DR. NORMAN

# GEISLER

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY



## VOLUME THREE

## SIN

## SALVATION

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Three persons deserve special recognition for the final state of this volume.

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# VOLUME THREE

# PART ONE: HUMANITY AND SIN

# PART TWO: SALVATION



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# SYNOPSIS FOR VOLUME THREE

In Volume 1 we discussed Introduction to Theology (*Prolegomena*) and the Bible (*Bibliology*). These serve as the method and basis for doing systematic theology.

In Volume 2 we focused on Theology proper, that is, on the attributes and activities of God. In the first half, attention was centered on God Himself—His attributes and His characteristics, both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral. After we addressed who God *is*, in the second half we discussed what God *does* (in relation to His creation).

## PART ONE: HUMANITY AND SIN (ANTHROPOLOGY AND HAMARTIOLOGY)

Volume 3 also is comprised of two parts. Part 1 deals with the doctrine of sin, known as *hamartiology* (from the Greek words *hamartios*, "sin," and *logos*, "study of"). First, a brief but necessary discussion of human beings covers the origin (chapter 1) and nature (chapter 2) of humanity. (This discipline is called *anthropology*, from the Greek words *anthropos*, "human being," and *logos*, "study of.") Then, we will examine the origin of sin (chapter 3), followed by the nature of sin (chapter 4), the effects of sin (chapter 5), and finally, the defeat of sin (chapter 6).

# PART TWO: SALVATION (SOTERIOLOGY)

Part 2 discusses the doctrine of salvation, called *soteriology* (from the Greek words *soterios*, “bringing salvation,” and *logos*, “study of”). Here we will cover the origin of salvation (chapter 7), followed by the theories of salvation (chapter 8), the nature of salvation (chapter 9), the evidence of salvation (chapter 10), and the assurance of salvation (chapter 11). Next, we will study the extent and exclusivity of salvation in regard to the theories of limited atonement (chapter 12), universalism (chapter 13), and pluralism (chapter 14). Then, we will consider the results of salvation in relation to infants and the heathen (chapter 15). Last, we will examine the condition of salvation (chapter 16) and the content of salvation (chapter 17).



PART ONE

# HUMANITY AND SIN

## (ANTHROPOLOGY AND HAMARTIOLOGY)



CHAPTER ONE

# THE ORIGIN OF HUMAN BEINGS

As discussed in Volume 2, all evangelical theologians believe in the creation of the first human beings by God. With this in view, the focus here is on the original created conditions of Adam and Eve in which temptation and the Fall occurred. All of this will set the stage for a treatment of the origin of the soul in each human being after Adam, and it will serve as background for understanding the inherent and inherited depravity of each person born since Creation.

## THE ORIGINAL CREATED CONDITIONS

God is absolutely perfect,[1] and it follows, therefore, that His creation was also perfect. Moses declared, “He is the Rock, his works are perfect” (Deut. 32:4). David added, “As for God, his way is perfect” (2 Sam. 22:31). Jesus said, “Your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). *Nothing less than the perfect can come from an absolutely perfect Being*, and it befits the perfect Being to make only perfect beings, for the effects bear the image of their Cause.[2]

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL

# STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

According to Genesis 1–2, Adam and Eve were created with complete innocence. They had no evil in their natures *or* their environment. They "were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25 NASB), and they did not yet know "good and evil" (3:5). In short, they were not only guiltless of any sin but also innocent of sin.

Further, the very temptation to "be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5) implies they did not know evil before they fell. Indeed, when they ate the forbidden fruit, "the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (3:7). According to the New Testament, by disobedience Adam and Eve *became* sinful (Rom. 5:12; 1 Tim. 2:14) and brought condemnation on themselves and their posterity: "The result of one trespass was condemnation for all men" (Rom. 5:18).[3] *Before* this, they were flawless.

## A State of Virtue and Uprightness

Not only were Adam and Eve innocent (without evil), they were morally virtuous by virtue of their created state, for God endowed them with moral perfection. Solomon wrote, "This only have I found: *God made mankind upright*, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29).[4] The Hebrew word for "upright" is *yashar*, meaning "straightness," "uprightness," "honesty," or "integrity"; it is the same word used in connection with "righteous" (Deut. 32:4 NASB), "blameless" (Job 1:1), and "pure" (Job 8:6). Consequently, *yashar* does not merely denote the absence of evil but also the presence of good—it is not simply the lack of vice but the presence of virtue. There are two basic views as to the origin of this created state of purity.

### *The Supernatural View*

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) held that this original status was a *supernaturally* created state of grace that Adam had before the Fall and then lost by his sin:

> The history [of Genesis 1–3] leads us to suppose that Adam's sin, with relation to the forbidden fruit, was the *first* sin he committed. Which could not have been had he not always, till then, been perfectly righteous, righteous from the first moment of his existence; and consequently, created or brought into existence righteous. [Further], in a moral agent, subject to moral obligations, it is the same thing, to be perfectly *innocent* as to be perfectly *righteous*. It must be the same, because there can no more be a medium between sin and righteousness, or between being right and being wrong, in a moral sense, than there can be

a medium between being straight and being crooked, in a natural sense. (*WJE*, 1.178)

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and Catholics following him have held the same view, viz., that original righteousness was not natural but supernatural. One Catholic scholar affirmed that it was necessary for God to give Adam this supernatural righteousness at creation "in order to provide a remedy for this disease or languor of human nature, which arises from the nature of material organization" (cited by Shedd, *HCC*, 1.143).

Noted Reformed theologian William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894) criticized this view as "a relic of the Gnostic idea of matter" (ibid., 1.147) and rejected it because: "If so, then God creates man in a sinful state" (ibid., 1.148).[5]

*The Natural View*

Shedd argued that this created state of perfection was *natural*, viz., the very created nature God gave Adam was a morally upright and perfect one. He noted that the same word (Heb: *yashar*) is used by God of Job: "This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil" (Job 1:1).[6]

> Original righteousness enters into the very idea of man as coming from the hands of the Creator. It is part of his created endowment, and does not require to be superadded. The work of the Creator is perfect, and needs no improvement, (op. cit., 1.145)

In short, according to the natural view, since God is perfect, He cannot make an imperfect creature. Hence, the natural state of Adam and Eve, from the moment of Creation, must have been perfect.

## A Perfect Environment

Not only was Adam given a perfect nature, but he also had a perfect environment. There was no sin in Eden, a paradise of goodness. God had made it (Gen. 2:8ff.), and everything God made was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).

There was no moral (or metaphysical) imperfection in Eden; it was flawless in every way. There was no tendency toward evil from within Adam, and there was nothing evil about his created environment around him. Creation was not subject to corruption, as it was after the Fall (Rom. 8:22). There was no human death (Rom. 5:12), and both internal and external natures were absolutely perfect.

## A State of Dominion

In the original created state, humankind was not a servant of nature but

master over it. Man did not serve under its strong hand; rather, it served his, for nature was subject to humanity. God said to them, “Fill the earth and *subdue it. Rule over* the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground” (Gen. 1:28; cf. Psa. 8).

**A State of Moral Responsibility**

All of this is not to say that Adam had no moral accountability to anyone over him. He did, for “the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die’ ” (Gen. 2:16–17). God had given an order, and Adam had a responsibility to obey His Creator. As we know, at this Adam failed miserably (Gen. 3:1ff.; cf. Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Tim. 2:14).

Adam was free in that his actions were self-determined;[7] God specifically said, “*You are free*” (Gen. 2:16). When Adam chose to disobey, God blamed him, asking, “Have *you* eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you *should not* eat?” (3:11 AMP). The emphasized words clearly point to a self-determined act (cf. v. 13). *You* did it, God said. Your “self” is responsible, He maintained. No one else made Adam and Eve commit sin, including the devil, who tempted them. Such is the self-determining nature of freedom.[8]

**The Presence of the Tempter**

Of course, these perfect persons in a perfect paradise were not without an imperfect intruder. Satan, a fallen archangel of God, had rebelled against his Creator, sweeping with him a third of all the angels (Rev. 12:4, 9). By clever deception, the great deceiver led Eve and then, through her, Adam into disobedience against God (Rom. 5:19; 1 Tim. 2:14). By a free and uncoerced choice of their wills, the perfect pair in the perfect paradise fell into imperfection —and their world with them. Their disobedience led to death and destruction (Rom. 5:12–21; 8:20–23).

It is noteworthy that Adam and Eve were not enticed to lie, cheat, steal, or curse. Indeed, their moral nature was perfect; thus, they were not vulnerable to these kinds of temptations. *The command of God for them not to eat the forbidden fruit was not a command to stay away from what was intrinsically evil.* With this, they had no problem, for their upright and virtuous state protected

them from it. *What they were vulnerable to was a test as to whether they would obey God simply because He said it*.

"Hath God said?" was the snare they faced from the devil (Gen. 3:1 KJV). Their moral responsibility to God was with regard to an object that was morally neutral. God could have said, for instance, "Don't pick the daisies." Again, the issue was not that the sin was inherent in the substance in which they partook; the temptation to sin was in the enticement to defy God, and subsequently to be conscious of the evil of choosing against Him. *No evil from within or from without drew them to their transgression*. Only a raw act of freedom, wrongly exercised, carried out their disobedience and sealed their doom.

Herein, perhaps, lies the solution to a thorny problem: If Adam and Eve had committed some other sin before eating the forbidden fruit, would it have precipitated the Fall? The answer may very well be that it was impossible for them to sin on another issue, since they were created morally perfect. Surely Satan would have so tempted them if he could have, but there is no indication that he did. Most likely, only disobedience to God's specific command would precipitate the Fall and plunge the whole creation into death and disaster.

# THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

The perfect condition of the original state of creation is derived from the nature of God as an absolutely perfect Being. The argument goes as follows:

(1) God is an absolutely perfect Being.
(2) An absolutely perfect Being cannot produce an imperfect creation.
(3) Therefore, the original creation God made was perfect.

### God Is an Absolutely Perfect Being

Since this point has been established elsewhere,[9] only the outline will be restated here. The biblical basis for God's moral perfection is found in numerous passages.

"He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (Deut. 32:4). "As for God, his way is perfect.… It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way

perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31, 33). "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge?" (Job 37:16). "His way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless" (Ps. 18:30). "The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7). "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago" (Isa. 25:1).

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10). "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ" (Col. 1:28). "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

The theological basis for God's perfection can be supported by other reasoning as well. For one thing, our knowledge of the imperfect implies a Perfect; because we cannot know what is not perfect unless we know what is Perfect, there must be a Perfect (God). Just as we cannot know a circle is flawed unless we have an idea of a flawless one, moral imperfections cannot be detected unless we possess some concept of moral perfection.

Furthermore, granted that God is a moral Being, it follows from three of His metaphysical attributes that He must be morally perfect. The reasoning goes like this:

(1) God's nature is morally perfect.
(2) God is infinite, unchangeable (immutable), and necessary by nature.[10]
(3) Therefore, God is infinitely, unchangeably, and necessarily morally perfect.

**An Absolutely Perfect Being Cannot Produce an Imperfect Creation**

Again, this premise is based on the principles of analogy and causality, which have been defended earlier.[11] Briefly, the effect must resemble the cause in its actuality, but not in its potentiality.[12] Thus, if the Creator makes something with moral perfection, He too must have the same characteristic, for a cause cannot give a perfection it doesn't possess, and it cannot share with others what it does not have to share.

However, unlike the *Cause* of all things, the *effect* must be limited—it must

have potentiality to be and/or not to be something other than it is, either accidentally or substantially.[13] Thus, while the effect is similar to the Cause in its *actuality*, it must be dissimilar in its *potentiality* and limitations, since God is Pure Actuality.[14] From this it follows that if creatures were given perfection in a limited way, then their Cause (God) must have perfection in an unlimited way; if creatures are relatively perfect, then God must be absolutely perfect, and so on. Whatever perfection creatures have, the Creator must have it absolutely, infinitely, and immutably.

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGINAL STATE OF INNOCENCE AND PERFECTION

## Early Church Fathers

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

Irenaeus contended that God did not bestow absolute perfection upon humanity—only God is *absolutely* perfect. Adam was *finitely* perfect, yet he was untested. Hence,

> If … anyone says, "What then? Could not God have exhibited man as perfect from the beginning?" let him know that, inasmuch as God is indeed always the same and unbegotten as respects Himself, all things are possible to Him. But created things must be inferior to Him who created them, from the very fact of their later origin; for it was not possible for things recently created to have been uncreated. But inasmuch as they are not uncreated, for this very reason do they come short of the [absolutely] perfect. (*AH*, I.4.38.2)
>
> God had power at the beginning to grant [absolute] perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it. (ibid.)

### *Theophilus (c. 130–190)*

> God having thus completed the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and all that are in them, on the sixth day, rested on the seventh day from all His works which He made.… And after the formation of man, God chose out for him a region among the places of the East, excellent for light, brilliant with a very bright atmosphere, [abundant] in the finest plants; and in this He placed man. (*TA* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II.2.19)
>
> Scripture thus relates the words of the sacred history: "And God planted Paradise, eastward, in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground made God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of Paradise" (*TA* in ibid., II.2.20).

## Medieval Fathers

The great theologians of the Middle Ages concurred on Adam's perfection from the moment of his creation. Augustine is a case in point.

### *Augustine (354–430)*

> Man's nature, indeed, was created at first faultless and without any sin; but that nature of man in which every one is born from Adam, now wants the Physician, because it is not sound. (*ONG*, 3)
>
> Accordingly we say that there is no unchangeable good but the one, true, blessed God; that the things which He made are indeed good because from Him, yet mutable because made not out of Him, but out of nothing. (*CG*, 12.1)

### *Anselm (1033–1109)*

> Man being made holy was placed in paradise … as it were, in the place of God, between God and the devil, to conquer the devil by not yielding to his temptation, and so to vindicate the honor of God and put the devil to shame, because that man, though weaker and dwelling upon earth, should not sin though tempted by the devil. (*CDH*, I.XXII)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> This is clear also from the very rectitude of the first state, by virtue of which, while the soul remained subject to God, the lower powers in man were subject to the higher, and were no impediment to their action. And from what has preceded it is clear that as regards its proper object the intellect is always true.… Therefore, it is clear that the rectitude of the first state was incompatible with any deception of the intellect. (*ST*, 1a.94.4)
>
> Paradise was a fitting abode for man as regards the incorruptibility of the first state. Now this incorruptibility was man's, not by nature, but by a supernatural gift of God. Therefore that this might be attributed to the grace of God, and not to human nature, God made man outside of paradise, and afterwards placed him in paradise to live during the whole of his animal life; and, having attained to the spiritual life, to be transferred thence to heaven. (ibid., 1a.102.4)

## Reformation Leaders

### *Martin Luther (1483–1546)*

> The image of God in which Adam was made was something most beautiful and noble. The leprosy of sin adhered neither to his reason nor to his will, but, within and without, all his senses were pure. His intellect was very clear, his memory very good, and his will very sincere. His conscience was clean and secure, without any fear of death and without care. To these inner perfections came also that beautiful and superb strength of the body and all its members, by which he surpassed all the other animate creatures in nature. For I fully believe that before he sinned, the eyes of Adam were so clear and their vision so acute that he excelled the lynx and the eagle. Stronger than they, Adam handled lions and bears, whose strength is very great, as we handle little dogs. (*WLS*, 878)

If we want to speak about outstanding philosophers, let us speak about our first parents while they were pure and unstained by sin. For they had the most perfect knowledge of God. And indeed, how could they be ignorant of Him whose image they had and felt in themselves? (ibid., 1046–47)

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

Our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory. This, however, cannot be better known than from the remedy provided for the corruption of nature. It cannot be doubted that when Adam lost his first estate he became alienated from God. Wherefore, although we grant that the image of God was not utterly effaced and destroyed in him, it was, however, so corrupted, that anything which remains is fearful deformity; and, therefore, our deliverance begins with that renovation which we obtain from Christ, who is, therefore, called the second Adam, because he restores us to true and substantial integrity. (*ICR*, I.XV.V)

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

Man, having been previously placed in a state of integrity, walked with unstumbling feet in the way of God's commandments; by this foul deed he impinged or offended against the law itself, and fell from his state of innocence (Rom. 5:15–18).… Man perpetrated this crime, after he had been placed in a state of innocence and adorned by God with such excellent endowments as those of "the knowledge of God" and "righteousness and true holiness" [Gen. 1:26–27; Col. 3:10; Eph. 4:24] (*WJA*, I.485).

"So many facilities existed for not sinning, especially in the act itself, yet man did not abstain from this sin" [Gen. 2:16–17] (ibid.).

### *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

In the moral image of God, or original righteousness, are included (1) the perfect harmony and due subordination of all that constitutes his reason; his affections and appetites to his will; the body was the obedient organ of the soul. There was neither rebellion of the sensuous part of his nature against the rational, nor was there any disproportion between them needing to be controlled or balanced by extra gifts or influence. (2) But besides this equilibrium and harmony in the original constitution of man, his moral perfection in which he resembled God, included knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. (*ST*, II.99)

### *Schubert Ogden (b. 1928)*

To some extent, of course, Protestant theology has always been critical of this distinction as understood and employed by Catholic theologians. Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy alike rejected the doctrine that "original righteousness" is a *donum superadditum*, on the ground that its implication that our natural state was imperfect clearly conflicts with Gen. 1:31 (Schmid: 158; Heppe: 190–191). And yet [Catholic theologians'] own understanding that God's original gifts to human beings were natural

did not preclude speaking of God's revelation in Jesus Christ as supernatural. For even these natural gifts themselves must be called supernatural, insofar as they are "above the nature corrupted by sin and are not restored except by supernatural grace" [Heppe: 191] (*OT*, 33).

# THREE VIEWS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SOUL

Three primary views on the origin of the soul have been held by Christians. One, the *preexistence* view, has subsequently been declared heretical, since it contradicts the clear teaching of Scripture about the creation of human beings.[15] The preexistence view has two forms: platonic (uncreated) and Christian (created). The former serves as a backdrop for understanding the latter.

## Two Forms of the Preexistence View

*The Uncreated-Preexistence View*

According to Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.), human souls are not only intrinsically immortal but they are also eternal (see *P*); they were never created but are part of the eternal world that exists outside of God (the Demiurgos). Just like Plato's proposed world of eternal Forms (Ideas), there are also eternal souls that exist by virtue of the World Soul, which animates all things. Before birth, allegedly, these souls enter a body (in a woman's womb) and become incarnate in human flesh. Thus, human beings essentially are eternal souls in temporal bodies.

So goes the uncreated-preexistence view, and the problems with it fall into three categories: (1) It isn't biblical, (2) it isn't scientific, and (3) it isn't philosophically sound.

*First*, the Bible clearly declares that human beings were created, body and soul.[16] If they were brought into being at a point in time, then they have not existed from eternity.

*Second*, the scientific evidence points to individual human life beginning at conception.[17]

*Third*, an infinite number of moments is impossible, since the present moment is the end of all moments before it, and there cannot be an end of an infinite series of moments (see Craig, *KCA*). Thus, no human (temporal) being can be eternal.

*The Created-Preexistence View*

The created-preexistence view, maintained by some early Christians, borrowed heavily from Plato. Origen (c. 185–c. 254) and even Augustine (earlier in his life) believed that the soul existed before birth, but that rather than having existed without creation from eternity, it was created by God from eternity. By insisting on creation, adherents to the created-preexistence view hoped to preserve the Christian dimension of the platonic view, but it was condemned as heresy nonetheless. Augustine rightly reversed this erroneous allegiance with preincarnationism in his *Retractions*; the Bible declares that human beings had a beginning (cf. Gen. 1:27; Matt. 19:4).

## The Creation View: The Soul Is Created Directly by God

Having addressed the two untenable forms of the preexistence view, there are still two other basic perspectives, embraced by orthodox theologians, on the origin of the human soul after the original creation. The first is creationism, examined here, and the second is traducianism, which we will address next.

The essence of creationism, in regard to the human soul, is that God directly creates a new individual soul for everyone born into this world. While the *body* of each new human being is generated by his or her parents through a natural process, the *soul* is supernaturally created by God.

Various Christian writers have placed the moment of this direct creation of the soul at different points in the development of the human body. There are several main subviews.

*Creation of the Soul at Conception*

Most evangelical Christians who hold the creationist view maintain that the creation of the soul by God occurs at the moment of conception. There is both biblical and scientific evidence in favor.[18]

## The Biblical Evidence

David wrote, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother *conceived* me” (Ps. 51:5). Jesus was the God-man from the moment of conception, for the angel said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is *conceived* in her is from the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:20).

## The Scientific Evidence

Modern science has provided a window to the womb. As a result, the evidence is now clearer than ever that an individual human life (soul) begins at the very moment of conception (fertilization).

*First*, it is a genetic fact that a fertilized human ovum is 100 percent human. From that very moment, all genetic information is present, and no more is added from the point of conception until death.

*Second*, all physical characteristics for life are contained in the genetic code present at conception.

*Third*, the sex of the individual child is determined at the moment of conception.

*Fourth*, a female ovum has twenty-three chromosomes; a male sperm has twenty-three chromosomes; a regular human being has forty-six chromosomes. At the very moment of conception, when male sperm and female ovum unite, a new tiny forty-six-chromosome human being emerges.

*Fifth*, from conception until death, nothing is added except food, air, and water.

*Sixth*, and finally, world-famous geneticist Jerome LeJeune (b. 1925) declares:

> To accept the fact that after fertilization has taken place a new human has come into being is no longer a matter of taste or opinion. The human nature of the human being from conception to old age is not a metaphysical contention, it is plain experimental evidence. (As cited in Geisler and Beckwith, *MLD*, 16)

### *Creation of the Soul at Implantation*

Other Christian writers maintain that the soul is created at implantation of the fertilized egg in the uterus. The basis for this is alleged to be in the fact that identical twinning can occur up to the embryo stage (two weeks, or fourteen days, after conception); thus, it seems implausible to speak of an individual human being where there is still the possibility of two. In such a case we would have to assume, for example, that the original individual (zygote) dies when it becomes the two twins. Further, it is argued that experiments on sheep and mice, which, like humans, have intrauterine pregnancies, show that there is not one individual being before the completion of implantation into the uterus.[19]

However, there are good reasons to reject this conclusion.[20]

For one thing, at best, this argument shows only that *individual* human life begins two weeks after conception, not that *actual* human life begins then.

Indeed, it is acknowledged that there is a *living human nature* from the very moment of conception.

In addition, if human life begins from conception, it is moot to debate when a continuous individual (person) begins. Human life has sanctity whether or not it is yet individuated (cf. Gen. 1:27; 9:6).

Further, as even proponents of this position agree, this argument is ultimately philosophical, not factual, and, therefore, it should not be used as a basis for treating a conceptus[21] with anything but full rights as a human being.

Finally, the later zygotic split (into twins) could be a nonsexual form of "parenting" akin to cloning.[22] Consequently, it does not logically follow that a zygote prior to twinning is not fully human simply because identical twins result from a zygotic split.

*Creation of the Soul After Implantation*

Thomas Aquinas, following the lead of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), placed the creation of the human soul well after conception. He argued that while the *animal soul* was generated by the parents, nonetheless, the *rational soul*,[23] in which is found one's humanness, was not created until forty days after conception for boys and ninety days for girls (*CSPL*, Dist. III, Art. II).

This view was based on an outdated aristotelian model of biology that has no basis in either science or Scripture. It is an embarrassment both to Roman Catholics and to the pro-life movement in general, since if it were true, a fertilized ovum, initially, would not be truly human, and hence subject to abortion for the first few weeks after conception. Most Catholic theologians are convinced that Aquinas would have repudiated the after-implantation view if he would have been made aware of the scientific facts available today (see Heaney, "AHC" in *HLR*, 63–74).

*Creation of the Soul at Animation*

Some theologians have speculated that God does not create a human soul until just before the baby starts moving in the mother's womb. This, however, is based on outdated scientific theory as well as an inadequate understanding of *soul*. (*Soul* was thought to be "the principle of self-motion"; thus, when life began to move in the womb, the mother assumed that God had given a life [soul] to it.)

*Creation of the Soul at Birth*

Finally, some Christians have argued for the view that individual human souls are created at birth. For this they offer two main arguments.

*First*, human life is biblically designated from the point of birth (cf. Gen. 5:1ff.).

*Second*, Adam was not human until he began to breathe, as Genesis 2:7 declares: "The LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, *and [then] man became a living soul*" (KJV).

Responding in reverse order, Adam was a unique case, since he was directly created by God. Therefore, the fact that he did not become human until he breathed is not decisive for determining when individual human life begins, for several reasons.

*First*, Adam wasn't conceived and born like other humans; again, he was directly created.

*Second*, the fact that Adam was not human until he began to breathe no more proves when individual human life begins today than does the fact that he was created as an adult prove that individual human life does not begin until we are adults.

*Third*, *breath* in Genesis 2:7 (Heb: *ruach*) denotes the origin of "life" (cf. Job 33:4). This indicates, then, that life began *when* God gave human life to Adam, not simply *because* Adam began breathing. Human life was later given to his posterity at fertilization or conception (Gen. 4:1).

*Fourth*, other animals breathe but are not people (Gen. 7:21–22). Obviously, breath, in and of itself, did not make Adam human.

*Fifth*, medically, many who at some point in life stop breathing later revive (or, they live by the aid of a machine). The unborn human cannot be seen (without instruments) in the womb, and hence is not a part of the *social* scene until birth.

*Sixth*, if "breath" is equated with "the presence of human life," then the loss of breath would mean the loss of humanness. However, God's Word teaches that human beings continue to exist after they stop breathing (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:6–8; Rev. 6:9).

*Seventh*, and finally, the Scriptures speak of human life in the womb long before breathing begins, namely, from the point of conception (Ps. 51:5; Matt. 1:20).

As to the other argument (that human life is designated from birth in the Bible [Gen. 5:1ff.]), it should be noted that the verses on *breath* do not speak of the

beginning of human life but simply of the initial "coming out" event (when the human being begins to breathe). These passages speak about the beginning of *observable* life, not the beginning of life itself. Even in biblical times, people knew the baby was alive in the womb (cf. Luke 1:44). Birth was not seen as the beginning of human life but simply as the beginning or emergence—the human debut—of life into the naturally visible world.

### The Traducian View: The Soul Is Created Indirectly Through Parents

The word *traducian* comes from the Latin *tradux*, meaning "branch of a vine." As applied to the origin of the soul, it means that each new human being is a branch off of his or her parents; that is to say, in the traducian model both soul and body are generated by father and mother.

In response to the creation view (which says that God creates each new life directly in the womb), traducianists observe, first of all, that creation was completed on the sixth day (Gen. 2:2; Deut. 4:32; Matt. 13:35) and that God is resting and has not created since (Heb. 4:4).

Further, traducianists note that the scientific evidence for how an individual human life (soul) begins is clear: It comes from the sperm and ovum of its parents and is first conceived in the womb as a fully individual person.

Finally, traducianists point out that the creationist view does not explain the inheritance of original sin.[24] Certainly a perfect God would not create a fallen soul, nor can we accept the gnostic[25] idea that the contact of a pure soul with the material body (in the womb) precipitates its fall. The most reasonable explanation is that *both fallen soul and body* are naturally generated from one's parents.

## SUMMARY AND CONTRAST OF THE THREE BASIC VIEWS

While *both creationists and traducianists believe that God creates all souls,* creationists claim He does it directly in the womb, and traducianists insist He does it indirectly through parents. Specifically, creationism holds that while each new human body is generated by parents, each new human soul is directly created by God.

The preexistence view, stemming from Plato, asserts that all souls existed

before the world began—they are eternal and uncreated. In a variant of this ideological model, some early Christian thinkers believed each soul was created by God before the world began and then later, before birth, came into a body. However, unlike the platonic and other non-Christian views, Origen and the early Augustine,[26] for example, did not believe there was a reincarnation of the soul after death (see Geisler and Amano, *RS*). The three main views can be summarized as follows:

## THREE VIEWS ON THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN SOUL

| | **Preexistence** | **Creationism** | **Traducianism** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Time of Creation | From eternity (Plato)<br><br>Before the world (Origen) | (1) At conception<br>(2) At implantation<br>(3) After implantation[27]<br>(4) At animation<br>(5) At birth | Originally in Adam, instrumentally through parents |
| God's Role | None (Plato)<br><br>He created all souls (Origen). | He creates each soul. | He creates body and soul through parents. |
| Parents' Role | No role in the creation of the soul<br>Efficient cause of the body[28] | Occasional cause of the soul<br>Efficient cause of the body | Instrumental cause of both soul and body |
| Nature of Man | Man *is* a soul.<br>Man *has* a body. | Man *is* a soul.<br>Man *has* a body. | Man is a unity of soul/body.[29] |
| Nature of Human Soul | Simple/Indivisible (unregenerable) | Simple/Indivisible (unregenerable) | Unified (regenerable) |
| Image of God | In soul only | In soul only | In soul and body[30] |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Immortality | Soul only | Soul only | Soul and body[31] |
| Christian Proponents | Justin Martyr<br>Origen<br>Early Augustine | Thomas Aquinas<br>Charles Hodge | W. G. T. Shedd<br>Later Augustine<br>Lewis S. Chafer |

# EVIDENCE FOR THE TRADUCIAN VIEW

The evidence for the traducian view of the origin of the soul is biblical, theological, and scientific. The heart of the traducian view is that human life (soul) can be divided and passed on to others.

### The Biblical Evidence for Traducianism[32]

*First*, from the beginning, male and female were considered one species, two sharing human life (Gen. 1:26).

*Second*, both male and female, not just male, were broadly called "Adam" (5:1–2).

*Third*, Eve was made from Adam, not separately (2:21–22).

*Fourth*, creation was complete from the beginning (2:1–3), and God has rested from creating ever since (Heb. 4:4).

*Fifth*, the Bible speaks of the unity of male and female (1 Cor. 11:8), one coming from the other.

*Sixth*, Eve is called "the mother of all the living" (Gen. 3:20), a title most appropriate if all other human life came from her.

*Seventh*, Adam had children in his image (5:3; cf. 1:26), which makes sense if his life was truly transmitted to them by natural generation.

*Eighth*, *flesh* (Gk: *sarx*) can mean "whole person with body" (John 3:6; cf. 1:14; Acts 2:17; Rom. 3:20) rather than just the transmission of a physical body (as is contended by the creationist view of the origin of the soul).

*Ninth*, likewise, in Romans 1:3, *flesh*, which comes from physical generation, refers to one's whole humanity, not just to the body.

*Tenth*, Acts 17:26 KJV says that all who are God's offspring (image) are made of "one blood," which is accomplished by natural processes.

*Eleventh*, Hebrews 7:10 teaches that Levi was in Abraham's loins and came by physical transmission from him.[33]

*Twelfth*, Psalm 139:13–16 reveals that our personal substance, which is more

than physical, was made in the womb by a natural, God-ordained process.

*Thirteenth*, the body in the womb is referred to as a person in many passages (e.g., Job 10:10; Ps. 22:9–10; Jer. 1:5). In addition, *person* is more than the physical aspect of humanity.[34]

*Fourteenth*, Romans 5:12 says we all sinned "through one man" [Adam]. This implies that sin, which is possible only for a person, can be transmitted by natural processes.

*Fifteenth*, 1 Corinthians 15:22–27 affirms that all humans were "in Adam."

*Sixteenth*, Ephesians 2:3 makes plain that we were all born with a sinful nature, and mere bodies without souls cannot sin.

*Seventeenth*, Psalm 51:5 declares that we were conceived in sin, something not possible unless there is a human soul at conception.

*Eighteenth*, and finally, Jesus is said to be from the "loins" of David (1 Kings 8:19 KJV), indicating His genetic connection through His mother.[35]

## The Theological Evidence for Traducianism

There are several theological truths that are best explained by the traducian view of the human soul's origin.

*First*, the Bible speaks of the imputation (attribution) of sins from Adam to his entire posterity (Rom. 5:13, 18). It is extremely difficult to interpret this in any actual sense of the term unless sin is transmitted through natural processes.[36]

*Second*, the fact that we are born with a natural inclination to sin (Eph. 2:3; John 3:6) favors the traducian view.

*Third*, the universality of sin supports traducianism, for if sin is not inherited by all at birth, then why are all people born in sin?

*Fourth*, and finally, the soul/body unity of human nature[37] favors traducianism, since it makes sense that soul and body, together, are transmitted from parent to child.

## The Scientific Evidence for Traducianism

Remembering that *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk: *psuche*) means "life," and that a human life is a human soul, the scientific evidence that human life (the soul) begins at conception is strong.[38]

*First*, it is a scientific fact that individual human life (with unique DNA) is

passed on by natural generation, from parents to child.

*Second*, cloning produces the same kind of life *without* a new creation. Hence, the possibility of human cloning argues in favor of traducianism.

*Third*, by analogy, human souls, like animal souls,[39] are passed on from parents to offspring.

*Fourth*, and finally, because humans are a psychosomatic (soul/body) unity,[40] the body is only part of, not the whole, person. Again, it makes sense that both are passed on together, from parents to child.

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE TRADUCIAN VIEW

Many arguments have been set against the traducian paradigm. However, as will be seen, none of them provides a definitive refutation.

### Objection One—Based on God as the Father of Spirits

This objection is based on Hebrews 12:9, which says, "How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!" This phrase, "Father of our spirits," is taken to mean that God directly fathers (creates) all human spirits.[41]

### Response to Objection One

In reply, the text does not say that God created our spirit at conception or that He fathered all human spirits directly (rather than indirectly, through our parents). God is also said (in Genesis) to be the Creator of all animals, yet He created only the first pair directly—the rest came about by a divinely given process of natural conception.

Further, even if the term *Father* implies creation, it does not indicate how or when God produced us. He certainly could have fathered us through an indirect process of human generation.

Also, the term *Father* in Hebrews 12:9 may not be a reference to the generation of human beings, but instead may describe the care given to them by God after they are conceived. This fits the immediate context of God, our Father, disciplining us, His children (cf. 12:3ff.).

### Objection Two—Based on God Making Souls

According to this argument, Isaiah affirmed that God made souls, saying, "I will not accuse forever, nor will I always be angry, for then the spirit of man would grow faint before me—the breath of man [soul] that I have created" (Isa. 57:16).

### Response to Objection Two

As with Objection One, the passage does not say why, how, or when God created all souls. There is no question that He is the ultimate *efficient* Cause of all souls;[42] the issue is whether He used *intermediate* (or *instrumental*) causes (such as parents) to create them.

In addition, the word *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk: *psuche*) is often biblically used of the whole person,[43] including the body, which we know is generated through natural processes.

Finally, the word *made* (Heb: *asah*), instead of *create* (Heb: *bara*), is used in this verse; *asah* seldom means "to create from nothing."

### Objection Three—Based on God Creating People Since Adam

It is also objected that the Bible presents God as having created people since Adam. Zechariah affirms that "the LORD … stretches out the heavens, [He] lays the foundation of the earth, and [He] *forms the spirit of man within him*" (Zech. 12:1). Malachi challenges, "Have we not all one Father? *Did not one God create us*?" (Mal. 2:10).

### Response to Objection Three

Once more, it does not say how God did it. The word *create* sometimes can even refer to "a natural process in the present" (e.g., Ps. 104:30), and it does not always mean "to create something from nothing." Even in Genesis, when God *created* Adam (1:27), He used dust to do part of it (2:7).

### Objection Four—Based on the Dependence of All Creation Upon God's Necessity

Thomas Aquinas opposed traducianism on the grounds that only God can create and that all creative acts are direct and immediate (see *ST*, la.44.1).[44] No creature can create, because every creature depends, for its existence, on a Cause that is not a creature. Every contingent being, for its existence, at every moment of its existence, is dependent on the necessary Being, for the contingent being never ceases to be a contingent being.[45] Thus, for Aquinas, parents cannot possibly be the cause of the existence of their children.

### Response to Objection Four

Traducianism does not hold that the parents are the *efficient* cause of their child's existence but only the *instrumental* cause. The parents cause the *becoming* of their child; only God can cause his or her *being*. However, as instrumental causes, the parents do *pass on* to their posterity the soul, which only God can and did create, and which only God can and does sustain in existence. The question is not about the *origin* and *sustenance* of a human soul, which, clearly, only God can perform and uphold. Rather, the question pertains to the *transmission* of the soul, which, as instrumental causes, parents facilitate.

## THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY ON THE ORIGIN OF THE SOUL

Long before Christian theologians philosophized on the soul, two brilliant ancient thinkers, Plato and Aristotle, provided a foundation for the divergent perspectives among Christians, depending on whether they followed Plato's dualistic preexistence view,[46] as Augustine did, or Aristotle's hylomorphic view,[47] as Aquinas did.

### Ancient Greek Philosophers

*Aristotle* (*384–322* B.C.)

> The question might also be raised about the parts of the soul: What is the separate role of each in relation to the body? For, if the whole soul holds together the whole body, we should expect each part of the soul to hold together a part of the body. But this seems an impossibility; it is difficult even to imagine what sort of bodily part [that] mind will hold together, or how it will do this. (*C*, I.5)

“The soul, therefore, is the primary act of a physical body potentially possessing life” (*DA*, II.1.412). “The soul is that whereby we primarily live and perceive and move and understand” (ibid., II.2.414).

### *Plato* (*c. 427–347* B.C.)

> Our soul also exists before we were born; and if these do not exist, would the argument thus be saying otherwise? Then is it so, and is it equally necessary these things exist and our souls also did before we were born. (*P*, 4.76d)
>
> “So answer,” [Socrates] said, “what makes the body to be alive?”
>
> “The soul,” [Cebes] said.
>
> “Then is this always the case?”
>
> “Of course,” he said.
>
> “Then the soul that takes possession of it, does it always come bringing life to that?”
>
> “It does,” he said.
>
> “And first is there anything opposite to life or not?”
>
> “There is,” he said.
>
> “What?”
>
> “Death.”
>
> “Then will the soul ever accept the opposite to what it always brings, as out of the previous agreement?”[48]
>
> “Most certainly not,” said Cebes.
>
> “Then does the soul not accept death?”
>
> “No.”
>
> “So the soul is immortal.”
>
> “Immortal.”
>
> “Well,” he said; “then shall we say this is demonstrated; how does it seem?”
>
> “And most sufficiently, Socrates” (ibid., 13.105e).

Hence, “If the immortal is also indestructible, it is impossible for the soul, when death comes upon it, to perish; for out of what was said before it will not accept death, nor will it be dead” (ibid., 13.106b).

> [Socrates asked,] “When did our souls acquire this knowledge of them?[49] For it was not after being born as humans.”
>
> [Simmias answered,] “Definitely not.”
>
> “Then previously.”
>
> “Yes.”
>
> “Then, Simmias, souls existed previously, before they were born in human form, without bodies, and they had wisdom.”
>
> “Unless we receive this knowledge when born, Socrates; for this time still remains” (ibid., 4.72e–77d).

## Early Church Fathers

## *Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)*

> We have already decided one point in our controversy with Hermogenes, as we said at the beginning of this treatise, when we claimed the soul to be formed by the breathing of God, and not out of matter. We relied even there on the clear direction of the inspired statement which informs us how that "the Lord God breathed on man's face the breath of life, so that man became a living soul"—by that inspiration of God, of course. On this point, therefore, nothing further need be investigated or advanced by us. (*TS* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, III.1.9.3–4)

## Further,

> When we acknowledge that the soul originates in the breath of God, it follows that we attribute a beginning to it. This Plato, indeed, refuses to assign to it, for he will have the soul to be unborn and unmade. We, however, from the very fact of its having had a beginning, as well as from the nature thereof, teach that it had both birth and creation. And when we ascribe both birth and creation to it, we have made no mistake: for being *born*, indeed, is one thing, and being *made* is another—the former being the term which is best suited to living beings.… Thus, the being made admits of being taken in the sense of being brought forth; inasmuch as everything which receives *being* or *existence*, in any way whatever, is in fact generated. For the maker may really be called the parent of the thing that is made: in this sense Plato also uses the phraseology. So far, therefore, as concerns our belief in the souls being made or born, the opinion of the philosopher is overthrown by the authority of prophecy even. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.3–4)
>
> It is essential to a firm faith to declare with Plato that the soul is simple; in other words, uniform and uncompounded; simply that is to say in respect of its substance.… If indeed the soul and the spirit are two, they may be divided; and thus, by the separation of the one, which departs from the one which remains, there would accrue the union and meeting together of life and of death. But such a union never will accrue: therefore, they are not two, and they cannot be divided; but divided they might have been, if they had been (two).… How much firmer ground have you for believing that the soul and the spirit are but one, since you assign to them no difference; so that the soul is itself the spirit, respiration being the function of that of which life also is! (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.10)
>
> How, then, is a living being conceived? Is the substance of both body and soul formed together at one and the same time? Or does one of them precede the other in natural formation? We indeed maintain that both are conceived, and formed, and perfectly simultaneously, as well as born together; and that not a moment's interval occurs in their conception, so that a prior place can be assigned to either. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.27)
>
> We allow that life begins with conception, because we contend that the soul also begins from conception; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does. Thus, then, the processes act together to produce separation by death. (*TS* in ibid.)
>
> Forasmuch, therefore, as these two different and separate substances, the clay and the breath, combined at the first creation in forming the individual man, they then both amalgamated and mixed their proper seminal rudiments in one, and ever afterwards communicated to the human race the normal mode of its propagation, so that even now the two substances, although diverse from each other, flow forth simultaneously in a united channel; and finding their way together into their appointed seed-plot, they fertilize with their combined vigor the human fruit out of their respective natures. And inherent in this human product is his own seed, according to the process which has been ordained for every creature endowed with the functions of generation. Accordingly from the one (primeval) man comes the entire outflow and redundance of men's souls—nature proving herself true to the commandment of

God, “Be fruitful, and multiply” (*TS* in ibid.).

### *Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)*

> We must now speak with respect to those who think meanly of the flesh, and say that it is not worthy of the resurrection nor of the heavenly economy, because, first, its substance is earth; and besides, because it is full of all wickedness, so that it forces the soul to sin along with it. But these persons seem to be ignorant of the whole work of God, both of the genesis and formation of man at the first, and why the things in the world were made. For does not the word say, “Let Us make man in our image, and after our likeness”? What kind of man? Manifestly He means fleshly man, for the word says, “And God took dust of the earth, and made man.” It is evident, therefore, that man made in the image of God was of flesh. Is it not, then, absurd to say that the flesh made by God in His own image is contemptible, and worth nothing? But that the flesh is with God a precious possession is manifest, first from its being formed by Him, if at least the image is valuable to the former and artist; and besides, its value can be gathered from the creation of the rest of the world. For that on account of which the rest is made, is the most precious of all to the maker. (*FLWJ* in ibid., 1.1.7)

### *Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

“The soul, when implanted in the body, moves all things in it, and exerts its force over everything on which it operates” (*DP* in ibid., IV.2.8.1).

> But with respect to the soul, whether it is derived from the seed by a process of traducianism, so that the reason or substance of it may be considered as placed in the seminal particles of the body themselves, or whether it has any other beginning; and this beginning, itself, whether it be by birth or not, or whether bestowed upon the body from without or no, is not distinguished with sufficient clearness in the teaching of the Church. (ibid., IV, preface, 5)

## Medieval Fathers

### *Augustine (354–430)*

> As for the opinion that new souls are created by inbreathing without being propagated, we certainly do not in the least object to its maintenance—only let it be by persons who have succeeded in discovering some new evidence, either in the canonical Scriptures, in the shape of unambiguous testimony towards the solution of a most knotty question, or else in their own reasonings, such as shall not be opposed to catholic [universal] truth, but not by such persons as this man has shown himself to be. If the doctrine of the propagation of souls is false, may its refutation not be the work of such disputants; and may the defense of the rival principle of the insufflation of new souls in every creative act, proceed from better hands. (*OSO*, 1.33)
>
> What shall I say, moreover, as to the [difficulty which besets the theory of the creation of each soul separately at the birth of the individual in connection with the] diversity of talent in different souls, and especially the absolute privation of reason in some? This is, indeed, not apparent in the first stages of infancy, but being developed continuously from the beginning of life, it becomes manifest in children, of whom some are so slow and defective in memory that they cannot learn even the letters of the alphabet, and some (commonly called idiots) so imbecile that they differ very little from the beasts of the field. Perhaps, I am told, in answer to this, that the bodies are the cause of these imperfections. (*L*,

166.6)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

"Now that it is actually such a body, it owes to some principle, which is called its act. Therefore the soul, which is the first principle of life, is not a body, but the act of a body" (*ST*, I.75.1).

> It is clear that the first thing by which the body lives is the soul. And as life appears through various operations in different degrees of living things, that whereby we primarily perform each of all these vital actions is the soul. For the soul is the primary principle of our nourishment, sensation, and local movement; and likewise of our understanding. Therefore this principle by which we primarily understand, whether it be called the intellect or the intellectual soul, is the form of the body. This is the demonstration used by Aristotle. [*De Anima*, ii.2] (ibid., I.76.1)

## Reformation Leaders

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

> We thus see that the impurity of parents is transmitted to their children, so that all, without exception, are originally depraved. The commencement of this depravity will not be found until we ascend to the first parent of all as the fountainhead. We must, therefore, hold it for certain, that, in regard to human nature, Adam was not merely a progenitor, but, as it were, a root, and that, accordingly, by his corruption, the whole human race was deservedly vitiated. This is plain from the contrast which the Apostle draws between Adam and Christ, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned; even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord" [Rom. 5:19–21] (*ICR*, I.2.1.6).
>
> To the understanding of this subject, there is no necessity for an anxious discussion (which in no small degree perplexed the ancient doctors) as to whether the soul of the child comes by transmission from the soul of the parent. It should be enough for us to know that Adam was made the depository of the endowments which God was pleased to bestow on human nature, and that, therefore, when he lost what he had received, he lost not only for himself but for us all. (ibid., I.2.1.7)
>
> The children, being vitiated in their parents, conveyed the taint to the grandchildren; in other words, corruption commencing in Adam, is, by perpetual descent, conveyed from those preceding to those coming after them. The cause of the contagion is neither in the substance of the flesh nor the soul, but God was pleased to ordain that those gifts which he had bestowed on the first man, that man should lose as well for his descendants as for himself, (ibid.)

## Post-Reformation Theologians

### *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

> [The soul's] origin … is from nothing, created by infusion, and infused by creation, a body being duly prepared for its reception, that it might fashion matter as with form, and, being united to the body by a native bond, might, with it, compose one … production. Created, I say, by God in time, as he still daily creates a new soul in each body.

> [The soul's] substance … is simple, immaterial, and immortal. Simple, I say, not with respect to God; for it consists of act and power (or capability), of being and essence, of subject and accidents; but it is simple with respect to material and compound things. It is immaterial, because it can subsist by itself, and, when separated from the body, can operate alone. It is immortal, not indeed from itself, but by the sustaining grace of God. (*WJA*, II.26.63)

## *William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)*

The body is of a different nature and substance from the soul: Genesis 2:7, "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul," a breath, or soul of life. According to this statement, man is composed of a material part, resulting from the vivification of the dust of the ground by creative energy, and of an immaterial part resulting from the spiration or inbreathing of God. The Creator first enlivens inorganic matter into a body, and then creates a rational spirit which he infuses into it. (*DT*, II.II.5)

Shedd maintained that "the 'soul of life' in the instance of the man is a higher principle, the rational soul, which was inbreathed by the Creator, and made in his image" (ibid., II.II.6). However, with regard to Adam's posterity, Shedd defended traducianism, asserting:

> There are three principal supports of Traducianism: (1) Scripture; (2) Systematic Theology; [and] (3) Physiology. The preponderance of the Biblical representations favor it. The Bible teaches that man is a species, and the idea of species implies propagation of the entire individual out of it. (ibid., II.18)

## *Karl Barth (1886–1968)*

> The Early Church and its theology, while rightly insisting on the gulf between Creator and creature, thought that the problem of the origin of the soul, and therefore of human life, could be solved in various ways between which we do not need to choose. Some, following Plato, and within the Church (Origen), talked of the pre-existence of created souls. These [souls] were … represented as a kingdom of spirits which had to relate themselves to the material bodies allotted to them.…
>
> The theory of a pre-temporal or at least pre-historical fall, championed in modern times by Julius Miller, might conceivably be adapted to this view—or it was assumed that when God created the first man they were all breathed into him and therefore created with and included in Adam, to be later distributed among his posterity. On both views it was possible to hold the particular doctrine of the migration of souls (metempsychosis or reincarnation), i.e., that the same souls could enter into many associations with different bodies.
>
> Partly in opposition to the doctrine of pre-existence, yet inevitably connected with it, and represented particularly by Tertullian in earlier days, and later (surprisingly enough) by Luther and Lutheran theology, was the traducianist doctrine that the soul originates in the act of conception [generated by the father and mother]. A soul-seed, distinct from the body-seed, is supposed to be detached from the soul of the parents, thus becoming the independent soul of the child. The doctrine prevailing in the Roman Church, which again surprisingly was followed in traditional Reformed theology, is creationism. On this view each individual soul originates in a divine creative act, an immediate *ex nihilo* ["out of nothing"]. This creative act is supposed (cf. F. Diekamp, *Kath. Dogmatik, Vol. II*, 1930, P, 119f.) to take place at the moment of conception when the parents create the requisite physiological conditions for the existence of a human being in this act. The parents are, of course, only

*causae secundae*, God Himself Being the *causa prima*. And simultaneously God in heaven, this time as the *causa unica*, creates the soul and associates it with this new human body. (*CD*, III.II.573)

# CONCLUSION

The original created conditions were perfect, but they included a perfection called free will, and, while good in itself, free will made evil possible. Originally, both body and soul were created by God. As to the dispute concerning how individual souls have come into being after Adam, it appears that traducianism, rather than direct creationism, better fits all the data. Indeed, as we have seen, it is difficult to comprehend how each human being could be born in sin unless fallen souls are generated from parents, for surely God does not create a fallen soul each time a human is conceived.

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CHAPTER TWO

# THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

For our comprehension of the doctrines of sin and salvation, the nature of human beings is of utmost importance, second only to the nature of the God from whom they come.[1] Human nature will be discussed both in its original created state and in its subsequent fallen condition.

## VARIOUS BIBLICAL TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE HUMAN BEINGS

Humans are described by many different words in Scripture. Some refer to the spiritual dimension, others to the physical dimension, and some to both.

### Terms Used of the Immaterial Dimension of Human Beings

Humans have an inner (immaterial) dimension and an outer (material) dimension. The former is often called *soul* (or *spirit*),[2] and the latter is usually called *body*.

*Soul*

Unlike its popular English usage, the term *soul* (Heb: *nephesh* and Gk:

*psuche*) is often biblically used of more than the spiritual dimension of human beings; sometimes the body is included (e.g., Gen. 2:7; Ps. 16:10).

However, there are also scriptural references to the soul as being distinguished from the body. Genesis 35:18 (KJV) speaks of the soul leaving the body at death: "And it came to pass, as [Rachel's] soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni."

First Thessalonians 5:23 differentiates soul from body, saying, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Revelation 6:9 speaks of souls totally separated from their bodies in heaven: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained."

Basically, the word *soul* means "life"; it refers to the principle of life in a human being, or to that which animates the body. Sometimes the word even refers to a dead body (e.g., Lev. 19:28; 21:1; 23:4) in the way we may speak of a departed loved one as "that poor soul." The primary meaning of *soul* can most often be captured best by translating it *as person*, which *usually* is embodied but is *sometimes* disembodied.

*Spirit*

The word *spirit* (Heb: *ruach* and Gk: *pneuma*) almost always refers to "the immaterial dimension of a human being." It is often used interchangeably with the word *soul*, as is indicated by many verses (e.g., cf. Luke 1:46). The body without *the soul* is dead (James 2:26); at death, Jesus "bowed his head and gave up his *spirit*" (John 19:30).

Spirit is immaterial, for Jesus said to His disciples, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself. Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:38–39). Indeed, the invisible God "is spirit" and must be worshiped "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

*Heart*

The term *heart* (Heb: *leb* and Gk: *kardia*) has a broader meaning than is commonly thought, sometimes even including the mind. Proverbs, for instance, speaks of a person who "thinks in his heart" (23:7 AMP). Essentially, *heart* refers to the whole inner person; it is the heart from which true faith springs, for in order to be saved one must "believe in [his] heart" (Rom. 10:9).[3] The heart is

the instrument with which we are to worship God, since we are exhorted: “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5).

The heart is also the seat of evil, for Jesus confirmed that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34 NKJV). The prophet said, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer. 17:9). In short, for better or for worse, the heart reflects the whole inner being.

*Mind*

The mind (Gk: *nous*) refers to the immaterial dimension of a human being by which he or she thinks and imagines. Jesus included it in the great commandment, saying, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and *with all your mind* and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Paul included the mind in that which needs renewal by God’s sanctifying power, declaring, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*” (Rom. 12:2). This is because “the mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so” (Rom. 8:6–7). Hence, “we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we *take captive every thought* to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

*Inward Man*

The spiritual dimension of human beings is also called the *inward man:* “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16 KJV). The inward man is related to the “things which are not seen,” the things that are “eternal” and never pass away (v. 18).

**Terms Used of the Material Dimension of Human Beings**

*Body*

The biblical word *body* (Heb: *basar* and Gk: *soma*) is normally used of the outer (material) aspect of human nature. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The body, then, can decay and be destroyed; in fact, it is the body that is called “dead” when the spirit leaves it (James 2:26). However, the body is reconstructable by God, and it *will* be

resurrected from the dead:

> The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.… The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. (1 Cor. 15:42–44, 53)

*Flesh*

The word *flesh* (Heb: *basar* and Gk: *sarx*),[4] when referring to a physical human being, nearly always includes the outer dimension, made of matter. Again, Jesus said, "Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; *a ghost does not have flesh and bones*, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). The same word is also used of the resurrection body in Acts 2:31: "Seeing what was ahead, [David] spoke of the resurrection of the Christ [in Ps. 16], that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body [flesh] see decay."[5]

*Earthen Vessel*

Paul demonstrates an analogy between an earthenware pot and the human body: "We have this treasure [the light of Christ] in *jars of clay* to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7). *Earthen vessel* (KJV) is an appropriate illustration of the human body, since it is an outer structure containing something else (a soul) inside. The same is true of the following example, a figure of speech presenting the body as a *tent* or *house*.

*Earthly Tent*

Paul, as a tentmaker, understood the purpose of the human body: "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands" (2 Cor. 5:1). Indeed, when Jesus assumed a body in the Incarnation, He *dwelled* (lit. "pitched his tent") in our midst: "The Word became flesh and *made his dwelling* among us" (John 1:14). In the same way, the body is the material shell that in this world houses the presence of the immaterial soul.

*Outward Man*

If the soul is the "inner man," then the body is the "outer man." Again, Paul wrote, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward [man] is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16 KJV). The outward person is visible, material, and tangible; as we have seen, it is subject to decay and destruction, since it can "perish."

Concluding this brief biblical description of the two basic dimensions of a human being, we now turn to the manner in which the body and soul relate.

There are many views on this topic, several of which have been held by Christians.

# VARIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUL AND BODY

There is an important debate among Christians over the relationship between the two human dimensions. Of course, in the broader (non-Christian) spectrum, there are even more perspectives. We will survey them now.

### Anthropological Materialism[6]

Materialism affirms that humans have a material body but denies that they have an immaterial soul. Materialism maintains that *only the body exists; what we call a rational soul does not*. Therefore, according to materialism, the body is to the mind (soul) what the brain is to a dream; mind is simply a manifestation of matter. (Thomas Hobbes [1588–1679], for example, was an adherent.)

### Anthropological Epiphenomenalism

One modified form of materialism is called epiphenomenalism. The French thinker Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis (1757–1808) proposed that the soul is only a silhouette of the body; that is, the body is to the soul what a tree is to its shadow. Mind is just a dependent by-product of matter; it is merely a sign of matter rather than something separate from it or a cause of it. *Soul is like an image in a mirror; it only reflects the body*. Thus, while the soul is not the equivalent of the body, it is reducible to the body.

### Anthropological Idealism

On the other end of the non-theistic spectrum from materialism is idealism, which affirms that humans have a soul but not a body. English Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) embraced this perspective, claiming that *while the soul exists, the body does not*. Allegedly, the body is to the soul what a mirage is to a

mind. The body is merely an illusion; it simply does not exist. Only the mind exists.

### Anthropological Monism (The Double-Aspect View)

Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) held the double-aspect view (also called "anthropological monism"), according to which *soul and body are two sides (inner and outer) of the same thing*. The soul and body are both of one substance; that is, the soul is to body what one side of a plate is to the other, namely, just another aspect of the same entity. Though Spinoza was a pantheist,[7] holding that all things are of the same substance, there have also been Christians who embraced anthropological monism. Creatures, supposedly, differ from God only as modes or moments of one and the same *thing*.

### Anthropological Dualism/Dichotomy[8]

According to dualism, *soul and body are separate and parallel entities*; like railroad tracks, they run side by side but never intersect with each other. The problem with dualism is the lack of any contact, unity, or interaction with soul and body, which, in actuality, appears to occur. This view has been attributed to Plato (c. 427–347 B.C.) and some of his followers, though Plato himself likened the relation of a soul to a body as that of a rider to a horse, claiming that the soul influences the body but not the reverse. Indeed, Plato held a form of occasionalism,[9] meaning that on the occasion of a sensory experience, the mind recollects what it had known in a previous life, where it beheld the true *Ideas* of all things. Like anthropological monism, different elements of dualism also have been espoused by some Christians.[10]

### Anthropological Interactionism

René Descartes (1596–1650) asserted that *body and soul are two different substances:* The intellectual soul (mind) is a thinking, non-extended entity, and the physical body is a non-thinking, spatially extended entity. These two different substances, soul and body, only interact with each other as two boxers interact with each other, though not necessarily in an antagonistic way. Opponents have described interactionism as the "ghost in a machine" view.

### Anthropological Occasionalism (Recollectionism)

Augustine (354–430) maintained a platonic dualism of soul and body, but he added a dimension to Plato's paradigm, wherein *the rational soul relates to the body by direct divine action*. The body connects to the mind the way a reminder does to our memory, meaning that on the occasion of the physical reminder (sensory perception), God causes ideas in our minds. According to occasionalism, the body, which is lower, cannot directly impact the soul, which is higher. This view is also called "illuminationism," since God is said to illumine the mind (or soul) as to what is going on in the body.

### Anthropological Pre-Established Harmony

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) attempted to explain the relationship between soul and body alternatively. He saw a pre-established harmony between them, like two clocks wound up by God to run parallel to each other. Therefore, *mind and body*, while not directly aware of each other, *are synchronized by God*. God is the Super Monad who keeps all created monads properly related to each other, including their souls to their bodies.[11]

### Anthropological Hylomorphism

The term *hylomorphism* comes from two Greek words;[12] the theory proposes that *there is a form/matter unity between the soul and the body*, just as there is a unity between the shape (form) of a statue and the rock (material) out of which it is made. Hylomorphism asserts that the soul (mind) is to the body (matter) what ideas are to words: They form a unity, one being the inner and the other the outer dimension of their holistic oneness. The soul animates the body and forms one hylomorphic (form/matter) substance called a human being. The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and the Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) embraced this view.

