Now then, to move beyond our experience, consider this: As perpendicular and parallel squares are to a cube, so are perpendicular and parallel cubes to a hypercube. A hypercube would be an object in four spatial dimensions which we could imagine only partially as having some sort of cube-ness properties. In the same way, "Flatlanders" could only imagine in some sort of impoverished way that a cube had square-ness properties. Just as a sphere, for instance, has circle-ness, so does a hypersphere have sphere-ness. Now, to bring it back to theology, just as men have responsibility (which is to say that they must satisfy God's justice), so, God has inconceivably greater responsibility (which is to say that He must answer to Himself in a way that we can't quite imagine). To further illustrate the "univocal"/"analogical" use of words I will use a syllogism. A "syllogism" is a logically consistent argument consisting of two propositions and a conclusion deduced from them. If the terms in the propositions and conclusion have identical ("univocal") meanings, then the conclusion is valid. If the terms have largely differing ("equivocable") senses, then the validity of the syllogism may be faulty. But if the differences are only ones of proportion ("analogical"), then there remains a qualified validity: Proposition 1.) If we are able to do either the right or the wrong in the choices we make, then we are responsible for the action we take. [note: c.f. Romans 2:15] Proposition 2.) If God makes it so that we are not able to do one of the apparent options (right or wrong), then He is responsible for our choice. [note: For instance, if God made Adam and Eve unable to do the right, then He is responsible for their choice, and He would have to satisfy His justice in the matter.] Conclusion: Hence, if we are responsible for an action, then God made us able to have done otherwise. Note that the word "able" here is spoken of with identical ("univocal") meanings in each case. "Responsible" is used analogously since in one case it means in control and having to give satisfaction to God, the other One, and in the next case it means in control and having to give satisfaction to Oneself. There is some greater degree of proportion with God than with man. Adam, for example, was responsible to obey God's command (i.e. "eat not of the one tree"). The Son of God, on the other hand,

was responsible to obey the command of the Father in an expanded way (Jn. 12:49-50), i.e. He was given all that He should speak. The Father, likewise, was responsible to the Son (Ps. 2:8,9; Jn. 17:1,2). Analogically the responsibility is proportionately greater, but not incomprehensibly so.

It is unlimited except for the nature of cases where limits are understood or self-imposed. An "understood" limit, to use a different example, would be the limit to breaching the law of contradiction in logic. For God to do so would be to contradict His nature; it would be the same as to say that God can be both God and not God.

J.I. Packer, *\_Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God\_* (Leicester: IVP 1961, pp.18,19)

*Ibid.*,p.23

Edwin A. Abbott, *\_Flatland\_* (Harper Perennial, NY, NY ;94)

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Calvinism's View Of "The Heart Of A King"*

In this chapter I intend to deal with the subjects of evil and freedom. Concerning freedom I want to show how close I am to joining the Calvinists in their view of it. Concerning evil I want to show two things. First, the need to define it and distinguish between meanings of evil and second, to see if there is an answer to the classical "problem of evil".

#### GOD'S CONTROL OF UNBELIEVERS

I have taken the title of this chapter from the often quoted Proverbs 21:1; "The King's heart is in the hand of the LORD; He directs it like a watercourse wherever He pleases." The Calvinist will often quote this verse to show that God is the origin and cause of all that happens. Here is what I think the proverb actually teaches.

We are taught that even those human beings who are least answerable to others are not outside of God's control. Kings represent the most sovereign of all men and yet, they too are manipulated by God. We see some examples of it in Ezra. The very first verse tells us that God, in order to fulfill prophecy, stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus to do His will. Also, chapter 6:22 says explicitly that the LORD had "turned the heart of the King" of Assyria to help the returning Israelites.

The second part of Proverbs 21:1 makes a remarkable comparison which I think reveals how God accomplishes the "turning". It is after the manner that a watercourse is directed. The mechanics of a stream or an irrigation ditch are dependent on the effects of gravity which induce water to "seek" the lowest level. Since the fall of man, men also have a bent toward sin and suppression of the truth about God. This downward bent is what God channels and directs. He frustrates certain movements of men in one direction much as an engineer would dam up the irrigation flow in one direction to have it go in another direction.<sup>[1]</sup> The engineer accomplishes his desire even though the flow continues to be downward. It is uncanny that the metaphor used should be water rather than the imagery of "command" or "dictation" of these men.

God, however, is able to present necessities to man in a way which causes him to obey whichever necessity is the most urgent. Because man inevitably seeks to avoid conflict and tensions, and because he cannot escape the mastery over him of his lusts and pride, he is in a position to be manipulated by God (c.f. Jer. 13:23).

A further illustration of God exploiting this phenomenon would be Genesis 50:20 where Joseph tells his brothers "you intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

To the extent that Calvinists say that God is the very origin of evil intent in a heart; to that extent I think they are wrong. God, however, directs men's "downward" intent to accomplish His good and just intent. The account of king Ahab of Israel ( 1 Kings 22:19-

23) is an illustration of a king's evil heart being manipulated by God who used among "all the hosts of heaven" those spirits that were not good (i.e. "a deceiving spirit"). Downward was the bent of both king and spirit.

## GOD'S CONTROL OF A "GOOD" HEART

God also has full control of a believer's heart (while he is believing). This is because the believer is persuaded by God (by reason of his belief) to "walk in the Spirit" and be obedient. Philippians 2:13 says, "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do His good pleasure." God's work in us is not of coercion but of persuasion. Revelation 3:20 indicates that He stands at the door and knocks and that He will come in with those who will open it.

As the verse previous ( 3:19) indicates, Christians may sometimes behave in unbelieving ways from which they need to repent. Such a person's heart is "in the hand of the LORD" in a different sense than the repentant person's heart. The unrepentant Christian is "rebuked" and "disciplined" by the Lord. This would indicate that God directs the course of men's behavior in three different ways. Unbelievers' hearts by reason of their downward bent, believers' hearts by reason of their belief and consequent affection, and wayward Christians by reason of the attention-getting value of negative reinforcements.

This arrangement seems to leave nothing outside of God's control regarding what humans do. This is not precisely true, however. In spite of His negative reinforcements, some believers become apostate unbelievers which is not God's will. Moreover, though the heart of an unbeliever may be turned some ways, God's self limitation does not allow every conceivable turn. One such "turn" (among others that might exist) that God has put beyond His absolute control is our faith and repentance. It's true we cannot have faith in Him merely by our own willing, for as Romans 9:16 makes clear, our faith must be preceded by God's mercy. When in His mercy God grants that we should hear the gospel of our salvation, we are granted opportunity. This opportunity is not of our doing.

At this point, the Calvinist who rejects any self- limitation on God's part must also reject that God grants opportunity in the sense that all hearers may receive or reject the gospel. Because he has presupposed a God fashioned by Greek philosophical ideas, he must also believe in irresistible grace (TULIP) and in a God who has absolute control of whether or not a man has faith. They don't see grace as opportunity, but as force, as it were. They would have to see Colossians 2:13, for instance, as defining that force as God making us to come alive ("regeneration") before we have faith so that we can then have faith. But, verse 12 explains that through our faith we are "raised" with the Christ who was raised from death. [\[2\]](#) This faith is what is commonly called "saving faith". It teaches us that our regeneration is through faith. It shows that faith is first exhibited and that new spiritual life follows.

## COMPULSION

Some "beliefs" that men come to are compelled by God, but such "beliefs" are not the same as "saving faith" in God. In Exodus 3:19, for example, God reveals that He compels Pharaoh's belief and in 4:8,9 God has contingency plans for compelling the elders of Israel to believe that Moses had been sent by Him (Ex.4:8,9). It says, "Then the LORD said, 'If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground.'" God knows that it is not inevitable that they would believe the first two signs. Even the contingent nature of God's plans concerning "non-saving belief", however, tends to show God's self-limitation with regard to the issues surrounding man's faith. Nowhere does the Bible teach that God compels man's "saving faith". Passage after passage, however, shows that God grants the possibility of our faith but not an irresistible necessity. [3] Our faith is therefore of both God and man in this sense: It is of God to grant the possibility where none had existed and it is of man to respond. Grace is from God; faith, in an environment of grace, is from man (c.f. Acts 5:31, 11:18).

## FREE WILL

Freedom may be viewed from different aspects. For example, the man who refuses to accept God's law, which questions his behavior, does so believing himself to be free. He truthfully has freely done what he has wanted to do ("compatibilism" to the Calvinist). He claims that he has performed an act of freedom. He claims to have liberated himself from the law. That man, however, is not ultimately free because he could not have done otherwise but transgress God's law. He has no real freedom of his will. His passions, instincts, and "needs" are liberated, but not himself. He shows in what he does that he cannot master them but is completely enslaved to them. How then can such a person be free to have faith in Christ? Apart from God's grace he cannot, but by God's grace he is granted freedom toward believing Christ to be his Savior when he is confronted with the gospel. He is not granted freedom from his passions (even after conversion!). He is not granted that he will not sin (but the truth sets him free from having to continue in it-- Jn.8:32). He is not granted that works should save him. The only freedom he is granted is opportunity to trust a Savior outside of himself. This singular opportunity is the only real freedom of the will ever granted to men.

## "SOLO GRATIA"

"Solo gratia", meaning "only of grace", is a phrase often used as a slogan among Calvinists to emphasize their contention that man contributes nothing to his salvation. The Bible makes it clear that man can contribute no "works" toward his salvation ("not of works lest any man should boast" -- Eph.2:9). But the Bible also makes it clear that a man's salvation is, in part, conditional upon faith ("by grace through faith" -- Eph.2:8). The Calvinist will insist, without clear proof, that faith is not a condition proposed by God but is one of His instruments over which He has absolute control. We must conclude, however, that a man's faith is of man and not a work and that it is essential to salvation. The word "contributes", which Calvinists use, is not easily dissociated from the

concept of "work". Therefore I wouldn't say that my faith "contributes" to my salvation. We ought to say, however, that our salvation is "conditional" on our faith and that our salvation is "only of grace" as opposed to any good works being involved.

## TWO SENSES OF "WORK"

Sometimes the word "work" in the Bible is used in a sense that does not denote earning something. When it is used in the earning or meriting sense, the writers have in mind good deeds, good works, or "works of righteousness" ( Titus 3:5). This type of action does not contribute toward our salvation.

On the other hand, when the word "work" is used in the sense of "functioning", it is even applied to the action of faith. Some examples are Galatians 5:6 which states, "for in Christ Jesus [nothing counts] ... but faith working through love." And, James 2:22 which says, "you see that his faith and his actions were working together." This illustrates that our faith functions (operates) for us without it being a work of righteousness in the earning sense. Faith involves an action, but it is not a "good" action in the earning sense.

For this reason we cannot boast about our faith even though by it we pursue righteousness ( Rom. 9:32, 1 Tim. 6:11). I once used a scheme while teaching in church to illustrate the nature of faith. Before the teaching I hid a fifty dollar bill in one of the shoes I was wearing. During the lesson I explained to the group of about 25 that the appeal to believe the gospel might be likened to what I was about to do. I explained that I had a fifty dollar bill in my right shoe and that whoever would come up and get it could have the fifty dollars. After a pause of several seconds a sixteen year old suddenly came and got the fifty dollars. Most everyone else was stunned. That person had exhibited faith in my word. I continue to see that person, but not at the time of the incident nor ever afterwards have I heard boasting concerning the faith that was had. The faith was accompanied by an action, but the faith itself was not a "good" work even though the person was responsible for having the faith.

This is how it is with our salvation. We may boast in Christ in the sense of the greatness of the gift, but we don't boast in our faith as some good accomplished. That is why I agree with Dr. John Piper (in a message on "Preaching as Worship") when he says, "Faith, more than any other human act, glorifies God and humbles man." When people believe God (or me, above), it honors Him. But if human faith were the irresistible result of God's working, it would not have the distinction of being any more glorious than the creation of any other thing in the universe. All things that God has created are truly glorious, but, apart from faith itself, they have been irresistibly created. In the human act of faith, God triumphs. He does not have the glory of "triumph- over-resistance" in any other matter (c.f. 2 Cor. 2:14, Col. 2:15).

I conclude that the work that effects our salvation is only of grace (it is God's work). Also, the function that our faith plays is only possible because of grace.

