

Preamble

In recent years, we have experienced both friends and family being caught in the snare of Calvinism. We live in a day when apathy flows deeply in the hearts of most professing Christians, and even within those who are involved in “ministry.” Despite being raised in a family where Calvinism was at least given the nod of acceptance, it was never discussed, and, unlike my older siblings, I did not go through a Reformed catechism that teaches the principles of this theology to the naive.

My wife and I experienced full-blown Calvinism when a young family moved into our town after we had left the Evangelical movement behind. When the man attended a local Baptist church and chided the pastor for not adhering exclusively to the King James Bible, he was told that he might find a better fit with us (I’m not sure why the pastor thought that, since we had never discussed the subject while attending his church). We got to know the family, and had a few Bible studies together before it became very obvious that we could not continue – there was no fellowship, and it was clear that only stress and conflict lay ahead. He emphasized *sola Scriptura* (the Scriptures alone), which was fine, but then he also needed to have the writings of his favored Reformed theologians so that he would know how to interpret the Scriptures (which were no longer *alone*). He became angry when we would not accept his Calvinism that *fit together so perfectly*, and we broke friendship (the fellowship was never really there) with his expressed desire to have nothing more to do with us. His vehemence and closed-mindedness surprised us, and yet we have come to recognize that this is not unheard of among Calvinists toward “outsiders.”

Our next experience came through friends whom we got to know at the time when we were leaving the local Evangelical Free church, where they continued to attend. They were unhappy with much of what was taking place and understood why we left, but seemed very hesitant to follow suit. When they finally left, they went to California so that he could attend Master’s Seminary (it appears that he stayed in the church in order to obtain a pastor’s letter of commendation to the Seminary). Before he left for California with his family, and while he was there, I cautioned him not to blindly accept what the professors taught as being Biblically accurate – you still must consider everything against the light of God’s Word.¹ When they came back to Canada after graduating, we visited a few times but it was not long before it became

¹ During this time I completed my studies at Briercrest Biblical Seminary and learned, first hand, that not everything that a professor says can be accepted as being the truth – everything needs to be weighed carefully against Scripture (1 John 4:1).

evident that he was starry-eyed about MacArthur and had been indoctrinated into the theology of Calvinism – and the friendship ended. We were quite taken aback at the vehemence of his last words to us (by email) because it seemed to be out of character for him (at least from what we had known), and we were left with additional evidence of the aggression of a Calvinist.

Most recently, we have felt the influence of the theology of Calvinism within our own family. I have studied bits and pieces of the TULIP of Calvinism from time-to-time while preparing for the teaching that I have done over the past 16 years and have recognized some of its failure to measure up to the standard of God's Word, but I have never taken the time to systematically go through the TULIP so that I could come away with a better understanding of where they err. I have been told how perfectly Reformed theology fits together, and I have frustrated a Calvinist for not bowing before it, but the time has come to carry out a Biblical examination of this increasingly popular theology.

My intent is to examine the doctrines of Calvinism that make up the TULIP and to expose the error of its teachings through the use of the text of Scripture. Calvinism seems to be everywhere today, and is becoming increasingly accepted because of its appeal to the historical teachings of the Reformation. The result is that many who have very little first-hand knowledge of the Scriptures parrot what they have heard with no understanding of what it really means or that it might actually contradict what God has given us in His Word. Unfortunately, the Reformation was nothing more than a separation (or eviction, really) from the Roman Catholic Church, and it doesn't take much research to realize that Martin Luther and John Calvin, who were the primary leaders during "the Reformation," did not depart far from the Catholic Church. Indeed, Martin Luther's intent was to seek reformation within the Catholic Church, but he was excommunicated for his efforts and so the apostate Church began to split. The Reformation was **not** a return to a Biblical faith, but merely a reformatting of Catholic doctrine – each leader taking their own stance on what was acceptable and what was not. Out of this very quickly came the Lutherans (following the lead of Martin Luther), the Reformed (John Calvin), and Presbyterians (John Knox, influenced by John Calvin); Anglicanism also came during this time, but it was more a result of the English king's rebellion against the pope of Rome for not giving him what he wanted (a marriage annulment) than a separation because of theology.

Among those who hold to the Reformed doctrines (Calvinism), there is a strong sense of being right on all matters of Scripture; it is this feeling of rightness (or is it self-righteousness?) that leads to their vehemence and arrogance toward those who do not accept their theology. It is one thing to consider what you believe to be correct (otherwise, why would you believe it?) and quite another to close your ears to everything that doesn't agree with your understanding. Yes, we are to avoid all that disagrees with God's Word (Romans 16:17), and a *theology* is man's interpretation of what God has said and, consequently, bears the marks of human bias. Consider these words that are used to introduce a Puritan website: "There are **only** two views concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ. First, there is what the church calls *Calvinism*, or more precisely speaking, the doctrines of grace. Then, the second, we find varying degrees of unbelief. These are your two choice [sic] for or against the Gospel found in Scripture" (all emphasis in the original).² Do you hear the arrogance? The *choice*, in their minds, is between salvation through faith in Calvinism or being destined for hell; yet even this shows their duplicity, for within the confines of Calvinism, there is no *choice* – God has predetermined who will be saved and who is lost. Calvinism is a theological structure that has been put together by men – the theology of Calvinism is not inerrant!

A product of the Synod of Dort held in 1618-1619 are the Canons of Dort, in which the doctrines of Calvinism were organized; although the acronym TULIP doesn't seem to have come into use until the early 1900s, its substance was present from the beginning.³ The purpose of the Synod was to present an organized stance against Arminianism – the Arminians had prepared *Five Articles of Remonstrance* in 1610 as a protest against the Reformed doctrine of predestination as set forth in the Belgic Confession.⁴ The Belgic Confession, in turn, had been compiled by Guido de Bras in hopes of getting the Roman Catholic Church to reduce its harsh attacks against its Reformed citizens; he set forth their understanding of the Scriptures, which, along with a commitment to remain as lawful citizens, he hoped would see their persecution diminish – it did not.⁵ The Belgic Confession, although largely a new document, was guided by the writings of John Calvin, and at the Synod of Dort it was revised and adopted as the established doctrinal standard that was imposed upon all Reformed churches.⁶ The Canons of Dort was the Reformed response to the

² <https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/>.

³ <https://www.theopedia.com/tulip>.

⁴ <https://www.theopedia.com/five-articles-of-remonstrance>.

⁵ <https://www.theopedia.com/belgic-confession-of-faith>.

⁶ Ibid.

document prepared by those of a more Arminian persuasion, and does not, therefore, expound all of the doctrines of Reformed theology; however, what is contained therein does represent some of their central theology. The primary difference between the Arminian and Reformed theologies revolves around the Reformed concept of the “absolute divine sovereignty” of God, commonly called predestination.⁷

Let’s consider the acronym TULIP as it was presented in the Canons of Dort:

T – Total depravity of man

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE, Article 3: “Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are **neither able nor willing** to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation” (emphasis added).⁸

U – Unconditional election by God

FIRST HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 6: “That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God’s eternal decree … He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy.”⁹

L – Limited atonement of Christ

SECOND HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 8: “For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them **alone** the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross … should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and **those only**, who were from eternity **chosen to salvation** and given to

⁷ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever (emphasis added).¹⁰

I – Irresistible grace of God

THIRD AND FOURTH HEADS OF DOCTRINE, Article 10: “... others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are **converted** is ... **wholly ascribed to God**, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles in various places” (emphasis added).¹¹

P – Perseverance of the saints

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE, Article 3: “By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But **God** is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and **powerfully preserves them** therein, even to the end” (emphasis added).¹²

Clearly, the Canons were not developed with TULIP in mind, nevertheless the accepted standard of Reformed doctrine was laid down with the essence of this acronym evident. With the upsurge of the popularity in the teachings of Calvinism in recent years, it is wise to take the time to consider them, however briefly, in order to provide us with the understanding necessary to avoid them. Let’s consider each of these in the light of what God has given to us in His Word.

¹⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Total Depravity

Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation – The Canons of Dort, “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine of the Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof,” Article 3.¹³

Some defenders of Calvinism will seek to make their harsher doctrines more palatable to a larger community by pointing out that, although they believe in *total depravity*, it should not be confused with *absolute depravity*, by which they mean that man is not as evil as he could be (*absolute depravity*), but rather, that sin has impacted all aspects of man – physically, spiritually and mentally. Other Calvinists are quick to object to this distinction and contend that man is *totally depraved*, by which they mean that “he is rebelliously and deliberately evil, that he loves and delights in wickedness of every kind.”¹⁴ That is the extreme position, and is less frequently held today; considering Jesus’ words that even a sinner can do good (Luke 6:33), it would seem that there is little basis for going that far. It is more generally accepted that sinful men are not “as a [sic] bad as they can be, but rather, that the effects of the Fall have completely ruined the total being of man” – by this they include both the material (body) and immaterial (soul) parts of man.¹⁵ C. Matthew McMahon goes on to define the extent of depravity this way: 1) *fallen man cannot do or work any good*, 2) *fallen man cannot comprehend or apprehend the good*, and 3) *man cannot have any desire towards the good*.¹⁶ The progression that is included here is very interesting: no one can *do*, no one can *comprehend*, and no one can *desire* good. The popular Calvinist, John MacArthur, agrees that sinners are not “always as bad as they could be” and goes on to say: “Total depravity means sinners have no ability to do spiritual good or work for their own salvation from sin. They are so completely disinclined to love righteousness, so



C. Matthew McMahon

¹³ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

¹⁴ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace2.html.

¹⁵ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/total-depravity-compiled-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

thoroughly dead in sin, that they are not able to save themselves or even to fit themselves for God's salvation. Unbelieving humanity has no capacity to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth”¹⁷ It is notable that these two definitions are very, very similar and that they both conclude with man's inability to *desire good* or to *desire or believe spiritual truth*.

As I have had opportunity to consider the teachings of Calvinism from time to time during my other studies, something that I have noticed on occasion is that a logical conclusion regarding one aspect of their argument will surreptitiously be extended to include something that goes beyond the scope of their immediate consideration. This is particularly evident with MacArthur, in this case. He defines



John MacArthur

man's *total depravity* as his inability to *do spiritual good or work for his own salvation* (no problem with this), but then he goes on to say that *unbelieving humanity* has no ability to even *desire, understand, believe or apply spiritual truth* – this is a mixed bag of *inabilities*, some of which do not necessarily fit within the definition of *total depravity* that he has just given. *Desire* and *believe* are actions of the will and are representative of the image of God that is still a part of humanity, even though the sin nature is universal. God clarified to Noah that His image was still present in sinful

mankind, even though He had just purged the world of everyone except Noah and his family (Genesis 9:6). In essence, both MacArthur and McMahon have subtly extended man's *total depravity* to mean his **total inability**, and have thereby declared that it is impossible for anyone to even have a desire to believe the words of the Lord Jesus – and this is deliberately done in order to establish a foundation for the other four primary doctrines of Calvinism. As one proponent put it: “Because the doctrine of total depravity describes man's sinfulness and wretched condition, it shows the need for the grace of God that is described in the other four points”;¹⁸ *total depravity*, therefore, forms the foundation upon which everything that follows in the TULIP of Calvinism is built – this is their *cornerstone*.

In defence of his position on the *total inability* of man to respond to God, MacArthur quotes 1 Corinthians 2:14. Let's look carefully at this verse: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.” A

¹⁷ John MacArthur, Jr., The Vanishing Conscience, p. 88, 90.

¹⁸ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

natural man is someone whose life is guided by his senses apart from the Spirit of God¹⁹ – i.e., someone who remains spiritually dead (they remain spiritually aligned with Satan) and separated from God. Notice that the *natural man* is spiritually dead to the Lord but very much alive unto Satan; this is someone whom Jesus describes as being *against* Him (Matthew 12:30). Such a man *is not accepting of that which pertains to the Spirit of God because foolishness to him it is, even being unable to have understood it since it is examined with the aid of the Spirit* (1 Corinthians 2:14, literal).²⁰ Since the *natural man* does not have the Spirit of God abiding within him, he is missing the key Element to having his understanding opened to the truths of God, His truth is as *foolishness* to him. It is noteworthy that *receiveth* (*accepting*) and *neither can* (*being unable*) are in the middle voice, which means that the subject (in this case, the *natural man*) is performing the action **and** he is the recipient or beneficiary of the action taken; on the other hand, *discerned* (*examined*) is in the passive voice, which identifies the subject as receiving the action that is carried out by someone else – in this case, the Spirit of God.²¹ Clearly, since the *natural man* does not have the Spirit of God abiding within, he cannot conduct a proper evaluation of spiritual matters. However, does this mean that such a person is unable to *desire* or to *believe* some of the spiritual truths of the Lord? Paul tells us that the *natural man* *is not accepting*, or is refusing, those things that have to do with the Spirit of God – in other words, he is making the choice in this matter. Let's study this a bit further, considering Adam by whom sin entered into the world (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Jehovah prepared a garden specifically for sinless man, whom He had made in His own image: “And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil … And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17). God created man as a sinless, perfect being, provided him with an idyllic setting where he had a job to do, and placed only one restriction upon him. As we look at the whole of Scripture, we can recognize that God desires a people

¹⁹ Friberg Lexicon, Bibleworks 8.

²⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT, Bibleworks 8.

²¹ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST.

(and that included Adam) who choose to follow Him – in other words, man was never to be robotic in his relationship with his Creator. The *image of God* is more than simply man being created with a body, soul and spirit – a three-part creation made by a triune God. God instilled within man the ability to think, to reason and to make choices based upon his cognitive abilities; all of the other creatures were made with physical bodies and given life (spirit). For the creation of man, God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [*lives*; this is plural]” (Genesis 2:7)²² – God breathed into man his eternal soul **and** the spirit of life; unlike all of the other creatures that God made with only life (*spirit*), He also placed within man an eternal dimension: his soul. Within the soul of man is the image of God: his emotions, his cognitive abilities and, out of these, his capacity to make choices. God brought all of the animals to Adam and he named them all, thereby demonstrating a tremendous ability to think and make choices based upon his reasoning (Genesis 2:20).

What happened to Adam when he chose to sin? God’s promise was that in the day that he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, *to die thou wilt be dying*.²³ This clarifies that there are two dynamics at work here: 1) one element of death will be immediate, and 2) another element will be perpetuated. The application of this is: 1) immediately: Adam and Eve died in their relationship with the Lord (their *souls* died toward God; they lost their God-ward orientation and were turned toward Satan) and their bodies began the dying process that took many, many years to complete, and 2) perpetuated: the deaths (physical and spiritual) that Adam and Eve experienced would be continued through their offspring. As the Lord pronounced His judgment upon Adam after he sinned, He declared: “for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19); the death that came to Adam and Eve included their bodies dying and returning to the dust from which they came. As Solomon contemplated life, he observed that as man dies “then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Two parts of man’s being are clearly identified and accounted for, and now we must consider what happened (and happens) to man’s soul, that part of man that bears the image of God.

As we have already noted, death entered into the soul of man; the fellowship that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with the Lord was immediately broken. However, despite death having entered their souls through choosing sin, they were still able to communicate with God; they hid from the Lord in shame, yet were able to provide

²² Brown, Driver, Briggs Lexicon (BDB), *Bibleworks 8*.

²³ Leningrad Hebrew OT, *Bibleworks 8*.

Him with their self-justification for what had happened: it was the “woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me,” and the “serpent beguiled me” (Genesis 3:12-13). Even though their souls had died, they still knew Who God was, knew their failure and could still speak to Him; this is not unlike Satan who, although forever separated from God, still came before Him to accuse His children who were on the earth (Job 1:9; Revelation 12:10). Nevertheless, Adam and Eve were unable to do anything to restore their relationship with the Lord; they had sinned, sin was their choice (and death was the consequence, Romans 6:23), they had broken their relationship with the Lord, and they could do nothing to change their standing before Him. From that moment, they (their eternal souls) were destined for an eternity separated from the Lord. However, before the foundation of the world, it was known by God that one day Jesus would come to deal with the debt of sin that man would bear but could do nothing about (1 Peter 1:18-20); before creation, the Lord already had a plan in place to make it possible for man to be restored to Him. While man was totally incapable of doing anything to restore the relationship, God had already designed a means of satisfying His perfect justice, righteousness and holiness while expressing His love, grace and mercy for the creature whom He had made in His own image. So far, we have seen that the *total depravity* of man is that he is absolutely incapable of doing anything to remove his load of sin in order to be made righteous and holy before God.

If there were two people who have walked this earth and knew the full extent of what sin had done, it was Adam and Eve; they went from open fellowship with their Creator to no fellowship, from sinless perfection to sinfulness that brought spiritual death and the promise of physical death, and from God as their Father to Satan (the adversary) as their taskmaster. What we are not told in Scripture, but what seems very evident through context, is that Adam and Eve accepted God’s provision of the restoration of their relationship with Him – it was not as it was before (that would come later, if they remained faithful to Him), but the Lord had made a way to cover their sins. *And the LORD God made for the man and the woman skin tunics, and He clothed them* (Genesis 3:21, literal).²⁴ The Lord implemented His plan of salvation in the Garden of Eden: He shed the blood of animals so that, through faith in the promise of God (Genesis 3:15), Adam and Eve could enjoy fellowship with their Creator again. A life was given (blood was shed) as a substitute for Adam (likewise for Eve), and for each one, by faith identifying with the animal slain, the shed blood brought temporary cleansing from sin. Did Adam and Eve exercise that saving faith?

²⁴ Leningrad Hebrew OT; BDB.

We are not specifically told, but we do see that both Cain and Abel, their first children, understood the need for shedding blood in order to make an acceptable sacrifice unto the Lord (Genesis 4:3-5) – if they had not received such specific instruction, Abel would not have known what was required by the Lord and Cain would not have been so unreasonably angry with Abel when his own offering was rejected. Like so many today, Cain thought that he could approach God on his own terms. What we learn from all of this is that Adam and Eve knew that God’s plan for salvation required the shedding of blood to bring cleansing from sin, and the fact that they taught this to their children tells us that they understood and accepted, by faith, what God had prepared for their salvation before they were created. God’s first gift of salvation was given to Adam and Eve who chose to follow God’s prescribed means in order to receive it (faith).

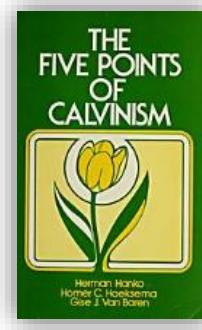
Both Adam and Eve heard God’s judgment that He gave to Satan: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [He; this is a masculine pronoun in the Hebrew] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).²⁵ Contained within this pronouncement by God is the clarification that: 1) Satan and his forces will always be adversaries to humanity, and 2) there will come One Who will be born of woman, and Who will, through suffering, deal a death-blow to Satan’s control over humanity. Adam’s sin made all of his posterity subject to Satan, but Satan has never been a benevolent taskmaster – he has always dealt with mankind in the spirit of *enmity*. However, through all of this came the shining promise of a time when Satan’s power would be *crushed* (*bruise thy head*), the first promise of the coming Messiah Who would defeat Satan by willingly giving His life in payment for sin (Matthew 27:50; Hebrews 2:14). Adam and Eve brought sin to all of humanity, but their faith in God’s promise of a coming Redeemer ensured that their posterity knew what God had done and what He required in order to restore man’s fellowship with Him.

As we consider how the Lord dealt with Adam and Eve after they chose to disobey Him, we can see His love and compassion for fallen humanity – a compassion that had already put into place a means of providing them with a way to overcome the devil’s grip on their lives. However, as we see exemplified in Cain and Abel, there was the necessity of choosing to obey the Lord’s requirements; both Cain and Abel *brought* their offerings to the Lord (Genesis 4:3-4) – the action was theirs and there is nothing to indicate that it was anything other than according to their own

²⁵ BDB.

determination.²⁶ We must not forget that man was created in the image of God, which includes the ability to reason and make choices based upon such. Even though sin had entered into the heart of man, God's image was not obliterated; the Lord said to Noah (many generations later, and after He had destroyed everyone, except Noah and his family, because of their *wickedness*): "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Genesis 9:6). Sinful man still retains *the image of God!* That is very significant in our consideration.