## OUTLINE OF THE BASIC SOUL/BODY VIEWS

| View | Primary Proponent | Soul/Body | Illustration (Soul/Body As … ) | Explanation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Materialism | Thomas | Body only | As dream to brain | Only body exists; mind (soul) is nothing |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Hobbes | | | but a manifestation of matter. |
| Epiphenomenalism | Pierre-Jean Georges Cabanis | Soul is a by-product of body. | As shadow to tree | Body causes mind; mind is only a sign (not a cause) of matter. |
| Idealism | George Berkeley | Soul only | As mind to mirage | Only mind (soul) exists; body is merely an illusion. |
| Monism (Double-Aspect View) | Benedict Spinoza | Two aspects of the same thing | As inner to outer | Mind (soul) and body are two sides of same substance. |
| Dualism (Dichotomy or Parallelism) | Plato | Two different but parallel realities | As railroad tracks | Soul and body never interact; they only exist simultaneously. |
| Interactionism | René Descartes | Two different substances mutually interacting | As two boxers | Mind and body interact with each other. |
| Occasionalism (Recollectionism) | Augustine | Two different substances coordinated by God | As memory to reminder | God causes ideas in the mind on the occasion of sensory perception. |
| Pre-Established Harmony | Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz | Two different, synchronized substances | As two clocks | Mind and body are synchronized by God. |
| Hylomorphism | Thomas Aquinas | Soul animates body | As ideas to words | Mind and body are a holistic unity. |

Of these diverse anthropological views, the biblical data surveyed above (see sections under “Various Biblical Terms Used to Describe Human Beings”) exclude those that deny one of the two basic dimensions of human beings. For example, this eliminates both materialism and epiphenomenalism, which deny any real immaterial soul, and idealism, which rejects any real material body. As parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism are all forms of dualism, they are treated under “Dualism (Dichotomy)” below. The other three perspectives are anthropological monism, trichotomy, and hylomorphism.[13]

We will now examine in more detail six primary categories of models for the relationship between body and soul:

(1) materialism/epiphenomenalism;

(2) idealism;
(3) monism;
(4) dualism/dichotomy (including parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism);
(5) trichotomy; and
(6) hylomorphism.

# AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL MATERIALISM[14]

Anthropological materialism is without either biblical or philosophical foundation.

## Biblical Arguments Against Anthropological Materialism

The Bible not only affirms that both soul and body exist, but it also distinguishes them in several ways.

*First*, even in this life they are distinct: The body will perish, but the soul does not (e.g., 2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1); the soul leaves the body at death (Gen. 35:18 KJV).

*Second*, Scripture describes the soul (or spirit) as being consciously separated from the body after death.[15]

*Third*, and finally, the Bible everywhere refers to the body and the material world as things that are tangibly existent, apart from the mind.

## Philosophical Arguments Against Anthropological Materialism

*Materialism Is Self-Defeating*

As former atheist C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) observed, the materialist view (that matter exists but mind does not) is clearly self-defeating, for the *theory* of materialism is not made up of matter: The *theory* about matter has no matter in it. The *idea* that all is made of molecules does not itself consist of molecules—the *thought* about all matter must itself stand over and above the matter it is talking about.[16]

If the thought about matter is part of matter, then it cannot be a thought about

*all* matter, since being a part of matter it cannot transcend itself to make a pronouncement about *all* matter. The only way that mind (or its thoughts) can transcend matter is if the mind is more than matter. And if it is more than matter, then matter is not all that exists.

*Modified Materialism Is Also Self-Defeating*

As previously implied, some materialists are not strict materialists. Epiphenomenalists, for instance, admit that mind is more than matter but deny that mind can exist independently of matter, arguing that mind is simply the reflection of matter and is therefore reducible to it. They insist that mind is only more than matter in the way that the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Even so, the "whole" ceases to exist when the parts do; when the body expires, so also does the soul. Basically, though epiphenomenalists allow for mind being more than matter, they maintain that mind is merely a silhouette that ceases to exist when a human's material parts dissolve.

Although this materialistic argument is apparently less self-defeating than the first one, it is nonetheless wrong. Epiphenomenalism affirms that mind is ultimately dependent on matter, but the statement "Mind is dependent on matter" does not claim to depend upon matter for its truth—in fact, *it claims to be a truth about all matter and mind*. No truth about *all* mind and matter can be dependent for its truth upon matter, for one cannot stand outside of all matter to make an affirmation about all matter and yet simultaneously claim he is really standing inside matter while being dependent only upon it and nothing else. If my mind is completely *dependent on* (and is only a reflection of) matter, then it can't make statements from a vantage point that is *independent of* matter, and if its statements are not from a vantage point that is independent of matter, then they are not really statements about *all* matter: One must step *beyond* something to see *all* of it (implying, of course, that mind, after all, is beyond matter).

In short, epiphenomenalism claims to have a transcendent[17] basis of knowledge with only an immanent[18] basis of operation. What epiphenomenalism tries to do is transcend matter (with mind) to make truth statements about all mind and matter to prove that mind is within (and, therefore, dependent upon) matter. In order for epiphenomenalism to succeed in this (and not be self-defeating), mind would have to be independent of matter. If mind to body, though, is only like a shadow to a tree (as epiphenomenalism argues), how can a mere reflection (which allegedly depends for its existence on the matter that projects it) be independent of its source?

According to epiphenomenalism, mind is not independent from matter. If this is *correct*, then epiphenomenalism's "truth statements" are untrue, having no basis. If this is *incorrect*, then epiphenomenalism's fundamental foundation crumbles. Either way, it is self-defeating.

*A Transcendental Argument Against Materialism*

Materialists attempt to reduce everything to matter, to the exclusion of mind.[19] This is self-defeating because whatever analysis I make of matter, there is always an "I" that stands outside the object of my analysis. Even when I analyze myself, there is an "I" that transcends the "me." I can never capture my transcendental "I" (*ego*); I can only catch it, as it were, out of "the corner of my eye." If I attempt to put my "I" in the test tube of analysis, it then becomes a "me" at which the elusive "I" is looking. There is always more than "me"; there is the "I" that is not merely "me." Contrary to materialism, then, everything is not ultimately reducible to the "I." Mind is prior to and independent of matter.

*The Universe Has a Non-Material Origin*

As was demonstrated earlier,[20] there is a supernatural, immaterial Cause of the universe. Since scientific evidence shows that the whole material universe came into existence *out of nothing*,[21] the Cause of the universe cannot be a *material something*; hence, there is more than matter. As the materialist Karl Marx (1818–1883) put it, either matter produced mind or mind produced matter. Since matter was produced, it must have been Mind that produced it. Consequently, the more-than-matter that exists is mind.

*The Moral Lawgiver Is Not Material*

Another way to demonstrate that all is not matter is known as the moral argument for God's existence.[22] It can be put this way:

(1) There is an objective moral law.[23]
(2) Moral law is prescriptive (tells us what we *ought* to do and what *not* to do).
(3) What is prescriptive is not part of the descriptive material world.
(4) Thus, there is an objective reality that is not material; that is, more than matter exists.[24]

# AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL IDEALISM

Anthropological idealism also is opposed by both biblical and philosophical evidence.

## Biblical Arguments Against Anthropological Idealism

*First*, the Bible unequivocally teaches that God created a material universe (Gen. 1–2) and that matter is truly different from God, who is purely Spirit (John 4:24).

*Second*, matter is finite and destructible (1 Cor. 15:42), whereas God is infinite and indestructible (1 Tim. 6:16).

*Third*, and finally, the human soul, as already stated, is set out as different from the body (e.g., Luke 24:39) in that the two are separated at death (e.g., James 2:26).

## Philosophical Arguments Offered for Anthropological Idealism

George Berkeley insisted that only minds and ideas exist, for supposedly *to be* is either "to perceive" (Lat: *esse est percipi*) or "to be perceived" (Lat: *esse est percipere*). Idealism alleges, for several reasons, that no "matter" exists.[25]

First of all, there is said to be no way to separate *being* from *being perceived*.

In addition, the arguments against existence of secondary qualities (like color) also apply to primary ones (like number and extension). For example, says idealism, *extension* cannot be known apart from color and bulk; *number* is based on unity, which cannot be perceived; *figure* changes with one's perspective; *motion* is relative.

Also, *things* (matter) cannot be known apart from thought; therefore, they exist only in thought.

Furthermore, belief in *matter* charges God with a useless creation, since we are able to have an idea of it without its existing.

In short, idealism maintains that it is impossible to conceive of anything existing outside of a mind. To "conceive of something" is a *power of mind* to form an idea *in the mind* (not outside of it). Nothing can be *conceived* as existing *unconceived*. That is, nothing can be thought to exist apart from one's thought.

**Response to the Philosophical Arguments for Anthropological Idealism**

Although Berkeley was a Christian theist, his anthropological idealism is contrary to the entire classical theistic position. Several criticisms are worthy of note.

*Idealism's Basic Assumption Begs the Question*[26]

The fundamental premise of idealism is that only minds and ideas exist; once this is granted, everything else in the theory follows. However, there is no compelling reason to grant it. Indeed, it begs the entire question by assuming, *to begin with* (a priori), that only minds and ideas exist. We certainly receive no surprise, then, in discovering Berkeley's *conclusion* that there is nothing else. The existence of extra-mental and non-mental reality is not eliminated by any of the arguments.

*Idealism's Basic Premises Fail*

Berkeley's arguments for idealism, at root, are based on the mistaken notion that "knowing" involves *a sensing of ideas* rather than *a sensing of things through ideas*. This again begs the question, for if ideas are not the *formal* object of knowledge but instead are merely the *instruments* through which knowledge of the external world is conveyed to us,[27] then idealism collapses.

*Idealism Is Contrary to Experience*

To speak, as Berkeley did, of bodies, matter, and nature—which we all experience—as mere ideas that God regularly excites in us, is possible but not really credible. When one eats food, he is not eating the idea of food or having the idea of eating the idea of food. Furthermore, it undermines the Resurrection to imply that God only raised up a cluster of ideas.

*Idealism Charges God With Deception*

Berkeley, in arguing that there is no external world, charged God with deception. Certainly God is *powerful* enough to create the ideas of things in us that do not exist; even so, God is not merely all-powerful—He is also all-perfect, and He cannot deceive. To have created in every human being the vivid perception that there is an extra-mental, material world, if there wasn't one, would be dishonest.[28]

# AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL MONISM

Unlike either materialism or idealism, *anthropological monism*,[29] which is the first of four views that have been held by some professed Christians and cults (the other three are examined below), does not deny either mind or matter.[30] Rather, it *affirms both while identifying them as one*. As mentioned previously, Benedict Spinoza held this view (see *E*), as do Jehovah's Witnesses.

Many arguments have been offered in favor of this view, both biblical and philosophical.

## Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism

The basic arguments from Scripture for anthropological monism are (1) from the nature of human beings and (2) from the alleged oneness of soul and body. Monism maintains that humans have only one nature—a *human* nature: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26). This original man's nature is shared equally by all human beings; consequently, it must be one nature, not many.

Another argument has been offered from 2 Corinthians 5:1, which appears to affirm that a person's resurrection body is received at the moment of physical death:[31] "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

## Response to the Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism

The biblical data put forward for monism—such as Acts 17:26—can also be interpreted another way.[32] Scripture demonstrates the *unity* of the two human dimensions, but not their *identity*. For example, there is a *unity* between the words of this sentence and the idea expressed in it, but the words and the idea are not *identical*.

Further, it is true that we have one nature, but it has two dimensions, as was shown above. The two dimensions cannot be identical, because one is material, and the other is immaterial; one is perishable, and the other is imperishable.

As to the use of 2 Corinthians 5:1 on the behalf of monism, there are at least two other interpretations.

*First*, some hold that there is an intermediate spiritual body provided at death so that the soul is never disembodied (e.g., see Chafer, *ST*, 2.506–07).

*Second*, others point out that Paul (in 2 Cor. 5:1) does not teach that a person receives the eternal body at the instant of death but merely that he anticipates the final resurrection. This view fits better with Paul's statements about the final resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15:42–44.[33]

*Third*, monism contradicts clear biblical references to a disembodied state (soul/spirit being separated from the body at death).[34] Thus, in 2 Corinthians 5:1, Paul is simply speaking in the knowledge that after death there is the ultimate anticipation of the permanent resurrection body. This correlates, also, with what he says regarding death and the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:50–54.[35]

## Philosophical Arguments for and Against Anthropological Monism

### *The Parmenidean Paradox*

On the level of being, the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides (fl. c. 485 B.C.) gave a powerful argument for *metaphysical*[36] monism, namely, that all being is one. It runs like this:

(1) It is impossible for there to be two things (beings), for to be two things they must differ.
(2) Things can only differ by either being or nonbeing, but to differ by *nonbeing* (or, to differ by nothing) is not to differ at all.
(3) To differ by *being* is not possible, since being is the only thing that all beings have in common.
(4) Things cannot differ by what they have in common; that is, they cannot differ by the very respect in which they are identical.

### *Response*

We have seen[37] that this argument, unassailable as it may seem, actually begs the question, since it assumes what is to be proven, which is that all things are *identical* in their being (monism). If, on the other hand, we posit and then demonstrate that all things are *similar* in their being, monism does not follow. Only by assuming that being is univocal (entirely the same) rather than

analogical (similar) does monism follow.[38] If the term *being* is predicated of (ascribed to) God in an analogous (similar) way, then all things are not identical; the argument for *metaphysical* monism does not stand.

*Anthropological* monism, being a subspecies of metaphysical monism, suffers the same fate. Unless one assumes that the terms *body* and *soul* are univocal (identical) in regard to the same human being, it does not follow that body and soul are the same. There can be different truths about one and the same thing without these different truths being the same. For instance, one and the same rock can be both round (which is not necessarily material in itself) and hard (which applies only to material things). Likewise, one and the same human essence can be both material and immaterial without having two different essences, provided that one is the form (soul) and the other is the matter (body).

*The Attack on Anthropological Dualism*

Another argument given for anthropological monism is that the dualist (dichotomist) view, which monism opposes, is Greek (rather than Hebrew) in origin; that is, anthropological dualism (see below) finds its roots in Hellenic philosophy, not Jewish theology.

*Response*

In reply, there are several serious problems with this contention.

*First*, this is a classic case of *poisoning the well*. The issue is not whether dualism comes from Greek philosophy (it does); a view should not be judged false (or true, for that matter) by its *cultural origin* but instead by the *evidence for and against it*.

*Second*, it is unhelpful and incorrect to administer the broad label of *Greek* to dualism, as though *being Greek* means "being a dualist." Aristotle, for instance, was Greek, and he rejected anthropological dualism. It is more precise to call dualism *platonic*. Nevertheless, even if the specific dualism being evaluated is platonic, it should not be rejected simply because Plato embraced it. Christians (even many anthropological monists) hold to a great number of Plato's ideas, including the objectivity of morality, meaning, and truth, as well as belief in God and an afterlife. Plato, like any other person, did not *create* the ideas but rather *discovered* them.

*Third*, this argument for monism is based on a false disjunction. Specifically, it fails to note that not all non-monisms are dualisms. Aristotle and Aquinas, for example, were opposed to platonic dualism, but they did not hold to

anthropological monism; instead, they embraced hylomorphism, a unity (rather than identity) of soul and body.

### Other Evidence Against Anthropological Monism

In addition to the failure of the philosophical arguments for monism, there are many arguments against it.[39]

*First*, monism denies that there are two dimensions in the human nature, which the Bible affirms.[40]

*Second*, monism does not explain scriptural texts where the soul (or spirit) survives death in a disembodied state.[41] If soul and body *were* one and the same, then the soul would die when the body does. It doesn't.

*Third*, monism does not account for Jesus being spiritually alive between His death and resurrection (Luke 24:46; John 19:30). He is the second person of the Godhead; He didn't go out of existence.

*Fourth*, monism necessitates either annihilationism[42] or immediate resurrection at the point of death—both are unorthodox and unacceptable. If body and soul are one, as monism claims, then either (1) both go out of existence, together, at death (which is annihilationism), or else (2) a new body is given to the soul at the instant of death (which is immediate resurrection). As for the first, annihilationism is plainly unscriptural,[43] and regarding the second, the giving of new bodies to the souls of believers at the instant of death would make their resurrection a *past* event, a view the New Testament condemns as heretical (cf. 2 Tim. 2:18). There can be no resurrection of the body while it is still in the grave, since resurrection involves the dead body being raised up (John 5:28–29), just as Jesus was, in the same body, crucifixion scars and all (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). Further, the resurrection of the body is set forth (e.g., in 1 Thess. 4:13–18) as a *future* event that will take place when Jesus returns to earth.

*Fifth*, monism is contrary to our consciousness of having two dimensions, a body and a mind (soul). My thoughts are clearly different from my body.

*Sixth*, and finally, all the arguments and texts used to show a so-called *identity* between body and soul can be explained instead as references to psychosomatic *unity*.[44]

## AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL

# DUALISM (DICHOTOMY)

Anthropological dualism, springing from Plato, is the view affirming that soul and body are of two different substances—a human being *is* a soul and merely *has* a body. The primary analogy is the soul as being to the body what a rider is to a horse; other *non-Christian* dualists spoke of the soul as being like a bird in a cage or a person in prison—when the soul is released from the body (at death), it is permanently freed from the shackles of earthly incarceration.

Although *Christian* dualists hold that the soul will be reunited with the resurrection body, they nevertheless maintain a psychosomatic dualism, which is evident in the occasionalism (recollectionism) of Augustine and many in the Reformed tradition to this date.[45]

## Two Arguments Offered for Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy)

### *The Argument From the Soul Surviving Death*

Against monists, dualists point out that since the soul survives death, it cannot be the same substance as the body. If it were, it would die with the body, but it does not, as both sides admit. The problem with this argument is that it is a false disjunction, wrongly assuming that if a view is not dualistic, then it must be monistic.[46] As already observed, there is at least one other tenable alternative, namely, a soul/body unity (without identity) known as anthropological hylomorphism (see below).

### *The Argument That Interchangeability of "Soul" and "Spirit" Proves Their Identity*

Against trichotomists,[47] who hold that a human being is tripartite ("having three parts"), dualists (dichotomists) argue that since *soul* and *spirit* are used interchangeably in many passages,[48] a human being has only two parts (body and soul/spirit); *soul* and *spirit* must refer to one and the same thing.

Further, dualists observe, *soul* and *spirit* are also used synonymously in poetic parallel (cf. Luke 1:46–47), and they often have the same functions (e.g., sighing, grieving, and refreshing).[49]

In response, it should be noted that if this argument is correct, *at best* it would only prove that trichotomy is wrong, not that dualism is right. In addition, once again, these same functions can also be explained by hylomorphism (see below).

### Other Evidence Against Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy)

In addition to the failure of these arguments to support dualism, there are several noteworthy reasons to reject it, including the following.

*First*, dualism denies biblical teaching on the essential unity of the human being.[50]

*Second*, dualism confuses *dimensions* with *parts*. Just as a work of art has two dimensions—the form and the medium—human nature has both inner (soul) and outer (body).

*Third*, dualism denigrates the body by excluding it from the image of God, whereas the Bible presents the body as part of His likeness.[51]

*Fourth*, dualism leads to untenable asceticism and otherworldliness, since it proposes that the essence of humanity is purely spiritual and excludes the material.

*Fifth*, and finally, platonic dualism's representation of human nature, even without its reincarnational (rebirth) and soteriological (salvific) aspects, is not biblical (see Ladd, "GVHVM" in *PNTT*).[52]

## AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRICHOTOMY

The third view held by Christians is called trichotomy, which insists that a human being is tripartite: body, soul, and spirit. It has origins in Plato and Plotinus (205–270) and was adopted by the early Christian father Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225). In one popular version of the trichotomist perspective, a human being is said to be *self-conscious* by virtue of her soul, *world-conscious* through her body, and *God-conscious* in her spirit.

### Arguments Offered for Anthropological Trichotomy

The biblical basis for trichotomy is sought in passages where soul and spirit appear to be clearly differentiated, such as the following.

*Hebrews 4:12*

"The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword,

it penetrates even to *dividing soul and spirit*, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Trichotomists reason that if the soul and spirit can be divided, then they cannot be one and the same (synonymous).

In response, many expositors take this apparent contrast between soul and spirit to be a figure of speech describing the power of the Word of God. It is so powerful that it can, as it were, divide the indivisible. In this sense, rather than being a proof of trichotomy, Hebrews 4:12 actually is evidence for the unity (but not identity) of human nature.

*1 Thessalonians 5:23*

Here the apostle prays, "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole *spirit, soul and body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Trichotomists argue that all three being listed separately, in the same passage, reveals that the soul and the spirit cannot be one.

Opponents make three points in response.

*First*, the emphasis in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is on the wholeness of human nature, since it refers to all these dimensions as being part of one *whole*.

*Second*, the words *soul* and *spirit* could still be interchangeable. For instance, both could be listed for completeness, in case some of those in the reading audience believed that part of the human being was omitted because the particular word (*soul* or *spirit*) was not used.

*Third*, and finally, there is no textual indication, in any event, that body, soul, and spirit are three separate *parts* of a human being. Perhaps they describe different aspects of one and the same human nature.[53]

*Romans 8:16*

In this passage the apostle Paul declares that "the Spirit himself testifies with *our spirit* that we are God's children." Proponents of trichotomy suggest that the word *spirit* distinguishes a unique part of a human being that has unshared reference to (connection with) God. They likewise insist that the word *soul* is never used in such a context.

In reply, opponents claim that even if this trichotomist observation *were* true, the logic would involve special pleading, since this supposed function or connection may be another aspect of what a *soul* does.[54] However, at best, this trichotomist point is a traditionally weak argument from silence.[55] Furthermore, there *are* texts that use the word *soul* in reference to God. Jesus, for example,

commanded us to love God "with all your … soul" (Matt. 22:37), and Mary proclaimed, "My soul glorifies the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

*1 Corinthians 15:44*

Paul writes, "[The body] is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." Nowhere in Scripture is the resurrection body described as *soulish* (rather than *spiritual*). Trichotomists, accordingly, insist that the spirit is uniquely and exclusively adapted to the glorified body in which we will see God.

In response, critics of trichotomy are quick to point out that the term *spiritual body* means "a body dominated by the Holy Spirit"; that is to say, the spiritual body is a body with a supernatural source of energy (rather than a natural source, as our earthly body has). The same word *spiritual* (Gk: *pneumatikos*), for instance, is also used of the Rock (Christ) that supernaturally provided water for Israel in the desert (1 Cor. 10:4; cf. Ex. 32:5–6).

*Mark 10:45*

Some trichotomists interpret Jesus' statement that "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life [Gk: *psuche, soul*] as a ransom for many" as evidence for their view; they allege that Jesus does not say He will give His *spirit* (Gk: *pneuma*) because the spirit does not die.

In response, it is noteworthy that when Jesus died, the gospel account says, "He gave up His *spirit*" (John 19:30). Further, if *soul* is only a reference to a *part* of Christ's humanity that was given for our sins, then trichotomy involves a heresy, for, in such a case, Jesus would not have given His full humanity to redeem our transgressions.

In addition, no distinction is made in Mark 10:45 between soul and spirit. Jesus was not saying here that His *soul,* exclusively, was going to be offered as the ransom; rather the one term, *soul*, which often stands for the whole person,[56] says it all.

*1 Corinthians 6:19*

Since Paul contends, "The spirit belongs to God," and the soul is said to be man's possession ("my life," 1 Kings 19:4), trichotomists argue that soul and spirit are distinct.

In reply, this too is a false disjunction. *All* belongs to God (1 Chron. 29:14; James 1:17), including the body, as 1 Corinthians 6 itself affirms (v. 20). Consequently, this argument is a distinction without an actual difference.

# AN EXAMINATION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL HYLOMORPHISM (SOUL/BODY UNITY)

The fourth and final view maintained by Christians is called *hylomorphism*,[57] which, as stated previously, holds that there is a form/matter unity between soul and body. The roots of the view are found in the beliefs of Aristotle, though it has earlier basis in the Old Testament, and it was later corroborated by Thomas Aquinas. The evidence for hylomorphism can be divided into biblical and philosophical.

## The Biblical Basis for Anthropological Hylomorphism

Human beings are described as a soul/body unity from the very beginning. As we have seen, Genesis says, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and *the man became a living being [soul]*" (2:7). That is, the whole unity of dust (matter) and breath (life) was a vital being.

Furthermore, the word *soul* means "person," and it often includes the body. For instance, in Psalm 16:10, David records, "Thou wilt not leave my *soul* in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see *corruption*" (KJV). Obviously, *soul* here includes the body, which, as prophesied (regarding Jesus Christ), did not see corruption but was resurrected (cf. Acts 2:30–31).

Also, as we have seen, the word *soul* sometimes even refers to a dead body (e.g., Lev. 19:28; 21:1; 23:4).

In addition, if both soul and body were not created as a unity, then the murder of a body would not be wrong. But it is, for God said, "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6). This, again, implies that the image of God includes the body, otherwise the prohibition against murdering a body would not apply.

Even more, the Bible declares that a soul without a body is naked and incomplete (2 Cor. 5:1–4). This would not be so unless there was a powerful unity between them.

Finally, resurrection makes no sense unless we are incomplete without a body, and God's Word declares that all human beings, saved and lost, *will* be resurrected (John 5:25–29). Without the body we are unwhole, lacking in our very nature as a human being.

## The Philosophical/Psychological Basis for Anthropological Hylomorphism

In addition to the biblical data, there are psychological and philosophical reasons to support the form/matter unity of soul and body. Consider the following arguments.

*The Analogy With Animals*

Higher forms of animals do have a soul; the same Hebrew word used for the soul of humans (*nephesh*) is also used of animals. Indeed, even the word *spirit* is used of an animal (see Eccl. 3:21). Therefore, while animals are alive, there is a form/matter unity between their soul and their body. The same is true of human beings, the only difference being that the *human* soul survives death and lives on consciously between death and resurrection (e.g., Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9).

*The Psychosomatical Interpenetration*

What is more, there is clearly an interpenetration of the soul and body, which befits a form/matter unity. *Interpenetration* means that the soul influences the body *and* vice versa.[58] For example, grief in the soul affects the body, and pain in the body affects the mind. This psychosomatic affiliation indicates not identity but unity.

## An Objection to Anthropological Hylomorphism

Like all other views, hylomorphism is subject to criticism. The primary opposition has to do with the disembodied intermediate state (between death and resurrection).

*The Objection Stated—Regarding the Survival of the Soul*

This argument contends that if the soul and body are a unity in this life, then it would seem that the soul could not exist in a disembodied state. If embodiment is a necessary vehicle for the soul, how can it survive alone?

*Response*

In reply, as already established, soul and body are a *unity*, not an *identity*. If they were identical, then of course one could not survive without the other.

Again, by way of analogy, the soul is to the body what thought in the mind is to words on paper; the concept remains when the material perishes.[59]

The Bible informs us that the soul *does* survive when the body dies. To be sure, the soul is incomplete without the body, and it does await the resurrection of the body, when it will once again be complete (2 Cor. 5:1), but survival as a soul without a body is not impossible or contradictory. Both God and angels are purely spiritual (John 4:24; Heb. 1:14), yet they exist without physical form. It is assumed, then, that in the intermediate, disembodied state between death and resurrection, human beings will exist as angels presently do.[60]

George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) wrote a masterful analysis of the contrast between the dualist view and the hylomorphic (unity) view of soul and body; this is summarized in the following chart (with the change of one word—*Greek* to *Platonic*).[61]

**Two Contrasting Views of Human Nature: Platonic vs. Christian[62]**

| Platonic View of Human Nature | Christian View of Human Nature |
|---|---|
| Dualistic | Unity |
| Is a Soul (Soul is complete without body) | Is a Soul/Body (Soul is not complete without body) |
| Matter is not good | Matter is good |
| Reincarnation into another body | Resurrection in the same body |
| Body is prison/tomb | Body is expression of the soul |
| Body is the enemy of soul | Body is the friend of soul |
| Soul is simple | Soul is composed |
| Soul is indestructible | Soul is destructible |
| Salvation from the body | Salvation in the body |
| Salvation is by knowledge | Salvation is by faith |
| Soul is divine | Soul is human |
| Soul is eternal | Soul had a beginning |
| Soul preexisted | Soul was created |
| Earth is an alien place | Earth is a friendly place |
| Humans have three parts (body, soul, and spirit)[63] | Humans have two dimensions (inner and outer) |
| | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Sin results from body burdening soul | Sin results from rebellion of will |
| Redemption of soul | Redemption of whole person |
| God is known by fleeing the world | God is known in and through the world |
| Salvation is by human effort | Salvation is by divine visitation |
| Reality is in the invisible realm | Reality includes the visible realm[64] |

# THE HISTORICAL TESTIMONY ON THE NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

## Early Fathers

### *Theophilus (c. 130–190)*

> Someone will say to us, "Was man made by nature mortal?" Certainly not. "Was he, then, immortal?" Neither do we affirm this. But one will say, "Was he, then, nothing?" Not even this hits the mark. He was by nature neither mortal nor immortal. For if [God] had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but … capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality … but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself.
>
> For God made man free, and with power over himself. That, then, which man brought upon himself through carelessness and disobedience, this God now vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death upon himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. For God has given us a law and holy commandments; and everyone who keeps these can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption. (*TA*, xxvii in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, II.2.27)

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> If some had been made by nature bad, and others good, these latter would not be deserving of praise for being good, for such were they created; nor would the former be reprehensible, for thus they were made [originally]. But since all men are of the same nature, able both to hold fast and to do what is good—and, on the other hand, having also the power to cast it from them and not to do it—some do justly receive praise even among men who are under the control of good laws (and much more from God), and obtain deserved testimony of their choice of good in general, and of persevering therein; but the others are blamed, and receive a just condemnation, because of their rejection of what is fair and good. And therefore the prophets used to exhort men to what was good, to act justly and to work righteousness … because it is in our power so to do, and because by excessive negligence we might

become forgetful, and thus stand in need of that good counsel which the good God has given us to know by means of the prophets. (*AH* in ibid., 1.4.37.2)

### *Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)*

We have assigned, then, to the soul both … freedom of the will … and its dominion over the works of nature, and its occasional gift of divination, independently of that endowment of prophecy which accrues to it expressly from the grace of God. (*TS* in ibid., III.1.9.22)

"That position of Plato's is also quite in keeping with the faith, in which he divides the soul into two parts—the rational and the irrational" (*TS*, III.XVI in ibid., 194).

Come now, you who deny the salvation of the flesh, and who, whenever there occurs the specific mention of *body* in a case of this sort, interpret it as meaning anything rather than the substance of the flesh, (tell me) how is it that the apostle has given certain distinct names to all (our faculties), and has comprised them all in one prayer for their safety, desiring that our "spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord and Savior (Jesus) Christ"?[65] Now he has here propounded the soul and body as two separate and distinct things. For … the soul has a kind of body of a quality all its own, just as the spirit has. (*FBAM*, III.XV in ibid., 462–63)

### *Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)*

There are other things, in which there is a power of will, and which have a free choice of doing what they will. These, as I have said, do not remain always in that order in which they were created: but according as their will leads them, and the judgment of their mind inclines them, they effect either good or evil; and therefore He hath proposed rewards to those who do well, and penalties to those who do evil. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.3.24)

## Medieval Fathers

### *Augustine (354–430)*

If, again, we were so to define man as to say, Man is a rational substance consisting of mind and body, then without doubt man has a soul that is not body, and a body that is not soul. (*OT*, 15.7)

It is with reference to the [human] nature, then, and not to the wickedness of the devil, that we are to understand these words, "This is the beginning of God's handiwork"; for, without doubt, wickedness can be a flaw or vice only where the nature previously was not vitiated. Vice, too, is so contrary to nature that it cannot but damage it. And therefore departure from God would be no vice, unless in a nature whose property it was to abide with God.

So even the wicked will is a strong proof of the goodness of the nature. But God, as He is the supremely good Creator of good natures, so is He of evil wills the most just Ruler; so that, while they make an ill use of good natures, He makes a good use even of evil wills. Accordingly, He caused the devil (good by God's creation, wicked by his own will) to be cast down from his high position, and to

become the mockery of His angels—that is, He caused his temptations to benefit those whom he wishes to injure by them. And because God, when He created him, was certainly not ignorant of his future malignity, and foresaw the good which He Himself would bring out of his evil, therefore says the psalm, "This leviathan whom Thou hast made to be a sport therein,"[66] that we may see that, even while God in His goodness created him good, He yet had already foreseen and arranged how He would make use of him when he became wicked. (*CG*, 11.17)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

The state of the human soul may be distinguished in two ways. First, from a diversity of mode in its natural existence; and in this point the state of the separate soul is distinguished from the state of the soul joined to the body. Secondly, the state of the soul is distinguished in relation to integrity and corruption, the state of natural existence remaining the same: and thus the state of innocence is distinct from the state of man after sin. For man's soul, in the state of innocence, was adapted to perfect and govern the body; wherefore the first man is said to have been made into a "living soul"; that is, a soul giving life to the body—namely animal life. But he was endowed with integrity as to this life, in that the body was entirely subject to the soul, hindering it in no way.…

Since the soul is adapted to perfect and govern the body, as regards animal life, it is fitting that it should have that mode of understanding which is by turning to phantasms. Therefore this mode of understanding was becoming to the soul of the first man also. (*ST*, I.94.4)

In the natural order, perfection comes before imperfection, as act precedes potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality is made actual only by something actual. And since God created things not only for their own existence, but also that they might be the principles of other things; so creatures were produced in their perfect state to be the principles as regards others. Now man can be the principle of another man, not only by generation of the body, but also by instruction and government. Hence, as the first man was produced in his perfect state, as regards his body, for the work of generation, so also was his soul established in a perfect state to instruct and govern others, (ibid., I.94.3)

Some virtues of their very nature do not involve imperfection, such as charity and justice; and these virtues did exist in the primitive state absolutely, both in habit and in act. But other virtues are of such a nature as to imply imperfection either in their act, or on the part of the matter. If such imperfection be consistent with the perfection of the primitive state, such virtues necessarily existed in that state; as faith, which is of things not seen, and hope which is of things not yet possessed. For the perfection of that state did not extend to the vision of the Divine Essence, and the possession of God with the enjoyment of final beatitude.

Hence faith and hope could exist in the primitive state, both as to habit and as to act. But any virtue which implies imperfection incompatible with the perfection of the primitive state, could exist in that state as a habit, but not as to the act; for instance, penance, which is sorrow for sin committed; and mercy, which is sorrow for others' unhappiness; because sorrow, guilt, and happiness are incompatible with the perfection of the primitive state.

Wherefore such virtues existed as habits in the first man, but not as to their acts; for he was so disposed that he would repent, if there had been a sin to repent for; and had he seen unhappiness in his neighbor, he would have done his best to remedy it. (ibid., I.95.3)

## Reformation Leaders

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

In general, they[67] are wont to place under the free will of man only intermediate things, viz., those which pertain not to the kingdom of God, while they refer true righteousness to the special grace of God and spiritual regeneration. The author of [*On the Calling of the Gentiles*], wishing to show this, describes the will as threefold, viz., sensitive, animal, and spiritual. The two former, he says, are free to man, but the last is the work of the Holy Spirit. (*ICR*, I.2.2.5)

Therefore, God has provided the soul of man with intellect, by which he might discern good from evil, just from unjust, and might know what to follow or to shun, reason going before with her lamp; whence philosophers, in reference to her directing power, have called her "*to hegemonikon*." To this God has joined will, to which choice belongs. Man excelled in these noble endowments in his primitive condition, when reason, intelligence, prudence, and judgement, not only sufficed for the government of his earthly life, but also enabled him to rise up to God and eternal happiness. Thereafter choice was added to direct the appetites, and temper all the organic motions; the will being thus perfectly submissive to the authority of reason, (ibid., I.XV)

Calvin continued, "In this upright state, man possessed freedom of will, by which, if he chose, he was able to obtain" (ibid.).

## *Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)*

Originally man was thus created, to be God's image; that is, his understanding [*verstand*] was endowed with a great light. He knew about number, he had knowledge of God and the divine laws, and he could distinguish virtue and vice. With this light his heart, his heart's desire, and his will were without hypocrisy. His heart was created full of the love of God, free of all evil desires. His will was free, so that he could choose to keep God's law, and his heart and external members could be fully obedient without any hindrance. It was also possible for his understanding and will to choose something else, as happened later.

Accordingly, when free will is mentioned, we mean understanding and will, heart and will; and they belong together, without hypocrisy. Man was created wise and upright, and before the Fall he had a free, unimpeded will. However, as Adam and Eve fell into sin and incurred God's wrath, God withdrew from them and man's natural powers became very weak. The light in his understanding became very dim, although some remained, for man can still use numbers and make distinctions between good and evil works and the teachings of the law. God wants all men to recognize sin; he wants to punish us by means of our own conscience; and he wants all men to maintain external discipline. For that reason knowledge remains in this corrupted nature, although it is dim and full of doubt and uncertainty about God, not knowing whether God wants to be man's judge or helper, or whether God wants to receive and listen to men.…

Further, all good virtues toward God in the heart and will were also lost—love of God, trust in God, and true fear of God. God is not received where the Holy Spirit has not first enlightened and kindled the understanding, will, and heart. Without the Holy Spirit man cannot of his own powers perform virtuous works, such as true faith, love of God, and true fear of God. And therefore the miserable human heart stands like a desolate, deserted, old and decaying house, God no longer dwelling within and winds blowing through. That is, all sorts of conflicting tendencies and lusts drive the heart to the manifold sins of uncontrolled love, hate, envy, and pride. The devils also spread their poisons.

When we speak about this great ruin of human powers, we are talking about free will, for man's will and heart are wretchedly imprisoned, impaired, and ruined, so that inwardly man's heart and will are unlike the divine law, offensive and hostile to it, and man cannot by his own inward natural powers be obedient. This is said about true inner obedience, without hypocrisy.

> Now to speak of the movement and motion of external members of the body. Although the heart and the inner will, as we ourselves are aware, neither hear nor inwardly obey the law without hypocrisy, nevertheless God has left the understanding free to govern in that it can move and control the external members of the body. The understanding may say to one who is sick with a fever and very thirsty that he should hold his hand and not drink, and he restrains his hand from seizing the mug. Even in this corrupted nature God has allowed such freedom with regard to external motions of the body. He wants all men to have external morality [*zucht*], and thereby learn the distinction between powers that are free and powers that are bound; thus we can think in some degree that God acts freely and is not a prisoner or a bound Lord, as the Stoics have pictured him with regard to his created nature.[68] (*OCD*, 51–52)

## Post-Reformation Theologians

### *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

> [The soul's] faculties, which are two, the understanding and the will, as in fact the object of the soul is two-fold. For the understanding apprehends eternity and truth both universal and particular, by a natural and necessary, and therefore by a uniform act. But the will has an inclination to good. Yet this is either according to the mode of its nature, to universal good and to that which is the chief good; or according to the mode of liberty, to all other [kinds of] good. (*WJA*, II.63)

### *Karl Barth (1886–1968)*

> In these circumstances how can we possibly reach a doctrine of man in the sense of a doctrine of his creaturely essence, of his human nature as such? For what we recognize to be human nature is nothing other than the disgrace which covers his nature; his inhumanity, perversion and corruption. If we try to deny this or to tone it down, we have not yet understood the full import of the truth that for the reconciliation of man with God nothing more nor less was needed than the death of the Son of God, and for the manifestation of this reconciliation nothing more nor less than the resurrection of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. But if we know man only in the corruption and distortion of his being, how can we even begin to answer the question about his creaturely nature? (*CD*, II)

### *Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)*

"Fullness of experience in the sphere of faith is due to the individual development, in virtue of this original perfection of human nature, of each life brought into existence by procreation" (*OCF*, 247).

### *William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)*

"Man is a species, and the idea of a species implies the propagation of the entire individual out of it.… Individuals are not propagated in parts" (*DT*, 2.19).

# A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE ELEMENTS OF HUMAN NATURE

There is some truth in all of the Christian anthropological views. *Monists* are right in claiming that human nature is one. *Dualists* are correct in that there are two dimensions to human nature (inner and outer). Trichotomists are on the right track in that human beings do operate in three directions (self-consciousness, world-consciousness, and God-consciousness). And hylomorphists are correct in their insistence that the oneness of human nature is that of a unity (not an identity) of form and matter.

# VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF HUMAN PERSONHOOD

Human beings, like God and angels, are not androids, or automations of human form. They are persons, with intellect (mind), emotion (feeling), will (choice), and conscience (moral capacity). The Bible spells out all of these aspects of human personhood.

### Intellect (Mind)

Human beings were created with self-reflective minds that have the power of syllogistic reasoning.[69] Solomon urged: "Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding" (Prov. 23:23). The power of human reasoning also places people above the "unreasoning animals" (Jude 1:10).

While intellect enables humans to worship God (Matt. 22:37), its inventiveness also makes it capable of great evil (Eccl. 7:25). However, by redemption the mind is "renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10; cf. Rom. 12:2).

### Emotion (Feeling)

In addition to rational thinking, human beings are capable of deep emotions and feelings, such as joy and sorrow. Unlike the mythical androids, humans are more than minds and wills—they have heart.

### Will (Choice)

Unlike animals, human beings were created with the moral capacity (see below) to know right from wrong and the will to choose one over the other. This responsibility was entailed in God's command to Adam: "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:16–17). The original state of the will is discussed earlier[70] and the fallen state later.[71]

**Conscience (Moral Capacity)**

Human beings are unique from all other creatures on earth in that within their very natures they have a God-given moral capacity called conscience. Even in our fallen state, God holds us responsible for avoiding evil. Paul states:

> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.… (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) (Rom. 2:12–15)

Of course, a fallen conscience is fallible. It reflects an innate capacity to know right from wrong, but it does not guarantee that it will always be accurate; it can be distorted (Rom. 2:15) by culture and choices and, at times, even "seared" by intense evil (1 Tim. 4:2).

There is, nonetheless, an objective moral law,[72] even though our fallen understanding of it is obscured by sin. God's moral law is reflective of His very nature: It is prescriptive ("You ought not …"), perfect (Ps. 19:7), objective (not subjective), and universal (for all persons everywhere—cf. Rom. 2:15).

The evidence for this objective moral law is found in:

(1) the universality of basic moral beliefs;
(2) the unavoidability of making moral judgments;
(3) the inescapability of there being a perfect standard by which we measure the imperfections in the world (we can't know injustice unless we know what is just);
(4) the impossibility of making judgments about the progress (or regress) of the human race unless there is an external objective moral standard by which we measure the human race;
(5) the fact that we make excuses for ourselves when we break the moral law;
(6) the moral guilt we suffer from breaking the moral law;

(7) the fact that the moral law, like the laws of mathematics, is discovered and not invented;
(8) the reality that we sometimes act from a sense of duty (e.g., to save a life), even when our strongest instinct to survive tells us not to risk our lives or safety to do so;
(9) the truth that we find some things in all cultures (like genocide or rape) that we perceive are wrong and evil;
(10) the fact that some things we do (such as kill, cheat, steal, or be disloyal), we do not want others to do to us.

Of course, humans have other abilities as well; one is the capacity to laugh (risibility). However, risibility flows from rationality, which gives us the ability to perceive the incongruous—which is at the heart of what is humorous.

Then, in addition, there is the ability to enjoy music and art, which also is only possible for rational beings. The inherent capacity to appreciate and savor beauty is a God-given part of human nature that is part of His universal revelation to all human beings.[73]

# CONCLUSION

Human beings are reducible neither to pure matter nor to pure spirit. They have two dimensions: body and soul. Nevertheless, these two aspects form one nature composed of form and matter, and they are a form/body unity, not an identity. The soul survives the dissolution of the body and is conscious, albeit incompletely (apart from the body), between death and resurrection.

In addition to being one in nature (soul/body) and two in dimension (inner and outer), human beings are three in direction: They have self-consciousness, world-consciousness, and God-consciousness. Only one of these dimensions—world-consciousness—is lost in the intermediate state between death and resurrection.[74] The resurrection will restore the wholeness and completeness of a human being as created by God—in unity.

The human person embodied in flesh possesses intellect, emotion, will, and conscience. That is, he or she is capable of thinking, feeling, and choosing, and also has the moral capacity to know right from wrong. As such, humans are morally responsible to the Moral Lawgiver—God, the Creator.

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CHAPTER THREE

# THE ORIGIN OF SIN

## GOD'S PERMISSION OF SIN

The origin of sin is a difficulty for any worldview, but it is a particularly acute problem for Christian theology. The three basic perspectives on evil bring the issue into focus: Atheism affirms evil but denies God; pantheism affirms God but denies evil; and theism affirms both God and evil, which appear to be incompatible. Herein lies the dilemma.[1]

To make the predicament worse, among those paradigms that, like theism, acknowledge both God and evil—deism, finite godism, and panentheism (process theology)—theism is the only one that maintains belief in an infinitely powerful God who can and does perform miracles.[2] Hence, according to theism, He alone could intervene and destroy evil, yet He has not and does not. We see, then, that theism faces the greatest difficulty: It posits a God who both could and should be able to prevent and/or destroy evil; however, evil is still with us. Why?

A further issue relates to the very origin of evil itself. According to theism, God is absolutely perfect, and He freely created the world; knowing that evil would arise, He made the world anyway. If God is perfect, and if the world He made is not eternal but was made perfect, from whence did evil come?

The response of theism consists in pointing out several basic facts. God cannot produce or promote evil; He can only permit it. Nevertheless, since He is all-powerful,[3] He can both defeat evil and also bring about a greater good when He allows it.

## God Cannot *Produce* Sin

God is absolutely perfect (cf. Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31; Ps. 18:30), and, as such, He cannot either perform or produce sin. Jesus declared, "Your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48).[4] An absolutely flawless Being cannot act in any way that is flawed; the world God made, and everything in it, was "very good" (Gen. 1:31).[5]

## God Cannot *Promote* Sin

Furthermore, God cannot encourage sin; He is completely holy and cannot endorse sin in any way.[6] The prophet wrote, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13). Indeed, God cannot entice us to sin: "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone" (James 1:13).

In the Lord's Prayer, the phrase "lead me not into temptation" doesn't imply that God does the tempting *unless* we ask Him not to do so. Indeed, it is a prayer that God *not allow* us to be led into temptation. He provides the deliverance from sin, as the phrase "deliver us from evil" affirms (Matt. 6:13 KJV).[7]

## God Can *Permit* Sin

Though He cannot produce or promote sin, God can and does permit it. In allowing sin to occur, He accomplishes His own higher purpose.[8] For example, God allowed Joseph's brothers, by selling him into slavery, to sin in order to save Israel and keep His promise to bring the Messiah through His chosen people to provide salvation for the world (Gen. 12:3). Joseph recognized this when he said to his brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

When parents allow a teenage driver to use the family car, they are permitting the potential for evil (calamity), but it is necessary to allow for the possibility of wrongdoing or accident for the greater good of the adolescent learning responsibility and driving skills. God, our heavenly Father, also gives us freedom —permitting the potential for us to produce evil—so that we can grow and learn

responsibility. When we choose wrongly and fail, we endure the consequences of our error; God uses our failures to strengthen us and to bring us from immaturity and incompleteness into spiritual adulthood. The writer of Hebrews saw this: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (12:11).

### God Can Produce a Greater Good by Allowing Sin

The apostle Paul realized that God permits evil to produce superior results:

> We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Rom. 5:3–5)

James had the same insight:

> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2–4)

## THE ORIGIN OF SIN BY CREATURES

According to Scripture, the origin of sin is found in free will.[9] God gave us the power of choice, which in itself is a good thing. Tragically, human beings misuse their God-given freedom.

### The Origin of Sin in Heaven by Angels

Actually, evil originated in heaven before it did on earth. Evil was born in the breast of an archangel in the presence of God. This is a tremendous mystery, but it is, nonetheless, the essence of Christian teaching on the source of evil.

#### *Lucifer's Sin*

The traditional name given to this archangel is taken from Isaiah 14:12:

> How art thou fallen from heaven, *O Lucifer*, son of the morning! … For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. (Isa. 14:12–14 KJV)

While most contemporary biblical scholars believe that this passage, in

context, refers to “the king of Babylon” (v. 4), the pride and fall of this man is an emulation of the choices of the first archangel, who rebelled against God by a similar but primeval hubris. Paul exhorted, “[An overseer] must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6).

*Other Angels Also Rebelled*

According to Revelation, other angels followed suit. A third of them rebelled with Lucifer and became demons (as he had become the devil). John wrote:

> Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.… The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev. 12:3–9)

Clearly, then, sin was in the universe before it was in the world; there was sin in heaven before there was sin on earth. This is made evident by the presence of the tempter (Satan) in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:1ff.).

## The Origin of Sin on Earth by Humans

The story of the sin of Adam and Eve is infamous. The perfect pair brought imperfection into their perfect paradise.

*The Origin of Evil: The Six Causes*

In order to enhance our understanding of the nature of human sin, an examination of the six types of causes will be helpful.[10] First set forth by Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) and later expanded by the scholastics,[11] the six causes are defined (and illustratively applied to the process of constructing a house) as follows:

- Efficient Cause—that *by which* something comes to be (the carpenter)
- Final Cause—that *for which* something comes to be (the dwelling in which to live)
- Formal Cause—that *of which* something comes to be (the house’s form or structure)
- Material Cause—that *out of which* something comes to be (the building materials)
- Exemplar Cause—that *after which* something comes to be (the blueprint)
- Instrumental Cause—that *through which* something comes to be (the

tools)

Applying these six causes to Adam and Eve's sin yields the following results:

- Efficient Cause—person (that *by which* sin came to be)
- Final Cause—pride (that *for which* sin came to be)
- Formal Cause—disobedience (that *of which* sin came to be)
- Material Cause—eating forbidden fruit (that *out of which* sin came to be)
- Exemplar Cause—none; it was the first human sin (that *after which* sin came to be)
- Instrumental Cause—power of free choice (that *through which* sin came to be)

# THE NATURE OF HUMAN FREE WILL

There are three basic logical possibilities regarding the nature of human free choice: determinism, indeterminism, and self-determinism.

*Determinism* is the view that all human actions are caused by another, not by one's self. *Hard* determinism does not allow for any free choice at all. *Soft* determinism posits free choice but sees it as completely controlled by God's sovereign power.

*Indeterminism* is the position that human actions are not caused by anything. They are simply indeterminate.

*Self-determinism* is the doctrine that human free actions are self-caused, that is, caused by one's self.[12]

**HUMAN FREE WILL: THREE VIEWS**

| | **Determinism** | **Indeterminism** | **Self-Determinism** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cause | Choices are caused by another | Choices are uncaused | Choices are caused by self |
| Model | Puppet | Erratic electron | Free agent |
| Contrary act | Could not do otherwise | Could have been otherwise | Could have been otherwise |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Illustration | Hard determinism: Being carried out (as against one's will) Soft determinism: Being forced out (as by a weapon) | Blown out (as by the wind) | Lured out (as by someone else) |
| Previous conditions | Causal | Non-causal | Non-causal |
| Future | Determined (like dominos) | Undetermined (like dice) | Determined by God, free for humankind (like foreseeing an accident) |
| All-Knowing Mind | Knows all future acts | Knows all except free acts | Knows all future acts |

# THE ORIGIN OF EARTHLY EVIL THROUGH HUMAN FREE WILL

Adam and Eve's disobedience raises significant questions about human free will. Were the original humans free? If so, of what did this freedom consist? Are we free in the same sense?[13] Is God free? If so, then why can't He sin? And if God is free but can't sin, then why can't we be free but not able to sin? In response to these queries, there are considerable theological differences. However, some answers do seem clear, and subsequently other solutions can be reasonably deduced from them.

### Adam's Freedom Involved Self-Determination

First of all, Adam *was* free in the sense that his act was self-determined. Indeed, God said, "*You are free*" (Gen. 2:16). When Adam chose to disobey, God held him accountable, asking, "Have *you* eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" (Gen. 3:11 NKJV). The emphasized words, as previously mentioned, specifically indicate a self-determined act on

Adam and Eve's part (cf. v. 13). *You* (your *self*) did it, God said.

Logically, there are only three possibilities. Either Adam's action was caused by another (which is determinism), was uncaused (which is indeterminism), or was caused by himself (which is self-determinism).

As for *determinism*, God did not cause Adam to sin, for, again, God can neither sin nor tempt anyone else to do so. Neither did Satan cause Adam to sin, for the tempter did only what his name implies, neither forcing him to do it nor doing it for him.

As for *indeterminism*, there was no evil (or lack of wholeness) in Adam's nature that gave rise to his sin, for he had none—God created him perfect.[14] And there are no uncaused actions', this would violate the principle of causality.

No event is without a cause, and there was nothing in heaven or on earth, outside of Adam, that caused his sin; *he must have caused it himself*; Adam's choice was *self-determined*. This is the heart of human freedom; namely, the ability to be the efficient cause of one's own moral actions.[15] Acts of which one is not the efficient cause, but rather which are forced, are not free moral acts.

### Adam's Freedom Involved a Choice Regarding Evil

Further, Adam's act involved a decision between good and evil, and it was free in that he was free to do evil. Had he not been free to opt for evil over good, he could not have done so. He had the power to obey or disobey—whichever he chose.

### Adam's Choice for Evil Could Have Been Avoided

In addition, evil was not inevitable for Adam. This is clear from the fact that God said Adam "should not" or "ought not" (cf. Gen. 2:17) to have sinned. *Ought* implies *can*—what one *should* do implies that he *is able* to do it. Furthermore, again, Adam's decision was something for which God held him responsible, punishing him for choosing wrongly. *There is no response-ability without the ability to respond*, and the consequences that followed the chosen evil indicate that it could have been avoided.

## THE NATURE OF GOD'S FREE WILL

The original humans were free to sin or not to sin. God is free, yet He *cannot* sin (Hab. 1:13; Heb. 6:18). Indeed, as we have seen, God cannot even be tempted to sin (James 1:13)—He is absolutely impervious to evil. How, then, can God be free if there is no possibility that He can choose wrongly?

The answer is that God is free in the sense of having the power of self-determination,[16] but not in the libertarian sense of having the ability to choose to do other than good.[17] While humans have the ability to choose either good or evil, God, in His very essence, *is* all-goodness,[18] and, therefore, He can only *do* good, being subject to His own nature.

## The Nature of Human Freedom in Heaven

It appears that regarding freedom and free will, the state of the perfected saints in heaven is similar to God's. While we are still in the world, human free choice involves not only self-determinism (to be the efficient cause of our own choices) but also the ability to do other than good (that is, evil). This sense of freedom, however, is only temporary; it is for the purpose of being tested:

> Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.… Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:2–4, 12)

This is the reason that, before heaven, humans are not both free *and* unable to sin. When the test is over—when our earthly race is run—*then* free choice becomes what it, from all eternity, is for God: the self-determined ability to choose only the good.

## Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom

It is important to note that heaven is not the *destruction* of true freedom but the *fulfillment* of it. On earth, we choose whether we want to do God's will or our own; once the choice is made, our destiny is sealed at death (Heb. 9:27). Then, if we have chosen God's will instead of our own, the freedom to do evil vanishes and we are free to do only the good. Since the freedom to do evil is also the freedom to destroy oneself, it is not perfect (complete) freedom. The essence of true freedom is self-determination; *true* freedom is the kind that God has (and, in eternity, believers will have), namely, the self-determined ability to choose only the good. Likewise, in hell,[19] evil persons no longer under the influence of

God's grace will be solidified in their will to do evil.

Heaven, then, is the *completion* of our freedom, not a *negation* of it. All true believers yearn to have the Lord's Prayer fulfilled: "Your will be done, [O God,] on earth as it is in heaven" and "lead us not into temptation" (see Matt. 6; Luke 11). Therefore, when God brings us to heaven, where this will be true, He will not have eliminated our freedom but instead fulfilled it. In summary, the loss of the ability to do evil is not an evil of any kind; it is, rather, a profound good.

The Christian concept of lifelong, monogamous marriage is an example of this. When a bride and groom pledge before God, for all time, "Forsaking all others, to you will I cling, until death do us part," they are making a free choice —to have, for life, intimate relations that they will share with no one else. In a way, it could be said that this limits their freedom, since they have now chosen, for the duration, to go in one direction and not in another. However, this decision does not *eradicate* their freedom; indeed, it is a *fulfillment* of their true God-given desire to have such a bond with one and only one person until heaven.

Likewise, in continuing the analogy, neither in marriage nor in heaven does the Lord give us "freedom" to break our vows; such would not be "freedom" at all but rather would bring the potential for (and reality of) evil (bondage to sin). We are free only to keep the covenant, as this is the greatest good both for us and for those to whom we pledge our love.

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO HUMAN FREE WILL

The difficulties that call for an answer in this context can be separated into several questions and responses.

### Objection One—Based on Causality

If every action needs an efficient cause—as the principle of causality demands—then who, or what, caused Adam to sin? Each of the possible answers seems to have shortcomings.

### Response to Objection One

We will scrutinize several potential responses to this objection.

*The Devil Did Not Make Adam Sin*

Since the time of Adam, people have used the widely popularized disclaimer "The devil made me do it." Some believers have been known to excuse their sin in this way, just as Adam blamed Eve, and Eve passed the buck to the evil one. But, as we have seen, Satan did not *make* Adam sin; he only *tempted* him. Adam was not forced but lured.[20] In the same way, the devil beguiled Judas to betray Christ: "The devil had already prompted[21] Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus" (John 13:2).

*God Did Not Make Adam Sin*

Likewise, God neither placed the desire in Adam's heart to disobey Him nor compelled him to sin.

Few venture intentionally or overtly into this arena, but some have a view of freedom that logically leads to it. If the sovereignty of God is truly as these people understand it—that is, if God is in direct sovereign *control* of all things, *including human choices*—then it would appear that God forced Adam to sin.

Indeed, following Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), some extreme Calvinists claim that free will is simply doing what we desire, and that *no one, ever*, desires to do *any* good unless God gives him the desire to do so. If this is the case, then it would seem that God is responsible for *all* human actions; no one can desire to do evil unless his evil nature gives him the desire to do it. But he could have done good if God had given him the desire.

Neither Lucifer nor Adam, before their respective falls, had an evil nature. From whence, then, the desire to sin? Even Edwards' defenders admit that this has not been solved within their theology. R. C. Sproul (b. 1939), for instance, calls this an "excruciating problem," adding: "One thing is absolutely unthinkable, that God could be the author or doer of sin."[22] Nonetheless, that is the apparent result of this determinist logic.