## ARBITER

An "arbiter" is someone who decides what will or should be accepted; he is someone who controls (as in controlling destiny). Is God, therefore, the arbiter of man's destiny or is man? By God's design in making man, He decided that faith would be accepted for a destiny of life with Himself. This makes neither God nor man the sole arbiter, for God decides upon whom He will have mercy, but He has designed the situation such that those granted mercy are granted an arbiter-like function. The only viable decision for man, of course, is to agree that God's decision be the one that should be accepted. I count the Calvinist's harping about me "wanting to be the final arbiter of my destiny" as specious. The fact that the Bible teaches that God limits His control of some human decisions makes their complaint moot.

## SUMMARY ON FAITH

Since faith is a condition for salvation, it is therefore man's action made possible by God. The action of faith is the only truly free thing that men ever do. The rejection of such faith (being part of the same action) is also free ( Rev. 2:21). Men may be free to do what their carnal desires dictate but only concerning faith are they allowed by God to be actually, metaphysically free. When man rejects having faith or acts in faith he is imaging, in a sense, God's freedom. God is free to do or not to do a thing if there are no overriding reasons for it being against His nature. God gave Adam that ability concerning faith. [4] Adam fell and man lost that ability to have faith. Through the work of the second Adam (Christ), man can once again hear the call to faith and, in hearing, be granted the freedom to respond.

## "CONCURRENCE"

Part of the Calvinist's teaching about the "heart of a king" has to do with the extent of God's responsibility in the actions of His creatures. To what extent has God "concurred" or cooperated with actions that are sinful? Does He initiate such actions or is He the author of sin?

I agree that the power to do anything that we do comes from God; even the power to sin. But, like a battery that powers an automatic device, God's operation in the things we do is morally removed from actions that initiate sinning. God does not set man's heart going in a sinful direction ("initiate sinning") rather, He "turns" man's heart. He forestalls man from doing one sinful thing which results in man turning to another sinful action. Neither sinful action is God's perfect will, but the resulting sinful action is used by God to accomplish His purposes. God is not responsible for the man's resulting new sin since there is nothing wrong with prohibiting the original sinful intention.

God is also not responsible for determining whether or not men shall respond to Him in faith since He has made our faith to be an absolutely free response. This does not negate passages like Romans 11:36 which states that "all things are through Him." Even the results of man's response to God are "through Him" to the extent that He gives the ability (the power) to man to make the response.

Calvinists, however, would make the totality of creaturely activity wholly and utterly at the disposal of the divine. To do this they resort to the concept of "antinomy" of which I addressed in chapter four. The Calvinist's antinomy argument states that God determines what men will do and that man is responsible for what he does; that both God and man are 100% responsible (that 100% plus 100% is 100%). They say we don't know how this mystery can be, but that both are true without God being responsible for man's sin. Appeal is sometimes made to the mystery of the union of God and man in Christ, but in doing so they have not established the need for an antinomy mystery regarding God's determinism and man's responsibility. Calvinists' profound agnosticism is necessary to keep them from reforming their faith.

## GOD CREATES CALAMITY

Some of the things the Bible tells us that God does, seem at first to be so harmful and distressing that we may wonder how He could avoid being the author of sin. Here are three examples: ) "The LORD said to him 'who has made man's mouth? Who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?'" ( Ex. 4:11)

2.) "Behold, my own son seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite! Let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD has bidden him." ( 2 Sam. 16:11)

3.) "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster [evil]; I, the LORD, do all these things."( Is.45:7) My considered response to all this is not that it shows God to be the author of sin, but that there are major differences between sin and evil and even distinctions that need to be made in the use of the word "evil".

## SIN, EVIL, & EVIL

Calvinists and others often use the word "evil" in two or three different senses without being clear about which sense is being employed. "Evil" is a broad word that covers meanings such as sinful action, harm, and judgment. if used indiscriminately it could lead to confused thinking about God's role in the origin of sin. God, for instance, may rightfully cause harm or judgment but will not do what is wrong since wrong defines what is opposed to His nature. Sinful action is both opposed to God's nature and it is wrong, so we can say that God does no sinful thing (c.f. Hab 1:13).

Verse 3.), above, states that God creates evil. The context clearly excludes, for instance, that God determined that Adam should sin. The "evil" spoken of in Isaiah 45:7 is used in the "harm" and "judgment" sense. God is revealing that He is the One who allows kingdoms to rise and that He is the One who judges them ("create calamity").

Verse 2.) is an example of the outworking of God's "judgment" on David's bloody guilt in killing Uriah the Hittite. The Benjamite was, in part, announcing the fulfillment of the curse promised of God in 2 Samuel 12:11.

Evil has further distinctions because there can also be a distinction between harm that is judgment and harm that is remote from judgment or incidental. The Bible often speaks of God sending evil in the sense of judgment upon nations by sending other nations to conquer them. One example, however, of incidental harm in this connection is found in Isaiah 54:15. God says there that "If anyone does attack you [future Israel], it will not be My doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you." Here the harm is incidental because it is action that is removed from God's immediate judging activity. The harm is incidental from Israel's point of view, but results in judgment on the evil intent of the attacking nations.

I think that even in a sinless world there might be "evil" in the sense of incidental harm. I can imagine that even sinless Jesus may have at times gotten a speck of dust in His eye ( Matt. 7:3) or harmful splinters ( Heb. 5:8). Such occurrences would not be the outworking of judgment. They would be mere instances of evil in the sense of harm for which greater skill and triumph ahead was planned.

With verses like 1.) above, we have examples of what men call "evil" when they ask the question, "How can a good God allow (or cause) evil in the world?"

We have already established that God does not cause sin (initiate sinning) in the world. We also know that He does cause harm in the form of judgment. We can see where, by the results of our disobedience to God's covenant (e.g. Deut. 7:12-15), we may suffer. Two things remain that may not be clear about evil:

a.) How could a good God allow sin (evil) to begin in and exist in the world? b.) If some harm (evil) that God causes is not clearly linked to the judgment of an individual's sinful actions (as in infants born blind), how can it be of God's goodness?

Jesus gives one answer to b.) in John 9:3 where the cause (at least the overriding cause) of the man born blind is that the glory of God's working in him might be displayed. From another point of view, the harm God causes anyone born blind (for example) is only classified "harm" because of viewing that condition in relation to others that are not blind. Were everyone in the world born blind such a condition would not be viewed as an undeserved "evil", or harm. This is sort of how we view the "harm" of death. God gives and takes life. Since everyone dies, we are not struck with notions of unfairness (in relation to others) unless the death seems to occur too soon. But if everyone died "too soon" we would not even classify such deaths as undeserved evil.

Therefore, so called "harm" caused by God can be done to glorify Himself and also it may be wrongly viewed by us as injustice, whereas, in reality the problem may be our sinful resentment that arises out of comparison and jealousy (e.g. The "workers in the vineyard" parable or Cain). By right, none of us should get to work at all in the vineyard.

**THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

I have tried to reduce the classical problem of evil to question a.): How could a good God allow sin to begin in the world?

I think the answer is similar to a situation involving "good" parents and their children. They choose to give birth to their children and as parents they remain good even though they have procreated a "situation" of possible evil. The parents remain good because they have not made it necessary that their children be evil. In fact, they have given them every opportunity to turn out good and the responsibility for evil rests with the children. Imperfect though this illustration is, it is similar to what God "allowed" in the creation of Adam. It is the free-will defense of the "problem of evil". The problem of evil is not one of divine weakness, meaning that God does not prevent "evil" because He can't. It is rather a result of self limitation on God's part in creating the kind of creature that Adam was.

If we suppose that "really good" parents wouldn't even have children, knowing that evil was a possibility, then I think the defense for the "Problem" could best be answered in the manner that St. Paul does in Romans 9 concerning the "problem of the evil of unbelief". Paul basically says that God is God and should be trusted and not questioned. John Frame summarizes well that argument. He explains that Paul appeals to God as being the standard for His actions. "God, as sovereign Lord, is the standard for His own actions. He is not subject to human judgment; on the contrary, our judgment is subject to His word." Once we correctly understand how we know what's what about God, "we can be assured, despite our questions, of God's good character, for on that matter the word of God is clear." [\[5\]](#)

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that God has at His disposal all things except whether or not an individual will have faith. This exception is not because of God's impotency but because of His chosen self-limitation in the nature of the case. This is what I call a higher view of God's sovereignty than that held by Calvinists. I realize that to the Calvinist I have necessitated that a man's faith be causeless and that seems incoherent to them. My answer has been that our faith is a response provoked by God's word to us but that it is not irresistibly caused.

When asked, "What causes successful resistance in one who resists?", I respond that men have made a cause-less choice. I am able to postulate such a choice on the grounds of God having made us in His image. When we speak of God being free, we mean that He is free to do or not do a thing, provided that there are no overriding reasons in His character to prevent it. It should not be thought of as accidental for God to freely do something. God can be the first cause of anything He decides to do because His free decisions have their origin in an absolute personality. Being made in God's image, Adam was created with a likeness to that absolute personality and that ability to make a causeless free choice (provided there were no overriding reasons in his immature character to prevent it). [\[6\]](#)

Dr. R.C. Sproul tells the story of a horse that has set before him two types of food that are desired exactly equally. Sproul says that because the horse has no superior inclination for one over the other, that the horse will never eat because the circumstances will never allow for a decision of one food over the other. By this anecdote Sproul would show the impossibility of a cause-less choice. I have shown that God is free to create a cause for His choice out of nothing, as long as it is consistent with His character. God is not under necessity to do the things He does (e.g. bring about the creation of our universe). God is free and does not do what He does out of necessity, mechanistically. When He chooses to do one thing out of several equally possible (and consistent with His nature) options, there is no reason to call His action arbitrary. To do so would be slanderous. If the anecdotal horse decided that He would demonstrate the glory of his freedom by choosing brown over yellow food (though both were equally appealing), he would have been moved by a desire to demonstrate his glory. The actual choice of brown over yellow, however, was created out of nothing.

By reason of man being in God's image, I have shown that God has created one who, like Himself, may create out of nothing a free response to God. Adam's response to God was consistent with the free aspect of his nature. Our response to God's grace will be made with the freedom Adam had. This is possible because of God's grace in Christ, and God's grace is not a force.

After all is weighed, compared, and harmonized we see that God turns the heart of a king away from things by forestalling him, and, as a consequence, He turns the king's heart toward other matters and circumstances, but He does not turn it irresistibly toward Himself.

## NOTES

Cyrus, himself, and his accomplices had diverted the flow of the Euphrates to conquer Babylon. c.f. Edwin Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids,p.86)

I think this faith operates even in people who cannot speak or think. It is likely a springing up of a desire in a person to trust the Savior when they sense His appeal. Such faith would be a disposition to hear and obey the gospel, even though the person is not yet able to understand it. He is raised to life by grace through faith.

e.g. Rev. 2:21, Jn. 1:7, Jas. 1:21, Deut. 5:29, Rom. 5:2, Matt. 8:10, Jn. 5:34, Jn. 7:17, Acts 17:27, Rom. 16:26, 1Tim. 2:4, Heb. 11:6, 1 Jn. 2:2, Rev. 22:17

Adam was good but his nature was not holy like God's. Adam's nature had the "imperfection" of needing maturity\_it was not that he was flawed. God's design was to make Adam mature and holy like Himself by grace through faith.

op. cit. Frame p.178

I think man's mature character in the resurrection will prevent unholy choices for all eternity.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Calvinism's View Of "The Inscrutable Basis Of Election"*

Calvinists believe that those of us who are saved were selected to be saved from eternity past on the basis of God's will alone. In saying this, the Calvinist excludes the possibility that God would be acting on a will to respond to something in man. They also believe that we cannot look into this "will" and see any reason why one was selected and not another.

In the book's Introduction I showed how the early church writers (AD 150 - 400) tended to teach that God foreknew from eternity some fact about each, particular human being upon which He based His decision to, save or not save them. [1]

In most cases the fact, in the early Fathers' view, was that these individuals would have or not have faith. The early church Fathers had read into the Bible texts the notions of Philo whose philosophy taught that God could foresee a future thing as though it had some type of virtual existence (apart from God causing it to exist).