How does the Calvinist view God's obvious love and mercy toward Adam and Eve? They like to underscore that *sin* is always against the Lord, and consequently, it requires a great punishment – so far that is acceptable for we are told that the *end result (wages)* of sin is *death* (Romans 6:23), which is nothing less than the fulfillment of God's promise to Adam (Genesis 2:17).²⁷ Early on we noted two different brands of Calvinism: the one that believes in an absolute, aggressive depravity within humanity, and the other that acknowledges that man is not as actively evil as he could be – he is totally depraved but not absolutely so. Herman Hanko, who holds to an absolute view of depravity, declares that "the punishment ... is that God killed Adam"; he goes on to explain that this means two things: 1) "that God poured out upon Adam the fury of His wrath and hatred. God hated Adam," and 2) "God made Adam totally depraved. That is what death is. Death and total depravity are synonymous."²⁸ Let's consider these for a moment; Hanko is at the extreme end of the Calvinistic scale, but let's take the time to deal with his understanding of depravity.



1. *God poured out upon Adam the fury of His wrath and hatred. God hated Adam.* Consider the Scriptures: "And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree ... cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return ... Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:17-21). Does this sound like *God hated Adam* or that this is the *fury of His wrath*? Physically, God

²⁶ Strong's Online, <https://onlinebible.net/>; https://uhg.readthedocs.io/en/latest/stem_hiphil.html.

²⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁸ Herman Hanko, Homer C. Hoeksema, Gise J. van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, p. 15.

decreed that the man would have a life of labor in order to provide sustenance, and this would continue until death when the body would return to the ground from which it had been formed. However, that can hardly be construed to be the *fury* of God's wrath; Revelation 16 describes the fury of God's wrath being poured upon the earth and, clearly, being condemned to a life of labor pales in comparison. What immediately follows God's judgment against Adam is the unveiling of His means of restoring the broken relationship through shedding blood – it was not a permanent fix, but foreshadowed the coming of the Savior Who would pay the price for sin, satisfy the pure justice of God and introduce a permanent solution to sin. Rather than expressing His hatred for Adam, God extended His grace and mercy to him and Eve.

2. *God made Adam totally depraved.* This is an interesting thought, and lest we miss what the author is saying, he repeats it: “**God brought upon Adam** the horror of total depravity. **He made him** a slave of sin with the whole of his being and nature” (emphasis added).²⁹ **Adam chose** to heed the lies of the devil, and yet it is **God Who made him depraved** and the *slave of sin*? God placed upon Adam one restriction in the Garden **and** He clarified for him what the consequences of disobedience would be: death (Genesis 2:17). Therefore, when Adam sinned he received the forewarned results of his action: death; that was the prescribed consequence of his disobedience, but to lay the blame for the promised results upon God seems to hint of God's determination of all things. Although Calvinists, generally speaking, try to remove themselves from anything that would suggest that God is responsible for Adam's sinful condition, this writer does not.

This is an ardent Calvinist's opinion, but how would a more “moderate” Calvinist like John MacArthur view this matter? We heard from him as we began our investigation; let me repeat his summary statement: “Unbelieving humanity has no capacity to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth.”³⁰ Although MacArthur openly acknowledges that not “all people play out the expression of their sin to the ultimate degree,” by saying that *humanity has no capacity*, in essence, he has boxed everyone in with their sinfulness and denied that the image of God is still a part of everyone born into this world. Let's unwrap this very carefully so as not to damage the concepts at play here – something of which I believe MacArthur is guilty.

²⁹ Hanko, *Five*, p. 16.

³⁰ MacArthur, *Vanishing*, p. 88.

We are all agreed that when God created Adam and Eve, they were made in His image (Genesis 1:27); we have seen that when God breathed into the nostrils of Adam, He filled him with both *ruach* (breath, spirit; that which gives life to the body) and *nephesh* (his eternal soul): He gave Him the *breath of lives* (Genesis 2:7).³¹ After Adam brought sin into the world, we have noted that the body and spirit now had an expiry date when the body would return to the ground and the spirit (the breath) would return to God Who had given it (Genesis 3:19; Ecclesiastes 12:7). That leaves us with the *image of God* that is forever linked to that eternal part of everyone: the soul. Therefore, MacArthur (and all Calvinists) are declaring, as a minimum, that everyone's soul has absolutely no capacity to *desire* or to *believe* anything about Who God is and what He has done for him – in other words, the *image of God* is gone!

We have already noted what God's response was to the sin of Adam: it was the provision of a means of salvation through faith in God's promise to one day pay the price for sin. Adam sinned, God heard his excuse, pronounced His judgment upon Adam (and all men) and immediately opened His plan for man's redemption. God's response was not hatred for Adam (as we've heard), but rather, an acknowledgement of the sin of Adam and an immediate implementation of His plan for redemption. "For when we were yet without strength [helpless], in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6);³² Peter describes the shedding of Jesus' blood in order to bring salvation (as promised in Genesis 3:15) as having been *known before the foundation of the world* (1 Peter 1:19-20; the KJV translators used *foreordained* meaning to determine beforehand,³³ but the Greek word is *proginosko*, which means to know beforehand³⁴). Notice that Paul identifies the state of the ungodly as being *helpless* – left to his own devices, man cannot restore his relationship with his Creator nor can he mediate with God for his own salvation. Jesus became that Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5): as a man, He could represent humanity; as God, He became that perfect Sacrifice that would appease the justice of God while breaking the power of Satan (death; Hebrews 2:14). Jesus, as the perfect and only Mediator between humanity and God through the blood that He shed for sin, has invited *whosoever* (anyone) to be persuaded that He has provided a means of redemption from sin. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they

³¹ Strong's Online; BDB.

³² Friberg Lexicon.

³³ <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/foreordain>.

³⁴ Strong's Online; Gingrich Lexicon.

shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). The Lord calls upon humanity to consider the salvation that the Lord has provided – to use the mind that God has instilled within everyone (the *image of God* that is still within sinful man) to come to the realization that God has made a way to cleanse the sin that clings to everyone. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth** in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus declared that everlasting life is available to everyone who *is believing*; *pisteuo* (*believeth*) means to carry out an intellectual evaluation that leads to being persuaded of the truth of the matter.³⁵ Moreover, *believeth* is in the present tense (it is to be a continual, unending action) and the active voice, which means that it is *whosoever* who is doing the believing.³⁶ Consider this: the one who is believing has evaluated God's offer of salvation by faith and has been persuaded of the veracity of His offer. *Believing* is so much more than mental assent; the persuasion that leads to belief includes the necessity of obedience. As we consider God's Message to mankind, it becomes clear that His call is to evaluate the plan of redemption that He devised and implemented through the Lord Jesus Christ; as such, there is no place for man's *total inability* to respond to the Lord.

In fairness, let's take some time to consider the Scriptures that Calvinists will use in an effort to support their doctrine of *total depravity*.

Genesis 6:5 – "And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually." Indeed, it is evident that, in general, men were living according to the dictates of their sinful hearts. Yet consider what we read just following this: "But Noah found [secured] grace [favor] in the eyes of the LORD" (Genesis 6:8);³⁷ Noah, who lived at this time, evidently was not among those whose *thoughts were only evil continually*. We read that "Noah was a just [or righteous] man *and* perfect [or blameless] in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God" (Genesis 6:9);³⁸ Noah was like unto every other descendant of Adam who was living on the earth at that time, except that he *walked with God*. Furthermore, three generations from Adam, Cainan had a son and called his name Mahalaleel – praise of God (Genesis 5:12);³⁹ one generation further and we read that "Enoch walked with God" and the Lord *took him* (Genesis 5:22, 24). What becomes clear is that from Adam to Noah there were

³⁵ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

³⁶ Strong's Online.

³⁷ BDB.

³⁸ BDB; Holladay Hebrew Lexicon, Bibleworks 8.

³⁹ Strong's Online.

those who were persuaded that the promise of God was true and faithful. Yes, these men were all *depraved*, in that they were unable to restore their relationship with Jehovah through their own efforts, yet each one (and there were undoubtedly many more who are not named) chose to believe in the promise of God and expressed their faithfulness to Him by offering a blood sacrifice. The people before the flood were not ignorant of what God required, yet even then it was only a remnant who would heed the Lord's requirements. Demonstrating that the general population of earth was consistently evil does not discount the fact that the Lord has always had His children – even though they are typically few in number.

Jeremiah 17:9-10 – “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, *I* try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.” Their understanding from this is: “God asserts here His right as judge and also gives His judgment telling us that our depravity … is … a matter of our hearts.”⁴⁰ However, within the same context, we read this: “Blessed *is* the man that trusteth [*is continually trusting* (imperfect); an action carried out by *the man*] in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted [*has been planted*; passive – the Lord plants the one who is *trusting*] by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (Jeremiah 17:7-8).⁴¹ It goes without much thought that God is the judge of all humanity, but it is also evident from this passage that for the one who is trusting in the Lord, God will provide great blessing (not necessarily physically, but spiritually) because **he is trusting** in the Lord!

John 3:3, 5 – “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God … Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” Their understanding goes like this: “Jesus tells Nicodemus and us here that we cannot even see (understand) the kingdom of God except by … the miracle of a whole new life … there is no hope.”⁴² They use this to underscore man’s hopeless condition, which is not untrue. However, consider Jesus’ explanation to Nicodemus as to how this new life could be accomplished: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever

⁴⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁴¹ Strong’s Online.

⁴² <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The premise for accomplishing this miraculous new life is this: God loved humanity to the extent that He willingly gave His only Son, begotten of a woman and the Holy Spirit (in keeping with Genesis 3:15; Matthew 1:18) in order to bring *new life*. On that premise, Jesus declares: whoever is believing (present tense – describes a continuous action; active voice – identifies *whosoever* as the one who is doing the *believing*) will not die (*perish*) but is having (again, present tense, active voice) everlasting life.⁴³ Both *perish* and *have* are in the subjunctive mood, which, in a purpose clause (such as this), means that they (the clauses: *does not perish* and *is having everlasting life*) are only dependent upon the presence of the *believing* in *whosoever*; there is no uncertainty here – in other words, if the believing is there (the condition), then so are not perishing and having everlasting life (the results).⁴⁴ As we have noted before, to *believe* requires the use of our intellect to evaluate, and a result of that evaluation is that we are persuaded of the truth of our consideration. Therefore, to *believe* (a verb [*pisteuo*]; what we do) on Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, requires that we evaluate Who He is, what He has done to bring hope, and what He requires of those who consider following Him; faith (a noun [*pistis*] is our believing formed into a conviction) in His ability to bring spiritual life (1 John 5:12), counting the cost of making Him top priority in all things (Luke 14:26-33), abiding in Him (John 15:4), and obedience to His commands (John 14:15).⁴⁵ What we find here is that man, who has been created in the image of God, is required to *believe* on a continuous basis in order to find that new life in Christ. By contrast, we are told that during the time of the Antichrist (*that Wicked*) there will be a deceit of unrighteousness in *those who are perishing* because they would not accept (*received not*; active voice) a love of the truth so that they could be saved (passive voice); the refusal of the truth is an action of the *perishing* (active voice), while *saved* (passive voice) is the work of God (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10).⁴⁶ Once again, context and Scripture provide a different view of the quoted texts.

John 6:44 – “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” Their elaboration on this focuses on the first two clauses: “This passage is concerned with faith, described here as ‘coming

⁴³ Strong’s Online.

⁴⁴ A subjunctive verb often introduces an element of uncertainty but, in cases such as this, they are certain as long as the action upon which they are dependent holds true; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

⁴⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

to Jesus.' This coming to Jesus or believing, Jesus says, is impossible except by the power of God. No man has that power of himself. This passage is especially important because so many Christians have the mistaken idea that believing is the one good action that sinful man can do. The Word of God here says that it is not so.⁴⁷ The premise for their explanation for how Jesus' words support their doctrine hinges on the word *draw*. *Helkuo* (translated from the Greek as *draw*) refers to a strong mental or moral attraction,⁴⁸ and is the verb of the conditional clause (protasis) of this two-clause statement. The condition is: "unless His Father ... should attract him" and the consequential clause (apodosis) that is dependent upon this condition is: "no one is able to come to Jesus."⁴⁹ There is no definition given as to what the Father's *attraction* of this undefined person might look like, and even more significant is that the Calvinist assumes that God is not *attracting* everyone, for if He was, in fact, *drawing* all men, then their doctrine would suffer a tremendous blow. Jesus, Who is the *express image* of God in human form (Hebrews 1:2-3) and Who carried out the will of the Father in fullness (Deuteronomy 18:18; John 12:49-50), declared: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw [*helkuo*] all *men* [meaning *everyone*] unto me" (John 12:32).⁵⁰ There is no question that Jesus was *lifted up* from the earth because John goes on to explain that Jesus used these words to indicate that crucifixion would be the manner of His death (John 12:33). However, not only was He *lifted up* at the time of His crucifixion, but He was ultimately *lifted up* to be seated with the majesty of the Father in glory (Mark 16:19). Since Jesus **was lifted up**, then it follows that *all (everyone)* will be *drawn* to Him; indeed, even though the Father is drawing everyone to His Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, He will not override the will of man (his ability to choose) in this matter – or any other.

However, once again it is important to look beyond the Calvinist's quoted source that they use in support of their understanding of total depravity. John 6:45 records Jesus' further comments on this matter: "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." He begins by quoting from Isaiah 54:13 that follows a passage that bears some similarities to John's description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:10-21. It is difficult to fully comprehend the significance of this quote from the OT at this point, but it could be an assurance that those who are coming to God will be *taught* by Him – they will not be ignored or left to flounder in ignorance.

⁴⁷ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

⁴⁹ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/conditional_sentences.htm#CONDITIONAL_PDF.

⁵⁰ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

Another thing that is important from this quote is that the Hebrew word for *taught* includes the thought of the instruction of disciples – i.e., the instruction springs from within an existing relationship (reinforcing the thought that God will instruct those who are coming to Him).⁵¹ Jesus then goes on: *everyone, then, who has heard from the Father and has heeded, is coming to Me.*⁵² *Heard* (*akouo*) includes the thought of comprehension – this is not simply an activity of the ear but involves the exercise of the mind resulting in understanding; *has heeded* (*learned*; *manthano*) takes the proper sense of *heard* to the level of obedience (in other words, what is understood, is being lived out – that is a true definition of *believe*).⁵³ Jesus describes the one who is hearing and heeding the Father as someone who *is coming* to Him – not someone who has arrived but who is still *coming* (it is in the present tense); another interesting aspect to the Greek word translated as *cometh* is that it is in the middle voice, which means that the one who has heard and heeded the Father is doing the coming **and** he is also the beneficiary of this action.⁵⁴

As Jesus expounded on being the Bread of Life, He said this: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth [*is believing* (this is persuasion and conviction that will result in obedience)] on me hath [*is having*] everlasting life [*aionios zoe*]” (John 6:47); *believeth* is in the present tense (making it a continually present reality) and active voice (*he* is carrying out this action).⁵⁵ To the consternation of the religious Jews, Jesus went on to say: “Whoso eateth [*is eating*] my flesh, and drinketh [*is drinking*] my blood, hath [*is having*] eternal life [*aionios zoe*]; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:54). What caused many of the Jews to cease following Him (*eateth my flesh* and *drinketh my blood*), He explained earlier through His parallel comment that *everlasting life* is held by *the one who is believing on Me*; what the Jews found offensive was His indication of the sacrifice that He would soon make for the sins of humanity. What we need to pay careful attention to is the correlation that He made between *eating* and *drinking*, which are clearly activities that everyone does, and *believing*; the comparable analogies help us to understand that everyone is capable of *believing* (just as he is of *eating* and *drinking*). In order to *believe on Him* we must be persuaded that He gave His body for us (*eat His flesh*) and that He shed His blood for us (*drink His blood*) – this persuasion will bring us into Christ: connected to the True Vine by faith (John 15:4), and grafted into the

⁵¹ BDB.

⁵² Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁵³ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.

⁵⁴ Strong's Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST.

⁵⁵ Strong's Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

Olive Tree by faith (Romans 11:20-21). “Take heed, brethren [those of faith], lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithless; no belief], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12);⁵⁶ faith is central to our relationship with the Lord! Jesus taught that **we are capable of believing** in His Word!

John 12:37-40 – “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.” Consider the passage of Isaiah that the Lord quotes from: “And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-10). This follows Jehovah expressing His anger against His wayward people; Isaiah receives a vision of the glory of God, and then volunteers to go to this people with the Lord’s message. The people of Judah were facing the Lord’s righteous judgment because they had “cast away the law of the LORD of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 5:24); in essence, they had turned away from the Lord, and He is going to hold them accountable for their choice. The Calvinist’s understanding of Jesus’ words is this: “... we also find here that this depravity of man is the **direct result of God’s judgment** upon man and does not just happen to be the case with him. His depravity is, then, the death with which God threatened him in the beginning” (emphasis added).⁵⁷ Their focus is on the words of Isaiah that Jesus quoted: *He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart*, from which their conclusion is that it is God Who has *blinded* and *hardened*, and so it is only God Who is able to open their vision and understanding so that they can *be converted*. In isolation, this may sound to be an appropriate understanding of Jesus’ words, but we must be careful to always consider the larger context of God’s Word.

To His disciples Jesus explained why He spoke to the people of Israel in parables, and His explanation provides illumination for the passages from John 12 and Isaiah. “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they

⁵⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁷ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive” (Matthew 13:13-15). Consider those to whom Jesus spoke the parables: *they who are seeing are not perceiving, and they who are hearing are not learning nor understanding* (Matthew 13:13b, literal).⁵⁸ The Jews of Jesus’ day had the Scriptures that foretold of His coming, yet, even though they saw what He did and heard what He said, they could not *understand* because they refused to believe Who He was; instead, the religious leaders plotted how they might remove Him: “If we let him thus alone, all *men* will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:48) – the religious Jews were content with their lot under Rome and did not see their need for a Savior from sin. After quoting from Isaiah, Jesus goes on: *“for the heart of this people is become insensitive, and their ears have heard with difficulty and their eyes they have closed, lest they should have seen with their eyes and their ears might have heard and with the heart they might have understood, and they may have turned and I might have healed them”* (Matthew 13:15, literal).⁵⁹ The *insensitivity* of the heart of this people is because of the choices that they had made prior to this moment in time (*insensitive* is in the passive voice) – they may not have set out to be so dull of heart (they actually considered themselves to be spiritually astute) but this was the product of their wrong decisions. As a result, they have a hard time hearing the truth of Jesus (and what they might hear, they do not understand, and seek to use it against Him), and they have actually closed their eyes so that they cannot see the Truth of God. In fulfillment of Isaiah, Jesus identifies the people of Israel as being closed to His Message of life; like Judah of old, they are destined for God’s judgment because they say, “We see,” and yet remain in their sin (John 9:41). We read of the Lord hardening (to make firm or rigid) the heart of Pharaoh when he was presented with Moses’ requests (Exodus 7:13), but we understand that this was the Lord orchestrating His judgment upon Egypt for their actions against Israel; His judgment of Egypt was not because Pharaoh rejected Moses’ petitions, but because of generations of idolatry and the oppression of Israel. Pharaoh’s heart is described as being *hardened* (literally, *heavy* or *dull*), not easily moved (Exodus 7:14); this was not from the Lord, but was the result of years of walking according to the pagan deities of Egypt. The time for God’s judgment of Egypt was ripe, and so the Lord simply ensured that Pharaoh’s already hardened heart remained so for Him to carry out His judgment. What we see from this is that the Lord was not the One Who

⁵⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

hardened the hearts, dulled the hearing or closed the eyes of these people – all of this was done through their own personal choices (springing from a heart that was spiritually dead) long before the Lord began to orchestrate their judgment.

Indeed, God's judgment upon sinful man is that he is spiritually dead and will physically die; however, to deny that sinful man has a choice to make, strikes at the very heart of what it means to be created in the image of God. God's judgment upon Adam and Eve was immediately countered with the salvation that He had prepared before creation (1 Peter 1:18-21); in other words, man (beginning with Adam, the first sinner) has never been without a choice! Adam's fatal choice came from a sinless creation; from then on, the propensity to make bad choices is so much easier because of the sin-nature that now lives within everyone. Cain discovered just how easy it was to make a bad choice but, nevertheless, the choice was still his; he knew what God required yet chose to make an offering of his own works (Genesis 4:3-5) – his anger exposes his understanding of what the Lord had prescribed; if he had not known, then he would have been surprised, not angry. Man's depravity is his harvest from disobedience, but God has also prepared a Way so that His judgment of sin might be suspended for the individual who places his faith in the Lord Jesus, our Redeemer. Generations of living away from the Truth of God may well bury the choice under piles of traditions that do not lead to Him, but that does not remove the choice that was made – it only makes it more difficult for them to find that Narrow Way that leads to life. Jesus said: “Enter ye [a command given by the Lord!] in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in therewith: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few there be that find it**” (Matthew 7:13-14).⁶⁰ The Calvinist contends that God has imposed depravity upon man, but he forgets that God also immediately opened the way to life because the Godhead had determined from eternity past that Jesus would come to remove the penalty of sin – a choice has always been there! God's judgement of sin was quick, but it was accompanied by a way for His mercy and grace to find a place in the individual's life. “And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know [knowing] good and evil ...” (Genesis 3:22);⁶¹ this is the Lord's assessment of man as a sinner – **he knows both good and evil**; there is **always** a choice to be made!