Therefore, this argument that God has kept all power in His own hands is fraught with serious implications. Most fundamentally, *determinism makes God responsible for evil*. Put bluntly, this means that when a murder occurs, it is God who is accountable for the death of the victim, and when an assault takes place, it is God who causes the attack.[23] Some ideas don't require refutation but, instead, simple clarification to see what doesn't hold up to scrutiny. God is absolutely good and, as such, He cannot do (or be responsible for) evil. Period.

*An Imperfect Nature in Adam Did Not Make Him Sin*

A second alternative is the argument that Adam was not perfect; his weak and imperfect nature caused him to sin.[24] However, here again, this is ultimately to lay blame at God's doorstep, since *weak* and *imperfect* would be how God made Adam. Unlike the previously addressed theories (both of which are determinist), the indeterminist blame is not direct but indirect; nonetheless, human sin would still be God's fault.

The Bible, by contrast, affirms that God made only good creatures. After almost every day of Creation Genesis says, "It was good" (1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25), and after the sixth day, "God saw *all* that he had made, and it was *very* good" (1:31). Solomon added, "This only have I found: God made mankind upright" (Eccl. 7:29). We are told explicitly that "every creature of God is good" (1 Tim. 4:4 KJV). Once again, an omnibenevolent (absolutely good) God cannot make an evil thing; only a perfect creature can come from the hands of a perfect Creator.[25]

*Adam Sinned by His Own Free Will*

The true answer is that Adam sinned by his own free choice.[26] The reasoning runs like this:

(1) One of the things God gave His good creatures was a good power called free will.
(2) Even *unbelievers* understand that freedom is good. What people march against freedom? One never sees a crowd carrying placards that say "Down With Liberty!" or "Back to Bondage!"
(3) Even if someone *did* speak against freedom, he would thereby be speaking *for* it, since he clearly values his freedom to express that idea.
(4) In short, free choice is an undeniable good.

Even so, the power of moral free choice entails the ability to either embrace God's designed good or to reject it—the latter is called evil. God revealed that freedom is good—so good, in fact, that He granted it to us—but freedom does make evil possible.[27] If God made free creatures, and if it is good for us to be free, then *the origin of evil is in the misuse of freedom*.

This is not difficult to comprehend. Most of us, for example, enjoy the freedom to drive a car, but many abuse this freedom and drive dangerously. We don't (and shouldn't) blame the government that licenses us to drive for all the

evil done with vehicles. Those whose reckless or malicious driving wounds or kills others are responsible for the results of their actions. Even though there is evil that results from misuse or malice, the government perceives that it is more beneficial to our society for its citizens to be able to utilize vehicles than it would be for us to have to walk everywhere, just as God has demonstrated that it is better for us to have the freedom to misuse our will than it would be for us not to have it at all.

While God is morally accountable for giving us the good thing called free will, He is not morally responsible for any evil we commit with our freedom. Again, Solomon said it succinctly: "God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes" (Eccl. 7:29). In brief, God made the *fact* of freedom; we are responsible for the *acts* of freedom. The fact of freedom is good, even though some of the acts of freedom are evil. God is the cause of the former, and we are the cause of the latter.

**Objection Two—Based on the Need for a Cause**

The "self-determination solution" leads to another problem: If every event has a cause, then what caused Adam to exercise his freedom to sin? Free choice is an action, and every action, even the action of free will, needs an efficient cause. Tracing sin back to free choice does not completely solve the overall issue; it raises another one.

**Response to Objection Two**

This objection is based upon misunderstanding.

*First*, admittedly, every event does have a cause; that is, every *effect* has a cause. However, not every *cause* has a cause. For example, every painting has a painter, but every painter is not painted. If *every* cause had a cause, then God could not be the first, uncaused Cause that He is. It is absurd to ask, "Who made God?" for this is the same as the question "Who made the unmade Maker?" Further pursuing "Who caused Adam to sin?" is like insisting that there must be an answer to the question "Who is the bachelor's wife?" A bachelor does not have a wife any more than an uncaused Being has a cause.[28] Likewise, if Adam's choice for evil (his wrong use of free will) is the first cause of human sin, then no other cause should be sought.

*Second*, this objection wrongly assumes a false disjunction—that an action

must be either uncaused or caused by someone other than one's self, since every event is either caused or uncaused (there apparently being no other logical alternatives). This is not the case, for there is a third option: An action may be either

(1) uncaused,
(2) caused by someone (or something) else, *or*
(3) caused by me.[29]

It is the third alternative that is meant by *freedom* or *free will*; a free act is a self-determined act. As we have seen and will continue to see, there is great reason to support the last view.

**Objection Three—Based on Alleged Logical Impossibility**

Again, the answer to the second objection leads to another question: If Adam's free will was the cause of his disobedience to God, then what was the cause of his free will? If every effect needs a cause, and if our free will is an effect, then free will needs a cause. Thus, the question "Who (or what) caused Adam to sin?" still remains.

**Response to Objection Three**

*First*, it must be noted, again, that this question confuses the *fact* of freedom with the *acts* of freedom. God is the cause of the former, but Adam was the cause of the latter. God created the person, Adam, and the power of free will that Adam had, but it was Adam who exercised that power for evil.

*Second*, there is an important distinction overlooked by this objection; namely, that distinction between the person and his powers. Free will is a power that was given to Adam, the person. Adam, that person, was the efficient cause of his disobedience to God; the power he used to do it was the power of free will granted to him. It is meaningful to ask *who the person was that used the power of free will*, but it is meaningless to ask *who caused the person to do it*. Adam, the person himself, was the cause of his disobedience by means of the power of free will, which God gave him and which he abused.

**Objection Four—Based on the Impossibility of Self-Causality**

This leads to another issue. If the person (Adam) was the cause of the action, then it was an action caused by his self (i.e., it was a self-caused action). Opponents of self-determination argue that to be self-caused is a contradiction in terms, for nothing can cause itself. We cannot lift ourselves by our own bootstraps. A cause is always prior to its effect (in being, even if not in time), and we cannot be prior to ourselves. Thus, it would seem to follow that a self-caused action is rationally absurd.

**Response to Objection Four**

Here again there is a confusion: A self-caused *being* is impossible, for the reason just given, but there is nothing contradictory about a self-caused *action*. Certainly we cannot exist before we exist or be before we are, but we can and must *be* before we can *do*—that is, we must exist before we can act. Self-caused actions, then, are not impossible; if they were, then even God, who cannot do what is impossible (cf. Heb. 6:18), would not have been able to create the world (for there was no one or nothing else, except Him, to cause the world to exist before it existed). If the *act* of Creation was not self-caused, then God could not have performed it.

Likewise, if self-caused actions are not possible, then neither is there an explanation for Lucifer's sin. A sinless, perfect God could not have caused Lucifer to sin, and since Lucifer was the first being to sin, his action must have been self-caused; otherwise he would never have been able (i.e., had the freedom) to sin. Consequently, it follows that self-caused *actions* are possible, even though a self-caused *being* is impossible.

Perhaps the reason it seems to some that self-caused actions are not possible is the term *self-caused* itself. It is clearer to speak, for example, of my actions as *caused by myself* (as opposed to caused by another), or, better yet, actions *caused by my self* (that is, by me). Speaking this way eliminates the ambiguity of language that gives rise to the false belief that a self-caused action is impossible.

# OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT FREEDOM AND EVIL

There are, of course, other questions about free will, such as, "In what sense,

if any, are human beings free after the Fall?" "Do we still retain freedom in the self-determined sense?" "How about in the libertarian sense?" These issues will be addressed in chapter 5.

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR ADAM'S FREE WILL

The origin of sin in a self-determined free choice of Adam (and Lucifer before him) has been a hallmark of Christian thought from the beginning. The following samples illustrate the point.[30]

### *Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)*

> God, wishing men and angels to follow His will, resolved to create them free to do righteousness. But if the word of God foretells that some angels and men shall certainly be punished, it did so because it foreknew that they would be unchangeably [wicked], but not because God created them so. (*DJ*, I.142)

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> This expression, "How often would I have gathered thy children together and thou wouldst not" [Matt. 23:37], set forth the ancient law of human liberty, because God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own soul to obey the behests of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [toward us] is present with Him continually. (*AH*, I.4.36.8)

### *Athenagoras (fl. second century)*

> Just as with men who have freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice (for you would not either honor the good or punish the bad; unless vice and virtue were in their own power, and some are diligent in the matters entrusted to them, and others faithless), so is it among the angels. (*PC*, II.24)

### *Theophilus (c. 130–190)*

> God made man free, and with power over himself.… God vouchsafes to him as a gift through His own philanthropy and pity, when men obey Him. For as man, disobeying, drew death on himself; so, obeying the will of God, he who desires is able to procure for himself life everlasting. (*TA*, II.27)

### *Tatian (120–173)*

> Our free-will has destroyed us; we who were free have become slaves; we have been sold through

sin. Nothing evil has been created by God; we ourselves have manifested wickedness; but we, who have manifested it, are able again to reject it. (*ATG*, II.11)

### *Bardesanes (c. 154–222)*

How is it that God did not so make us that we should not sin and incur condemnation? If man had been made so, he would not have belonged to himself but would have been the instrument of him that moved him.… And how, in that case, would a man differ from a harp, on which another plays; or from a ship, which another guides: where the praise and the blame reside in the hand of the performer or the steersman … they being only instruments made for the use of him in whom is the skill? (*E*, VII)

### *Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)*

We, who have heard by the Scriptures that self-determining choice and refusal have been given by the Lord to men, rest in the infallible criterion of faith, manifesting a willing Spirit, since we have chosen life and believe God through His voice. (*S*, II.2.4)

### *Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)*

I find, then, that man was by God constituted free, master of his own will and power; indicating the presence of God's image and likeness in him by nothing so well as by this constitution of his nature.… Therefore, both the goodness and purpose of God are discovered in the gift to man of freedom in his will. (*FBAM*, III.2.5)

### *Novatian (c. 200–c. 258)*

He also placed man at the head of the world, and man, too, made in the image of God, to whom He imparted mind, and reason, and foresight, that he might imitate God.… And when He had given him all things for his service, He willed that he alone should be free. And lest, again, an unbounded freedom should fall into peril, He laid down a command, in which man was taught that there was no evil in the fruit of the tree; but he was forewarned that evil would arise if perchance he should exercise his freewill in the contempt of the law that was given. (*CT*, V.1)

### *Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

"This also is clearly defined in the teaching of the church that every rational soul is possessed of free-will and volition" (*DP*, IV, preface). "There are, indeed, innumerable passages in the Scriptures which establish with exceeding clearness the existence of freedom of will" (ibid., IV.3.1).

### *Methodius (c. 260–311)*

"Now those who decide that man is not possessed of free-will, and affirm that he is governed by the unavoidable necessities of fate … are guilty of impiety toward God Himself, making Him out to be the cause and author of human

evils" (*BTV*, VI.8.16).

"I say that man was made with free-will, not as if there were already existing some evil, which he had the power of choosing if he wished … but that the power of obeying and disobeying God is the only cause" (*CFW*, 362).

*Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)*

> Know also that thou hast a soul self governed, the noblest work of God, made after the image of its Creator, immortal because of God that gives it immortality, a living being rational, imperishable, because of Him that bestowed these gifts: having free power to do what it willeth. (*CL*, II.VII.IV.18)

"The soul is self-governed: and though the Devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to thee the thought of fornication: if thou wilt, thou rejectest" (ibid., 21).

*Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395)*

"Being the image and the likeness … of the Power which rules all things, man kept also in the matter of a free-will this likeness to Him whose will is over all" (*OV*, II.V.12).

*Jerome (c. 340–420)*

> It is in vain that you misrepresent me and try to convince the ignorant that I condemn free-will. Let him who condemns it be himself condemned. We have been created endowed with free-will.… It is true that freedom of the will brings with it freedom of decision. Still man does not act immediately on his free-will but requires God's aid who Himself needs no aid. (*LSJ*, II.VI.133.10)

*John Chrysostom (347–407)*

"God, having placed good and evil in our power, has given us full freedom of choice; he does not keep back the unwilling, but embraces the willing" (*HG*, 19.1).

> All is in God's power, but so that our free-will is not lost.… It depends therefore on us and on Him. We must first choose the good, and then He adds what belongs to Him. He does not precede our willing, that our free-will may not suffer. But when we have chosen, then He affords us much help.… It is ours to choose beforehand and to will, but God's to perfect and bring to the end. (*HEH*, 12)[31]

*Early Augustine*[32] *(354–430)*

> "Free will, naturally assigned by the creator to our rational soul, is such a neutral power, as can either incline toward faith, or turn toward unbelief" (*OSL*, 58). "In fact, sin is so much a voluntary evil

that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary" (*OTR*, 14). "Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin" (*OGFW*, 3.49).

Augustine added,

> Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will, since this consideration also would have helped me, that justice holds guilty those sinning by evil will alone, although they may have been unable to accomplish what they willed. (*TSAM*, 10.12)
>
> Every one also who does a thing unwillingly is compelled, and every one who is compelled, if he does a thing, does it only unwillingly. It follows that he that is willing is free from compulsion, even if any one thinks himself compelled. (ibid., 10.14)

### *Anselm (1033–1109)*

> No one deserts uprightness except by willing to desert it. If "against one's will" means "unwillingly," then no one deserts uprightness against his will.… But a man cannot will against his will because he cannot will unwillingly to will. For everyone who wills, wills willingly. (*TFE*, 130)
>
> Although they [Adam and Eve] yielded themselves to sin, they could not abolish in themselves their natural freedom of choice. However, they could so affect their state that they were not able to use that freedom except by a different grace from that which they had before their fall. (ibid., 125)
>
> We ought not to say that they [Adam and Eve] had freedom for the purpose of receiving, from a giver, the uprightness which they didn't have, because we have to believe that they were created with upright wills—although we must not deny that they had freedom for receiving this same uprightness again, should they once desert it and were it returned to them by the one who originally gave it. (ibid., 126)
>
> Don't you see it follows from these considerations that no temptation can conquer an upright will? For if temptation can conquer the will, it has the power to conquer it, and conquers the will by its own power. But temptation cannot do this because the will can be overcome only by *its* own power. (ibid., 132)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> Necessity comes from the agent when the latter so coerces something that he cannot do the contrary. … Such necessity by coercion is contrary to the will. [Thus,] something cannot be absolutely coerced or violent and simultaneously voluntary.… Consequently man does not choose necessarily but freely. (in Clark, *AR*, 291–92)

Therefore, "man has free choice, otherwise counsels, exhortations, precepts, prohibitions, rewards, and punishment would all be pointless." Consequently, a free choice "leaves intact the power of being able to decide otherwise" (ibid., 259).

With the exception of the later Augustine, this view of self-determined free will was the virtually unanimous view of the Fathers up to the time of the Reformation, and with the exception of Calvin and Luther, it has continued to be the consistent view since the time of the Reformation.[33]

# CONCLUSION

The origin of evil is a problem for any worldview, but particularly so for theism, which must account for how evil arose in a universe where God and everything He made were perfectly good. The answer is found in one of God's good gifts: free will. While freedom is good in itself, it also allowed the potential for evil. Hence, free will made evil possible.

However, while God is responsible for the fact of freedom (which made evil *possible*), free creatures themselves (e.g., Lucifer and Adam) are responsible for their acts of freedom (which make evil *actual*). God gave them the power of choice, and instead of choosing to obey and follow the good, they disobeyed and exercised free choice for sin. Hence, evil arose from the free will of the good creatures that God made.

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CHAPTER FOUR

# THE NATURE OF SIN

The originally created conditions were perfect, and a perfect God can make nothing less than a perfect world.[1] Eventually, however, by a misuse of free will,[2] sin entered the world and vitiated God's perfect creation. There followed a state of human sinfulness—in which we now find ourselves—that is humanly irreparable. Our imperfection is best understood in light of the ultimate Standard of perfection, which is God Himself. The vivid contrast reveals a deplorable picture of human depravity.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

Sin is an ugly reality, especially as seen through God's eyes. In the famous Romans 3 passage (based on Psalm 14), Paul described man's total depravity, insisting,

> There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. (vv. 10–18)

A horrid image, to say the least.

## Two Basic Kinds of Sin

All sins can be placed into two broad categories: sins of commission and sins of omission. This means that some sins are doing what we should not do, and others are not doing what we should do.

*Sins of Commission*

Sins of commission, *doing* what we *should not* do, are described by the apostle John in this verse: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). The law of Moses was recorded in the Old Testament, and its basic moral principles are repeated in the New Testament.

*Sins of Omission*

Sins of omission are *not doing* what we *should* do. As James put it, "Anyone … who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17). Perhaps this latter category contains even more sins than the former.

## Seven Detestable Sins

God singled out seven particular sins He cannot abide:

> There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: [1] haughty eyes, [2] a lying tongue, [3] hands that shed innocent blood, [4] a heart that devises wicked schemes, [5] feet that are quick to rush into evil, [6] a false witness who pours out lies and [7] a man who stirs up dissension among brothers. (Prov. 6:16–19)

Simply stated, these are pride, deceit, murder, plotting evil, quickness to do wrong, false testimony, and troublemaking.

## The Chief Names for *Sin*

There are numerous biblical terms for *sin* in the Bible, many more than there are names for *good*. Each word adds to the overall picture of heinous action against a holy God.

*Sin*

The Hebrew word often translated *sin* is *chata*, meaning "to miss," "to forfeit," or "to lack." The use of *chata* in Psalm 51:4 captures the idea behind it. After committing adultery and planning a murder, David confessed to God: "Against you, You only, have I *sinned*, and done this evil in Your sight" (NKJV).

The basic Greek word for *sin* is *hamartia*, which means “to miss the mark” (“and so not share the prize”), “to err,” “to sin.” *Hamartia* is used in Romans 3:23: “For all have *sinned* and fall short of the glory of God.”

*Trespass*

The Hebrew root word for *trespass* is *maal*, which means “to cover up,” “to act covertly, that is, treacherously, grievously.” Numbers 31:16 declares: “Behold, these caused the children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit *trespass* against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the LORD” (KJV).

The Greek word for *trespass* is *paraptoma*, which means “to slip,” “to lapse,” “to fall,” “to stumble aside,” “to offend,” or “to sin.” Paul used *paraptoma* in Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a *sin*, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”

*Iniquity*

Another term for violating God’s law is *iniquity*. The basic Hebrew word is *avon*, which means “perversity,” “fault,” “iniquity.” In Isaiah (53:11) God declares: “My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their *iniquities*.”

The Greek word for *iniquity* is *adikia*, meaning “morally wrong,” “unjust,” “unrighteous.” James said, “The tongue also is a fire, a world of *evil* among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).

*Evil*

A common Hebrew word for *sin* is *ra*, which means “bad,” “harmful,” “wrong,” even “calamity.” For example, Isaiah spoke of the ability to “reject the wrong and choose the right” (Isa. 7:15).

Among the common Greek words for *evil* are *poneros*, meaning “evil in effect”—Jesus spoke of fallen human beings as *evil* (Matt. 7:11)—and *kakos*, denoting what is “evil in character.” Paul said, “When I want to do good, *evil* is right there with me” (Rom. 7:21). What the apostle meant is that there was a worthless, degenerate, depraved (evil) nature within him.

*Wickedness*

Another biblical term for *sin* is *wickedness*. In the Old Testament, *wickedness*

is often a translation of the Hebrew word *rasha*, which means "morally bad" or "ungodly." The psalmist said, "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the *wicked*" (Ps. 1:1). The New Testament Greek word *anomia* is also translated as *wickedness* (cf. Matt. 23:28; 24:12; Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:14).

## Other Terms for Sin

There are many other scriptural names and descriptions of evil. In portraying the pagan world, Paul lists at least *forty-one* different designations and characterizations of sin in Romans 1:

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the *godlessness* [1] and *wickedness* [2] of men who *suppress the truth* [3] by their wickedness.… For although they knew God, they *neither glorified him* [4] as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became *futile* [5] and their *foolish* [6] hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for *images* [7] made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the *sinful desires* [8] of their hearts to *sexual impurity* [9] for the *degrading* [10] of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a *lie* [11], and *worshiped and served created things* [12] rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to *shameful lusts* [13]. Even their women exchanged natural relations for *unnatural* [14] ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with *lust* [15] for one another. Men committed *indecent acts* [16] with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their *perversion* [17]. Furthermore, since they *did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God* [18], he gave them over to a *depraved mind* [19], to do *what ought not to be done* [20]. They have become filled with *every kind of wickedness* [21], *evil* [22], *greed* [23] and *depravity* [24]. They are full of *envy* [25], *murder* [26], *strife* [27], *deceit* [28] and *malice* [29]. They are *gossips* [30], *slanderers* [31], *God-haters* [32], *insolent* [33], *arrogant* [34] and *boastful* [35]; they invent ways of doing *evil* [36]; they *disobey their parents* [37]; they are *senseless* [38], *faithless* [39], *heartless* [40], *ruthless* [41]. (vv. 18–31)

A more succinct but equally dreadful list (of fifteen different depictions of sin) is found in "the works of the flesh" of Galatians 5:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: *sexual immorality* [1], *impurity* [2] and *debauchery* [3]; *idolatry* [4] and *witchcraft* [5]; *hatred* [6], *discord* [7], *jealousy* [8], *fits of rage* [9], *selfish ambition* [10], *dissensions* [11], *factions* [12] and *envy* [13]; *drunkenness* [14], *orgies* [15], and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (vv. 19–21)

## The Nature of Sin in Relation to God

As committed against God, sin is described in several ways. It is unbelief in Him, rebellion against Him, transgression against His law, and pride that exalts self above Him.

*Sin As Unbelief*

Paul bluntly declared, “Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). Thus, according to Jesus, “Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:18). And so, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6).

*Sin As Rebellion*

Samuel forthrightly affirmed, “Rebellion [is as] the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [is as] iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam. 15:23 KJV). Solomon added, “An evil man is bent only on rebellion” (Prov. 17:11). Nehemiah described Israel in these words: “They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery” (Neh. 9:17). God is King, and we, his subjects, have rebelled against His rule in our lives.

*Sin As Transgression*

As the Sovereign, God revealed inviolable guidelines by which His servants should live. However, Adam broke His law, as have all Adamites since. These transgressions are at the heart of sin; the Scriptures assert, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses,[3] even over them that had not sinned after the similitude [likeness] of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him [Jesus] that was to come” (Rom. 5:14 KJV). Indeed, “sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4 KJV). Again, even when David’s sin was clearly directed toward the wife and life of another, he nonetheless cried out to God in confession, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge” (Ps. 51:4).[4]

*Sin As Pride*

At the root of *all* sin is pride, which was the evil that prompted Lucifer’s rebellion against God. Thus Paul exhorted about elders: “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited [proud] and fall under the same judgment as the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). As the one who inspired the sin of the king of Tyre, Satan’s wickedness is emulated and described in these words: “Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor” (Ezek. 28:17). John lists pride as one of the three

basic sins, saying, “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16 KJV).[5]

**The Degrees of Sin**

Contrary to widely held opinion, not all sins are considered (by God) to be equal. Jesus said there were “*weightier matters* of the law” (Matt. 23:23 KJV), such as, for example, mercy and justice over tithing. He also declared our love for God to be a higher duty than our love for human beings, calling the former “the *first* and greatest commandment” (Matt. 22:38). He told Pilate that “the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a *greater sin*” (John 19:11).

The more severe eternal punishment for some is due to the heaviness of the sins they have committed (Rev. 20:12). John spoke of a sin so monstrous that God took the guilty person’s life (1 John 5:16). Paul said some were disciplined with death by God for partaking of the Lord’s table in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:29–30), indicating that this is a particularly substantial sin. Not only are some sins greater, there is also a “greatest” sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:32).[6]

**The Metaphysical Nature of Sin**

One of the difficulties regarding sin can be illustrated by the objection that if God created everything, and if sin is real, then God must have created sin. Since Christian theism denies the conclusion (that “God must have created sin”), it would seem necessary, then, for Christian theism to deny one or both of the two premises (that “God created everything” and that “sin is real”). However, we cannot deny that God created everything, since He alone existed before anything else did,[7] and everything else that exists He created.[8] As for the other premise, to deny that sin is real is to reduce it to a non-reality or illusion.[9] In short, to deny that God created everything is to admit materialism and reject theism, and to deny that sin exists (as a reality) is to reject theism and accept pantheism. Therefore, how can the conclusion (that “God must have created sin”) be incorrect?

Unsolvable as the dilemma seems, Christian theism gives a forthright answer. God *did* create every *thing* (substance), but sin is not a thing or substance: *Sin is a privation or lack in a good substance*, a distortion of something pure. Evil is

an ontological parasite—*it exists only in something good, as a corruption of its goodness*. For example, evil is like rot to a tree or rust to a car; both rot and rust corrupt the good substance (tree or car), but neither rot nor rust exists *in and of itself*.[10]

# THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

From a theological standpoint, *sin is anything that falls short of God's perfect moral nature*. Paul wrote that "*all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). God said, "I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy" (Lev. 11:45). It is plain, then, that the ultimate objective standard is God's absolute moral perfection, and anything that falls short of it is sin.

As previously established, God possesses both nonmoral (metaphysical) and moral attributes.[11] The moral attributes are the final standard for what is right and wrong. Since God has at least six basic moral attributes—holiness, justice, perfection, jealousy, goodness (love), and truthfulness—a brief description of each is necessary so that it is clear what sin is and how it falls short of God's ultimate objective standard, which is His own moral nature.

## God Is Holy

The biblical Hebrew words for *holy* are *godesh*, meaning "apartness" or "sacredness," and *gadosh*, which is translated "sacred" or "holy." The Greek word *hosios* means "righteous," "holy," or "pious." In the moral sense, that God is holy means He is totally and utterly set apart from all evil. His holiness is associated with His jealousy (Josh. 24:19), His exaltation (Ps. 99:9), His righteousness (Isa. 5:16; Luke 1:75), His almightiness (omnipotence—Rev. 4:8), His absolute uniqueness (Ex. 15:11), His moral purity (2 Cor. 7:1), and His being vexed by evil (Ps. 78:41).

God is holy by His very nature. Exodus 15:11 inquires: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" In Leviticus 11:44–45 God affirms:

> I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because *I am holy*.… I am the LORD

who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because *I am holy*.

In Joshua 24:19 the people were told, "You are not able to serve the LORD. *He is a holy God*; he is a jealous God." First Samuel 2:2 confirms that "*there is no one holy like the* LORD; *there is no one besides you [God]; there is no Rock like our God*." First Samuel 6:20 adds, "*Who can stand in the presence of the* LORD, *this holy God*?" Psalm 78:41 laments that "again and again they put God to the test; *they vexed the Holy One of Israel*."

Numerous biblical passages speak of God as "*the Holy One*."[12] Isaiah the prophet said, "The LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and *the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness*" (Isa. 5:16). Paul exhorts:

> Since we have these promises, dear friends, *let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God*. (2 Cor. 7:1)

John informs us:

> Each of the four living creatures [around God's throne] had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come*" (Rev. 4:8).

In addition to direct biblical references to God as holy, *the Godhead has a Holy Spirit*,[13] *God has a holy Name*,[14] *God makes the ground (where He stands) holy* (Ex. 3:5), and *God has holy ways* (Ps. 77:13).

*God takes an unchangeable oath by His holiness* (Ps. 89:35), *God has a holy arm* (1 Chron. 6:35; Isa. 52:10), *God sits on a holy throne* (Ps. 47:8), *God's throne is on a holy mountain* (Ezek. 28:14), *God has holy angels*,[15] and *God has a holy place* (heaven) where He dwells.[16]

## Sin Is Being Unholy

If God's moral nature is the ultimate standard for what is right, and if God is absolutely holy, then it follows that *sin is being unholy*. Indeed, the Bible uses this very term of sin; for example, Paul said, "We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious" (1 Tim. 1:9). Again,

> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a

form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. (2 Tim. 3:2–5)

## God Is Just (Righteous)

To be righteous means "to be just" or "right." Used of God, *righteous* refers to the intrinsic characteristic wherein He is absolutely just or right and is the ultimate standard of justice and rightness.

The biblical basis for God's righteousness is found in the many ways the words (Heb: *tsadaqah*, and Gk: *dikaioo, diakaiosune*) are used.

*First*, righteousness involves God's true ordinances (Ps. 19:9): "The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous."

*Second*, righteousness is the basis of God's throne (Ps. 89:14): "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."

*Third*, righteousness is the royal power of God's domain (Heb. 1:8): "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."

*Fourth*, righteousness does no injustice (Zeph. 3:5): "The LORD… is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail."

*Fifth*, righteousness will always remain (2 Cor. 9:9): "As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.' "

*Sixth*, righteousness is the ultimate standard of judgment (Acts 17:31): "He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed."

*Seventh*, righteousness renders to all in keeping with their deeds (Rom. 2:6): God "will give to each person according to what he has done."

*Eighth*, righteousness is the basis for the believer's rewards (2 Tim. 4:8): "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

*Ninth*, and finally, righteousness is revealed in the law of God (Rom. 10:5): "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: 'The man who does these things will live by them.' "

## Sin Is Unrighteousness (Injustice)

While righteousness is a moral attribute of God, righteousness is also one of His communicable characteristics and can be possessed by His creatures. Hence, righteousness is something that we should be *instructed in* (2 Tim. 3:17); that we should *seek* (Matt. 6:33); that we should *pursue* (2 Tim. 2:2); that we should *thirst after* (Matt. 5:6); that we should *suffer for* (1 Peter 3:14; 2 Tim. 3:12); that we should *submit to* (Rom. 10:3); that we should *be slaves of* (Rom. 6:18); and that we should *practice* (1 John 3:7).

*Insofar as human beings fall short of God's righteousness* (*justice*), *they are in sin*. Paul wrote of his Jewish brethren, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3). In fact, the Bible describes sin as "unrighteousness" itself, saying, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts" (Isa. 55:7 KJV). Paul adds,

> Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9–10 KJV)

This list explicitly spells out what God by His very nature regards as unrighteousness: that which falls short of His absolute Tightness.

## God Is Perfect

God is absolutely morally perfect—impeccable. This flawless excellence of God is expressed by several Hebrew words for our English word *perfect: tamim*, meaning "complete," "sound," "blameless," "perfect," "without blemish"; *shalem*, which means "complete," "safe," "blameless"; *tam*, which is rendered "complete," "blameless," "perfect;" *omen*, translated "perfect" and "faithful"; *kalil*, meaning "entire," "whole," "perfect"; and *taman*, which is expressed by words like *complete*, *finished*, and *blameless*.

The Greek words for *perfect* are *teleios*, which means "complete," "perfect," "mature"; *teleioo*, which bears the idea of "bringing to an end," "completing," "perfecting"; *teleiotes*, a kindred concept that can be rendered "completeness" and "perfection"; and *katartizo*, which means "to complete," "to perfect," "to prepare."

God is perfect in every way (Deut. 32:4; 2 Sam. 22:31). "Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is *perfect in knowledge*?" (Job 37:16). "*The law of the* LORD *is perfect*, reviving the soul" (Ps. 19:7). "*The*

LORD *will fulfill his purpose for me [that is, "will perfect" me]*; your love, O LORD, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands" (Ps. 138:8). "O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for *in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things*, things planned long ago" (Isa. 25:1).

"Be perfect, therefore, as *your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48). "Then you will be able to test and approve what [is] *God's* … good, pleasing and *perfect will*" (Rom. 12:2). "*When perfection comes*, the imperfect disappears" (1 Cor. 13:10). "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone *perfect in Christ*" (Col. 1:28). "*Every good and perfect gift* is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17). "The man who looks intently into the *perfect law* that gives freedom … will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). "There is no fear in love. But *perfect love* drives out fear" (1 John 4:18).

**Sin Is Moral Imperfection**

Since God's moral nature is the standard of perfection, it follows that *whatever is imperfect is sinful by nature*. Thus, the Bible exhorts believers to perfection (Matt. 5:48) by following His perfect will (Rom. 12:2): "Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity [perfection]" (Heb. 6:1). In addition, we are to "*stand perfect and complete* in all the will of God" (Col. 4:12 KJV). In short, imperfect thoughts, intentions, or actions are sinful, and the flawless standard of the Holy One's absolute perfection clearly cannot be achieved by human flesh but only by the enabling of God (Phil. 2:13).[17] Humans are totally depraved.

**God Is Jealous**

As mentioned in Volume 2, many are surprised that one of God's attributes is jealousy; however, His Word lists it as an essential characteristic, even declaring that it is part of His "name" (Ex. 34:14). God is jealous for what rightly belongs to Him, which is everything that He created.

The biblical Hebrew word for *jealous* (*kannaw*) means "to be desirous of," "to be zealous about," "to be excited to anger over," "to execute judgment because of." The primary Greek term (*zeloo*) means "to have strong affection

toward," "to be ardently devoted to," "to desire earnestly," "to be fervent." God's jealousy is never wrong because He is never jealous about something that doesn't belong to Him (Ps. 24:1).[18]

God's jealousy connotes *anger* (Deut. 29:20), *fury* (Zech. 8:2), and *wrath* (Isa. 42:13); His jealousy is carried out against sin, a violation of His perfect nature. The Bible describes God's passionate opposition to idols (1 Cor. 10:19–22), images (Ps. 78:58), other gods (Deut. 32:16), and other sins (1 Kings 14:22). God is jealous for His holy name (Ezek. 39:25), His holy people (Zech. 8:2), His holy land (Joel 2:18), and His holy city (Zech. 1:14). Foremost is God's jealousy for His holy nature, His uniqueness:

(1) God is unique and supreme.
(2) God is holy, loving, and morally perfect.
(3) Thus, God is uniquely and supremely holy, loving, and morally perfect.
(4) Whatever is supremely holy, loving, and perfect is to be preserved with the utmost zeal.
(5) God's jealousy is His zeal to preserve His own holy supremacy.
(6) Therefore, God is eminently justified in His jealousy (cf. Ex. 34:14).

**Sin Is the Absence of Godly Jealousy and the Presence of Ungodly Jealousy (Envy)**

In regard to humans, Scripture speaks of both righteous and unrighteous jealousy; we are to embrace the first and reject the second. Right jealousy is valuing and preserving what belongs to us, while wrong jealousy is being possessive of and demanding what does not belong to us. It is sinful for us not to guard and protect what God has entrusted to us; it is likewise sinful for us to be envious or covetous of what He has not given us.

Jealousy, then, is not an inherent evil. God is jealous for what is right, true, and unchanging—as we should be. For instance, Paul was zealously impassioned for the church: "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him" (2 Cor. 11:2). In the same way, because it is God who ordains marriage, a husband and wife belong to each other (cf. Num. 5:14; 1 Cor. 7:4) and are rightly jealous to protect their love.

**God Is Love**

The Bible says that "God *is* love" (1 John 4:16). If love is defined as "that which wills the good of its object," then God is good. Indeed, He *is* goodness itself; God, truly, is *all-good* (or "omnibenevolent"). Biblically, the basic Hebrew term for "love" (*chesed*), used of God, means "lovingkindness" or "tender lovingkindness." The Greek word *agape*, used of God's love, means "selfless" or "sacrificial" love.

"The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: '*I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness*' " (Jer. 31:3). "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, *he will quiet you with his love*, he will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17). "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). "*God has poured out his love into our hearts* by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Rom. 5:5). "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).

"*Because of his great love for us*, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ" (Eph. 2:4–5). "[*I want you*] *to know this love that surpasses knowledge*—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:19). "Live a life of love, just as *Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*" (Eph. 5:2). "*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us*, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1). "*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us*. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16).

Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*. This is how *God showed his love* among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that *he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*. (1 John 4:7–10)

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.… And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But *the greatest of these is love*. (1 Cor. 13:4–8, 13)

## Sin Is Being Unloving

*If God, our ultimate moral standard, is love, then to be unloving is sin.* Indeed, Jesus said that love is the greatest moral good (Matt. 22:37), and He added, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute

you" (Matt. 5:43–44). The law said, "Do not hate your brother in your heart" (Lev. 19:17). Those who do not love their fellow believers do not love God, because "if anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

## God Is Truth

The Hebrew word for *truth* (*emeth*) means "firm," "stable," "faithful," "reliable," "correct." The Greek word for *truth* (*aletheia*) means "truthful," "dependable," "upright," "real." *Truth*, as taught in Scripture, means "that which, because it corresponds to reality (the facts, the original), is reliable, faithful, and stable." Used of words, truth is telling it like it is. True statements are those that correspond to reality, and hence are dependable.[19]

By contrast, falsehood is telling it like it is not (1 John 2:21), and therefore is not reliable. False expressions do not correspond to reality. The devil is the father of all lies (John 8:44); God, on the other hand, cannot lie (2 Cor. 1:18; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18), and His Word cannot pass away (Mark 13:31; cf. Ps. 117:2).

God by His very nature is truthfulness. Creatures *have* truth, but God *is* truth: "[He is] … *a God of truth*" (Deut. 32:4 KJV). "*God is not a man, that he should lie*, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" (Num. 23:19). "Redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth" (Ps. 31:5). "The word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does" (Ps. 33:4). "*I am* the way and *the truth* and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). "*The Spirit of truth* … will testify about me" (John 15:26).

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and *true God*" (1 Thess. 1:9). "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (Heb. 6:18). "This is how we recognize *the Spirit of truth* and the spirit of falsehood" (1 John 4:6). Because God is truthful, we can trust His promises (Ps. 89:35), we can be assured of our salvation (2 Tim. 2:13), we are protected (Ps. 91:4), we are saved (Eph. 1:13), we are sanctified (2 Thess. 2:13), we are liberated (John 8:32), and we are established forever (Ps. 117:2).

## Sin Is Being Untruthful

Again, *if God's nature as truth is the ultimate standard of righteousness, then to be untruthful is sin*. Thus, the Bible exhorts us to always speak the truth (Eph. 4:25), to walk in His truth (Ps. 86:11), to serve Him in truth (1 Sam. 12:24), to diligently study His truth (2 Tim. 2:15; John 17:17), to worship Him in truth (John. 4:24), and to pray to be led in truth (Ps. 25:5).

Lying is sinful and is pointedly forbidden in the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not bear false witness" (Ex. 20:16 KJV).[20] The Bible commands us, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices" (Col. 3:9). Liars eventuate in eternal judgment: "Those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and *all liars*—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur" (Rev. 21:8).

# AN OBJECTION TO THE DOCTRINE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

There is a significant objection to this doctrine of human sinfulness: It is alleged that such a high and lofty standard is impossible for human beings to attain.

### The Objection Stated—Avoiding Sin Appears to Be Impossible

In the light of God's absolute standard of perfection, it is argued that it is irrational to demand that mortal human beings comply. In effect, God is commanding the impossible and then blaming humans for not being able to measure up.

### A Response to the Objection

In the first place, Adam *was* created with the ability to adhere to this standard of absolute perfection by his divine endowment of original righteousness.[21] As previously established, he was not tempted on ordinary moral matters but rather on whether he would obey God because God said that he must.[22] Before the Fall, then, humans *were* capable, in and of themselves, of living up to God's absolute standard of moral perfection. If they had *not* been given this ability, God could

be charged with making imperfect creatures.[23]

Further, even after the Fall, God could not have lowered or diminished the ultimate moral standard—His very nature, which He cannot change (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). Being holiness itself, He cannot even look on sin (Hab. 1:13), and as it violates His very essence and thus the essence of reality and truth, sin absolutely cannot go unnoticed or unpunished before Him.

How, then, is it fair or just for God to demand of us, in our sinful state, what is impossible? The answer lies in His enabling grace. It *is* impossible for us to please God *in our sinful flesh*. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6), and "he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:5). Paul declared, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but *I cannot carry it out*" (Rom. 7:18). Indeed, Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 NKJV).

What we cannot do in our own strength, though, we *can* do by the Lord's grace: "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). Paul said, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13).

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

Consequently, *even in our fallen state* it is possible to live a holy life—which is developed in us when we accept the enabling and saving grace of God. God never commands what is actually impossible; to suggest otherwise is to attribute irrationality to the ultimate Source of rationality itself. As we have seen, *ought* implies *can*—and we *can*, not in our own strength but by His grace.[24]

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF HUMAN SINFULNESS

Throughout the history of the Christian church, its great teachers have affirmed the awful nature of human sin in contrast to God's wondrous perfection. The following citations illustrate the unity and continuity of their conviction regarding human depravity, stressing its nature as based upon free action, and its corruption (or privation) of the perfect good that God created.

## Early Fathers

The biblical teaching on the nature of sin was carried on in the writings of the early Fathers.

### *Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)*

> Man directs the voluntary motions of his own actions. And thus there are some things which have been created for this end, that in their services they should be subject to necessity, and should be unable to do aught else than what has been assigned to them; and when they have accomplished this service, the Creator of all things, who … arranged them according to His will, preserves them. But there are other things, in which there is a power of will, and which have a free choice of doing what they will. These, as I have said, do not remain always in that order in which they were created, but according as their will leads them, and the judgment of their mind inclines them, they effect either good or evil; and therefore He hath proposed rewards to those who do well, and penalties to those who do evil. (*ROC* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, VIII.3.24)
>
> Some things, as we have said, He [God] has so willed to be, that they cannot be otherwise than as they are ordained by Him; and to these He has assigned neither rewards nor punishments; but those which He has willed to be so that they have it in their power to do what they will, He has assigned to them according to their actions and their wills, to earn either rewards or punishments. Since, therefore, as I have informed you, all things that are moved are divided into two parts, according to the distinction that I formerly stated, everything that God wills is, and everything that He wills not is not. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.3.25)
>
> You will meet me by saying, "Even if it has come to this through freedom of will, was the Creator ignorant that those whom He created would fall away into evil? He ought therefore not to have created those who, He foresaw, would deviate from the path of righteousness."
>
> Now we tell those who ask such questions that the purpose of assertions of the sort made by us is to show why the wickedness of those who as yet were not [created], did not prevail over the goodness of the Creator. For if, wishing to fill up the number and measure of His creation, He had been afraid of the wickedness of those who were to be, and like one who could find no other way of remedy and cure, except only this, that He should refrain from His purpose of creating, lest the wickedness of those who were to be should be ascribed to Him; what else would this show but unworthy suffering and unseemly feebleness on the part of the Creator, who should so fear the actings of those who as yet were not [created], that He refrained from His purposed creation? (*ROC* in ibid.)
>
> By the freedom of the will, every man, while he is unbelieving in regard to things to come, by evil deeds runs into evils. And these are the things in the world which seem to be done contrary to order, which owe their existence to unbelief. Therefore the dispensation of divine providence is [in addition] to be admired, which [was granted] to those men in the beginning, walking in the good way of life, to enjoy incorruptible good things; but when they sinned, they gave birth to evil by sin. (*ROC* in ibid., VIII.8.51)

### *Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)*

> Behold, [the heretics] say, how He acknowledges Himself to be the creator of evil in the passage "It is I who create evil" [Isa. 45:7]. They take a word whose one form reduces to confusion and ambiguity two kinds of evils (because both sins and punishments are called *evils*), and will have Him in every

passage to be understood as the creator of all evil things, in order that He may be designated the author of evil.

We, on the contrary, distinguish between the two meanings of the word in question, and, by separating evils of sin from penal evils, *mala culpae* from *mala poenae*, confine to each of the two classes its own author—the devil as the author of the sinful evils (*culpae*), and God as the creator of penal evils (*poenae*); so that the one class shall be accounted as morally bad, and the other be classed as the operations of justice passing penal sentences against the evils of sin. Of the latter class of evils which are compatible with justice, God is therefore avowedly the creator. (*FBAM* in ibid., III.2.2.2.14)

## Medieval Fathers

Beginning with Augustine and concluding with Thomas Aquinas, the great theologians of the Middle Ages stressed the same themes of the nature of evil as a privation of the good natures God had made brought about by granting free will to His creatures.

### *Augustine (354–430)*

That the whole human race has been condemned in its first origin, this life itself, if life it is to be called, bears witness by the host of cruel ills with which it is filled. Is not this proved by the profound and dreadful ignorance which produces all the errors that enfold the children of Adam, and from which no man can be delivered without toil, pain, and fear? Is it not proved by [man's] love of so many vain and hurtful things, which produces gnawing cares, disquiet, griefs, fears, wild joys, quarrels, lawsuits, wars, treasons, angers, hatreds, deceit, flattery, fraud, theft, robbery, perfidy, pride, ambition, envy, murders, parricides, cruelty, ferocity, wickedness, luxury, insolence, impudence, shamelessness, fornications, adulteries, incests, and the numberless uncleannesses and unnatural acts of both sexes? (*C*, 22.22)

Neither are we to suppose that because sin shall have no power to delight … [that] free will must be withdrawn. It will, on the contrary, be all the more truly free, because [they will be] set free from delight in sinning to take unfailing delight [in God's goodness] in not sinning. For the first freedom of will which man received when he was created upright consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin; whereas this last freedom of will shall be superior, inasmuch as it shall not be able to sin.[25] This, indeed, shall not be a natural ability, but the gift of God. For it is one thing to be God, [and it is] another thing to be a partaker of God. God by nature cannot sin, but the partaker of God receives this inability from God. (*CG*, XXII, 30)

Our first parents fell into open disobedience because already they were secretly corrupted; for the evil act [would] never [have] been done had not an evil will preceded it. And what is the origin of our evil will but pride? For "pride is the beginning of sin" (*C*, 14.13).

The will which cleaves to the unchangeable good that is common to all, obtains man's first and best good things though it is itself only an intermediate good. But the will which turns from the unchangeable and common good and turns to its own private good or to anything exterior or inferior, sins. (*OFW*, 2.53)

What cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing? Either it is a will, in which case we have not got beyond the root of evil will, or it is not a will, and in that case there is no sin in it. Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin. (ibid., 3.49)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

"The absence of good, taken in a privative [negative] sense, is an evil; as, for instance, the privation of sight is called blindness" (*ST*, 48.3).

> Evil … is the privation of good, which chiefly and of itself consists in perfection and act. Act, however, is twofold; first, and second. The first act is the form and integrity of a thing; the second act is its operation. Therefore evil also is twofold. In one way it occurs by the subtraction of the form, or of any part required for the integrity of the thing, as blindness is an evil, as also it is an evil to be wanting in any member of the body. (ibid., 48.4)

## The Reformation Leaders

While the Reformers stressed the extent and depth of human depravity, as well as its absolute irredeemability apart from God's grace, the roots for their emphases were taken from the great medieval teachers before them, particularly Augustine.

### *Martin Luther (1483–1546)*

> No suffering in a man's experience, be it never so severe, can be the greatest of the evils that are within him. So many more and far greater evils are there within him than any that he feels. And if he were to feel those, he would feel the pains of hell, for he holds a hell within himself. Do you ask how this can be? The Prophet says, "All men are liars"; and again, "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity." But to be a liar and vanity is to be without truth and reality; and to be without truth and reality is to be without God and to be nothing; and this is to be in hell and damned. Therefore, when God in His mercy chastens us, He reveals to us and lays upon us only the lighter evils; for if He were to lead us to the full knowledge of our evil, we should straightway perish. (*WL*, I.115)

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

> Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh. This corruption is repeatedly designated by Paul by the term sin (Gal. 5:19), while the works which proceed from it, such as adultery, fornication, theft, hatred, murder, revellings, he terms, in the same way, the fruits of sin, though in various passages of Scripture, and even by Paul himself, they are also termed sins. (*ICR*, II.1.8)

### *Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560)*

> It is very necessary to recognize that sin is not caused by God. God has no pleasure in it, does not will it, and does nothing to effect it; he neither compels nor drives anyone to sin. On the contrary, he is an earnest enemy and punisher of sin. Man's will and the devil's will are the sources of sin! First the devils and then men themselves, of their own free wills, unforced by God, departed from God and fell into sin. (*OCD*, 45)

### Post-Reformation Teachers

The results of the teaching of the Reformation continue on into the contemporary world, stressing the heinous nature of sin, resulting from the misuse of Adamic freedom, which polluted the bloodstream of all humankind.

#### *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

> The effects of sin upon our first parents themselves, were, (1) Shame, a sense of degradation and pollution. (2) Dread of the displeasure of God; or, a sense of guilt, and the consequent desire to hide from his presence. These effects were unavoidable. They prove the loss not only of innocence but of original righteousness, and with it of the favour and fellowship of God. The state therefore to which Adam was reduced by his disobedience, so far as his subjective condition is concerned, was analogous to that of the fallen angels. He was entirely and absolutely ruined. It is said that no man becomes thoroughly depraved by one transgression. In one sense this is true. But one transgression by incurring the wrath and curse of God and the loss of fellowship with Him, as effectually involves spiritual death, as one perforation of the heart causes the death of the body; or one puncture of the eyes involves us in perpetual darkness. (*ST*, II.VII)

#### *William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)*

> The tendency to sin implies that the origination or self-determining power has been inwardly exerted, though it may not have been externally. A *tendency* to sin is an inclination to sin. It is a propensity of the heart, and a disposition of the will. The possibility of sinning is innocent; the tendency to sin is sinful. (*DT*, II.IV.150n)

#### *Millard Erickson (b. 1932)*

> Our sinful nature does not only affect us as individuals, but it affects our relationships as well. We become competitive, and want someone else's car, wife or husband, or house. We get to the point where we cannot empathize with others because the only thing we are concerned about is ourselves. We reject authority, because we must be free to do what we want to do. We become unable to love others, because if all we are is self-seeking, then even helping someone else out should only be done for the sake of making us look good. (*CT*, 615–19)

## CONCLUSION

The originally created conditions for and in humankind, designed by God, were perfect. However, by an illicit usage of free choice,[26] sin made its entrance into the world, leaving a ghastly marring of God's unblemished creation. The subsequent state of human sinfulness left Adam's race *humanly* (but not

*divinely*) irreparable. When this fallen condition is viewed in the light of God's absolutely perfect nature—the ultimate standard of purity and holiness—the stark contrast reveals a horrible picture of human depravity.

Human beings are totally depraved; that is, sin extends to every part of human nature, including body and soul, mind, will, and emotion. No facet of our being is immune to sin's pervasive influence. However, while total depravity is extensive, extending to every part of a human being, nonetheless, it is not intensive, for it does not destroy a person's humanness. If it did, he would not be able to think, feel, or choose; without rational and volitional capability, a person would not be able to sin.

Fallen human beings are clearly in the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), an image effaced but not erased by sin. While humans are totally incapable of initiating or attaining salvation on their own, they are cabable of rejecting it (John 3:18, 36; cf. Rom. 1:18). *And*, as we will see, they are capable, under the pervasive influence of the Holy Spirit, of accepting the gospel and being saved.[27]

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CHAPTER FIVE

# THE EFFECTS OF SIN

## THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ADAM AND EVE

God created the first human beings in a state of perfection (see chapter 1). One of the perfections God gave was the power of free choice (see chapter 2). Adam and Eve exercised this freedom to disobey God (see chapter 3). What followed this wrong use of free will was a state of human sinfulness that we cannot reverse (see chapter 4).

As we shall see here in chapter 5, the disobedience of the original humans brought death into the world. There are three kinds of death: spiritual, physical, and eternal. Adam and Eve died *spiritually* the moment they sinned. They also began to die *physically* that very day.[1] Had Adam and Eve not accepted God's provision of salvation,[2] they would have eventually died *eternally*, which would have meant everlasting separation from God.[3]

### Spiritual Death

Death is separation from God, and spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. Isaiah said, "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). The instant Adam sinned, he experienced spiritual isolation from God; this is evidenced by his shame and his hiding from his Creator.

> Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and *they realized they were naked*; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *they hid from the* LORD *God* among the trees of the garden. (Gen. 3:7–8)

Every descendant of Adam—every person born of natural parents since the Fall—is spiritually dead as well.

> As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.… [We who are saved have been] made … alive with Christ even when we were *dead in transgressions*—it is by grace you have been saved. (Eph. 2:1, 5)

Thus, Jesus said to Nicodemus,

> I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.… No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again" (John 3:3, 5–7).

The new birth of which Jesus speaks is the act of *regeneration*, whereby God imparts spiritual life to the believer's soul (1 Peter 1:23). Paul says of this,

> He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5–7)

*Without this regeneration, every human being is spiritually dead in sin.*

## Physical Death

After creating Adam, "the LORD God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it *you will surely die*' " (Gen. 2:16–17). The very moment Adam partook of the forbidden fruit, he began to die physically, despite the lie of Satan that "you will not surely die" (Gen 3:4).[4]

Physical death is the inevitable result of Adam's sin not only for himself but for *all* of his natural descendants (except Christ):[5]

> Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned [in Adam] … death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come [Jesus]. (Rom. 5:12, 14)

### Eternal Death

Had Adam not accepted God's provision of salvation (Gen. 3:15–24), he would have eventually experienced "the second death," which is eternal separation from God.[6] John wrote of this, saying, "The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name [is] not found written in the book of life, he [will be] thrown into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14–15). Those who are born only once (physically) will die twice (physically *and* eternally);[7] however, those who are born twice (physically *and* spiritually) will die only once (physically). Jesus said, "Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:26).

## THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ADAM'S DESCENDANTS

Adam's sin affected not only himself but also all of his offspring—all of us have sinned "through one man" (Rom. 5:12). All of Adam's descendants were present in him *potentially, seminally*,[8] and/or *legally* (*judicially*), since as the head of the race he was our legal representative (Rom. 5:18–21).

### The Judicial (Legal) Effects of Adam's Sin

As our legal representative,[9] Adam sinned on our behalf, and we received the legal consequences of his choice. In other words, *Adam had the God-given power of attorney for the whole human race*, and when he exercised it for ill, the consequences of his sin were directly imputed[10] to all of his posterity—which is all of us. Paul says,

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass [Adam's sin] was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness [Christ's death] was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man [Jesus] the many will be made righteous. (Rom. 5:18–19)

As legally or judicially, then, the consequences of Adam's sin were imputed to all his natural offspring, we will later learn that Christ, "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), revoked what Adam did, making every human being legally and potentially savable.[11]

> Hence, all of us stand guilty before God because of what Adam did on our behalf; his sin on behalf of

the race was imputed to the race. Clearly, the *all* (or *many*)[12] were not made sinners *actually*, since they did not actually exist at that time. However, they were *potentially* and *legally* present in Adam, and, as such, received the imputation of the consequences of his sin.

## The Transmissional Effects of Adam's Sin

Not only was the effect of Adam's sin (fallenness or depravity) imputed to his descendants *directly* and *immediately*, but it was also transmitted to us *indirectly* and *mediately*. Everyone who is naturally generated from Adam—every human—inherits a sinful nature from him. This is sometimes called the doctrine of "original sin" (or "inherited sin" [see Ps. 51:5]). Again, Paul confirms,

> You were dead in your transgressions and sins.… All of us also lived among [the unsaved] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, *we were by nature objects of wrath*. (Eph. 2:1, 3)

We are sinners not only because we sin, but also because we were born sinners. Being sinners *by nature*, short of and without salvation,[13] we inevitably are and do what comes naturally: We sin.

Just how this sinful nature is transmitted from parents to child is a subject of substantial theological debate. Undebatable, however, is the Bible's teaching that it *is* transmitted. The best explanation seems to come from the traducian view of the human soul's origin:[14]

(1) Since Adam's direct creation by God, each soul that comes into this world arrives by natural generation from his or her parents.
(2) Surely God does not directly create fallen souls.
(3) Just as certainly, each new soul is not created sinless; it is sinful from its conception.
(4) The most reasonable conclusion appears to be that a sinful soul is transmitted from sinful parents by the natural process of conception.[15]

## The Relational Effects of Adam's Sin

Adam's sin also had an immediate effect upon his relationship with God, with other human beings, and with his environment.

### *The Effects of Sin on Relationship With God*

Adam's fall affected his relationship with God in several ways.

## Spiritual Separation

Death is separation, and spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. Consequently, by spiritual death, which occurred at the very moment he sinned, Adam lost his relationship with his Creator. Likewise, as we have seen, all his descendants are naturally "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV). Hence, without a new birth (John 3:3), also known as "regeneration" (Titus 3:5 KJV), no one can be saved.

However, *spiritual death* should not be misunderstood as referring to, for example, the notion of human beings so depraved that they have no capacity to understand and respond to God's message. In the very context of Paul's letter to the Ephesians, cited above, their salvation from spiritual death comes "through faith" (2:8–9).[16]

Other figures of speech describing *total depravity* likewise imply that a sinner is not *dead* in the sense of not being able by God's grace to understand and accept salvation." For instance, the sinner is

(1) *polluted*, in need of purification/cleansing;[17]
(2) *sick*, in need of healing;[18] and
(3) *in the dark*, in need of light.[19]

Clearly a sick person is able to receive a cure, just as a dirty person can embrace cleansing and a person in the dark can accept light. In every case, the sinner *is* incapable of doing these things *by himself* (in his own strength); lacking spiritual life, he needs the aid of the grace of God. *Total depravity*, then, means "total inability to achieve/obtain the solution to our sin by ourselves," *not* "total inability to accept it from God."[20]

## Guilt and Shame

According to Romans 5, Adam's act of disobedience was a "sin," a "trespass," resulting in "condemnation" (vv. 12, 17, 18). It is in view of the law "that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). Therefore, Adam's sin brought on him *guilt*, as well as the *shame* he expressed in view of it (Gen. 3:7).[21]

## Loss of Fellowship

Not only did Adam lose his *relationship* with God, he also lost his *fellowship* with Him. Adam no longer wanted to talk with his Creator but instead hid from Him in the Garden. John reminds us:

> If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (1 John 1:6–7)

*The Effects of Sin on Relationship With Other Human Beings*

Along with the loss of relationship (and fellowship) with God, the relationship between Adam and other people was also disturbed; sin has a horizontal as well as vertical effect, which is evident in two events that followed.

*First,* Adam blamed Eve for his situation. Responding to God's questioning about the forbidden fruit, he said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it" (Gen. 3:12).

*Second,* sibling relationship was disrupted by sin when, because of anger, Cain killed his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1–8).

*The Effects of Sin on Relationship With the Environment*

Adam's sin affected his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve were told to "subdue" the earth (Gen. 1:28); they were to "work" and "take care of" the Garden (Gen. 2:15), not destroy it; to rule over it, not ruin it; to cultivate it, not pollute it.

However, after the Fall, Adam's connection with his environment was disrupted. Thorns and thistles appeared. He had to work by the sweat of his brow. Death became a fact of life. Indeed, everything, because of his sin, was put under bondage. Paul writes:

> The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Rom. 8:20–21)

## The Volitional Effects of Adam's Sin

In addition to Adam's sin affecting his relationship with God, other human beings, and the environment, it also had an effect on his will.

### *Free Will* Before *the Fall*

The power of free choice is part of humankind having been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Adam and Eve were commanded to multiply their kind (1:28) and to refrain from eating the forbidden fruit (2:16–17). *Both of these responsibilities imply the ability to respond*. As noted above, the fact that they *ought* to do these things implied that they *could* do them.

The text narrates their choice, saying, "*She took some and ate it*. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and *he ate it*" (Gen. 3:6). God's condemnation of their actions makes it evident that they were morally free to choose (Gen. 3:11, 13).