Facts, however, do not have an independent existence. They are determined by God or by some other free agent. Before their determination, the facts do not exist. If this were not true then God and future facts would be dual ultimates or dual gods, and we know the Bible does not allow that. We have shown in earlier chapters that God limits His sovereignty in a way that allows man to freely determine his response to God's call to faith. In this particular and very limited way, men bring certain states into existence that have not been actually predetermined by God.

Augustine, as we saw, attempted to correct the early Fathers who did not think this way about facts. They often thought like Philo, that independent facts existed for God to see. Augustine's correction, as I have observed, was that God's election is not based on what God foresees from eternity, but is based on the mystery of His unsearchable will.

I agree with Augustine that God's choice of particular men is not based on what He foreknows or foresees about them from eternity. Even though 1 Peter 1:1,2 says that God's elect are "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God," the wording, "according to", does not require the understanding of, "on the basis of" ("according to" can mean "in a manner consistent with" or, "in a manner depending on" or both). Nor does it necessitate an individual's selection from eternity. Augustine did have warrant for making a correction, but, whatever the basis of God's choice, Augustine was wrong in thinking that the Bible teaches that God makes a choice from eternity of particular ones of us. The proof of this error has to do with clarity about St. Paul's meaning, first, with regard to the objects of election; whether he viewed the objects of his discussion as certain particular persons or as a class of persons, and second, whether Paul meant "selection" by his use of words like "elect."

I will deal with this question shortly, but before doing so it is important to affirm that I do agree with Augustine's observation that God's choice is based on His will. The critical

distinction being that I don't agree that God's will is any longer an obscure, inscrutable mystery. God's choosing is based on what He wants, but what He wants has been revealed to us in the New Testament. There we see that God's "choosing", "calling", "naming", or "election" is synonymous with His purpose towards men; a purpose which He has had from all eternity ( 2 Tim. 1:9). As I epitomized in chapter Three, God's purpose of the ages is, through the work of His Son to have a people for Himself who would be to the praise of His glory, whom He would possess by means of His grace through faith.

Such a choice; such a purpose; such a decision makes our Lord Jesus Christ the Elect One par excellence. He becomes the Elect One because He is the One whom the Father loved ( Eph. 1:6). God favored us in this One and in Him we are also chosen as His inheritance ( Eph. 1:11). We were not eternally "in Him", but the choice to include, in His purpose, those who by grace through faith would come to be "in Him", was an election made from eternity. When people enter into Christ, His election becomes their election. This result, in history, was by arrangements established from eternity.

What I have done in these last few sentences is to make plain that God's choice rests initially upon a corporate group; that is, the body of those who believe. Paul in Eph. 1 & 2 is oriented toward thinking in terms of groups (i.e. believers, unbelievers, Jews, Gentiles, c.f. 2:14). God would then have His choice rest upon each individual that is joined to His Son. The only individual who was actually "selected" from eternity was God's own Son. All other individuals are considered "elect" when they come to be in unity with the elect One.

Therefore, part of the error of some early Fathers into which Augustine continued, was the failure to distinguish the primarily corporate nature of God's election from a virtual selection of certain ones of us from eternity. The other part of the early Fathers' error was corrected by Augustine; that had to do with their belief that "foreknowledge from eternity" was the basis of God's election of particular persons. Foreknowledge, however, is the basis for the predestination of those who do believe, and a "commissioning" of them, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter.

SUMMARY We are made aware of God's intentions for us in the New Testament and it is called the mystery revealed. God's will regarding who should be saved is made plain. It is not as Saint Augustine said, "inscrutable". There are three possible views of what it means to be chosen by God and in conclusion I would like to give Forster and Marston's analysis of them:

The three views might be summarized thus:

- (a) Because of our works and merits we have earned the right to share the election of Christ (the Pelagian view).
- (b) God chose us individually before the world began, and because of that choice he gave us faith as an irresistible gift and put us into Christ (Augustine).

(c) God placed us in Christ not because we earned it or deserved it, but because in his free grace he counted our faith as right-standing. Since we are in Christ, and he is the chosen One, we are chosen in him and share his election.

Augustine was right to condemn view (a), but there are serious problems in his own view. What, in his view, is the significance of the phrase "in him"? In Ephesians the phrase "in Christ" occurs 14 times, "in whom" occurs 6 times and "in him" 4 times--always in reference to Christ. Ephesians 1:3 speaks of the blessings we have in Christ, and verse 4 is a direct continuation to add that we were also chosen in him. If Augustine were right then Paul surely needed only to say: "even as he chose us before the foundation of the world..." But Paul in fact says: "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world ..." Why should Paul have added the phrase "in him" if it had no function? As it is, its addition seems directly to contradict Augustine's view. Surely to be, a "believer" in this context means nothing else than to be "in Christ." Thus Augustin's words could be rendered as: "He chose them that they might be in `Christ,' not because they were already so." But Paul does not say that we were chosen to be put into Christ, but that we were chosen in Christ. If we were chosen (in Christ), then surely we were chosen because we were in him (and he has been chosen) --which is exactly what Augustine denied.

We have already seen (p. 140 in *\_Strategy\_*) the confusion caused by Augustine's application to the election of the believers, of Christ's words to the apostles in John 15:16. Yet it is this verse which Augustine used as the main support for his view! Thus we find him repeating three or four times an argument like this: "I ask, who can hear the Lord saying, 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you,' and can dare to say that men believe in order to be elected, when they are rather elected to believe ...". This is the mainstay of his argument, on the basis of which he effectively ignores the phrase "in him" in Ephesians 1:4.

These then, are the very serious problems in Augustine's view of election. But his view became so influential in western Christianity ... that we might think of the issue as a choice between views (a) and (b) above, which it certainly is not. Any true Christian must rule out view (a), as did Augustine, but whether Augustine's own view or view (c) is the correct one needs to be given full considerations (note: Roger T. Forstar and V. Paul Marston, *\_God's Strategy in Human History\_* (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, 1973)]

I conclude that beginning with men's faith in Him, God foresees the certain affinity between the elect One and those who would cleave to Him by faith. In this sense we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God."

## NOTES

To the extent that some early Fathers may have taught God's election of individuals as based on His foreknowledge of them, beginning with their actual show of faith, to that extent I agree with those early Fathers as I will show further on. (c.f. Clement of Rome who by using the phrase "to partake of His election" in his famous first-century epistle,

shows that he thought of "election" of individuals to have a beginning with the individual's faith. Clement was a very early Father and may have been untainted by Philo and well acquainted with St. Paul ( Phil. 4:3).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Calvinism's View Of Some Biblical Terms*

In the last chapter I began to show how Augustine tried to be more precise than the early Church Fathers in their discussions about "the basis" of God's choice of those He saves. Part of the reason why he wound up with his wrong conclusions had to do with a misunderstanding of how Bible authors had used certain words like "elect", "call", "foreknow", and "predestine". Even some of the Fathers who were closer in time to the Bible writers seem to have misinterpreted them in some ways. Our biases tend to put a certain spin on the words we choose to use. To correct the early Fathers without being charged with "linguistic revisionism" by the traditionalists will require more expertise than I can provide. Therefore, to explain the use employed by these words and their authors, I will draw heavily on Forster and Marston.

#### THE GREEK WORD "EKLEKTOS" (ELECT)

"Eklektos" which is translated either as "chosen" or "elect" refers primarily to an office that God has conferred on a person (or body). That "someone" may have been a Judas who failed to live up to his calling ( Acts 1:17,25; Mk 3:14), or it may have been a nation such as Israel among whom were those who fell away from God's purpose for them ( Rom 11:22). Or, in some passages, that Someone, who is a chosen one, may be Christ ( Is 42:1). The fact that God's elect was Christ reveals not that our Lord was a selection, as though there were other candidates, but that He was God's "choice one" in the sense of His being God's precious one, valued one, or treasured one. We shall see later that this is how New Testament authors took the meaning of "elect" from Isaiah.

With both the early Fathers and with Augustine the selection aspect of "elect" dominates the meaning they give the word, though, certainly a selection is implied. The word, "elect", however, is used more as we would use a noun than as we would use a verb. But, because of the "selection" aspect of the word "election" (c.f. Rom. 9:11; 11:5, 7, 28; 1 Thes. 1:4; and 2 Pet. 1:10), the word, "elect", too, is understood as a verb. Having given the implied meaning of "selection" to the word "elect", attention is often mistakenly focused on the singular individual and the basis of God's selection of him from eternity past. "Election" (God's choice) does have the "selection" aspect to its meaning, but more so the "thing" aspect than the "action" aspect of the meaning of the word.

In the last chapter I showed from Ephesians 1 how the Church is elect because it is in Christ who is the elect One. Because of this we have been made "coheirs" of the same office as the chosen One of God. As part of His body we share in His chosenness. As Isaiah 49 sees Christ, "a light to the Gentiles", so are we the light of the world ( Matt 5:14). As Isaiah 49: 3 sees Christ, the One "in whom I will be glorified", so Ephesians 3:21 includes the Church: "unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus..." As He reigns, we reign with Him ( Rev 2: 26, 27). We are individually elect only because we have been identified with Christ through faith; a fact that only comes into being in our life-time.

Individuals, then, are not in the church because they are elect, but rather they are elect because they are in the church, which is the body of the elect One.

#### THE GREEK WORDS FOR "CALLED" OR "CALLING" (a word they use correctly)

Another Greek word, "Kletos", means "called" or "calling" (depending on which of the "kletos", "kaleo", "kaleomai", or "lklisis" forms is used).

I first discussed "Eklektos" which is an office of a person, persons, or thing (i.e. the Church). We are now discussing "kletos" which has verb characteristics. "Kletos" has a two meanings. It can mean "invited" or "named". "Called" in English can also mean "invited" or "named". Very often when the New Testament uses the word "called" (kletos) it means "named". For example, "...he should be called a Nazarene" ( Mat 2:23). Or, in the setting of Peter's vocation: "you shall be called Cephas." Likewise we read that Paul was "named an apostle", that we are "named saints" and "named children of God.

Many are sincerely invited (to be named with "the elect"), but few were actually becoming elect ones as Jesus plainly states in Matthew 22:14; "Many are called but few are chosen."

The terms "chosen/elect" (eklektos) and "called" (kietos) are not normally opposed to each other, but are rather to be identified. Sanday and Hedlam say that

by reading into "kletos" the implication that the call is accepted, Saint Paul shows that the persons of whom this is true are also objects of God's choice. By both terms Saint Paul designates not those who are destined for final salvation [though it is true that believers are headed for that destiny], but those who are "summoned" or "selected" for the privilege of serving God and carrying out His will. If their career runs its normal course it must issue in salvation, the "glory" reserved for them; this lies as it were at the end of the avenue; but "eklektos" only shows that they are in the right way to reach it. At least no external power can bar them from it; if they lose it, they will do so by their own fault. (note p. 149 Forster and Marston)

Therefore, we Christians are the ones who have been both "invited" and "named" as well as having been commissioned to an office having a task to perform. If New Testament authors used the words "elect" and "called" as Forster and Marston have urged, then interpretations that would suggest selection from eternity past should be treated guardedly. We should ask ourselves if our "hermeneutical circle" of presuppositions and resulting conclusions is reinforcing an interpretation of Scripture that is not explicit and likely not even implicit. Augustine and Calvin (following some of the early Fathers) interpreted these words with the idea of selection-from-eternity-past as foremost in their minds, even when applied to specific individuals. I think it is plain to see that this has led to undue support of the Calvinist's doctrine of salvation.

#### SPECIAL AND PRECIOUS

I conclude that the sense of the Holy Spirit's design in letting Peter and Paul use the words "elect" and "called" was to get across the meaning of "specialness" to those who are in Christ. We have been made special. We are the special ones. This is in line with the constant association of "belovedness" with references to Christ being elect.

This is seen most clearly in the way Gospel writers translate into Greek the words which God spoke during the transfiguration of Christ. Matthew renders it: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear you him." Mark is similar: "This is my beloved Son; hear you him." Luke, however, renders the same words using the Greek word for chosen: "This is my Son, my chosen, hear you him." We thus see that when the word "elect" or "chosen" is applied to Christ, its primary meaning is not one of selection, but one of belovedness.