Romans 1:28 – “And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient

⁶⁰ Strong's Online.

⁶¹ Ibid.

....” Although more of this passage is quoted, this becomes the focus of their support for the *depravity* or *inability* of man: “Here the Word of God establishes the fact that man’s will is not at all inclined toward God (‘they did not like to retain God in their knowledge’), but toward evil.”⁶² However, in their haste, they have missed the meaning of the very phrase that they point to for support. *Like* comes from the Greek root word *dokimazo*, which means to approve: after examination, a thing or concept is considered to be valuable.⁶³ In other words, man weighed (however briefly) between his way and God’s way, and *chose* to consider God to be of no value to him; it is as a result of this that God gave them over to their *unapproved (reprobate, adokimos)* minds.⁶⁴ Rather than exposing man’s inability, this expresses man’s responsibility for his godless (*unapproved*) mind and that a choice is still his – the image of God is still present!

However, they go on: “And the preceding context [in Romans 1] supports this fully by showing that the worship of the heathen is not a seeking after God, or longing for him, but a changing of the truth of God into a lie.”⁶⁵ Even when they endeavor to use the context, they fail to see the part of that context that discredits their agenda: “Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened … Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness … Who changed the truth of God into a lie …” (Romans 1:21-25). The context reveals that when they *knew God (having known God)* they *chose* not to acknowledge Him as such, and, as a result, God gave them over to what they had chosen (*uncleanness*) with the result that they distorted God’s truth into a lie. Therefore, it is clearly evident that, **before** God turned them loose to their uncleanness, they knew Him. After clarifying that God’s wrath (*orge*, His anger against sin) is evident against ungodliness and unrighteousness, Paul explains the situation of the ungodly this way: *because what can be known of God is clearly seen, being in them; for God has been revealed to them, indeed the invisible attributes of Him, from the creation of the world, the things made have been understood – they have clearly seen His eternal power and divine nature so that they are without excuse* (Romans 1:19-20, literal).⁶⁶ Before God *gave them up to uncleanness*, they turned away from the evidence that was both within and all around them, refused to acknowledge God as the Creator and Sustainer of all

⁶² <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁶³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁶⁴ Strong’s Online.

⁶⁵ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

things, and became arrogant – *wise* in their own eyes but *fools* before God (Romans 1:21-24). It is after that initial rejection of God and His majesty that men become consumed with what is evil and against the Lord; as we have seen before, this can become a tradition of spiritual blindness that will perpetuate for generations (Exodus 20:5).

Romans 3:9-19 – Although they quote the whole passage noted, the core of their attention is on this: “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:10-11). From this they state that “the apostle Paul is quoting here from *eight* different Old Testament passages to prove the depravity of man.”⁶⁷ There is no doubt that humanity is depraved and unable to do anything to save themselves, but the Calvinist is caught trying to overstate the condition of the ungodly as being one of **inability** to even **choose** to believe the Lord! Their basis for this fallacy is due to their misunderstanding of what it means for man to have been created in the *image of God* (Genesis 1:27). They quote Genesis 5:3 – “And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth”; their comment is this: “What a testimony this is against man who was created in the image of God but who now begets children, **not in God’s image**, but in his own!” (emphasis added).⁶⁸ Within this thinking, all of the children of Adam have lost the image of God and only bear Adam’s sin-stained image.⁶⁹ Yet, just a little later we read: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for **in the image of God made he man**” (Genesis 9:6). After the flood, God prescribed the death penalty through Noah because sinful man was made in *His image!* This fits with Paul’s instruction in Romans 1 that we just looked at – God has revealed His eternal power and divinity to sinful men through their own bodies and the created world (Romans 1:19-20). Yes, all of the children of Adam are born with a sin-nature (his image), but what is equally evident is that they also bear the *image of God* – the ability to think, to reason, and to choose! Man’s condition, when left to his own devices, is not *inability*, but, too frequently, it is simply *independence* – an arrogant desire to follow his own determination. And so, “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools [*foolish*] ...” (Romans 1:22).⁷⁰

⁶⁷ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ That this is not the opinion of all Calvinists is evident; John MacArthur says: “God’s image was placed in humanity at creation, not redemption. Although the image of God was seriously marred by Adam’s fall, it was not utterly obliterated” (<https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A200/loving-gods-image-in-our-neighbors>).

⁷⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

Ephesians 2:1, 5 – “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins.... Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved).” Their analysis of this is: “This time our depravity is described as a spiritual death to help us understand that **no more than a dead man can think, will, understand, speak, or act can we** think, will, understand, speak, or act in a way that is pleasing to God – not without grace and salvation. **This passage is proof**, therefore also that total depravity and spiritual death are one and the same” (emphasis added).⁷¹ It seems that this is where they will rest their case – this is the evidence that “irrefutably” proves their point: **depravity is total inability!** This is the past condition of those who are presently saints (Paul included), yet just a little earlier Paul’s teaching clarified the situation. “In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard [with understanding] the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed [the active voice makes this the action of those who *heard*], ye were sealed [marked for identification; passive voice – this is God’s work in the one who *believed*] with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest [first installment or down payment] of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Ephesians 1:13-14).⁷² Clearly, the unregenerate can *hear* the truth of God’s Word and they can evaluate it, ponder its message, and then *believe* it or reject it. One of the difficulties that Calvinists have is that they remove God’s image from the sinner, and this is a problem because God does not do so! It is because they have declared the sinner to be without the image of God (only Adam’s fallen image) that they have defined depravity to be *total inability*.

As we have seen, there are varying degrees to the extent that Calvinists carry their understanding of *depravity*, but it has also become clear that even the moderates still hold to the *inability* of anyone to choose to believe in the Lord. However, it should also be evident by now, that the Scriptures do **not** support this interpretation. All Calvinists are intent on protecting their historical theology, and even men like MacArthur will seek those Scriptures that might appear to support their well-defined doctrines, while turning a blind eye to the context and other Scriptures that would place their teachings in jeopardy. Nevertheless, this is an important doctrine for them

⁷¹ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁷² Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online; neither *believed* nor *sealed* is in the past tense – Paul is not looking back in order to affirm his salvation – this is a reminder of something that takes place only once and needs to be held onto firmly (Hebrews 3:6).

because it the cornerstone of their theology; we will come to see just how important as we consider the other parts of the TULIP acronym.

UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

That some receive the gift of faith from God and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree ... He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy – THE CANONS OF DORT, “First Head of Doctrine of Divine Predestination,” Article 6.⁷³

This next doctrine of Calvinism builds upon the foundation that has been laid: the total inability (depravity) of humanity. As we noted when considering their teachings on depravity, all of their other doctrines spring out of their flawed understanding of the depravity of man. If, as they contend, man is absolutely unable to even choose to believe on the Lord, then, of necessity, if anyone is to be saved, it must the Lord alone Who decides who will be chosen for salvation.

Unlike the doctrine of *total depravity*, there seems to be more of a cohesive

understanding among Calvinists on *unconditional election*. In the words of one: “By election we mean the eternal choice by God of certain definite individuals in Jesus Christ unto salvation.”⁷⁴ John MacArthur, probably considered to be a moderate Calvinist, says: “Election is the act of God whereby in eternity past He chose those who will be saved.”⁷⁵ Earlier (in

the *Preamble*) we noted that Reformed theology focuses on what they refer to as God’s *absolute divine sovereignty*.⁷⁶ Their teaching on the matter of *unconditional election* flows out of their understanding of *predestination* that they see as an

⁷³ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

⁷⁴ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

⁷⁵ <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A132/considering-election-not-politics>.

⁷⁶ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>

essential part of God's *absolute sovereignty*. In our approach to this subject, let's begin by looking carefully at a couple of their Biblical *proofs* for this doctrine, and then move on to their understanding of *predestination* in the light of the Scriptures.

Deuteronomy 7:6 – “For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth.” Their explanation for selecting this text (as well as several others like it) is: “The outstanding example of election in the Old Testament is God’s election of the nation of Israel.”⁷² Moses reminded the people of Israel that they were *set apart* (a more appropriate translation of *qadowsh* than *holy*, given the context) unto the Lord as a single unit (*thou, thy, and thee* are all singular pronouns), and it is the people of Israel whom the Lord had chosen to be a *special people*.⁷⁷ If we go back to Jehovah’s calling of Abraham, we read this: “And I will make of thee a great nation … and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:2-3) – through the lineage of Abraham, all of humanity would be blessed through the coming Savior. This promise was reiterated to Isaac (Genesis 26:4) and Jacob (Genesis 28:14), thereby making the children of Jacob (Israel) a very *special people* unto the Lord – it would be through them that the eternal Word would take on a body of flesh to make the full payment for sin as it had been determined from before creation. The Lord chose Abraham, Isaac and Israel to be the family line through whom the promise of a coming Savior would be fulfilled. Yes, God chose Israel to be a special people unto Him, but this is **NOT** the *unconditional election* that is touted by the Calvinists – not even close. Remember, *unconditional election* (by their definition) is God choosing *individuals to salvation!* God did **not** choose Israel to salvation – He chose them to be the earthly family through whom *all families of the earth* would be *blessed!* The line of Israel brought the Savior, Jesus into the world; through them, salvation has been opened in a whole new way to all of humanity (*all families of the earth*). Israel was a people who had been set apart unto the Lord as Moses stated, but that cannot in any way be misconstrued to represent the *unconditional election* of Calvinism.

Matthew 22:14 – “For many are called, but few *are* chosen.” To the Calvinist, this appears to be a simple affirmation of God’s unconditional election of those who are *chosen*. Based upon the natural contrast between *many (polloi)* and *few (eklektoi)*, at first glance this might seem to be the correct response.⁷⁸ However, as we all know, *first glances* are not always correct. There is actually much more here

⁷⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

than might initially come to mind, so let's consider it carefully to be sure that we understand what Jesus is saying.

We need to begin by recognizing that this is the final summation given by Jesus after He presented a parable to the religious Jews; they realized that many of His parables exposed their failures, and that served to increase their commitment to see Him silenced. This parable regarding the kingdom of heaven was this: a king made wedding festivities for his son, and he sent his slaves to call those who had been invited, and they refused to come. When he sent more slaves and explained that everything had been made ready, they either ignored his invitation, or mistreated and even killed some of his slaves. The king sent his armies, destroyed the murderers and set their city on fire. To his slaves, he declared that those who had been invited were not worthy, and then sent them to the main roads to invite as many as they could find to the wedding. They went out and brought together **all** (*pantas*) whom they found, whether bad or good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. As the king came in to see the guests, he found a man who was not wearing a wedding garment; having no reason for not wearing the appropriate garment, the king ordered his slaves to bind him and cast him into *outer darkness*. *For many are called, but few are chosen* (Matthew 22:1-14).⁷⁹ Since this is a parable about the kingdom of heaven, we understand that the *king* is God the Father Who has prepared wedding celebrations for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and that those attending the celebrations actually make up the Bride, the *ekklesia* of the Lamb. From Abraham onward, we understand that the invitation to the celebrations was particularly directed to the chosen family-line through whom the promised Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:18-19) and Sin-Bearer (Isaiah 53:5-6) would come; yet those of this family-line also chose to mistreat and kill those who came proclaiming the salvation of Jehovah (the invitation). Therefore, they were not accounted as being *worthy* of the wedding celebrations and, because of their *blindness* and stubbornness, were excluded – the wedding hall was now being filled with willing guests (Romans 11:25); God has ended His work through Israel (Ephesians 2:14-16), destroyed their city (in 70 AD), and has given the invitation to the celebrations (His Gospel under the New Covenant) to all of humanity (Paul told the Jews as much – Acts 13:46)! Notice that the invitation given by the king was redirected to **all** whom his slaves could find; *and He, the Atonement, is because of our sins, and not because of ours only but also because of all of humanity* (literal, 1 John 2:2).⁸⁰ All, is from the Greek

⁷⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong's Online.

⁸⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

word *holos*, which means the whole or all; *kosmos (humanity)* must refer to humanity since the redemption that Jesus accomplished is for those who bear His image, and not for the world-system that remains under Satan's control.⁸¹ Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36) – He did not die to redeem the corrupted culture of this world; He died in order to provide atonement for the sins of humanity! This provides us with a fuller understanding of the *many (polloi)* in the quoted verse;⁸² as is frequently the case, *polloi* can be used in an inclusive sense (*all*) – as it is here: *all are invited.*⁸³

Does this parable shed any light on the last phrase: *but few chosen?* As the king entered the celebration hall to look upon the guests whom his slaves had brought for the festivities, he saw someone there who was not wearing a *wedding garment* (Matthew 22:11). When asked why he wasn't wearing the appropriate attire, the man was speechless: there was no, "I didn't know," "I'm sorry," or "Nothing was available for me." The king then had him bound and cast *into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 22:13) – this is that place of eternal separation from the Lord that begins with the torments of Hades (Luke 16:23) and ends in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). Clearly, there is a greater application to be made than what we might catch at first read, otherwise we might be inclined to view this as a massive overreaction to the matter at hand – not wearing a wedding garment. Let's take a step back and consider the larger picture.

The terms of acceptance for the *celebrants* (participants) of the marriage of the Lamb have been carefully laid out for us in God's Word – they are God's terms formulated by Him from eternity past! From Genesis 3:15 came the promise that God would one day defeat Satan through a male Offspring of the woman, and the promises of God throughout the OT continued to refine this promise until it found fulfillment in Christ. Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6) and thereby proclaimed that He is the only pathway to eternal life – **this** is the *narrow way* that leads to life and which only few will find (Matthew 7:14). Even though Jesus issued a general command to enter through the *strait (narrow) gate* (Matthew 7:13), He recognized that few would find Him so that they would be able to enter or not be offended by Him (Matthew 11:6).⁸⁴

⁸¹ Vine's Expository Dictionary, "all"; Friberg Lexicon.

⁸² Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁸³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, "polloi." It is because of being a part of this parable that Kittel and Friedrich specifically see the necessity of recognizing the inclusive sense of *polloi*.

⁸⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

Paul elaborated on this for us: “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places in Christ*: According as he hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world ...” (Ephesians 1:3-4a). The clarity is this: in the eternal counsels of God (*before the foundation of the world*; cp. 1 Peter 1:19-20), Christ was identified as being the One Who would make the full payment for the sins of man – Christ, eternal God in the garb of flesh, was the One Who was *chosen* (*bachiyr*; the *Elect*; Isaiah 42:1) to bring redemption from sin.⁸⁵ Paul explains to the Ephesians that we (those who have placed our faith in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus) are *chosen in Him*. The selection of saints that the Lord made from eternity past is everyone who is *in Christ* – this is not a predetermined list of names of those who will be saved, but rather a single name (*Christ, the Elect*) through Whom everyone must enter in order to be saved (and then counted as *elect*). “*There is* therefore now **no condemnation** to them which are **in Christ Jesus** ...” (Romans 8:1): outside of the Lord Jesus Christ there **is** condemnation – being found *in the Lord* is very important and holds eternal consequences. Jesus also said that it is the one who is doing the will of the Father (a present-tense, active obedience to His Word) who will find his place in heaven (Matthew 7:21), and so He also clarified: “But he that shall endure [*hypomeno* – to remain faithful even through trials] unto the end [our death or the Lord’s return], the same [a demonstrative pronoun in the Greek that means *this is the one who*] shall be [will be; future tense] saved” (Matthew 24:13).⁸⁶ This brings together *doing the will of the Father* and *remaining faithful to the Lord*; James, in turn, issued the warning that unless our faith yields a life of faithfulness, that faith is dead (James 2:17). As we bring all of this into focus with the Bride of the Lamb, we are told that she is clothed with *fine linen*, which is the *righteousness of saints* (Revelation 19:8); *righteousness* (*dikaioma*), as it is used here, speaks of the fulfillment of the righteous requirements of God: i.e., obedience to His commandments – the faithfulness of those who are *in Christ*.⁸⁷

Now we bring this back to the parable of the king and a wedding guest not attired in the proper wedding garment. The proper *wedding garment* for the Bride of the Son of the King is the *fine linen* of faithful obedience to the King’s commands. Therefore, this man, who was mingling with the properly attired wedding guests (dressed in the *fine linen* of faithfulness to the Lord), was not found to be faithful, and was banished to *outer darkness*. The slaves of the King did not notice that his

⁸⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁸⁶ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁸⁷ Strong’s Online.

garment was inappropriate – clearly he was living in a way that did not announce his inadequacies, but the King knew immediately! Like Cain of old, this man knew the requirements in order for him to be a part of this wedding celebration (which is why he had no response to his inappropriate attire), yet he chose his own way that led to his eternal rejection.

All have been called to be a part of the wedding celebrations of the Son of the King, those who first received the formal invitation have spurned it, but even among *all* who are called, only those who remain faithful to the King and His Son will have a part in the celebrations to come. The religious Jews of Jesus' day were destined for *outer darkness* (Matthew 8:12), whereas "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth [*is believing* (present tense – continuous; active voice – *whosoever* is doing the *believing*)] on me should not abide in darkness" (John 12:46).⁸⁸ *In Christ* is life and light, and we are *in Him* through faith (*believing*; Acts 10:43) – a living faith that must be accompanied by faithful obedience to the Lord! *All have been invited, but only those who remain faithful to the Lord will be among the chosen in Christ.*

Rather than proceed with further evaluation of the proof-texts that the Calvinists provide for *unconditional election* (we have already demonstrated that their evaluation is superficial), let's take a closer look at the concept of *election*, since that is an essential part of this element of their doctrine.

As we began this study, we included a clarification that is offered by the Calvinists as to their exact meaning of *election*: "Election is the act of God whereby in eternity past **He chose those who will be saved**" (emphasis added).⁸⁹ It is important to note that the Calvinists' *election* is to salvation and that it is applied to individuals; as we examine what the Scriptures tell us about this matter, we need to keep this in mind.

We have already noted Isaiah's reference to the coming Savior as *the Elect* – let's begin there. "Behold my servant [or slave], whom I uphold; mine elect [*bachiyr*; Chosen], *in whom* my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles [nations]" (Isaiah 42:1).⁹⁰ This is very clearly a messianic prophecy concerning the Lord Jesus Christ; Matthew specifically noted that Jesus was the fulfillment of this passage from Isaiah (Matthew 12:18-21) – there

⁸⁸ Strong's Online.

⁸⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A132/considering-election-not-politics>.

⁹⁰ Strong's Online; BDB.

can be no question that *mine Elect* is a reference to Christ: the *Chosen* of God! Micah prophesied: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel [speaking of the Lord Jesus]; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2) – the Word came out of eternity to take on a body of flesh (Jesus): “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word [the *Word* became flesh, John 1:1-2, 14], and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). The *Word* was chosen in eternity past to enter this world in a body of flesh for the purpose of paying the price for sin; John the Baptist recognized this truth: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29b). The eternal purpose of the Lord was to send the *Word* (an eternal part of the Godhead) to pay the price for the sin that would be committed by a humanity who was yet to be created – Jesus (the *Word* made flesh) was **chosen** to bring redemption to humanity. From the eternal counsels of God, Jesus is **the Elect** – chosen for a very specific purpose!

The Lord gave Isaiah a message for Cyrus, the Lord’s *anointed*, so that he would know that Jehovah is the God of Israel, and “For Jacob my servant’s sake, and Israel mine elect ...” (Isaiah 45:4a). The relationship of Israel to the Lord is as a *servant* and as His *elect*. As the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He expressed His desire for them: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Exodus 19:6a) – a desire that was contingent upon their obedience to His commandments. A *priest* acts as an intermediary between God (in this case) and man, and must have an established relationship with God in order to communicate His expectations to man as well as intercede with God on his behalf – the priest is a *servant* of God. God’s desire for Israel to be a *holy nation* was so that they might present a favored view of God to the world – they might live out God’s desire for mankind as His *elect*. Once again, we see that Israel, as God’s *elect*, was chosen for a specific purpose: to be a light for the Lord in a spiritually dark world, and also that through them *all families of the earth* would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). As a people, Israel had great difficulty being a light for the Lord; as a matter of fact, by the time of Isaiah, the traditions of the priests and sacrifices had become empty rituals (they continued to foreshadow the coming of the Savior but there was no longer any cleansing from sin); although the blood flowed from the many sacrifices that they kept as prescribed by God, He tells them that their hands are *full of blood* and their empty liturgies are *evil* (Isaiah 1:15-16). Even though they failed to be a faithful *servant* of the Lord, they still remained the Lord’s *elect* and “when the

fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). Israel, as God’s *elect*, was the chosen family line through whom the Savior was born, and through Whom *all families of the earth* would be blessed!