The New Testament references to Adam's action make it plain that he made a free choice for which he was responsible. Again, Romans 5 calls it "sin" (v. 16); a "trespass" (v. 15); and "disobedience" (v. 19). First Timothy 2:14 (RSV) refers to Eve as a "transgressor," pointedly implying culpability.

### *Free Will* After *the Fall*

Even after Adam sinned and became spiritually "dead"[22] (Gen. 2:17; cf. Eph. 2:1) and thus, a sinner because of "[his] sinful nature" (Eph. 2:3), he was not so completely depraved that it was impossible for him to hear the voice of God or make a free response: "The LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, '*I heard you in the garden*, and I was afraid because I was naked; so *I hid*' " (Gen. 3:9–10).[23] As already noted, God's image in Adam was *effaced* but not *erased* by the Fall; it was corrupted (damaged) but not eliminated (annihilated). Indeed, the image of God (which includes free will) is *still* in human beings—this is why the murder or cursing of *anyone*, Christian or non-Christian, is sin, "for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6).[24]

### *Fallen Descendants of Adam Have Free Will*

Both Scripture and good reason inform us that depraved human beings have the power of free will. The Bible says that fallen humans are ignorant, depraved, and slaves of sin—all involving *choice*. Peter speaks of depraved ignorance as being "*willingly*" ignorant (2 Peter 3:5 KJV). Paul teaches that unsaved people perceive the truth, but they willfully "suppress" it (Rom. 1:18–19),[25] so that they are, as a result, "without excuse" (v. 20). He adds, "Don't you know that when you offer your selves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom *you obey*?" (Rom. 6:16). *Even our spiritual blindness is a result of the choice not to believe*.

With respect to *initiating* or *attaining* salvation, both Martin Luther and John Calvin were right—fallen humans are *not* free with regard to "things above."[26] Salvation is *received* by a free act of faith (John 1:12; Eph. 2:8–9), yet it does not find its *source* in our will but in God (John 1:13; Rom. 9:16). With respect to the freedom of *accepting* God's gift of salvation, the Bible is clear: fallen beings have the ability to so do, since God's Word repeatedly calls upon us to receive salvation by exercising our faith (cf. Acts 16:31; 17:30; 20:21).

Thus, the free will of fallen human beings is both "horizontal" (social) with respect to this world and "vertical" (spiritual) with respect to God. The *horizontal freedom* is evident, for instance, in our choice of a mate: "If her husband dies, she is *free* to marry anyone *she wishes*, but he must belong to the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). This freedom is described as having "*no constraint*," a freedom where one has "*authority over his own will*" and where one "*has decided this in his own heart*" (v. 37 NASB). This is also described in an act of giving "entirely on their own" (2 Cor. 8:3) as well as being "spontaneous and not forced" (Philem. 14).

The *vertical freedom* to believe is everywhere implied in the gospel call (e.g., cf. John 3:16; Acts 16:31; 17:30). That is, humans are offered salvation as a gift (Rom. 6:23) and called upon to believe it and accept it (John 1:12). Never does the Bible say, "Be saved in order to believe"; instead, repeatedly, it commands, "Believe in order to be saved."[27] Peter describes what is meant by free choice in saying that it is "*not under compulsion*" but "*voluntarily*" (1 Peter 5:2 NASB). Paul depicts the nature of freedom as an act where one "*purposed in his heart*" and does not act "*under compulsion*" (2 Cor. 9:7 NASB). In Philemon 14 he also says that choice is an act of "*consent*" and should "*not* be … by *compulsion*, but of your own *free will*" (NASB).

Unsaved people have a free choice regarding the reception or rejection of God's gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23). Jesus lamented the state of those who rejected Him: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem … how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*" (Matt. 23:37). John affirmed, "*All* who received him [Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). Indeed, as we have frequently observed, God desires that all unsaved people will change their mind (i.e., repent), for "he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but *everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9).

Like the alternatives of life and death that Moses gave to Israel, God says, "*Choose* life" (cf. Deut. 30:19). Joshua said to his people: "*Choose* for

yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15). God sets morally and spiritually responsible alternatives before human beings, leaving the *choice* and *responsibility* to them. Jesus said to the unbelievers of His day: "If you do not *believe* that I am … you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24), which implies they *could have* and *should have* believed.

Over and over, "belief" is declared to be something we are accountable to embrace: "*We* believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:69); "Who is he, sir?… Tell me so that *I* may believe in him" (John 9:36); "Then the man said, 'Lord, *I* believe,' and he worshiped him" (John 9:38); "Jesus answered, 'I did tell you, but *you* do not believe' " (John 10:25). This is why Jesus said, "*Whoever believes* in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:18).

**The General Effects of Sin and Common Grace**

The effects of sin on fallen human beings are so great that without God's common grace (i.e., His nonsaving grace that is available to all persons), society would be unlivable and salvation unattainable. Without common grace:

(1) The judicial effects of sin (Rom. 5:12–21) would produce overwhelming guilt.
(2) The blinding effects of sin (2 Cor. 4:4) would make it impossible for us to recognize evil as such.
(3) The deceiving effects of sin (Jer. 17:9) would make rational thought and action virtually impossible.
(4) The debasing effects of sin (Rom. 1:21–32) would be destructive of self and others.
(5) The corrupting effects of sin (Eph. 2:1–3) would produce moral decay that would dominate society.
(6) The debilitating effects of sin (Rom. 3:10–18) would make the performance of social good unachievable, (cf. Radmacher, *S*, 80)

It is God's common grace to unsaved persons that makes living in this corrupt world possible. This common grace is provided through His natural revelation (Rom. 1:19–20), through the moral law written on human hearts (Rom. 2:12–15), through His image (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9), through marriage (Heb. 13:4),

through the family structure (Eph. 6:1–4), through human government (Rom. 13:1–7), and through many other nonredemptive means.

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR HUMAN SIN AND HUMAN FREE WILL

## Early Fathers

That human beings have free will was held by the great Fathers of the Christian church.

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

Vain, too, are Marcion and his followers when they seek to exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to which the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (*AH*, I. 4.8.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1:470).

### *Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.… If an example is required, I think it must suffice to mention the thief on the cross, who asked Christ to save him and was told: "Truly, this day you will be with me in paradise" [Luke 23:43] (*CR*, 3.28).

### *Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)*

> Just as a writing-pen or a dart has need of one to employ it, so also does grace have need of believing hearts.… It is God's part to confer grace, but yours to accept and guard it. (*CL*, I.1)

### *Ambrose (339–397)*

> "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' " Abraham believed God. Let us also believe, so that we who are the heirs of his race may likewise be heirs of his faith. (*ODHBS*, 2.89 in Oden, *FC*, 22:236, as cited in *ACCS*, 6:111)

### *John Chrysostom (347–407)*

> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (*HE* in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11.377, as cited in ibid., 6:100)
>
> So that you may not be elated by the magnitude of these benefits, see how Paul put you in your place. For "by grace you are saved," he says, "through faith," then, so as to do no injury to free will, he

allots a role to us, then takes it away again, saying “and this not of ourselves” (*HE*, 2:8 in *IOEP*, 2:160, as cited in Oden, *JR*, 44).

*Ambrosiaster (c. fourth century)*

“They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God” (*CSEL*, 81, ad loc in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:101, as cited in ibid., 108).

## Medieval Fathers

The teachers of the Middle Ages were no less definite with this message, carrying on the salvific tradition from both the apostles and the patristics.

*Jerome (c. 340–420)*

“Paul shows clearly that righteousness depends not on the merit of man, but on the grace of God, who accepts the faith of those who believe, without the works of the Law” (*EG*, 1.2.16 in Oden, *FC*, 53:306, as cited in ibid., 6:106).

*Augustine (354–430)*

> God is said to be “our Helper”; but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

*Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 466)*

“The Lord Christ is both God and the mercy seat, both the priest and the lamb, and he performed the work of our salvation by his blood, demanding only faith from us” (*ILR*, 82, ad loc as cited in Oden, *ACCS*, 6:102).

*Anselm (1033–1109)*

> This is the question[28] which you ought to ask those in whose behalf you are speaking, who have no faith in the need for Christ for man’s salvation, and you should also request them to tell how man can be saved without Christ.… And if this terrifies them, let them believe in Christ as we do, that they may be saved. (*CDH*, I.XXIV)

*Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> This salvation of grace is by faith in Christ. In the justification of an adult who has sinned, the movement of faith toward God coincides with the infusion of grace. “Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace” [Luke 8:48 KJV] (*CE*, 95).

> Of course, grace is necessary to aid the will. So, any human act, then, that is under the control of free will, can be meritorious, if it is directed towards God. Now, to believe is an act of mind assenting to the divine truth by virtue of the command of the will as it is moved by God through grace; in this way the act stands under the control of free will and is directed toward God. (*ST*, 2a2ae.2, 9)

## Reformation Leaders

The main point of the Reformation was, at its heart, that "the just shall live *by faith*—and faith alone." Therefore, the exercise of faith is the one condition (action) necessary for a person to receive justification before God.[29] Nevertheless, both ironically and contradictorily, Martin Luther (1483–1546) insisted, against the mainstream of fifteen hundred years of church teaching and history, that a free act of belief is *not* a condition for receiving salvation at all. Rather, he argued that "this is plainly to ascribe *divinity* to 'free will,' for to will to embrace the Law and the Gospel … belongs to the power of God alone" (*BW*, sect. 44, final emphasis original).

Addressing John's statement that a man must "receive" Christ (John 1:12), Luther contended,

> This man is merely passive (as the term is used), nor does he do anything, but is wholly mad; and John is speaking of being made; he saith we are made the sons of God by a power given unto us from above, not by the power of "free will" inherent in ourselves, (ibid., 74)

He added,

> How could reason then think that faith in Jesus as the Son of God and man was necessary, when even at this day it could neither receive nor believe it? … so far is it from possibility that it should either will it, or believe it. (ibid.)

Luther was not timid in carrying his view to its logical conclusion, namely, that *even evil men are caused to act by God:*

> He uses evil instruments, which cannot escape the sway and motion of [His] omnipotence.… Hence it is, that the wicked man cannot but always err and sin; because, being carried along by the motion of the Divine Omnipotence, he is not permitted to remain motionless, but must will, desire, and act according to his nature. All this is fixed certainty, if we believe that God is Omnipotent! (ibid., 84)

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

Calvin also swam against the current of church history when he argued that faith is a gift of God only to the elect, who make no free decision to accept or reject it. He acknowledged the same when he wrote of God's alleged influence

on the human will:

> This movement of the will is not of that description which was for many ages taught and believed—viz., a movement which thereafter leaves us the choice to obey or resist it—but one which affects us efficaciously.[30] We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, "Whom he draws, he draws willingly;" insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid. We grant that, as man was originally constituted [before the Fall], he could incline to either side, but since he has taught us by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure? (*ICR*, 260–61)

Interestingly, both Calvin and Luther admitted that their views left some nagging questions. Calvin wrote:

> Perseverance is the gift of God, which he does not lavish promiscuously on all, but imparts to whom he pleases. If it is asked how the difference arises—why some steadily persevere, and others prove deficient in steadfastness—we can give no other reason than that the Lord, by his mighty power, strengthens and sustains [those who persevere], so that they perish not, while he does not furnish the same assistance to [those who do not], but leaves them to be monuments of instability, (ibid., 275)

Luther confessed:

> Why does He not then change, in His motion, those evil wills which He moves? This belongs to those secrets of Majesty, where "His judgments are past finding out." Nor is it ours to search into, but to adore these mysteries. (*BW*, 88)

The answer, in reality, is that there isn't a need to ask these questions. *Whatever God does is right by definition*.[31] Luther's own words, however, contradict this truth: "What God wills is not therefore right because He ought or ever was bound so to will; but on the contrary, what takes place is therefore right, *because* He so wills" (ibid., emphasis added). This radical voluntarism (as opposed to essentialism) is addressed in chapter 12

# ANSWERING EXTREME CALVINISM ON HUMAN FREE WILL

## Can *Everyone* Believe?

Contrary to the extreme Calvinist view, faith is not a gift that God offers only to some ("the elect"). *All* are responsible to believe, and *whoever* decides to

believe can believe:[32] Jesus said, "*Everyone* who believes in [me] will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16 NLT). He added, "*Whoever* believes in [me] is not condemned" (v. 18).

Some, however, have objected that if *everyone* (or *anyone*) can believe, then how can John 12:37–40 be explained?

> Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"[33] For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them."[34]

The answer is found in the context.

*First*, belief was obviously their responsibility, since God held them responsible for not believing. As John himself records, "*They still would not believe in him*."

*Second*, Jesus was speaking to hardhearted Jews, people who had seen numerous indisputable miracles[35] and who had been called upon repeatedly, before this point, to believe (cf. John 8:24–26). This manifests the fact that *they were able to do so*.

*Third*, and finally, it was their own stubborn unbelief that caused their blindness. Jesus had already said to them, "*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be*, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:24). Thus, their blindness was *chosen* and *avoidable*.

## Can *Anyone* Believe Unto Salvation Without God's Special Grace?

Even though *faith* is possible for the unsaved, nonetheless, no one can believe *unto salvation*[36] without the aid of God's special grace. Jesus says, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). Paul adds, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect" (1 Cor. 15:10). Jesus promises, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul confessed, "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (Phil. 4:13). Indeed, David acknowledged to God, "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14).

However, although no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's saving grace, the gracious action by which we are saved is not monergistic (an act of God alone) but synergistic (an act of God *and* our free choice). *Salvation comes from God, but it is received by our cooperation*; as we have noted, His

grace is not exercised on a passive object but on an active agent. Again, Augustine said,

> God is said to be "our Helper"; but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

The difference between the extreme and moderate Calvinistic position on the need for God's grace for our salvation can be summarized as follows:

## THE RELATION OF GRACE AND FREE WILL

| **Position** | **Extreme Calvinism** | **Moderate Calvinism** |
|---|---|---|
| Grace | Operative | Cooperative |
| Action | Monergistic | Synergistic |
| Recipient | Passive object | Active agent |
| Free act | No | Yes |
| Resistibility | Irresistible on the unwilling | Irresistible on the willing |

## SOVEREIGNTY AND FREE WILL?

God's sovereignty and human freedom: Is it either one or the other, or is it both one and the other? The Bible says both. Earlier we saw that on the one hand God is sovereign over all things, including human events and choices.[37] Nothing catches Him by surprise, and nothing is outside His control. On the other hand, in this chapter we have seen that human beings possess the God-given power of free will.[38] This applies to many earthly elements here "below" as well as to some heavenly elements from "above," specifically our reception of God's magnificent salvation.

The mystery of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human free will has challenged the greatest Christian thinkers down through the centuries. Unfortunately, some have purged human responsibility in order to seemingly preserve divine prerogative. Likewise, others have sacrificed God's sovereignty in order to hold on to humanity's free choice. Each of these alternatives is wrong and leads to subsequent error.[39]

# THE EFFECTS OF SIN ON ANGELS

While not resulting from Adam's sin, nonetheless, evil had an effect on angels as well. As was shown earlier,[40] angels sinned prior to the creation of humankind—Satan, the fallen angel Lucifer, was already on the scene and solidified in wickedness when Adam arrived (Gen. 3:1; cf. Rev. 12:9).[41] While the sin of angels *directly* affects only themselves, by virtue of their presence in the world to tempt human beings into sin, Satan and all his demons[42] have had an *indirect* effect on the sins of humans as well.

## Angels Are Irredeemable by Choice

Paul, in speaking of Satan, who chose to rebel against God, commands that an elder should not be "a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation *incurred by the devil*" (1 Tim. 3:6 NASB). Jude 6 adds, "Angels who *did not keep their own domain*, but *abandoned their proper abode*, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (NASB).

Peter notes that "God did not spare angels *when they sinned*, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 NASB). As established previously,[43] angels are never called upon to repent in the Bible, nor do they manifest any desire to so do. As C. S. Lewis said, for angels, "*Their freedom is simply that of making a single naked choice*—of loving God more than the self or the self more than God" (*PP*, 18, emphasis added). Thus, by the very nature of their freedom, angels are irredeemable once they have made their decision.

## Angels Are Irredeemable by Nature

Like God,[44] angels are immaterial, being pure spirits. Therefore, they have an invisible nature, though some angels have taken on physical forms and appeared to human beings (cf. Gen. 18; Josh. 5:13–15). Colossians 1:16 declares: "By Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him" (NASB). Hebrews 1:14 calls angels "ministering spirits," and in Luke 24:39 Jesus said that spirits do not have "flesh

and bones" (NKJV).

Further, each angel is a species of its own—each is one of a kind, even though there are groups or classes (such as *cherubim* or *seraphim*). Unlike the human species, whose members can multiply, angels by nature are simple, created, and indivisible. They are not sexual beings, nor do they engage in marriage; hence, they can produce no offspring (Matt. 22:30). In Luke 20:35–36, Jesus said,

> Those who are considered worthy of taking part in that [eternal] age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.[45]

Having a fixed *nature* from the moment of their creation, angels do not change. Unlike human beings, they do not grow up or grow old; they have no age, nor are they subject to any other kind of natural alteration. They thus have no accidents,[46] and, hence, they cannot change *accidentally*. The only *essential* change they can undergo is creation or annihilation by God (if He chose to do so).[47]

Since angels have no body, they are not subject to decay and death; they are immortal (Matt. 25:41). Since they cannot change, they are fixed in their nature; consequently, once an angel sins, he is doomed forever (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Indeed, the Bible says explicitly that Christ did not die to redeem angels: "It is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). Again, those angels who sinned are never called upon to repent, nor can they.[48] Christ's death is never presented as a means of their salvation but only of their condemnation: Jesus, "having disarmed the [spiritual] powers and authorities … made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

Like all of God's creatures who possess both rationality *and* morality, angels were given a choice. And, like humans at the point of physical death (Heb. 9:27), once angels have made their final choice, it is eternally too late. Since by nature they cannot change, once they have made their decision, it is final, and they know it (Matt. 8:29).

## Church Fathers on the Fall of Angels

The great ecclesiastical teachers, especially Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, have had much to say about the sin of angels.

### *Augustine on the Fall of Angels*

Since these things are so, those spirits whom we call angels were never at any time or in any way darkness, but, as soon as they were made, were made light; yet they were not so created in order that they might exist and live in any way whatever, but were enlightened that they might live wisely and blessedly. Some of them, having turned away from this light, have not won this wise and blessed life, which is certainly eternal, and accompanied with the sure confidence of its eternity; but they have still the life of reason, though darkened with folly, and this they cannot lose even if they would [desire or aspire to do so]. (*CG*, 11)

That the contrary propensities in good and bad angels have arisen, not from a difference in their nature and origin, since God, the good Author and Creator of all essences, created them both, but from a difference in their wills and desires, it is impossible to doubt. While some steadfastly continued in that which was the common good of all, namely, in God Himself, and in His eternity, truth, and love; others, being enamored rather of their own power, as if they could be their own good, lapsed to this private good of their own, from that higher and beatific good which was common to all, and, bartering the lofty dignity of eternity for the inflation of pride, the most assured verity for the slyness of vanity, uniting love for factious partisanship, they became proud, deceived, envious, (ibid., 12.1)

There is, then, no natural efficient cause or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause, of the evil will, since … the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God, a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient, (ibid., 12.9)

### *Anselm on the Fall of Angels*

As man must not be restored by a man of a different race, though of the same nature, so are not angels to be saved by any other angel, though all were of the same nature, for they are not like men, all of the same race. For all angels were not sprung from one, as all men were. (*CDH*, 2.21)

### Further,

There is another objection to their restoration, viz., that as they fell with none to plot their fall, so they must rise with none to aid them; but this is impossible, [for] had they not sinned, they would have been confirmed in virtue without any foreign aid, simply by the power given to them from the first, (ibid.)

### *Thomas Aquinas on the Fall of Angels*

An angel or any other rational creature, considered in his own nature, can sin.… Mortal sin occurs in two ways in the act of free choice. First, when something evil is chosen.… In another way, sin comes of free choice by electing something good in itself, but not according to the proper measure or rule [as angels did]. (*ST*, 1a.63.1)

A spiritual nature cannot be affected by such pleasures as pertain to bodies, but only such as can be found in spiritual beings.… But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to a good of the spiritual order, unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride—not to be subject to the superior where subjection is due. Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride, (ibid., la.63.2)

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS ABOUT THE

# EFFECTS OF ANGELIC SIN

Many protests have been leveled at the above conclusions. The first, and one of the most perplexing, is about how sin could arise in a perfect creature.

### Objection One—Based on the Perfect Nature of Lucifer

The Bible declares that God made all things perfect (Gen. 1:31; 1 Tim. 4:11), which would include the angel Lucifer, who became known as Satan. In God and in His heaven, there is no sin (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13), yet Lucifer sinned and rebelled against God (1 Tim. 3:6), leading a third of all the angels with him (Rev. 12:4). How could a perfect creature, made by a perfect God and placed in a perfect environment (heaven), commit evil? Sin could not have arisen from a perfect God, or from Lucifer's perfect environment, or from his perfect nature. Whence, then, sin?

### Response to Objection One

Sin first arose in the universe from Lucifer's free will. As laid out before, God made perfect creatures and gave them both perfect natures *and* perfect freedom. With freedom, though it is good in itself, comes the ability to sin.

Creaturely freedom *is* good, but it does, by nature, contain the possibility of evil. God made Lucifer perfectly good; Lucifer was made evil by choosing it. God gave him the good *fact* of freedom; Lucifer performed the evil *act* of freedom. God provided the good *power* of free choice, but Lucifer performed the bad *action* of free choice.

Even the Calvinistic *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1648) acknowledged that some actions are not necessary or inevitable[49] but instead arise from the secondary cause known as free will: "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" (3.1). Hence, "God hath endued the will of man with the natural liberty that is neither forced nor any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil" (9.1).

### Objection Two—Based on the Irredeemability of Angels

A third of the angels sinned and became demons (Rev. 12:4). When Adam

sinned, he and his progeny were offered salvation (Gen. 3:15). What about angels? Can they be saved?

**Response to Objection Two**

The biblical answer is no.

*First*, the Scriptures say emphatically, "It is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16). That is, Christ assumed human nature (v. 14), not angelic nature, to redeem human beings, not angels.

*Second*, the cross of Christ, which is declared to be the source of human salvation, is by contrast proclaimed to be the source of demons' condemnation (Col. 2:14–15).

*Third*, the lost state of demons is always portrayed in the Bible as final and eternal (2 Peter 2:4; cf. Jude 6). Even they appear to recognize their everlasting doom; as one asked of Jesus, "Have You come here to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8:29 NASB). Satan actually "*knows* that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12).

*Fourth*, and finally, Aquinas offers an explanation as to why angels are naturally irredeemable:

> The angel's apprehension differs from man's in this respect, that by his intellect the angel apprehends immovably … whereas man by his reason apprehends movably, proceeding discursively from one thing to another, and having the way open by which he may proceed to either of two opposites; whereas the angel's will adheres fixedly and immovable. [In brief,] as Damascene [c. eighth century] says, "*Death is to men what the fall is to the angels*." Now, it is clear that all the mortal sins of men, grave or less grave, are pardonable before death; whereas after death they are without remission, and endure forever. (*ST*, la.64.2)

**Objection Three—Based on the Justice of Angelic Condemnation**

It seems unfair to some that humans were given an opportunity for redemption after they fell, while angels were not. Why did God not offer salvation for them as well?

**Response to Objection Three**

In reply, we must observe several important facts.

*First*, angels, like humans, do have a choice in their destiny. They freely chose to rebel against God. They were not forced to do so; they were not doomed *against* their will but *in accordance with* their will.

*Second*, like humans, angels were doomed after their final choice. The only difference is that their first choice was also their last. Even as humans have a cut-off point (Heb. 9:27), angels too make a final decision.

*Third*, as noted above (by Aquinas), the very nature of angels makes their first choice final, for they are created simple beings who are by their very nature unchangeable (except by annihilation). Hence, once they make a choice to serve or rebel against God, it is permanent, one way or the other.

*Fourth*, and finally, unlike human beings, angels are never called upon to repent (Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9). In short, what is a lifetime for us is an instant for an angel. Once their minds are freely made up, they are naturally immutable, and, since by nature they cannot change, there is no possibility of their redemption. God, knowing this, did not need to provide salvation for angels.

# THE EXTENT OF SIN (DEPRAVITY): VARIOUS VIEWS

As observed above, humans—Adam and Eve after the Fall, as well as all of their natural descendants—are totally and wholly depraved. Just how far this depravity extends (and therefore what is meant by "total depravity") has been a matter of theological dispute for centuries. A brief survey of the various views on total depravity will be helpful before making a determination.

## Pelagianism

The Pelagian perspective on human depravity emanates from the British monk Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420), whose alleged views (and/or those of his followers) on the matter were condemned by the Council of Carthage (416–418). He and/or his followers held that human beings are born innocent, just as Adam was created. In this state they are able to obey God, since they inherit no sin from Adam and did not sin "*in* Adam" (cf. Rom. 5) but instead sin *like* Adam. The only thing, then, that Adam bequeathed to us is a bad example.

According to Pelagianism, only *our* own sins are imputed to us (rather than both our sins *and* Adam's). Spiritual and eternal death can only be activated by one's personal sins. Even our physical death is not the result of Adam's sin, as his sin was not transmitted to us. Allegedly, humans were simply created mortal; the original image of God is untarnished from the time of creation, and no grace

is needed for salvation, which can be attained by our unaided free choice.

### Arminianism

This view gets it name from Jacob (James) Arminius (1560–1609), a Reformed theologian from Holland, although "Arminianism" also bears resemblance to a view called semi-Pelagianism. However, the popular version of what we know *today* as "Arminianism" springs from John Wesley (1703–1791) and is more properly called "Wesleyanism."[50]

Since subviews in the overall Arminian camp differ significantly, it is difficult to point to a single person who held to all the elements listed here. Even so, a general Arminian view of depravity, in contrast to Pelagianism, maintains that all people are born depraved and *cannot* on their own power obey God. Each human was either potentially or seminally in Adam when he chose evil, and, hence, he or she is born with a corrupt nature, under the stigma of Adam's sin.

Arminianism (Wesleyanism) believes that all human beings are born with both the bent toward sin and the unavoidability of physical death; and should they not repent of their sins, they will die eternally. The image of God in humans is so effaced that they need His grace to overcome it and to move in His direction, as He alone can save them. In contrast to the insistence of extreme Calvinism, however, God's grace does not work *irresistibly* on all (or on the elect only). Rather, God's grace works *sufficiently* on all, awaiting their free cooperation before it becomes savingly (salvifically) effective. H. Orton Wiley (1877–1961) was a theologian in the Arminian (Wesleyan) tradition, as was Richard Watson (1781–1833) before him.

### Moderate Calvinism

Unlike Arminianism, moderate Calvinism holds that we inherit a judicial guilt from Adam's sin and that we are legally (and/or naturally) connected to him. As a result of Adam's choice for evil, all human beings, apart from salvation, suffer spiritual death and will undergo both physical and eternal death. Further, God's grace is not merely *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* for the elect. In order for God's grace to be effective, there must be cooperation by the recipient on whom God has moved.

In common with strong Calvinism,[51] moderate Calvinism maintains that all human beings sinned in Adam, either legally or naturally, and that we all inherit

a sinful nature—Adam's guilt is imputed to all his posterity. This guilt can only be overcome by God's saving grace, which, according to moderate Calvinism, is irresistible only on the *willing*.

**Strong Calvinism**

Strong Calvinism is on the opposite pole from Pelagianism; it affirms that we are not only born depraved but that we are also *totally* depraved.[52] According to strong Calvinism, the spiritual image of God[53] in human beings has not only been marred, it has been destroyed—not only effaced, but for all practical purposes erased. The natural person cannot understand or respond to the gospel; God must, by irresistible grace, regenerate the sinner (against his will) before he can be saved. Adam's sin has been imputed to the entire human race, and being completely dead in trespasses and sins (totally depraved), the sinner cannot even cooperate with God's saving grace. As with moderate Calvinism, every person born since Adam, apart from Christ, is spiritually dead; those who are not rescued will undergo both physical and eternal death. However, with strong Calvinism, only those select few (the elect) whom God irresistibly regenerates—meaning, they have no choice—will be able to understand and believe the gospel. Strong Calvinism finds its roots in Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and blossomed in Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758).

The various perspectives can be summarized as follows:

## VARIOUS VIEWS ON HUMAN DEPRAVITY

| | **Pelagianism** | **Arminianism** | **Moderate Calvinism** | **Strong Calvinism** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| State at birth | Innocent | Depraved | Totally Depraved (extensively) | Totally depraved (intensively) |
| Ability | Can obey God | Can cooperate with God | Can cooperate with God | Can't cooperate with God |
| Guilt | None | Potential | Judicial (and/ or actual) | Actual (and/ or judicial) |
| | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| "In Adam" (Rom. 5:12) | Not at all (rather, we sinned *like* Adam) | Potentially (or seminally) | Legally (and/ or naturally) | Naturally (and/ or legally) |
| What is inherited from Adam | Bad example | Propensity to sin; necessity to die | Propensity to sin; necessity to die | Necessity to sin; necessity to die |
| Deaths incurred | Spiritual and eternal | Physical and spiritual | Physical, spiritual, and eternal | Physical, spiritual, and eternal |
| What is imputed | One's own sin | One's own sin (we *ratify* Adam's sin) | One's own sin and Adam's sin | One's own sin and Adam's sin |
| Spiritual image of God | Retained | Effaced | Effaced | Erased[*] |
| Effect of grace | None | Sufficient for all | Irresistible on the willing | Irresistible on the unwilling |

Of course, there are other shades and variations of views, but Pelagianism, Arminianism (Wesleyanism), moderate Calvinism, and strong Calvinism are the four main perspectives. As the foregoing and following analysis shows, the biblical, theological, and historical evidence favors the moderate Calvinist view.

# THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE EFFECTS OF HUMAN SIN

According to the Bible, the effects of sin upon human beings are vast and pervasive. Sin reaches to the very core of our beings, corrupting the totality of human nature—nothing is left untouched.

### The Effects of Sin on the Image of God in Humans

Numerous passages speak of humans as created in God's image, beginning with Genesis 1:27 (cf. 5:1; 9:6; Col. 3:10). The relation of sin to this image is theologically important, and it can be summarized in two major points.

*The Image of God in Humans Is Effaced but Not Erased*

Even in their fallen state, human beings are still in the image of God; His image in people is damaged but not destroyed by sin. Again, it is for this reason that we are forbidden to murder anyone, whether saved or unsaved: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Gen. 9:6). If unsaved persons were not still in the image of God, this prohibition (against murdering them) would make no sense.

Likewise, we are told not to curse other human beings, since they are in God's image, and hence we would thereby be cursing God in effigy: "With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be" (James 3:9–10).

In brief, sin *effaces* but does not *erase* the image of God in human beings; it is *marred* but not *eliminated*. Even the most vile of human beings retain God's likeness, be it oh so vitiated within.

*Total Depravity Is Extensive, Not Intensive*

Since the whole person is made in God's image, and since sin affects the whole person, the first thing to be said is that the effect of sin on God's image in fallen human beings is pervasive, extending to every dimension of his being—body and soul, mind and will.[54] Hence, it is in this sense that sinful humanity is appropriately described by moderate Calvinism as "totally depraved." This *does not* mean that fallen humans are as sinful as they could be, but it *does* mean that apart from Christ we are not as good as we should be (in accordance with God's perfect nature and the perfection with which He created us).

Sin *does* penetrate and permeate our whole being. Humans *are* born wholly, not partially, depraved; that is, every aspect of our being is affected by sin. No element of human nature is unaffected by inherited evil, even though no aspect is completely destroyed by it.

While this pervasive depravity is *extensive*, it is not *intensive*. That is to say, even though fallenness extends to every dimension of human nature, it does not destroy either human nature or any of its essential powers. For example, fallen human beings can still think, feel, and choose (see below); they have not,

because of sin, lost any of these abilities of personhood. If they had, they would no longer be persons. They *are* still human, and therefore they are still in the image of God, even though they are *fallen* humans, consequently incapable of either initiating or attaining their own salvation.

Ironically, if one takes total depravity too far, he destroys a person's ability to be depraved. For if *total depravity* means "one's ability to know and chose good over evil is destroyed," then the person whose knowledge and volition have been eliminated is no longer able to sin, because then he would have had no access to the good (only evil would have been available to him). There *are* creatures without these abilities, but they are subhuman animals and plants that cannot sin. What has no moral capacity and ability has no moral responsibility.

### The Noetic Effects of Human Sin

Sin also has noetic[55] effects on human beings. When Adam chose evil, his mind was darkened by sin, as are the minds of his posterity. Depravity brings spiritual darkness and blindness to unbelievers. Paul said of pagan minds, "Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a *depraved mind*, to do what ought not to be done" (Rom. 1:28). He told the Corinthians that "the god of this age has *blinded the minds* of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4).

Jesus said, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness" (John 12:46). Paul reminded the Ephesians, "You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8). The purpose of salvation is "to open their eyes [unbelievers] and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18).

### The Volitional Effects of Human Sin

Sin makes its indelible mark not only on the human mind but also on the human will. The result is that there are several actions the unaided human will *cannot* perform.

For one thing, human will cannot, unmoved by divine grace, seek God. Paul said, "There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:11).

Further, human will cannot initiate salvation. John declared emphatically that believers are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a

husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13).

Also, by the human will one cannot attain his own salvation: "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

Nonetheless, while the unaided human will cannot do any of the above, there are certain things, by God's grace, that fallen human beings *can* do.

First of all, as both Luther and Calvin acknowledged, the human will is free in the "things below"; that is, there is freedom in social and moral matters. For example, one is free to choose a school, a job, and a life-partner; he is also free to either care for or abuse his children.

In addition, one is free in the choice to receive or reject the gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23). God not only wants all to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) but He also provides the ability for all who choose to believe (John 1:12). While we cannot believe without God's grace, neither can we receive God's grace of salvation without believing. Again, as John Chrysostom put it:

> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:377)

Of course, our act of faith is itself prompted and aided by God: "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor. 4:7). Again, "not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Cor. 3:5). While God, though, *prompts* our act of faith, He does not *perform* it—it is, after all, our act. While God aids our choice, He does not choose for us. He provides the impetus and assistance, but we must make the decision to believe.

As to the charge that even the act of receiving salvation as a gift from God would be meritorious:[56]

> A rich man bestows, on a poor and famished beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. *Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it*? Can it be said with propriety that "the alms depend partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver," though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand? … If these assertions cannot be truly made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine Grace are required! (Arminius, *WJA*, 1.365–66, emphasis added)

## The Effects of Sin on Human Nature

A human person has a human nature; hence, if the person is fallen, his nature is fallen. Just what does it mean to have a fallen nature? To begin, there are

things this *does* mean.

*First*, having a fallen nature means we are born this way (Ps. 51:5). The psalmist says, "Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies" (Ps. 58:3; cf. Eph. 2:3).

*Second*, having a fallen nature means that it is natural for us to sin. Sin is not merely an acquired habit; it is a basic inclination. One does not have to be taught to sin.

*Third*, having a fallen nature means that one will inevitably sin. Given the opportunity, sin will manifest itself.

*Fourth*, and finally, having a fallen nature means we are incapable of saving ourselves. No matter how good we try to be, we are still sinners by nature and practice, and, as such, we cannot enter God's perfect heaven without Jesus Christ. In short, having a fallen nature means that we are not simply sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners.

However, there are also several things having a sinful nature *does not* mean.

*First*, as even strong Calvinists agree, having a fallen nature does not mean that we are as sinful as we could be. Rather, as stated before, it means that we are not as good as we should be.

*Second*, having a fallen nature does not mean that sin is excusable. We are responsible for every sin we commit.

*Third*, having a fallen nature does not mean we're unable to avoid sin; if we were, then we would not be responsible for our sins—but we are. Indeed, "each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), and "the dead [will be] judged according to what they [have] done as recorded in the books" (Rev. 20:12).

*Fourth*, having a fallen nature does not mean that any particular sin is inescapable. While sin *in general* is inevitable, no sin *in particular* is unavoidable. God's grace is always available for the resistance of sin, both for the believer (1 Cor. 10:13) and for the unbeliever (Titus 2:11–13). As Calvin correctly noted, "It [is] beyond dispute that free will does not enable any man to perform good works, unless he is assisted by grace" (*ICR*, 1.2.2.6).

*Fifth*, and finally, as already established, having a fallen nature does not mean we have no choice in our salvation. While the unaided human will cannot believe unto salvation, nonetheless, all who are willing to receive God's gift of salvation are aided by His grace to this end. He not only wants all to be saved, but He provides the ability for all who desire it (Phil. 2:13). Our free choice does not *initiate* (1 John 3:19) and cannot *attain* (John 1:13) the unmerited gift of

salvation, but by God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9) our will can *receive* it (John 1:12; 3:16–18).

## CONCLUSION

The effects of sin are extensive, both on the human race overall and on individuals in particular (Rom. 3:23). The entire human race is fallen and irredeemable, except by God's grace (Titus 3:5–7; Eph. 2:8–9). Furthermore, each individual is totally depraved, for sin has extended to every part of his being. He is a fallen person, including mind, emotions, will, and body.

While this depravity, however, does not mean that everyone is as evil as they are able to be, it does mean that they are not as good as they need to be. Hence, God's grace is the only force in the universe that can overcome the natural irredeemability of human beings. "Grace alone" (Lat: *sola gratia*) is the only cure for humankind's total depravity. Grace, and only grace, can overcome the vast and devastating effects of sin (Titus 2:11–13).

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CHAPTER SIX

# THE DEFEAT OF SIN

God chose not to annihilate sin but rather to defeat it. He chose to defeat it progressively instead of instantaneously. There are many possible reasons for this, but two prominent ones involve (1) the freedom God gave to humans and (2) God's desire to produce a more godlike (godly) product in the process. Defeating evil without destroying freedom, while at the same time perfecting free creatures—this appears to be at the heart of God's plan.

## THE DIVINE PLAN TO DEFEAT EVIL[1]

God's plan to defeat evil was devised in the council chambers of eternity. In order to conquer evil, God had to permit it. To permit evil in order to allow for greater good, He had to create free creatures. These he created in two kinds: angels (spirit) and human beings (spirit/body).[2]

## THE PREREQUISITES OF GOD'S PLAN

Since God is an eternal Being,[3] His plan was willed from all eternity, rooted in several other divine attributes. Since God is all-knowing (omniscient), He knew how everything would turn out from the beginning.[4] Further, because God

is all-loving (omnibenevolent), it was assured from the start that He would honor the free will He gave to His creatures.[5] And, as God is all-powerful (omnipotent), it was certain from the outset that He would accomplish what He set out to do.[6] As it has been said, the rest is history. Finally, God's freedom guarantees that He was not forced to do what He did,[7] and His omnisapience (all-wisdom) insured that He would choose the wisest means to accomplish His ends.[8]

## THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S PLAN

If God knew evil would occur, why did He create at all? He was free to create or not to create, so why did He choose to make a world He knew would fall into sin? This appears to conflict with God being all-good and all-wise, for as an all-good God He must have had a good purpose for doing what He did, and as an all-wise God He must have chosen the best possible way to do it. Why, then, did He freely create a world of free creatures He knew would choose evil—many of whom would never recover?[9] Critics often claim that there were other (better) alternatives open to God.

### Alternative One: Not to Have Created

If God is all-knowing,[10] all-good, and free in accordance with His own nature, then there were other options He could have chosen. As all-knowing, God foresaw evil, and as free He could have avoided creating any world at all. This would have avoided all of the evil this world contains and hence would seem to have been preferable.

### Alternative Two: To Have Created a Non-Free World

Further, God could have created a nonmoral world where there would be no sin. Such a world, by virtue of having no free beings in it, would be void of any moral evil. This kind of world would seem to be an improvement over the evil one we have.

### Alternative Three: To Have Created a Free World Where No One Ever Chooses to Sin

In addition, God could have created a world where no one ever decides for evil. That a free person *can* sin[11] does not mean that he *will* sin.[12] God knew who would sin and who would not, and it would seem that He could have simply created those He knew would not choose evil.

**Alternative Four: To Have Created a Free World Where No One Is Allowed to Sin**

God is all-powerful, and He could have created free creatures that He prevented from sinning, even if they would have otherwise (if given free will) chosen to do so. Since God does not will evil and has the power to prevent it, exercising His power to make sin impossible would seem to have been a better option. Surely this would appear to have been preferable to the world we have, wherein free creatures have been allowed to sin in such destructive ways.

**Alternative Five: To Have Created a Free World Where Sin Occurs but Where All Are Eventually Saved**

Finally, why didn't God make a world where everyone is free and where sin occurs, but where everyone is also eventually rescued from it? Such a world would have had the advantage of allowing the freedom to do evil while also including the time and circumstances necessary for us to learn the lessons from it and thus choose to reform. In the end, this would have provided an evil-free world.

The problem for the Christian theist can be summarized in this manner:

(1) God could have chosen an alternative to this world (which contains free creatures who sin) by:
  (a) not creating at all;
  (b) not creating a free world;
  (c) creating a free world that would not sin;
  (d) creating a free world that could not sin; or
  (e) creating a world that sinned but would all be saved in the end.
(2) However, according to His own Word, God did not choose any one of these supposedly better alternatives. Rather, He created a world of free creatures who could and would sin, and yet would not all be saved in the

end.
(3) Since God did not choose one of these apparently "preferable" options, He is vulnerable to the charge that He did not do His best.
(4) To do less than one's best is evil.
(5) Therefore, no all-perfect God exists.

# GOD'S PLAN IN PERMITTING EVIL

In response to this objection, one must demonstrate, from an evangelical Christian point of view, that no other possible alternatives would have been better than the one God chose:

(1) In His infinite wisdom and goodness, God chose the plan that would bring the greatest good.
(2) God deemed that the plan resulting in the greatest good would be to permit evil in order to defeat it, without destroying free will in the process.
(3) As He is the greatest possible Good, God willed the greatest possible good for free creatures.
(4) Furthermore, God used the greatest possible means to attain the greatest possible good.

An understanding of this plan will unfold as each of the above alternatives is addressed.

Some theologians challenge the fourth premise ("To do less than one's best is evil"), arguing that God is not obligated to do *His best*; He merely has to do *good*. And what He did in creating this world was good, even if there could have been something better.

This, though, is problematic in view of God being *all*-good. How can the Best Being possible do less than what is *best* to do? It would seem that the perfect Being must perform perfect actions, for less than the best does not measure up to the standards of the Best. In any event, it is necessary to address the alternatives, for an opponent can also argue that it was not good for God to permit evil in the first place, since He had other alternatives that would have resulted in no evil.[13]

**Response to Alternative One (Not to Have Created)**

In reply, the truth is that *no world* is not morally better than *some world*.

*Nothing* is not better than *something*. This is a category mistake; *something* and *nothing* have nothing in common, so they cannot be compared. This is not even like comparing apples to oranges, since at least both of those are fruits. It is more like comparing apples and no apples, insisting that *no apples* tastes "better" or "worse.[14]

Further, the critic's argument is that *no world* would have been morally better than this one. But *no world* is not a moral world (no world is not a world at all)—it is amoral.[15] Here again, it is a category mistake to claim that an amoral world is *morally better* than a moral world. They aren't in the same theological or ideological realm.[16]

Therefore, *to create* was not better than *to not create*. Creation was a free choice; God was under no compunction to create something. He did not create because He *had to* (either metaphysically or morally)—He created because He *wanted to*.

**Response to Alternative Two (To Have Created a Non-Free World)**

In the same way, a non-free world is not morally better than a free world, for a non-free world is a nonmoral world—free will is necessary for morality. As just noted (in response to Alternative One), a nonmoral world cannot be *morally better* than a moral world, regardless of whether there is no world at all or whether the world is non-free. Since the posited world is not even a moral world (either being no world at all, as in Alternative One, or being a non-free world, as in Alternative Two), there is no moral basis for the comparison with the world God made. This alternative is a category mistake as well.

**Response to Alternative Three (To Have Created a Free World Where No One Ever Chooses to Sin)**

This alternative implies that it is possible to have a free world where no one ever decides for evil. This conclusion is questionable; in fact, it involves an equivocation on the word *possible*. Of course, it is *logically possible* that a free creature will never sin, since human freedom to sin involves the ability to do otherwise.[17] However, not everything logically possible is *actually achievable*.

Given what we know about freedom, a world where *no one* exercised it in a wrong way (*ever*) is beyond highly unlikely. In a 50/50 situation, if there are really two possibilities—for example, heads and tails—and the coin is flipped a

million times while never coming up tails, we suspect that the coin is loaded. And, unlike the coin, *humans are free to choose otherwise*.

At any rate, even if it is logically possible that God could have created a world in which no one ever sinned, it may have been actually *un* achievable, if we posit God's infallibly foreknowing that in every truly free world He could have created, at least some would freely sin. So while a free world where no one ever sins is *logically* possible, it may not be *actually* possible. Hence, it is possible that God could *not* have created only those who wouldn't sin, since He knew with certainty that in any group He made some would choose evil. For example, it is possible that had God created fewer angels, a third of them would have sinned.

In addition, even if God could have created a world where everyone was free but no one ever sinned, it is debatable whether this truly would be best. The best possible world is the one that achieves the greatest good—which, as Scripture makes clear, is achieved by allowing first-order (lower) evils in order to achieve second-order (higher) goods. For example, patience is not achievable without tribulation, nor forgiveness without sin, nor courage without fear, nor mercy without tragedy. *All* of these greater goods are dependent on permitting the precondition of evil. If, then, the greater good cannot be achieved without allowing evil, and if God must achieve the greatest good (because He *is* the greatest Good), then it seems to follow that it would not have been best for God to have chosen to create a free world where sin would not occur (even if it were actually possible).

If, as mentioned before, it is objected that God does not have to do His best and, consequently, did not have to achieve the *greatest* good but simply a *good* world, then the entire objection that God should have chosen a better world fails anyway. This present world that God created with allowance for sin *is* a good world, and if a good world will suffice, then this world meets the criterion and the objection is irrelevant.

### Response to Alternative Four (To Have Created a Free World Where No One Is Allowed to Sin)

As to the view that God could have made a free world in which no one was permitted to do evil, it appears to be contradictory. God is omnipotent, but even an omnipotent Being cannot do what is contradictory,[18] and it is a contradiction to say that one is free to sin but yet is not allowed to sin. The only logical way

sin can be avoided is for there to be no ability to do otherwise. Once someone is forced not to sin, he is not free; we have noted that *forced freedom* is an absurd concept. God *can*, of course, make creatures that cannot sin; they are, for example, rocks and robots, not moral beings. A *moral* creature, by nature, is one who is free to choose,[19] and it is antithetical to say one is free to do otherwise and also *not* free to do otherwise.

**Response to Alternative Five (To Have Created a Free World Where Sin Occurs but All Are Eventually Saved)**

Like Alternative Three, a free world where everyone sins and then gets saved is *conceivable*, but it may not be *achievable*. As long as everyone is truly free, it is always possible that in every possible world someone will refuse to be saved.[20] Of course, if God *forced* everyone to be saved they would not be free—there is no such reality as *coerced liberty*. Since God is love, He does not and cannot force Himself on people against their will. So a sinful world where universal salvation occurs because of divine coercion upon the unwilling is untenable. In addition, while a world where everyone eventually is saved because they unilaterally refuse *ever* to choose sin *would* be evil-free in the end; nevertheless, it is possible that given what God foreknew from all eternity about their use of free will, such a world is not truly attainable.

Further, a world where sin never materializes is *conceivable*, but it may not actually be the most *morally desirable*.

For one thing, if evil is not permitted, it cannot be defeated. As with automobiles, a tested world is better than an untested one. Or to put it another way, no boxer can actually defeat an opponent unless he gets into the ring with him. God, then, may have permitted evil in order to defeat it (and thus achieve a greater good).

Also, if evil is not allowed, then higher virtues cannot be attained. To reemphasize a previously stated example, there is no way for us to experience the joy of being forgiven without God's allowance for our fall into sin (e.g., Luke 7:36–48). While a world where sin does occur and everyone is saved is *theoretically conceivable*, it seems, nevertheless, that such a world would be *morally inferior*.

In brief, since none of these alternative views is necessary (and some are impossible), it has not been demonstrated that any theorized world-variant is morally better than the one we have. As a result, opponents have failed to show

that God did less than His best in creating our world. This, of course, does not mean we are committed to the belief that this present world is the best world achievable. God is not yet finished: *This world is only the best* way *possible to the best world achievable*.[21]

## SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENTS FOR AN ALTERNATIVE WORLD

Pulling the strings together, we have seen that no alternative has been demonstrated to be superior to the world God chose to create, namely, a world where evil is possible and in which it has actually happened. Surely nonmoral (amoral) worlds—Alternatives One and Two—cannot be *morally* better than this moral world. Likewise, a world of forced freedom—Alternative Four—is not even a logically viable alternative. And a world where persons are free but evil never occurs—Alternative Three—is theoretically conceivable but may not be actually achievable.[22] The same is true of Alternative Five, for it may be that no such world would or could actually materialize where everyone freely willed to be saved. (And even if it were achievable, it would be morally inferior.) In short, it can be argued:

(1) If the greatest possible Being (God) decides to create a moral world, then it is either
   (a) necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it, or
   (b) not necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it.
(2) If it is *not* necessary for Him to achieve the greatest possible good in it, then this world meets the qualification, and the objection (that the world could have been better if He had chosen an alternative plan) fails.
(3) If it *is* necessary for God to achieve the greatest possible good, then permitting this evil world as a necessary precondition for achieving the highest good would be the best alternative.
(4) This world has not yet achieved the greatest good.[23]
(5) However, this present evil world is the best means of achieving the end of the greatest good, which could not be achieved without the preconditioning presence of evil.
(6) An all-good God must accomplish the best end.
(7) An all-wise God must choose the best means to the best end.

(8) An all-powerful God can achieve an end that does not involve any contradiction.
(9) It is contradictory to force freedom to achieve a moral end.
(10) Hence, universalism,[24] in which all are saved (including some against their will), is a contradiction.
(11) Therefore, it is conceivable that this present evil world is the best possible means of obtaining the best world achievable (namely, (a) one where some are saved and some are lost and (b) where sin is defeated and a greater good is achieved).

According to the Bible, what has been shown here to be philosophically and logically possible is *actually* what God decided to do. That is, He chose to permit evil in order to defeat it, thus bringing about a greater good. He chose to create a perfect—and free—world, which He knew would become imperfect by free choices, so that He could bring about a more perfect world. In other words, He chose to permit a world that is not the best possible world in order to achieve one that is. In summary, while our world is not the *best world* possible, it is the *best way* possible to achieve the *best of all possible worlds*, namely, a world where (1) everyone freely chooses his own destiny and (2) where sin is forever defeated (hell) and righteousness reigns eternally (heaven).

## GOD DESIRES TO, CAN, AND WILL DEFEAT EVIL

The very nature of God assures us that evil will eventually be defeated.

(1) God is all-loving and wants to defeat evil.
(2) God is all-powerful and can defeat evil.
(3) Evil is not yet defeated.[25]
(4) Hence, evil will yet be defeated (in the future).

The fact that God is all-good and all-powerful guarantees this conclusion. Further, since God is all-wise, we can be sure that He has chosen the best means to that end (defeating evil).

Consequently, while this present world is not the best of all possible worlds, nonetheless, it must be the best means to the best world. Thus, a world in which evil is permitted is the best kind of world to permit as a means to produce the

best kind of world—one that has no evil in it. That world is our promised destiny.[26]

# THE PROCESS OF DEFEATING EVIL

As previously established, God chose not to annihilate all evil immediately, for then He would have to destroy all the good made possible by freedom as well. Rather, in His infinite wisdom, God decided to defeat evil gradually, without destroying free will. God is doing this in stages through out the ages.

## The Role of Dispensations

*Dispensation* is a biblical term (see Volume 4, chapters 13, and 15). Speaking of Christ's coming kingdom, Paul affirmed "that in the *dispensation* of the fullness of the times He might gather together … all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth in Him" (Eph. 1:10 NKJV).

A dispensation is a "divine order of affairs" or a "period of administration." It is a specific time in the unfolding drama of redemption wherein God ordains a specific arrangement of events and commands for a specific purpose. His purpose includes the defeat of evil.

## The Number of Dispensations

Most evangelical scholars believe in several administrations of God's plan, even if they do not use the term *dispensation*. For example, the divine economy God set up in the Garden of Eden, under which Adam and Eve were tested, is obviously not the same as the one set up between Eden and Moses, or the one after the time of Christ. Neither do we have the same conditions now that will prevail when Christ bodily returns to earth and reigns after His second coming (see Volume 4, chapter 17).[27] In this sense, virtually all evangelical scholars are "dispensationalist," even those who disavow the label. The only question for everyone, then, is how many dispensations there are. *Minimally*, there would seem to be at least four or five. Some scholars see more. Be that as it may, it is not the *number* but the *nature* and *purpose* of dispensations that matter.

## The Nature and Purpose of Dispensations

Relying upon the traditional seven dispensations, God's purpose to defeat evil seems to go something like this: In each age or period from Adam through Christ's return, God orchestrates a different condition, with a different test, to see whether human beings will obey Him. Each time they fail—under almost every conceivable condition. The sum total of the dispensational examinations demonstrates that it is always wrong to disobey God and that complete obedience to Him is the only true path to eternal satisfaction. The aforementioned seven dispensations can be delineated in Scripture.

# DISPENSATIONS

### The Dispensation of Probation (Innocence)

In the Garden of Eden, the test was whether in a state of innocent purity, when people did not know good or evil, they would obey God's command (Gen. 2:16–17). They failed miserably, and God, after judgment (Gen. 3), gave them another chance to prove themselves under a new condition—that of conscience.[28]

### The Dispensation of Conscience (Moral Sense)

After the Fall, human beings had a conscience that informed them what was right and what was wrong (Rom. 2:12–15). But here too they heeded not the command of God to do good and shun evil. The period of conscience also ended in tragedy and judgment when God sent the Flood (Gen. 6–9).

### The Dispensation of Human Government

Since violence had filled the earth (Gen. 6:11) in the previous period, God established human government for humans to obey, providing the sword to enforce it (Gen. 9:6). However, here again human beings failed the test and used the powers of government to make a kingdom in defiance of God. This disobedience to God's established order led to disaster; He destroyed their tower and dispersed them by confounding their languages (Gen. 11).

## The Dispensation of Promise

Thus began the period in which God, after judging the peoples at Babel, chose one nation through whom He would bless all others (Gen. 12:1–3). He gave Abraham the Promised Land and commanded him to dwell in it. Subsequently, as before, humans failed the test. Abraham (and his offspring after him) left the land and descended into Egypt, the land of bondage.[29]

## The Dispensation of Law

As before, God provided grace, giving humans another chance under new conditions to prove that they would not abuse their freedom. They accepted the law given by God through Moses, but then proceeded to disobey by engaging in idolatry and immorality down through the centuries, until God sent them into captivity, first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians. Indeed, even when He sent the promised Messiah, they crucified Him (John 1:10–12); consequently, their temple was destroyed, and God scattered them throughout the world. Yet God's moral law embedded in the Old Testament theocracy did not pass away with it, but continues in the New Testament as a reflection of His moral character.

## The Dispensation of Grace

While God was gracious in every prior age, offering new opportunities to obey Him under new conditions, His unlimited benevolence was poured out through the Cross at the beginning of this new dispensation—the age of grace. Here too God's grace was spurned by the masses; this era will end in the tragedy of the Great Tribulation at the end of the age, though God's grace exists in every age.[30]

## The Dispensation of the Kingdom

Although God is sovereign and has always ruled the affairs of humanity, nonetheless, the promised reign of the Messiah in a visible, literal kingdom has not yet occurred (Matt. 19:28; Acts 1:5; Rev. 19–20). This dispensation will provide an opportunity to test human freedom under a new condition—one in which the devil will be bound for "a thousand years" (Rev. 20:2). Unlike in

previous periods, human beings will not be able to use the excuse that "the devil made me do it." Even so, after the millennial reign of Christ—personally and physically, here on earth—there will be a mass rebellion against God (Rev. 20:7–8), an uprising that He will judge with fire from heaven (v. 9).

So concludes the series of the periods of human history in which people have been divinely examined under almost every conceivable condition: innocence, conscience, government, promise, law, grace, and the kingdom. In each case they proved (or will prove) that human freedom, left to itself, will always rebel against God. They have also demonstrated that God is always right and that real satisfaction comes only from obeying Him.[31]

Again, the point is not how many of these periods existed or even what they should be called, but instead that there have been a number of different conditions at distinct time periods under which God has tested humankind in working out His plan to defeat evil. In the end, God will have used human history, with its varied conditions and administrations (dispensations), to show in eternity to come that (1) sin is always wrong, (2) God is always right, and (3) evil is justly put away forever.

Untold throngs from all the ages will be able to testify from their experience, under a wide variety of conditions, that God is just, that sin is destructive, and that submitting freely to His will is the only way to obtain true and permanent blessedness. In effect, *God will have defeated sin by permitting it in virtually every possible way*. This defeat will include a final separation of the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats—the latter being sent to eternal condemnation (Matt. 25:40–41; Rev. 20:14–15) and the former into everlasting bliss (Rev. 21–22). Sin will be quarantined forever, and each person will be assigned the permanent place of his or her own choosing. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) put it:

> I would pay any price to be able to say truthfully "All will be saved." But my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say "With their will," my reason replies "How, if they *will not* give in?" (*PP*, 106–07).

Therefore,

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "*Thy* will be done." All that are in hell, choose it. (*GD*, 69)

Lewis believed that "without that self-choice there could be no hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find.

To those who knock it is opened" (ibid.). God has determined not to rob His creatures of the freedom He gave them, and hence to instead defeat sin without destroying volition.[32]

# THE EXECUTION OF GOD'S PLAN

God's plan to defeat evil was and is (and will be) carefully and gradually executed in seven primary stages:

(1) the creation of free creatures;
(2) the fall of humankind;
(3) the preparation for the Savior;
(4) the incarnation of the Savior;
(5) the present session of the Savior (in heaven);
(6) the return and reign of the Savior (the final judgment); and
(7) the new heaven and new earth.

## The Creation of Free Creatures

As omniscient,[33] God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). Before He created, He foresaw the fall of humanity and made plans for our salvation. Nonetheless, God created human beings innocent and perfect,[34] endowing them with free will (Gen. 2:16) and, consequently, holding them responsible for their choices (Gen. 2:16–17).

## The Fall of Humankind

Again, God foresaw the Fall, even planning for it from all eternity. John spoke of "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), and Paul said, "He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4 KJV). Nothing catches the omniscient Mind by surprise. Permitting Adam and Eve to sin was part of God's plan to defeat evil.

## The Preparation for the Savior

Immediately following the Fall, God announced His eternal plan to provide salvation for all humankind. He said to the serpent, whom He had allowed to tempt Adam and Eve, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen. 3:15). The Savior would be the Seed of the woman, and He would ultimately—fatally—crush the serpent’s head. This Christ did *officially* on the Cross (Col. 2:14) and will do *actually* when He returns (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10).