The point may also be illustrated from Matthew's rendering of Isaiah 42:1. The Hebrew of Isaiah reads: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delights." The LXX [Septuagint version] quite naturally renders the word "chosen" by the Greek "eklektos", but Matthew does not follow the LXX in this instance. Instead he renders the Hebrew using the Greek word "agapetos" (beloved), thus: "Behold my servant whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased." Matthew, therefore, uses the word "beloved" as a substitute for the word "chosen" in this context.

In two other verses the connection with belovedness is marked. Thus in 1 Peter 2:4 we find that he is: "a living stone...with God elect, precious" and in 1 Peter 2:6 that he is "a chief cornerstone, elect, precious." The double linking of the election [state of being sense] of Christ to his preciousness to God shows us the connotation of the term. (Forster and Marston, pp. 129, 130)

Since the Church is elect in Christ we too share in the preciousness or specialness that being "elect" implies. Colossians 3:12, for example, says that we are "...God's chosen ones, holy and beloved ... " (c.f. 1 Thes. 1:4).

## FOREKNOW

Next time you read 1 Peter 1:1,2 try substituting "special" for "chosen" ("elect" in some versions): "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to [those] ... who are special according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."

How is it that in a manner consistent with (or, in a manner depending on) God's foreknowledge, we are special? I submit that it is because we are His, and there is a mutual love in existence. We are not His from eternity, but we are His because He has decided that those responding to Him in faith should be His. In this sense, God planned from ages past that such as responded this way would be special. As stated thus, there is not a necessity for God to have predetermined which individuals should so respond. The early Church Fathers had decided this much (as I have shown).

Many of these Fathers, however, had decided that "foreknow" implied that God knew from eternity, certain facts about each individual without determining these facts. I have tried to show this as an impossibility because it is a free agent who ultimately determines what facts shall be. If facts exist they ultimately have to be caused by someone.

The Calvinist presupposes that God determines the response that we make to Him if we are among those who become believers. It would therefore be consistent for the Calvinist to understand that certain people are special because from eternity, and in God's foreknowledge, they are designated to become believers. That is, He knows the fact ahead of time because He determines that it will be. I have tried to show, however, that both the early Fathers were wrong in saying that God knows in advance, independent facts, and that Calvinists (though being consistent) are, nevertheless, wrong in saying that God merely knows in advance that He will cause a certain response in certain selected people.

#### WHO OR WHAT GOD KNOWS IN ADVANCE

Since Scripture speaks of those whom God foreknew (c.f. Rom. 8:29; 1 Pet 1:1,2), people, themselves, seem to be in view rather than facts about people. From the Calvinist point of view this reinforces the notion that God (for His glory) selects certain people before their actual existence, to favor with salvation. This possibility may grammatically be conceded, but the fact that it is people who are in view also reinforces my argument that it is those who begin having faith in Him that God foreknows -- and He does so at the time of their having faith. [1] In both cases it is people whom God foreknows. In my case it is actual people; in the Calvinist's case it is potential people.

At first it may seem unnecessary for St. Peter and Paul to use the word "foreknow" concerning God's knowledge of those who merely begin having faith in Him. Why couldn't he just say, "know"? That is, "...to those who are elect according to the knowledge of God the Father...". Why say, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father"? It is interesting that St. Luke (quoting Paul) gives us a usage of the word "foreknow" that shows this understanding and use of "foreknow" to be on good standing in a place such as this where the word "know", alone, seems like it would be suitable.

Acts 26:4,5 says, "The manner of life I [Paul] have lived from my youth upward among my own nation and at Jerusalem, all that early life of mine, is well known to all the Jews; foreknowing me from the first if they are willing to testify, how that according to the strict sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee." Paul, it seems, could have used just the word "knowing" here. Why didn't he? Forster's comment on this is instructive:

Paul's manner of life was well known to all the Jews. He adds, therefore, "pre-knowing me from the first ... how that...I lived a Pharisee." He does not here, of course, imply that all the Jews knew him in the sense Of being on personal terms. Indeed, since he was brought up in Tarsus it is not likely that all the Jews at Jerusalem would have known him personally! The point was that they knew all about him. Here foreknowledge implies knowledge about the manner of life he lived from his earliest days. (Ibid. p.195) [2]

Paul's use here brings out a meaning of "foreknow" that might be expressed as a thorough understanding of a person and knowledge about him in advance of the present situation. When used in this sense the object of the word is a personal one but there may be no relationship necessarily involved [3] (c.f. this sense of the word "know" in Matt. 25:24, Jn. 2:24,25; Jn. 1:47,48; Jn. 5:42).

This blending of people being the subject of foreknowledge with facts-about-the-people being the subject of foreknowledge is strikingly brought out in 1 Peter 1: 18-20.

Literally the Greek reads: "were ye redeemed with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and unspotted -- Christ's -- foreknown, indeed, before the foundation of the world, and manifested in the last times because of you ." Peter's grammar here is not entirely consistent, and his exact meaning is unclear. From the sentence structure it would seem that the "foreknowledge", would naturally refer back to the noun "blood"; but in fact Peter makes its Greek form agree with the word Christ's! Does he mean, then, that God foreknew Christ before the world began? The Father did, of course, have a relationship with the Son before the creation -- and to interpret Peter to mean this would be quite consistent with the present word study. It does seem, however, that there would be little point in Peter stating this truth here.

The context of his words may help us. He has been saying that the suffering and death of Christ (which achieved our salvation of faith) was something that prophets of old dimly saw and sought to understand (v. 10, 11). Even angels desire to look into such matters. It is with this in mind (he says) that we should set our own aim and hope -- knowing that we were redeemed by Christ's blood, for which the Old Testament sacrificial lamb was merely a picture. He follows this with the words: "foreknown, indeed, before the world, but manifested in these last times for you." God foreknew the redemptive function of the Messiah before history began, but its actual manifestation did not come until the New Covenant. This we take to be Peter's meaning. [4]

The scriptures cited tend to support the definition of "foreknow" that I have given above; that is, "a thorough understanding of a person and knowledge about him in advance of the present situation (i.e. the situation and context in which the word, "foreknow" is used).

## PREDESTINE

With the word "predestine", the Calvinists are prone to have three faults concerning its usage. First, they tend to view the Bible as describing a person's regeneration as predestined whereas the Bible speaks of the end result in a person who is already converted as being predestined.

Second, they are often confused about the words, "elect" (or "election") and "predestine" as having the same meanings. And, they tend to use them interchangeably.

A third fault is that they ignore that certain conditions could affect the seeming inevitability in the idea of "predestine".

Regarding the third fault: conditionality in the concept of "predestination"; there is the whole subject of apostasy which is falling away from the faith. How Calvinists are not completely right about "apostasy" is well presented in other works so I will refer you to a few of them: Robert Shank's *Life in the Son*, Guy Duty's *If Ye Continue*, and Jeffery J. Meyers' (Scroll about 85% of the way down the page to a seminar on "Coming to Grips Honestly With The "Arminian" Language In The Bible", available in taped form from Biblical Horizons, P.O. Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588). Meyers is a Reformed pastor whose argument concerning the biblical view of apostasy is very telling. He admits that people who have been made alive in Christ may fall away eternally, but that God has determined that this is how it should be with some believers because they are not among the elect. Such believers have apparently been given the grace to be made alive in Christ but have not been given the grace to persevere. Such a view brings into question the Calvinian doctrine of Limited Atonement. If the atonement is only for the elect, how is it that this un-elect-one's sins were originally atoned for? I think Meyers' work also forces other questions for which *Ten Little Reasons* has some worthwhile answers.

Regarding the second fault: confusing "elect" and "predestine"; I think the rest of this chapter will help to clarify the confusion caused by Calvinian interchangeable usage.

Now, regarding the first fault: viewing a person's conversion as predestined; it is wrong to think of a person's conversion as predestined when the Bible focuses on the final glorification of those already regenerated, as the thing that is predestined. I can see how, from the long, "run-on" sentence in Ephesians 1:3-14, one might easily assume that the "predestinating" of verse 5 had taken place with the "choice" of verse 4. Since the "choice" took place "before the foundation of the world", and since it is the main verb of the sentence, then it might be natural to think that the predestination of individuals to glory and to conversion might have taken place before creation. [5] Two things weigh against this understanding. First, the Bible nowhere makes it explicit that our conversion is predetermined, and, second, it is evident that Paul is not concerned with making everything in this sentence agree with the time of the "choice" in verse 4. Verse 9, for example, would then read: "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world...making known to us the mystery of His will ... The "making-known" is a contemporary action as "predestinating-us-to-adoption" would be. From the text we could conclude that "predestination" is not necessarily an action limited to the time before creation, just as "making-known-the-mystery" is not. What God did do from the foundation of the world was set His intention for every individual, even though this intention is only actualized for a particular individual upon his conversion (and, of course, completed in their glorification).

The misunderstanding brought about by this text is probably the origin of making "election" and "predestination" the same thing, as far as meaning is concerned, with Calvinists.

An appeal to the "before the ages" aspect of the predestination found in 1 Cor. 2:7 also fails to make a person's conversion predestined. There it is God's wisdom that is predestined before the ages for our glory. The fact that something is predestined before

creation, though, may tend to slant peoples' thinking toward believing that their individual conversion was also predetermined in the sense of being inevitable. Even though the Bible does not explicitly teach this, I believe that in a sense, everyone's salvation was a predestined thing. The sense I am speaking of has to do with God's intentions. God intended a great destiny for all those He created in His image. Since these were intentions before creation, they may be spoken of as "pre" intentions or "pre-set" horizons, or, predestination.

Forster and Marston do a good job of showing that words like "foreknow" and "predestine" pertain in a special way to believers but technically would include unbelievers:

The Greek word "proorizo" (predestine) does not mean an inevitable fiat. It may be a predetermination in the sense of a "marking out beforehand." Beet has remarked, "The boy marked out for one trade may enter another," and such a meaning is not precluded by the word "predestine" in this context. Second, when Paul makes a statement in a context of speaking of the church, he does not necessarily mean that it may not apply to unbelievers also. Thus in Romans 3:23 he says: "All have sinned..." meaning all those who are justified. But we know that all those outside the church have sinned as well. Likewise when Paul says that God foreknew those who love him, he does not mean that God did not foreknow others also in a similar fashion. Moreover, when Paul says that God had marked out a destiny for those who love him, he need not necessarily be saying that such a destiny was not intended for all men. Indeed we have seen how Luke tells us that God did have plans for a group of unbelievers, which they rejected for themselves ( Luke 7:31). Perhaps these plans included the marking out of a destiny in Christ, which they failed to obtain because they rejected Christ. Paul does not specifically say this, for he rarely uses the word "proorizo", and only in a context of believers. But his words by no means rule it out (pp. 203,4). Having qualified the meaning of "predestine" to something not necessarily inevitable, we could, with that understanding, go back and state, concerning the scriptures that teach predestination, that our individual conversions were predestined. [6]

All men's conversions were intended! And, certainly, all people who continue in faith are destined for glorification!

## SUMMARY

I have overstated this chapter's title in claiming errors in word meanings. Calvinists know that "predestine" means to predetermine the ends; that "foreknow" means to know in advance; that "election" can mean to choose; and that "elect" is the choice.

The trouble for me comes with the way they apply these meanings to our salvation. Theological words can be used like slogans that promote a popular meaning that glosses over the original intentions of the authors. "Predestine", for example, is made to seem an inflexible necessity to which "irresistible" notions are attached (TULIP).

When applying the meaning of these words to our salvation, I have shown that we should:

1. Realize that the passages we are dealing with have primarily in mind a corporate body --the church-- in union with Christ. They (plural) are the elect; they (plural) are predestined.
2. Realize that those who cling to God's "Beloved" are also "beloved". They who cling to the "Elect One" are "the elect" also. They are not lucky humans who have been picked out by God before the ages to be favored with the ability to have faith.
3. Realize that God "foreknows" us in the sense of knowing how it will be for us who cling to Him in faith. He pre-set our destiny in spite of His foreknowledge of us. He made His plans for us in full knowledge of all our weaknesses. He foreknows us. He knows what He will make of us faith- havers.
4. Realize, finally, that God predestines believers to glory with Him and also realize that He predestines that none should perish if they respond to Him in faith. Biblically it may be said that He is not willing that anyone should not respond to Him in faith ( 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). Because this is an intention for everyone, it is a destiny that God would have for everyone.