We have looked at Christ and Israel, since both are recorded in Scripture as being God’s *elect*, and we have noted that both were chosen by God to accomplish specific purposes. What is noteworthy for our discussion is that that purpose in neither case is *salvation*! Yet the Calvinist insists that God’s choice of the *elect* from among humanity is to salvation: “the eternal choice by God of certain definite individuals in Jesus Christ **unto salvation**” (emphasis added).⁹¹ Is this a legitimate expression of what God has done, or are they reaching beyond the Word of God into the theological musings of men? Let’s consider the concept of *elect* as it is used within the NT so that we can better understand God’s purpose in this matter.

The NT does include a reference to Israel as being God’s elect: “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matthew 24:22). Jesus was explaining to His disciples what was coming, and this is specifically directed to the time of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem; He gave them signs to watch for, along with the instruction to then flee from the city without stopping for anything (Luke 21:20-21). As His prescribed signs unfolded in 70 AD, those who were His children and familiar with His warnings would have fled the city so that its inhabitants would have been primarily Jews – His *elect* for the purpose of bringing the Messiah. As it turned out, the days of the siege of Jerusalem were *shortened*, and many Jews (the OT *elect* according to God’s purpose) were saved from sure death as a result. Despite their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, God still had mercy upon them.

As Paul writes to the Colossians, he refers to them “as the elect of God, holy and beloved” (Colossians 3:12); he addressed this epistle to “the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse” (Colossians 1:2a), or, more literally: *to the saints in Colossae, and to the faithful brethren in Christ*.⁹² From this we can come to understand who the *elect of God* are within the context of the Gospel. *Holy* (*hagioi*) and *saints* (*hagiois*) are different forms of the same Greek word (dative and nominative, respectively) that speaks of being consecrated to God, set apart unto Him, and therefore, those who have been made fit to enter into His holy presence through the cleansing that comes through the blood of Jesus. *Beloved* is a verb in the

⁹¹ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

⁹² Young’s Literal Translation.

passive voice – it is God’s love expressed to the *elect of God*; coming from the Greek word *agapao*, it is a love that is an act of the will that is based upon evaluation and the freedom to choose.⁹³ It is also in the perfect tense, which means that there was a point in the past when we became the *beloved* of God (with the further understanding that it is a one-time action), and that the ongoing results of such a relationship with Him are continuing in full effect.⁹⁴ The final descriptive is: *faithful brethren in Christ*. *Holy* describes our restored position through Christ before God, *beloved* tells of how God views those who have been made *holy* in Christ, and this last phrase describes the maintenance of this wonderful relationship with the Lord: being *faithful in Christ*! From this we can learn that the *elect* are *holy* before God, they are *beloved* by God, and they are those who remain *faithful* to God. However, most significant is the phrase *in Christ* – being *holy* and *faithful in Christ* makes us *beloved* of the Father and His *elect*. As we consider this carefully, we can begin to see that being among God’s *elect* is a reflection of who we are before Him *in Christ*.

Jesus is the *faithful witness* (Revelation 1:5) and *Faithful* is one of His many names (Revelation 19:11). *Faithful* (*pistos*) speaks of trustworthiness, reliability and dependability, and this is eternally tied to the Lord Jesus; the living creatures and elders whom John sees around the throne of God proclaim Jesus to be *worthy* because He was *faithful* in the task of purchasing redemption for mankind (Revelation 5:9). We read much of *faith in the Lord Jesus*, and a little about the *faith of Jesus Christ* – they are not the same. *Faith* (a noun) and *believe* (a verb) work hand-in-hand; *believe* (*pisteuo*) includes the idea of persuasion of the truth of something, which implies evaluation in order to arrive at a place of conviction.⁹⁵ *Faith* (*pistis*), on the other hand, takes the persuasion from *believing* and makes it the basis for living – it forms the foundation for all activities.⁹⁶ If we truly believe something, then it will influence how we live (*faith*): our decisions, what we embrace and avoid, how we relate to those about us, and the allocation of our time. If we are *believing* the Scriptures to be the Word of God, then we **must** be living in obedience to them – to do otherwise would demonstrate that we do not truly believe. When we speak of *faith in the Lord Jesus*, we are persuaded (*believing*) that Jesus and what the Word of God teaches us about Him are true, and we live out our faith in obedience to Him; this *faith* is from our perspective – however, our faith can often be misplaced. Consider a literal translation of 2 Corinthians 13:5a: *put yourselves to*

⁹³ Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁴ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST.

⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

the test whether you are in the faith (implied: *or not*; in essence: are you a hypocrite?); *be proving yourselves* (evaluating and testing to ensure that your faith is genuine according to God's Word).⁹⁷ Paul's concern is twofold: 1) that we not profess to believe one thing while secretly holding to something else, and 2) that our faith be founded upon the eternal God and His Word!

When we read of the *faith of Jesus Christ*, we might recognize that this is something different, but may be at a loss as to how this is to be understood. Jesus is eternal God wrapped in a body of flesh (John 1:14); yet we read that “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched [*sympathize*] with the feeling of our infirmities [*with our weaknesses*]; but was in all points tempted [*has experienced*] like as *we are [in the same way]*, yet without [*apart from*] sin” (Hebrews 4:15).⁹⁸ Jesus experienced the same limitations that we face: fatigue (John 4:6), hunger (Matthew 4:2), thirst (John 19:28), distress (Matthew 26:37), and death (John 19:33) – yet all of His human experiences were *apart from sin* (Hebrews 4:15). It was the *faith of Jesus* that saw Him complete the purpose for which He came to earth – His purpose as God's *Elect* (John 12:27); His humanity shrank from what faced Him (Matthew 26:39), but His *faith* in the eternal purposes of God the Father (John 17:5; Hebrews 2:9) allowed Him to go through the rejection by the Jews (John 19:6), the cruelty of the Romans (John 19:1-3), and the suffering of the crucifixion (John 19:18) in order to bring redemption from sin to humanity. It was the *faith of Jesus* that permitted Him to look beyond this world to the glory of the next (Hebrews 12:2): His deity understood that this was predetermined (after all, He was a part of the planning) in order to bring salvation to humanity, and as a Man, He experienced the rejection, cruelty, and pain of the cross. Yet through it all, He never lost sight of the glory that would soon be His and opened for His own (John 17:5; John 14:3), and the new abundant life that would soon be available to mankind through what He endured (John 10:10). It was His *faith* in the God-ordained plan of redemption that saw Him willingly submit to the cruelty of the creatures whom He had made in His own image – His name is *Faithful*. Paul caught the essence of this: “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot [is not able to] deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).⁹⁹ God is eternally faithful, and it was Jesus' faithfulness as Deity that overcame His human fear of the cross; the *faith of Christ* is eternally fused into the faithfulness of God – it is ***the faith*** that will lead to everlasting life!

⁹⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.

⁹⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; Gingrich Lexicon.

⁹⁹ Strong's Online.

What does the *faith of Christ* mean to us? “Knowing that a man is not justified [being pronounced righteous] by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified [declared to be righteous] by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Galatians 2:16).¹⁰⁰ Although *justified* (as underlined) is in the subjunctive mood (hence the word *might*), it must not be thought of as a possibility but as the reality that comes from having *believed in Jesus Christ*; the *cause* is believing in the Lord Jesus with the consequential *result* of being declared righteous (*justified*) by the faith of Christ that wrought salvation for us.¹⁰¹ “But now the righteousness of God without [*apart from*] the law is manifested [*has been revealed*] … Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe [*are believing*]: for there is no difference [distinction]: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God …” (Romans 3:21-23).¹⁰² *Believe* (*are believing*) is in the active voice (the *all* are doing the believing), and the present tense (this is a continuous action – a past action does **not** qualify to retain the *righteousness of God*).¹⁰³ Therefore, in order to bear the *righteousness of God* (after being declared righteous through the atoning work of Christ [the faith of Christ]), we must be holding a present belief in Jesus Christ, which, in turn, means that our *believing is producing* a life of obedience to the commands of God.

Returning to the matter of the Calvinist’s *unconditional election*, it should be evident by now that when we are referred to as being the *elect of God* it is because we are *in Christ*, but nothing whatsoever to do with salvation! God’s righteousness comes to *all* (*pas*; an inclusive expression that is to be applied to all of humanity – Romans 3:22) **only** through the completed atonement for sin that was accomplished by Christ – it is a *righteousness* that comes **only** through the faith of Christ by actively believing (in the full understanding of this term) in Him! Paul challenged the Ephesians *to put off the old man in respect to your former way of life, being corrupt according to its craving of deceitful pleasure, and being renewed in the spirit of your mind, even to put on the new man in God having been created in righteousness and true holiness* (Ephesians 4:22-24, literal).¹⁰⁴ Both *put off* and *put on* are in the middle voice – this is something that the subject (*you*) must do and you

¹⁰⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰¹ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

¹⁰² Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰³ Strong’s Online.

¹⁰⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

are also the beneficiary of the action;¹⁰⁵ both (*put off* and *put on*) are an act of the will! By contrast, *being renewed* is in the passive voice – this is something that only God can do within us; when we don the *new man* of *righteousness* and *holiness*, the renewing of our mind will then take place through the working of the abiding Spirit of God. Earlier, Paul had clarified that we are saved by the grace of God and that there is nothing that we can do to merit saving grace; however, he then goes on to explain: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). The *good works* for which we have been created will flow out of the *righteousness* and *holiness* of the *new man*. Jesus illustrated this: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23). Because the *many wonderful works* did not come out of the *new man* created in Christ Jesus, both the works and the workers were rejected by the Lord. The element that is critical to our acceptance with the Lord is that we are found to be *in Christ Jesus* – **those who are *in Him* are the elect!**

Let’s look again at Ephesians 1:3-5a – “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings [every spiritual blessing (these are singular in Greek)] in heavenly *places in Christ*: According as he [God] hath chosen us **in him** before the foundation of the world, that we” *being holy and blameless before Him, in love having predetermined us to adoption through Jesus Christ to Himself ...* (literal in italics).¹⁰⁶ As we permit our thinking to move away from *election-equals-salvation*, we can come to know a whole new vista of God’s mercy and grace that is far more marvelous than the *grace* of Calvinism. “*There is* therefore now no condemnation to them which are **in Christ Jesus**, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1); to the one who is *in Christ* there is *no condemnation* before God, but to be *in Christ* means to be living in keeping with the Spirit of God! Jesus said that if we are loving Him, then we must be attending carefully to His commandments (John 14:15); it is because of this that He took the time to carefully explain our need to count the cost of following Him before we commit to being His disciple – it will cost us everything (Luke 14:26-33)! John the Baptist declared: “He that believeth [*pisteuo*; *is believing* (present tense, active voice)] on the Son hath [*is having* (present tense, active voice)] everlasting

¹⁰⁵ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST; Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁰⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

life: and he that believeth not [*apeitheo; is not obeying* (present tense, active voice)] the Son shall not see life; but the wrath [*orge*, God's enduring anger against sin] of God abideth [*meno; is remaining* (present tense, active voice)] on him" (John 3:36).¹⁰⁷ John explains two distinct truths: 1) whoever is believing on the Lord Jesus is having everlasting life (as the *believing* is present, so is the everlasting life); 2) whoever is being disobedient to the Lord Jesus remains under God's anger against sin. Two very different ends, and both dependent upon the choice of *whoever*; notice that *whoever* is the one who is either *believing* or *disobeying* – this is nothing other than the choice of *whoever*. Consider Moses' words to the children of Israel just before they were to enter into the Promised Land: "I call heaven and earth to record [witness] this day against you, **that I have set before you life and death**, blessing and cursing: **therefore choose life**, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).¹⁰⁸ Although there were undoubtedly those who were faithful to the Lord within Israel, it is very evident from their history that most were not – yet Moses calls upon all of them to consider what he had rehearsed for them, and then to *choose life!*

Once more, we arrive at the problem that Calvinists have: mankind has been created in the image of God, and that image is still present within every person on earth – it has not been lost among sinners! As Noah and his family set about to replenish the earth, the Lord instructed Noah: "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man" (Genesis 9:6); after purging the earth of the majority of humanity, God implements the death penalty for murder **because** man has been made in His image. God created man in His own image, thereby infusing him with an eternal element (the soul) and the ability to choose between *good* and *evil* (Genesis 1:27; 2:17); God (Jesus) took on the image of man in order to bring redemption to man thereby permitting him to once again choose *good* (Hebrews 2:14).

Unconditional election states that God has predetermined everyone who will be saved. The Scriptures proclaim that God's grace has been extended to all of humanity *in Christ!* Man, who has been created in the image of God, still has the ability to evaluate and reason, by which he is able to choose good, which is contrary to his nature, or evil, which is in keeping with the sin nature that we all bear. After the Lord provides evidence of the rebellious actions of Judah, He declares: "Come now, and let us reason together [*yakah*], saith the LORD: though your sins be as

¹⁰⁷ Strong's Online.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). The Hebrew *yakah* is a term that bears a judicial element;¹⁰⁹ in the first part of Isaiah one, the Lord lays out His reasons for identifying Judah as being rebellious and clarifying for them that their religious activities were nauseous to Him and without merit. The Lord laid out His case and then calls upon Judah to join Him in thinking through what it is that has broken their covenant (a binding agreement¹¹⁰) with the Lord; “it is precisely because of the covenant that Yahweh … requires his people to exhibit in their lives this element of the *imago dei* [*image of God*].”¹¹¹ It is because man has been created in the *image of God* that the Lord calls upon Judah to consider carefully their situation with Him, since there is still cleansing available within their covenant with Jehovah, if they will only recognize it. The difficulty with Judah was not that they did not have the Mosaic Covenant to follow, but that “the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*” (Hebrews 4:2); they followed the letter of the Mosaic Law, carefully kept the prescribed festivals and meticulously followed the regulations for the priesthood and sacrifices, yet their hands were full of blood – they were still guilty of sin (Isaiah 1:11-15, cp. Matthew 7:22-23). They had the *works* down pat but failed to realize that they had lost the foundation for those works: *faith* in Jehovah! God calls them to consider their position in His covenant with them, and if they choose correctly, cleansing from sin is possible for them. Despite Judah’s rebellion and their empty religious rituals, God calls upon them to think carefully with Him about their present state; this is completely contrary to the Calvinistic doctrine of *unconditional election* – there would be no need to *reason together* if God had already individually chosen those who would be saved.

It is as we consider this aspect of Calvinism that the whole matter of *predestination* comes into question as it pertains to God. Since we’re in the vicinity, let’s take a moment to look into this matter.

We have already considered Ephesians 2:10 – “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath **before ordained** that we should walk in them.” Right in the middle we have the phrase ***before ordained*** (*proetoimazo*), which literally means to prepare before;¹¹² if something has been prepared in advance, then it simply unfolds as it was prepared. When we carry this

¹⁰⁹ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), Laird, Archer, Waltke editors, #865, “yakah,” p. 377.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/covenant>.

¹¹¹ TWOT, p. 377.

¹¹² Strong’s Online.

into the realm of Almighty God, we can understand that what He has *prepared beforehand* **will** take place. The application in this verse has nothing to do with salvation, and is opposing *unconditional election* rather than supporting it; this Greek word only appears twice in the NT Scriptures – the other is in Romans 9:23, and it, too, has no bearing on salvation.

We find a similar word in Ephesians 1:5 – in love “having **predestinated** us unto ... adoption ... by Jesus Christ to himself.” This is from the Greek word *proorizo*, which means to define before or to decide beforehand;¹¹³ it is quite similar to *proetoomazo*, except that it carries the implication of being far more finely detailed – this is not a general plan but a very specifically detailed one from which there will be no deviation. However, this application also does **not** concern salvation but what God has predetermined for those who are *in Christ* – namely, being adopted as His children.

Consider the first three items of the Westminster Confession on this matter under *Chapter III: Of God’s Eternal Decree*.¹¹⁴

I. God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and **unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass**; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established. [The bold expresses their deep understanding of the predetermination of God; however, in an effort to sidestep making God the creator of sin and doing violence to the will of man, they immediately apply certain caveats at this juncture and define terms in such a way that they are able to maneuver through the impossible maze that they have created. They define the *decree of God* as “his purpose or determination with respect to future things,” and then go on: “The decree of God is either effective or permissive. His effective decree respects all the good that comes to pass; his permissive decree respects the evil that is in sinful actions.”¹¹⁵ From this it is evident that they have introduced just enough ambiguity in the terms used so as to allow themselves to wiggle through, or around, most difficulties.]

II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath he not decreed anything because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions. [They assure us that “the

¹¹³ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹⁴ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20III>.

¹¹⁵ <https://reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

decrees of God are *absolute* and *unconditional*" and that they are *eternal*¹¹⁶ – i.e., His decrees were not influenced by His foreknowledge.]

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death. [Since the decree of God regarding those *predestinated unto everlasting life* is *good*, that makes this an *effective*, *eternal*, and *unconditional* decree; His decree for the rest of humanity is *permissive*, yet it is equally *eternal* and *unconditional*. *Effective* and *permissive* appear to be differing labels that they have arbitrarily assigned in order to make two things appear to be different when they are exactly the same – the more terms that they can define and include, the better that their theology will hold together. It seems that they endeavor to make everything as complicated as possible in an effort to provide sufficient loopholes through which they can deal with what lies outside of their *Confession* but within the Scriptures.]

Within Reformed theology (and hence, Calvinism) the absolute sovereignty of God, or "the truth of sovereign predestination,"¹¹⁷ is held in high regard: "election proceeds from the mere sovereign will of God."¹¹⁸ The TULIP of Calvinism is only possible by holding to "the principle of **absolute divine sovereignty**" (emphasis added),¹¹⁹ and out of this flows their strong emphasis upon the *sovereign grace* of God – notwithstanding, this grace is only for those who are deemed to be God's *elect*. It is upon this *absolute sovereignty* of God (by which they mean His predetermination of everything) that *unconditional election* stands. "Reprobation [God's choice to send some to eternal damnation] demonstrates the sovereignty of God in salvation, that God does what He wills with the creatures whom He has made. **The reprobate are no worse than the elect.** All men appear in the mind of God as involved in a common ruin ... Beyond that we cannot go, and before that we humans must bow" (emphasis added).¹²⁰ They see all of humanity as being equal before the Lord (and I would concur) but they don't stop there; God has, in His absolute sovereignty, randomly selected some people for heaven and banished the others to hell. They accept this as **the truth** of God, and go so far as to issue a warning against going beyond this and call for everyone to submit to it!

¹¹⁶ <https://reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

¹¹⁷ <http://www.prca.org/fivepoints/chapter2.html>.

¹¹⁸ <https://reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

¹¹⁹ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

¹²⁰ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books/folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

We have already looked at one example of what the Lord has predestined for His children: namely, our adoption as His own (Ephesians 1:5) – a passage that the Calvinist uses to *prove* that election is to salvation. It is also clear that our adoption only comes as we are *in Christ*, and it is Christ Who is the *Elect* from eternity past, and if we are *in Him, then* we are numbered among God's elect. Those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus are *elect* in Christ Who was chosen from *before the foundation of the world*.

There are two other Scriptures that are used by the Calvinists to *prove* their concept of *predestination* and their teaching that *election* is to salvation; let's consider these as well.