The rest of the Old Testament is the preparation for the coming Savior. To begin, God called into existence the holy nation through which He would bring the Promised Seed. In the *books of the law* (Genesis through Deuteronomy), God laid the *foundation* for Christ. In the *historical* books (Joshua through Nehemiah), He made the *provision* for the holy nation to enter and obtain the Holy Land so that they could produce the Holy One (Christ).

We see, then, that in Genesis God chose the nation; in Exodus He redeemed them; in Leviticus He sanctified them; in Numbers He guided them, and in Deuteronomy He instructed them so that in Joshua they could be victorious. In Judges they were unsettled without a king, but in 1 Samuel the nation was established and in 2 Samuel it was expanded. After the reign of Solomon, the nation declined (in 1 Kings) and was deported (in 2 Kings—a *prophetic* history repeated from a *priestly* viewpoint in 1 and 2 Chronicles). In Esther the nation was protected, and in Ezra and Nehemiah they were returned and rebuilt.

Meanwhile, the *poetic* books express an *aspiration* for Christ. Job aspired for mediation, Psalms for communion with God, Proverbs for wisdom, Ecclesiastes for the greatest good (Lat: *summum bonun*), and Song of Solomon for intimate union—*all* of which was found ultimately in Jesus the Messiah.

Finally, the *prophetic* books (Isaiah through Malachi) earnestly proclaim an *expectation* for Christ. Each book in its own way anticipated the coming Savior,[35] concluding the Old Testament preparation for the One who was to bring salvation.

## The Incarnation of the Savior

> When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons [adoption]. (Gal. 4:4–5)

The *anticipation* of the Old Testament became the *realization* of the New Testament: The eternal Word assumed temporal flesh. He became incarnate (1) to fulfill prophecy, (2) to manifest deity, and (3) to redeem humanity.

First of all, as John says,

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God … [And] the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1, John 1:14)

Also, Jesus said, “Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), and “The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost” (Luke 19:10).

The Gospels detail the historic manifestation of Christ; Acts chronicles the spread of the sharing of Christ; the Epistles establish the interpretation and application of Christ; and Revelation reveals the final consummation in Christ.

*Christ’s Substitutionary Death*

Jesus did not come simply to speak to His people as their Prophet, but He also made a sacrifice for them as their Priest (see Mark 10:45): “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full… and I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:10, 15). Christ’s atoning death was not merely exemplar,[36] but it was also sacrificial and substitutionary.[37] He died in our place, as a substitute for our sins.[38]

*Christ’s Physical Resurrection*

The resurrection of Christ is the kingpin of God’s plan of redemption. Paul wrote, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). Jesus, when asked for proof of His identity, answered,

> A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matt. 12:39–40)

As He approached the cross, Jesus said, specifically: “ ‘The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.’ And the disciples were filled with grief” (Matt. 17:22–23).

The resurrection of Christ was the dominant theme of early apostolic preaching (e.g., Acts 2, 13). It is the culmination point of Matthew, Mark, Luke, *and* John, occupying the last sections of each. Indeed, Paul proclaimed that the resurrection of Jesus was at the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8) and that one could not be saved without believing in it (1 Cor. 15:14–19; cf. Rom. 10:9).

*Christ's Bodily Ascension Into Heaven*

Christ's work of salvation did not end with His death and resurrection. He told Mary, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, '*I am returning to my Father* and your Father, to my God and your God' " (John 20:17). He said this because He had not yet completed His work by ascending to the Father and receiving acceptance of His finished work of salvation. His ascension, like His resurrection, was announced in advance.

Luke wrote, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem."[39] Later, before His ascension, He said,

> "I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. (Luke 24:49–51)

In John 14:2–3, Jesus told His disciples,

> In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

His ascension was necessary to complete the work of salvation by preparing a place for His bride. Paul said,

> Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Eph. 5:25–27)

Jesus promised,

> I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because *I am going to the Father* … You heard me say, "I am going away and I am coming back to you." If you loved me, you would be glad that *I am going to the Father*. (John 14:12, 28)

Without the Ascension, the Holy Spirit would not have descended to indwell and empower the disciples.

Jesus also said,

> *I am going to the Father,* where you can see me no longer.… I came from the Father and entered the

world; now *I am leaving the world and going back to the Father*. (John 16:10, 28)

The language is unequivocal: Jesus came from and returned to His Father—He descended and then ascended.

> What "does he ascended"[40] mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe. (Eph. 4:9–10)

Just as Jesus in His humiliation descended to the grave, so in His exaltation He ascended into heaven.

The Ascension is implied in Philippians 2:8–11, regarding Christ's exaltation:

> Being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name*, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Acts 1:9–11 is the chief text on Christ's bodily assumption into heaven. It affirms that the Ascension was a literal, visible rising of His resurrection body. His body was not, as some suggest, transformed into an invisible one. Rather, His physical body simply passed out of their sight behind "a cloud":

> After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."[41]

## Christ's Present Session (the Church)

In addition to Christ's physical death, literal bodily resurrection, and actual ascension into heaven, He has an indescribably important "present priestly session" in heaven on behalf of believers.

> My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1–2)

According to John, Satan is the accuser of God's people (Rev. 12; cf. Job. 1–2)

> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. *For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down*" (Rev. 12:10).

In view of this, Christ—our Advocate—counters by pleading (with His Father) the efficacy of His blood, which was shed for our sins.

> It is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." … Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (Heb. 7:17, 22–26)

Because Christ is human as well as divine, He can sympathize with our human frailties:

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. (Heb. 4:14–15)

Since He Himself was tempted in all points that we are, He can, by His present session, overcome these temptations:

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1 Cor. 10:13)

This "way out" is provided by Christ's intercession for us, His present priestly ministry on our behalf.

## The Return and Reign of the Savior

As noted above, Jesus will come again and fulfill His role as King over His people. The complete discussion of Christ's second coming and subsequent reign is found under "Eschatology."[42]

### *Christ As King*

Jesus is not only Prophet to and Priest for His people, but one day He will literally (actually, physically) be King over them as well: "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you

who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). John added,

> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and *reigned with Christ a thousand years*. (Rev. 20:4)

### *The Final Judgment*

According to Revelation,

> When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (20:7–10)

This is followed by the final judgment before the Great White Throne:

> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11–15)

## The New Heaven and New Earth

Following this, John said,

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
>
> One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates.…
>
> The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second

> sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (Rev. 21:1–4, 9–12, 18–22)

Also describing this great event, Peter wrote:

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10–13; cf. Isa. 65:17–25)

# THE RESULT OF GOD'S PLAN

God's great plan culminates in the total defeat of evil. Evil was vanquished *officially* at the Cross (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14) and will be defeated *actually* at Christ's return.

### The Official and Actual Victories Over Sin

This official defeat of sin at the Cross notwithstanding, the fact is that Satan is still present and acting upon planet earth. He knows, however, that his doom is sealed (Matt. 8:29) and that his time is short (Rev. 12:12). The day of his destiny is coming:

> Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after [God] has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (1 Cor. 15:24–28)

We see, then, that the official defeat of sin came at the First Advent; the actual defeat will be at the Second Coming.

There are three stages in the overall battle to defeat sin in the lives of God's children.[43]

*Justification* (deliverance from the *penalty* of sin) is a past action for all

believers, accomplished at the Cross.

*Sanctification* (deliverance from the *power* of sin) is a present and continuous process of believers becoming Christlike, accomplished by the Holy Spirit's power and presence.

Finally, *glorification* (deliverance from the *presence* of sin) will take place at Christ's return—the dawning of the eternal kingdom.[44]

**The Eventual (Ultimate) Defeat of Sin**

We speak of the *defeat*, not the *destruction*, of sin, because sin, in the sinner, will continue forever in hell. Even so, *God will defeat sin without destroying the sinner*. Thus, what is meant by *defeat* must be unpacked.

What does the defeat of sin *not* mean?

For one thing, it does not mean that God will annihilate sinners.[45] This would be to attack His own immortal image, which all sinners, even those in hell, still bear.

Further, the annihilation of all sinners would not be punishment, since those who do not exist cannot feel any pain.

What is more, there are degrees of punishment in hell (Rev. 20:12–13), and clearly there cannot be "degrees of annihilation."

Finally, it is contrary to the nature of an all-loving God to snuff out people who do not love Him in return. Rather, in His infinite love, God will allow even those who hate Him to "have it their way." Again, as C. S. Lewis intoned, since they refuse to say to Him, "Thy will be done," *He* will say to *them*, "Thy will be done."

What *does* the defeat of sin mean?

For one thing, it means everlasting torment.[46] Sin against the Eternal demands eternal consequence. God is forever just and hence cannot overlook sin forever.

For another thing, it involves eternal separation of the saved from the lost, of righteousness from sin. Today, good and evil exist side by side. As Jesus said, the wheat (saved) and the tares (lost) must live together for the time being: "Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn' " (Matt. 13:30). For, in the end,

> The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and

gnashing of teeth. (Matt. 13:41–42)

What frustrates good people is evil, and what frustrates evil people is good. The final solution demands a separation, where there will be no more evil to frustrate good persons and no more good to frustrate evil persons. Each will have it according to their respective wills: Sin will be defeated in the saved, since they will be rescued from its very presence, and sin will also be defeated in the unsaved, since they will no longer be able to spread it to others. The infection of evil will be forever halted by its everlasting quarantine. Therefore, the good will be forever preserved from evil's deadly effects.

Finally, evil is *defeated* because the good is actually victorious over it. Evil has been proven to be wrong in every age and in every way. Good can no longer be contaminated by it, and the righteous will reign while the wicked are in pain. The good will be unshackled from the presence of sin, and the evil will be forever enslaved by it. There will indeed be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4 NKJV).

# THE DEFEAT OF SATAN

Sin will not ultimately be defeated until Satan is defeated. God's plan to defeat evil, then, is also a plan to defeat the devil and his demons.

## The Creation of the Devil

We have noted that God did not create the devil as such. Rather, He created pure spiritual beings,[47] and some of them rebelled against Him, becoming "the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). God created only good things (Gen. 1:31), for "every creature of God is good" (1 Tim. 4:4 NKJV). And God created all the heavenly host: "Praise Him, all His angels.… For He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:2, 5 NKJV). Paul said,

> By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. (Col. 1:16 KJV)

## The Fall of the Devil

As we have seen, while Ezekiel 28 speaks directly about the prince of Tyre,

nonetheless it eloquently expresses truths about the one who inspired him, for Paul reminds us that pride brought Lucifer down (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6).

Speaking of the King of Tyre, who emulated Satan, the Lord said,

> "*You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God*; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl.… *You were anointed as a guardian cherub*, for so I ordained you. *You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones*.
>
> *You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you*. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. *Your heart became proud on account of your beauty*, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth" (Ezek. 28:12–17).

Speaking of the king of Babylon, Isaiah's words also describe the one who inspired and typified his fall:

> *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!* How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! *For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High*. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isa. 14:12–15 KJV)

## The Fall of the Demons

Many good angels followed Satan in His rebellion against God. John wrote:

> There appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth … And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Rev. 12:3–4, 7–9 KJV)

Peter said, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4 KJV). Again, Jude added, "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6).

## The Plan of the Devil and His Demons

The purpose of Satan can be determined in large part from his many names. He is “the prince of this world” (John 12:31; John 16:11); “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2 NASB); “the god of this age” (2 Cor. 4:4); “Satan” (“adversary”—Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:9); “the Devil” (“slanderer”—Luke Rev 4:2; Rev. 12:9); “the serpent” (“crafty”—Gen 3:1; “that ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9); “the great dragon” (“terrifying”—Rev. 12:3, 7, 9); “the evil one” (John 17:15; 1 John 5:18); “the Destroyer” (Rev. 9:11); “the Tempter” (Matt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5); “the Accuser” (Job 1:9; Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10); “the Deceiver” (Rev. 12:10; cf. Eph. 6:11); “the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2 NKJV); “Beelzebub” (“prince of demons”—Matt. 12:25; Luke 11:15); “Baal-Zebub” (“Lord of high places”—2 Kings 1:3); “Abaddon” (“Apollyon,” “destructor”—Rev. 9:11); “Belial” (2 Cor. 6:15), an “angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), and “the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

In brief, like the antichrist whom he inspires, the devil “opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4 NKJV). He not only opposes God, but he opposes God’s plan and God’s people. As John stated, he “accuses them [the saints] before our God day and night” (Rev. 12:10).

Satan’s tactics are to cause doubt, denial, disobedience, deception, and the destruction of God’s people and plan. Paul said, “No wonder, for … Satan disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14 NASB).

**The Defeat of the Devil and His Demons**

The defeat of the devil, like the defeat of sin, is not accomplished in one blow. It was *promised* from the beginning, when God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; *he will crush your head*, and you will strike his heel.” This was not officially *accomplished*, however, until Christ died on the cross and rose again:

> He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And *having disarmed the powers and authorities*, he made a public spectacle of them, *triumphing over them by the cross*. (Col. 2:14–15)

Just how did this happen? While the serpent was biting the heel of the Savior (by His crucifixion), the Savior was crushing the head of the serpent (by His resurrection). As one writer put it, Satan bit on the bait of Christ’s humanity and was caught on the hook of His deity. The writer of Hebrews said, “Since the

children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity *so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil*" (2:14).

The defeat of Satan is also in three stages.

> *Officially*, it occurred (as the above verses indicate) on the Cross.
> *Practically*, it is occurring through the purification of believers.
> *Actually*, it will not occur until Christ's return.

These correspond to the aforementioned three stages of salvation in the believer's life: justification (salvation from the penalty of sin—*official*); sanctification (salvation from the power of sin—*practical*), and glorification (salvation from the presence of sin—*actual*).

Satan was defeated officially (legally) by the death of Christ (Rom. 3–5). He is defeated practically (applicationally) in our lives when we resist him by the power of the Cross (Rom. 6–7). And He will be defeated finally (ultimately) when Christ returns (Rom. 8) and redeems our bodies from death. In this connection, Paul promised the Romans, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Rom. 16:20):

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as *we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies*. (Rom. 8:22–23)

In this final stage of salvation, the defeat of Satan (and his demons) will consist of two main elements.

*First*, the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the goats, will be separated from each other.

> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." … Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:32–34, 41).

*Second*, not only will Satan be separated from the good so that he can no longer corrupt it, but he will be quarantined from spreading evil:

> The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Likewise, all his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire with him. (Rev. 20:10 NASB)

John wrote, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8 NASB). Finally, in the end, he who was the great destroyer will be destroyed.

## CONCLUSION

God permitted evil to defeat evil. He *created* only good creatures, but He *permitted* evil in order that He might ultimately conquer it. Satan, who was the great deceiver, was self-deceived; Paul speaks of “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor. 2:8 NASB). While the serpent bit the Savior’s heel, Christ crushed the devil’s head. The defeat of sin has not been swift and immediate, but it will be complete and final.

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# PART TWO

# SALVATION (SOTERIOLOGY)



CHAPTER SEVEN

# THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

**S** is the precondition for salvation;[1] salvation isn't necessary unless there are sinners in need of being saved. As to the origin of salvation, there is universal agreement among orthodox theologians: God is the author of our salvation, for whereas human sin originated with human beings on earth, salvation originated with God in heaven.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR SALVATION

The topic at hand is divided into several soteriological sections: the origin of God's decrees,[2] the nature of God's decrees, the order of God's decrees, and the results of God's decrees.

### The Origin of God's Decrees

The origin of salvation is the will of God, who decreed from all eternity to provide salvation for those who would believe: "Salvation is *of the Lord*" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV). As John puts it, believers are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but *born of God*" (John 1:13). Paul adds, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on *God's mercy*" (Rom. 9:16), for "he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through

Jesus Christ, *in accordance with his pleasure and will*" (Eph. 1:5). In short, salvation originated in God's decision to save us. Otherwise, no one would ever be rescued.

With God, as with human beings in His image, free choice is self determination;[3] salvation is based in a free, self-determined act of God. This decision was made in accordance with His good and gracious nature, but the choice was completely self-determined (cf. Eph. 1:5; 1 Peter 1:2). There was no external or internal compulsion for God either to create or to save. He did both freely.[4]

*Election According to God's Foreknowledge*

Peter spoke of the "elect *according to the foreknowledge of God* the Father" (1 Peter 1:2 NKJV). Thus, it is necessary that God act lovingly, since He *is* love (1 John 4:16), and it is also necessary that God act justly, since He is just (Gen. 18:25; Rom. 2:11; 3:26). However, it was not required that God create moral creatures; what is incumbent is that if God chooses to create moral creatures, that He then act consistently with His unchanging nature of love and justice and with the freedom He chose to give His creatures.[5]

*The Condition for Giving vs. the Condition for Receiving*

Likewise, it is necessary that upon the conditions that God chose to create and to save free moral creatures, He does so in accordance with the freedom He gave them. Hence, there is no condition for God's *giving* salvation, but there is one (and only one) condition laid down for *receiving* the gift of eternal life: faith (Acts 16:31; Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9). Therefore, the reception of salvation is conditioned on our belief.[6] Salvation is unconditioned from the perspective of the Giver, but it is conditioned from the view of the receiver (who must believe in order to receive it). In short, salvation comes *from* God, but we receive it *through* faith: "For *by* grace you have been saved *through* faith" (Eph. 2:8 NASB).

**The Nature of God's Decrees**

Whereas the source of salvation is God's choice to save us, the nature of salvation is God's grace. The wondrous gift of everlasting life is by grace and grace alone, "and if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). *Soteriologically*, grace and works are

mutually exclusive. “Working for grace” is a contradiction in terms, for “when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation” (Rom. 4:4). “However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness” (Rom. 4:5).

*The Nature of Grace: Unmerited Favor*

Grace, then, is unmerited favor. What we work for, we earn, and what we do not work for, we do not earn. Since salvation comes to us without works on our part, it follows that we did not merit it: Salvation is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23). God’s salvific grace is His unmerited favor for us.

Some have contrasted grace and mercy by noting that grace is giving us what we *did not* deserve (viz., salvation), whereas mercy is *not* giving us what we *did* deserve (viz., condemnation). Although biblical usage of these terms does not necessarily accord with this distinction, the point is biblical nonetheless. God’s actions of grace and mercy are two sides of His unconditional love for us.

*The Object of Grace: Repentant Sinners*

According to the Bible, God’s grace of salvation is not bestowed automatically or unilaterally on sinners but is received only *through faith*.[7] Paul is careful to qualify how God’s gracious provision of eternal life is received: “It is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Elsewhere he adds,

> Now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes *through* faith in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*. (Rom. 3:21–22)

Again,

> There is no difference [between persons], for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, *through faith* in his blood. (Rom. 3:22–25)[8]

Even in the strongly stated words of Romans 9, the “objects of his wrath” are such because *they did not repent:* “What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, *bore with great patience* the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction?” (v. 4:22). Why is God salvifically patient with us? Because, as Peter says, He doesn’t want “anyone to perish, but *[He wants] everyone to come to repentance*” (2 Peter 3:9).

*The Relation of Grace and Wrath*

Therefore, the rejection of grace incurs wrath, and the acceptance of grace brings salvation. As we have seen, like a person standing under Niagara Falls with an upside-down cup, the emptiness comes from rejecting the flow. By a simple act of repentance (turning the "cup" of the soul right side up), one can receive the blessings intended for him from the abundant flow of God's love.

## The Order of God's Decrees

Whereas there is general agreement on the *origin* of salvation, theologians have long debated the *order* of God's salvific decrees. The fact of God's election is clear in Scripture; it is the progression of His choices relating to election that is the subject of much dialogue.

The main discussion on the order of God's decrees has followed along the lines indicated by the chart below, the primary question being whether God decreed to elect before or after He decreed to permit the Fall (Lat: *lapsus*).

The chart begins with the most Calvinistic on the left and proceeds to the Arminian (i.e., Wesleyan) view on the right. Various terms on the chart will be subsequently defined and explained.

# THE ORDER OF GOD'S DECREES

| Supralapsarianism | Infralapsarianism | Sublapsarianism | Wesleyanism |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Elect some and reprobate others | (1) Create all | (1) Create all | (1) Create all |
| (2) Create both the elect and the non-elect | (2) Permit the Fall | (2) Permit the Fall | (2) Permit the the Fall |
| (3) Permit the Fall | (3) Elect some and pass others by | (3) Provide salvation for all | (3) Provide salvation for all |
| (4) Provide salvation only for the elect | (4) Provide salvation only for the elect | (4) Elect those who believe and pass by those who do not | (4) Elect based on the fore seen faith of believers |
| (5) Apply salvation only to the elect | (5) Apply salvation only to the elect | (5) Apply salvation only to believers (who cannot lose it) | (5) Apply salvation only to believers (who can lose it) |

The term *supralapsarian* is from the Latin *supra (above)* and *lapsus (fall)*, meaning that God's decree of election (predestination) is considered by supralapsarians to be *above*, or logically prior to, His decree to permit the Fall. Since *infra* means "below," the infralapsarians consider God's decree of election to be beneath, or logically after, His decree to permit the Fall. The sublapsarians (Amyraldians)[9] are similar to the infralapsarians, except they place God's order to provide salvation before His order to elect (see Chafer, *ST*, 2.105). Wesleyans adhere to the same basic order as infralapsarians, except they hold that God's election is *based on His foreknowledge* rather than simply *in accord with it*. Hence, for Wesleyans (Arminians), God's decree is conditional instead of unconditional (which is maintained by the three Calvinistic views).

Supralapsarians are *hypter*-Calvinists, being double-predestinarians.[10] Infralapsarians are *strong* Calvinists but are not double-predestinarians. Sublapsarians (Amyraldians) are *moderate* Calvinists, holding to unlimited atonement. Again, Wesleyans are Arminians, insisting that election is conditional, not unconditional. Wesleyans also do not believe in eternal security,[11] while adherents to the other views do.

## The Sequence of God's Decrees

One of the primary problems with this discussion is the way it has been framed, namely, on the assumption that there is an order in the decrees of God. In view of God's attributes,[12] one thing is clear: Whatever order there may be in God's choices, it is not chronological, since an eternal Being has no chronological sequence. God is both simple and eternal, and, as such, He does not think or act sequentially.

### *There Is No* Chronological *Order in God's Decrees*

Being eternal (nontemporal), God does not have any time-related sequence in His thoughts or decisions. Whatever things He has thought and whatever actions He has done, He has thought and done simultaneously, from all eternity.

### *There Is No* Logical *Order in God's Decrees*

Is there a logical order, though, to God's decrees? Not for Him. God does not think sequentially (i.e., discursively, having one thought after another). He knows all things immediately and intuitively in Himself, since He is simple, eternal, and immutable in His Being. As such, all that He knows and chooses is

known and performed immediately and intuitively, from all eternity.[13]

*There Is an* Operational *Order in God's Decrees*

Of course, there *is* an operational order in the execution of God's decrees. God eternally willed things to happen in a certain temporal sequence (one after the other), just as a doctor wills in advance the patient's cure by prescribing, for instance, the ingestion of a pill a day for a week. Hence, God willed, for example, that Creation would occur before the Fall, and that salvation would be provided after the Fall.

It makes no sense to speak of God having a logical order in His mind, as though one of His thoughts followed after another. All thoughts are known by God in one eternal contuition (i.e., co-intuition). As a simple Being, He therefore knows all things simply, which is why the Bible speaks of election as being "*in accordance with*" His will (Eph. 1:5; cf. 1 Peter 1:2) and not based on or independent of other attributes. *All* of God's attributes, thoughts, and decisions are eternal in accord with one another, and none is logically dependent on or independent of another. If it were, there would be a contradictory logical sequence in a God who has no multiplicity, not even in His thoughts.[14]

## The Results of God's Decrees

The results of God's salvific decrees are twofold: to *provide* salvation for all, and to *apply* salvation to those who believe.

*Salvation Is* Provided *for All*

The Bible is clear and emphatic: God desires all to be saved and, thus, He provided salvation for all humankind.[15] "God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16 NKJV).

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all men*. (Rom. 5:18)

"Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). "God was *reconciling the world to himself* in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). God "*wants all men to be saved* and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). "We have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Savior of all men*, and especially of those

who believe (1 Tim. 4:10). "The *grace* of God that brings salvation *has appeared to all men*" (Titus 2:11). "[Jesus] suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might *taste death for everyone*" (Heb. 2:9). "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also *for the sins of the whole world*" (1 John 2:2).

God willed from all eternity, then, to provide salvation for all humankind. Hence, Christ is "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8; cf. Eph. 1:4).

*Salvation Is Applied* to Those Who Believe

However, while salvation was *provided* for all, it is *applied* only to those who believe. Some ask the question, "For whom was the Atonement *designed*?" Strong Calvinists respond by asking why, if the Atonement was intended for *all*, all are not saved. How can a sovereign God's intention be thwarted? (see chapter 12).

If, as strong Calvinists argue, the Atonement was intended only for some (the elect), then limited atonement follows. This leads to the apparent dilemma that either (1) the Atonement was intended for all or (2) the Atonement was intended only for some (the elect).[16] If it *was* intended for all, then all will be saved (since God's sovereign intentions must come to pass), and if it was *not* intended for all, then it was intended only for some (the elect). Therefore, it would appear that either universalism is true or else limited atonement is true (see Sproul, *CG*, 205).

Of course, both moderate Calvinists and traditional Arminians deny universalism.[17] Hence, in response to the supposed problem, it is only necessary to point out that the argument contains a false dilemma. There is a third alternative: The Atonement was intended to *provide* (offer) salvation for all as well as to *procure* (apply) salvation for those who believe.

In short, the problem is a false dichotomy, wrongly assuming either (1) that there was only one intention for the Atonement, or if understood in terms of a primary or single intention, (2) that the one purpose of the Atonement was to *procure* salvation for the elect. Actually, *since God also wanted everyone to believe, He also intended that Christ would die to* provide *salvation for all people*. The alternative—limited atonement—leads to a denial that God truly wants all persons to be saved—a belief contrary to His omnibenevolence[18] as revealed in Scripture.

Salvation, then, was provided for all, but it is only applied to those who believe. "It is by grace you have been saved, *through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "This righteousness from God

comes *through faith* in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*" (Rom. 3:22). Again, we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, *through faith* in his blood" (Rom. 3:24–25).

# THE THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

Since the *origin* of salvation is found in the will of God as a loving Being (His omnibenevolence), the *basis* for God's will to save sinful human beings is found in His omnipotence[19] and its application involves the God-given power of human free choice.[20]

Because God is loving, and because love cannot force itself on the beloved (since, again, "forced love" is a contradiction), it was necessary that if God wished to love and to be loved by His creatures, He had to create them free. Testimony to the doctrine of human free will (both before *and* after the Fall) is found in abundance throughout the history of the church. In fact, with the explainable exception of the later Augustine, virtually every major father of the church has held that salvation is received by the free choice of human beings.[21]

Since God is all-loving, He must love all. And since love is impossible for God and creatures without free will, both must be free. If God freely loves all His creatures and cannot force His love upon them, then there is one condition for receiving this love: the willingness to be loved. In short, not everyone will be saved because not everyone wills to be saved (cf. Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9).

Theologically, then, salvation originates in divine omnibenevolence and is received by human choice. Salvation is *given* by an act of God's freedom, and it is *received* by an act of our freedom. To be sure, this act of freedom is aided by God's grace, but His grace does not save apart from the co-operation of our will.[22]

### The Nature of God's Freedom

*Freedom* in God means that He is self-determined, neither determined by another nor undetermined in His actions (which are caused by Himself).[23]

*No External Compulsion*

Logically, God's actions must be (1) caused by another, (2) uncaused, or (3) caused by Himself. Uncaused actions (indetermined) are contrary to the principle of causality; there is a cause for every event.[24] God's actions cannot be caused by another (determined), since there is no force outside of Him capable of determining His actions (the sovereign God cannot be forced to do anything by anyone else). While self-caused *being* is contrary to the law of noncontradiction,[25] God's *actions* must be caused by Himself (self-determined).

*No Internal Compulsion*

Likewise, God's actions cannot be internally compelled. "Forced freedom" is a contradiction regardless of whether the alleged force comes from without or from within. As opposed to the suggestion of pantheism, God's choice to create (and to save) was not determined by His nature. *Creation flows freely from God's will*, and, as God's will is identical to His nature, it is of His nature that God is free to create or not to create. As we saw in Volume 2, He did not create because He had to but because He wanted to. Creation does not come from God like a flower unfolds from a seed; rather, it flows like love from a lover—freely.

*Internal Consistency*

While salvation does not flow from God necessarily (i.e., by compulsion) but freely, nevertheless, it is consistent with His moral nature that God chose to provide salvation for all and to save those who believe. Even so, it was not necessary that God create *or elect* anyone; election is an unconditional act. There are no conditions for God's choice to *provide* salvation; however, again, there is one condition for us to *receive* it—a free act of faith in God. This is demanded both by the nature of God as all-loving and by the nature of free creatures, who alone are able to love Him.

**The Nature of God's Omnibenevolence**

God's freedom is rooted in His unchanging love; He cannot act contrary to His own nature. For example, since God is truth, "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18; cf. Titus 1:2), and since God is love, it is impossible for Him not to love whatever is good.[26] Since God's omnibenevolence has already been treated extensively,[27] the main points will be only summarized here.

God has said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you

with loving-kindness" (Jer. 31:3). "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14). "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ" (Eph. 2:4–5). "Live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2). "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy" (Titus 3:4–5). "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1).

> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:7–10)

Theologically, God's omnibenevolence flows from a logical connection between love and several of His metaphysical attributes.

*God's Infinity and Simplicity Imply Omnibenevolence*

God is infinite in His essence,[28] and love is of the essence of God (1 John 4:16). Therefore, God must be infinite love.

God's essence is also simple,[29] which means that He is indivisible, having no parts. Therefore, God cannot be partly anything, and since God is loving, it follows that He must be wholly and completely loving.

*God's Necessity Implies Omnibenevolence*

God is a necessary Being,[30] and God is love; hence, God necessarily is love—He cannot *not* love. He must love Himself, and if He chooses to create beings like Himself, then He must necessarily love them—all of them. In addition, there is no conflict between necessity and freedom in God, since it is of His necessary nature that all creation and salvation flow freely from Him. Further, freedom in God does not mean "the power of contrary choice in moral matters" (e.g., the ability to do evil rather than good). God's freedom in moral matters, as His basic freedom in all matters, is the power of self-determined actions. In this sense, there is no logical contradiction between freedom and the necessity to love all He creates.

## Implications of God's Omnibenevolence

Two important soteriological implications, following from the omnibenevolence of God, must again be observed.

*Implications for the Doctrine of Irresistible Grace*

All Calvinists believe in some form of irresistible grace: Extreme Calvinists and strong Calvinists believe grace is irresistible on the *unwilling*, and moderate Calvinists believe grace is irresistible on the *willing*.[31] In view of God's omnibenevolence, it follows that grace cannot be irresistible on the unwilling, for a God of complete love cannot force anyone to act against his or her will. "Forced love" is intrinsically impossible; a loving God can work persuasively but not coercively. C. S. Lewis aptly commented,

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will …would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 38)

*Implications for Universalism*

As we saw in Volume 2 (chapter 15), God's omnibenevolence renders universalism untenable.[32] Though an omnipotent God can do whatever is possible, an omnibenevolent God is only able to do what is moral, and there would be nothing morally right about forcing moral beings to go against their will. God clearly wants all to be saved, but "irresistible grace on the unwilling" is in opposition to God-given human freedom. Hence, there is no guarantee (such as is offered by universalism) that all people will be saved; God's omnibenevolence will not allow Him to do everything His omnipotence could otherwise do.

It simply begs the question to argue that all will eventually become willing. How? By having their freedom fettered? If so, then they would not truly be free, at any rate. It is contrary to both Scripture and experience to insist that all will eventually choose to follow God freely.[33]

In addition, if strong Calvinism is correct in maintaining that God *can* force people (by irresistible grace) to be saved, then the only way supralapsarians and infralapsarians can avoid universalism (which, again, is plainly false) is by denying that God is omnibenevolent. The reason for this is that if God can save anyone He wants to save, even apart from the response of free will (the assertion of strong Calvinists), and if God really loves all (omnibenevolence) and wants all to be saved, then all *will* be save … which is universalism. Therefore, we

insist that God is all-loving, and, as such, He cannot coerce free choices—it would be contradictory for Him to do so, and God cannot do what is contradictory.

**Monergism vs. Synergism**

This raises the hotly debated theological issue of monergism vs. synergism. Strong Calvinists maintain that the moment of conversion (regeneration) is totally the result of God's operation, without any cooperation on the human's part. This is sometimes called *operative grace*, as opposed to *cooperative grace*. Regeneration (conversion) is thus said to be a *monergistic* act (meaning, "His work alone"). However, according to strong Calvinists, at every point after regeneration, our will cooperates with God's actions for the purpose of our sanctification (purification); all of this subsequent work of grace is acknowledged to be *synergistic* (meaning, "our work together"; see Sproul, *WB*, 119).

That is, for the strong Calvinist, humans are completely passive with regard to the beginning of their salvation, but they are active in cooperating with God's grace from that point forward. This view was held, for instance, by the later Augustine, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and Francis Turretin. The Synod of Dort,[34] following the later Augustine, even used the illustration of the "resurrection from the dead" of God's work on the unregenerate.[35]

As stated, the strong Calvinist view of an initial monergism is based on the belief that God exercises irresistible grace on the unwilling. This would be a violation of *God-given* human free choice. There are several reasons for rejecting monergism.

*Monergism Is Not Supported by the Bible*

Scripture does not support the view that irresistible grace is exercised on the unwilling; the Bible affirms that all can and some do resist the grace of God. Jesus lamented,

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, *but you were not willing*. (Matt. 23:37; cf. 2 Peter 3:9)

Stephen spoke of the stiff-necked people of God, charging, "*You always resist the Holy Spirit!*" (Acts 7:51).

In the days of Noah, "The LORD said, '*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever*' " (Gen. 6:3 NKJV). Indeed, while the Holy Spirit "will *convict the world of sin*, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8 NKJV), not all the world will respond. During His earthly ministry, and in spite of His supernatural works, Jesus did not convince everyone of the need to be saved. Indeed, He pronounced that some had so rejected the work of the Holy Spirit that they "*blasphemed against" Him* and, hence, would never receive forgiveness but would be "subject to eternal condemnation" (Mark 3:28–29 NKJV).

*Monergism Is Not Supported by the Church Fathers*

Besides the later Augustine, who was caught up in the donatist controversy, no major Fathers up to the Reformation held to irresistible grace on the unwilling. For example, Augustine earlier (and correctly) stated:

> God is said to be "our Helper;" but nobody can be helped who does not make some effort of his own accord. For God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will. (*OFSB*, 2.28)

Even Martin Luther's perspective, the first major one after the later Augustine to argue for irresistible grace on the unwilling, was reversed by his disciple and systematizer, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), whom subsequent Lutherans followed. Likewise, John Calvin's view was opposed by Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and is rejected by all moderate Calvinists.[36]

*Monergism Is Contrary to the "Protestant Principle"*

One of the fundamental principles of Protestantism is "salvation by faith alone" (Lat: *sola fidei*). If salvation comes by faith—which Scripture plainly affirms—then faith is logically prior to being regenerated. Again, as to whether regeneration is prior to faith or faith is prior to regeneration, the Bible is clear. We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8–9); we are justified by faith (Rom. 5:1); we must believe in Christ in order to be saved (Acts 16:31). In each case, faith is logically prior to salvation. We do not get saved in order to believe; rather, we believe in order to become saved.[37]

*Monergism Is Contrary to God's Omnibenevolence*

Strong Calvinists admit to believing that God is not all-loving in a redemptive sense: They maintain that He loves, sent Christ to die for, and attempts to save

*only the elect*. However, this is contrary to Scripture;[38] an all loving God (1 John 4:16) loves all (John 3:16) and wants all to come to salvation (1 Tim. 2:4–5; cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

*Monergism Is Contrary to God-Given Free Will*

Since love is always persuasive but never coercive, God cannot force anyone to love Him—and this is what "irresistible grace on the unwilling" would do. God's persuasive but *resistible* love goes hand in glove with God-given human free choice. Again, human free will is self-determination, involving the ability to choose otherwise. We can either accept or reject God's grace.

In brief, God's saving grace works synergistically with free will; that is, it must be received to be effective. There are no conditions for *giving* grace, but there is one condition for *receiving* it—faith. Put in other terms, God's grace works cooperatively, not operatively. Faith is the precondition for receiving God's gift of salvation, and faith is prior to regeneration, since we are "saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8 NKJV) and "justified through faith" (Rom. 5:1).

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE ORIGIN OF SALVATION

Since many of the following objections revolve around the love of God and the freedom of humanity, they have already been addressed in some form. Only the prominent ones will be briefly repeated here.[39]

### Objection One—Based on the Idea That Necessary Love Is Contradictory

Love is a free act, flowing from one's free choice, and a person cannot be forced to love. If this is so, then love cannot flow from the essence of God, since God's essence is necessary.[40] Hence, salvation must flow from God's will and not from His unchangeable nature.

### Response to Objection One

Love and *necessity* are not contradictory, but love and *compulsion* are.[41] It is of the nature of God that He loves, and since God's nature is necessary, it is

necessary that God loves. Further, since love is a free act, it is necessary that God loves freely. Consequently, it is *not* contradictory for love to be both necessary and free; this simply means that God, by His very nature, must love. Since love must be expressed freely, then it is of the necessary nature of God that he loves freely; that is because His will is in accord with His nature, His freely chosen love is in accordance with His necessary and unchanging essence.

### Objection Two—Based on God's Unique Love for the Elect

Strong Calvinists claim that God does not salvifically love all people, insisting that Christ died only for the elect. If this is true, then God is not omnibenevolent. For instance: "He chose *us*" (not "all"—Eph. 1:4); "Christ died for *our* sins" (1 Cor. 15:3); "I lay down my life for *the* sheep" (John 10:15); "Christ loved *the church* and gave himself up for *her*" (Eph. 5:25).

### Response to Objection Two[42]

The fact that only believers are mentioned in some passages as the object of Christ's death does not prove that the Atonement is limited, for several reasons.

*First*, Paul also said that Jesus "gave himself for *me*" (Gal. 2:20), yet no proponent of limited atonement takes this to exclude the fact that Christ died for others as well.

*Second*, when the Bible uses terms like *we*, *our*, or *us* of the Atonement, it speaks only of those to whom it has been *applied*, not for all those for whom it was *provided*. In doing so, Scripture does not thereby limit the Atonement.

*Third*, and finally, the fact that Jesus loves His bride and died for her (Eph. 5:25) does not mean that God the Father and Jesus the Son do not love the whole world and desire them to be part of His bride, the church. John 3:16 explicitly says otherwise.[43]

### Objection Three—Based on God's Loving Jacob and Hating Esau

According to Romans 9, God loved Jacob and hated Esau (v. 13); He has mercy on some but not on others (v. 15); He destines some to destruction and not others (v. 22); He hardens the hearts of some (in unbelief) but not others (v. 18). From these examples, it seems obvious that God is not omnibenevolent when it comes to salvation.

## Response to Objection Three

This is a misinterpretation of these texts.

*First*, the passage is not speaking about electing *individuals* but *nations*. *Esau* is the nation of Edom that came from him (cf. Mal. 1:2), and *Jacob* is the nation of Israel that came from him (cf. 9:2–3).

*Second*, the passage is not referring to the election of individuals to salvation but of Israel being chosen as a national channel through which the eternal blessing of salvation, through Christ, would come to all (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Rom. 9:4–5). In addition, even though Israel *as a nation* was chosen by God, not every *individual* in Israel was elected to be saved (9:6).

*Third*, the word *hate* (Gk: *emisesa*, from *miseo*), in this case, means "to love less" or "to regard with less affection"; it does not mean "not to love at all" or "not to will the good of the person."[44] This is evident, for instance, from Genesis 29:30–31: The phrase "loved Rachel more than Leah" is used as the equivalent of "Leah was hated" (cf. also Matt. 10:37).

*Fourth*, Pharaoh hardened his *own* heart against God (cf. Ex. 7:13–14; 8:15, 19, 32) before *God* hardened it (Ex. 9:12). The purpose of the ten plagues upon Egypt was to convince Pharaoh to repent; since he refused, his heart was hardened as a result of his own actions. Repeatedly we have seen that the same sun that melts wax, hardens clay. The problem is not with the source but with the receptivity of the agent on which it is acting.

*Fifth*, and finally, the "vessels of wrath" (Rom. 9:22 NKJV) were not destined to destruction against their will. Indeed, they were such because they rejected God even as He "endured with much longsuffering," waiting for them to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

## Objection Four—Based on the Idea That Omnibenevolence *Must* Lead to Universalism

If God loves all people and therefore desires all of them to be saved, then why are not all people saved? He is omnipotent, and an all-powerful Being, allegedly, can do whatever He wants to do. Further, God is sovereignly in control of all things,[45] and His will cannot be thwarted—He accomplishes whatever He sets out to do (Isa. 55:11). If God can accomplish whatever He desires, and if He desires to save all, then it seems to follow that all will be saved (universalism).

## Response to Objection Four

As we have observed, God's *ultimate* will is always accomplished, but His *immediate* will is not. This is because God wills some things conditionally and others unconditionally. Salvation is willed on the condition of our accepting it (cf. John 1:12; 3:16). Neither omnipotence nor omnibenevolence is in question (2 Peter 3:9; cf. Matt. 23:37).

In addition, it is *not* true that an all-powerful God can do anything and everything. Again: *He cannot do what is contradictory* (cf. Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). So while God *is* all-powerful (omnipotent) He must exercise His power *in accordance with His love* (all-goodness). His love cannot (and thus will not) force someone to love Him.

## Objection Five—Based on God Having Power That Is Not Used

Extreme Calvinists argue that God is not obligated to exercise love toward everyone just because He is all-loving any more than He must exercise His power toward everyone just because He is omnipotent. Simply stated, from this viewpoint, God can have more love than He uses, just as He has more power than He uses.

## Response to Objection Five

First of all, love is a *moral* attribute of God, while power is *nonmoral*; it is a category mistake to confuse them.[46] Moral attributes bind God to act in a certain way *because* they are moral attributes; nonmoral attributes *do* not because they *are* not.[47] For example, that God has the power to create more worlds does not mean He must do so.

Furthermore, it is inconsistent to argue (as extreme Calvinists do) that God must always act justly by virtue of His being all-just, while at the same time maintaining that He does not always have to act lovingly by virtue of His being all-loving.[48] If God's omnibenevolence were not to compel Him to love all people, then, likewise, God's justice would not obligate Him to condemn all sin —but it does, just as His love binds Him to love all sinners.

## Objection Six—Based on What Sinners Deserve

We are saved by God's grace, but grace isn't deserved by any sinner, which means *any of us*. On the contrary, justice demands that all sin be condemned.

**Response to Objection Six**

It is true that there is nothing *in sinners* that prompts God to save us. Rather, as rightly objected, justice must condemn us in our sinfulness. However, it is also true that there is something *in God* that prompts Him to save us: His love. Since God is essentially omnibenevolent, He must try to save His fallen creatures. Therefore, God does not have to show love *because we deserve it* (we don't), but *because His nature demands it*. Love is not an *arbitrary* attribute of God, but is rooted in His *necessary* nature. Hence, if He is all loving, then He must love all.

**Objection Seven—From a Monergistic Perspective**

The central argument against the salvific synergism implied in the above discussion is that it supposedly makes human beings responsible for their own eternal life. Thus, such synergism seems to suggest a kind of works salvation, taking the sole glory from God and making salvation dependent (in part) upon the actions of human beings.

**Response to Objection Seven**

This criticism overlooks several important factors.

*First*, in synergistic salvation, the *origin* and *initiative* of justification *is* solely from God. Humans simply respond to *receive* the gift He has offered.

*Second*, faith is not a form of works; rather it is an acknowledgment that as sinners we are totally incapable of saving ourselves and must depend upon God's grace to be eternally rescued. As the apostle Paul points out, there's a big difference between *meriting* something that is earned and *receiving* an unmerited gift (Rom. 4:4–5). It is a twisted logic that attempts to give the credit for salvation to the receiver rather than to the Giver.

*Third*, and finally, the monergist confuses an *action* (faith) with a *work*. All works are actions, but not all actions are works. *The act of faith*, by which we acknowledge that we cannot work for or merit our salvation, *is not a work*.

Again, as Paul emphatically affirms,

> When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom. 4:4–5)

## Objection Eight—From a Broadly Deterministic Vantage Point

Pantheists and other determinists contend that if God is a necessary Being, is it not necessary, on the basis of His necessity alone, that He wills to save? No, it isn't. The only necessity placed on a necessary Being is the necessity that it be what it is; therefore, God cannot be other than God, and no contingent being or thing can place any necessity on Him.[49] How, then, can God be *both* free *and* necessary? How can He be a necessary Being and yet also free to create and to save?

## Response to Objection Eight

By His very nature as a personal Being, it is necessary that God be free with regard to morality. That is, it is of necessity that as a moral Being, God must be a free Being. Hence, the will to create and to save free beings is a free moral decision of a free moral Being (God). Again, it is of the very nature of God that He be free; as such, God is both necessary and free—*it is necessary that He be free*.

## Objection Nine—From a Neotheistic Perspective

So-called "open theists" suggest that if God originated and determined (by His free choice) who would be saved, from all eternity, then we cannot be free. Their argument can be stated as follows:

(1) Whatever God knows infallibly must come to pass.
(2) Whatever must come to pass could not have been otherwise.
(3) What is freely chosen could have been otherwise.
(4) Therefore, if God foreordained who would be saved, then none of us had a choice in the matter, and consequently we cannot be free.

Neotheists also contend that if God knows the future infallibly, then it must occur the way He knows it, or else He would be wrong in what He knows. If the

future *must* occur according to that knowledge, then God is not free to change it. Hence, a God who knows the future infallibly is not really free (in the sense that He could have chosen otherwise regarding the future).

The argument can also be stated this way: If God knew eternally what would happen in the future, then God's knowing this is part of the past and is now fixed, impossible to change. And,

> Since God is infallible, it is completely impossible that things will turn out differently than God expects them to turn out. [But] if God knows that a person is going to perform [a certain action], then it is impossible that the person fail to perform it—so one does not have a free choice whether or not to perform it. (Pinnock, *OG*, 147)

**Response to Objection Nine**

In reply, several things should be noted.

For one thing, God *could* be free in the *non-libertarian* sense of doing what He desires.[50] As mentioned previously, *this* view is open to strong Calvinists in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards.

However, for moderate Calvinists and Arminians, another alternative is also possible. God could be free to create in a *libertarian* sense (of having the power of contrary choice, i.e., the freedom to do otherwise), or even in the *broader* sense of having the power of self-determining choice; either way, He could still know the future with certainty (meaning, the future is determined). As Anselm observed, there is a difference between antecedent and consequent necessity.[51] If God wills the future to be a certain way, then by *consequent* necessity it must be that way. But God was free not to will it as such; hence, He had *antecedent* freedom with regard to which way the future would occur. God could have chosen to create a different world, yet when God decides to make a certain world, His omniscience knows how everything will occur by consequent necessity.

Being a simple Being, God's will and knowledge are coordinate; He knows what He wills, and He wills what He knows. In fact, He knows eternally what He wills eternally, and He wills eternally what He knows eternally. One is not subsequent to the other, either chronologically (since He is not temporal) or logically (since He knows intuitively, not sequentially).

Also, the argument from open theism wrongly assumes that God knows in the way we know and also wills in the way that we will—that God does have foreknowledge of what we will do and, thus, reacts accordingly. This is an incorrect perception. An eternal Being does not really *fore* know anything as

future; He knows it all in His eternal *Now*.[52] Hence, God's decisions are not determined "in advance" of His knowing our free choices. Indeed, God knew our temporal choices from eternity, not by foreseeing them outside Himself, but by seeing them inside Himself in the same way that effects preexist in their Cause. Our free choices, then, are not determined "in advance"; God does not actually *fore* see what will happen—He simply *sees*, within the infinity of His own nature, all that will proceed from it and participate in it. God, in everlasting perspective, sees in Himself the entire course of time. God is *proactive*, not reactive, in what He will in accord with what He knows.

Thus, no free action is so determined in advance so that it could not have been otherwise. If we had chosen otherwise, then God would have seen it from all eternity. As a result, humans can be free in the libertarian sense (of having the ability to do otherwise—contrary choice), and God can eternally know all of this without violating our freedom.

## CONCLUSION

Salvation originates with God, being based in an unconditional act of His boundless love and unmerited favor (grace). Nonetheless, once again, while there are no conditions for God's *giving* salvation, there is one condition for our *receiving* it: faith. God has sovereignly willed it this way; salvation is *by* grace but comes *through* our belief. Faith is a free act on the part of the recipient, for an omnibenevolent God must not only love all, but He must respect the freedom He freely gave to His creatures. It is necessary for God to act in accordance with His own perfect nature, and love is of this very essence.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

# THEORIES OF SALVATION

All evangelical theologians agree that Christ died “for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Likewise, all believe that Christ made atonement for us. However, there is considerable divergence among theologians on how the Atonement works.

This, naturally, has led to many theories of the Atonement. A review of the main viewpoints will be helpful in achieving a better understanding of salvation in its broadest dimensions.

## VARIOUS THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

Not all theories of the Atonement can be justified biblically. Some are incompatible with others, and many, while having an element of truth, are not adequate explanations of how salvation is accomplished. All of them, however, are illuminating and in some way widen our knowledge of this profound and crucial subject.

Brief evaluation will accompany the theories, but an attempt to view salvation in an extensive, biblically based, theologically satisfactory manner is set forth in chapter 9. By and large, the views will be discussed in the order of their first appearance in history.

### The Recapitulation Theory of the Atonement

Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202) was the first church father to propose the *recapitulation theory*.[1] He held,

> The fully divine Christ became fully man in order to sum up all humanity in himself. What was lost through the disobedience of the first Adam was restored through the obedience of the second Adam. [That is,] Christ went through all the stages of human life, resisted all temptations, died and arose a victor over death and the devil. [Hence,] the benefits of Christ's victory are available through participation in him. (Elwell, *BDT*, 569)

The primary text used to support this position is Romans 5:18–21, where Paul states:

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

In the words of Irenaeus,

> [God] caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished.… Unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become partaker of incorruptibility.… Wherefore also He [Christ] passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God. [For] as by the disobedience of the one man [Adam], who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man [Jesus], who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. [Thus,] God recapitulated in himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man. (*AH*, 18.7)

## The Ransom Theory of the Atonement

Forms of the *ransom theory* were widely held by various fathers of the church, beginning with Origen (c. 185–c. 254), who proposed that Christ's death was paid to Satan to purchase human beings, who were captive in sin, and set them free. Used as a basis is Mark 10:45, where Jesus said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Likewise, Paul reminded: "You were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20).

Origen wrote: "Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ" (*CR*, 2.13). Of course, Satan got the short end of the deal, for after demanding Christ's blood from the Father, his own doom was sealed by Christ's death and victorious resurrection. According to the ransom theory, Satan released

humankind (for the payment made to him by Christ to the Father), only to discover that he could not hold Christ (who rose and thus defeated death).

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–c. 395) explained the plot of redemption this way:

> The Deity [of Christ] was hidden under the veil of our nature, so that, as with ravenous fish, the hook of the Deity might be gulped down along with the bait of flesh. (*C*, 22)

Because this idea seemed, to many Christians, to suggest a deceptive action on God's part, Gregory expanded the theory in an attempt to show how it maintained God's justice. He reasoned that since our bondage to Satan is of our own choosing, it would have been unjust to rob Satan of his captives by some arbitrary method (ibid.); therefore, a payment to Satan had to be made. Although the whole transaction may seem to have been a deception, Gregory reasoned that Satan got his due *and* that God's motive (His love of human beings) was pure. Gregory argued:

> As regards the aim and purpose of what took place, a change in direction of the nobler is involved … the enemy [Satan] effected his deception for the ruin of our nature.… He who is at once the just, and good, and wise one [God], used His device, in which there was deception, for the salvation of him [humanity] who had perished, and thus not only conferred benefits on the lost one, but on him too who had wrought our ruin. (ibid., 24)

Augustine (354–430), another ransom-theory adherent, differently explained God's tactics in defeating Satan. Although he too thought of the Cross as bait or a trap, he maintained that Satan's deception is not something God did but what Satan did to himself—God simply permitted the self-deception of Satan to accomplish our salvation (*OT,* 13.12). Satan was a victim of his own pride—the fatal flaw he had from the beginning (1 Tim. 3:6).

After Anselm,[2] the ransom theory waned but was later resurrected by Gustaf Aulen (1879–1978) with a new emphasis—God's triumph (*CV,* 26–27). This view is sometimes called the *victory theory* or *drama theory* of the Atonement, and it maintains that the central point of the Cross is God's triumph over Satan. In Aulen's own words:

> Let it be added, in conclusion, that if the classic idea of the Atonement ever again resumes a leading place in Christian theology, it is not likely that it will revert to precisely the same forms of expression that it has used in the past; its revival will not consist in a putting back of the clock. It is the idea itself that will be essentially the same: the fundamental idea that the Atonement is, above all, a movement of God to man, not in the first place a movement of man to God. We shall hear again its tremendous paradoxes: that God, the all-ruler, the Infinite, yet accepts the lowliness of the Incarnation; we shall hear again the old realistic message of the conflict of God with the dark, hostile forces of evil, and His

> victory over them by the Divine self-sacrifice; above all, we shall hear again the note of triumph.
>
> For my own part, I am persuaded that no form of Christian teaching has any future before it except such as can keep steadily in view the reality of the evil in the world, and go to meet the evil with a battle-song of triumph. Therefore I believe that the classic idea of the Atonement and of Christianity is coming back—that is to say, the genuine, authentic Christian faith, (ibid., 158–59)

Unlike other theories of the Atonement, in this case Christ's work on the cross was not directed toward God or toward human beings, but instead toward victory over the devil: "The atonement is a divine victory overcoming the destructive powers of hell and death, making available and visible the reconciling love of God" (Elwell, *BDT*, 107).

## The Moral-Example Theory of the Atonement

In the fourth century, Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420) offered a view of the Atonement called the *moral-example theory*. According to this position, Christ's death provided an example of faith and obedience that inspires others to be obedient to God. The exhortation of 1 Peter 2:21 is often used to support this view: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

Translator Theodore De Bruyn states in *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*:

> Adam and Christ are not, however, equal as antetype and type. Pelagius, following Paul, observes that Christ has begun something immeasurably greater than Adam. Whereas Adam led only himself and his descendants into death, Christ frees not only those who have lived after him, but also those who were born before him and were alive in his lifetime (Rom. 5:15). Furthermore, whereas Adam destroyed righteousness by his example of sin, Christ not only provides an example of righteousness, but also has the power to forgive past sins. [Rom. 5:16] (41)

De Bruyn continues:

> The first verses of [Romans] 8 elaborate what was announced in the last verse of [Romans] 7 to show how Christ frees one from sin and enables one to be righteous—neither of which the law was able to effect (Rom. 8:1–4). By his death Christ makes it possible for the sins of the "carnal person" to be forgiven, and by his life Christ provides an example of the way sin can be overcome (Rom. 8:3). As a result one is expected to refrain from sin and increase in holiness, embarking on a process of sanctification … in the gifts of the Spirit. (ibid., 44)

Faustus Socinius (1539–1604) perpetuated this view, which was later adopted by the unitarians. His followers (the socinians) minimized the role of Christ as Priest in favor of His other two ministries as Prophet and King. They stressed

His beautiful and perfect moral example of God's total love for us, which provides the inspiration for us to live life in honor of Christ (cf. Rom. 5:8). Socinians also appealed primarily to 1 Peter 2:21, and, as referenced in Millard Erickson's *Christian Theology*,

> Other passages appealed to include 1 John 2:6: "He who says he abides in him [Christ] ought to walk in the same way in which he [Christ] walked" (RSV). It is however, only in 1 Peter 2:21 that we find an explicit connection drawn between Christ's example and his death. (Socinius, *CRBI*, 1.667, as cited in Erickson, *CT*, 784)

## The Necessary-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement

In the latter years of the Middle Ages, another view of the Atonement emerged in the famous writing of Anselm (1033–1109), called *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why the God-Man?"). This position is called the *necessary-satisfaction theory* because of its affirmation that it was necessary for God's offended justice and honor to be satisfied by a penalty only Christ could pay. As the God-man, His death had infinite value and, therefore, could restore the honor due to an infinitely holy God. Since God cannot simply remit[3] sins—reparation *must* be paid—this view is sometimes called the *commercial theory* of the Atonement.

However, Anselm, unlike with Origen's ransom theory, held that the payment had to be paid to God, not to Satan, for it is *God* who is offended by sin and who, therefore, must be compensated. Anselm's comments unfold naturally under several headings.

### *Sin Puts Us in Debt to God*

> What is the debt which we owe to God? Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God. Nothing is more sure. This is the debt which man and angels owe to God, and no one who pays this debt commits sins; but everyone who does not pay it sins. This is justice or uprightness of will, which makes a being just or upright in heart, that is, in will, and this is the sole and complete debt of honor which we owe to God, and which God requires of us.… He who does not render this honor which is due to God, robs God of his own and dishonors him; and this is sin. (*CDH*, I.XI)
>
> In the order of things, there is nothing less to be endured than that the creature should take away the honor due the Creator, and not restore what he has taken away. (ibid., I.XIII)
>
> Can you think that man, who has sinned, and never made satisfaction to God for his sin, but only been suffered to go unpunished, may become the equal of an angel who has never sinned? (ibid., I.XIX)

### *God Is Just and Cannot Overlook Sin*

> Again, if there is nothing greater or better than God, there is nothing more just than supreme justice,

which maintains God's honor in the arrangement of things, and which is nothing else but God himself. (ibid., I.XIII)

Therefore God maintains nothing with more justice than the honor of his own dignity. Does it seem to you that he wholly preserves it, if he allows himself to be so defrauded of it as that he should neither receive satisfaction nor punish the one defrauding him? (ibid.)

"Even God cannot raise to happiness any being at all by the debt of sin, because He ought not to" (ibid., I.XXI).

### *We Cannot Pay Our Own Debt of Sin*

Listen to the voice of strict justice; and judge according to that whether man makes to God a real satisfaction for his sin, unless by overcoming the devil, man restores to God what he took from God in allowing himself to be conquered by the devil; so that as by this conquest over man the devil took what belonged to God, and God was the loser, so in man's victory the devil may be despoiled, and God recover his right. Surely nothing can be more exactly or justly conceived. Think you that supreme justice can violate this justice? I dare not think it. (ibid., I.XXIII)

When you render anything to God which you owe him, irrespective of your past sin, you should not reckon this as the debt which you owe for sin.… But what do you give to God by your obedience, which is not owed him already, since he demands from you all that you are and have and can become? (ibid., I.XX)

"If in justice I owe God myself and all my powers, even when I do not sin, I have nothing left to render to him for my sin" (ibid.). "Therefore you make no satisfaction unless you restore something greater than the amount of that obligation, which should restrain you from committing the sin" (ibid., I.XXI).