#### NOTES

Broadly speaking He foreknows from eternity what believers will be like as believers.

I can imagine a parallel here between the Jews foreknowing Paul from the first and God foreknowing us from the first of our becoming believers. Or, even a usage of "foreknow" that was similar to the contemporary medical usage of "prognosis" to which I made reference in Chapter Five.

But, of course, there is a relationship involved with us as believers!

ibid., p. 193

In a certain sense all individuals are predestined to be converted, as I will show in Chapter Nine.

Our conversions were predestined on the condition that man would fall into sin and need conversion.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Calvinism's View Of Romans 9*

I have not joined the Calvinists because they are not completely right about Romans 9. Basically, the Calvinist believes that Romans 9 teaches that God's design and purpose is to glorify Himself by predetermining who should believe and thus predetermining their respective eternal destinies. This view got started by Augustine about AD 400. As far as I know, no Christian had this view before him.

St. Peter testifies about some things in Paul's writings that are hard to understand ( 2 Pet 3:16) and I think Romans chapter 9 is one of those places. However, if we submit our preconceptions to following Paul's line of thought and put ourselves in his circumstances as much as possible, we may arrive at an understanding.

My approach to Romans 9, in the past, has been with the preconceptions that I had gained from the rest of the Bible. I had always approached it thinking that God's grace and a person's response to that grace, determined one's destiny. That God also predetermined what my response would willingly be, never entered my mind until I began listening to Calvinists. I began to think that maybe I had been blind to some unique revelation that Paul was making in this text.

As I studied the context of Paul's letter to the Romans, I slowly began to see Paul's purposes. I saw that only at Rome and Colossae did churches, not established by Paul, receive a letter from him. Since the one at Colossae seems to have been established by disciples of Paul, it leaves the recipients at Rome in a unique position. Paul plans to visit them but does not know for sure that they have as good a foundation in the Gospel as the churches he has personally founded. Paul frames the purpose of his letter in the words, "in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" ( Rom 1:17, NIV).

He uses almost the whole letter (chapters 1-11) to explain this valid method of man's acceptance with God. He had probably done this kind of exposition in all the churches that he had personally founded, and he may have been anticipating from Rome the response that he had faced in these churches (e.g. Galatians) where the dominate Jewish approach to righteousness was one not easily dissociated from works.

In order to affect this ingrained disposition, Paul would have to prove that God has a right to justify men according to this "faith" method He has chosen. Paul apparently can't get by just by stating that by grace we are saved through faith. Paul first has to clear away assumptions about God's rightness in doing this. Paul's dealings with Jews has shown him that they expect God to require some valuable distinction as a basis for His choosing them; that His mercy depends on moral distinctives like being keepers of the law, or, at least, as having the covenant's racial distinctives such as Jewish circumcision. They think that if God does not base His choice on this, that He is being unrighteous.

THE THEOLOGY OF ROMANS 9

In this chapter Paul discusses the failure of the majority of the Jews to see God's revelation concerning true righteousness. Their questions might have been: "How is it that God can do such a thing!?" Or; "OK; given that we believe Jesus to have lived an exemplary and righteous life and that He was, nevertheless, executed, but vindicated by God; still, how can God not require works from all the ones He approves?"

These are the questions that had alienated the dominate Jewish mentality from the new Christian mentality. The case of Abraham had been cited in Romans 4 to counter Jewish objections that Abraham's justification was really by works.

"Paul shows that the righteousness reckoned to him was essentially on the basis of his trust in God. Nor could anyone claim that Abraham's covenant came through circumcision, for the promise was given before he was circumcised. Paul enlarges upon the circumstances in which Abraham believed God to make abundantly clear that it was not Abraham's achievements (in which every Jew gloried) but his faith that was the ground of his justification." [1] But, the alienating question still lingers: "Is it not possible that God is unfair not to take into account men's lineage or efforts (v:4)?" Romans 9 is Paul's answer in two parts. The first part is that this is the way God does things ( 15,16). The second part is that it is His decision when to let His mercy give way to hardening, as was happening with Israel ( 17-23; c.f. 11:25).

In this chapter Paul gives some examples of where God's favor rested on certain ones in the past in order to give expression to His purpose to establish His criterion apart from works. Isaac over Ishmael, illustrates that God's purpose is to elevate faith and discount works. God did this, as verse 11 states, "in order that the purpose, which corresponds to the choice of God, might be maintained." The next example does the same thing since God's favor to Jacob over Esau can't be attributed to their works; neither having been born yet.

Paul's subject in Romans 9 is primarily God's method. It is only secondarily the particular historical actions that gave expression to God's purpose. The true, primary subject here is God's "modus operandi"; His manner of operating; His ongoing principle; His "way". It was this purpose of God that Moses was inquiring about in Exodus 33:13 when he asks God, "let me know Thy way, that I may know Thee..."

## THY WAY

God's answer to Moses has to do with His freedom from man's choice of works and the nature of God's choice of mercy: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." What God speaks to Moses is an expression of what lies behind the choices He makes. It is a revelation of His way. This way is echoed by both Isaiah and Paul who both point to God's choice behind His specific, illustrating choices that He makes. it is a revelation of His way. God chooses Abraham ( Ne 9:7), Israelites ( Deut 7:7), the second place one ( Gen 48:14), a tribe ( Ps 78:67,68), descendants ( Deut 4:37), a place for His glory ( Deut 12:5), etc. But behind these choices is God's choice for mercy (grace):

"Is this not the fast which I have chosen, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke? Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into the house; when you see the naked, to cover him; and not to hide yourself from your own flesh ( Is 58:6,7)?"

What God chooses magnifies God's glory; "... then your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard ( Is 58:8)."

Paul is vivid about the way God's choices make nothing, man's glory, and by so doing exalts His own glory; to paraphrase:

"God has chosen the foolish, weak, base, despised, and nothings of the world that He might shame the wise and strong, and nullify the things that are supposedly important [i.e. man's glory] ( 1 Cor 1:27,28)." "He teaches the humble His way. All the paths of the LORD are loving kindness [mercy] and truth... ( Ps 25:9,10)."

#### WHAT OR WHO QUESTIONS GOD'S WAY

The Calvinist, John Piper, in his work entitled, *The Justification of God* (IVP), tries to clarify what had called God's rightness into question. What he points to is different than what I point to. I try to show that it was the recalcitrant attitude of the unbelieving Jews calling God into question. They sought to keep a self-glory in the achievements wrought through their unparalleled law ( Rom 2:17-20).

Piper, on the other hand, is apparently not sure who (or what) had called God's righteousness into question. He intimates that it is an apparent failure of God's word concerning His promise to have Israelites as a people and nation of His own possession ( Deut 7:6; Jer 31:35-40). [2] Most Jews of the time were, of course, not believing the gospel. Even the believing Jews may have wished to think that God's election of Israel as a nation would forever stand. And, yet, Israel was now being set aside. The Lord had predicted the destruction of their temple ( Lk 19:43,44; Mk 13:2), their dispersion ( Mt21:21), and the transfer of their stewardship to others ( Mk 12:9), etc. The "apparent failure", however, is clarified by Paul who shows the conditional nature of God's promises to Israel. The promises, he says, were given to believers; "not all who are descended from Israel are Israel" (9:6). Not all Israelites are children of the promise. A child of promise is as Paul had shown in Romans 4:13, one who owes his existence to the creative power of God's promise to Abraham; that his children "would be heirs of the world not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith."

The "apparent failure of God's word", then, is not the matter that questions God's rightness. Jews should have known this much from what they had learned concerning the conditional nature of God's choice of them as it impinged on their idol worship and subsequent captivity (c.f. Rom 3:3; 2 Tim 2:13). The very fact that they now felt they had it all together concerning their former proclivity to idols, served to blind them to God's choice against works.

God had used several other occasions in Jewish history to let His favor give expression to His purpose. In each case God's promises were not conditioned by human works but by men's faith. The implicit condition for Cain, for example, was "belief". Would he have believed God's love for him and mastered resentment, he would have been saved.

With God's election of Saul as King ( 1 Sam 10:24; 2 Sam 21:6), Israel had seen a conditional nature to God's election ( 1 Sam 15:11) that involved faith ( 1 Sam 13:13).

Piper's attempt (to show that it is "the apparent failure of God's word" that questions God's rightness) is not successful because Israel's history shows that God's rightness is maintained. The Calvinist's stumbling block is their a priori assumption that God's continuing grace has no conditions, whereas the truth is that it only has no conditions with regard to human works. It is the Jewish "attitude" (which says that God needs to require works) that questions God's rightness. Therefore Piper doesn't truly understand Paul's answer to the question. Paul's answer is also God's answer to Moses about His way; which is, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (9:15).

How does this quote from Exodus 33:19 support Paul's claim of God's righteousness or rightness? To begin with, it shows that God's choice of faith is HIS decision for the way He will save men -- not ours. The next verse (16) says, "So then it is not a question of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who has mercy." This shows that God does what He does apart from any constraint coming from outside His own will. God teaches us that grace cannot be grace and be subject to entitlement. If only Israel would see that the grace of God is not subject to works or to some kind of entitlement linked to their nationality.

If the method of salvation were of man's effort, then the glory would be man's. If, on the other hand, God dispenses His mercy according to His choice, the glory will be all God's.

Paul goes on in the next few verses to illustrate what the Jews already knew, intellectually; that God's purpose includes the display of His glory -- a glory that He will not relinquish to another, for then He would not be God (Is 42:8). If it is right for God to be God, then it is right for God to chose His own methods. This explains the righteousness of God in the matter. It also explains the many times, in Israel's history, why God made particular choices to favor this one over that one. It was in order that the purpose which corresponds to the choice of God -- might be maintained (9:11). His secondary choices of this one or that one, gave expression to His purpose. And, that purpose, as I have formulated in other chapters, is to have a people for Himself, through the work of His Son, who would be to the praise of His glory, whom He would possess by means of His grace through faith. When Paul speaks of God's "purpose" in Romans 9, I think he has something very like this formulation in mind.

Piper always speaks of God's purpose as His "electing purpose." This is not done by Paul and tends to muddy the fact that God's choice is grounded in His purpose. Whomever He

favors in particular, it is true, is also a choice. And, these choices are used by God to give expression to His choice regarding our way of being saved.

God's favor is not based on the desires of men to merit it by their moral distinctions ("running") or national entitlements ("willing"). It is based on a distinction of God's choosing -- faith. This is God's choice, it is a God- chosen human distinctive not having any merits or pedigree.

There stands my major difference with the Calvinist who believes Romans 9 would define God's purpose as the design to glorify Himself by predetermining the respective responses (to the gospel) and eternal destinies of all individuals. Such an interpretation does not satisfy the historical context of Paul's letter.

### THE EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT ("EXEGESIS")

I would like to give an explanation to those specific texts in Romans 9 in which I differ with John Piper's explanations. Having a Bible open to Romans 9 I think will facilitate your analysis of what follows:

The first text is 9:4 "[Paul's kinsmen according to the flesh, who are separated from Christ] ...are Israelites of whom [are] the sonship, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of worship, and the promises ... (Greek/English Interlinear)." [3]

This verse may seem to be a list of privileges that belong by rights to national Israel. Piper believes that all of Romans 9-11 answers why Paul's citation of this list of privileges does not guarantee the salvation of all Israelites. Piper's argument seems to be that, yes, these are reliable and lasting promises, but that they are realized "eschatologically" (p.46). I think he means that Israel's possession of these privileges, as lasting promises, awaits a final return of national Israel (11:26 - even though they were "not-lasting" historically).

My view is different in that I believe that Paul sees a condition to the privileges. I will discuss below, the inadequacy of Piper's no-conditions viewpoint and the definition of "all Israel" in Romans 11:26.

The next text is Rom. 9:6-13 in general, as it regards the personal destinies of Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and Jacob:

Piper believes that the Old Testament examples of God's discriminating favor to certain individuals is the same thing as a predestination of those individuals to certain eternal destinies. In other words, Calvinists say that God decided to save Isaac and Jacob and let Ishmael and Esau go on being forever lost. They make this interpretation because it gives support to their idea of Romans 9 -- that it is an argument for God's freedom in selecting people for salvation apart from any conditions whatsoever.