As Paul and Barnabas received opposition to the Gospel message from the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, they proclaimed to them: "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). The Jews were envious of the following that Paul and Barnabas received, and set out to discredit them and their message. As Paul and Barnabas turn away from the Jews, they quote from Isaiah 49:6b – "I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth"; then we read of the response that they received from their new audience: "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:47-48). It is the phrase *as many as were ordained to eternal life believed* that is used to affirm that God's *effective* (their word!), arbitrary and unconditional election (*predestination*) of some is to salvation. Again, if we read it over, it might well sound to be supportive of the Calvinists' perspective. Consider a literal translation: *and the non-Jews, hearing this, rejoicing and glorifying the Word of the Lord also did believe – all of those who had been placed into life everlasting.*¹²¹ *Ordained* is from the Greek *tasso* and it means to place, to put into order or to arrange.¹²² Since these *Gentiles* believed, they also now belonged among those who held everlasting life; Jesus said that the one who is believing in Him is having this life (John 3:16) – the two go together (believing and everlasting life), and Jesus declared the order to be: believe, then endless life. Since Jesus is the *Elect* from eternity past Who came to purchase salvation for humanity, these Gentiles believed and were now counted among those to whom this unending life was a reality. Paul referred to himself as being an example of one who, through the

¹²¹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹²² Strong's Online.

patience of Christ, *is believing on Him to life everlasting* (1 Timothy 1:16b).¹²³ Salvation comes through *believing*: “the righteousness of God which *is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe [*are believing* (present tense); active voice (it is the *all* who are *believing*)]” (Romans 3:22). A reminder: *believing* means to be persuaded of the truth of what Christ has done, to the extent that it changes how we live; Jesus said: “If ye love me [the essence of *believing*], keep my commandments [*a command to change how we live*]” (John 14:15).¹²⁴ A careful examination of this text has shown that it does not support God’s predeterminedation of who will receive salvation.

The next passage is this: Romans 8:28-30 – “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.” Included within this passage are the terms *foreknow* and *predestinate* – surely this will settle the matter; this is what the Calvinists like to call the *Golden Chain of Salvation*: it “begins with foreknowledge and predestination and ends with justification and glorification.”¹²⁵ Let’s look at it very carefully.

This passage follows on the heels of an explanation of how the Spirit of God and the Lord Jesus Christ are working together to make intercession for us according to the will of God because we have not understood (*know*; *oida*; perfect tense, active voice, indicative mood) for what we should ask.¹²⁶ I’ve noted the grammatical characteristics of *understood*, but what does this mean? *Perfect tense*: a completed past action with ongoing results (*we* have not understood and *we* still do not understand); *active voice*: this is something that *we* have done; *indicative mood*: this is a simple statement of fact.¹²⁷ We have never understood, nor do we now understand our situation from a heavenly perspective, and so we are not able to pray for what we really need; the Spirit and Jesus intercede for us so that petitions for our good come before the Father. Now to the quoted passage.

¹²³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹²⁴ Strong’s Online.

¹²⁵ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

¹²⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹²⁷ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm#AORIST; Strong’s Online.

It begins with a clear declaration of something that we have always understood: *for those who are loving God, all things are working together for good*, and it then goes on: *being a plan for the called*.¹²⁸ For those who are loving God (alluding to their faithfulness to Him, as well), there is an understanding that He is orchestrating what comes into their lives for their good – even if it may not always be evident. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6); each of the verbs underscored is in the present tense – is it any wonder that we don’t know how to pray for what we need? Would we pray for *chastening*? Jesus said that unless we will make Him first over everything else in our lives, we cannot be called His disciples (Luke 14:26-33); having counted the cost, we are committed to being His disciples – we are *loving God* and trusting Him to work in us to bring glory to His name (*good*). This is God’s plan for all who are *called*. Earlier we looked at Matthew 22:14 and found that, in fact, God has *called* everyone to salvation; this is His plan for everyone: *loving Him* and having the assurance that *all things are working together for good*.

For whom he did foreknow – *foreknow* (from *proginosko*) means to have knowledge of beforehand.¹²⁹ What we must be careful not to do, is remove this from its Biblical context. Paul has just referred to those who are *loving God*, those who have placed their faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and who are being guided by the intercession of the Spirit and the Son – those who are *in Christ*! As Paul taught the Ephesians, in order to be among those who are chosen by God, we must be *in Christ* – it is Christ Who is the *Elect*, and if we are *in Him*, then we are among God’s elect (Ephesians 1:4a)! It is those who are *in Christ* and who are living in keeping with the guidance of the Spirit of God, who are not under God’s condemnation (Romans 8:1). Therefore, those who are being referred to here as being in the *foreknowledge* of God are those who are *in Christ* (the context demands this, not that God’s *foreknowledge* is limited to those who are *in Christ*), which is not surprising since God, Who knows all things, was there at the beginning of time and will be there at the end as well (Revelation 1:8).

*... he also did predestinate [proorizo] to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn [prototokos] among many brethren.*¹³⁰ These who are *in Christ*, God did predetermine (*predestinate*) that they would appear (*be conformed*) in the likeness of His Son, Jesus. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God,

¹²⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹²⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong’s Online.

¹³⁰ Strong’s Online.

and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2) – when we see Jesus, we will be like Him; we will be changed from mortality to immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). As John began the Revelation, he brought greetings from “Jesus Christ, *who is* the faithful witness, *and the first begotten (prototokos) of the dead*” (Revelation 1:5); Jesus, the first Who was raised from the dead to **never die again**; many throughout Scripture were raised from the dead, but that was to their former state of living – they would have died again. It is through Him that we (the faithful in Christ) will be adopted by God as His children (Ephesians 1:4; Revelation 21:7): “For both he that sanctifieth [Jesus] and they who are sanctified [those who are *in Him*] are all of one [God]: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). Jesus, the first to be resurrected to never die again, is the First among all of those who are *loving God*, who will one day wear a glorified body just like His.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: – those who are *loving Him* and whom He has predetermined to be made in the image of His Son, He has also *called*. As we learned earlier, even though *all* have been *called* to the celebrations, only those who are properly attired will be accepted. There is a *calling*, or *invitation*, that is broad in its scope, but it also bears a narrowness that must not be overlooked. Jesus said: “Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] gate … which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14); this is a general command (*enter* is in the imperative mood) to enter at the narrow gate that leads to life, but He lets us know that only a *few* will find it.¹³¹ Jesus went on to define the *gate* more precisely: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); this restriction alone will cause many to miss the Pathway to life, for they refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Jehovah in the flesh or they will deny that He is the only Way. The *Word made flesh* also said: “And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure [*hypomeno* – to remain faithful to the Lord in the face of trials] unto the end [of our time on earth], the same [this is a demonstrative Greek pronoun that emphatically identifies that *it is the faithful one who*] shall [will] be saved” (Mark 13:13)¹³² – only those who remain faithful to the Lord will be accepted by Him! The *called* whom we are considering, are *loving God* and have been *predestinated to the image of His Son* – they have already *entered* onto the *Pathway* to life. Paul explained this *calling*: “[God] Who hath saved us, and

¹³¹ Strong’s Online.

¹³² Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

called *us* with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9). We have received a *holy calling* from God – another view of the restrictive calling **and** it has been given to us *in Christ Jesus before the world began!* This is an aspect to the *calling* of God to which we are to walk worthily with the guidance of the Spirit, having donned the *new man* who was created by God in *righteousness* and *true holiness* (Ephesians 4:1, 24). For those who hear the call to *enter*, they face the reality of Jesus Christ (Who He is, what He has done for them) and the cost that they must be willing to pay in order to become His disciples (Luke 14:26-33); the restrictive aspect of this calling is revealed in the person of Christ Jesus, and entrance is not permitted without understanding Who He is and who we are before Him. Those who are *loving Him* and whom He has predetermined to be made in the image of His Son, understand that their calling *in Christ* is holy – a call to separation from the world unto Christ through the working of His Spirit.

And whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. For those who are *loving God*, who are *destined* to wear the immortality of the Son, and who are living in their *holy calling* in Christ, they are also declared to be righteous (*justified*) and *glorified in Him*. God’s purpose for us was placed *in Christ Jesus before the world began* (2 Timothy 1:9), it is only as we are *in Him* that we can discover *every spiritual blessing* that He has prepared for us (Ephesians 1:3). Yes, God has exercised a predetermination for us from before the world began, but that was **not** to salvation – part of His determination is the spiritual blessings that are ours only in the Lord Jesus Christ. “For by grace are ye saved through faith [a present persuasion (*belief*) that leads to life-changing convictions of the truth]; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God [*and this, the gift of God* (a reference to the salvation from God), *is not from you*]: Not of works, lest any man should boast [*so that no one can boast*]. For we are his workmanship [*for of Him we are made*], created in Christ Jesus unto [*for the purpose of*] good works, which God hath before ordained [*did prepare beforehand*] that we **should** walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).¹³³ Here we see another of God’s determinations for His own: we have been created (a *new man*) in Christ Jesus for doing His works of righteousness and holiness – it is His intention that we walk in them! Nowhere in this passage have we seen that God has chosen some to salvation, but we do see that He has predestined

¹³³ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm; Friberg Lexicon.

His children (those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ) to a life that is faithful to His Word and one that will bring Him glory.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever. – THE CANONS OF DORT, “Second Head of the Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men Thereby,” Article 8.¹³⁴

We have now arrived at that place within the five-points of Calvinism that is most frequently neglected by those who otherwise profess to be Calvinists – they are identified as being *four-point Calvinists*; however, it is also contended that “all five of these doctrines [the whole TULIP] ‘hang together’ and are impossible to separate from one another.”¹³⁵ Clearly, those who claim to be less than five-point Calvinists do not understand its teachings thoroughly enough to recognize the cohesion that exists. I was told by an ardent Calvinist that it all fits together beautifully (which is why he couldn’t understand my refusal to accept it), and its cohesion may well remain intact as long as you do not study the Scriptures carefully. As we have seen so far in our study, a careful examination of the Scriptures that they use to support their doctrines reveals a truth that undermines their profession; it is important that we hold a greater allegiance to the Word of God than to the doctrines of men.

Atonement, within the OT, always dealt with the matter of sin; it is most commonly suggested that it means to cover over, but a closer examination of the

¹³⁴ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

¹³⁵ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books/folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

Hebrew yields the more specific understanding of “to atone by offering a substitute”¹³⁶ – within the OT sacrificial system, it was the sacrificed animal (the innocent) whose blood was shed in the place of the sinner (the guilty). *Atone* means to be in harmony, in agreement, and to be *at one*;¹³⁷ the shed blood of the sacrifice became a temporary means of reconciling a sinful person with a holy God when it was accompanied by that person’s faith in Him. Jesus, the *Word* made flesh, came to shed His blood so that through faith in His one sacrifice, sinful man could be brought into fellowship (*harmony*) with Him – He became our Substitute (the Atonement, shedding His blood for us) in fulfillment of the OT sacrifices. Within the Mosaic Law, the sacrifices of a sweet savor unto the Lord and those made for the sin of ignorance were carefully prescribed; nevertheless, both offerings were also open and available to *the stranger* who dwelt within Israel (Numbers 15:3-16, 27-29) – the Lord made the same means of cleansing available to the foreigner as for the Israelite. Within this light, when we hear of the Calvinists’ doctrine of *limited atonement*, it might appear to be a surprise; the Lord made His provision for cleansing available to whoever desired it within the Old Mosaic Covenant, but after Christ has paid the full price for sin (as foreshadowed by the OT sacrifices), why is His cleansing suddenly only open to those individuals whom God has chosen from eternity past? Or, perhaps there is something very wrong with the doctrine of *limited atonement*!

The Westminster Confession expounds very clearly their understanding of this matter: “As God hath appointed the elect [those whom He has individually chosen from eternity past (according to their teachings)] unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. **Neither are any other redeemed by Christ**, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, **but the elect only**” (emphasis added).¹³⁸ They are saying that Christ’s atoning work on the cross was **only** for those individuals who have been chosen by God.

As we consider this doctrine of Calvinism, we can readily anticipate that the difficulty that arises has less to do with the subject of *atonement* and everything to

¹³⁶ TWOT, #1023, p. 453.

¹³⁷ <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=atone>.

¹³⁸ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20III>.

do with their word *limited* (or *real, actual* or *effective*) as it is applied to Christ's sacrifice for sin.¹³⁹ This clarification is made on this matter: "those who believe in limited atonement **do not teach that the power and value of Christ's death is in any way limited. The only thing limited is the number of those for whom Christ died**, and the limitation is not due to any defect in the work or death of Christ but to **God's sovereign decree to save some and not others**" (emphasis added).¹⁴⁰ In other words, they are saying that the atonement for sin that came through Christ's death and resurrection is potentially unlimited, but because God chose some individuals from eternity past for salvation, His *unlimited atonement* is now limited to the elect (the chosen). Therefore, the difficulty with their teaching of *limited atonement* goes back to their doctrine of *unconditional election* (from their own words). It can easily be seen why many within Calvinism struggle with this teaching: they acclaim that Christ's death was sufficient to cover the sins of all of mankind (it is *not limited*) but then immediately limit His work to the *elect* – Christ died for everyone, but God has limited *everyone* to the *elect*. What they consider to be their doctrinal advantage within this teaching is this: "The doctrine of limited atonement teaches that Christ by His death on the cross **actually saves those for whom He died and does not just make salvation a possibility**" (emphasis added).¹⁴¹ They claim a definite result (a finite number) from Christ's atoning death (the *elect are* saved), whereas those who consider Christ's atonement as being unlimited cannot say that everyone for whom Christ died will be saved. Recognizing that this is a teaching that many even within Calvinism find difficult to understand and accept, let's look at some of the Scriptures that they put forward in support of this doctrine.

Matthew 1:21 – And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Being the first of their *primary references* in support of this teaching, they provide this explanation for considering this text to be of such importance: "Notice here the emphasis on 'his people.' They are the ones Jesus saves and no others. Whoever they may be (and the Scriptures teach us in other places that they are the elect), they are a limited and particular number of persons. But notice also the emphasis on the fact that He *does* save them. He does not merely make salvation available but saves them from their sins entirely. Most important of all is the fact that these are the reasons why He is called JESUS. To deny either of these things is to deny His very name and the meaning of His

¹³⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-356/the-atonement-real-or-potential>.

¹⁴⁰ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace3.html.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

name.”¹⁴² Let’s evaluate this carefully, being aware of the tendency among those who are defending their position (particularly when it is often indefensible) to overstate their case and to make statements without any proof. Their first point is that *his people* is *emphasized*; this is a very poor start, for, in fact, this phrase is **not** emphasized at all; the phrase in Greek is simply *the people of Him*.¹⁴³ If there is any emphasis within this text, it would have to be on Jesus: *for He, Himself will save the people of Him*;¹⁴⁴ this emphasizes that He alone is the One Who will bring salvation. Who are *his people*? Yes, they are the people whom Jesus *will* save (future tense) from their sins, they are the only ones whom Jesus will save, and quite obviously the number of those who will be saved is not infinite (therefore, it is limited) – these are not unique understandings to the Calvinists and their doctrine of *limited atonement*. Believing that Jesus died for the sins of all of humanity does not change any of these at all: Jesus said that He will save those who remain faithfully obedient to Him (Matthew 24:13), only those who are believing in Him (and obeying) will be saved (John 3:36), and He made it very clear that only a few would find the Gate to life (Matthew 7:14). What seems to have eluded the Calvinists’ attention is that **none** of these things provides one iota of support for their *limited atonement* doctrine; saying that Jesus *does not merely make salvation available but saves them*, is an anemic justification for being able to say that none of Jesus’ atoning work was wasted on those who won’t be saved. Yet, it was God’s great love for **all of humanity** that brought the eternal Word to earth in order to die for their atonement (John 3:16); if Jesus came to die only for the *elect* (as under their thinking), that does **not** demonstrate a very *great love* for humanity. I would suggest that their first reference, upon careful scrutiny, has failed them.

These next “proofs” center around a common theme: does the Bible’s use of *many* fall into an inclusive or exclusive application? When we use the word *many*, it is commonly understood that this does not include a *few* – i.e., it is *exclusive* in its function; if we wish to include everyone, then we use the word *all*. Within Hebrew, the word *kol* is defined as *the whole* – if the noun following is plural, then it can be translated as *all*, or if the noun following is singular and without an article then it would be *every*; however, rather than being an inclusive word like our English *all*, it is applied to *the whole* as a unit, and so appears only in the singular, even when it

¹⁴² http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace4.html.

¹⁴³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

is used in a plural sense.¹⁴⁵ The Hebrew word *rab*, as an adjective, means *many*, *great*, *large*, etc. but doesn't carry the *exclusive* sense like our English word *many*;¹⁴⁶ in other words, this Hebrew word does not identify that a *few* have been excluded – it doesn't hold a *many-but-not-all* concept: just *a large number*. Therefore, particular care must be taken when interpreting the Hebrews Scriptures where these words are used. Additionally, as with most languages, the precise meaning of a word can also vary depending upon its context. With this in mind, let's keep going.

The first verse that the Calvinists pull to demonstrate from Scripture “that Christ gave His life for a select and limited number of persons and not for every single person” is: *Isaiah 53:11* – *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities*. The words in bold are those that are used to defend the Calvinists’ doctrine of Christ dying for only some of humanity; however, what is being explained here is that Jesus would be the means whereby *many* would be declared to be righteous (*justify*). Since this word (Hebrew *rab*) does not include the exclusive concept like our word *many*, all that is presented here is that there will be a large number who will be *justified* by the Lord – there is nothing here to create the *limiting* factor that the Calvinists teach. Perhaps their intention was to look to the next verse: “Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and **he bare the sin of many**, and made intercession for the transgressors” (*Isaiah 53:12*). The same Hebrew word is used here, but this time it is within the context of the Savior bearing the sin of *many*, which would appear to be more fitting for their argument. As John Calvin commented on this verse, he said this: “Yet I approve of the ordinary reading, that he alone bore the punishment of many, because **on him was laid the guilt of the whole world**. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that ‘many’ sometimes denotes ‘all’” (emphasis added).¹⁴⁷ There are some who have contended that much of what is modern Calvinism was shaped more by the Synod of Dort than by the pen of John Calvin and, indeed, his thoughts on *Isaiah 53:12* would seem to support such a position. Consider *Romans 5:15b* (from the passage to which Calvin alluded): “For if through the offence of one **many** be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace,

¹⁴⁵ Vine's, “all”; Strong's Dictionary, ESword.

¹⁴⁶ Vine's, “to be great, heavy.”

¹⁴⁷ <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/isaiah-53.html>.

which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many." **Many** is from the Greek word *polus*, which under ordinary usage is an exclusive word (like our English *many*); however, context must be brought to bear so that we understand it correctly. Just earlier (v. 12), Paul stated that it was through *one man* (Adam) that sin and death entered into the world, with the full understanding that **all** who are born of Adam (i.e., all of humanity) are born under sin and death; therefore, when he now says that through *one* (Adam) *many* are dead (that means **all**) and God's grace by Christ (*one man*) is extended unto *many*, we must understand that *many*, as it is used here (the parallel structure requires **all** in both cases), means **all of humanity** – this is what John Calvin understood and then applied to Isaiah 53:12! Even though the Greek word *polus* typically means *many* (in the exclusive sense), there are times when the context requires that it be inclusive and mean **all** (as here); so Paul states that even as **all of humanity** died through the offence of one, so the gift of God's grace through One has abounded unto **all of humanity**. This strikes at the very heart of *limited atonement*, and it does so with the blessing of John Calvin who recognized that Jesus bore the sin of the *whole world*.

Let's take a moment to establish this reality from other Scriptures; God has given us His Word so that we are able to compare Scripture with Scripture in order to help us to understand His desire for us. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Timothy 4:10); *because we hope in the living God Who is the Savior of all men [panton anthropon (both plural!)], especially of the believing.*¹⁴⁸ We saw earlier that God's grace is extended to **all of humanity** through Christ, which clearly makes God *the Savior of all men* – He is the One and only Way to be saved. Jesus stated: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh to the Father, but by me" (John 14:6); Jesus is the Savior for *all men* because He is the **only** Savior for all of humanity! However, He is *especially* the Savior of those who have placed their trust in Him because they are *believing* – for them He is their known Savior, for the rest of humanity He is their only hope for salvation. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that [here is God's stated purpose for the Son coming to earth] whosoever believeth [*is believing*; present tense participle, active voice] in him should not perish [*it is God's purpose* that the one who *is believing has not come to ruin*], but have [*His purpose again: is having*] everlasting life" (John 3:16).¹⁴⁹ We must not miss that it is *whosoever* (*anyone* – it is open to all of

¹⁴⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁴⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

humanity, as we have seen) who *is believing* (active voice) and this is an ongoing belief (present tense); when someone is believing, then it is God's **intention** that that person does not come to ruin and that he is having everlasting life – while the *believing* is active, so is the freedom from perishing **and** the holding of life everlasting.¹⁵⁰ Jesus explained that “he that shall endure [*hupomeno* – to remain faithful to the Lord through trials] unto the end [of our time on earth], the same shall [a demonstrative pronoun that says: **this is the one** who will (future tense)] be saved” (Matthew 24:13)¹⁵¹ – faithfulness is required in order to be saved by the Lord one day.