Moreover, so long as [man] does not restore what he has taken away, he remains in fault; and it will not suffice merely to restore what has been taken away, but, considering the contempt offered, he ought to restore more than he took away. For as one who imperils another's safety, without making some compensation for the anguish incurred; so he who violates another's honor does not enough by merely rendering honor again, but must, according to the extent of the injury done, make restitution in some way satisfactory to the person whom he has dishonored. (ibid., I.XI)

### *God Cannot Forgive Sins Without the Debt Being Paid*

Let us return and consider whether it were proper for God to put away sins by compassion alone, without any payment of the honor taken from him.… To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then is it passed by undischarged. [And] it is not fitting for God to pass over anything in his kingdom undischarged.… There is also another thing which follows if sin be passed by unpunished, viz., that with God there will be no difference between the guilty and the not guilty; and this is unbecoming to God. (ibid., I.XII)

Truly, such compassion on the part of God is wholly contrary to the Divine justice, which allows nothing but punishment as the recompense of sin. Therefore, as God cannot be inconsistent with himself, his compassion cannot be of this nature. (ibid., I.XXIV)

It [is] not fitting for God to do anything unjustly, or out of course, it does not belong to his liberty or compassion or will to let the sinner go unpunished, who makes no return to God of what the sinner has defrauded him. (ibid., I.XII)

Therefore the honor taken away must be repaid, or punishment must follow; otherwise either God will not be just to himself, or he will be weak in respect to both parties; and this is impious even to think of. (ibid.)

Briefly put, "satisfaction or punishment must follow every sin" (ibid., I.XV).

If it is unfitting for God to elevate man with any stain upon him, to that for which he made him free from all stain, lest it should seem that God had repented of his good intent, or was unable to accomplish his designs; far more is it impossible, on account of the same unfitness, that no man should be exalted to that state for which he was made. (ibid., I.XXV)

### *Only the God-Man Can Pay the Debt of Sin*

How, then, shall man be saved, if [man] neither pays what he owes, and ought not to be saved without paying? Or, with what face shall we declare that God, who is rich in mercy above all human conception, cannot exercise this compassion? (ibid., I.XXIV)

Thus,

The restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid [paying] the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God.… Moreover … the life of this man [is] so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more. (ibid., I.XVIII.a)

No man except this one [Christ] ever gave to God what he was not obligated to lose, or paid a debt he did not owe. But he freely offered to the Father what there was no need of his ever losing, and paid for sinners what he owed not for himself. (ibid., I.XVIII.b)

Consequently,

It is sufficiently proved that a man can be saved by Christ.… For either by Christ or by someone else can man be saved, or else not at all. If, then, it is false that man cannot be saved at all, or that he can be saved in any other way, his salvation must necessarily be by Christ. (ibid., II.XXV)

Further,

As God owed nothing to the devil but punishment, so man must only make amends by conquering the devil as man had already been conquered by him. But whatever was demanded of man, he owed to God and not to the devil. (ibid., II.XIX)

## The Moral-Influence Theory of the Atonement

Peter Abelard (1079–1142) is credited with originating the *moral-influence theory*, which holds that the primary effect of Christ's death was not as a moral example to us (as in the view of Pelagius) but as *a demonstration of God's great love for us*. Abelard developed this theory in reaction to Anselm's (necessary-satisfaction) insistence that some sort of payment to God was required (*CER* 3.26; 5.5, as cited in Erickson, *CT*, 785).

This theory was not widely accepted until Horace Bushnell (1802–1876) and Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924) embraced it in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when it became the heart of the liberal view of the Atonement.[4] In the moral-influence view, God is perceived as essentially love, to the virtual exclusion of His justice and holiness. The primary difficulty of sin, proponents say, is not with God's need to punish evil or His necessity of being appeased, but with us in that we have a spiritual sickness from which we must be healed. Thus,

> [Christ's] sacrifice, taken as a fact in time, was not before him as the end, or object of his ministry —that would have it as a mere pageant of suffering, without rational dignity, or character—but, when it came, it was simply the bad fortune such a work, prosecuted with such devotion, must encounter on its way. (Rashdall, *IACT*, 26)

## The Optional-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) offered the *optional-satisfaction theory* of the Atonement, which *allowed for* but did not *require* satisfaction of God for the sinner (see Stump, "AAA" in Morris, *PCF*). Aquinas made three important claims on the matter of Christ being the satisfaction for our sins:

(1) Christ's passion caused God to be satisfied on behalf of our sins.
(2) God could have forgiven us without Christ's death.
(3) However there was no better or more fitting way to satisfy God than with the death of Christ.

*First*, to the question "Did Christ's passion cause our salvation by way of satisfaction?" Aquinas said yes (*ST*, 3a.48.2):

> A man effectively atones for an offense when he offers to the one who has been offended something which he accepts as matching or outweighing the former offense. Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.…

> Christ's passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, "He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (ibid.).

*Second*, as to whether God could have forgiven us without the death of Jesus: "Simply and absolutely speaking, God could have freed man otherwise than by Christ's passion, for 'nothing is impossible with God' " (ibid., 3a.46.2). Aquinas explicitly rejected the argument that "God's justice required that man be free from sin by Christ's atoning passion":

> Even this justice depends upon the divine will.… For if God had wanted to free man from sin without any satisfaction at all, he would not have been acting against justice.… But God has no one above him, for he is himself the supreme and common good of the entire universe. If then, he forgives sin, which is a crime in that it is committed against him, he violates no one's rights. The man who waives satisfaction and forgives an offense done to himself acts mercifully, not unjustly. (ibid., 3a.46.2–3)

*Third*, by the reasoning of Aquinas, even though the Cross was not necessary for God to forgive us, nonetheless, there was no better or more fitting way:

> First, man could thus see how much God loved him, and so would be aroused to love him.… Second, he gave us an example of obedience, humility, constancy, justice, and of other virtues which his passion revealed and which are necessary for our salvation.… Third, by his passion, Christ not only freed man from sin, but merited for him the grace of justification, and the glory of beatitude.… Fifth, in this way a greater dignity accrues to man. Man had been overcome and deceived by the devil. But it is a man [Jesus] who overcomes the devil.… It was therefore better for us to have been delivered by Christ's passion than by God's will alone. (ibid., 3a.46.3)

According to Aquinas, God is not an accountant, adding up our sins that must be paid for, but instead a parent wanting to forgive us while also desiring to change us so that we will not choose evil again. Hence, in the optional-satisfaction view, any punishment is strictly a means to an end, the end being the sinner's harmony with God.

When a person sins, he does not incur, on his celestial account, a debt of guilt that must somehow be paid back. In Aquinas's perspective, God is not concerned with balancing the account but with restoring the sinner. Therefore, the aim of satisfaction (including vicarious satisfaction) is not to cancel a debt incurred by sin but to restore a sinner to harmony with God.

Aquinas saw the problem not as one of God's wrath toward human sin, but of human withdrawal from God. Thus, Christ's atonement produced reconciliation with a loving God, not appeasement of an angry God. By Aquinas's argument, God does not *require* a penalty for sin, either from humanity or from Jesus, and,

thus, He did not *inflict* suffering on Christ as a punishment for sin; rather, He *accepted* Christ's sacrifice as an act of making satisfaction *aimed at restoration of the sinner* (cf. Luke 19:10). As a result, when the sinner accepts that sacrifice for his sins, he is moved away from his sin to God.

Consequently, nothing compelled God to deal with sin by a vicarious substitute (Jesus), but there is, nonetheless, something appropriate about His doing it for two reasons: (1) When a person is made aware of his evil and sees his separation from God, he will want to undo what he has done, and (2) by God's wooing the sinner to repentance by vicarious satisfaction, hopefully he will not be so easily enticed back into the same sin again.

**The Substitution Theory of the Atonement**

The roots of the legal or penal *substitution theory* of the Atonement are found in the earlier ransom and optional-satisfaction views (see above), since both contain objective elements holding that a penalty *was* paid. Likewise, the substitution theory builds on Anselm's view that a satisfaction of God *must* be accomplished (i.e., it was *necessary*). On the other hand, the substitution argument insists that this necessity of satisfaction is not simply because God's perfect honor has been offended but also because His absolute justice has been violated, and, therefore, a substitution for our sins had to be made by the sinless Son of God. John Calvin (1509–1564) is credited with giving expression to this view, which subsequently moved to the front and center of evangelical soteriology.

Calvin asked the question: "How can it be said that God, who prevents us with his mercy, was our enemy until he reconciled to us by Christ?" He answered: "God was the enemy of men until they were restored in favour by the death of Christ (Rom. 5:10); they were cursed until their iniquity was expiated by the sacrifice of Christ" [Gal. 3:10, 13] (*ICR*, 2.16.2). Calvin added,

> But again, let [man] be told, as Scripture teaches, that he was estranged from God by sin, and heir of wrath, exposed to the curse of eternal death. Excluded from all hope of salvation … that then Christ interposed, took the punishment upon himself, and bore what by the just judgment of God was impending over sinners; with his own blood expiated the sins which rendered them hateful to God, by this expiation satisfied and duly propitiated God the Father, by this intercession appeased his anger, on this basis founded peace between God and men, and by this tie secured the Divine benevolence toward them. (ibid.)

This is a description of why a substitutionary atonement is not merely *fitting*

(as Aquinas said) but is *essential*. In Calvin's words,

> God, who is perfect righteousness, cannot love the iniquity which he sees in all. All of us, therefore, have that within which deserves the hatred of God. Hence, in respect, first, of our corrupt nature; and, secondly, of the depraved conduct following upon it, we are all offensive to God, guilty in his sight, and by nature the children of hell. (ibid., 2.16.3)
>
> But, in short, from the moment when he [Christ] assumed the form of a servant, he began, in order to redeem us, to pay the price of deliverance.… He himself declares that he gave his life a ransom for many. [Matt. 20:28] (ibid., 2.16.5)
>
> Moreover, as the curse consequent upon guilt remained for the final judgment of God, one principal point in the narrative [of Hebrews 10:5] is his condemnation before Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea, to teach us that the punishment to which we were liable was inflicted on that Just One. (ibid.)

Therefore,

> Our acquittal is in this—that the guilt which made us liable to punishment was transferred to the head of the Son of God (Isa. 53:12). We must specially remember this *substitution* in order that we may not be all our lives in trepidation and anxiety, as if the just vengeance, which the Son of God transferred to himself, were still impending over us.…
>
> Wherefore, in order to accomplish full expiation, he made his soul *asham*, i.e., "a propitiatory victim for sin" (as the Prophet says, Isa. 53:5, 10) on which the guilt and *penalty* being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. (ibid., 2.16.6, emphasis added)

It is clear from the emphasized words that Calvin pointed to a penal substitution for our sins. What is more, he made it plain that God's absolute holiness demands such a substitute to appease His wrath and release His mercy (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:21–25).

## The Governmental Theory of the Atonement

Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) responded to the antinomian extremes he saw implied in the socianian (moral-example) view, which pictured a God of overindulgent love, lacking in emphasis upon justice and holiness. As a lawyer, Grotius formulated the *governmental theory* of the Atonement by stressing the law of God and reminding believers that any violation of it was a serious matter. In His holiness, God has established laws to which sin is in opposition. These are the primary tenets of the governmental view: God, as sovereign Ruler, has the *right* to punish sin, which is inherently deserving of punishment, but it is not *mandatory* that He do so. *Love* is *God's dominant attribute*. He desires to forgive sins, but He wishes to do it in such a way as to maintain His moral government (*DFCSC*, 20).

Just as a creditor may cancel a debt if he so chooses, he must still act in the

best interest of those under his authority. Likewise, God, taking into consideration the best interest of humanity, sent Christ to die for our sins. The Atonement was necessary to provide forgiveness and simultaneously to retain the moral structure of the world. However, the death of Christ was not offered as *payment* for the penalty for our sins; rather, it was a *substitute* for the penalty. Christ's sacrifice demonstrated that God's justice will require us to suffer if we continue in sin.

Unlike with Anselm's necessary-satisfaction theory, Christ's death, according the governmental view of Grotius, is not a satisfaction for our sin for breaking God's law—punishment, allegedly, cannot be transferred from one person to another. Christ's death, then, was *a demonstration of God's hatred of sin*. Sin is not punished because it deserves to be, but because of the demands of moral government. The point of punishment, according to the governmental perspective, is not retribution but *deterrence* of further sins.

Grotius believed that if the death of Christ *were* truly a punishment for the sins of humanity, then there would be no possibility of future punishment for us and, consequently, we could do whatever we wanted, knowing that there would be no penalty.[5] Thus, says the governmental view, while there *is* an objective element in the Atonement—Christ's suffering as an acceptable substitute to the moral Ruler of the universe—the *chief aim* is its impact upon human beings, serving as a deterrent to sin. By the death of Jesus, God was able to forgive sins in such a way that there would be no adverse consequences for human beings. It was not a full payment of the debt of sin, but it was a sufficient satisfaction to provide God with grounds for forgiving sinners and yet without encouraging sin.

Grotius offers little explicit scriptural support for his governmental theory of the Atonement, though Isaiah 42:21 is used: "It pleased the LORD for the sake of his righteousness to make his law great and glorious." Psalm 2 is also referenced, since it refers to God as the Ruler whose wrath is kindled at the unruly:

> Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.
> "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters."
> The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them.

## The Mystical Theory of the Atonement

One final perspective on the Atonement is the *mystical theory*, which comes

from the “father of liberalism,” Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). He proposed that salvation is attained by a mystical union with Christ—in Him, the ideal of humanity is fully realized.

According to the mystical theory, since Christ was the absolute unity of divinity and humanity, God became man that man may become God. As “God-men,” the redeemed partake of the divine human nature, or the life of Christ. For Schleiermacher, then, God and man become mystically united in the person of Jesus:

> [This] presentation of the redeeming activity of Christ… exhibits it as the establishment of a new life common to Him and us (original in Him, in us new and derived), [and it] is usually called, by those who have not had the experience, “mystical.” This expression is so extremely vague that it seems better to avoid it. But if we are willing to keep so close to [the term’s] original use as to understand by [“mystical”] what belongs to the circle of doctrines which only a few share, but for others are a mystery, then we may accept [the definition]. Provided that we recognize that no one can be received into this circle arbitrarily, because doctrines are only expressions of inward experiences, whoever has these experiences ipso facto belongs to the circle. (*CF*, 428)
>
> The original activity of the Redeemer, therefore, which belongs to Him alone, and which precedes all activity of our own in this challenge, would be that by means of which He assumes us into this fellowship of His activity and His life. The continuance of that fellowship, accordingly, constitutes the essence of the state of grace; the new corporate life is the sphere within which Christ produces this act; in it is revealed the continuous activity of His sinless perfection. (ibid., 425)
>
> Hence we can know the fellowship of the Redeemer only in so far as we are not conscious of our own individual life; as impulses flow to us from Him, we find that in Him from which everything proceeds to be the source of our activity is also a common possession, as it were. This too is the meaning of all those passages in Scripture which speak of Christ being and living in us, of being dead to sin, of putting off the old and putting on the new man. But Christ can only direct His God-consciousness against sin in so far as He enters into the corporate life of man and empathetically shares the consciousness of sin, but shares it as something He is to overcome. This very consciousness of sin as something to be overcome becomes the principle of our activity in the action which He evokes in us. (ibid., 425–26)

Although Schleiermacher understood this mystical union in a pantheistic context, many of his followers have tried to translate it into a more theistic framework. In any event, adherents to this theory still believe that salvation is a mystical unity made possible by God becoming man in Christ, so that man may have a union with God in Christ (cf. Eph. 4:3–4). The Atonement, then, has a purely subjective basis—the mystical theory alleges that there is no objective basis in any redemptive act of Christ on the cross that makes salvation possible (see Hodge, *ST*, 3.204–08).

## AN EVALUATION OF THE THEORIES OF THE

# ATONEMENT

There are dimensions of truth in all of these views.

*First*, as the recapitulation theory[6] asserts, “Christ went through all the stages of human life, resisted all temptations, died and arose a victor over death and the devil,” thus making all “the benefits of [His] victory available to us through participation in him.”

*Second*, as the ransom theory[7] affirms, Christ *did* pay the price to purchase us from the clutches of Satan, though the price was paid to God, not the devil. Without the Atonement, we would still be in bondage to Satan and, consequently, to sin (cf. Mark 10:45; 1 Cor. 6:20).

*Third*, the moral-example theory[8] contains truth, for Christ’s death *did* provide an example of faith and obedience that inspires us to be obedient to God (cf. 1 Peter 2:21).

*Fourth*, the necessary-satisfaction theory[9] gets to the very heart of the Atonement, affirming that it *was* necessary for God’s offended justice and honor to be satisfied by a penalty that only Jesus could pay. Because He is the God-man, Christ’s death had infinite value and, hence, could restore the honor due to an infinitely holy God. Since God cannot simply remit sins, a reparation must be paid, and only a sinless person could pay it for humanity.

*Fifth*, there is truth in even the liberal moral-influence theory[10]. God *is* love; His demonstration of self-sacrificing love at the cross (Rom. 5:8) *does* have a moral influence on us (1 John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).

*Sixth*, building on the necessary-satisfaction theory, the substitution theory[11] rightly maintains that such an atonement *was* a substitution for the sins of all human beings.[12] Absolute justice *has* been violated, and, therefore, a substitution for our sins *had* to be made by the sinless Son of God.

*Seventh*, although the need for God’s satisfaction is *not* optional, again, the optional satisfaction theory[13] correctly affirms:

> A man effectively atones for an offense when he offers to the one who has been offended something which he accepts as matching or outweighing the former offense. Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.… Christ’s passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, “He is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world” (*ST*, 3a.48, 2).

*Eighth*, even the governmental theory[14] is not without verity, for it truthfully

affirms that, in His holiness, God *has* established laws of which sin is a violation. As the sovereign Ruler, God *does* have the right to punish sin, which is inherently deserving of punishment. Likewise, the governmental theory correctly stresses God's love and notes that while He *does* desire to forgive sins, He wishes to do it in such a way as to maintain His moral government.

*Ninth*, and finally, as inadequate as the mystical theory[15] may be as a full explanation of the Atonement, there is an element of truth in it, for salvation *does* involve a mysterious spiritual union with Christ. Indeed, He *is* the absolute unity of divinity and humanity. In brief, God became man that man may become *like* God. Even Paul spoke of the "mystery" of the union of "Christ and the church" as Bridegroom and bride (Eph. 5:32).

## VARIOUS VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT

| **Theories** | **God's Attribute** | **Basic Goal** | **Object** | **Key Verses** | **Proponent** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recapitulation | Omnipotence | Reverse the Fall | Satan | Romans 5:15–21 | Irenaeus |
| Ransom | Wisdom | Defeat Satan | Satan | Mark 10:45 | Origen |
| Moral-Example | Love | Show God's love to us | Humanity | Romans 5:8; 5:17–19 | Pelagius, Abelard |
| Necessary-Satisfaction | Majesty | Pay the debt of sin | God | 1 John 2:1 | Anselm |
| Optional-Satisfaction | Mercy | Restore the sinner | Humanity | Luke 19:10 | Aquinas |
| Substitution | Justice | Appease wrath, release mercy | God | 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 3:21–25 | Calvin |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Governmental | Sovereignty | Keep moral order | God and humanity | Isaiah 42:21 | Grotius |
| Mystical | Oneness | Unite us with God | Humanity | Ephesians 4:3–4; 5:30–32 | Schleiermacher |

# A SUMMARY OF THE THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT

Comparing and contrasting the main theories of the Atonement not only demonstrates the multifaceted realities contained in this momentous act of redemption, but it also puts them in focus with the foundation of all theological truth—the attributes of God. Each view of the Atonement appears to be related to one or more of God's attributes, showing how His redemptive actions are rooted in His very nature and not simply His arbitrary will.

The *recapitulation* view stresses God's omnipotence as He defeats Satan and reverses the effects of the Fall. The *ransom* view emphasizes God's wisdom as He out-strategizes Satan through the Cross, where Satan bites on the bait of Christ's humanity and gets caught on the hook of Christ's deity. The *moral-example* view focuses on God's love, revealed in Christ's self-sacrificial and exemplar love for us. The *optional-satisfaction* view showcases God's mercy in rescuing sinners and restoring them to Himself. The *necessary-satisfaction* view demonstrates the majesty of God, whose honor is violated and who must be appeased by His Son's death for us. The *substitution* view stresses God's justice, which must be satisfied to release His mercy on sinners. The *moral-influence* view demonstrates the motivating power of God's love in Christ's redemptive acts on our behalf. The *governmental* view is based on God's sovereignty, since, as King, He must keep the moral order of the universe. Finally, the *mystical* view zeroes in on that mysterious oneness between Christ and His church, which is based on God's attribute of unity.

While each of the aforementioned theories of the Atonement contributes some truth to the overall redemptive acts of Christ, the *substitution view*—meaning that Christ's death brought substitutionary satisfaction to God—fully explains the necessary *objective* basis (in God) for the Atonement: Without Christ, the God-man, paying the price for our sins, God could not be just and yet

also be the Justifier of the unjust, as Paul declared Him to be (Rom. 3:21–25).[16] Without the Just dying for the unjust, God's justice would not be satisfied, and without justice being appeased, God's mercy could not be released to declare the otherwise unjust sinners to be justified in His eyes and, hence, qualified for heaven.[17] Most theories of the Atonement, instead of centering on Christ and offering an objective response, lean more heavily on subjective elements and focus primarily upon the Atonement's effect on Satan (in defeating him) or on human beings (in delivering them and setting an example for them).

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CHAPTER NINE

# THE NATURE OF SALVATION

As we have seen, there are many theories of the Atonement, and all of them contain an element of truth. However, only the necessary-satisfaction and substitution views provide an objective basis for understanding and explaining the work of Christ. In this chapter, the biblical, theological, and historical bases of an objective view of the Atonement will be explored.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)

The Bible is a salvific book, and what Paul told Timothy is its central message: “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

### Pre-Salvation Acts of God

Salvation is not a single act but is provided for believers in three major stages.[1] Further, there are pre-salvation acts of God that are important for our understanding of the salvific process.

*Election*

The word *election* (or *elect*) occurs fourteen times in the New Testament. An elect person is a chosen one; *election* (or *elect*) is used of *Israel* (Rom. 9:11; 11:28), of *angels* (1 Tim. 5:21), and of *believers*.[2] In relation to believers, election is the decision of God from all eternity whereby He chose those who would be saved. Paul wrote, "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10). Peter said that the elect are those "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2).

### *Chosen (or Chose)*

The words *chosen* and *chose* are used numerous times.[3] The terms are employed of *Christ* (Luke 23:35; 1 Peter 1:20; 2:4, 6), of a *disciple* (Acts 1:2, 24; 10:41; 22:14; John 15:10), and even of *Judas* (John 6:70; 13:18), who was chosen to be an apostle. Soteriologically, a chosen one is a person elected to salvation by God. Ephesians 1:11 is a key passage:

> In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.

### *Predestined*

Just as God predetermined from all eternity that Christ would die for our sins (Acts 2:23), He also predestined who would be saved. As Paul says, "Those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the likeness of his Son" (Rom. 8:29).

> He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined* us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. (Eph. 1:4–5)

### *Foreknowledge*

Being omniscient, God also eternally *foreknew* those who would be saved: "Those God *foreknew* he also predestined" (Rom. 8:29). Indeed, they were "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" (1 Peter 1:2 KJV). Since His foreknowledge is infallible (He is omniscient), whatever God foreknows will indeed come to pass. Hence, His foreknowledge of who would be saved assures that they will be.

### *Calling*

God's *calling* of persons to salvation is found in many passages.[4] Paul summarizes the place of calling in salvation in Romans 8:28–30:

> We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been *called* according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also *called*; those he *called*, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

*Conviction*

While the aforementioned acts are eternal, the next two are pre-salvation acts *in time*. The first is God's work in convincing a sinner of his sin (Gen. 6:3; John 8:9; 16:8). In the latter passage, Jesus promised: "When he [the Holy Spirit] comes, *he will convict the world of guilt* in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment." The act of convicting, then, is that by which God persuades a person that he is a sinner and, thus, is in need of the Savior.

*Prevenient Grace*

*Prevenient* means "before," and *prevenient grace* refers to God's unmerited work in the human heart prior to salvation, which directs people to this end through Christ. Paul speaks of it in Titus: "*The grace of God that brings salvation* has appeared to all men" (2:11). He adds in 2 Corinthians,

> You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (8:9)

This grace is also seen in the fact that "the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4 NKJV). Thus, prevenient grace is God's grace exerted on our behalf even before He bestows salvation on us.

## The Names Used of God's Saving Acts

Salvation is described by different terms in the Bible, the most prominent of which include the following.

*Effectual Grace*

God's grace is not only prevenient ("before" salvation), but it is also efficacious or effectual in *producing* salvation in the elect. That is, it accomplishes in the lives of believers the salvation God has foredetermined for them and by which He accomplishes what He has ordained.[5]

> So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:11)

Being all-knowing and all-powerful, God never attempts what He does not accomplish. Thus, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6), "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13).

*Sealing*

Paul speaks of *being sealed* with the Holy Spirit as a salvific act that guarantees our ultimate salvation. He told the Ephesians that the Holy Spirit's presence in their life "is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:14). Later he adds, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). This seal of the Holy Spirit comes at the moment of justification (Rom. 8:9) and is the guarantee of our ultimate glorification.

*Salvation (or Save)*

The most common words for the process by which God fits someone for heaven are *salvation* or being *saved*. As Earl Radmacher notes,

> The word *salvation* has its roots in the Hebrew word *yasa*, [meaning] "to be wide or roomy" in contrast to "narrow or restricted." Thus words such as *liberation, emancipation, preservation, protection,* and *security* grow out of it. It refers to delivering a person or group of people from distress or danger, from a "restricted" condition in which they are unable to help themselves. (*S*, 3)

The Greek nouns for *salvation* are *soteria* and *soterion*; the adjective is *soterios*, from which we derive the word *soteriology*.

The meaning of *soteria* and *soterion* is "deliverance," "preservation," or "salvation." *Salvation* is often used of physical deliverance (cf. Luke 1:69, 71; Acts 7:25; 27:37), such as Paul's desire to be delivered or released from prison: "I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance" (Phil. 1:19).

Spiritually, salvation refers to the process by which God, through the work of Christ, delivers sinners from the prison of sin. Paul declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16; cf. Eph. 1:13). He later says, "It is with your heart that

you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom. 10:10). Peter announced; "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

As mentioned previously,[6] *salvation* is a broad term that encompasses three stages: Salvation from the past penalty of sin, from the present power of sin, and from the future presence of sin. These are often called, respectively, *justification*, *sanctification*, and *glorification*.

*Redemption*

Another broad term, often used as the equivalent of *salvation*, is the term *redemption*. Several Greek words are translated *redemption*; one is *apolutrosis*, which means "to redeem," "to ransom," or "to deliver." *Apolutrosis* is used ten times in the New Testament, once of physical deliverance (Heb. 11:35) and nine times primarily of spiritual deliverance.[7]

Another Greek word for *redemption* is *lutron*, which is used twice (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). *Lutron* means "to ransom," "to redeem," or "to buy back," and its spiritual application pictures sinners being redeemed (purchased) from the marketplace of sin.

An additional term for *redemption* is *antilutron*, which means "re-adoption price" or "ransom." In 1 Timothy 2:6, Paul speaks of Christ, "who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time."

Another word, *agoradzo*, which comes from the Greek word for the market (*agora*), carries the meaning of "buying," "purchasing," or "paying a price for" something. *Agoradzo* is used thirty-one times (usually of physical things—cf. Matt. 13:44, 46; 14:15).

Spiritually, *agoradzo* means "to redeem from the marketplace of sin," "to purchase our salvation" (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Peter 2:1; Rev. 14:3–4; 5:9). In this final passage we read:

> They sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and *with your blood you purchased men for God* from every tribe and language and people and nation.

While some scholars have argued that the *purchase price* was paid *to Satan*,[8] since sinners are his slaves, most orthodox scholars reject this, insisting that the price Christ paid for sin was *to God*, since sin makes us a debtor to Him.[9] Without this price, which we couldn't pay and which Christ *did* pay for all humankind, we could never have been saved.

*Mediation*

As Savior, Christ is our *mediator*. The Hebrew word *yakach* is employed once in the Old Testament (Job 9:33): "If only there were someone to *arbitrate [mediate]* between us, to lay his hand upon us both."

A Greek word for *mediate, mesitas,* is used six times (Gal. 3:19–20—of Moses; Heb. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24—of Christ; and 1 Tim. 2:5: "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" [cf. John 10:9]).

There are three aspects of Christ's mediation: (1) As Prophet (Heb. 1:2ff.), He represents God to man; (2) as Priest (Heb. 9:15), He represents man to God; (3) and as King (Ps. 2), He reigns over man for God.

*Regeneration*

The Greek word for *regeneration* is *paliggenesia*, which means "regeneration," "rebirth," or "spiritual renovation." *Paliggenesia* is used twice in the New Testament (Matt. 19:28—of Messianic renovation; Titus 3:5—of salvation). In Titus it refers to the impartation of spiritual life to the soul:

> [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*.

Regeneration is the impartation of spiritual life, by God, to the souls of those who were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV) and who were "saved" made alive by God "through faith" in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8 NKJV).

The *Source* of regeneration is God; the *result* of regeneration is sonship; the *means* of regeneration is the Holy Spirit; and the *duration* of regeneration is eternal:

> To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:12–13)

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26). Parallel ideas are expressed in many biblical texts.[10]

*Born Again*

Being *born again* or *born from above* is parallel to regeneration. *Rebirth* is the point at which a person "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 KJV) receives spiritual life. Jesus said, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born

again' " (John 3:6–7). Peter adds, "You have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23; cf. John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18.). This idea was expressed in the Old Testament by Ezekiel when he spoke of God giving a new heart to Israel if they repented (Ezek. 11:19).

*Adoption*

*Adoption* (Gk: *huiothesia*) means "placing as a son"; it signifies, literally, "a legal child" (Ex. 2:10) and is used five times in the New Testament.[11] Theologically, *adoption* (Gal. 4:5) refers to the act of God that places a person as a son in God's family.[12] *Adoption* is a term of position whereby one becomes a son by the new birth (John 1:12–13), is redeemed from the bondage of the law (Gal. 4:1–5), and, although only a child (Gk: *teknion*), is by adoption made an adult son (Gk: *huios*), which is fully manifested at the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:23; cf. 1 John 3:2).

*Reconciliation*

One Greek word for *reconciliation* is *katallasso*, which means "to reconcile" or "to bring together" (cf. Matt. 5:23–24). *Katallasso* is used five other times in the New Testament.[13]

Another term for *reconciliation* is *katallage*, which means "bringing together." *Katallaga* is used four times.[14]

Also, *hilaskomai* is translated *reconciliation* (Heb. 2:17 KJV):

> In all things it behooved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, *to make reconciliation for the sins of the people*.

Being alienated from God by sin, fallen human beings need reconciliation with Him.

> All this is from God, who *reconciled* us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation:* that God was *reconciling* the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of *reconciliation*. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be *reconciled* to God. (2 Cor. 5:18–20)

There are two sides to reconciliation: the objective side, the potential for which Christ accomplished for all humankind (v. 19), and the subjective side, by which we actually become reconciled to God (v. 20). Once again, the whole

world is reconciled in the sense of being made *savable* by Christ (v. 19), but not in the sense of being *saved* (see Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:20).

It is also noteworthy that God is not reconciled to us; *we* are reconciled to *Him*. God does not move in relation to the sinner; the sinner moves in relation to Him. Both alienation and reconciliation are mentioned in Colossians 1:20–21, a powerful expression of what it means to be saved:

[It was God's purpose] through him [Christ] to *reconcile* to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were *alienated* from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

*Forgiveness*

The Greek word for *forgiveness* is *aphesis*, which means "to forgive" or "to remit" one's sins. Hebrews declares that God cannot forgive without atonement, for "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (9:22). Paul announced: "Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you" (Acts 13:38). Forgiveness does not erase the *sin*; history cannot be changed. But forgiveness does erase the *record* of the sin. Like a pardon, the crime of the accused is not expunged from history but is deleted from his account. Hence, it is "in [Christ Jesus that] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col. 1:14).

*Justification*

*Justification* is the act of God by which we who are unrighteous in ourselves are nevertheless *declared* righteous before God. It is a judicial (legal) act of *pronouncing* one to be right in God's sight.

Several Greek words describe the act of justification. *Dikaios* means "just" or "righteous)"; it is used of *humans* (Matt. 1:19; 5:45; 9:13, etc.), of *Christ* (Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; Rom. 5:7), of *God* (Rom. 3:26), and of *salvation* (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

*Dikaiosune (righteousness*) can refer to *practical justification*[15] or to *positional justification*.[16] Systematic theology speaks of it in the latter sense.

*Dikaioo* means "justify" or "justified." It sometimes refers to *God* (Luke 7:29; Rom. 3:4), to *Christ* (1 Tim. 3:16), or to *salvation*.[17] Romans 4:2–5 is a foundational passage:

> Was it because of [Abraham's] good deeds that God accepted him? If so, he would have had something to boast about. But from God's point of view Abraham had no basis at all for pride. For the Scriptures tell us, "Abraham believed God, so God declared him to be righteous." When people work, their wages are not a gift. Workers earn what they receive. But people are declared righteous because of their faith, not because of their work, (NLT)

God declares a sinner righteous before Himself on the basis of faith alone!

*Dikaiosis* is translated *justification* (Rom. 5:18); Paul says of Christ, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our *justification*" (Rom. 4:25). It is important to point out that *justification* means "to *declare* righteous" (not "to *make* righteous"), because:

(1) It is done apart from works (Rom. 1:17; 3:20; 4:2–5);
(2) It is done on sinners (Rom. 3:21–23); and
(3) It is a judicial act (Rom. 4:4–6; 5:18).

This is evident from words variously translated *imputed*, *counted*, or *credited* in regard to one's account with God (cf. Rom. 4:3, 6, 11, 22–24).

> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation.… David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works.… "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never *count* against him." … We have been saying that Abraham's faith was *credited* to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it *credited*? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! … So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be *credited* to them.… This is why "it was *credited* to him as righteousness." The words "*it was credited to him*" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. (Rom. 4:3–4, 6, 8–11, 22–24)

Even James, who stresses the works that flow naturally *from* saving faith, speaks of credited righteousness (called *forensic righteousness*): "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (James 2:23).

In Paul's strong comparison between Adam and Christ (in Rom. 5), he uses the word *justification* twice to describe what Christ provided for all human beings:

> The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought *justification*. … Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was *justification* that brings life for all men. (vv. 16, 18)

Observe the following comparison of Romans 5:

| **Person** | **Adam** | **Christ** |
|---|---|---|
| Act | Sin (vv. 12, 14, 16) Trespass (vv. 15–18) Disobedience (v. 19) | Grace (v. 15) Righteousness (v. 18) Obedience (v. 19) |
| Physical Results | Death for all (vv. 12, 14–15, 17) | Life for all (vv. 17–18, 21) |
| Moral Results | Sin enters for all (v. 12)<br>Sin reigns on all (v. 21) | Grace enters for all (v. 15)<br>Grace reigns for all (v. 21) |
| Legal Results | All made sinners (v. 19)<br>Judgment for all (v. 18)<br>Condemnation for all (16, 18) | All made righteous (v. 19)<br>Gift for all (v. 18)<br>Justification for all (16, 18) |

Now, since it is evident from Scripture that not all people will eventually be saved,[18] Paul cannot mean that everyone is *actually* justified because of Christ's vicarious sacrifice, but rather is *potentially* justifiable, for many reasons.

*First*, Romans 5 clearly declares that some of the consequences of Adam's sin (like physical death) are actually passed on to all human beings (vv. 12–14).

*Second*, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) shows that the parallel is not perfect.

*Third*, the phrase "those who receive" (v. 17) implies that not all receive the gift of salvation, and that only those who do receive it will be saved.

*Fourth*, this fits with the context of Romans 4, which declares that salvation only comes to those who believe (vv. 3–5; as does Rom. 5:1).

*Fifth*, and finally, if the phrase "made righteous" (v. 19) is taken as actual, then universalism follows. Universalism is not taught in the Bible;[19] hence, everything under "Christ" in the above chart is *potential* for all persons. It is available for all but is only appropriated by some.

It is also important to note in this connection that it does *not* follow from the preceding points, as some Arminians infer, that everything under "Adam" in the above chart is *also* only potential for all persons until they actualize it by their own personal sins.

*First*, again, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) differentiates the two sides of the comparison.

*Second*, Romans 5 clearly says that some of the consequences of Adam's sins (such as physical death) are automatic, without any choice on our part (vv. 12–14).

*Third*, and finally, no such qualifying terms like *receive* (v. 17) are used of the consequences of Adam's sin, even though these terms are used in reference to the appropriation of the *gift* of salvation that Christ provided for all.

## Propitiation (or Expiation)

The word *propitiation* appears in many English translations (e.g., KJV, ASV, NKJV), although others translate it *expiation* (e.g., RSV) or *atoning sacrifice* (e.g., NIV). *Hilasmos*, meaning "to satisfy God on behalf of the sinner," is found in two places: "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2 KJV); "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10 KJV).

Another Greek term for *propitiation*, *hilasterion*, is used in two texts. Hebrews 9:5 refers to the mercy seat in the Old Testament tabernacle, and Romans 3:25 (KJV) says, "God hath set forth [Jesus to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

A third word, *hilaskomai*, means "to propitiate," "to satisfy," or "to expiate." *Hilaskomai* is used twice: once meaning "be merciful" (Luke 18:13) and the other pointing to Christ (Heb. 2:17):

> For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was the throne of grace where, once the sacrificial blood was sprinkled, God was satisfied and released His mercy upon the sinner in forgiveness. In the New Testament, Christ forever satisfied God on our behalf (1 John 2:2) by one sacrifice (Heb. 10:14).

## Other Figures of Speech for *Salvation*

In addition to those above, the New Testament speaks of salvation by many other terms and phrases. Believers are said to be "in Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; 2 Cor. 5:17); be "baptized by one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13);[20] be a "new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and be a "new man" or "new self" (Eph. 2:15; 4:24; Col. 3:10). The saved undergo purification (or cleansing—Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22); have identification (or union) with Christ (Rom. 6:2–4; 1 Cor. 12:13);

experience healing (Isa. 53:5; Mark 2:17; 1 Peter 2:24); are offered enlightenment (John 8:12; 12:36; 2 Cor. 4:4–6; 1 Thess. 5:5); can live at peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 12:1; Eph. 2:14–15 [cf. 5:19, “aliens”; Col. 1:20); and are made alive (Eph. 2:1; John 5:21, 24; 1 Cor. 15:22; 1 John 3:14).[21]

**Atonement**

One of the most important expressions of salvation is the word *atonement*, translated from the Hebrew *kaphar*. Literally, *kaphar* means “to cover,” but it also carries a broader meaning of “expiation,” “condoning,” “wiping away,” “placating,” or “canceling.” The Authorized Version translates *kaphar* as “to appease,” “to disannul,” “to forgive,” “to be merciful,” “to pacify,” “to pardon,” “to purge,” “to put off,” and “to reconcile.” The key thoughts are “to cover over in God’s eyes” and/or “to wipe away.” *Kaphar* is used around one hundred times in the Old Testament (in verbal form).

The Greek term for *atonement* is *hiloskomai*, meaning “to propitiate,” “to expiate,” or “to conciliate.” It is used twice; once in Luke 18:13, when the penitent sinner asks God to “be merciful” to him,[22] and once in Hebrews 2:17, where again we read:

> Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people, (RSV)

An elemental Old Testament text on atonement is Leviticus 4:14–21:

> When they become aware of the sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a *sin offering* and present it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of the community are to *lay their hands on the bull’s head* before the LORD, and the bull shall be *slaughtered* before the LORD. Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull’s blood into the Tent of Meeting. *He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the* LORD *seven times in front of the curtain*. He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. *In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven*. Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull. *This is the sin offering for the community*.

Several facts are noteworthy about this prototype of Christ our High Priest, who made atonement for our sins.

*First*, Old Testament atonement involved more than merely passing over their sins. The text says they were “forgiven.”

*Second*, forgiveness in the Old Testament was by looking forward to the

Cross (John 8:56) on the basis that in God's eyes the Lamb (Christ) was slain before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4). Abraham was justified when he believed (Gen. 15:6; cf. Gal. 3:8).

*Third*, and finally, atonement involved a blood sacrifice (Heb. 9:22).

Another important verse in this regard is Leviticus 17:11: "The life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life."

Hebrews 10:4, 11–14 provides an inspired commentary on Old Testament atonement:

> *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* … Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers *the same sacrifices*, which *can never take away sins*. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered *for all time one sacrifice for sins*, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*.

## Sacrificial (Substitutionary) Atonement

Clearly contained in the many biblical passages on the Atonement is that it is *substitutionary:* Christ died in our place, punished for our sins that we might be set free. Consider the strong arguments in favor of substitutionary atonement.

*First*, God's absolute justice demands a perfect Substitute for us, since He cannot simply overlook sin. As we have seen, He is too holy to even look on sin with approval (Hab. 1:13); God is essentially just and cannot be otherwise, since He is unchanging by nature.[23]

*Second*, our total depravity[24] demands a sinless Substitute for our sins, because nothing we can do measures up to God's standard: "We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God" (Rom. 3:19). The only way we can enter the eternal presence of an immutable, holy God is by the substitutionary sacrifice of humankind's perfection: the man Christ Jesus.

*Third*, the Old Testament sacrifices imply substitutionary atonement, since in the one offering he laid his hands on the animal, symbolizing a transfer of guilt:

> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. (Lev. 1:3–4)

*Fourth*, Isaiah 53:5–6 speaks explicitly about substitutionary suffering in

several phrases:

> [1] He was pierced *for* our transgressions, [2] he was crushed *for* our iniquities; [3] the punishment that brought us peace was *upon him*, and [4] by *his* wounds *we* are healed.…[5] The LORD has laid *on him* the iniquity of us all.

What Christ did was "for" us, and our sins were laid "on him"—substitutionary atonement.

*Fifth*, Jesus was presented as the Passover Lamb, a substitutionary sacrifice. Just as the Old Testament Passover lamb was sacrificed for their sins, even so "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" for us (1 Cor. 5:7). John the Baptist declared: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

*Sixth*, Jesus claimed to be a fulfillment of Isaiah 53, which portrays a substitutionary sacrifice. He said, "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment" (Luke 22:37).

*Seventh*, Jesus presented His death as a ransom (Gk: *lutron*), which usually meant (in the Greek Old Testament) "a deliverance from bondage in exchange for the payment of compensation or the offering of a substitute."[25] Again, He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom* for many" (Mark 10:45).

*Eighth*, Christ presented Himself as a consecrated priest and sacrifice: "For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified" (John 17:19). The term *agiadzo* ("to sanctify"), used here, commonly carries this meaning. Many other passages likewise speak of Christ as our Sacrifice, which implies a substitution for us. The writer of Hebrews declares:

> [In Old Testament times] only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and *for* the sins the people had committed in ignorance.… How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died *as a ransom* to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (9:7, 14–15)

Similarly, the next chapter reads:

> Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.' " …

> And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every [Old Testament] priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice *for* sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (10:5–7, 10–14)

*Ninth*, Christ's death was "for," that is, on another's behalf. The Greek word *for (huper)* often implies substitution; Luke 22:19–20, for example, says:

> He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given *for* you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for* you."

Likewise, in John 10:15, the word *for* implies substitution: "I lay down my life *for* the sheep." Many other passages also use *for* in a substitutionary sense.[26]

*Tenth*, in Christ's death *for* (Gk: *anti*, meaning "instead of") us, substitution is explicit. For example, as in Mark 10:45, Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom *for* many." In addition to the idea of ransom, the great Greek scholar A. T. Robertson (1863–1934) noted that "there is the notion of exchange also in the use of *anti*." Robertson reserved rebuke for those who reject this, declaring that "those who refuse to admit that Jesus held this notion of a substitutionary death … [take] an easy way to get rid of passages that contradict one's theological opinions" (*WPNT*, 1.163).[27]

*Eleventh*, *expiation* (or *atoning sacrifice*—NIV), used of Christ's death, implies a substitutionary sacrifice. For instance, in 1 John 2:2 we read: "He is the atoning sacrifice *for* our sins, and not only for ours but also *for* the sins of the whole world." This text makes little sense unless Christ gave His sinless life as a substitute for our sins.

*Twelfth*, and finally, appeasing God's wrath by Christ's death implies a substitutionary death. Paul affirms, "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25). The Old Testament portrays the same idea (cf. Zech. 7:2; 8:22; Mal. 1:9), and numerous New Testament passages speak of God's wrath against sin,[28] which implies that it must be appeased by a substitutionary sacrifice.

Combined, these arguments present a powerful case for the orthodox concept of a substitutionary atonement. Christ died in our place: "God made him who had no sin to be sin *for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of

God" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ died *for* sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

# THE THREE STAGES OF SALVATION

Salvation begins with the judicial act of justification, proceeds through the lifelong process of sanctification, and is completed when we meet Christ in an act of glorification.

## Salvation From the *Penalty* of Sin (Justification)

The first stage of salvation is called justification, salvation from the *penalty* of sin. Justification is an instantaneous, past act of God by which one is saved from the guilt of sin—his record is cleared and he is guiltless before the Judge (Rom. 8:1).

The heart cry of the Reformation was "justification by faith *alone*!" This formula was strongly opposed by the Roman Catholic counterreformation that insisted on justification by faith *and* works. Interestingly, some modern Catholics claim that "Luther's famous formula 'faith alone' … can have a good Catholic sense" (*CCA*, 199). However, this is not the same sense in which Protestants believe it, for in Catholicism the performance of progressive works is added to faith as a condition for ultimate justification.

In order to appreciate this significant contribution of the Reformers, it is necessary to examine the biblical background of the term *justification.* As we will see, there are solid biblical grounds, in both testaments, revealing that the Protestant doctrine of forensic justification, expounded clearly by the Reformers and their followers, is correct.

### *The Old Testament Use of Forensic Justification*

The background for the doctrine of forensic justification (as with other New Testament doctrines) is found in the Old Testament. More often than not, the Hebrew term *hitsdiq*, usually rendered *justify*, is "used in a forensic or legal sense, as meaning, not 'to make just or righteous,' but 'to declare judicially that one is in harmony with the law' " (Hoekema, *SBG*, 154). George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982) remarked, "He is righteous who is judged to be in the right (Ex. 23:7; Deut. 25:1); i.e., who in judgment through acquittal thus stands in a right

relationship with God" (*TNT*, 440).

The majority of Reformed scholars would agree:

> In the Old Testament, the concept of righteousness frequently appears in a forensic or juridical context. A righteous man is one who has been declared by a judge to be free from guilt. (Erickson, *CT*, 955)

This thinking on the forensic nature of the Old Testament terms for *justification* and *righteousness* is not restricted to evangelicals. Hans Küng (b. 1928) agrees that "according to the original biblical usage of the term, 'justification' must be defined as a *declaring just by court order*" (*J*, 209).

*The New Testament Use of Forensic Justification*

Turning to the New Testament, the verb translated "to justify" is *dikaioó*. This word is used by Paul in a forensic or legal sense; the sinner is declared to be "righteous" (cf. Rom. 3–4). Justification is the opposite of condemnation; as observed by Anthony Hoekema (b. 1913), "The opposite of condemnation, however, is not '*making* righteous' but '*declaring* righteous.' " Therefore, by *dikaioó*, Paul means the "legal imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner" (*SBG*, 154, emphasis added). When a person is justified, God pronounces him acquitted—in advance of the final judgment. Therefore,

> The resulting righteousness is not ethical perfection; it is "sinlessness" in the sense that God no longer counts a man's sin against him (2 Cor. 5:19). [Thus we find in the New Testament that] justification is the declarative act of God by which, *on the basis of the sufficiency of Christ's atoning death*, he pronounces believers to have fulfilled all of the requirements of the law which pertain to them. (Erickson, *CT*, 956)

*A Theological Explanation of Forensic Justification*

Next to Martin Luther, John Calvin is usually regarded as the most important figure in the Reformation. On the subject of forensic justification, Calvin stated:

> Man is not made righteous in justification, but is accepted as righteous, not on account of his own righteousness, but on account of the righteousness of Christ located outside of man. (As cited in McGrath, *ID*, 2.36)

The reason human beings need justification is that in our Christ-less state, we are totally depraved.[29]

*First*, corruption is present at the center of the human being.

*Second*, depravity extends to every aspect of humanity.

*Third*, depravity prevents humans from pleasing God unless enabled by grace.

*Fourth*, and finally, corruption extends to every corner and culture of the human race (ibid., 2.90).

However, "total depravity" does not mean that humans are destitute of all natural goodness; as we have seen, the *imago Dei* has been effaced but not erased. The Reformers acknowledged that humans *can* horizontally do good (i.e., socially), yet vertically (i.e., spiritually) they are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and can initiate no meritorious action toward God on behalf of their sinful condition; eternal life is received by faith and faith alone.

Charles Hodge (1797–1878) indicated that sin has predisposed humanity against any move toward God and His wondrous salvation. Hence,

> Every man should bow down before God under the humiliating consciousness that he is a member of an apostate race; the son of a rebellious parent; born estranged from God, and exposed to his displeasure. (As cited in McGrath, *ID*, 2.92)

Likewise, for Calvin, the need for justification follows from the spiritual reality of total depravity, and this justification is *judicial*, or *forensic*, in nature.

"The term *justification* means 'a declaring just.' It really implies 'a declaring just,' in the sense of 'a leaving out of the account,' 'a not imputing' " (Küng, *J*, 212). In the Old Testament, King David puts it in this way: "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (Ps. 32:1–2 NRSV). Paul, in the New Testament, states that God was "reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

These valuable insights into the biblical doctrine of justification had been largely lost throughout much of Christian history, and it was the Reformers who recovered this Pauline truth. Although some contemporary Catholics are beginning to acknowledge the important Protestant emphasis on forensic justification, it was not spelled out by the counterreformational Council of Trent (1545–1563). Indeed, while there may be no logical incompatibility between forensic justification and the Roman Catholic idea of *initial* justification, nevertheless, there are other serious problems with the Roman Catholic concept of *progressive* justification.[30] In short, salvation within Catholicism is a merit-based system of works that tends to negate *in practice* what has been affirmed *in theory* about justification by grace.

### Salvation From the *Power* of Sin (Sanctification)

The second stage of salvation is called sanctification, salvation from the *power* of sin. Unlike justification, sanctification is not an act of God *declaring* us righteous; rather, it is a continual process in the present by which God is *making* us righteous. Justification is the act by which God gets us out of sin (legally). Sanctification is the process by which God gets sin out of us (actually).

There are three areas of victory over the power of sin:

(1) Victory over the *world* (1 John 5:4);
(2) Victory over the *flesh* (Rom. 7:24–25); and
(3) Victory over the *devil* (James 4:7).

*Three Steps to Sanctification*

The path to sanctification is set forth in Romans 6:

(1) *Knowing* we are dead to sin through Christ (v. 6);
(2) *Reckoning* this to be a fact (v. 11); and
(3) *Yielding* ourselves to God's righteous demands (v. 13).

Thus, purification does not follow automatically from justification. It involves cooperation on our part; we must yield to God's sanctifying grace.

*The Wesleyan Doctrine of a Second Work of Grace*

Wesleyans, following John Wesley (1703–1791), hold to a special second work of grace called *entire sanctification*, *perfectionism*, or, more popularly, called by some, *baptism of the Holy Spirit/filling of the Holy Spirit*. This is based on Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, in which he contended that one may attain a state of sinless perfection in this life. This state, according to Wesley, has been attained by only a few, but can and should be attained by all.

*A Response to Wesleyan Perfectionsism*

In reply, several comments. Many people do experience a *second work of grace* in their hearts; this has different names in different traditions. In addition to the titles listed above, some, for instance, call it *dedication* or *consecration*. With regard to the need for a deeper, higher, or more Christ-like experience, there is little but semantic disagreement between Wesleyans and those outside their tradition. Indeed, Wesley himself often described this phenomenon in terms

acceptable to almost all Christians, such as *loving God with all one's heart or being crucified with Christ*.[31]

However, Wesley went beyond this (as does subsequent Wesleyanism), describing this occurrence as an instantaneous second work of grace by which one reaches, in this life, a state of sinlessness. With this most non-Wesleyan theologians disagree, for many reasons.

*First*, for those who, like Pentecostals, call this *the baptism of the Holy Spirit*, several things should be noted. The scriptural use of this phrase is as an act that occurs *at justification* (cf. Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9); *baptism of the Holy Spirit* is never repeated, any more than being *born again* is repeated. Paul said, "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor. 12:13). Baptism of the Spirit is a *completed* act[32] and an *unrepeated* act, one *by which* we are saved (placed into Christ body).

*Second*, such an alleged *second work of grace* should not be confused with *the filling of the Holy Spirit*, which can be a continual or repeated process. Unlike the *baptism* of the Holy Spirit, which (1) happens only once, and (2) we are not commanded to subsequently seek, "*filling*" *is both continual and mandated*. Paul ordered the Ephesians, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). This is in the present tense, implying that we should *keep on* being filled with the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in the book of Acts, those who were filled on the Day of Pentecost (2:4) were refilled later (4:31).

*Third*, those in the Wesleyan tradition who claim that one can reach a state of sinless perfection in this life (through a supposed "second work of grace") lack both biblical and experiential support.[33] Even saints with remarkable maturity confessed they never completely overcame sin. Take Paul for instance:

> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (Rom. 7:14–18)

The most devout of God's prophets and servants considered themselves woefully sinful when God revealed Himself to them (cf. Isa. 6:1ff.). We *can* get to the place where we are able not to sin, but we can never *in this life* reach the point where we are not able to sin. Those who claim that they *can* (and/or *have*)

often either redefine *intentional sin* to mean *unintentional mistakes* or are self-deceived.

*Fourth*, again, even the apostle Paul, well into his spiritual life, recognized his profound fallibility, claiming he was the chief among all sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15). Indeed, there seems to be an inverse relation dictating that *the less sinful we think we are, the more sinful we are; the more sinful we think we are, the less sinful we are*. Like a person in a white suit who falls into a mud puddle in the dark but doesn't realize his true condition, the closer we get to the Light, the more dirty we appear. John admonishes believers emphatically:

> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:8–9)

*Fifth*, even Wesley's criteria for what qualifies as *sin* reveal that those who claim to have reached this *state of sinless perfection* are still sinning, only under another name for it. For example, Wesley said that one could reach this supposed plateau of perfection and still commit numerous "mistakes," have many "infirmities," and possess "a thousand nameless defects" in one's life. What is this but a redefinition of sin so as to accommodate belief in an alleged state of sinlessness?

*Sixth*, Wesleyans are no doubt right in speaking of peak experience via dedication, obedience, or yielding to God (cf. Rom. 12:1–2; Eph. 5:18), but during these times *we do not get more of the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit simply gets more of us*. Sanctification is not an instantaneous act but a lifelong process (Rom. 7:13ff.). "Yielding to the Spirit is also a daily task, not a onetime action (cf. Rom. 6–7).

*Seventh*, Wesley does not explain how one can be in a sinless state (which he repeatedly said was possible) and yet still commit a sin so serious as to lose his salvation (which he believed could happen). In his *Journal* (August 1743), Wesley wrote: "I cannot believe … that there is a state attainable in this life, from which a man cannot finally fall" (in *WJW*, 1.427). But if one had attained a state where sin was no longer possible, how could he commit any sin by which he would lose salvation?

*Eighth*, and finally, while all believers should endeavor to have a higher, deeper, and more intimate relationship with God, experience is a notoriously faulty method for *testing* truth. Experience, rather, is a God-ordained method for *expressing* truth. We must always be careful to interpret our experience by the Word of Truth, never vice versa. Martin Luther wrote,

Feelings come and feelings go,
And feelings are deceiving.
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.

Once again, the biblical presentation of sanctification is as a continual, lifelong process in which we should grow to be more and more like Christ, awaiting our death or His return; then and *only* then will we reach true perfection. Paul reminds us, "When perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. … Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face" (1 Cor. 13:10, 12). John adds, "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2–3). Meanwhile, Peter says that we must "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever" (2 Peter 3:18).[34]

## Salvation From the *Presence* of Sin (Glorification)

The third stage of salvation is called *glorification*. Unlike *justification* (which saved us from the past penalty of sin) and *sanctification* (which is saving us from the present power of sin), *glorification* is the future act that will save us from the very *presence* of sin.

A few primary passages make the point. In Paul's words:

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with *the glory that will be revealed in us*. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the *glorious freedom* of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

John's vision of our future salvation includes this glorious description:

> I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.…
>
> And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.… And the building of the wall of it

was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones.… And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (Rev. 21:1–4, 10–11, 18–19, 21–22 KJV)

John also assures believers,

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:2–4)

Consider again the insight of Paul:

What is perfect will someday appear, and what isn't perfect will then disappear.… Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. (1 Cor. 13:10, 12 CEV)

In view of this day, the hymn writer Charles H. Gabriel (1856–1932) declared,

O that will be glory for me,
Glory for me, glory for me;
When by His grace I shall look on His face,
That will be glory, be glory for me.

Several important events will mark this third and final stage of salvation.

*First*, our sinful nature will be abolished. *Currently*, "if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). But *then* we will be "perfect" (1 Cor. 13:10)—"we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). On that day, Christ "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3:21).

*Second*, the Beatific Vision (see vol. 4, chap. 9) will be accomplished. We will see God face-to-face. This is something that no mortal can do, for "no one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18). Indeed, even Moses, the great mediator who spoke directly with God, was forbidden to see His face. When he asked, God replied, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Ex. 33:20).

Nonetheless, while mortal man cannot see God and live, immortal man will see God and live forever. John says, "*They will see his face*, and his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev. 22:4). Jesus promises, "Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they will *see God*" (Matt. 5:8).

*Third*, our freedom will be perfected. While all freedom involves self-determination,[35] in order to test His creatures, God also gave them the freedom to do otherwise, that is, the (libertarian) power of contrary choice. This freedom is still retained in fallen humans; however, it will not exist in heaven, where our freedom will be perfect and made more like God's. Being absolutely perfect, God does not have the freedom to do evil (Heb. 6:18; James 1:13). Likewise, at the Beatific Vision, when we behold absolute Goodness, we too will no longer be able to sin.