The counter to this, among theologians, has been that the favored individuals were predestined to more of God's historical blessing (e.g. to be heads of a chosen race) whereas the supplanted ones had relatively more impoverishment. I agree with this and would also add that God's temporal, historical favor gave expression to His choice for "faith" conditions as opposed to human works conditions.

I hold to this counter position because it fits in well with the way Paul develops his argument for God's right to by-pass men's merits in granting salvation. I also see that the temporal favoring of certain OT individuals and their descendants, parallels the use of typology in scripture (c.f. Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). Because the law is fulfilled in Christ, OT things are applied now in a new and greater way in the life of the church. The temporal things become eternal things. The physical Sabbath, for instance, becomes an even greater spiritual rest from works-to-save. And, God's OT choice against the particular works of some men (e.g. the contrived conception of the "not-promised" Ishmael), becomes, in the NT, the damnation of those who will not submit to God's choice -- faith (they were "illustrations": Heb 9:9,14; 4:1,2,10,11).

Romans 9:13 "Just as it is written, 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.'"

Piper thinks this verse supports the view that God appoints eternal destinies for each child. I see the verse as a testimony to the fulfillment of the prophecy quoted in v. 12, "it was said to her, 'The older will serve the younger.'" As Malachi shows ( Mal 1:2,3), the history of Jacob and Esau's descendants has borne out the prediction of God's respective appointments. The difference between the favor of one and disfavor of the other is cast in Hebrew phrasing similar to Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother ... yes, and even his own life, he, cannot be My disciple." It is an expression of favoring one of two alternatives and, as such, is what I call a comparison-type hatred.

Not only does Malachi testify to the fulfillment of God's historical appointments, but at the same time he reinforces the notion of God's specific hatred of a works orientation. Even though a "comparison-type" hatred (but not a "condemnation-type" hatred) existed before the children were born and before they had done any works, by the time of Malachi the Edomites were exhibiting the same kind of self-sufficient behavior that Paul was exposing in the Jews of his time. The Edomites were saying, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins ( Malachi 1:4)." This self-sufficiency was not of God's appointment, but because of God's utter hatred of it the Edomites would face judgment. [4]

The Biblically literate Jew of Paul's day should have made some inferences from this allusion concerning their own status. The same judgments awaited the "Jacob God Loved" (corporately) if they continued in their "entitlement attitude". Conditions for God's favor were given: "those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name" would be favored ( Malachi 3:16, c.f. Ps 5:11,12 where the "righteous" and "those who love Thy name" are interchangeable). The implied condition for God's favor was faith. The

alternative was, "lest I come and smite the land with a curse (4:6);" a reality fast approaching in Paul's day.

Romans 9:16 "Therefore, it is not of the one who wills nor of the one who runs but it is of God who has mercy."

I agree with Piper (p.155) that the subject of this verse, "it", has to do with the bestowal of mercy, but in light of Paul's whole argument I would specify that "it" refers to the way to salvation (which, of course, involves the bestowal of mercy).

"Runs" has to do with good works and "wills" has to do with resolve to keep the law, and, together, they exhibit a human desire to be God's favored ones. Paul is saying that the way to salvation is not one of these human choices, but God's choice -- the choice of the One who has mercy.

Because God's chosen way to salvation includes the "faith" response, Piper is loath to exclude faith from the meanings he gives to the words "wills" and "runs" p.153 . He wants to label "faith" as a "kind of" good works and thus he puts "faith" under the category of human "willing" in verse 16. Scripture, however, puts the terms in opposition: "By grace you have been saved through faith... Not of works..." ( Eph 2:8,9). In spite of this, Piper cites two texts in an attempt to support his notion that faith is a work (i.e. of merit, as "good work" was hoped to be). He cites 1 Thess 1:3 which clearly speaks of works being "of" faith -- not faith itself, but a result of faith. And, Galatians 5:6 which speaks of "faith through love working". I have shown above that the term "work" may be used in the sense of "functioning" (or "operating" or "expressing itself") when the idea does not involve "good works." This is obviously Paul's sense of the word, "work" in Galatians 5:6.

Piper is legitimately afraid of making God dependent upon man, but to whom it is that God has grace towards is not dependent on man's faith. God's decision to save a man is determined by God's decision to save a man who responds to His grace through faith. As far as it concerns God, "faith" is His choice. As far as it concerns man, "faith" is the acceptable response. The mode of salvation certainly is not of him who has faith; it is of God who determines that He will take men's faith into account.

If Piper's concern were important -- that there is no explicit reference to faith in Romans 9 until verse 30, [5] then he would have no grounds for cautioning against the notion that the terms "wills" and "runs" also include the notion of "faith"-- an unwarranted caution, from my point of view. The mode of salvation certainly is not of him who has faith; it is of God who determines that He will take men's faith into account.

Romans 9:17,18 "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'For this very thing I raised you up: that I might demonstrate by you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore, on whom he desires he has mercy and whom he desires he hardens."

These verses are a logical step in the progression Paul has been making, but because Piper chooses to see the argument differently than I do, he must give verses 17 and 18 an "inscrutable" cast. That is, to him it is an example of God making choices of individuals to save or to damn based absolutely on His freedom and not giving any account of His purpose in these matters.

I expect the cogency of what I will show will convince you that Paul's argument runs differently than Piper sees it:

Verses 9-13 illustrate God's choice against man's choice -- faith against works.

Verse 14 poses the question of God's rightness in His decision regarding this mode of salvation (as it affects particularly the Jews, but also, everyone).

Verse 15 answers the question by reference to God's answer to Moses concerning His way (mode). By an answer like this Paul shows that any of man's choices for ways of salvation would be honoring to man and dishonoring to God. God cannot be God and not be honored and glorified. He will give His glory to no other would-be God, which is what man would be if he alone could determine his own destiny. And, as Piper rightly says, "God's righteousness consists in his unswerving commitment always to act for the glory of his name (p.100)." [6]

Therefore, verse 16 says the choice concerning the way of salvation is God's not man's. God will be glorified, not man (except by God's mode of sharing His glory -- c.f. Jn 8:54).

Now, verses 17 and 18 continue the theme of God's glory and honor by showing that God will be honored even if man refuses to submit to God's design. The Jews of Paul's day should have been galled at Paul's implicitly likening them to Pharaoh. But to drive his point home, Paul must show that even the unbelieving Jewish stance will bring glory to God just as Pharaoh's stance did. God, in the first century AD was hardening the majority of Israelites in their chosen course of action, and God was doing this to glorify His name. This is the main point of Paul's larger polemic.

The Calvinist interpretation of this verse leans hard on their presupposition concerning the inscrutability of God's will. They think there is no way of knowing who it is that God will have mercy on or who it is that He will harden. They rightly assume that God's choice is not dependent on any good works in man, but they come to the wrong decision for "inscrutability" because of previous inclinations toward Greek philosophical notions about God being unable to really respond to men. They don't see that "by grace through faith" is God's choice that by-passes man's glory.

We do know, however, for whom it is that God respectively wills these things. By the revelation of the gospel we know who it is that God has chosen to harden and we know on whom it is that He will continue to have mercy. [7] Though God's thoughts are not our thoughts ( Is 55:8), the mind of Christ that we have is not inscrutable. It teaches us that

the will of God is to have compassion on repentant ones ( Is 55:7). God's choice is to save by His grace through faith. We know this by the good news which reveals "a righteousness that is by faith from first to last (Rom 1:17)."

Because of what we know of God's glory, we know that He will not let His mercy be demanded as a ransom by unbelievers. That would cause God's name and glory to be dishonored (c.f. all of Malachi; Jer 3:4,5; 5:12,13; 7:9- 11,14; 12:4; Hos 7:2; 12:8). The Jewish entitlement attitude was making this demand of God's mercy. Although He is long-suffering ( 2 Pet 3:9), God at some point in persistent unbelief, will harden and cut off ( Luke 13:6-9; Rom 1:28; 2:4,5; 11:20; Gen 6:3; Rev 2:21-23).

I conclude that this well explains that God shows mercy and hardens, both for the sake of His glory and both according to His plainly revealed purpose.

Romans 9:19,20 "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who has ever resisted His will?' O man, on the contrary, who are you to dispute with God? Shall the thing made say to its maker, 'Why did you make me thus?'"

Piper sees here a clear denial of man's having a part with regard to who becomes a believer. This is because Calvinists would make the totality of creaturely activity, wholly and utterly at the disposal of the divine. If Adam sinned against God, for example, it was by God's appointment that he did so. God, to the Calvinist, is the author of sin without being responsible for it. And, to them, He is also the dispenser of faith to those whom He has selected for salvation (the rest being "justly" denied that possibility).

Because I believe the Bible teaches that God has designed man to be metaphysically free in his response to the gospel, I view this verse differently than Piper does. My view is built on the character of the "objector" presented in these verses. The objector in 9:19, 20 also appears under similar circumstances in 3:7 and 6:1. This objector appears to personify an attitude characterized by the insolence of the unbelieving Jewish mentality. It is really against God Himself, not Paul, that he is being disrespectful, rude and even blasphemous. The objector is voicing his opinion that his supposed sins might as well be excused since Paul has shown that God gains greater glory (in bolder relief) against his sin ( 3:17).

It is not actually the case, that people not accepting God's way of things as Paul had defined it, would really imagine that God was finding fault with them. The unbelieving Jews didn't really think that they were being hardened by God, against their will. But, these people were looking for a way to find fault with the God revealed by Paul rather than find fault with themselves.

Their objection might be paraphrased like this: "Well, if I am, as you say, the victim of hardening, like pharaoh, then how can God blame someone He has victimized -- it's God's fault!"

Paul could have responded, "No, no, it is not God's fault, it's your fault if you are an unbeliever; God's hardening follows unbelief." But, that is not Paul's style. Something stronger was needed for someone so obnoxiously conceited that they would try to blame God for their sins.

Because Paul sees an impudent rather than an anguished response from the majority of Jews, he blasts them first (vv. 20-23) before turning to the fact that they have misconstrued God's-will-to harden as arbitrary, in verse 18. Paul turns to correct this in 9:30 - 11:36.

In this later section Paul makes explicit what he has been alluding to in 9:1-29. It concerns man's responsibility for making a faith-response to the gospel. Paul says, "They did not pursue God's righteousness which is by faith (v.30)."; "they stumbled (v.32)11; "they did not subject themselves (10:3)11; they ignored the word of faith which was "near you, in your mouth and in your heart (10:8)11; "they did not all heed the gospel (10:16)11; "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again (11:23)."

This makes explicit what God regards and what the conditions are. Piper and the Calvinists would have us believe that God hardens individuals without any regard for anything in the individual. However, the point of Romans 9 is that it is nothing of merit in an individual for which God has regard.

Paul's sharp response to the Jewish attitude shows that it is presumptuous to question the rightness of God's dealings. The Jewish premise is that unless a man has the power of self-determination over against God, his sin cannot be justly faulted. But there lingers in this premise a works-view of self-determination rather than a humble response that allows man's destiny to be determined for good. It is not part of the good news that God holds final sway over who should be believers. That would be anxiety- filled bad news. How often do Calvinists preach Romans 9 when they preach the good news about salvation? Even though the theme of Romans is salvation by faith ( 1:17), I venture that not often is this chapter a part of their evangelism. But, it really is part of the good news Paul has for unbelievers; "works are by-passed!"

I have claimed that Paul's response to the objector shows the insolence of questioning God's right-dealing. But, it is also true that Paul's answer seems to agree with the objector's pretended conception of God's appointment to hardness without regard for anything in the objector. By not disagreeing with the objector, Paul is not affirming that God predetermines our sinfulness, but Paul is pointing to the absurdity of a created thing wanting to direct its own creation, and, by implication, its own mode of salvation. This, as I have shown, is the case that Paul is dealing with here. Paul is assuming the objector's point of view for the sake of the argument. This means Paul is countering the objector's supposition with a supposition of his own which he intends to prove.

Romans 9:21 "Or does not the potter have authority over the clay to make from the same lump one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?"

Paul continues to question the objector's authority. Who has the authority, the thing made, or the maker? The maker, obviously! Suppose God wants to do a thing a certain way; who can object? Of course, no one can with any effect. If the objector's objection has any merit on the face of it, this verse demolishes its pretensions.