Having established through a proper understanding of Romans 5:15 that the expression of God's grace through the work of Christ has been extended abundantly unto all of humanity, and having seen other Scriptures that support this truth, we have a solid foundation for evaluating the Calvinists' next “proof” texts: **Matthew 20:28** – *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many*; **Matthew 26:28** – *For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sin*; **Hebrews 9:28** – *So Christ was once offered to bear the sin of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation*. Each of these wonderful Scriptures provide further evidence that the sacrifice that Christ made was for **all of humanity!** Many, in each of these instances, in the light of other Scriptures, can only be understood to mean **all**. “And he [Jesus] is the propitiation [*means of forgiveness*] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world [all of humanity]*” (1 John 2:2).¹⁵²

Perhaps a moment of clarification regarding 1 John 2:2, which speaks of Jesus being the *means of forgiveness* for the sins of the *whole (holos) world (kosmos)*.¹⁵³ Some within Calvinism have redefined *kosmos* to refer to “the children of God scattered abroad,” but this is a completely inconsistent definition of *world (kosmos)* that is used in a vain attempt to squeeze this text into the *limited atonement* mold.¹⁵⁴ Jesus said: “The world [*kosmos*] cannot hate you; but **me it hateth**, because I testify of it, that **the works thereof are evil**” (John 7:7); this would then mean that the

¹⁵⁰ Strong's Online.

¹⁵¹ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁵² Friberg Lexicon; some Calvinists have taken 1 John 2:2 in parallel with John 11:51-52, and concluded that *the whole world* is to be understood as *the children of God scattered abroad* – a convenient but wild misapplication of Scripture (<https://www.monergism.com/understanding-1-john-22-john-samson-0#>).

¹⁵³ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.monergism.com/understanding-1-john-22-john-samson-0>

“children of God scattered abroad” (using their understanding of *kosmos*) hate the Lord Jesus and that their works are evil! John later wrote: “And we know that we are of God, and the **whole [holos] world [kosmos] lieth in wickedness**” (1 John 5:19) – the “children of God” lie in wickedness?¹⁵⁵ I fear that the author of that article was overly zealous in his determination to force this text to fit into his theology. *World (kosmos)* is most frequently a reference to humanity (sometimes also used to refer to the world system under Satan’s control), and if you consider the texts above in that light, then there is no difficulty with understanding what is actually meant. Unfortunately, redefining terms has become somewhat of a habit among those who try to make the Scriptures conform to their doctrines. When John the Baptist first saw Jesus, he declared: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world [*kosmos*]” (John 1:29) – again, this word means humanity and not “the children of God scattered abroad.”

The difficulty in which modern-day Calvinists find themselves is due to their reluctance to study the original languages behind the English words of a text, **and** their decision to view God’s Word through the lens of their theology (rather than the other way around). The latter is their greatest failure; they have permitted the theology of Calvinism to be the driving force in how they understand the Scriptures – a particular theology or theologian has become a popular means of identifying what an individual believes, and it saves them the time of actually studying the Scriptures in order to determine *whether those things were so* (Acts 17:11). My wife and I heard recently “I believe what David Jeremiah believes” in matters related to eschatology, but unfortunately, David Jeremiah does not hold the same level of godly inspiration as the Scriptures. One Calvinist became particularly frustrated with me because I would not accept his understanding of some very plain Scriptures; his argument for accepting his Calvinism was that it all *fit together so perfectly*. He was well versed in a theology but remained largely ignorant of the truth of God’s Word; he also loved to speak of *sola Scriptura* (the Scriptures alone) but would always add: *and my Puritan writers so that I can understand the Scriptures correctly* – that is no longer *sola Scriptura* but simply a theology that is used to “interpret” God’s Word. We must be Bereans and weigh all things in the light of the Truth!

Let’s consider a few other “proofs” that are a little different from what we have looked at to this point.

¹⁵⁵ Strong’s Online.

John 6:37-39 – All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. Their explanation is this: “This passage also says that Christ actually loses none of those for whom He does His work. It is not as though Christ comes for all and yet loses many who slip away or do not believe. If He had lost even one of those for whom He came, He would not have done the Father’s will, and His work would not even have been approved of God. This, by the way, also shows that it was **not even God’s will that Christ should die for or make salvation possible for all men**” (emphasis added).¹⁵⁶ They go on: “This passage is also valuable because it gives clear guidance as to how the word ‘all’ is used in the Scriptures. We must not forget that it is not only used here but further defined as ‘all whom the Father giveth me.’ The ‘all’ for whom Christ died, as this passage shows so clearly, **never includes anyone but ‘all’ the elect**” (emphasis added).¹⁵⁷ Clearly, in their minds this is a very significant passage in supporting their position. Let’s begin by looking at a literal translation of verse 37: *Everything that the Father is giving to Me, to Me it will come, and he who is coming to Me I will never leave out.*¹⁵⁸ All (*everything*) is in the neuter case (it does **not** refer to humanity) and singular number, and so *everything* (rather than *all*) is the best translation. *Come* is in the future tense, which tells us that everything that the Father is now giving to the Son will at some time in the future come to Him (He is *heir of all things*, Hebrews 1:2). Ephesians 1:10 tells us that in God’s administration of the completion of times, He will gather together all things in heaven and earth under Christ’s authority (see also Ephesians 1:22); the passage then goes on to speak of the predetermined inheritance that we have in Christ, which tells us that the *all things* in heaven and earth is not a specific reference to the permanent new heaven and earth that will be the inheritance of the faithful. Verse 10 refers, firstly, to the Millennium when the will of Christ will be done on earth (He will rule over everything and everyone during this time) even as it is being done in heaven (Matthew 6:10), and then, secondarily, to the new heaven and earth where there will be no corruption of created things. Therefore, John 6:37a is **not** referring to people who have been given to the

¹⁵⁶ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace4.html.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

Son by the Father, but rather to that time when all *things* (that are now being given to Jesus) will be under His governance and control.

The rest of John 6:37 says this: “and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” *Him* is an article (*the*) that is in the masculine/singular form, used as a pronoun, and is correctly understood to be *he* (or, *him*).¹⁵⁹ *Cometh* is in the middle voice (and masculine/singular), present tense and tells us that this action is being taken by *he* or *him*; being in the middle voice, *cometh* is a verb that describes an action undertaken by *him* of which *he* is also the recipient or beneficiary of the action.¹⁶⁰ The rest of the verse tells us that this one who is coming, Jesus will absolutely never leave out – this is the benefit that *he* will reap from *his* action. Therefore, when speaking of the one who is coming to the Lord, this latter portion tells us: 1) the one who is coming is performing the action – he is not being irresistibly drawn (looking ahead to the “I” of TULIP, which would require a passive construction), and 2) he who is coming will find open acceptance in the Lord.

In the following verse (v. 38), Jesus goes on to say that He did not come from heaven in order to do His own will but the will of the Father Who had sent Him. The next two verses provide an explanation as to the *will* of the Father Who did send the Son into this world (although their quote stops with verse 39, the following verse needs to be included to complete the thought). The first (verse 39) parallels verse 37a as to content: “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day” (John 6:39). It is the Father’s will that the Son should lose nothing of what He has been given (*all* is again neuter and singular), and the Son will raise it up on the last day (there is no *again* in the Greek) – firstly, a restoration during the Millennium, and then that day when a fresh creation will be free of the taint of sin in the new heaven and earth (Romans 8:21 – even creation awaits deliverance from the present corruption).

As already noted, the next verse needs to be included in order to complete this passage: “And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). The content of this not only parallels the second part of verse 37, but its form also matches the previous verse. The Greek word translated as *all* (*everything*) in verse 39, is here in its masculine/singular form and is correctly

¹⁵⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁶⁰ Strong’s Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/verbs1.htm

translated as *everyone*, and therefore, the subject of this verse relates to humanity (just like verse 37b). The actions that are taken by *everyone* are: 1) *seeth* (*theoreo*, which includes understanding or knowing; present tense, describing a continuous action; active voice, clarifying that it is *everyone* who is performing this action), 2) *believeth* (*pisteuo*, meaning a life-changing persuasion; once again, present tense and active voice), and 3) *may have everlasting life* (more literally: *is having life everlasting*; *have*, bearing the subjunctive mood within a purpose clause, describes the Father's will regarding the one who is knowing the Son and whose life is changed by believing on Him).¹⁶¹ Unless *knowing* and *believing* the Son are presently active in the life of *everyone*, the *having life everlasting* is not there; the everlasting life is contingent upon the *knowing* and *believing* remaining a present reality. Jesus said that if we desire to be saved, then we must remain faithful to Him to the very end of our time on earth (Matthew 24:13);¹⁶² this is a required faithfulness in the midst of a time of great deception from many false prophets (from the context). In John 6:40, Jesus is saying that for the one who remains in Him (*knowing* and *believing*), He will raise him up on the last day – that great day of full salvation!

I don't believe that the *last day* is the same for *everything* as it is for *everyone*. *Everything* will be made new when the old heaven and earth vanish (Revelation 20:11) and the new, eternal heaven and earth are established (Revelation 21:1) – that will be the final *last day* for the old creation and the time when the new will *rise* to replace it forever. For *everyone*, the *last day* will differ depending upon his stand with the Lord. If he has lived faithfully for the Lord to the end of his lifetime (in obedience to His commands), then he will be raised to be with the Lord forever when He comes in the clouds to have His angels harvest the earth of those who are His – the faithful (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). For those who do not end their time on earth in faithfulness to the Lord, they will be raised to stand before God at the time when He will judge all of the dead (those who died with the removal of the old heaven and earth, and the unrighteous dead from Hades) – this will take place after the close of the Millennium (Revelation 20:11-15). How we will be *raised up* is dependent upon what we have done with the Lord Jesus during our time on earth; what our final rising will be, is established when we leave this earth – it is then unchangeable.

John 10:14-15 – I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life

¹⁶¹ Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

¹⁶² Strong's Online.

for the sheep. They explain how they view this as supportive of their doctrine: “This passage not only teaches limited atonement by its emphasis on the sheep as the ones for whom Christ died, but it teaches very plainly what we have previously called ‘particular’ atonement [which they define as: ‘Christ died only for particular persons and not for all people’] in that it tells us that Christ knows His sheep in the same way that the Father knows Him and He knows the Father, i.e., personally and by name. If this is true and if He laid down His life for those whom He knows personally, then **He cannot have died merely so that anyone and everyone might have a chance at salvation**” (emphasis added).¹⁶³ Once again, they have neglected the context of their choice text. Immediately before this, Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep” (John 10:11-13). Don’t miss the obvious: **the sheep already belong to the shepherd!** Jesus is explaining the level of protection that the shepherd gives to his sheep – he will risk his life (*giveth his life*) for the sake of his sheep; yes, Jesus gave His life to buy us out of sin, but that is not the context for this! This is not dealing with what it takes to become a *sheep* of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, it is expressing the protection that the Lord provides for those who are His – this is **not about salvation**, it is about the Lord’s care for those who are already His! Jesus elaborated on this a little later: “My sheep hear [*are hearing*] my voice, and I know [*am knowing*] them, and they follow [*are following*] me: And I give [*am giving*] unto them eternal life; and they shall never [*absolutely cannot*; the Greek negatives *ou* and *me*, along with an aorist/subjunctive verb make this a very strong negative¹⁶⁴] perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:27-28). These are *sheep* (they already belong to the Shepherd) who are given two conditional promises; the **conditions** that apply are that they must be in a present, obedient relationship with the Shepherd (*hearing* and *following* Him), and the **promises** are: 1) they will **never be brought to ruin** (*perish*), and 2) they are **forever safe from any outside force** that might try to snatch them out of His hand. We must understand this second promise clearly: this is **neither** the Evangelical doctrine of eternal security, nor the Calvinists’ doctrine of the perseverance (or preservation) of the saints. Steadfastness of faith is both urged and commended among the saints (1 Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 2:5),

¹⁶³ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace4.html.

¹⁶⁴ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

and warnings are issued against failing: “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [unfaithfulness], in departing [becoming apostate] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).¹⁶⁵ The Shepherd will do everything to protect His sheep (those who are His own), but He will not disregard His image that all of mankind still bear (including His *sheep*) – the ability to think, reason, and choose.

***Titus 2:13-14** – Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of all good works.* Their choice of this passage “is especially significant because it not only speaks of Christ giving Himself for us but shows that those for whom He gave Himself are surely and completely saved – redeemed, purified, and zealous of good works.”¹⁶⁶ Again, we must consider the context in order to arrive at a proper understanding of this passage. Just a little earlier Paul wrote: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” (Titus 2:11); the literal is this: *for the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all men.*¹⁶⁷ Perhaps there is a reason that they did not consider the context; if they had, they would have found God’s Word runs contrary to their doctrine that they are desperately trying to shore-up. Of course Jesus *gave Himself for us*, but that does not restrict His gift to *us* – Paul had just stated that He brought salvation *to all men!* However, for those who have accepted His gift of salvation, He has much more in store: *having set us free from all lawlessness and having cleansed to Himself a unique possession zealous of good works.*¹⁶⁸ The grace of God extends His gift of salvation unto *all men*, but once it is accepted, then the Spirit of God begins to work “teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:12). There is nothing within this passage to support the doctrine of *limited atonement*.

Those who advocate for a *limited atonement* will frequently claim that those who believe that Jesus died for the *sin of the world* (as John the Baptist declared) are either Universalists (everyone will be saved) or hold to the sovereignty of man. It’s interesting that they identify these two as being the only options that are available besides their Calvinism; because their doctrines fit together so wonderfully, they

¹⁶⁵ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁶⁶ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace4.html.

¹⁶⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

simply cannot be wrong – at least in their minds. It is inconceivable to them that anyone could study the Scriptures and not arrive at their particular doctrines; they exude great confidence, but as we have seen, they do not carry out a careful exegesis of the Scriptures, nor do they pay close attention to the context. If they would examine their doctrines in the light of Scripture, with a heart that is open to seeing the truth of God, they would come away with a very different understanding of His Word.

IRRESISTIBLE GRACE

... others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is ... wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so He confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory not in themselves, but in the Lord according to the testimony of the apostles in various places.

But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them and powerfully illuminates their mind by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions. – THE CANONS OF DORT, “Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine of the Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof,” Articles 10, 11.¹⁶⁹

So far we have considered the *total depravity* or, more appropriately, the *total inability* of man, God’s *unconditional election* of some individuals to glory and others to damnation, and the *limited atonement* of Christ that views His death as being only for those who are elected to glory. Now we come to *irresistible grace* – in essence, what we are seeing unfold is, first of all, the absolute *total inability* of

¹⁶⁹ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

man to even desire to be saved (“T”), and then everything that God must do in order to save those whom He has chosen (“ULIP”).

“By irresistible grace we mean that God’s grace and salvation cannot be effectively resisted. **When God determines to save a man, that man is saved.** Neither he himself, nor the devil, nor the wicked world are able to prevent his salvation. Nothing can stand in the way of God’s purpose.”¹⁷⁰ In essence, they say that God is absolutely sovereign over everything, He has predetermined who will be saved, and there is absolutely nothing that can stand in His way – even if the person whom He has determined to save wants no part of it. The Calvinists’ position is that this could not happen, for God, in His sovereignty, will **make** the individual *willing*, yet “**the liberty of the will is not invaded**, for that would destroy its very nature; but **its obstinacy is overcome**, its perverseness taken away, and the whole soul powerfully, yet sweetly, attracted to the Saviour” (emphasis added).¹⁷¹

The Westminster Confession states: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, **effectually** to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).¹⁷² Consider an explanation of this matter: “There is *an eternal* call of the gospel, whereby **all who hear it are called** to the fellowship of Christ, and **to receive a full salvation in him** … That the call of the gospel is indefinite and universal, that God is sincere in addressing this call to all to whom the gospel comes, and that none who comply with the call shall be disappointed; these are unquestionable truths. But the **outward call** by the Word is of itself *ineffectual* … But there is also **an internal call**, in which the Holy Spirit accompanies the external call with power and efficacy upon the soul; and this call is always *effectual*” (bold emphasis added).¹⁷³ They openly admit that “to reconcile the unlimited call of the gospel with the doctrines of particular election and a definite atonement, seems to exceed the efforts of the human mind.”¹⁷⁴ In effect they are admitting that the doctrines of Calvinism must be **accepted by faith** – faith in the ponderings of men; although they purportedly find all of their doctrines within the pages of Scripture, when they are finished, they admit that it is virtually impossible to reconcile their teachings with the Scriptural call of

¹⁷⁰ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace5.html.

¹⁷¹ <https://reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

¹⁷² <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20X>.

¹⁷³ <https://reformed.org/documents/shaw/>.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

the Gospel to everyone, therefore: accept their theology by faith! Yet Jehovah openly declared to a sinful Judah: “Come now, and let us **reason** together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18). Why do the Calvinists insist that God has predetermined who will be saved and that God alone will save them, when the Lord Himself calls upon Judah to present their case to Him so that they (Judah and Jehovah) might consider their situation together? The Calvinists insist that man “is altogether passive” in the matter of salvation, yet Jehovah calls upon Judah to *reason* with Him – that is **not** a passive role in salvation (which is precisely what the Lord wants to discuss with Judah). Jesus explained that *everyone who is knowing the Son and is believing in Him is having life everlasting* (John 6:40, literal).¹⁷⁵ the *knowing* and *believing* are both participles in the present tense that are used to describe *everyone*; these are continually present attributes of *everyone* who is holding *life everlasting!*¹⁷⁶ The Calvinist says: man is passive in his salvation; Jesus says that perceiving Who the Son of God is and being persuaded that He is Truth is something that *man* must do! Even though man can be persuaded to believe, that does not make him the author of salvation: “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6); “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [*is believing*: a present reality – an attribute of *whosoever*] in him should not [*will not*] perish, but have [*is having*] everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved [*passive voice*: God does the saving]” (John 3:17).¹⁷⁷

They go on to explain: “The god of resistible grace is not the God of the Scriptures. He is a weak god, an ineffective god, a powerless god. In reality, he is no god at all, but an idol god. So serious is the denial of irresistible grace!”¹⁷⁸ Clearly, we are not on the same page, but it is equally evident that the Calvinist feels very strongly about this teaching – going so far as to identify anyone who denies their teaching of *irresistible grace* as an idolater (those are strong words that require strong evidence). Since they are so very confident of their position, their proof should then be readily evident; let’s continue to evaluate this teaching.

¹⁷⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

¹⁷⁶ https://koine-greek.fandom.com/wiki/Participles#Present_Active_Participle.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid; Strong’s Online.

¹⁷⁸ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace5.html.