*Now*, by God's grace we are *able not to sin* (1 Cor. 10:13), but *then* we will *no longer be able to sin*. This is not the loss of true freedom but the actualization of it.[36] Perfect freedom is not the freedom of being in *bondage to sin*; instead, it is the freedom of being *delivered from sin*. Again, heaven, like marriage, is not the deprivation of freedom but the fulfillment of it.[37]

We will one day be liberated from all bondage, including bondage to Satan. As we have seen, by His first coming Jesus defeated Satan *officially* (Col. 2:14; Heb. 2:14), but at His second coming He will defeat Satan *actually* and *finally* (Rev. 20:10; Matt. 25:41).[38]

# THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)

Salvation is rooted in several realities, including the nature of God and the nature of human beings. For reconciliation between God and His creation, salvation was necessary, since *He* is absolutely holy and *we* are completely sinful. Salvation is possible because God is loving and gracious, desiring all to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

### Salvation Follows From the Nature of God As Completely Holy

Several attributes of God, both metaphysical and moral, serve as the background for salvation. God is not only holy, just, and perfect,[39] but He is also infinite and immutable.[40] Hence, God is absolutely holy and unchangeably just, and He cannot merely turn His head from sin and arbitrarily forgive it. He must

punish evil, or He would not be completely just, and He must punish it eternally, or He would not be eternally just.

### Salvation Follows From the Nature of Humankind As Totally Imperfect

Not only is God morally perfect, but human beings are morally imperfect.[41] God is not only absolutely holy, but *fallen* human beings are completely unholy.

> As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10–12).

Thus, the entire world stands guilty before the Creator, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). All have broken His law and are culpable (cf. Rom. 2:12–15; 3:19). Even human "righteousness" is sinful before God:

> All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isa. 64:6)

Moses had earlier written, "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen. 6:5). Jeremiah proclaimed, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer. 17:9). Whatever righteousness we have is *self*-righteousness, which Jesus condemned (Luke 18:10–14). Paul clarifies, "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Rom. 10:3).

### Salvation Follows From the Nature of God As Wholly Loving

Given God's unchanging moral perfection and humanity's complete moral imperfection, salvation is *necessary*. And, granting that God is completely and unchangeably loving,[42] salvation is *possible*, for while His holiness makes it necessary that He punish sin, His grace moves Him to try to save all sinners. In His infinite wisdom, God found a way to do both—exchanging the substitutionary death of His perfect Son for our imperfections. In this manner, God was able to remain just and yet also be the Justifier of the unjust; His Son, the God-man, died—the Just for the unjust—that He might bring us to the Father.

In perhaps the most theologically significant and compact text in the Bible, the apostle Paul puts it this way:

> But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Rom. 3:21–26)

This is not to say there are no other dimensions of the Atonement, regarding which, as we have seen, most of the main theories have an element of truth. However, at the *heart* of the Atonement is the idea of a sacrificial substitute who paid the penalty for our sins that we might be free. He became sin for us that we might be declared righteous. Alvin Kelly's hymn says, "I gave him my old tattered garments; He gave me a robe of pure white."

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT

Many objections have been leveled against the idea of the Atonement, particularly a substitutionary atonement. The most prominent ones are briefly discussed here.

### Objection One—Based on the Alleged Unfairness of Punishing Another for Our Sins

It is argued by some that it is unfair to punish one person in place of another. After all, the very principle of just punishment is that each person bears his own sin:

> The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him. (Ezek. 18:20)

How, then, could justice be served in punishing Christ for our sins?

### Response to Objection One

In reply, it is definitely unjust to punish an *unwilling* person for another's sin. But Christ was *willing* to die for us. He died voluntarily: "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (John 10:17–18). Even in ordinary life, some people (like soldiers) are willing to die for others (like their countrymen). Such a deed is considered not only moral but noble.

Further, Christ is God.[43] The One who demanded the penalty (God) was the One who paid it. The Judge paid the fine for the defendant. Like an earthly judge who takes off his robe, reaches into his wallet, and pays the fine for his accused son, even so God did this for us. In such a case the complaint that it is unjust to pay the fine for another's sin vanishes.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, it is unjust to *charge* another person for my crime, but it is not unjust for him to voluntarily *pay* the fine. Once again, a voluntary substitutionary atonement is the apex of morality:

> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:7–8)

In short, God's justice demands that *all sin be punished*, but not necessarily that *all sinners be punished* for their sin.

Finally, there is a priority within morality: Mercy triumphs over justice. Thus, while God's justice demands the punishment of the sinner, in the Cross, His love wins out and forgives his sin by faith. When there is an unavoidable conflict between two moral principles, the higher takes precedence over the lower. For example, Jesus taught that when the two unavoidably conflict, our love for God should take precedence over love for our parents (Matt. 10:37). Likewise, even though God's justice demands that all sin be punished, His love compelled Him to provide forgiveness for all sinners who will receive it.

Hence, while justice *as such* demands that the guilty pay for their own sins, when there is a conflict with love *as such*, the latter takes precedence over the former. By way of comparison, a child should always obey his or her parents. However, when this is transcended by a greater duty to obey God (as when a parent commands the child to sin), we are not dealing with obedience to parents *as such*—when there is a discrepancy between commands, God is preeminent. In substitutionary atonement, we are not dealing *only* with God's justice but *also*

with a conflict between God's love and God's justice. In this case, the obligation to what *as such* would always be wrong (viz., not to punish the guilty) is suspended in view of the higher obligation to what is always right (viz., to save the repentant sinner).

### Objection Two—Based on the Alleged Implication of Universalism

Some object that substitutionary atonement implies that all will be saved (universalism),[44] since Christ is said to have been substituted for all. Many strong Calvinists (particularists) use this argument in defense of limited atonement,[45] insisting that since all for whom Christ died *will* be saved—and *not* all will be saved—then it follows that Christ did not die for all. Universalists, on the other hand, agree that all for whom Christ died will be saved, but they argue that Christ died for all, and, hence, all will be saved. Accordingly, universalists and particularists agree that there can be no substitutionary atonement without the effective salvation of *everyone* for whom Christ was a substitute; the former hold that Christ died for all, and the latter maintain that He died for some (the elect).

### Response to Objection Two

Moderate Calvinists and Arminians who maintain substitutionary atonement can respond by making a substantial distinction: There is a difference between *procurement for all* and *application to some*. Christ achieved procurement of eternal life for everyone; application of salvation happens only to those who believe. All persons are saved *potentially* through Christ's death, but only some are saved *actually*—those who receive it.[46] Just as a prisoner who is given clemency is legally free but may actually die while still in jail, even so Christ's death has made all "righteous" potentially (Rom. 5:19), but not all have actually appropriated it. As the apostle states, Christ "is the Savior of all men [potentially], and especially [actually] of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10).

### Objection Three—Based on an Alleged Double Jeopardy

Philosopher Eleonore Stump (b. 1947) objects to the substitutionary-atonement model based on the claim that the price for sins was paid *twice* for all who are lost ("AAA" in Morris, *PCF*, 61–91). According to the substitution

view, Christ paid the penalty in full so that no human has to pay it. However, those who go to hell pay for their own sins. If Christ has already paid that price, how is it just to demand that someone pay again? Isn't this double jeopardy?

**Response to Objection Three**

This contention, the error of universalism,[47] wrongly assumes that the Atonement is unconditionally applied to all sinners. *It is not*. The Atonement is applied only when it is received;[48] hence, again, the substitution is potentially available to all but is not automatically applied to all. Christ put more than enough funds in the account to cover the debt of all sinners to God. We must draw on the account by faith for this forgiveness to actually take place.[49]

**Objection Four—Based on the Ability of God to Forgive**

Substitutionary atonement implies a necessity for Christ to die in order for us to be forgiven. Nevertheless, God, as God, has the ability to forgive sins without Christ dying for those who commit them. After all, we can and do forgive people who sin against us without having to die in order to do so. Why couldn't God do the same, without the sacrifice of His Son?

**Response to Objection Four**

For one thing, this analogy is flawed. *Our ability to forgive is* based *on Christ's forgiveness*. As Paul said, we are to forgive one another "as Christ forgave you" (Col. 3:13 KJV). No mortal has the inherent ability to forgive; as the Pharisees recognized, only God can forgive sins (cf. Mark 2:7).

Also, even God, without atonement, cannot overlook or accept sin: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Hab. 1:13). Nor can He simply forgive sin arbitrarily. Sin has caused a debt with God, and the debt must be paid. *Christ paid that debt* and ransomed us. As we have repeatedly observed, God can no more wink at sin and turn His head than He can cease being holy, perfect, and absolutely unchangeable.

**Objection Five—Based on an Alleged Internal Conflict Within God**

The substitution view of the Atonement seemingly implies an internal conflict

within God. His love and wrath are at war with each other: One demands that all sinners be punished, and the other insists that they be set free. Hence, apparently, the wrath of God had to be poured out on Christ.

### Response to Objection Five

This objection involves a misunderstanding. Christ was not sent out of God's wrath but because of His love: "God so *loved* the world that he gave his only Son" (John 3:16 NLT; cf. 1 John 3:16). Consequently, a wrathful God is not somehow made loving by Christ's death; instead, by the substitutionary atonement of Christ, a just and loving God has His justice satisfied (propitiated) so that His love could be released. The justice of the Justifier was satisfied by the Just dying for the unjust so that they could be justified (cf. Rom. 3:21–24).

### Objection Six—Based on Alleged Nontransferability of Righteousness

According to this objection, righteousness can no more be transferred or imputed to another person than can guilt (cf. Ezek. 18:20).

### Response to Objection Six

First of all, while people cannot suffer for the *guilt* of another's sin (Ezek. 18:20), nevertheless, they can (and do) suffer for the *consequences* of others' sins. Exodus 20:5 speaks of God "punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Abused children, for example, suffer from the consequences of parental sin, and the whole human race suffers from the consequences of Adam's sin.[50]

Further, the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us is *judicial* (legal), not *actual*. While the actual transfer of guilt from one person to another is *not* possible, the legal transfer *is*.

What is more, this perfect righteousness is what we are "in Christ," not in ourselves (2 Cor. 5:17): "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). This is possible because in salvation we are united with Jesus:

> Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Therefore,

> What the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit. (Rom. 8:3–4)

## Objection Seven—Based on an Alleged Incompatibility Between Forgiveness and Payment for Sin

Eleonore Stump contends that a substitutionary atonement is contrary to its own intention, since it does not really present God as *forgiving* sins but as *exacting a payment* for them. To forgive a debt is not to *demand atonement for it*, but rather *not to exact all that justice demands*. Even so, according to the substitution view, God *does* exact His due from every sin, since He allows no sin to go unpaid. Indeed, God Himself fully pays the debt, and, thus, does not overlook any of it. Allegedly, then, there is no real forgiveness in substitutionary atonement ("AAA" in Morris, *PCF*, 62).

## Response to Objection Seven

This objection incorrectly assumes that the total debt of every sinner is automatically canceled by the Atonement. According to the Bible, the sacrifice must be received to be effectual. Christ's death was *sufficient* for all but only *efficient* for those who believe.[51] The actual canceling of the debt is conditional upon belief, i.e., upon actual acceptance of it. Hence, there is no contradiction, since there is no forgiveness of those who choose to attempt to pay for their own debt.[52] Likewise, those who are forgiven do not have to pay for their own debt, since Christ's payment has been applied to them. The only incompatibility between forgiveness and substitutionary atonement, then, comes when the Atonement is misconceived as an automatic and unconditional payment applied to everyone's sins.

For example, when one buys a bank, he buys all the debts owed to that bank as well. If he decides to cancel (forgive) these debts, the debtor does not have to pay them, but the debt has still been paid for by the one who purchased the bank. Hence, forgiveness and paying the debt are not contradictory.

## Objection Eight—Based on the Alleged Inequity of the Payment for Sins

The substitution view of the Atonement claims that Christ paid the full penalty for the sins of all human beings so that they would not have to pay it. The substitution view also claims that the penalty for sin is everlasting damnation. However, no matter what agony Christ suffered, it certainly was not equivalent to eternal punishment, since while Christ's suffering came to an end, the suffering of sinners who choose hell will never be finished (see ibid., 63).

## Response to Objection Eight

This argument wrongly posits that Christ's death had only temporal value. To the contrary, since Christ is God,[53] and because He suffered as the God-man, His death had *infinite* value. Hence, the sacrifice was more than enough to atone for a finite number of sins. Christ's death cannot be measured simply in quantitative, temporal terms—such as "how long did He suffer?"—but rather must be regarded in terms of the infinite quality of His suffering. Accordingly, the death of the infinite has infinite value, which is more than sufficient to atone for finite sins.

Further, this objection is misdirected in that it focuses only on the debt and the debtor; it fails to note the objective value for God of the death of Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus completely satisfied (propitiated) the Father, regardless of how many sins it would be applied to in forgiveness. Once God's justice is satisfied, He is free to release His love on the sins of all sinners.

## Objection Nine—Based on an Alleged Inability to Change One's Life

It is further charged that substitutionary atonement does not accomplish what it intends, namely, overcoming our alienation with God and, thus, changing a sinner's life. Supposedly, nothing in the substitution view points to how the work of Christ redirects human behavior and alters our propensity to sin. This, it is said, is the whole point of salvation, and hence a substitutionary atonement misses the whole point of atonement itself, which is to bring at-one-ment with God (see ibid., 61–91).

## Response to Objection Nine

*First*, this contention overlooks the fact that the primary objective of the Atonement is to *satisfy God*, not *transform the sinner*. Indeed, the word *atonement* does not mean "at-one-ment"; it means "to appease," "to placate," "to pacify," or "to cover over" in the eyes of God.[54] *Atonement* is a *God directed* term, for *God* must be propitiated (1 John 2:1), otherwise His justice is not satisfied so that He can release His mercy (Rom. 3:21–26).

*Second*, substitutionary atonement *does* lead to the transformation of a sinner in the most effective way possible; namely, *by the grace of God*. God's great love for us motivates us to love Him in return (1 John 4:19): Grace "teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions" (Titus 2:12), and "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14 NKJV). Therefore, our understanding of the unparalleled sacrifice of Christ on our behalf provides the highest possible motivation to change our sinful lives.[55]

*Third*, and finally, nominal faith[56] in the Atonement will not effect change in the sinner; nominal faith is not saving faith (cf. James 2). *Saving* faith involves trust, dependence, and repentance—all of which bring change in—and of—one's life.[57]

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE NATURE OF SALVATION (SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT)[58]

From these numerous citations, it can be seen that the need for Christ's blood atonement and sacrifice for our sins is deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian history.

### Biblical Writers

The Old Testament teaching of the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12) was fulfilled by Christ, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 NKJV): "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). Indeed, "the life of a creature is in the blood … it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Lev. 17:11), and "the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22).

## Early Church Fathers

In spite of many different views on the Atonement among church leaders,[59] there was still a basic strain, from earliest times, that preserved elements of the substitution view.

### *Polycarp (fl. second century)*

> Let us then continually persevere in our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, "who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth," but endured all things for us, that we might live in Him. (*EPP* in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1.8.)

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> Thus, then, was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: "God, true are His works." But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true. (*AH* in ibid., 1.3.18.7)
>
> And not by the aforesaid things alone has the Lord manifested Himself, but [He has done this] also by means of His passion. For doing away with [the effects of] that disobedience of man which had taken place at the beginning by the occasion of a tree, "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross;" rectifying that disobedience which had occurred by reason of a tree, through that obedience which was [wrought out] upon the tree [of the cross]. (*AH* in ibid., 1.5.1.36)

## Medieval Church Fathers

### *Augustine (354–430)*

> Now, if infants are not embraced within this reconciliation and salvation, who wants them for the baptism of Christ? But if they are embraced, then are they reckoned as among the dead for whom He died? … Nor can they be possibly reconciled and saved by Him, unless He remit and impute not unto them their sins. (*OFSB*, 1.44)
>
> But perhaps, through some special perception of my own, I have said that sin is a sacrifice for sin. Let those who have read it be free to acknowledge it; let not those who have not read it be backward; let them not, I say, be backward to read that they may be truthful in judging. For when God gave commandment about the offering of sacrifices for sin, in which sacrifices there was no expiation of sins, but the shadow of things to come, the self-same sacrifices, the self-same offerings, the self-same victims, the self-same animals, which were brought forward to be slain for sins, and in whose blood that [true] blood was prefigured, are themselves called sins by the law; and that to such an extent that in certain passages it is written in these terms, that the priests, when about to sacrifice, were to lay their hands on the head of the sin, that is, on the head of the victim about to be sacrificed for sin. Such sin, then, that is, such a sacrifice for sin, was our Lord Jesus Christ made, "who knew no sin" (*OGJ*, 41.6).
>
> So sin means a bad action deserving punishment, and death the consequence of sin. Christ has no sin in the sense of deserving death, but He bore for our sakes sin in the sense of death as brought on

human nature by sin.… By Christ's taking our sin in this sense, its condemnation is our deliverance, while to remain in subjection to sin is to be condemned. (*RFM*, 14.3)

### *Anselm*

To remit sin in this manner is nothing else than not to punish; and since it is not right to cancel sin without compensation or punishment; if it be not punished, then is it passed by undischarged. (*CDH*, I.XII)

So heinous is our sin whenever we knowingly oppose the will of God even in the slightest thing; since we are always in his sight, and he always enjoins it upon us not to sin.… Therefore you make no satisfaction unless you restore something greater than the amount of that obligation, which should restrain you from committing the sin. (ibid., I.XXI)

[Thus,] the restoring of mankind ought not to take place, and could not, without man paid [paying] the debt which he owed God for his sin. And this debt was so great that, while none but man must solve the debt, none but God was able to do it; so that he who does it must be both God and man. And hence arises a necessity that God should take man into unity with his own person; so that he who in his own nature was bound to pay the debt, but could not, might be able to do it in the person of God.… Moreover, you have clearly shown the life of this man [Jesus] to have been so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more, (ibid., I.XVIII.a)

Yes, it is of all things most proper that such a Father should acquiesce with such a Son in his desire, if it be praiseworthy as relates to the honor of God, and useful for man's salvation, which would not otherwise be effected, (ibid., I.X)

## Reformation Leaders

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

Wherefore, in order to accomplish a full expiation, he made his soul *asham*, i.e., a propitiatory victim for sin, (as the prophet says—Isa. 53:5, 10), on which the guilt and penalty being in a manner laid, ceases to be imputed to us. The Apostle declares this more plainly when he says that "he made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21 KJV). For the Son of God, though spotlessly pure, took upon him the disgrace and ignominy of our iniquities, and in return clothed us with his purity. (*ICR*, II.XVI.VI)

To satisfy our ransom, it was necessary to select a mode of death in which he might deliver us, both by giving himself up to condemnations and undertaking our expiation. Had he been cut off by assassins, or slain in a seditious tumult, there could have been no kind of satisfaction in such a death. But when he is placed as a criminal at the bar, where witnesses are brought to give evidence against him, and the mouth of the judge condemns him to die, we see him sustaining the character of an offender and evil-doer, (ibid., II.XVI.V)

It is now clear what the prophet means when he says that "the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all" [Isa. 53:6]; namely, that as he was to wash away the pollution of sins, they were transferred to him by imputation. (ibid., op. cit)

### *Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)*

The necessity of satisfaction for sin, and the reasonableness of that Christian doctrine, may appear

from the following considerations: Justice requires that sin be punished, because sin deserves punishment. (*WJE*, 2.565)

Hence, “the satisfaction of Christ by his death is certainly a very rational thing” (ibid, 2.569).

Christ is often represented as bearing our sins for us: Isaiah 53:4, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” Isaiah 53:11, “For he shall bear their iniquities.” Isaiah 53:12, “He bare the sin of many” (ibid., 2.570).

Further, “the laying on of hands on the head of the sacrifice was a token of putting the guilt of sin upon a person; agreeably to the customary signification of the imputation of guilt among Hebrews” (ibid.).

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)*

It is Divine justice that demands satisfaction, and it is the Divine compassion that makes the satisfaction. God is the one who holds man in a righteous captivity, and He is the one who pays the ransom that frees him from it. God is the holy Judge of man who requires satisfaction for sin; and God is the merciful Father of man who provides it for him. (*DT*, 2.392–93)

Not until the Holy One has been “propitiated” by an atonement, can the penalty be “released.” Neither of these effects can exist without the antecedent cause. The Bible knows nothing of the remission of punishment arbitrarily: that is without a ground or reason. Penal suffering in Scripture is released, or not inflicted upon the guilty, because it has been endured by a substitute. If penalty was remitted by sovereignty merely, without any judicial ground or reason whatever; if it were inflicted neither upon the sinner nor his substitute; this would be the *abolition* of penalty, not the remission of it. (ibid., 2.392)

### *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

According to this doctrine the work of Christ is a real satisfaction, of infinite inherent merit, to the vindicatory justice of God; so that He saves his people by doing for them, and in their stead, what they were unable to do for themselves, satisfying the demands of the law in their behalf, and bearing its penalty in their stead; whereby they are reconciled to God, receive the Holy Ghost, and are made partakers of the life of Christ to their present sanctification and eternal salvation.

This doctrine provides for both [of these great objects].… It shows how the curse of the law is removed by Christ’s being made a curse for us; and how in virtue of this reconciliation with God we become, through the Spirit, partakers of the life of Christ, [and] He is made unto us not only righteousness, but sanctification. We are cleansed by his blood from guilt, and renewed by his Spirit after the image of God. Having died in Him, we live in Him. Participation of his death secures participation of his life. (*ST*, 563–64)

### *Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871–1952)*

> In all these temporary coverings of sin is anticipation of the final sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, the concept of covering is no longer accurate, and the New Testament uses other terms. While the Old Testament sacrifices provided temporary covering from divine judgment, the death of Christ takes away the sin of the world [John 1:29; 1 John 3:5]. (*ST*, 2.83–84)

*Millard Erickson (b. 1932)*

> We have seen that Christ's death is interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Each of the theories we have examined seizes upon a significant aspect of his work. While we may have major objections to some of the theories, we recognize that each one possesses a dimension of the truth. In his death Christ (1) gave us a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of us, (2) demonstrated the great extent of God's love, (3) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God's righteousness, (4) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating us from their power, and (5) rendered satisfaction to the Father for our sins. All of these things we as humans needed done for us, and Christ did them all. (*CT*, 799)

# CONCLUSION

The Bible is a soteriological book that begins in eternity with God's acts of foreknowledge, predestination, and election. Even before we are saved, God is at work in prevenient grace and conviction. When by faith one receives the initial act of salvation (justification), at that very instant he or she is sealed by the Holy Spirit, baptized into the body of Christ, redeemed, regenerated, born again, adopted into God's family, reconciled to God, and forgiven of sin based on the mediation and atonement of Christ. All of these saving acts are made possible only because of the substitutionary death of Jesus on behalf of our sins, whereby the Just died for the unjust in order that God's justice may be satisfied and His mercy justify the unjust.

Salvation does not end with a single act of justification; this is only the first stage, by which one is saved from the penalty of sin. Salvation also involves a lifelong process of *sanctification*, by which we are saved from the power of sin. At death, our redemption climaxes with an act of *glorification* that saves us from the very presence of sin. At this point we will see God face-to-face (in the Beatific Vision) and become like Him, for then we shall see Him as He is.

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CHAPTER TEN

# THE EVIDENCE OF SALVATION

Virtually all Christian theologians believe that those who are saved should manifest their faith in good works. However, there is a significant intramural controversy as to (1) the scope and characteristics of this manifestation and (2) the actual connection between faith and works. The primary debate is between the Roman Catholic and Protestant views;[1] a secondary discussion continues between lordship-salvation proponents and the free-grace group.[2]

## THE HISTORIC CONTEXT OF THE CATHOLIC/PROTESTANT DEBATE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

In spite of the common core of Augustinian belief in the necessity of God's grace for salvation, Catholics and Protestants have had strong disagreement over the relationship between faith and works. As we have seen, the heart cry of the Protestant Reformation was "justification by faith *alone*!" The Roman Catholic Church responded with the declaration that "by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God" (from the Council of Trent, as cited in Ott, *FCD*, 264).

Even within Protestant circles there is considerable discrepancy on the topic. While most evangelicals believe that saving faith reveals itself through good

works, they differ as to the precise connection. Some hold that the performance of works *automatically* results from faith, while others claim that at times there is no observable evidence confirming that a person is saved. Some see good works as flowing *inevitably*, rather than automatically, from saving faith, while still others maintain that the doing of good works *accompanies* but does not result *by necessity* from it.

In contrast to all these Protestant views, Roman Catholics argue that performing good works is a *condition* for salvation rather than a *consequence* of it. Protestants insist that while we are saved *for* works, we are not saved *by* works.[3]

The Catholic position on the relationship between justification and works was made infallible dogma in the sixteenth century at the Council of Trent,[4] which was a reaction to Martin Luther's proclamation that "the just shall live by faith—alone." Luther was initially upset by the Roman Catholic sale of *indulgences*. In his region, an overzealous salesman named Johann Tetzel was promising potential purchasers that "when in the box the penny rings, the soul from purgatory springs." Luther's subsequent outcry (protest) sparked the Protestant Reformation.[5]

## Luther's Position

Before Martin Luther, standard (Augustinian) doctrine stressed *intrinsic* justification: The believer was *made* righteous by God's grace. *Extrinsic* justification, by which a sinner is legally *declared* righteous, was less conspicuous in pre-Reformation Christendom.[6] With Luther, the situation did change dramatically; however, as noted by Peter Toon (b. 1939): "Luther does not employ forensic [legal] terms to explain this imputation of alien righteousness. This development will come later, from others" (*FFJS*, 58).[7]

Luther was directed by Johann von Staupitz (*c*. 1460–1524), an abbot who in some ways supported him, to lecture (from 1515 to 1517) on Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. The result of this study led Luther to a new view of God: The *All-Terrible* is also the *All-Merciful*. Luther found that in Paul's Greek usage, the word *justice* has different meanings:

> [The first meaning is a strict enforcement of the law, and the last is] a process of the sort which sometimes takes place if the judge suspends the sentence … and thereby instills such resolve that the [guilty] man is reclaimed, (in ibid., 49)

This second meaning of the word *justice* is necessary because

> the sinner cannot ever attain any righteousness of his own: he merits or deserves only condemnation.… [But God has] freely opted to receive us to Himself … to a fellowship that we from our side had broken and could never mend, (in Atkinson, *MLPCC*, 133)

When studying the meaning of Romans 1:16–17, Luther came to the following revolutionary discovery:

> Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that "the just shall live by faith." Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning, and whereas before the "justice of God" had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in great love. This passage became to me the gate to heaven, (in Bainton, *HISLML*, 65)

In spite of Luther's findings, it is sometimes forgotten that he, like Roman Catholics, believed in a progressive definition of *justification*.[8] For example, he said, "We understand that a man who is justified is not already righteous but moving toward righteousness" (*LW*, 34, 152). Further, "Our justification is not yet complete.… It is still under construction. It shall, however, be completed in the resurrection of the dead" (in Althaus, *TML*, 237). This sense of "progressive justification" is what many Protestants call "sanctification," the process by which one is *made* righteous (intrinsically), to be distinguished from an initial act (of justification from God) by which one is *declared* righteous (extrinsically). Toon adds,

> Justification by faith is both an event and a process. What later Protestants were to divide, Luther kept together. He is quite clear that there is a moment when a sinner is actually justified by faith. [The sinner] then possesses the righteousness of another, the alien righteousness of Christ, imputed to him.… [However,] this is the beginning of a journey toward a time (following the resurrection of the dead in the age to come) when he will in fact possess a perfect righteousness created in him by the Spirit of God. (*FFJS*, 58–59)

## The Catholic Response to Luther

Again, the Council of Trent was the Catholic retort to Luther's belief that one is saved by faith alone, apart from works. Trent considered the following questions concerning justification:

(1) Is justification only judicial [or legal] in nature (extrinsic), or is there also an intrinsic (sanctifying) work involved?

(2) What is the relationship between faith and good works?
(3) Does the [human] will have an active role in justification?
(4) How are justification and sacraments such as the Eucharist, baptism, and penance related?
(5) Can the believer know with certainty that he is justified?
(6) Can man incline himself toward justification, and, if so, is this inclination to be understood as meritorious? (from ibid., 69)

Plainly, most of these speak to the relationship between faith and works.

On January 9, 1547, council participants agreed on a final formula for justification. We will examine their conclusions based on the six questions mentioned above.

*First*, although several members recognized an extrinsic element in justification (thereby approaching the view of the Reformers on this point), the consensus view was that "the opinion that a sinner may be justified solely as a matter of … imputation … is rejected" (ibid., 72). Therefore, "justification is thus defined in terms of a man *becoming*, and not merely *being* reputed as, righteous" (ibid., emphasis added).[9]

*Second*, in that Trent presented justification in two senses (the first being what Protestants [the Reformed] understand as *justification* and the second corresponding to the Protestant doctrine of *sanctification*), the latter (*second justification*) requires good works: "It is thus both possible and necessary to keep the law of God [for salvation]" (ibid., 84).

*Third*, Trent, taking original sin into account, stated that evil has affected the human race, and therefore, "man is incapable of redeeming himself. Free will is not destroyed, but is weakened and debilitated by the Fall" (ibid., 81). Luther rejected *debilitation* in his *Bondage of the Will.* According to Trent,

> If anyone shall say that man's free will moved and aroused by God does not cooperate by assenting to God who looses and calls… let him be anathema [i.e., "be hereby excommunicated, needing to either recant or go to hell"], (in Toon, ibid.)

So as one Catholic author put it, "The sinner indeed cooperates with this grace, at least in the sense of not sinfully rejecting it" (Anderson, *JF*, 34). While most Protestants agree, Calvinists quickly add (as would Catholic thomists)[10] that it is God, by His grace, who brings about this cooperation.[11]

*Fourth*, the subject of the sacraments was addressed at Session VII (March 3, 1547). In order to comprehend these pronouncements, we must remember that

Trent understood justification in two ways: The first phase and the second phase.[12] Baptism is operative in the first way, since grace to overcome original sin is "mediated" to us through baptism. Both the Eucharist and penance pertain to the second sense of justification, and Catholics hold that such justification (i.e., righteousness) is "increased" (or "enhanced") by participation in these sacraments.

*Fifth*, due to the Reformers' stress on the assurance of salvation, Trent was forced to deal with the matter. Alister McGrath (b. 1953) claims that they issued "an explicit condemnation of the Lutheran doctrine of assurance as an assertion contrary to proper Christian humility" (*ID*, 2.78). However, the "explicit condemnation" deals with "infallible certainty" of salvation, which many Catholic scholars point out is not necessary but perhaps possible. In fact, "in many ways Roman [Catholic] dogmatics have pointed out that Rome's rejection of personal assurance of salvation does not mean the proclamation of a religion of uninterrupted anxiety" (Berkouwer, *CWR*, 114). For the Roman Catholic, "there is an intermediate position between the assurance of faith and doubt. This position is that of moral certainty which excludes any anxiety and despair" (Bartmann, *LD*, 2.109, cited in ibid., 115). Thus, according to Catholicism, Christians can be said to have "relative" but not "absolute" (i.e., "infallible") certainty of their salvation.

*Sixth*, and finally, Trent stated that our initial (first) justification must be seen as a "gift." Therefore, it comes as a surprise to many Protestants that Roman Catholics believe "*If anyone shall say that man can be justified before God by his own works which are done … without divine grace through Christ Jesus: let him be anathema"* (in *Denzinger, SCD*, 811, emphasis added). Further, Catholics maintain,

> *Nothing that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification. For if it is by grace, it is no more by works; otherwise, as the apostle says, grace is no more grace*, (in ibid., chapter 8, emphasis added)

In this connection it is only fair to point out that when Catholic scholars cite James 2:24 ("A man is justified by works" NKJV), they do not mean the initial, first justification (at baptism), which comes only by God's grace. Rather, they are referring to the second, progressive justification (growth in righteousness) that Protestants call *sanctification*. On the other hand, Trent did assert that the performance of works is necessary for salvation in the progressive and eventual senses, and with this Protestants disagree strongly. Indeed, as we have seen, it is

Catholic dogma that "by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God" (in Ott, *FCD*, 264).

Since the defense of forensic (legal, judicial) justification is directly connected with Protestant rejection of the Roman Catholic teaching on merit, we must first discuss the Catholic doctrine of good works. As with previous chapters, the examination will be divided into biblical/theological and historical (traditional) arguments.

## Catholic Appeals to the Bible for Meritorious Justification

Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott (b. 1906) argues, "According to Holy Writ, eternal blessedness in heaven is the reward for good works performed on this earth, and rewards and merit are correlative concepts" (ibid.). Ott offers the following Scripture in support:

> "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven" (Matt. 5:12 RSV); "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungry, and ye gave me meat" (Matt. 25:34–35 KJV).

He adds,

> St. Paul, who stresses grace so much, also emphasized, on the other hand, the meritorious nature of good works performed with grace, by teaching that the reward is in proportion to the works: "He [God] will render to every man according to his own labor" [Rom. 2:6] (ibid., 265).

Ott cites other similar passages (1 Cor. 3:8; Col. 3:24; Heb. 10:35; 11:6) and concludes, "The good works of the just establish a legal claim (*meritum de condigno*) to reward on God" [cf. Heb. 6:10] (ibid.).

Of course, this "claim" ('demand') is not intrinsic; our supposed right to reward is only real because God has placed Himself in this situation through His promise to compensate us for our good works. Nonetheless, eternal life[13] is given to us on the grounds of our good works.[14] Thus, the Council of Trent declared:

> To those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" … faithfully given to their good works and merit. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257)

Read this statement (from Trent doctrine) again:

> If anyone shall say that the good works of the man justified are in such a way the gift of God that they are not also the good merits of him who is justified, or that the one justified by the good works … does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life (if he should die in grace), and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema, (in ibid., 842.261)

### Catholic Appeals to History (Tradition) for Meritorious Justification

Catholic theology claims: "From the times of the Apostolic Fathers, Tradition attests the meritoriousness of good works" (Geisler and MacKenzie, *RCE*, 228). For example, Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Polycarp: "Where there is great effort there is rich gain" (*EP*, I.I.3). Justin Martyr is also cited in defense of merit, and Tertullian asserted, "The man who performs good works can be said to make God his debtor" (*OR*, 1.323.44–46). Of course, in Catholic belief, these works grow out of faith, but the performance of works is the stated basis for the merit necessary for obtaining eternal life. Ott claims,

> Natural reason cannot prove the reality of supernatural merit since this rests on the free Divine promise of reward.… [Nevertheless,] the general conscience of men bears witness to the appropriateness of a supernatural reward for supernaturally good deeds freely performed. (*FCD*, 265)

## AN EVANGELICAL CRITIQUE OF THE DOCTRINE OF MERITORIOUS JUSTIFICATION

We have already noted the Catholic declaration that the doing of works prior to justification[15] is not meritorious. Nonetheless, with all due recognition to the shared Augustinian core of the necessity of grace, several substantial differences remain between the official Roman Catholic and orthodox Protestant views on salvation. Before stating the grounds for the Protestant position, we will respond to the Catholic arguments in favor of meritorious justification.

### The Catholic View Confuses *Reward* and *Merit*

The English word *reward* has an equivocal sense that has led to confusion. While Catholic theology rightly points out that the Bible sometimes refers to eternal life as a reward (e.g., Gal. 6:8) that can be *inherited* (e.g., Luke 18:18), the New Testament also refers to eternal life regarding the *kind* or *degree* of reward that one will *inherit*. This *is* based on the works that one performs, and Galatians 6:6–10 seems to fit into this category, since it speaks of believers

reaping what they sow while on earth.

Nevertheless, in this sense the performance of works is not a *condition* but a *consequence* of salvation. No person *works* for an inheritance; an inheritance, by design, is graciously *given* by a benefactor. If a man is "rewarded" *with salvation* for his work, then eternal life is not truly and solely out of God's grace, despite Catholic protests to the contrary. When one is rewarded for works, the reward is not grace—payment is *owed* (at least in part) for services rendered.

In this way the New Testament emphatically rejects the idea of salvation as a reward (*wage*) for duty performed: A worker's wages "are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation" (Rom. 4:4). If the Catholic concept of merit[16] were accurate, the bestowal of the grace of sanctification would be on the basis of good works. Again, however, *what is worked for is not of grace, and what is given by grace is not obtained by works* (Rom. 4:4; Eph. 2:8–9). The Catholic belief in merit as a necessary condition for eternal life (or ultimate justification) is contrary to the clear affirmation of Holy Writ.

## The Catholic View Makes Works a Condition of Eternal Life

As we have seen, the Council of Trent declared:

> To those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" which is … to be faithfully given to their good works and merit, (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257)

The Bible, by contrast, declares, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Further, in direct opposition to the Catholic position, Scripture guarantees eternal life as a present possession of those who believe. Jesus said:

> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me *has* [present tense] eternal life, and *does not come into judgment*, but *has* [already] passed out of death into life. (John 5:24 NASB)

This same truth—that eternal life is a present position of the believer—is frequently repeated: "Whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life" (John 3:36); "I write these things to you … so that you may *know* that you *have* eternal life" (1 John 5:13). Catholic dogma excludes any believer from claiming that he can be sure, right now, that if he were to die he would have salvation; he must await

a final justification at death to have assurance that he possesses everlasting life and will not see God's condemnation.

In John's entire gospel, only one condition is laid down for obtaining eternal life: *belief* (3:16, 36; 5:24; 20:31; et al.).[17] If salvation were not by faith alone, the whole message of John would be deceptive in stating that there is only one condition (faith) when there are actually two (faith plus works). Indeed, John *overtly* states that the only "work" necessary for eternal life is the act of believing. When asked, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29 NKJV). There is simply nothing else we must do for our *justification*—Jesus did it all (John 19:31; cf. Heb. 10:14–15).[18] It is important to note that *belief* and *faith* are the *same*, coming from the Greek root *pisteuo*.

## The Catholic View Makes Works of Sanctification a Condition of Salvation

Again, the Council of Trent affirmed:

> When he [Paul] characterizes the eternal reward as "the crown of justice which the Lord, the just judge, will render" (2 Tim. 4:8), he thereby shows that the good works of the just establish a legal claim to reward on God. (in Ott, *FCD*, 265)

Of course, as already established, this "legal claim" is not intrinsic to us but is a reality *because God has promised it*. Nonetheless, according to the Catholic argument, this is a promise to give us salvation based on our works; the fact is, *one cannot work for a gift:*

> When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (Rom. 4:4–5)

We work *from* our salvation but never *for* it (cf. Gal. 3:11; Eph. 2:8–10).

Even granting (as Catholicism teaches) that for baptized infants the performance of works is not a condition for receiving *initial* righteousness (justification), even so, according to Catholic theology it is a condition for *progressive* righteousness (sanctification). In other words, one cannot receive a right standing before God (by which he has the divine promise of eternal life) without engaging in works of righteousness. But that is precisely what Scripture says is not the case: It is "*not* by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to *His mercy* He saved us" (Titus 3:5 NKJV). This cannot, as

Catholics claim, apply only to initial justification, because the present tense (Gk: *anakainoseos, renewal*) is used in this verse. Righteousness before God comes by grace through faith alone: It is "not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:9 NKJV). Catholicism's overreaction to Luther obfuscated the purity and clarity of the gospel and conflicted with their own earlier Second Council of Orange (529), which denied semi-Pelagianism.[19]

Catholics have responded by pointing out that not all Protestants agree that a Christian has the promise of heaven on the basis of justification alone—Arminians, for example, maintain that a true believer can lose his salvation.[20] However, this objection misses the mark, for the question at hand is not how we *keep* salvation after we receive it but how we *obtain* it in the first place. That anyone believes a Christian can *lose* eternal life in no way validates or supports the Catholic insistence that eternal life cannot be *obtained* without meritorious works. Once again, eternal life—not just *initial* (or, as some say, *forfeitable*) justification—is a *present* gift to, and possession of, believers (cf. Luke 23:42–43; John 3:16; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

After verbal ambiguity is cleared up, the official Catholic position is clearly unbiblical. Its insistence that the performance of works is necessary for salvation—a condition for receiving a right standing before God that entails the promise of heaven—is precisely what the Reformation rightly rejected.

### The Catholic View Confuses Working *for* Salvation and Working *From* Salvation

Put in traditional terms, Catholicism fails to recognize the important difference between working *for* salvation and working *from* salvation. We do not work in order to obtain salvation; we work because we have already been given it. God works salvation *in* us by His justification, and we work *out* our salvation through sanctification by His grace (Phil. 2:12–13).

In spite of the fact that the Catholic understanding of salvation does not logically *eliminate* forensic justification, it does nevertheless *obscure* it. By failing to make a clear distinction between forensic (legal) *justification* and practical (applicational) *sanctification,* Catholic belief blurs the truth that the only necessary action required of us for justification is faith. Perhaps this is why hundreds of thousands of Catholics have come to personally know Jesus Christ outside of the Catholic Church. In fact, this may be why Catholicism has not produced any of the great evangelists[21] and has not widely circulated an outline

of the process of salvation.

## The Catholic View Makes a False Distinction Between *Works* and *Works of the Law*

The New Testament teaching against the concept of salvation by works is starkly opposed to the Catholic doctrine that salvation can be merited. In order to counter this, Roman Catholic scholars have made an artificial distinction between keeping the *works of the law* (which they admit *is not* a condition for salvation) and the performance of *works* (which they insist *is* a condition for salvation). Nevertheless, Paul's statements against *works* for salvation cannot be limited only to *works of the [Mosaic] law* (such as circumcision)—they extend equally to *all* kinds of meritorious good works. *Every good work, in one way or another, is in accordance with God's law,* for no work is *good* unless it fulfills God's standard of goodness (His law).

Since God is the standard of all righteousness, it follows that all true works of *righteousness* will be according to His nature. It is only *our* righteousness (*self*-righteousness) that is abhorrent in God's eyes (cf. Isa. 64:6; Rom. 10:3). Catholicism holds that part of the basis for obtaining eternal life is meritorious works; it makes no difference whether or not a work is *prompted by grace*—if the accomplishment of meritorious works is a *condition* for eternal life, then salvation is not solely based on God's grace. According to His Word (Rom. 4:5), we are saved *only* through faith (Lat: *sola fidei*) and only by grace (Lat: *sola gratia*).

Further, when condemning the idea of works for salvation, Paul does not limit it to "works of the law" but sometimes simply refers to "works" or "works of righteousness" (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7). Contrary to the Catholic view, the Ephesians passage is clearly aimed at "Gentiles" who had been "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" (2:11–12 KJV), with no suggestion of works in adherence to Jewish law. Nor does the Jew-Gentile conflict diminish the reality that Paul is speaking to Gentiles about "works" other than those unique to Jewish law; the argument offered by some Catholics that "boasting" (in Eph. 2:9) refers to Jewish boasting (since they boasted about "works of the law") is implausible for several reasons.

For one thing, unbelieving Jews are not the only ones who boast in their good works. Pride is a condition of *all* fallen creatures (cf. 1 John 2:15).

Furthermore, in this very context Paul explicitly addresses alienated Gentiles

(Eph. 2:11–12), and the Titus text (3:5–7 NKJV) does not point to "works of the law" but rather "works of righteousness." That the Greek past tense is applied to "salvation" does not bolster the Catholic explanation that this passage refers only to what Protestants call *justification* (and not to *sanctification*), for Paul is speaking to people who have *already* been saved—use of the past tense is natural.

In addition, the Catholic claim that "works" is occasionally an abbreviation for "works of the law" (Rom. 3:27–28 KJV) fails.

*First*, that all "works of the law" are here summarized as "works" does not mean the reverse is necessarily true. All works of the law are works, but not all works are works of the law.[22]

*Second*, when Paul is speaking to Gentiles (who, as Romans 2:14 says, "have not the [Mosaic] law"), he does not note their performance of works of the Mosaic Law (e.g., Eph. 2:8–9)—they likewise are said *not* to be justified by works (Rom. 3:21–24). To be sure, "works" often arise in the New Testament in the context of circumcision (cf. Rom. 4; Gal. 3); this occurs when specific situations occasioned Paul's condemnation of *any* kind of works deemed necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 15:5). To limit all of Paul's rejections of "works" to "works of the law of Moses" is akin to limiting God's Old Testament condemnation of homosexual behavior to Israel because such passages occur only in the Pentateuch, written to Jews.[23]

*Third*, the same is true of Paul's rejection of meritorious "works" as a means of salvation. To limit Paul's condemnation to "works of self-righteousness" as opposed to "meritorious works" is an example of *eisegesis*.[24] What is more, if our works had even a small part in obtaining salvation, we *would* have grounds to boast and, hence, would still come under condemnation.

*Fourth*, and finally, the basic moral character of God expressed in the Ten Commandments is the same as that expressed through natural law to all humanity: That someone is not consciously or deliberately doing works according to the law of Moses does not mean the basic moral standard is different. Therefore, in this sense, *all* moral works are "works of the law," for they are in accord with the moral principles expressed in Mosaic Law.

This is why "when Gentiles, who do not have the law [of Moses], by nature do the things in the law [of Moses], these … show the work of the law written in their hearts" (Rom. 2:14–15 NKJV).

In the final analysis, when it comes to the *moral* demands of the law, there is no substantial discrepancy between "works of righteousness" and "works of the

law." Consequently, the Catholic contention that Paul meant the latter but not the former is a distinction without a difference. The simple truth is that no works of any kind merit salvation: Eternal life is a gift received only by faith (cf. John 3:16, 36; 5:24; Rom. 6:23).

**The Catholic View Is Similar to the Error of Galatianism**

By insisting that the achievement of works is not a condition for obtaining justification (*initial righteousness*) but only for obtaining sanctification (*progressive righteousness*), Catholics do not avoid the charge of serious soteriological error. The claim that sanctification is by works seems to be akin to the falsehood Paul addressed in the book of Galatians. The Galatians were already justified[25] or, to use Catholic terminology, had already received *initial justification*. They were "brethren" (1:11; 6:1 KJV); they were "in Christ" (2:4); hence, they would not be in danger of falling from grace (5:4) unless they were already within it. They were secure in their justification (initial righteousness) but were in danger of losing their sanctification (progressive righteousness).

Further, we argue that the apostle's warning to them related to their sanctification because his fear was not that they would lose their justification but that they would fall back into "bondage" to the law (2:4).[26] Paul was not afraid his Galatian children (4:19) would fall from grace in the sense of *obtaining* salvation; they had already received it (3:2). Rather, his concern was that they would lose sight of grace as a means of *continuing* in their Christian life (3:3). Paul's pivotal plea is "Having *begun* in the Spirit, are you *now* being made perfect by the flesh?" (3:3 NKJV). Their *initial* righteousness was given by grace through faith, so why should they think they could *progress* in righteousness through any other means than by grace through faith? (1:6). *Paul did not want them to fall from grace in their path to holiness and purity*. In other words, the central message of Galatians is: You are not only justified by grace, but you are also being sanctified by grace. Neither initial righteousness (justification) nor progressive righteousness (sanctification) is received by or conditioned on meritorious works. Both are received by grace through faith alone.

It should be noted in this connection that Paul's reference to "false brothers" (Gk: *pseudadelphos*) is not to the *believers* in Galatia who had adopted the Judaizers' erroneous teaching that converts needed to keep the law of Moses as a means of sanctification. Paul was actually pointing to the false *teachers* who

were “secretly brought in” from the outside (2:4 NKJV). Since the Galatians had already been justified by faith, the danger of the false teaching was that the true believers at Galatia would adopt the Judaizers’ additions or supplements to the gospel (1:7–9) as a means of progressive sanctification. This grave distortion was obscuring the pure grace of God that was as necessary for their progressive sanctification as it was for their initial justification.

### The Catholic View Confuses the Reward of Salvation With Rewards for Service

The texts cited by Catholics about “reward for works” do not highlight the reward of *salvation* (whether justification or sanctification); they are talking about *service* rewards. It is true that all who are saved by God’s grace through faith (Eph. 2:8–9) will be rewarded for their works done in honor of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11ff.; 2 Cor. 5:10). These works, however, have no relation to *whether* we will be in heaven—they have to do with *what status* we will have once we are there (Luke 19:17, 19). *All believers will be in His kingdom*. By contrast, in Roman Catholic theology one’s progressive sanctification does bear on whether he will *make it* to heaven. For Catholics, what one obtains at the moment of initial justification does not suffice (unless, of course, he dies immediately after regeneration).

Further, works-for-reward comes under sanctification, not justification: We do works *as a result of* being saved, not *in order to become* saved (i.e., to receive eternal life). In other words, merit makes sense if understood in the context of someone already justified before God and *working out* salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), but not in the context of *working for* it. Even here, the doing of works is not a condition for being sanctified but a manifestation of it. Catholicism, then, is left in de facto denial of the grace it officially claims is necessary for both justification and sanctification.

### The Catholic View Loads Works Into Its Concept of Faith

Roman Catholic biblical scholars acknowledge that “the absence of any reference to sacraments and good works in Paul’s thesis in [Rom. 1:16ff.] has often been noticed.” To this they respond by redefining faith to include works:

> Omission causes no difficulty if faith be understood in the sense of dogmatic faith, which accepts all the doctrines of the Gospel as true and obeys all its precepts as divine commandments. For in this

faith sacraments and good works are included. (Orchard, *CCHS*, 1049)

This is another definitive instance of eisegesis.[27] Remember that Paul goes on to confirm "the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (Rom. 4:5 NASB) and "a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the LAW" (Rom. 3:28 NASB). Nevertheless, when commenting on this very verse, *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* emphatically teaches:

> Another conclusion from [Rom. 3:28] that had to be rejected by the Council of Trent is that *before* justification only faith is necessary [for adults] as a preparation and no other good works. (Orchard, 1055)

The commentary insists that faith is only the "immediate" preparation for justification—a "remote" preparation is also necessary, including "a resolution to receive the Sacrament of baptism and *to keep the commandments*" (ibid., emphasis added). Nothing could be more contrary to the plainly evident meaning of the Romans text.

Consequently, in spite of commendable emphasis on the necessity of grace for salvation and the need for explicit faith as a precondition for our justification, Roman Catholics still maintain that even justification (in adults, not baptized infants) is preconditioned on faith *plus* works. Furthermore, for Roman Catholics, *ultimate* salvation—glorification, eternal life—always requires both faith and works.

## The Catholic View Makes Works Necessary for Re-Justification

Catholic doctrine also makes it clear that the accomplishment of works is a condition for receiving re-justification, which is necessary after one commits a *mortal sin* (otherwise, salvation will be lost). Since the Roman Catholic Church does not believe in *re-baptism*, it must offer another way for a wayward soul to *come back into the fold*. This is provided by *penance*. The Council of Trent declared,

> This sacrament of penance, moreover, is necessary (normatively) for the salvation of those who have fallen after baptism, as baptism itself is for those as yet not regenerated. (Canon 6, in Denzinger, *SCD*, 895.273)

Penance is a form of works; hence, in this sense, the performance of works is

a condition for re-justification—the *re-saving* of those who have lost their initial justification by a mortal sin.[28] In view of this, one has to question why Catholics do not believe meritorious works are also necessary for *initial* justification. At least part of the answer lies in the teaching that justification (regeneration) comes at baptism, which is performed on infants who cannot yet believe. Infants are not even self-conscious (to say nothing of God-conscious), nor have they yet developed the power of moral choice, since they aren't morally aware. One must ask, then, "If baptism were only for adults, would works (e.g., penance) also be a precondition for salvation?" The answer seems to be yes, for "doing penance" is explicitly listed by the Catholic Church as a precondition for adults who wish to be saved. The Council of Trent cited both Jesus and Peter in proof of this point:

> The Lord also said: "Unless you do penance you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3), and the prince of the apostles, Peter, recommending penance to sinners about to receive baptism, said: "Do penance and be baptized, every one of you" (Acts 2:38). (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 894.272)[29]

## The Catholic View Mitigates Grace by Making Works a Condition of Progressive Justification

Another way to make the point is to note that while Catholic theology admits grace is necessary for the initial stage of salvation (which Protestants call *justification*), nonetheless, the doing of works is necessary for the subsequent stage of salvation (which Protestants call *sanctification*). To be sure, Catholics believe this transformation (which they call *progressive justification*) is not possible unless one is moved by God's grace. However, arguing for the necessity of works for sanctification negates *in practice* the doctrine of grace that Catholicism confesses *in principle*. Whether the doing of works is prompted by grace (Catholics and Protestants agree that it is) isn't the issue—when one cannot be saved without meritorious good works, these works become a condition to obtain eternal life.

Again, the Protestant view holds that the carrying out of good works flows from justification but is not a condition for sanctification, even though saving faith will be confirmed through action. Even Protestants (e.g., Arminians) who believe we can *lose* salvation do not believe the performance of works is necessary for *obtaining* salvation (whether justification or sanctification). Sanctification is not *obtained* by good works, it is *manifested* in good works; the sanctified life results from faith prompted by *grace* (Rom. 4:4; cf. Gal. 3:3), and we do not work *for* God's grace but *from* it.

The Protestant presentation of *the way of salvation*, following the unmistakable biblical distinction between justification (in the forensic sense) and sanctification (in the practical sense), is more cogent, much more purely preserving the doctrine of grace. Once a believer knows he has right standing before God (i.e., is justified) by faith alone, his mind is not cluttered with works he must perform in order to be assured that all his sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven and that he has been promised eternity with the Lord. While Catholics acknowledge that there is an initial act of justification,[30] they also maintain that one must work to faithfully avoid *mortal sin* in order to achieve final justification. This is *not* conducive to the assurance of salvation by which we "know … [we] have eternal life" (1 John 5:13) and by which we are inseparably connected with God by His love (Rom. 8:1, 36–39).

**The Catholic View Decreases Motivation to Perform Good Works**

Ironically, Catholic insistence on good works to *attain* progressive and final justification does not provide the proper motive toward good works: *Knowing we are justified by grace alone through faith alone is the highest motivation to sanctification*. In recognizing God's grace, which declares one righteous apart from any merit, a believer is most highly energized for service. The love of Christ "controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14 NASB), and "we love him because [we realize that] He first loved us" (1 John 4:19 NKJV); the grace of God not only brings us salvation (Titus 2:11) but also "*teaches* us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions (2:12). *Keeping laws to obtain grace only brings one into further bondage* (cf. Col. 2:22; Rom. 8:2–3; Gal. 4:3–4). In the words of the chorus, those who recognize they are saved *only* by grace can sing,

> How can I do less
> than give Him my best
> and live for Him completely
> after all He's done for me.[31]

**The Catholic View Argues for Sacramental Salvation**

While Roman Catholic theology claims there is no salvation apart from God's grace, its view of the sacraments tends once more to take away with the left hand in practice what it has affirmed with the right hand in principle. The Catholic view of a sacrament, unchanged by the Council of Vatican II (1962–1965),[32] is

that it is given “not merely as a sign but as a cause of grace” (in Ott, *FCD*, 325). Catholic dogma maintains:

> If anyone shall say that the sacraments of the New Law do not contain the grace which they signify, or that they do not confer that grace on those who do not place any obstacle in the way, as though they were only outward signs of grace or justice, received through faith … let him be anathema, (in Denzinger, *SCD*, canon 6, 849.262)

Furthermore, according to Catholic doctrine, it is anathema to believe that “grace is not conferred from the work which has been worked” but has come from “faith alone” (in ibid., canon 8, 851.263). This being the case, *according to Catholic doctrine, salvation is by sacraments—God’s normative method of saving sinners is through the Catholic sacramental system*. This is, in effect and for the most part, an institutionally mediated salvation, piece by piece, until the sacraments are received throughout the course of life.[33]

Roman Catholics believe that sacraments are effective *objectively* regardless of whether their efficacy is experienced subjectively: “Sacraments confer grace immediately, without the mediation of fiducial faith.”[34] In order to designate this, Catholic theology coined the phrase *ex opere operato* (Lat: “by the work that is worked”); meaning, “the Sacraments operate by the power of the completed sacramental rite” (in ibid., canon 8, 851.263). Trent’s adoption of *ex opere operato* was vigorously opposed by the Reformers, for the phrase means the sacraments “move God to bestow the grace by their objective value. As soon as the sacramental sign is validly accomplished God bestows the grace” (Ott, *FCD*, 331). In other words, *salvation is dependent on performing the works of the sacramental system—it does not come by grace alone through faith alone*.

## The Catholic View Holds That the Roman Catholic Church Is the Institution of Salvation

The sacraments, of course, are mediated through the Church, which is believed to bestow the grace of God on its recipients in stages from birth (baptism) to death (extreme unction). Catholicism does recognize the validity of two sacraments—baptism and marriage—that are widely practiced outside its jurisdiction and also allows that grace can be dispensed through the Lord’s Supper.[35] *The institutionalized sacraments are necessary for salvation* (Denzinger, canon 4, 847.262).

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that “except for Baptism and

Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power, conferred by Holy Orders, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (Ott, *FCD*, 341). While both Catholic laypersons (e.g., nurses or doctors) and even Protestant ministers may administer baptism in the name of the Trinity, the Council of Trent soundly condemned the belief that "all Christians have the power to administer all the sacraments" (ibid.). *Only* the Roman Catholic Church has the right.

Trent made it infallible dogma that Catholicism is God's chosen organization to mete out God's sacramental grace, bit by bit, from birth to death. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church is the institution of salvation—something to which Protestants take strong exception. The Eucharist is a prime example: Not only does the Church (through its priesthood) claim to be the only divinely appointed organization that can administer this sacrament, but it also insists it has the God-given power to actually transform the physical elements of bread and wine into the literal body and blood of Christ (transubstantiation).[36] Perhaps one must stand outside the Roman Catholic system to be appropriately impressed by the utter inappropriateness of this presumption about the institutionalization of salvation.

**The Catholic View of the Eucharist As Sacrifice Vitiates Salvation by Grace**

Roman Catholics view the Eucharistic Feast as an "unbloody sacrifice," an idea found in the writings of some early medieval Fathers (see Ott, ibid., 405–07). Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), considered "the father of the medieval papacy" (Cross, ed. *ODCC*, 594–95), held that at every mass Christ was sacrificed afresh, and "this notion of the mass as sacrifice eventually became standard doctrine of the Western church—until it was rejected by Protestants in the sixteenth century" (González, *SC*, 1.247).

Protestants reject "Eucharistic Mass as sacrifice." Lutheran theology, for example, declares: "Since Christ died and atoned for sin once and for all, and since the believer is justified by faith on the basis of that one-time sacrifice, there is no need for repeated sacrifices" (Luther, *BC*, 140).

Sacerdotalism[37] is also denied: "The presence of Christ's body and blood is not a result of the priest's actions. It is instead a consequence of the power of Jesus Christ" (ibid.).

Of course, Catholics argue that the priest does not consecrate by his own power but by the power of God invested in him. The Protestant objection does not stem from whether the priest is truly an efficient cause or merely an

occasional cause of God's power;[38] the problem is the Catholic belief that such divine power is given to the administration of the Roman priesthood. Here again, Catholicism has institutionalized salvation and thus corrupted the pure grace of God by placing it under the control of a human hierarchy.