For unbelieving Jews to hold to their own designs regarding salvation would be like the clay deciding in what way it would become a vessel for honor. The theme, then, of man's honor versus God's honor continues here from its original development in verses 15-18 with the key phrase being, "that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth (c.f. the "making glory known" of v.23)". God decides what will be honored and what will be dishonored. He honors faith and dishonors works. This way, being of God, brings honor to God as I have shown. If man's choice of works saved, it would be man-honoring. [8]

Piper's examination of these verses overlooks God's reasons for doing what He does with His creatures. Piper, however, is right on when he finds the meaning behind Paul's potter/clay image in Is 29:16 (p.195). In this text, "perverted" wise men (c.f. 29:14) in Israel, presume to hide counsel from God, acting as if they were God. Isaiah says, "You turn things around! Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made should say to its maker, 'He did not make me', or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding'?" This is exactly the case with Paul's objector who would decide the mode of his own salvation.

It is not inexplicable that God has the "right" to decide that one vessel should be honored and another dishonored. Having the right also implies that He uses it and decides what our destinies shall be, but the basis for His decision is not explicitly being dealt with precisely here in this verse.

Romans 9:22,23 "What if God, while intending to show forth His wrath, and to make known His power, yet endured with much long-suffering, vessels of wrath, fit for destruction? And [what if He did so] in order that He might make known the wealth of His glory on vessels of mercy, which He previously prepared for glory?"

"Suppose the scenario of these verses is true", Paul says, "if God is the final authority, who will bring Him to task?" This seems to be Paul's implication in these verses that have an "if/then" construction, but without the "then" being explicit. I don't think these verses are merely hypothetical (as I will show), but Paul's choice of words causes me to come to different conclusions than Piper does.

Piper, it seems, would construe the verses to mean that both the honored and destroyed vessels were individually designed for these destinies in the Creator's mind before He actually created those individuals (pp 212,f). Piper decides that the two phrases; "vessels fit for destruction" and "vessels prepared for glory"; both affirm divine agency. He says it is God that makes each vessel become the way it becomes (p 212).

The word that I rendered as "fit" is a passive verb (used in reference to vessels of wrath), while the word "prepared" (used in reference to vessels of mercy) is an active verb. Because "fit" (or "having been fitted") is passive, it could be taken to mean that God did the fitting or that man had made himself fit. Piper says we can only guess why Paul used different voices for each case. He then offers some possibilities why (p 213). Given his explanations of the first part of Romans 9, Piper's guesses look reasonable, but given the way I have explained Romans 9 I think the following explanations are more reasonable:

It appears that had Paul's intention been to teach that God was the cause of men's sinfulness, Paul would have used an active voice in each case. He, no doubt, intended to make an important distinction when he used a passive voice with regard to the "fitting" of the vessels of wrath and then used the active voice with regard to the vessels of mercy. Furthermore, it is significant that God's plans for the vessels of mercy are described as an original plan; a before-hand preparation, while endurance rather than preparation is God's initial action with regard to the vessels of wrath. One might infer that God's intentions (before-hand intentions) were to have all be vessels for bringing glory to Him through their reception of His mercy. If Paul really meant to imply that God designed some men to be sinners for damnation, he could have been much less ambiguous about it.

Paul's non-Christian contemporaries, the Essenes, who believed that God caused men to become either sinners or believers, were well able to articulate their position unambiguously. Piper quotes their literature (p. 212 f): "Thou hast ordained [the way of every man] before creating him... the just from his mother's womb... whereas the wicked Thou hast created [for the time of] Thy [wr]ath and hast set them apart from their mother's womb for the Day of Massacre..."

Paul's proposal, however, is not the same as the Qumran tradition of double predetermination of destiny. Paul's proposal asks, "What if God puts off judging unbelieving Jews in order to elicit faith in Gentiles (and remnant Jewish believers) -- what then?" Paul proceeds to show that his proposal (vv.22,23) is not hypothetical.

What God has a "right" to do with each group of people, He actually does for the purposes listed: 1) to show forth His wrath against sin; 2) to make His power known; and 3) to make known the wealth of His glory on vessels of mercy.

As Paul shows more fully in Romans 11, God is using an unbelief, that would be dishonoring, to bring about a belief in others that will compound His honor. It adds to the satisfaction of His honor received through His wrath and power upon unbelievers, the glory He will obtain in having more believers.

Paul doesn't blink when he proceeds from the 9:1-23 section of Romans to the 9:24-33 section where it is again made explicit that faith is taken into account in God's choice (vv. 30-33). I don't think it's because Paul is comfortable with antinomies, but because there are no antinomies in what he has presented. Conditionality and God's purpose are the warp and woof of Romans 9, 10, and 11. The "if" of Romans 11: 19-23 forcefully expresses those conditions:

You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear, for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again. (NASB)

"ALL ISRAEL", ROMANS 11:25-27

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "the deliverer will come from Zion. He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins."

I promised earlier to get back to my view of "all Israel" being saved. It would be easy for a Calvinist to believe that "all Israel" here refers to all national Israel, and that God, for His own inscrutable purposes, decides to save part of national Israel early, but all of national Israel at a later date. After all, from the Calvinist viewpoint, if God wants to save a person, He merely and irresistibly gives them faith. God saves as many or as few as He wants. [9]

The context of Romans 11 often contrasts national Israel with "Gentiles". This gives considerable weight to viewing the "all Israel" of verse 26 as all national Israel. There are, however, good reasons for seeing the reference as being to the "Israel" that includes all the "sons of Abraham by faith" -- which is to say, all Christians (c.f. Gal 6:16):

) Paul has already introduced this concept in Romans 4:16, 9:6, and 11:2.

) Paul implies that all Israel is saved at the time that the Gentiles are added to the Church. He does not say, in verse 26, "and after that all Israel will be saved", but, "and thus all Israel will be saved." That is, when the Gentiles come into the Church.

) Paul quotes Isaiah 59:20 about the Deliverer removing ungodliness from Jacob. We see this being actualized in the judgment upon unbelieving Jerusalem which leaves, in effect, a new purified Jerusalem ( Rev 21:2, Heb 12:22, 1 Pet 2:9) -- the Christian Church. The reference to "My covenant with them when I take away their sins" reminds me of the Lord's words concerning "the new covenant in my blood."

) Paul continually thinks of the conversion of national Jews in a conditional and uncertain sense: He prayed ("wished" NIV) that he were accursed from Christ if that would have insured their salvation ( 9:3, 10:1). Paul hopes that he might save some of his countrymen by the provocation of jealousy ( 11:14). Paul casts the Jewish condition in conditional terms when he says in verse 11:23, "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again."

All this is much easier than trying to mitigate the impact of the word "all" as applied to a nation. Granting that such mitigation is proper in many textual cases, it is not necessary here, and there's certainly no need to do it if you're a Calvinist (though some do) because, as a Calvinist, you believe that whom the Lord wants, He gets, even if it is "all" of a whole nation.

## CONCLUSION

In commenting on Romans 9-11, I have shown that Paul's main purpose has been to demonstrate that God will be glorified by the state of affairs in the Jewish nation. Paul gets to the center of this thesis in 9:15 where he refers to God's "way" as revealed to Moses. There we see that the way God chooses, magnifies His glory. If it is a "fast", of showing mercy ( Is 58) that God has chosen, for instance, then our following that "way" will assure that "the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard (v.8)."

If we don't follow God's way it is actually an attempt to gain our own glory. Apostates can't get away from trying to make themselves look good by works-salvation attempts. God thwarts such attempts (e.g. Ishmael, Edom, Pharaoh, and unbelieving Jews) and in doing so brings even greater glory to Himself. That's why chapters 9-11 of Romans is largely a theme of man's honor verses God's honor; "that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth ( 9:17,23)."

After revealing all of God's scheme in bringing honor to Himself (and His chosen ones) Paul crowns his theological work (all of chapters 1-11) with a hymn of praise eternal ( 11:33-36).

In concluding this chapter, I think I have at least shown that ones interpretation of Romans 9 depends a great deal on ones starting presuppositions. At most, I have shown, by the side by side comparison with John Piper's work, that the probability of my view of the crucial texts outweighs Piper's. Of course, the final decision about the correct interpretation is up to the saints publicly ( 2 Pet 1:20).

## NOTES

Donald Guthrie, New Testament Introduction, (IVP, p. 428)

I have discerned three main views concerning texts like Jer. 31:36-40: The first view was had by unbelieving Jews of Paul's day. They felt entitled to a continued existence with God's favor, based on this and other texts. After AD 70, this notion was shattered, leaving the Jews with a culture having lots of momentum, but with a lot of agnostic-type beliefs typical of reformed Judaism today.

Early Christians interpreted the "not-reject-all" reading (in Jer. 31:37) as referring to a remnant of believing Jews who were joined by believing Gentiles, thus expanding the concept of the "nation" (e.g. 1 Pet. 2:9; Eph. 2:12; Rom. 11:17) and the city ( Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2,3). By citing these texts, I show that I believe this view to be Biblical. Some

Christians, of this and last century, believe that since the old Jewish nation and city did not remain established "forever" after the return from Babylonian exile (because of the AD 70 destruction) that Jeremiah and other prophets had to be referring to another return from exile yet in the future (i.e. 1948 Israel). These people, including today's Dispensationalists, believe there will be two holy nations; the Christian nation of 1 Peter 2:9 and the old racial Israel as well. I cite an interlinear text that I have to show that some translators use "of whom are" instead of "to whom belong" in this verse. The translation is of a genitive case that might either be translated in the sense of being "a source of" or "showing possession".

As a nation, Moab, as well, was under God's curse, but salvation came to the Moabitess, Ruth, when she abandoned the "sufficiency" of her former religion.

9:30-33 is Paul's summation of all that he has been alluding to in chapter 9 - faith!

"At the 1995 Biblical Horizons Summer Conference, Rev. Jeffrey Meyers suggested that the Reformed notion that 'God does all things for His own glory' requires Trinitarian refinement. Referring to a number of passages in John's Gospel, Meyers showed that each person of the Trinity, far from seeking His own glory, seeks the glory of the other two. The Father glorifies the Son ( John 8:50, 54; 17:1), the Son glorifies the Father( 7:18; 17:40), and the Spirit glorifies the Son who glorified the Father ( 16:14). The Church is caught up in the mutual exchange of glory: The Son shares the glory that He receives from the Father with the Church ( 17:22), even as the persons given to the Son glorify Him ( 17:10). Thus, while it is true from one perspective that the creation is to glorify the Creator, it is also true that the Creator glorifies the creation, even as each person of the Godhead glorifies the others. As Meyers put it, God doesn't suck glory from everything else; on the contrary, God (and each of the three persons) overflows in bestowing glory on others." [From Peter J. Leithart's essay in "Rite Reasons", No. 43, Jan 95, published by Biblical Horizons, PO Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588]

When God grants that men should hear the gospel, He has linked the dispensing of His mercy to human agency ( Rom. 10:14; Mt. 9:38), but a response of faith insures that God's mercy will continue in ones life.

It would be man-honoring, not to mention the fact that man's choice of works would be unable to come up with an equivalent atonement for the attempted robbery of God's infinite honor by our former disbelief of Him (c.f. Anselm).

In the mediocre Arminian view, God merely sees the future fact that at a later date, all of national Israel become believers. I have shown that this view is faulty because a future fact cannot "exist" without God being the determiner of it. God would not just see an existing truth; He would be the creator of it if He saw it.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Calvinism's View Of Christian Unity*

John 17:21 says, "\_that they may all be one\_that the world may believe\_" Jesus wasn't just saying, "Why can't we just all get along, pluralistically?". Puritans and Calvinists, more than most others, recognize this and are quick to herald the alarm against impure amalgamations. I believe, nonetheless, that God can make a way for reform in various traditions that will bring them closer to the truth of God's revelation.

In this chapter I will first analyze "the world believing" and move from that to our responsibility toward unity.

#### WHO WILL BE SAVED?

In previous chapters I have tried to describe how we are saved or how it might be that a man fails to be saved. The Arminian believes that it is by God's grace through faith. And, that God grants us opportunity to repent when we hear the gospel. They also believe that the end results of humanity's salvation or damnation is foreseen by God without God having predetermined the outcome of particular people. I have sketched a reform of that view that I think is more Biblical.