Deuteronomy 30:6 – And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live. “God does not try to save sinners … God saves sinners, sovereignly, efficaciously, irresistibly.”¹⁷⁹ That is their assessment of the matter, and this is one of the texts that they use to try to support this statement. However, once again, they have failed to look beyond the words of the text that they have selected. If we consider the context, we find this: “And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee [in detail in Deuteronomy 28], and thou shalt **call them to mind** among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, And shalt **return unto the LORD** thy God, and shalt **obey his voice** … That **then** the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and … *circumcise thine heart … to love the Lord thy God*” (Deuteronomy 30:1-3, 6). In Deuteronomy 28, Moses gave the children of Israel a detailed pronouncement of the blessings that awaited them for obedience to the Lord (1-14) and of the curses that would abide with them if they did not observe the Lord’s commands (15-68); chapter 29 has a reminder of what the Lord had done for them, and a summation of the curse that will be theirs for not living in obedience to the Lord. The Calvinists would have us believe that the quoted text (Deuteronomy 30:6) comes out of the blue – but it doesn’t; the text is built upon the Israelites understanding what the Lord required of them, and the consequences for not being obedient. At some time when the children of Israel find themselves under the promised curses and recall the Lord’s promised blessings for obedience, on the premise that they will *return* to the Lord and *obey* Him, **then** the Lord will *circumcise* [their] *heart to love the Lord thy God*. Very clearly, the Lord is looking for someone who willing turns and obeys before He will *circumcise* their heart. Under the New Covenant, Paul explained it this way: “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is not* of men, but of God” (Romans 2:28-29). The *circumcision of the heart* is a spiritual covenant with the Lord; the persuasion of the Lord as Truth is already in place, which leads to our faith reaching out to embrace the Lord’s provision, and the Lord sealing that with His Spirit: “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). For Israel, this required faith

¹⁷⁹ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books/folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace5.html.

in the promises of God; for us, it is faith in the accomplished sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

John 6:44-45 – No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. At first glance this might appear to limit those who can come to the Lord Jesus to those whom the Father has drawn. Remember, this is being used to affirm that God will make those who receive His *irresistible grace* willing recipients of His salvation; this same text (v. 44) was used in support of *total depravity*. The condition is this: if the Father Who sent the Lord Jesus should not have drawn a person, **then** he cannot come to Jesus; but **if** the Father has drawn someone, then that one can *come unto me*. What did Jesus teach about His relationship with the Father? “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). Jesus also stated: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me” (John 12:32). In this case, the condition is: **if** Jesus is lifted up from the earth, **then all** (*pantas* – masculine, plural: it means **all of humanity**) will be *drawn to Him*.¹⁸⁰ Since the Lord was *lifted up from the earth* in crucifixion (a fulfillment of the condition that He stated), then it follows that *all men* are being drawn to Him. Therefore, we must understand John 6:44 to read: everyone is able to come unto the Lord Jesus because all are being drawn to Him. The question remains: is the *coming* a product of God’s *irresistible grace*? The following verse explains who is coming; all are being drawn, but not all are coming. Consider the last portion of John 6:45 – *so everyone who has learned from the Father and has understood, he is coming to Me* (literal).¹⁸¹ The Gospel invitation is open to *whosoever will*, and those who have *learned* and *understood* are coming to the Lord Jesus – that sounds a lot like *believing!* Because we are created in the image of God (something that is still present, even within the sinner – Genesis 9:6), we have the ability to ponder what we hear, and either accept or reject it; it is this ability to reason that makes the *whosoever-will* of the Gospel a reality. For the one who ponders the Gospel and is persuaded of its veracity (he has *learned* and *understood*), he is coming to Jesus: he is believing on Him, and that opens access through the Narrow Gate to the way of life (Matthew 7:13-14, John 10:9). The *coming* that is explained here is not by God’s *irresistible grace* but by His grace at work within a heart that has heard, learned and understood what the Lord has done for him. It is by God’s exceeding grace that He

¹⁸⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

expresses in kindness to us through Christ Jesus that we are among those who have been saved *through the faith* (Ephesians 2:7-8) – it is expressed *faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ (persuaded and believing) that opens God’s rich storehouse of grace and brings us His salvation.

They make this interesting observation: “That salvation is a rebirth **implies** that the grace of salvation is irresistible. As far as physical birth is concerned, the child who is born has no say in the matter of whether or not he will be born. He does not cooperate in being born, not even will to be conceived [sic] and brought forth. Neither is he able effectively to resist conception and birth. **What is true of physical birth is also true of spiritual rebirth.** It is not due to us; **we do not cooperate in it; nor are we able effectively to resist it**” (emphasis added).¹⁸² This is a very interesting analogy, but I wonder if they really thought it through carefully. As a non-Calvinist, I have no problems with the term *rebirth*, but for a Calvinist to use this term to describe salvation *implies* (to use their term) that they believe that man is born with a *spiritual life*, but one that isn’t of God. As we examined the Calvinists’ understanding of *total depravity*, they took great care to emphasize man’s inability to “to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth.”¹⁸³ Within their theology, wouldn’t it be more appropriate to speak of salvation as being *spiritual birth*, rather than *rebirth*? However, if we consider what took place when Adam sinned, perhaps we can bring some clarity to this matter.

Before Adam disobeyed the commandment of the Lord, he and Eve enjoyed spiritual vitality as they fellowshiped with the Lord, their Creator – the Lord came to the Garden to commune with them (Genesis 3:8). Satan came to the Garden in the serpent with the intent to deceive and gain control over what God had created; Satan is a created **spirit-being** who is alive and yet in direct opposition to God (from God’s perspective, you could say that he is *spiritually dead*) – it was his intent at the time of his rebellion, to become *like the most High* (Isaiah 14:14). Satan was *perfect* and the most highly acclaimed of God’s created angelic beings until unrighteousness was found in him (Ezekiel 28:15): he aspired to be as exalted as his Creator. Adam and Eve were also perfect until Satan came tempting them with an opportunity to be *as gods, knowing good and evil* (Genesis 3:5): he used his own point of failure (pride) as his means of deception (Ezekiel 28:17). When God created man, He breathed

¹⁸² http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace5.html.

¹⁸³ MacArthur, Vanishing, p. 88.

into him both his breath and his *eternal* soul (Genesis 2:7, *breath of lives* [plural]¹⁸⁴) – He made him in His own image: man could perceive, think, reason and choose (Genesis 2:19-20). Satan, a spirit-being who is the antithesis of the Lord God, came into the Garden with the intent to gain control over all of God's creation. The sin of Adam was disobedience to the Lord and obedience to the lure of Satan: his allegiance (by his choice) changed from Jehovah to Satan. The Lord's warning was that when Adam would eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, on that day *dying you will die* (Genesis 2:17).¹⁸⁵ *Dying* is an infinitive absolute verb, which means that it serves to emphasize the verb that follows it; in this case, *dying* could also be shown as *surely* or *utterly*.¹⁸⁶ *Die*, on the other hand, is a second person masculine singular verb (*thou wilt die*) in the imperfect tense, which means that it is an incomplete action; from this we can deduce that there will be several facets to the death that is promised.¹⁸⁷ If we ponder this in the light of Adam's sin, we can recognize three aspects to this promised death: 1) there was an immediate spiritual death – the fellowship with God was gone, 2) perhaps less noticeable but also immediate, is that physical death was everywhere, and for humanity it could end either "naturally" or unnaturally (as with Abel), and 3) more significantly, there is a future death coming when man's eternal soul (the image of God now marred by sin) would experience eternal separation from God. When God breathed life into Adam, He gave him his physical breath **and** his eternal soul; sin did **not** abolish this eternal aspect of man, it merely set it on a course that was away from God (Genesis 9:6), and physical death serves to make the soul's destination irreversible. At the end of time we are told that "... death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them"¹⁸⁸ ... And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:13-15); consider a literal translation of the latter portion: *this, the second death being: if anyone was not found having been written in the Book of Life, then he was thrown into the Lake of Fire.*¹⁸⁹ The souls that are aligned against God (they are not found in the Book of Life: i.e., they have either not been made alive in Christ or have failed to remain faithful to Him) will be separated from Him for eternity in the Lake of Fire

¹⁸⁴ Leningrad Hebrew OT.

¹⁸⁵ <https://www.ancient-hebrew.org/learn/learn-biblical-hebrew-16.htm>.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, Strong's Online.

¹⁸⁷ Strong's Online.

¹⁸⁸ Death: with the vanishing of the old heaven and earth, any who are alive on the earth at the time are caught in death; hell (Hades) is where the unrighteous dead from all ages are being held pending the Great White Throne judgment.

¹⁸⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

– this is the *second death*; this is that final stage in Adam’s *you will die!* As we noted in our study of *total depravity*, the Lord had a means of redemption in place even before Adam was created – this was God’s gracious gift to humanity that would permit everyone to avoid the *second death*. His gift centered on the need for a blood sacrifice to atone for sin (Hebrews 9:22) – it began in the Garden of Eden with the coats of skins that Jehovah made for Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). Until Jesus died upon the cross, shedding the blood of an innocent, clean animal (as prescribed by God) combined with faith in the Lord’s promise of deliverance (Genesis 3:15) brought temporary cleansing from sin; since the cross, Jesus’ shed blood has replaced the animal sacrifices with a one-time cleansing from sin (Hebrews 9:12) yet it, too, must be combined with faith in the Lord in order to be personally effective. Jesus said that it is the one who will remain faithful to Him through the trials of life unto the very end who will be saved (Matthew 24:13) – it is a life of obedience to the Lord that will bring His welcome. This is not *irresistible grace*, but *abundant grace* that is administered by the abiding Spirit of God that will enable us to live in faithfulness to Him despite the trials of life (Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 4:13-15).

After the sin of Adam, the Lord pronounced a curse upon the serpent, the woman and the man – things on earth would never be the same again. However, more significantly, the Lord set His pre-creation plan for redemption into motion: as already noted, He shed the blood of animals in order to provide Adam and Eve with coverings (Genesis 3:21) – the shedding of blood, mixed with faith in the Lord, brought a temporary restoration of fellowship between the Creator and His fallen creatures. The promise was made to Satan: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it [He; this is a masculine pronoun in Hebrew] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).¹⁹⁰ The temporary cleansing from sin accomplished by Jehovah for Adam and Eve foreshadowed the time when the *Word* would take on a body of flesh (John 1:14) and Jehovah would record a final, one-time sacrifice for the sins of humanity (Hebrews 10:12); God’s first sacrifice in the Garden was a pattern for everyone to follow (we see that exemplified in the choices that Cain and Abel made – Genesis 4:3-5), the last Sacrifice fulfilled the Lord’s promise in Genesis 3:15 and broke the power of the devil (Hebrews 2:14). The efficacy of the sacrifices that were made for sin was always dependent upon the choice of the one for whom the sacrifice was made: Abel exercised faith in the Lord’s promise and drew His grace (*respect*;

¹⁹⁰ BDB.

righteous in the eyes of God), whereas Cain trusted in his own abilities and found no grace (Hebrews 11:4). “For unto us was the gospel [the Good News of God’s redemptive work] preached, as well as unto them [referring to the children of Israel]: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it” (Hebrews 4:2). Moses rehearsed before the children of Israel the work that Jehovah had done and their required obedience to His commands (Deuteronomy 28-30), and his summation was this: “I call heaven and earth to record [*bear witness*] this day against you, *that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live*: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, *and* that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he *is* thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).¹⁹¹ The majority of the children of Israel did not live in obedience to the Lord, yet Moses called upon them to *choose life* – choose obedience to Jehovah! What did Jesus say? “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15) – if we are loving Him, then He requires that we attend carefully to His commands (*keep* is in the imperative mood).¹⁹²

In the Calvinist’s words, *salvation is a rebirth* – that is true to a greater degree than even they believe! Within their theology, the sin of Adam rendered all of his posterity unable “to desire, understand, believe, or apply spiritual truth.”¹⁹³ They hold that man is spiritually incapable of anything; within this vein, some Calvinists believe that the *image of God* (Genesis 1:26) is no longer present in man, citing that Seth was born in Adam’s image and not God’s (Genesis 5:3). Yet MacArthur, who believes in the total inability of man to even *desire* or *believe* any *spiritual truth*, also believes that sinful humanity still bears the *image of God* – despite being marred by sin, it is “not utterly obliterated” and is “essential to the very definition of humanity.”¹⁹⁴ Within the *image*, he includes man’s rational abilities: his ability to understand morality, to feel emotions, to think, to “reason and solve problems” (i.e., make choices) – these are all a part of being made in the likeness of God.¹⁹⁵ Clearly, he is not above contradicting himself, or accepting two opposing truths at the same time; or, perhaps, he has limited the *total depravity* of man to spiritual matters, and his somewhat marred image of God only applies to the rest of life. Yet if the image

¹⁹¹ Strong’s Online.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ MacArthur, Vanishing, p. 88.

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/A200/loving-gods-image-in-our-neighbors>.

¹⁹⁵ <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B200710>.

of God remains even somewhat intact within sinful man, then it is entirely possible that he can hear, ponder and choose to believe the truth about the Lord Jesus (just like Moses' expectation of Israel) – which makes *total depravity, unconditional election* and *irresistible grace* all an unnecessary contrivance of sinful man.

They like to point to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus in support of their position: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3); literally: *unless someone has been born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God*.¹⁹⁶ *Born*, as it is used here, is in the passive voice, which identifies God as the One Who performs this action – clearly, they would have no problem with that. Therefore, the question is: how is one born from above? Interestingly, the Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas that very question: “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30); their response to this question will provide us with the answer to ours, and from the Apostle Paul himself! The jailor was told: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). Within this concise response, *believe* is the one word that we must be very sure that we fully understand. *Pisteuson* (the Greek word so translated) means to think to be true, to be persuaded of, or to evaluate and become convinced of the truth of a matter; moreover, the word is also in the imperative mood (Paul issued this as a command to the jailor) and active voice, which means that it was the jailor who was required to be persuaded of the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ (*believe*).¹⁹⁷ Paul and Silas did not leave the jailor with that command, but “they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house” (Acts 16:32) – instruction was given so that the jailor and his household would **understand** what was required, could **evaluate** what they heard, and then be **persuaded** (*believe*). How are we saved? First of all, by being persuaded of the truth of the Lord Jesus through learning about Him (as the eternal *Word* made flesh, His sinless life, His death for our sin, His shed blood for our cleansing, and His resurrection as our High Priest and Master); Jesus said that everyone who is believing in Him will not be ruined but is holding everlasting life (John 3:16).¹⁹⁸ Part of *believing* in Him and learning about Him is counting the cost of being His follower (Luke 14:26-33) and, if I am willing to pay the price of discipleship and have been persuaded, then it is understood that all things are made new (for I am now cleansed); through the enablement of the

¹⁹⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT; Strong's Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; https://koine-greek.fandom.com/wiki/Participles#Present_Active_Participle.

Spirit of God, Who now abides within, I embark on a *new* life designed by God to show forth His righteousness and holiness (Romans 8:1-4; Ephesians 2:10; 4:24).

As we learned in our study of *limited atonement*, everyone is *called* to the Lord, but few will find the Door to the narrow pathway to life (Matthew 7:14; John 10:9). Although the wealth of God's grace has been expressed to us through Christ (Ephesians 2:7) and our salvation comes only through that abundant grace, it is a *gift of God* to be received, it is **not** an *irresistible* force that requires our compliance, or one that will change our mind in order to bring compliance. The *image of God* is very much a part of all of humanity and an *irresistible grace* would contravene what God has placed within each one of us: the ability to understand, reason and choose; truly, our eternal souls have been tainted by sin so that our evaluations are not without a sinful bias, but since Jesus commanded the multitudes to make every effort to *enter* onto the pathway of life through the Narrow Gate, then it would be foolish of us to say that no one can obey Him (Matthew 7:13; Luke 13:24). Concerning those who will be deceived by the Antichrist, Paul said that the Antichrist will come "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness [Satan's *power, signs* and deceitful *wonders* (v. 9)] in them that perish [*those who are perishing*]; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might [*in order to*] be saved" (2 Thessalonians 2:10).¹⁹⁹ Those who will be perishing under the Antichrist's lies will be those who **refuse** to accept (*received not*) a love for the truth in order to be saved – in other words, they will evaluate the lies of the Antichrist along with the truth of God, and they will choose the lies because they come with convincing *signs* and *wonders*. They will be permitted to exercise their ability to think, reason and choose; *irresistible grace* does not fit into this scenario because **then** there would be **no choice** – they would not be able to reject the truth because either 1) they are the object of this *irresistible grace* and cannot resist (no choice), or 2) they are not the object of this *irresistible grace* and will have no choice.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

By reason of these remains of indwelling sin, and the temptations of sin and of the world, those who are converted could not persevere in a state of grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and

¹⁹⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon; <https://www.morechristlike.com/koine-greek-present-tense-present-participle/>.

powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end. – THE CANONS OF DORT, “Fifth Head of Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints,” Article 3.²⁰⁰

This is the final teaching (of TULIP) that is built upon the absolute sovereignty of God in the matter of salvation through His *unconditional election* and *irresistible grace*. This doctrine is known as the *perseverance of the saints* (as in the Canons of Dort; pointing to the individual’s *responsibility* to remain steadfast in the faith), the *preservation of the saints* (emphasizing God’s sovereignty and grace as the keeping agents), and *eternal security* (the *comfort* that is received by the individual from this doctrine).²⁰¹ It is admitted that some, who call themselves Calvinists, have some doubts about this teaching (and others who outrightly reject it), nevertheless it fits very well with the other four *petals* of this *flower*; if one accepts that salvation is *all* of God, then God’s preservation of those whom He has *unconditionally elected* seems fitting. However, if one’s relationship with the Savior is at all dynamic (rather than robotic), then all of the teachings of the TULIP are called into question, including this one.

The Westminster Confession states: “They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.”²⁰² They are speaking of those whom they believe God has *unconditionally elected* to salvation after having drawn them by His *irresistible grace* – they shall *persevere therein to the end*, and so they will be *eternally saved*. After laying their foundation of *total depravity*, the Calvinists work tirelessly to explain their other doctrines that are *entirely* of God, being careful to show how they are totally interconnected. *Unconditional election* is necessary because of the *total inability* of humanity, *irresistible grace* is the means by which those who are chosen by God for salvation become the *elect*, and finally, the *perseverance of the saints* explains how God will keep the *elect* to the end and for eternity; *limited atonement* is added so that it is understood that Christ only died for the *elect*. Truly, Calvinism is a maze of interwoven threads but, alas, too frequently those threads have lost any connection with the truth of Scripture, and find their source in the theological musings of men. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1);

²⁰⁰ <https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>.

²⁰¹ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace6.html.

²⁰² <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/the-westminster-confession/#Chapter%20XVII>.

false prophets are those who profess to speak the truth of God, and we must examine their words and lives against the standard of the Word of God – there is no other acceptable measure, and we must do it for our own spiritual welfare.

Let's consider how they use the words of the Lord Jesus in an effort to support this teaching.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It is interesting that they begin with this verse; here is how they understand it: “so often quoted by those who believe salvation depends on the choice of man’s own will … [it] actually teaches the very opposite, that is, that those who believe *shall not perish*, but by virtue of their faith have everlasting life, which we know is a gift of God (Rom. 6:23). Similar passages are John 3:36 and 5:24.”²⁰³ Let's consider each of these references very carefully to ensure that we understand them correctly and test their explanation, beginning with John 3:16.

The first part of this text (John 3:16) makes a declaration: God's love for the world was so great that He did give His only begotten Son (the eternal *Word* made flesh) – this is what God did, and the rest of the verse clarifies for us the reason that He did it. *Believeth* is a participle (in this case, a verb that fills the role of a noun) in the present tense; consequently, the participle is to be taken as an ongoing activity with no anticipated end, and therefore, it is best understood as: *the one who is believing* (this acknowledges both its *noun* role and the continuous action).²⁰⁴ The object of this *believing one* is *the Son*: *the one who is believing in the Son*.²⁰⁵ As already noted, the latter half of this verse explains the reason for God's love and the gift of His Son. *Perish* and *have* are both subjunctive verbs (which normally identifies something that is a possibility but not a certainty); when the subjunctive appears in a *purpose clause* (such as these), they lose their normal “maybe” trait and, instead, explain the reason or result of the given action (in this case, God's love and gift).²⁰⁶ Therefore, we understand that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son” *in order that the one who is believing in Him will not be ruined but is having everlasting life*.²⁰⁷ Understand that the Calvinist is using this to demonstrate

²⁰³ http://www.reformedspokane.org/Doctrine_pages/Calvinism%20%26%20Sovereign%20Grace/books_folder/Saved%20By%20Grace/Saved_By_Grace6.html.

²⁰⁴ <https://www.morechristlike.com/koine-greek-present-tense-present-participle/>.

²⁰⁵ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁰⁶ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

²⁰⁷ Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

that “the guarantee of scripture and therefore the promise of God is that salvation is forever.”²⁰⁸ Jesus said very clearly that the reason for God’s love for humanity and the gift of His Son is so that *the one who is believing in Him is having everlasting life* – the *everlasting life* is forever tied to the one who is continually, unendingly *believing* in the Son! To say it another way: as long as the *believing in Him* continues, then the *everlasting life* continues for the *one who is believing*; this, of course, means that if the *believing* ceases, then so does the *everlasting life*. The writer of Hebrews warned of just such a situation: *understand, brethren, lest there will be in anyone of you an evil heart of unbelief [apistias – no belief; faithless] in having become apostate from the living God* (Hebrews 3:12, literal).²⁰⁹ This is addressed to *brethren*, who are earlier referred to as being *holy brethren* (Hebrews 3:1); **warnings in Scripture are never framed within hypothetical situations** – this is a warning against a real possibility, and is only one of many within Scripture calling us to remain steadfast in our faith. When faced with such passages that clearly contradict his theology, MacArthur offers this blanket excuse and, thereby, seeks to eliminate every admonition to remain firm in the faith: “... those are warnings to **false believers**. Those are warnings to people who are uncommitted. Those are warnings to people who have come close to the gospel and made a superficial acknowledgement of the gospel but not a real one” (emphasis added).²¹⁰ *Holy brethren* are *false believers*? Really? What are *false believers* anyway? That’s an amazing oxymoron: *believers* identifies those who are persuaded of the truth of the Lord Jesus and all that He has done, and *false* means incorrect, untrue or wrong – these concepts simply do not fit together! Clearly, there are those who might *claim* to believe (the Ecumenical crowd is filled with them) and may even sound like a Christian, but making such a claim does not make them *believers* – not even *false believers* (Matthew 7:22-23). It seems that when the Scriptures contradict their theology, Calvinists will unashamedly resort to unsubstantiated sweeping statements that expose their inability to Biblically defend their position!

John 3:36 – “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.” This is the testimony of John the Baptist regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Once again, *believeth* (*pisteuon*) is a present-tense participle describing a continuous action: *the one who is believing*; so our discussion for John 3:16 also applies here.²¹¹ Here, too,

²⁰⁸ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-271/~about>.

²⁰⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

²¹⁰ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-270>.

²¹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

the *believeth*-participle is in the active voice – *he* is doing the believing, and a proper understanding of this word (*believing*) clarifies that this is **not** because of God’s *irresistible grace*: *he* has been persuaded and is believing! However, as above, unless that active *believing* continues, all else fails. Before we move on, let’s consider the phrase *believeth not* for a moment. The Greek word is *apeithon* (also a present-tense participle) and, within this context, it means to be disobedient to God; it is the one who is not living in obedience to the Lord who will not (future tense) *see life*, but God’s wrath (*orge*) is presently abiding on him.²¹²

John 5:24 – “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” In the Greek, *heareth* and *believeth* are two present-tense participles, and identify the *he* as being someone who is continually hearing the words of Christ and continually believing on Him. These participles are acting as adjectives telling us something about *he*; so when we read the main clause, *he ... hath everlasting life*, we understand immediately that *he* is continually and actively (these participles are also in the active voice) hearing the Word of the Lord and is believing on Him, and that is why *he* is having *everlasting life*. Such a one as this is not coming into condemnation but has moved from death unto life.²¹³ However, the moment that the hearing and believing are in jeopardy of failing, the many warnings of Scripture about remaining steadfast in the faith come into play (like Hebrews 3:12 that we looked at earlier) – no, I do not buy the argument that these warnings are meant for *false believers*.

From what we have just looked at, MacArthur declares: “If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never perish”; a little later he declares: “We are secured by the same supernatural faith that was given to us **to cause us to believe** savingly ...” (emphasis added).²¹⁴ It’s amazing! As careful as he will be in some areas to be sure that we understand the sense of the underlying text, is as careless as he is when to do so would be to undermine his Calvinistic theology. In each of the *believeth*-texts that we have just considered, *believeth* is always in the active voice, which means that the action of believing is being carried out by the subject (*whosoever* or *he*). If we are given faith by God to *cause us to believe* (as MacArthur suggests), that would require the passive voice – we are then being acted upon by someone or something else, i.e., we are the recipients of the action. Furthermore, MacArthur’s

²¹² Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon.

²¹³ Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

²¹⁴ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-271/~about>.

suggestion eliminates any possibility of evaluation and persuasion prior to our *believing* – something that the Greek word so translated requires.²¹⁵

Let's consider a few more of their favored passages to ensure that we have not missed anything.

1 Peter 1:3-5 – “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” I’m sure that you can easily recognize the *key phrase* for the Calvinists: *who are kept by the power of God*.²¹⁶ Within the context of Calvinism, *kept* takes on the added thought of *saved* or *preserved*; in other words, this must mean that God will preserve us by His power – i.e., the *preservation* or *perseverance of the saints*! However, that would be a conclusion that is arrived at all too hastily. MacArthur correctly identifies *kept* as being translated from the Greek word “*phrouroumenous*. A military term. It indicates being guarded by soldiers, present tense, constantly under guard by a powerful, protective force.”²¹⁷ This Greek word is a present passive participle, which means that we are the recipients of a continuous protection by God – to this point, we are in agreement.²¹⁸ Jesus spoke of this protection, and His words shed some additional light on this matter: “My sheep hear [*are hearing*] my voice, and I know [*am knowing*] them, and they follow [*are following*] me: And I give [*am giving*] unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish [the Greek words *ou* and *me* along with the subjunctive verb make this a very strong negative], neither shall any *man* pluck them [*no one will seize them*] out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me [*Who has given to Me*], is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of [*able to take away from*] my Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).²¹⁹ This passage is also frequently used to defend the *perseverance of the saints*, so let's consider it carefully. Jesus’ sheep are *hearing* and *following* Him, and He is *knowing* them and *giving* them everlasting life so that they will not perish – this is very similar to the passages from John that we have already considered. However, Jesus then goes on to say that no one, or nothing, can remove His sheep from His hand, and that His Father has the

²¹⁵ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

²¹⁶ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-271/~about>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²¹⁹ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Friberg Lexicon; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

same protective grasp. What is too often missed when considering Jesus' words here, is that this amazing protection is against **external** forces; in other words, this protection does not extend to the heart of man. I recognize that many Calvinists discredit the will of man, but the ability to think, to reason, and to choose are those unique qualities that God breathed into the first man: his *soul* – the image of God! The warnings in Scripture to remain steadfast in our faith in the Lord are not intended for *false believers*, they are meant for us as a warning against allowing our hearts to be drawn away from the Lord. The Lord declares: “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9); that deceitful heart is among what we are to account as having been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6). In Christ, God has provided us with every spiritual blessing (Ephesians 1:3), He has written His Law upon our minds and placed it on our hearts (Hebrews 10:16), His Spirit is abiding within (John 16:13; Romans 8:9), and both Christ and the Spirit are interceding with the Father on our behalf (Romans 8:26, 34); we have been equipped with everything that we need to live in keeping with what God has prepared for those who are in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). If we accept that God’s many warnings in Scripture against failing to remain steadfast are intended for those who are *in Christ*, then we can properly understand the protection that Christ’s hand offers. We are thoroughly protected against anyone or anything snatching us away from the Lord, but we are able to choose to turn away from the Lord and lose it all. “Wherefore let him that thinketh [*is thinking*] he standeth [perfect tense – a completed action] take heed lest he [*should*] fall [*fall away*]” (1 Corinthians 10:12);²²⁰ the warning given here is that if we are of the opinion that our position in Christ is permanent (like the Calvinists), it is then that we are to *take heed* lest we *should fall away*. This is not a hypothetical impossibility, but a warning against a reality; granted, it does not fit within Calvinistic teaching, which is why MacArthur has assigned this warning (along with all of the others) to the scrap heap for *false believers*.

In keeping with Jesus’ words concerning our protection, Paul wrote: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39). Everything that is listed here is **external** to us – what is not included is our hearts, because if we choose not to remain faithful to the Lord, then we will be separated from His love. The warnings that God has given to us in His

²²⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

Word are there for our attention! Jesus warned His disciples: *you must be taking heed lest anyone should lead you away from the truth* (Matthew 24:4, literal),²²¹ if we choose to ignore God's many warnings and arrogantly place ourselves above being deceived, then we have become an easy target for the deceptions that Satan will send our way – the warning in 1 Corinthians 10:12 is real!

Titus 1:1-3 – “Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God’s elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour” Into the context of our study, the Calvinists bring this passage and say: “Before you ever lived, before there ever was a creation, **God promised eternal life**, and he cannot lie” (emphasis added).²²² Yet the Scriptural phrase is: *hope of eternal life* (an acceptable translation of the Greek²²³); *hope* speaks of an expectation, an anticipation: “hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Romans 8:24). There is a significant difference between having *hope of eternal life* and having *eternal life*; since God *promised hope of eternal life*, it would be foolhardy to twist God’s words and say that He *promised eternal life*. Paul is revealing the basis for his being a slave of God and an Apostle of Jesus Christ: 1) it is in keeping with *the faith of God’s elect* (*eklekton*), those who are believing that Jesus is the Son of the living God and, thereby, are made a part of the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building (Matthew 16:16-18), and 2) it is with the *full knowledge (acknowledging) of the truth* according to godliness (John 14:6). Paul, the recipient of the Gospel of the New Covenant and its chief Apostle to the Gentiles, spoke of the *hope of eternal life*! To the Corinthians, Paul said: *I am disciplining and subduing my body lest perhaps after having preached to others, I should be disqualified* (1 Corinthians 9:27, literal); he used the word *disqualified* (*adokimos*) in keeping with his athletic example of the discipline that is needed in order to obtain the prize in a race. He was exercising personal discipline in his walk with the Lord (guided by the Spirit of God), and he did it so that he might not be *disqualified* when he arrived at the finish line. “For if ye live [*are living*] after [*according to*] the flesh, ye shall [*are beginning to*] die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify [*are putting to death*] the deeds of the body, ye shall [*will, future tense*] live” (Romans 8:13).²²⁴ Within the

²²¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²²² <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-271/~about>.

²²³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²²⁴ Ibid.

context of our study, we must note two things: 1) Paul did not see himself as being above being *disqualified* – the Apostle to the Gentiles did **not** teach *perseverance of the saints* (Philippians 3:12); 2) Paul taught that *life* (the eternal life of salvation) is future. Jesus, God incarnate, also taught these same precepts: “... he that shall endure [*hupomeno – endure*; to remain steadfast in the faith through trials] unto the end [of our time on earth], the same [this is a demonstrative pronoun meaning: *this is the one who*] shall be saved [*will be saved*: future tense, passive voice – God does the saving]” (Matthew 24:13);²²⁵ Jesus made it clear that we must follow Him faithfully (obediently: *hupomeno*, with endurance) to the end of our time on earth (our death or His harvest), and **then** we will be saved. The basis for the Calvinists’ doctrine of the *perseverance of the saints* does not rest on the teachings of Scripture, and they contravene the words of the Lord Jesus!

One other thing: the thought process is frequently something like this: “How could anyone be so foolish as to think that a person could lose ‘eternal life?’ If you can lose it, then is it eternal? No!”²²⁶ I have faced this in an individual, and no amount of explaining from the Scriptures made one iota of difference. In his case, I think that he clung desperately to the eternal security of a-prayer-for-salvation-uttered because most of his children were not walking with the Lord. Unfortunately, such a position is common among Evangelical teachers today, and the Calvinists’ doctrine of *perseverance*, which is founded upon the absolute predestination (sovereignty) of God, provided the groundwork for the development of the modern *eternal security* teachings.²²⁷ Why is it claimed that if you can lose *eternal life*, then it was not *eternal*? It’s not that your *eternal life* will somehow fall away while you go through life – yet that seems to be how some view it; they think: it’s yours without condition (Jesus gave it to you when you asked Him to be your Savior), and then you can lose it? Perhaps they hold an incorrect view of salvation, and they think that when they ask Jesus to be their Savior, He gives them eternal life – it’s theirs **now!** Jesus said that for the one who is believing in Him, he will not perish, and he is having everlasting life (John 3:16); what is abundantly evident is that this *eternal life* is only present for the *one who is believing* – if the *believing* is no longer present, then the *eternal life* is also gone, and he will perish. In other words, the *eternal life* is bound up with the continuous *believing* (not the individual), and **cannot** be possessed apart

²²⁵ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

²²⁶ https://www.jesus-is-savior.com/Believer's%20Corner/eternal_security.htm; curiously, this is set down in favor of *eternal security* by someone who discredits *perseverance of the saints* as a system of works and faith in order to retain salvation – obviously, the opinions on this matter vary widely.

²²⁷ http://www.eternalsecurity.us/a_historical_examination.htm.

from an active and continuous *believing* in the Lord – the two are inextricably joined. Despite MacArthur’s attempt to discredit the warnings of God’s Word, Hebrews 3:12 still stands: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [*apistas* – no faith (unfaithful)], in departing from [*becoming apostate from*] the living God.”²²⁸ The *eternal life* of salvation is no longer there for the one who chooses to turn away from his *faith* in the Lord; the *eternal life* is **not lost**, it is forsaken – the one who turns away from the Lord, is also turning away from *eternal life*. Can you see it? The *eternal life* is only *in the Lord*, and if we turn our back on Him then we are also rejecting eternal life.

The Scriptures do not support the *perseverance of the saints* as the Calvinists understand it; what it does call for is a steadfast commitment to the Lord that must not wane. This perseverance is a product of our commitment to the Lord and His Spirit being our guide and strength along the narrow way that leads to life. Yes, we must make a commitment to follow the Lord; Jesus said that unless we are prepared to make Him our highest priority in life (above family, friends, prestige, and exemplified by obedience to His commandments), then we are not worthy to be His disciples (Luke 14:26-33). God will not force us to persevere with Him (as the Calvinists assume), and there are no Scriptures to support such a teaching.

Conclusions

I will admit that this study has uncovered some things that I was not expecting; my brief forays into the doctrines of Calvinism up to this point, had given me sufficient evidence to recognize that they are holding to some unbiblical teachings. It is always surprising to me (although, by now maybe it shouldn’t be) the extent to which some will go to convince the unwary that what they teach is the truth. I’m sure that no one within the Reformed umbrella would knowingly teach what contravenes God’s Word – they are thoroughly convinced that what they have been taught (and are teaching) regarding their theology is correct. They can spend a lifetime studying the Scriptures, but unless they are willing to look beyond their theology, they will never come to see God’s full truth because their theology is blinding them.

²²⁸ Gingrich Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

I was amazed to read of one who identified ONLY two views of the Gospel: Calvinism and unbelief.²²⁹ Wow! I guess that I have felt that in how some Calvinists' have responded to me, but I have never actually seen it in print before! Calvinism, a man-made theology, holds the only complete understanding of God, His eternal character, what He requires, and how He works in this world today! What arrogance; *the one who is thinking that he stands, must be taking heed lest he should fall* (1 Corinthians 10:12, literal).²³⁰ Our study of Scripture must be with this in mind: "For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8). If we think that we understand God fully, then our focus has not been on the God of the Bible; Calvinists know Calvinism, but they do not know God!

I always find it disturbing when words are redefined in order to provide support for a particular teaching. The outstanding example of that was the redefinition of *kosmos* (world) to mean "the children of God scattered abroad."²³¹ Clearly, this had not been thought through very carefully, otherwise I'm sure it would have never been proposed. Nevertheless, this is a tactic that is used quite extensively among those who need to make some words to mean that which fits with their thinking. This is an illustration of our need to be alert – don't accept what someone says as being the truth (just because of who they are or the position that they hold), always examine everything in the light of Scripture (1 John 4:1).

Perhaps the most surprising tactic came from none other than John MacArthur, well known for his Master's Seminary – a bastion of indoctrination into the tenets of Calvinism. While teaching on the *perseverance of the saints*, in one sweeping statement he dealt with all of the warnings in Scripture against falling away and the need to remain steadfast in the faith: "those are warnings to false believers."²³² Jesus spoke of *false christ*s and *false prophet*s, and warned that they would come with signs and great persuasion so as to deceive even *the elect* (the children of God) if they are sufficiently persuasive (Matthew 24:24). A *false christ* is someone who claims to be the promised Messiah, and, through the years, there have been many who have claimed to be Jesus or His reincarnation – the pinnacle of a *false christ* will be the coming Antichrist. A *prophet* is someone who proclaims the truth of God, and so a *false prophet* is someone who desires to be seen as a teacher of God's truth when he is not; there have been a multitude of *false prophets* through the years, and

²²⁹ <https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/>.

²³⁰ Stephanus 1550 NT.

²³¹ <https://www.monergism.com/understanding-1-john-22-john-samson-0>.

²³² <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-270>.

even today there is such a profusion that any aberrant belief will have its teacher – the coming False Prophet (of the Antichrist) will be well qualified for this. On the other hand, a *believer*, within the context of our consideration, is someone who has evaluated and considered carefully the call of the Lord Jesus, and has been persuaded of His truth so as to make a life-changing commitment to Him; that is what the Greek word for *belief* requires even though that is not how most would define it today. To add the word *false* to this makes no sense; a *false belief* is no belief and so the whole concept of a *false believer* falls apart. Yes, there will be (and are) many who profess to believe, and may even use the language of a Christian, but that does **not** make them a *believer*; they may well deceive many by their religious-righteousness, but when the Lord sees them, He will immediately recognize the sham and reject them (Matthew 7:22-23) – why? Because they are *false believers*? No, because He *never knew* them! MacArthur's flagrant dismissal of the many warnings that the Lord has given to those who are walking on His narrow pathway to life, reveals a spirit of arrogance and carelessness in his handling of God's Word – in reality, it places him in contradiction to God! What God has included as **His Truth** to us for our admonition, MacArthur rejects out-of-hand as being irrelevant to him! “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, **neither shall ye diminish ought from it**, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you” (Deuteronomy 4:2).

Something that I have had in the back of my mind is this: how does a Calvinist **know** that he is among those whom the Lord has chosen from before the beginning of time? After all, if God has made the apparently arbitrary selection in eternity past and since His Word to us does not include a directory of who they are, how is it possible for the Calvinist to have any assurance that he is among the *elect* (according to their understanding)? If we think for a moment on this matter, it seems evident that he cannot! It is at this point that the waters of Calvinism become very muddied.

John MacArthur, who, through his Master's Seminary, is influencing many into the faulty doctrines of Calvinism, when it comes to the matter of assurance of being God's child, exposes Calvinism to be a hopeless, man-made theology. Romans 8:6 tells us this: “For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace”; the *carnal mind* is one that is taken up with the matters of this life, and is declared to be in opposition to God (Romans 8:7). Referring to those who are *carnally minded*, MacArthur makes this observation: “They are already spiritually dead ... and **unless they repent** they are headed for eternal death” (emphasis

added).²³³ What? That does not sound at all like *total inability, unconditional election* or *irresistible grace!* In the preface to his book *The Vanishing Conscience*, he writes this: “God’s purpose is to save **those who will repent of their sins and believe** the gospel” (emphasis added),²³⁴ later in the same book, he says: “Unbelievers are called to repent and flee to Christ.”²³⁵ Is this the same man who said: “Being born physically is something that happened to you, completely out of your control. And **being spiritually born is something that happened to you completely out of your control**” (emphasis added)?²³⁶ Is this a man who is trying to hold two contradictory concepts of salvation in his mind? He teaches and preaches Calvinism with great enthusiasm when it’s expedient, but if it can’t provide an adequate explanation, then he will whistle a different tune – all the while retaining a façade of theological *integrity*? “A double minded man [having two minds] is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8);²³⁷ this is commonly referred to as the very stressful state of *cognitive dissonance*.²³⁸ Mixed throughout MacArthur’s teachings, you will find things like this: “I was saved from the penalty of sin in the past **when I believed** and the righteousness of Christ was imputed to me and my sin imputed to him” (emphasis added).²³⁹ MacArthur may be unwittingly revealing what is obvious to those who still retain the ability to think objectively about Calvinism: there can be **absolutely no assurance** of salvation within these so-called *doctrines of grace*. For some unknown reason, he will not forsake Calvinism as being wholly inadequate nor embrace the teachings that God has given to us in His Word; in essence, he has become a fountain that appears to be presenting both truth and falsehoods (James 3:11-12), something that James identifies as being an impossibility: because he is mixing truth and lies together, the truth is destroyed! In essence, MacArthur has become a tool in the hands of Satan to entice those who hear his brief moments of Biblical lucidity in the midst of general falsehood, he assures those who are committed to the myths of Calvinism, and he generally sows confusion in the hearts of thousands.

²³³ MacArthur, *Vanishing*, p. 154.

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 12.

²³⁵ Ibid, p. 156.

²³⁶ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-12/the-blueprint-for-being-born-again>.

²³⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²³⁸ “The term cognitive dissonance is used to describe the mental discomfort that results from holding two conflicting beliefs, values, or attitudes.” (<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-cognitive-dissonance-2795012>).

²³⁹ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-271/~about>.

From our study, one thing is certain: the Calvinists are exuberantly confident that they are right, yet the evidence would indicate that they fail miserably at handling God's Word with care. They will quickly take the superficial understanding of a word (if it fits their theology), they will give little or no heed to the context of their selected Scripture, and they will go so far as to redefine words in order to meet their needs. This has not been an exhaustive examination of TULIP by any means, but the consistency in the general failure of Calvinists to investigate the Word with carefulness has done much to limit this study. When the same shallow use of the Scriptures is found in passage after passage, there is little enthusiasm for expending additional time and energy in exposing the same things over and over. I trust that this brief look into the Calvinists' TULIP has illustrated the need to weigh all things according to God's Word, and to be cautious about taking the teachings of any popular teacher/preacher at face value. There have been many times throughout my time of teaching that I have encouraged my listeners to take what I have taught back to the Word of God: if it agrees, then do it; if it doesn't agree, then tell me so that I may re-evaluate my position to ensure that I remain Biblical. It is always my prayer that all of the studies that I have done will be used to strengthen God's truth in the heart of the reader. God bless you to that end!