Although Calvinists use the same basic language, they don't believe that many are allowed to respond to the gospel. They believe that God gives to those He wants, a spiritual birth that is the type of life that is persuadable. If God wants us, we will agree; if He doesn't, we are already in disagreement with God's seeming proposal to save us.

It would be instructive to evaluate the final human state of affairs under both my scenario and the Calvinian scenario.

Some Calvinists believe the Bible teaches that when it's all over, few will be saved. Other Calvinists look for God's plan to include a majority of humans being saved. Each view has its plausible proof texts, but both views admit of billions of souls being eternally damned as part of God's plan to glorify Himself. What do Calvinists say about this? Some try to make a case against God saving everybody (which, according to them, He could do if He so chose), saying that without the comparison of the saved with the lost, God's glory would be diminished. They say that God's goodness would not look as good as it really is unless there were examples present of the badness that is inevitable apart from God's grace, and the glory of His wrath upon that badness. From my point of view, however, there is some sense of the "goodness" present in believers that shines out like lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ( Phil. 2:15). This comparison is a testimonial in our present time of God's glory, while also being a testimonial for the benefit of unbelievers. The need or desire for God to have an eternal "good/bad" comparison has its appeal but lacks Biblical support.

But, we have in history at this time, a majority-lost scenario. A Calvinist God might respond by saying, "The glory is Mine, I designed the outcome this way. I am able to show My wrath on a great deal of sinfulness."

I agree that the showing of wrath upon sinfulness does bring honor and glory to God, but it stuns me to think that God would arrange it in such great proportions; willingly! Do we serve a God who takes pleasure in the death of the wicked? Do we serve a God who is quite willing that many should perish and not come to the knowledge of repentance?

Because of these "ten little reasons", I don't think so. The Bible teaches us that God does not afflict men willingly ( Lam. 3:33), but that He may eventually "be stirred up \_ to do His work, His strange task, His alien task" ( Is. 28:21,22) of judgment. Though not leaving the guilty unpunished, God primarily reveals Himself as a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin." ( Ex. 34:6,7).

The Calvinist pleads with me that should the number of those saved be undetermined then God might not have anyone saved, which, they say, would be a great dishonor. My answer is threefold:

1. The eternal punishment of all those who freely disbelieve God - even if it were everyone - would satisfy God's infinite dishonor for being called a liar (disbelief). Even the Calvinist would agree to the truth of this.
2. None of the fallen angels have been redeemed and this is not to God's discredit. Their fate, in fact, serves as a show of God's wrath and a comparison of "saved with lost" if there is a need for such a thing.
3. The plea is hypothetical and has not been born out in history where many have indeed been saved to the glory of God.

My view is that the number to inherit salvation will be great but undetermined. You might object that God can't guarantee great results if He does not predetermine them. My answer is that the great number of saved ones is God's vision for His creation which "was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, \_in hope that\_ the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" ( Rom. 8:20,21).

Certainly part of that "hope" included God's desire that Christ would be willing to go through with the sacrifice of His life rather than alter the fulfillment of Scripture: "Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?" ( Matt.26:53,54).

Old Testament prophecies speak of the nations coming to the light ( Is. 60:3; c.f. Dan 2:35,44,45), but it is especially after the victory of Christ that earlier hints given in parables like the mustard seed/tree in Luke 13:19, become more explicit like Revelation 7:9, which speaks of a great multitude which no man could number." Before the work on the cross was accomplished, Jesus did not give a direct yes/no answer to the question,

"Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" ( Lu. 13:23). His answer is somewhat evasive (get saved while you have opportunity), and is directed at "the sons of the kingdom [ethnic Israel] " (c.f. Matt. 8:11,12; Lu. 13:28,29). These people were in danger of being excluded from the number being saved. Jesus, no doubt, was reacting to the Jewish entitlement attitude which may have been encouraged by the previous verses ( Lu. 13:18- 21) which pictured the number of those "saved" as being decidedly large. The person asking the question may have been confused over the-kingdom-is-great references as they related it to Matthew 7:13-14 where Jesus refers to the "many entering the broad gate and wide road leading to destruction. Because the gate and way to life is narrow, few are finding it." This was a description of present conditions rather than a prediction of the future of the kingdom which was described as a great harvest for which we humans were to request fellow workers ( Lu. 10:2).

It is astounding to realize that God's plan is for man to be necessarily instrumental in the outcome of those who will be saved. A kinsman is necessary to be the redeemer of mankind. A man is necessary to save man. That man is Christ and because of Christ it is also those men who are in Christ who are necessary to save a large number of men. Think of Peter praying for workers. God didn't send angels to Cornelius to deliver the gospel, but Peter, himself. Romans 5 teaches that by one man came death and by one man came redemption. By this last man, we believers become workers together with God ( 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:20; 6:1), letting God entreat potential believers through us; urging our hearers not to receive the grace of God in vain. This is one example of Biblical synergism; "working together with God." Acknowledging that God does this is not the same thing as being fascinated with human agency.

Once Christ is victor, everything eventually falls before Him. The multitude of those being saved is insured by the persuasive powers of our God. Why didn't He accomplish this persuasion earlier in human history? I don't know, but I would hazard a guess that mankind (as a corporate entity) by its nature, in mankind's early history, had similarities with what a child is like. A child, for example, is persuaded without his reason playing a large part. In the adolescence age of mankind, man tests his reasoning powers against his former training that he had in his childhood period. In the adolescent age he tends to side with his lusts against his former training or his reasoning. In the manhood stage he may see that his early training was not unreasonable, but that his lusts are. He has examples to look back upon. So does mankind today (in its early manhood period, so to speak) have examples to look back upon. Mankind's history is a catalogue of such examples. "Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. \_and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." ( 1 Cor. 10:6,11). All of history teaches us what is of error and what is blessed by God.

Perhaps we are now coming out of mankind's adolescent stage (where we have been for most of history) where billions of people were lost as far as salvation is concerned. To the extent that the lost ones know their Master's will, to that extent is their eternal punishment severe ( Lu. 12:48). In his coming "early manhood", humankind may benefit greatly with billions being saved as history speaks more clearly through the work of our

Lord Jesus Christ. We hope that in the nations there will be a growing up into the fullness of the stature of Christ. ( Eph. 4:13 - "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ")

Knowledge about man's history doesn't guarantee belief or obedience (witness sex education), but with more and more things serving as examples of God's sanctions in history, mankind has more occasion to believe; even as our own children may have, at first tested their Godly heritage, but may have possibly been won back by God's sanctions, by more maturing, and by kindness and example. We are to "live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." ( 2 Pet. 3:11,12). As workers together with God, we actually take part in hastening that day's coming! It is God's plan to do things this way.

I have said that I don't really know why few are saved early in history and possibly many later on. A Calvinist would give the same answer as he referred to the inscrutability of God's will; but, my view of it given here accords better with the revelation we have of God's reluctance to see any lost. My view holds that God even if He does not know (as an actuality, He doesn't know, but as an "unnecessitated" contingency, He does have knowledge) whether particular ones will believe Him ( Ex. 4:9,30,31), has not created one, in creating man, who is beyond His own sovereignty. He knows our limits, our hearts ( Deut. 5:29; 29:4; 31:21), our psychology (as the human race), and He knows where He has brought us to in history and the kind of persuasion He plans to bring to bear on man as history proceeds, with the work of His Christ, finished. He knows that an increase of His kingdom will be the outcome of Christ's work since that work did succeed in being accomplished.

#### WHAT RESPONSIBILITY DO CALVINISTS HAVE TOWARD CHRISTIAN UNITY?

Having cited Ephesians 4:13 "until we all attain the unity of the faith", I am led at last to a large part of my desire in writing Ten Little Reasons; a desire to promote Christian unity.

Concerning unity, Jesus said, "[I pray] that they all may be one; as thou , Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me ( Jn. 17:21)." If this means essentially the same thing as Paul meant when he said, "Now I exhort you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you, but you be united in the same mind and in the same judgment ( 1 Cor. 1:10)", then I am made to think unity has something to do with Christian doctrine.

True Christians are not ordained to be just as schismatic as the Jews are among themselves, or the Mormons are, or as the Islamists are, or even as the history-revising, deity- denying "Christians" are. True Christians are called to be forbearing "to one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (

Eph. 4:2,3). There ought to be a difference between Christians and the religions of man. Alas, we have not been much different with regard to schisms. I'm not ready, on the other hand, to call "compromise", "unity" as is done when ecumenicists exclude and disobey Scripture to avoid disagreement.

Most Christians tolerate minor interpretational differences ("forbearing in love") and at the same time deeply believe that perfect unity about what the truth is will never be achieved this side of the resurrection. If Jesus' idea of oneness was epitomized like this, then He must have believed there would always be a certain level of discord among His true followers. Since He never alludes to such discord, we must believe that in our forbearance of others we ought to be working to achieve actual unity.

"Every congregation that loves the word of God should be eager to have its doctrines and practices searched in a charitable spirit by others." [1]

I am naïve enough to believe that, despite centuries of differences among "parts of the body" of Christ, "if any man is willing to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from Myself." ( Jn. 7:17). Jesus implies that if people are willing to know the truth, they may actually learn and know it. Being "willing" implies willingness to repent from previous positions of belief. God's church will be as He designs it, not as cynical men design it. He will "sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." ( Jn. 17:17). It is true, then, that we will "all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." ( Eph. 4:15).

If we believe these things, we will consider whether we need to repent from former positions. In doing this myself I have found that I am growing and changing from being the "classical" Arminian that I used to be. I broke out of the interpretational circle that I was in. I think God used Calvinist friends of mine to let me enter what some have called a "hermeneutical spiral" instead of a self consistent hermeneutical circle. [2]

As I understand the concept of the "hermeneutical spiral" approach to interpreting Scripture, it is a method of facing our Bible readings each day (as much as possible) without our previous filters (leanings, biases, etc.). Doing this allows the Spirit to bring better understanding to us about His revelation. The Spirit is able to move us from one engrained pattern of thinking to a new and better pattern.

True reform happens when authority is changed. Authority, for example, changed from tradition to the Bible in the reformation involving Luther and others. Authority is changed when darkness is exposed by the light. It has been shown in Ten Little Reasons and in other works, how that Calvinism tends to find a basis in Greek philosophy, but what has been lacking is a way out that is not Arminian or Calvinian, but a synthesis that involves deeper but less obvious truths. Common sense may be contradicted when this happens but if it's from God it shows the way forward.

For example, common sense may tell us that sovereignty does not allow for anything for which the Sovereign is not totally responsible, but the exposure of the truth brings to light too many contradictions to our expectations for us to keep going on. I hope that this is what Ten Little Reasons has done. As we begin to despair, our continued trust in God leads us to see the way of escape which breaks the "circle" into a "spiral out".

To trust God in this is to obey Him, and to obey God is to be led out of our difficulties. I am indebted to Richard Bledsoe for this understanding. [3]

One of the implications of the gospel is that the Lord is in control of all things that exist ( Matt. 28:18). This means that whatever is involved in God's self-limitations of His sovereignty, He does not lose control of things. The concept of God's self-limitation that I have described is, therefore, accomplished by God without His surrendering control of what He must control to be sovereign. I can't explain how He does this but I believe He does it. Because of their view of what the sovereignty of God means, Calvinists are often caught in an analysis paralysis; coming up with new terms and concepts (like "accommodation", "antinomy argument", "supra lapsarian", etc.) to help explain things. Not that it's wrong to reach for terms to be precise about things, but that the simplicity of God's revelation as we have it, is in danger, through Calvinism, of becoming a concatenated hermeneutical circle that justifies itself without consideration of its presuppositions.

I believe the way forward is to seek Christian unity. As Jesus said, "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me." ( Jn. 17:21). I am responsible for doing this. The Calvinist is responsible for doing this. This is one big reason Calvinism needs reforming.

#### NOTES

Willard A. Ramsey, Zion's Glad Morning (Millennium III Publishers, SC, 1990, p.133)

Richard Bledsoe, "Prophecy and the Coming Christian Revolution" (in "Biblical Horizons", No. 77, Sept. '95, PO Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588)

Ibid., Bledsoe