## SUMMARY OF AGREEMENTS AND DIFFERENCES

In terms of justification (righteousness), the areas of agreement and disagreement between Protestants and Roman Catholics may be summarized as follows:

| Roman Term<br>Protestant Term | **Initial Justification**<br>**Justification** | **Progressive Justification**<br>**Sanctification** | **Final Justification**<br>**Glorification** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Legal (forensic) | Catholics allow<br>Protestants affirm | Catholics allow<br>Protestants deny | Catholics affirm<br>Protestants deny |
| Actual (practical) | Both affirm | Both affirm[39] | Catholics affirm<br>Protestants deny |
| Behavioral change | Both affirm | Both affirm | Both affirm |
| Necessity of grace | Both affirm | Both affirm | Both affirm |
| Necessity of works[40] | Both deny | Catholics affirm<br>Protestants deny | Catholics affirm<br>Protestants deny |

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS[41]

Now that we have studied the historic battle between Catholics and Protestants, we will examine the intramural debate among Protestants on the relationship between faith and works.[42] All agree that the performance of works is not a *condition for* but a *result of* salvation. It is the precise connection between faith and works that awaits discussion.

Whatever the connection between faith and works, it is clear that the Bible repeatedly emphasizes the believer's need to manifest good works: "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your *good deeds* and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every *good work*" (2 Cor. 9:8). "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do *good works*, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). "[I am] confident of this, that he who began a *good work* in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). "We pray [for you to receive wisdom and understanding] in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every *good work*, growing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:10). "I also want women … [to practice] *good deeds*, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Tim. 2:9–10). "No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she … is well known for her *good deeds*" (1 Tim. 5:9–10). "*Good deeds* are obvious, and even those that are not cannot be hidden" (1 Tim. 5:25). "Stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to *doing what is good*" (Titus 3:8).

**True Believers Manifest Their Faith in Good Works**

There are crucial differences between the proponents of various Protestant views on the relationship between faith and works. Many strong Calvinists hold that as a believer is moved by God's grace, saving faith *automatically* produces good works. Other Protestants hold that doing good works flows *inevitably* from saving faith but not automatically (a free choice is involved). Still others prefer to say that works flow *naturally* from saving faith. Some free-grace proponents claim that the accomplishment of good works usually *accompanies* saving faith, even though it is not a direct (or mandatory) result. Others insist that works are *neither automatic nor necessary*.

*Why Works Do Not Flow Automatically From Saving Faith*

There are many reasons for rejecting strong Calvinism's insistence that works flow automatically from saving faith.

*First*, sanctification is a process involving obedience, and obedience is not automatic but is an act of the will (cf. Rom. 6:16; Eph. 6:5; 1 John 2:3, 22, 24). Even the strong Calvinist acknowledges that grace works cooperatively (with

our free will) after justification. Accordingly, it cannot be automatic.

*Second*, sanctification is a manifestation of our love for God, and love is not an automatic act but a free one (cf. Matt. 22:37–39; John 15:10; 1 John 5:3).

*Third*, again, strong Calvinists admit that sanctification involves cooperative grace, which signifies a synergistic ("working together") act of God's grace and the human will.

*Fourth*, Romans 6:16 describes sanctification as a free action in which we are directed to "*offer [our] selves*."

*Fifth*, other acts of goodness are described as free and uncoerced—such as "*entirely on their own*" (2 Cor. 8:3) or "*spontaneous and not forced*" (Philem. 1:14; cf. 1 Cor. 7:37, 39).

*Sixth*, sanctification is a duty, and every responsibility implies the ability to respond, if not in our own strength, then by God's grace.[43]

*Seventh*, we are rewarded for good works (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.; Rev. 22:12), and it is meaningless to reward someone for actions that come automatically (i.e., without choice).

*Eighth*, and finally, we suffer loss of rewards for bad actions (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11ff.), and it is senseless to punish someone for what could not have been avoided (since, again, it allegedly came automatically).

### *Why Works* Do *Flow* Naturally *From Saving Faith*

While works do not flow *automatically* from saving faith, they do flow *naturally*, just as buds come naturally from a living bush. As Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) correctly observes,

> Every Christian will bear fruit.… Otherwise he or she is not a true believer.… *Fruit, then, furnishes evidence of saving faith*. The evidence may be strong or weak, erratic or regular, visible or not, but *a saving faith works*. (SGS, 42–43, emphasis added)

Even if circumstances put faith into a dormant state of survival for a time, there will be signs of life. With a true believer, as with other kinds of vitality, spiritual life can neither hide completely nor for long—it naturally blooms forth. Of course, to be fruitful it must be cultivated (2 Peter 3:18), and this is supported by many lines of scriptural evidence.

*First*, saving faith is likened to a seed that grows naturally in good soil (Luke 8:11–18; cf. 1 Peter 1:23).

*Second*, activity follows naturally from one's nature, and the true believer receives a new nature (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 3:10).

*Third*, true believers are "born again" (John 3:3, 7), and, as such, they manifest a desire to grow by their hunger for nourishment.[44]

*Fourth*, the undeniable biblical connection between faith and works indicates that the achievement of works flows naturally from the faith that saves.[45]

*Fifth*, it is widely acknowledged, even by free-grace proponents,[46] that saving faith involves trust.[47] Trust leads naturally to good actions toward the one who is trusted.

*Sixth*, saving faith involves true repentance (Acts 17:30–31; 20:21; cf. 19:4),[48] and true repentance will naturally lead to good works (Matt. 3:8; Acts 26:20).[49]

*Seventh*, that true faith involves love for God (Matt. 22:37; John 4:7) reveals that it will result in actions. True love naturally expresses itself (1 Cor. 13:1ff.).

*Eighth*, true faith is not mere mental (intellectual, mind-based) assent. Since true faith also includes the emotions and will (Ryrie, *SGS*, 110–11), good works flow from the genuine belief of the whole person.

*Ninth*, that true faith involves obedience shows that belief naturally expresses itself in action.[50]

*Tenth*, James says explicitly:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [No.] … In the same way, *faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*.… You see that *[Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did*. (James 2:14, 17, 22)

*Eleventh*, and finally, we are sanctified the same way we are justified—by faith (see Gal. 3:4, 11). However, *sanctification* is conditioned on our "obedience, which leads to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16; cf. Eph. 6:5; 1 John 2:3, 22, 24).

Some have objected that if doing good works naturally flows from faith, then the Bible has no need to exhort us in that regard (which it does—e.g., Titus 3:8). The reason Scripture so encourages us is that while the accomplishment of good works does come *naturally* from saving faith, it does not come forth *automatically*. Furthermore, while *some* actions come naturally, *additional* fruit comes by the arduous work of cultivating, fertilizing, watering, and pruning (cf. John 15:2). Again, without these actions, spiritual life can become dormant and stunted.

Similarly, some have observed that grace is said to be a teacher of godliness (Titus 2:11–12) and subsequently argued that if godliness follows naturally from saving faith, one has no need of grace to teach him to do good works. However, *teaching helps to produce better fruit* (John 15:2); also, *nature* will *naturally* produce some fruit, but not as much as if it is lovingly tended (cf. 1 Cor. 3:6; 2

Peter 3:18). As Ryrie states, "*Saving faith is a working faith,* and those works justify believers in the courtroom on earth [as opposed to "in heaven"].… Unproductive faith is a spurious faith" (*SGS*, 121, emphasis added).

### True Believers Can Fall Into Sin

All of this is not to say that true believers cannot "backslide" (Jer. 3:14 NKJV) or be "overtaken in any trespass" (Gal. 6:1 NKJV) or commit "sins" (1 John 1:8–9). David did (2 Sam. 11), and he paid dearly (2 Sam. 12). Lot, who lived in Sodom, was "a righteous man" (2 Pet. 2:7), but he fell into sin, as did Noah, a great man of faith (Gen. 9). Likewise, Abraham, "the father of many nations," was beset by deceit and unbelief (Gen. 20–21).

In the New Testament, even John the Baptist, the herald of the Messiah, had his doubts (Luke 7:19), but Jesus said he would be in the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:11). Peter, who denied the Lord three times, did not lose his salvation (John 21:15–19; cf. Matt. 26:34–36). He was still "wheat,"[51] and he still had his "faith" (cf. Luke 22:31–32). Paul speaks of "carnal" believers (1 Cor. 3:1, 3 KJV); indeed, the Corinthian church as a whole was living in various kinds of sin, yet Paul addressed them as "saints" (1:2 KJV). Even the believer who committed incest was rescued (5:5). Of course, not all Christians will receive rewards in heaven (3:12–14); some will be saved "as through fire" (v. 15 NKJV).

### True Believers Are Disciplined When They Sin

Sometimes the *sola gratia* view is confronted with the charge that it leads to a libertine or licentious life. Paul himself faced this accusation and asked, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! *We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer*?" (Rom. 6:1–2). Grace does not prompt godlessness by godliness.

For one thing, as we have seen, true grace gives us the motivation to live righteous lives. Paul says:

> The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and *to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age*. (Titus 2:11–12)

Further, believers who fail to avail themselves of God's grace receive His discipline as His children. Hebrews tells us: "The Lord disciplines those he

loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (12:6). God spanks His wayward children: "What son is not disciplined by his father? *If you are not disciplined* (and everyone undergoes discipline), *then you are illegitimate children and not true sons*" (vv. 7–8).

"The Lord knows those who are his," and, "everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2 Tim. 2:19). In short, when a believer falls into sin he is disciplined, and if he persists, God may even take his physical life so as to save His Name from further dishonor. Paul told the Corinthians that their abuse of the Lord's Table had resulted in the deaths of some among them (1 Cor. 11:30; cf. 15:20). This may be what John was referring to in saying, "*There is a sin that leads to death*."[52] I am not saying that [the interceding brother] should pray [on behalf of his fallen brother for this sin] (1 John 5:16). Perhaps the one who'd sinned had gone so far that God would no longer entertain prayer to save his life. This also may be what James was warning about when he said, "Remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will *save him from death* and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20).[53]

Pointing out one Corinthian Christian's horrific sin, Paul instructed the congregation to "hand this man over to Satan, *so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 5:5). Two things are evident here: First, in spite of his great sin, he would be ultimately saved (cf. Heb. 12). Second, he was to receive severe discipline for his sin (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30–32). Paul was also writing to believers when he said, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. *A man reaps what he sows*" (Gal. 6:7; cf. v. 8).

In brief, no believer gets away with sin: "*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). At this judgment seat,

> [Our] work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and *the fire will test the quality of each man's work*. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. *If it is burned up, he will suffer loss*; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:13–15)

Note (from v. 15) that all who have been truly saved will *always* be saved.[54] God does not renege on His promises (Rom. 11:29), nor does He begin a project He does not complete (Phil. 1:6). There isn't anyone declared righteous by God who has cause to doubt eternity: "Those he predestined, he also called; those he

called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

## Can True Believers Ever Lose their Faith Completely?

One question not yet specifically addressed, one that divides even proponents of *sola gratia*, is whether continual faith in Christ throughout one's life is a necessary indication that one is truly saved. Or, put negatively: Can one be a ture believer (i.e., be saved) and "lose" his faith?

### *Continued Faith Is Not a Condition for Keeping One's Salvation*

In distinction from Arminians and Roman Catholics, Calvinists of different varieties answer no: There are *no* conditions of any kind on our eternal security. Salvation is an unconditional gift (Rom. 11:29), and while continued faith and its fruit in good works is a *manifestation* of true faith, it is not a *condition* of it.

### *Continued Faith* Is *a Natural Manifestation of One's True Salvation*

Zane Hodges (b. 1932),[55] Charles Stanley (b. 1933), and other freegrace proponents agree that continued faith is not a necessary sign of the elect. Stanley affirms that "God does not require a *constant attitude* of faith in order to be saved—only an *act* of faith" (*ES*, 80). With this we concur, but that is not the issue at hand—the question is "Must a believer exercise continual belief in Christ throughout his whole life in order to be shown to be one of the elect?" Hodges and Stanley again say no: "Hodges argues that "*Satan can completely shipwreck a believer's faith but that this in no way affects the believer's security*" (ibid., 91, emphasis added). Stanley asserts, "The Bible clearly teaches that God's love for His people is of such magnitude that *even those who walk away from the faith* have not the slightest chance of slipping from His hand" (ibid., 74, emphasis added).

True faith *may* become dormant for a time, as has been presented above. In addition, the true believer's eternity is unquestionably secure. However, it is highly doubtful that, as Stanley suggests, a *true* believer *can* ever totally lose his faith.

*First*, as already shown, continued works are the natural result of saving faith.

*Second*, true faith is the kind that produces (manifests itself in) good works. James (see 2:14–22) states this overtly: Faith without works is dead.[56]

*Third*, as Jesus said in the parable of the soils, saving faith is not in those "who believe for a while" but in those who "bear fruit" (Luke 8:13, 15 NKJV).

As Ryrie says, faith is not a work, but true faith continues to work.

*Fourth*, true faith will persevere to the end because it is "*through faith* [we] are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Phil. 1:6).

*Fifth*, the Bible records that true believers who did falter didn't lose eternal hope (cf. Matt. 11:11; John 21:15–19). Once again, Peter denied to several people that he knew Christ, but he never stopped believing in Him (Luke 22:32). John the Baptist had questions about whether Jesus was the Messiah (Matt. 11:1–4), but he didn't reject Him and turn away; rather, he sent messengers to ask his question and have his wavering faith confirmed.

*Sixth*, the Bible declares, "*No one who is born of God will continually sin* because God's seed abides in him; he cannot go on sinning because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9).[57] To avoid continual sin one must be in continual faith, for faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

*Seventh*, and finally, those who "depart from the faith" entirely were never truly within it: "[The false teachers] went out from us, but *they did not really belong to us*. For *if they had* belonged to us, *they would have remained with us*" (1 John 2:19).

Charles Ryrie clarifies,

> To be sure, justification is proved by personal purity, [for] once justified, we show this by changes in our lives. "He who has died is freed [literally, 'justified'] from sin" (Rom. 6:7).… Justification before the bar of God is demonstrated by changes in our lives here on earth before the bar of men. (*SGS*, 132)

**True Believers Are Not Always Faithful**

*Continuing in faith* and *continuing in faithfulness* are not the same: One can continue to believe in Christ, and manifest a modicum of good works springing from that faith, without being a faithful and fruitful Christian. *True believers are not always faithful*, but when they are unfaithful to the Lord they do not lose their salvation: "If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

The true believers of the biblical era *were* unfaithful at times. They were untrue to one or more of God's commandments, but none of them was without faith in the God of the commandments. No matter how dormant or suppressed anyone's faith may have become, *there are no undisputed scriptural examples of anyone known to be saved who completely gave up his faith in God*. People who permanently turn from the faith are professing, not possessing, Christians; that is, they were never saved. They fall into the category of those about whom Jesus

said, “I *never* knew you” (Matt. 7:23).

### Good Works That Are Evidence of Personal Salvation

While the doing of good works is an *evidence* of (not a *condition* for) salvation in general, nonetheless, certain specific kinds of works are scripturally singled out. These are sometimes taken as tokens of one’s assurance of having eternal life; the apostle John enumerates several in his first epistle with the introductory phrase, “By this you know” (cf. 2:3; 3:14, 19, 24; 4:2, 13; 5:2, 13, 18–20). Biblically, these include love for the brethren, keeping God’s commandments, and the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22–23), which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”

A more extensive discussion on this point is reserved for chapter 11. Two brief observations will suffice here.

*First*, whatever role these kinds of works may play in providing assurance, they are all the *fruit* and not the *root* of salvation.

*Second*, these are at best the subjective grounds for knowing we are saved; the objective basis is the saving work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

## THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS

There are many theological arguments beneath the evangelical view that the carrying out of good works is the evidence of, but not a condition for, saving faith. First, we will look at three theological reasons for works not being a condition for salvation, then we will present two theological reasons for works being a natural result (evidence, manifestation) of true faith.

### The Nature of God’s Grace

The God of Scripture is the totally self-sufficient, uncaused Cause of all things.[58] He is *the* Source and Sustainer—He created all, and He sustains all.[59] We have nothing we did not receive from Him, and we cannot give to Him what He has not already given to us: God “is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25). “From him and through him and to him are all

things" (Rom. 11:36). "Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chron. 29:14).

Eternal life, then, cannot be of our works: "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV). Even though it must be received by faith (Eph. 2:8; Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:25), nonetheless, salvation does not originate with our will (cf. John 1:13; Rom. 9:16) but with Him who is the Source of all that has been created. Without grace initiating and executing the plan of salvation, no one would ever be saved: Our eternal life finds its origin only in grace (*sola gratia*).

**The Nature of Human Depravity**

Total depravity means (among other things) that fallen humanity—the whole human race—is *totally* incapable of achieving salvation. If humans are to be justified before God, *He* must both initiate and accomplish it.[60]

**The Nature of Faith**

Faith is the only condition (*sola fidei*) for receiving God's gracious gift of salvation (Rom. 4:5; cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:3–7).[61] Saving faith involves dependence only on God for our salvation, acknowledging that He and He alone is the Source and Sufficiency of eternal life.

**The Nature of the Results of Faith**

Saving faith involves trust and commitment, so naturally doing good works flows from it. As we have seen, an act of trust or commitment, by its very nature, is one that tends to result in a change of *action (behavior, work*). Persons we trust are persons *toward* whom we act appropriately (because we trust them, we respond in ways that signify trust) and *for* whom we act beneficially (because we trust them, we act in ways that convey and proliferate goodness). Persons we are committed to are persons *toward* whom we act positively and *for* whom we respond lovingly and sacrificially.

**The Nature of Salvation**

Salvation, once again, is an act of God's grace, and grace, by its very nature, tends to soften the heart and change the actions of the one receiving it. This

softening change causes us to be more favorably disposed—grateful and responsive—to the Gracious One. “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4 NKJV), and “the love of Christ controls us” (2 Cor. 5:14 NASB); our Lord said that those who are forgiven much will love much, “but to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little” (Luke 7:47 NKJV). It follows, then, that the intrinsic nature of salvation as a gracious and loving act of God tends naturally to produce good works in the lives of those who receive it (cf. Titus 1:11–13).

**Relation of Faith, Works, and Salvation: Four Views**

| | **Lordship** | **Moderate Calvinism** | **Free Grace** | **Wesleyanism** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Must accept Christ as Lord for salvation | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Need to repent for salvation | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Obedience is necessary for salvation | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| “Belief *that*” and “belief *in*” are the same | No | No | Yes | No |
| “Belief *that*” can save | No | No | Yes | No |
| Faith involves commitment | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Abiding in Christ is necessary for salvation | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Continual faithfulness is necessary for salvation | Yes | No | No | Yes |
| Necessary to continue in faith as *condition* of salvation | No | No | No | Yes |
| Necessary to continue in faith as *evidence* of being saved | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Faith *naturally* produces works | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Good works *automatically* follow from faith | Yes | No | No | No |
| All saved should be disciples | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| One must be a disciple to be saved | Yes | No | No | Yes |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All the regenerate will be saved | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| Salvation can be lost | No | No | No | Yes |
| One can lose all faith in Christ and still be saved | No | No | Yes | No |
| The performance of good works is a necessary *condition* for keeping salvation | No | No | No | Yes[62] |
| Continual faith is a necessary *sign* of salvation | Yes | Yes | No | Yes |
| Those who *fall* into serious sin are still saved | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| One can die in serious[63] sin and be saved | No | Yes | Yes | No[64] |
| Those who continue in sin can be saved | No | No | Yes | No |
| We can know we are saved while in serious sin | No | Yes | Yes | No |

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS —WORKS ARE NOT A *CONDITION* OF SALVATION

There is a firm and continuous tradition from the beginning of Christian teaching that while true faith should (and naturally does) result in good works, the performance of works is not a condition of salvation. *All who are ever saved are saved apart from their good works and in spite of their bad works.*

## Early Fathers

According to the patristic Fathers, salvation cannot be earned. Nothing we can do merits God's gracious gift of salvation.

*Clement of Rome (c. A.D. first century)*

> We, therefore, who have been called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves, neither by our wisdom or understanding or piety, nor by the works we have wrought in holiness of heart. (*LC* in *FEF*, 1.9.16 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*)

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> Vain, too, are Marcion and his followers when they seek to exclude Abraham from the inheritance, to which the Spirit through many men, and now by Paul, bears witness, that "he believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (*AH* 4.8.1 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*, 1:470).

### *Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

> We hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law. If an example is required I think it must suffice to mention the thief on the cross, who asked Christ to save him and was told: "Truly I say to you, this day you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43 NASB).… A man is justified by faith. The works of the law can make no contribution to this. (*CER*, on Rom. 3:28, 2.132–34 in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:104)
>
> God is just, and therefore he could not justify the unjust. Therefore he required the intervention of a propitiator, so that by having faith in him those who could not be justified by their own works might be justified. (2.112 in ibid., 6:102–03).

### *Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315–c. 387)*

"Just as a writing-pen or a dart has need of one to employ it, so also does grace have need of believing hearts.… It is God's part to confer grace, but yours to accept and guard it" (*CL*, 1.3–1.4 in *FEF*, 1:348.808; ibid.).

### *John Chrysostom (347–407)*

> The man who boasts in his works is boasting about himself, but the man who finds his honor in having faith in God has a much better reason for boasting, because he is boasting about God, not about himself. (*HR* in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:385–86; ibid., 6:110)
>
> In order to stop anyone from asking: "How can we be saved without contributing anything at all to our salvation?" Paul shows that in fact we do contribute a great deal toward it—we supply our faith! (ibid., on Rom. 7 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:377; ibid., 6:100)
>
> So that you may not be elated by the magnitude of these benefits, see how Paul put you in your place. For "by grace you are saved," he says, "through faith," then, so as to not do injury to free will, he allots a role to us, then takes it away again, saying, "and this not of ourselves" (*HE*, on Eph. 2:8 [*IOEP* 2:160] in ibid., 8:13).

"This is God's righteousness, that we are not justified by works (for then they would have to be perfect, which is impossible), but by grace, in which case all our sin is removed" (*HEPC*, 11:5 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.12:334; ibid., 7:252). "The righteousness is not ours but belongs to God, and in saying this, Paul hints to us

that it is abundantly available and easy to obtain. For we do not get it by toil and labor but by believing" (*HR*, 2.17 in Schaff, *NPNF*, 1.11:349; ibid., 6:32).

*Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–c. 466)*

> All we bring to grace is our faith.… For [Paul] adds, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). It is not of our own accord that we have believed, but we have come to belief after having been called. (*CEP* as cited in *FEF*, 3:248–49.2163)

"The Lord Christ is both God and the mercy seat, both the priest and the lamb, and he performed the work of our salvation by his blood, demanding only faith from us" (*ILR*, 82 in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 6:102).

*Caius Marius Victorinus (c. fourth century)*

"The fact that you Ephesians are saved is not something that comes from yourselves. It is the gift of God. It is not from your works, but it is God's grace and God's gift, not from anything you have deserved" (*EE*, 1.2.9.152 in ibid., 8:134). "He did not make us deserving, since we did not receive things by our own merit but by the grace and goodness of God" (1.2.7.152 in ibid., 8:132).

*Ambrose (339–397)*

> "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.' " Abraham believed God. Let us also believe, so that we who are the heirs of his race may likewise be heirs of his faith. (*ODHBS*, 2.89 in *FC*, 22:236; ibid., 6:111)

*Ambrosiaster (c. fourth century)*

> [God] justifies him who has faith in Jesus.… God gave what he promised in order to be revealed as righteous. For he had promised that he would justify those who believe in Christ, as he says in Habakkuk: "The righteous will live by faith in me." Whoever has faith in God and Christ is righteous. (*CPE* in *CCL*, 81; ibid., 6:103)

Again, "They are justified freely, because they have not done anything nor given anything in return, but by faith alone they have been made holy by the gift of God" (*CCL*, 74 in ibid., 6:104).

**Medieval Fathers**

The medieval Fathers were no less definite about the impossibility of works

being the basis of salvation. In this way they carried on the salvific tradition from the apostles and the patristics.

*Jerome (c. 340–420)*

"We are saved by grace rather than works, for we can give God nothing in return for what he has bestowed on us" (*EE [PL]* 26:468B [574] in ibid., 8:132). "[Paul] says this in case the secret thought should steal upon us that 'if we are not saved by our own works, at least we are saved by our own faith, and so in another way our salvation is of ourselves' " (26:470A–B in ibid., 8:133). "Paul shows clearly that righteousness depends not on the merit of man, but on the grace of God, who accepts the faith of those who believe, without the works of the Law" (*AP*, 2.7 in *FC*, 53:306; ibid., 6:106).

> Some say that if Paul is right in asserting that no one is justified by the works of the law but from faith in Christ, the patriarchs and prophets and saints who lived before Christ were imperfect. We should tell such people that those who are said not to have obtained righteousness are those who believe that they can be justified by works alone. The saints who lived long ago, however, were justified from faith in Christ, seeing (John 8:56) that Abraham saw in advance Christ's day. (*EG* [*PL]* 26:343C–D [412] in ibid., 8:30)

*Augustine (c. 354–430)*

> Grace is given, not because we have done good works, but in order that we may have power to do them, not because we have fulfilled the Law, but in order that we may be able to fulfill it. (*OSL* in *LCC*; ibid., 8:206)

"Paul's intention is perfectly clear—to accost the pride of man, that no one should take glory in human works, and that no one should glory in himself" (*PS*, 5.9 in *FC*, 86:228; ibid., 7:18). "It is not that the will or the deed is not ours, but without his aid we neither will nor do anything good" (*OGC*, 26 in *PL*, 44:373; ibid., 8:258). "It is certain that when we do a deed, the deed is ours; but he is the one who makes us do the deed by giving us strength fully sufficient to carry out our will" (*OGFW*, 32 in *PL*, 44:900–01; ibid., 8:258).

> [It is not God's will that] anyone should be forced against his will to do evil or good but that he should go to the bad, according to his own deserts, when God abandons him. For a person is not good if he does not will it, but the grace of God assists him even in willing. It is not without cause that it is written, "God is the one who works in you to will and to do, of his own good will" (*TLP*, 1.36 in *PL*, 44:567; ibid., 8:258).

*Cyril of Alexandria (375–444)*

“We do not say that Christ became a sinner, far from it, but being righteous (or rather righteousness, because he did not know sin at all), the Father made him a victim for the sins of the world” (*L*, 41:10 in *FC*, 76:174; ibid., 7:252).

> Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On the principle of works? No, but on the principle of faith.… For who will glory, or for what, when everyone has become worthless and gone out of the right way, and nobody does good works any more? Therefore he says that all glorying is excluded. (*CR*, 74 in ibid., 6:104)

### *Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 390–c. 463)*

> Just as there are no crimes so detestable that they can prevent the gift of grace, so too there can be no works so eminent that they are owed … that which is given freely. Would it not be a debasement of redemption in Christ’s blood, and would not God’s mercy be made secondary to human works, if justification, which is through grace, were owed in view of preceding merits, so that it were not the gift of a Donor, but the wages of a laborer? (*CAN*, 1.17 in *FEF*, 3:195.2044)

### *Fulgentius (c. 467–533)*

> The blessed Paul argues that we are saved by faith, which he declares to be not from us but a gift from God. Thus there cannot possibly be true salvation where there is no true faith, and, since this faith is divinely enabled, it is without doubt bestowed by his free generosity. Where there is true belief through true faith, true salvation certainly accompanies it. (*OI* in *CCL*, 91:313 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 8:133–34)

“Law without grace, then, can expose disease, but cannot heal. It can reveal the wounds but does not administer the remedy. But so that the law’s precepts may be fulfilled, grace provides assistance within” (*OTP*, 1.41 in *CCL*, 91A:485, 980–83; ibid., 8:49).

### *Caesarius of Arles (c. 470–543)*

“What does it mean to receive the grace of God in vain except to be unwilling to perform good works with the help of his grace?” (*S*, 126.5 in *FC*, 47:219; ibid., 7:254).

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> When [Paul] next says “and that not of yourselves,” he clarifies what he had spoken of: First, regarding faith, which is the foundation of the whole spiritual edifice. Secondly, regarding grace ([Eph.] 2:10).… Since he had said we are saved by faith, anyone can hold the opinion that faith itself originates within ourselves and that to believe is determined by our own wishes. Therefore to abolish this he states “and that not of yourselves.”
>
> The second error he rejects is that anyone can believe that faith is given by God to us on the merit of our preceding actions. To exclude this he adds “Not of preceding works that we merited at one time to be saved; for this is the grace,” as was mentioned above, and according to Romans 11:6, “If by grace, it is not now by works; otherwise grace is no more grace.” He follows with the reason why God saves

man by faith without any preceding merits, that no man may glory. (*CE*, 95–96)

## Reformation Leaders

*Martin Luther (1483–1546)*

"To want to merit Grace by works which precede faith is to want to appease God by sins; which is nothing but adding sins to sins, laughing at God, and provoking His Wrath" (*WLS*, 604).

*John Calvin (1509–1564)*

"The reader now perceives with what fairness the Sophists of the present day cavil at our doctrine, when we say that a man is justified by faith alone" [Rom. 4:2] (*ICR*, 3.11.19).

> "Faith is imputed for righteousness," and therefore righteousness is not the reward of works, but is given without being due. Because "we are justified by faith," boasting is excluded. "Had there been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe" (Gal. 3:21–22). Let them maintain, if they dare, that these things apply to ceremonies, and not to morals, and the very children will laugh at their effrontery. The true conclusion, therefore, is that the whole Law is spoken of when the power of justifying is denied to it. (ibid.)
>
> Since a great part of mankind imagine a righteousness compounded of faith and works, let us here show that there is so wide a difference between justification by faith and by works that the establishment of the one necessarily overthrows the other. The Apostle says, "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (ibid., 3.33.13).
>
> The conclusion, therefore, is that [Abraham] was not justified by works. [Paul] then employs another argument from contraries, viz., when reward is paid to works, it is done of debt, not of grace; but the righteousness of faith is of grace: therefore it is not of the merit of works. Away, then, with the dream of those who invent a righteousness compounded of faith and works. (*ACT*)

Therefore, "no man is justified by works unless he has reached the summit of perfection, and cannot be convicted of even the smallest transgression" (*ICR*, 1.3.15.1).

> Thus when the publican is said to have gone down to his house "justified" (Luke 18:14), it cannot be held that he obtained this justification by any merit of works. All that is said is that after obtaining the pardon of sins he was regarded in the sight of God as righteous. He was justified, therefore, not by any approval of works, but by gratuitous acquittal on the part of God. Hence Ambrose elegantly terms confession of sins "legal justification" (Ambrose on Psalm 118, Sermon 10; ibid., 3.11.1).
>
> The Gospel differs from the Law in this, that it does not confine justification to works, but places it entirely in the mercy of God. In like manner, Paul contends, in the Epistle to the Romans, that Abraham had no ground of glorying, because faith was imputed to him for righteousness (Rom. 4:2); and he adds, in confirmation, that the proper place for justification by faith is where there are no works to which reward is due. "To him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt" (ibid., 3.11.18).

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *John Wesley (1703–1791)*

> "By grace are ye saved": Ye are saved from your sins, from the guilt and power thereof, ye are restored to the favour and image of God, not for any works, merits, or deservings of yours, but by the free grace, the mere mercy of God, through the merits of his well-beloved Son: Ye are thus saved, not by any power, wisdom, or strength, which is in you, or in any other creature; but merely through the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, which worketh all in all. (*MG*, sermon 16)

### *Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892)*

> What is the heresy of Rome, but the addition of something to the perfect merits of Jesus Christ, the bringing in of the works of the flesh, to assist in our justification? And what is the heresy of Arminianism but the addition of something to the work of the Redeemer? Every heresy, if brought to the touch-stone, will discover itself here. ("DC" in *CHSA*, 5a)

### *Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)*

> Everyone prefers the feeling of being able to do something to be saved. And once the door is open to his kind of thinking, the whole emphasis shifts from salvation as a gift from God.
>
> That kind of thinking accounts for the fact that none of the major religions of the world, with the exception of Christianity, offers salvation as a gift apart from any human effort at all. (*S*, 115)

### *Millard Erickson (b. 1932)*

> Even faith is not some good work which God must reward with salvation. It is God's gift. It is not the cause of our salvation, but the means by which we receive it. And, contrary to the thinking of some, it has always been the means of salvation. (*CT*, 959)

"Another difficulty is that when humans do accept the principle that they do not have to work to receive salvation, there frequently is a tendency to overreact, all the way to antinomianism" [Rom. 6:1–2; Gal. 5:13–15] (ibid.).

> Despite the fairly common opinion that there is tension between Paul and James, both make essentially the same point: that the genuineness of the faith that leads to justification becomes apparent in the results which issue from it. If there are no good works, there has been no real faith nor justification. We find support for this contention in the fact that justification is intimately linked with union with Christ. If we have become one with Christ, then we will not live according to the flesh, but rather by the Spirit. [Rom. 8:1–17] (ibid., 960)

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS —WORKS ARE A *MANIFESTATION OF* SALVATION

The fathers of the church were unanimous in supporting the view that saving faith ought to and naturally does manifest itself in good works. As this has already been documented at length, a few citations will demonstrate the point.

### *John Chrysostom*

> God's mission was not to save people in order that they may remain barren or inert. For Scripture says that faith has saved us. Put better: since God willed it, faith has saved us. Now in what case, tell me, does faith save without itself doing anything at all? Faith's workings themselves are a gift of God, lest anyone should boast. What then is Paul saying? Not that God has forbidden works, but forbidden us to be justfied by works. No one, Paul says, is justified by works, precisely in order that the grace and benevolence of God may become apparent! (*HE,* 4.2.9 (*IOEP*) 2:140 as cited in Oden, *ACCSNT*, 8:134).

### *Anselm (1033–1109)*

> Hence, with however great confidence so important a truth is believed, the faith will be useless and, as it were, dead, unless it is strong and living through love. For that faith which is accompanied by sufficient love is by no means idle, if an opportunity of operation offers [itself], but rather exercises itself in an abundance of works. (*M*, LXXVII)
>
> It is not absurd to say that operative faith is alive, because it has the life of love without which it could not operate; and that idle faith is not living, because it lacks that life of love, with which it would not be idle, (ibid.)

"It may, therefore, be said with sufficient fitness that living faith believes *in* that *in* which we ought to believe; while dead faith merely believes that which ought to be believed" (ibid.).

### *John Calvin*

> The faith by which alone, through the mercy of God, we obtain free justification, is not destitute of good works; and also to show the true nature of these good works on which this question partly turns … the concept of justification. (*ICR*, 1.3.11.1)
>
> In the same manner, a man will be said to be justified by works, if in his life there can be found a purity and holiness which merits an attestation of righteousness at the throne of God, or if by the perfection of his works he can answer and satisfy the divine justice. On the contrary, a man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous,

(ibid., 1.3.11.2)

### *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

> On this subject there has never been any real difference of opinion among Protestants, although there was in the early Lutheran Church some misunderstanding.
>
> First, it was universally admitted that good works are not necessary to our justification; that they are consequences and indirectly the fruits of justification, and, therefore, cannot be its ground.
>
> Secondly, it was also agreed that faith, by which the sinner is justified, is not as a work, the reason why God pronounces the sinner just. It is the act by which the sinner receives and rests upon the righteousness of Christ, the imputation of which renders him righteous in the sight of God.
>
> Thirdly, faith does not justify because it includes or is the root or principle of good works; not as, *fides obsequiosa*.
>
> Fourthly, it was agreed that it is only a living faith, i.e., a faith which works by love and purifies the heart, that unites the soul to Christ and secures our reconciliation with God.
>
> Fifthly, it was universally admitted that an immoral life is inconsistent with a state of grace; that those who willfully continue in the practice of sin shall not inherit the kingdom of God.…
>
> The "Form of Concord," in which this and other controversies in the Lutheran Church were finally adjusted, took the true ground on this subject, midway between the two extreme views. It rejects the unqualified proposition that good works are necessary to salvation, as men may be saved who have no opportunity to testify to their faith by their works. On the other hand, it utterly condemns the unwarrantable declaration that good works are hurtful to salvation; which it pronounces to be pernicious and full of scandal. (*ST*, 3.18.5)

### *Earl Radmacher*

> Many Christians either overemphasize works by saying they are essential for a person to be saved from sin's penalty, or they de-emphasize works, failing to see that works give evidence of faith and of ongoing salvation from sin's power. (*S*, 172–73)

### *Millard Erickson*

"Good deeds done to others are represented as what follows from salvation, not as what we must do to receive it" (*CT*, 1013). "Genuine faith will necessarily issue in works. Faith and works are inseparable" (ibid., 1014).

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Roman Catholicism argues that, in addition to faith, one must work for salvation, but the Bible is clear that this is false: We cannot work *for* our salvation but only *from* it. We are not saved *by* works but *for* works. In other words, it is impossible to work for grace; we can work only from grace (Rom. 11:6).

As for orthodox Protestants, there is general agreement that salvation is by

faith alone, apart from any works. There is also wide consensus that while we are saved by faith alone, *the faith that saves us is not alone—it is accompanied by good works*.

Even though there is considerable intramural disagreement on whether works flow *automatically, inevitably,* or merely *naturally* from saving faith, an examination of the biblical evidence favors the view that works flow naturally from saving faith. Faith *can* sometimes be dormant, like life in a cut-down bush; but if the bush is still alive, it will naturally bud out somewhere—given the right soil and sustenance.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

In this chapter the assurance of salvation is both objectively and subjectively discussed. The first question is, can a truly regenerate person ever lose salvation? The second question is, if such a person *cannot*, then can he or she have assurance of salvation in this life?

## TERMS FOR ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

The primary terms that relate to the certainty of salvation are *assurance* and *security*. However, there are other words or phrases often used, such as *the perseverance of the saints; eternal security; once saved, always saved*; and *the assurance of the believers*.

### Perseverance

The traditional phrase *perseverance of the saints* represents the *P* in Calvinism's acrostic T-U-L-I-P.[1] *Perseverance of the saints* illustrates the strong Calvinist belief that those who are truly among the elect will persevere in faith unto the end.

### Eternal Security

Another term for the certainty of salvation is *eternal security*. This label is often used by moderate Calvinists to show that a true believer has more than present assurance of salvation. Christians can have current confidence that they will never lose their salvation—they are eternally secure.

### Once Saved, Always Saved

More popularly, many believers speak of *once saved, always saved*. This phrase has the advantage of clarity, even though it is somewhat cumbersome.

### The Assurance of the Believer

Another contemporary phrase in some circles is *the assurance of the believer*. However, this can be misleading—while Calvinists and Arminians agree that present assurance of salvation is possible, the latter insist that both assurance of eternal life and eternal life itself can be lost.

More precisely, the assurance of salvation is the *subjective* side of the issue, and eternal security is the *objective* side. *Assurance* deals with a feeling or sense or experience that one is saved, while *security* relates to the ultimate fact (truth, reality) about the matter.

Since most on both sides (Calvinist and Arminian) of the internal debate about eternal security hold that present assurance of salvation is possible for Christians, the focus here will be on the differences between the two, particularly whether one can actually lose salvation.

## DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION[2]

Among evangelicals, there are at least four views on the topic of eternal security. We will briefly describe each before examining the related biblical data. There are some substantial intramural discrepancies; the two basic views, of course, are Calvinist and Arminian—the former affirms eternal security and the latter denies it.

In the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith, perseverance* means:

> 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. (17.1)

In other words, all who are truly regenerate *will* enjoy eternity with God—"once saved, always saved."

### Strong Calvinism on the Assurance of Salvation

Strong Calvinists believe in the security of the elect. Nevertheless, they cannot, at present, be absolutely sure that they are among the elect. Each person, it is argued, can only prove his or her election by persevering to the end.

### Moderate Calvinism on the Assurance of Salvation

Moderate Calvinists hold that they are eternally secure *and* can be presently sure of it. Hence, they claim to have both eternal security and present assurance.

### Classical Arminianism on the Assurance of Salvation

Those who believe salvation can be lost are called Arminians. They are divided into two basic camps: Classical Arminians, who follow Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), and Wesleyan Arminians, who follow John Wesley (1703–1791). Classical Arminians maintain that a saved person can lose salvation but only by the sin of apostasy—a complete denial of Christ. Once someone has apostasized, he can never be saved again.

### Wesleyan Arminianism on the Assurance of Salvation

Wesleyan Arminians argue that salvation can be lost through any serious intentional sin. John Wesley addressed the issue in several places: "I cannot believe … that there is a state attainable in this life from which a man cannot finally fall" (*J* [Aug. 1743] in *WJW*, 1.427); "I find no general promise in holy writ 'that none who once believes shall finally fall' " ("PCC" in ibid., 9.242); "On this authority [Ezek. 18:24], I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly" ("STPS" in ibid., 9.28). However, unlike classical Arminians, Wesleyans hold that one can regain salvation by repentance

of that sin.

## A Final Contrast

Ironically, Arminians and strong Calvinists have much in common on this issue. Both assert that professing believers living in gross, unrepentant sin are not truly saved. Both insist that a person cannot be living in serious sin at the end of his life if he is truly saved. And both maintain that no one living in grave sin can be sure of his salvation.

In regard to security and assurance, three primary views may be contrasted as follows:

| **Strong Calvinism** | **Arminianism** | **Moderate Calvinism** |
|---|---|---|
| Security, but no Assurance | Assurance, but no Security | Security and assurance |

Some strong Calvinists insist that they believe assurance is possible before death. However, this claim is seriously undermined by several factors within their own view.

*First*, they acknowledge that there can be "false grace" and "false assurance," whereby one believes he is one of the elect when in fact he is not (Brooks, *HE*, 49).

*Second*, the very name of the doctrine of *perseverance* suggests that some who claim to be believers will not persevere to the end and, consequently, will not be saved.

*Third*, some of them admit to the possibility of apparent believers falling away before they die and thus being lost forever. They hold that all true believers *will* endure in their faithfulness to the end; those who do not endure in holiness were not true believers. This being the case, there *is* eternal security for the elect, but the catch is this: *No one can really be sure he is one of the elect unless he remains faithful to the end*.

This is different from what we present as the moderate Calvinist view (that all believers can be sure they are saved and *will* continue in their faith to the end). Scripture says that the presence of "faith" is "evidence" that one is truly saved (Heb. 11:1); faith is implanted in the heart by the Holy Spirit upon believing the Word of God (Rom. 10:9, 17). Strong Calvinists, though, argue that in addition to continuing to have *faith*, believers must continue to the end in *faithfulness* to God as evidence (proof) of salvation. Again, even though strong Calvinists say

they believe assurance of salvation is possible, Puritan Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), for instance, maintained that *true* perseverance involves perseverance

(1) in a holy profession of our faith;
(2) in holy and spiritual principles; by abiding and continuing in the doctrine of Christ; and
(3) by continuance in gracious actions. (*HE*, 272–74)

*Fourth*, and finally, these very elements offered by strong Calvinists as *signs* of true and enduring assurance make it impossible for one to know with certainty, before he dies, that he is saved.[3] The truth of the matter is that it is practically impossible for anyone to be certain he has persevered faithfully in all of these to the point of death. To put it another way, anyone who is not doing all of this up to the time he dies cannot be sure he is one of the elect.

**Assurance vs. Security**

Another contrast is that while moderate Calvinists believe in both temporal assurance on earth and eternal security in heaven for the elect, some strong Calvinists hold only to the latter, since one cannot be really sure that he is one of the elect until he perseveres to the end. As Brooks noted,

> Being in a state of grace will yield a man a heaven hereafter, but seeing himself in this state will yield him both a heaven here and a heaven hereafter.… [For] it is one thing for me to have faith, and another thing for me to know that I have faith. Now assurance flows from a clear, certain, evident knowledge that
>
> I have grace, and that I do believe, (ibid., 14)

Again, there is such a thing as "false assurance," and "we may think that we have faith when in fact we have no faith" (Sproul, *CG*, 165–66).

A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) said,

> *Perseverance in holiness*, therefore, in opposition to all weakness and temptations, *is the only sure evidence of* the genuineness of past experience, of the validity of *our confidence as to our future salvation*.… [There can be a] temporary withdrawal of restraining grace [while an elect person is] allowed to backslide for a time, [nonetheless,] *in every such case they are graciously restored*. (*OT*, 544–45, emphasis added)

This seems to imply that if someone backslides and does not return to

faithfulness before he meets his Maker, it is proof that he was not truly saved. If so, then regardless of the evidence one may have manifested in his life for any number of years before this, he cannot have had true assurance that he was saved.[4] In brief, for strong Calvinists on the knowledge of salvation, the proof of the pudding is in the persevering.

# THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

Not only are there significant differences on the subject of eternal security between strong and moderate Calvinists, there are even more prominent disagreements between moderate Calvinists and Arminians. For instance, as we have seen, Arminianism affirms that a person can lose salvation. Arminian theologian H. Orton Wiley (1877–1961) taught that a believer could become "*reprobate*" and, "*dying in such a state, may finally perish*" (*CT*, 344, 351).

Arminian theologian Richard Watson (1781–1833) believed he had "established" and "proved from Scripture":

> *True believers may turn back unto perdition,* [and be] cast away, [and fall into a state in which it were better for them] never to have known the way of righteousness, [and thus] the number of the elect may be diminished. (*CI*, 340, emphasis added)

On the contrary, there are many arguments in favor of eternal security, along with present assurance, for all believers.

### Biblical Arguments in Favor of Eternal Security

Moderate Calvinists insist that Christians can have true assurance of eternal salvation. Indeed, the Bible exhorts us to obtain it. Paul urged the Corinthians: "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith*; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter teaches, "*Be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure*. For if you do these things, you will never fall" (2 Peter 1:10). Jude adds, "*Keep yourselves in God's love* as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life" (Jude 21).[5]

Just what is it that provides the basis of our assurance that we have saving faith? "Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that *through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have*

*hope*" (Rom. 15:4). John declared, "*I write these things* to you who believe in the name of the Son of God *so that you may know that you have eternal life*" (1 John 5:13).

The Bible is replete with affirmations that salvation can never be lost and that we can be sure of this while we are still living. Among them the following stand out.

*Job 19:25–26*

"*I know that my Redeemer lives*, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh *I will see God*."

Job was certain of two things: (1) that his Redeemer lived, and (2) that he would one day see God in his flesh (affirming resurrection). In other words, Job had present knowledge that he had been redeemed ("*my* Redeemer") and that he would see Him in his heavenly resurrected body: I "*know" (now*) that I "*will* see God" (*later*, in heaven). Such knowledge implies his assurance of eternal security.

*Ecclesiastes 3:14*

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the wisest man who ever lived said, "I know that *everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it*." Scripture's application of this principle to salvation (cf. Eph. 1:4) results in the doctrine of eternal security. If what God does is forever, and if salvation is a work of God (Jonah 2:10), then salvation is forever. If salvation can be lost, then it is not forever. Therefore, *salvation cannot be lost*.[6]

*John 3:18*

"*Whoever believes in him is not condemned*, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already* because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

The plain sense of this text is that if one believes *now*, he is not condemned (lost) now and will not be condemned later (cf. Rom. 8:1). John adds that *such a man "will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life*" (John 5:24, see below); likewise, if a man does not believe now, then he is "already" condemned (lost). In short, a present act of faith assures one of never being condemned. Just as one is condemned "already" for *not* believing in Christ, even so one is saved "already" *for* believing in Him.

*John 5:24*

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and *believes* him who sent me *has* eternal life and *will not* be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." That is, those who truly believe *now* can be certain *now* that they will be in heaven *later*. Everlasting life is a present possession the moment one believes, and this assures he will never be condemned.

*John 6:37*

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and *whoever comes to me I will never drive away*." Not only is everyone who comes saved, but everyone who is saved is saved permanently! God's gift is a forever salvation.

*John 6:39–40*

This is the will of him who sent me, that *I shall lose none of all that he has given me*, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that *everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life*, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Jesus says everyone who *now* "believes" in Him will be resurrected to life—saved. Further, He emphatically declares that He will never lose anyone given to Him by the Father. Thus, those who believe are as eternally secure as the promise of Christ. *Believe now; be saved forever*.

*John 10:27–28*

> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish*; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

What makes our salvation sure is not only God's infinite love but also His everlasting omnipotence. We are not only saved by His unlimited love, but we are also kept by His unlimited power (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Jude 24). *No one*, not even ourselves, can pry us away from His promise.

Further, Jesus said His sheep (the saved) would *never perish*. Plainly, then, if any believer *does* lose his salvation, Jesus was wrong. If Jesus is the Son of God,[7] this is impossible. Accordingly, our salvation is as eternally secure as the Word (Gk: *logos*)—Jesus Himself (John 1:1), who said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Matt. 24:35).

*John 17:9–24*

> *I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours*. … Holy Father, *protect them by the power of your name*—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one.… *I pray also for those who will believe in me*.… Father, *I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory*, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world, (vv. 9, 11, 20, 24)

It is noteworthy that Jesus' prayer included believers not yet born as well (see v. 20). We are assured here that all true believers will be saved, for He said "none has been lost" (v. 12). Only those, like Judas (v. 12), doomed to destruction by their own unwillingness to repent, will be condemned (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). Since Jesus' high-priestly prayer for us is efficacious (Heb. 7:25), as is His advocacy for us in heaven (1 John 2:1), it is impossible that any of His children will be taken from His hand. If they were, God would have failed to answer His Son's petition, in direct contradiction to His Word's assurance that He is pleased with what Jesus did for us (cf. Heb. 7:25–27; 1 John 2:1).

*Romans 4:5–6*

> To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is *credited [imputed] as righteousness*. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits [imputes] righteousness* apart from works.

The doctrine of divine imputation, asserted here and elsewhere in Scripture,[8] powerfully argues for eternal security. If we are already accounted as completely justified (because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us), then there is no sin that can keep us out of heaven. We have been dressed in Christ's perfection (2 Cor. 5:21), which is all sufficient.

*Romans 8:29–30*

> For *those* God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.… And *those* he predestined, he also called; *those* he called, he also justified; *those* he justified, he also *glorified*.

This "Golden Chain" is unbroken. The same persons who were foreknown and predestined were also called and justified and will be glorified (received into everlasting life). In order to discredit the doctrine of eternal security, one would have to insert the word *some* into the text—it isn't there. All who are justified

*will* eventually be glorified.[9]

*Romans 8:33*

"*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies*." Charles Ryrie's comment is to the point:

> It makes no difference who in all the universe may try to charge us with whatever. It makes no difference as long as it is not God who charges us. And God does not. *[God] has already announced the verdict in all instances when we are and will be charged. And that verdict is "not guilty*" (*SGS*, 127).

*Romans 8:35, 37–39*

> *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ*? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? … No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons*, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, *nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.

This passage needs little comment, merely contemplation. There is literally nothing "in all creation" that can separate a believer from Christ! Because of His unconditional love, the Creator *won't* do it, and no creature *can* do it.[10]

*1 Corinthians 12:13*

"*We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body*—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (cf. Eph. 1:22–23; 4:4). As Charles Ryrie keenly notes,

> At conversion the believer is joined to the body of Christ by the baptism of the Holy Spirit. If salvation can be lost, then one would have to be severed from the body, and the body of Christ would then be dismembered. (*SGS*, 129)

*Romans 11:29*

"*God's gifts and his call are irrevocable*." Salvation involves both the gift (Rom. 6:23) and the calling (Rom. 8:30) of God. Paul here declares that both are "irrevocable"—salvation can never be undone.

*2 Corinthians 5:1–2*

"Now *we know* that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, *we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven*, not built by human hands." Paul says he not only knew he was destined for eternity with the Lord, but he knows

it *now*. This present assurance of his future place "in heaven" is the confidence of eternal security.

*2 Corinthians 5:5–6, 8*

> Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, *guaranteeing what is to come*. Therefore *we are always confident and know* that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.… *We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord*.

Here Paul expresses his certain knowledge that were he to die, he would be with Christ. This is an emphatic expression of his present assurance of eternal security, for God's present "guarantee" is the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4:30). To deny either the present assurance or the eternal security of the believer is to say that God's promise—God's very Spirit—is without value.

*2 Corinthians 5:17, 21*

> Therefore, *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation*; the old has gone, the new has come! … God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him *we might become the righteousness of God*.

According to this text, we are already a new creation, which guarantees us a place in heaven. Indeed, we have been robed in "the righteousness of God"; thus, in His eyes, we are as perfect as we can be—not because of our merit but because of Christ's work. In turn, since our sins have been imputed to Him and His righteousness to us, if *anyone* is to be kept out of heaven, it must be *Christ*. In the same way, if anyone is received into heaven because of *Christ's* righteousness, it must be *us*.

*Ephesians 1:4–5*

> *He chose us in him before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in his sight. *In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons* through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.

Believers are adopted into God's family before the creation of time. God knew in advance everything that we would do, even after we had been saved, including all of our sins. Nevertheless, *there is nothing that can undo an eternal decree of God* (cf. Rom. 11:29). Hence, those who are adopted as His children are eternally secure—there is no such scriptural reality as *unadoption*. He chose us because He wanted us, even though He knew all things from eternity.

*Ephesians 1:13–14*

> *Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal*, the promised Holy Spirit, who is *a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance* until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory, (cf. 4:30)

Elsewhere Paul says that all who have the Holy Spirit belong to Christ (Rom. 8:9). According to this text, having the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of ultimate redemption. Therefore, to argue that we can lose our salvation is tantamount to saying that God's guarantee is no good (or can expire). Stated in the vernacular, God has placed His credibility on the fact that every believer is going to make it; He has guaranteed it with the presence of His own Spirit in our lives, who "himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Rom. 8:16).

*Ephesians 2:5–6*

> *[God has] made us alive with Christ* even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And *God raised us up with Christ* and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

According to this passage, the saved, *positionally*, are already in heaven. In addition, we are there not because we seated ourselves but because God confirmed our reservation. Again, our eternity is as secure as Christ's: We can no more be kicked out of our everlasting inheritance than can Jesus be kicked out of heaven. As we have made clear, *what we do practically should and will (at least to some degree) reflect this status, but it is in no way able to negate it*.

*Philippians 1:6*

"[I am] *confident* of this, *that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul expressed conviction that the God who initiated the salvific process would finish it. *All the regenerate will be in heaven*. God ends what He begins.

*Philippians 4:3*

Paul wrote:

> Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, *whose names are in the book of life*.

From this it is clear Paul taught that it is possible for us to know, *here and now*, whether we are on our way to heaven. Furthermore, since names in the Book of Life are there from eternity (Rev. 13:8), it is evident that God knows that the bearers are eternally secure. Indeed, John recorded that once one's name is in this book, it will *never* be taken out (Rev. 3:5). Again, both present assurance of salvation and eternal security are found in these passages.

*1 Thessalonians 1:4–5*

"*We know*, brothers loved by God, *that he has chosen you*, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with *deep conviction*."

Here, as in Romans 8:16, one's "deep conviction" that he or she is among the elect (i.e., is a *chosen* one) results from the omnipotent work of the Spirit. The Thessalonian believers had this assurance immediately upon conversion.

*2 Timothy 1:12*

Paul proclaimed: "*I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day*." Since our salvation does not depend on our faithfulness but on God's (2 Tim. 2:13), our perseverance is assured. Hence, we can know now that we will be glorified later, when He returns.

*2 Timothy 4:18*

Paul was certain: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and *will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom*." This assurance would not be possible if a believer could lose his salvation. How else could Paul possess the Spirit-inspired conviction that he would one day be with the Lord? Scripture promises that God will preserve all believers (Phil. 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5).

*Hebrews 10:14*

"By one sacrifice *he has made perfect forever* those who are being made holy." According to this passage, the one-time self-offering of Christ *eternally* secured the salvation of the elect. Since this certainty was obtained by the Cross, almost two thousand years before we were even born, it follows that any true believer can be assured *now* that he will be in heaven later. He is as perfect now, dressed in Christ's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21), as he will ever be or needs to be

for glorification in God's kingdom.

*Hebrews 12:2*

> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, *the author and perfecter of our faith*, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

God is both the Creator and the "finisher" (KJV) of our saving belief. He begins it, and He completes it (Phil. 1:6). Indeed, what the author of Hebrews calls "eternal redemption" (9:12) could not be everlasting if it were potentially temporal and if a person could lose it.

*1 Peter 1:5*

Peter speaks of those "who through faith are *shielded by God's power* until the coming of the salvation that is *ready to be revealed in the last time*." Once a man places his faith in Christ, he is protected by God's strength until he reaches heaven. Since God is omnipotent, it follows that nothing can penetrate this divine safeguard. Of course, this salvation is accomplished "through faith,"[11] which is strengthened by God's grace and assured in advance by His foreknowledge that it will come to pass (1 Peter 1:2).

*1 John 3:9*

John affirmed that "no one who is born of God will continue to sin, because *God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God*."

This confirms moderate Calvinism's view of eternal security for two reasons.

*First*, anyone truly born of God cannot persist in evil. If someone does, then he is not born of God. That is, a Christian's perseverance in avoiding continual, habitual sin is a proof of his salvation.

*Second*, the word *cannot* indicates that a true believer has a divine nature that guarantees his ultimate salvation. God has planted a *seed* in each believer at conversion that will grow to fruition (cf. Phil. 1:6).

*1 John 5:13*

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that *you may know that you have eternal life*." Present knowledge of unending life in Christ is assurance of one's eternal security.

*Jude 1–2*

"Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that *are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ*, and called" (KJV).

Not only are the "beloved" (v. 3) believers "preserved" in Christ, but they are also already "sanctified" ("set apart") by the Lord.[12]

*Jude 24–25*

> To him who is able *to keep you from falling* and *to present you before his glorious presence without fault* and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!

Whatever warnings the Bible may give about the potential for our falling,[13] we are assured that a true believer will experience no failure that will involve the loss of heaven. An all-powerful God is able to prevent it!

*Revelation 3:5*

Jesus said of the believer, "*I will never blot out his name from the book of life*." This being the case, there is no fear of losing salvation once we receive it. Indeed, as we have seen, the names of the saved were written there from eternity (Rev. 13:8). Further, it is God who before the dawning of time wrote (and will never erase) the names of the elect in the Book of Life. No one whose name is contained had done anything to either gain or lose salvation, and the Lord knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). In His omniscient foreknowledge, God knew about *every* sin that the elect would commit after salvation, yet He eternally secured them anyway. *He knew they would persevere in their faith.*[14]

**Eternal Security and Present Assurance: Other Evidence of Salvation**

Throughout his first epistle John lists ways we can know that we are one of God's elect:

(1) if we keep His commandments (2:3);
(2) if we keep His Word (2:4);
(3) if we walk in love (2:5);
(4) if we love the brethren (3:14);
(5) if we love in deed, not only in word (3:19);
(6) if we have the Holy Spirit within us (3:24);

(7) if we love one another (4:13); and
(8) if we don't continue in sin (5:18; cf. 3:9).

In short, if we manifest the fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:22–23), we have the presence of the Spirit in our hearts and can be assured we are among the elect. *We do not have to wait until we meet Christ to know that we belong to Him*. The first fruit of the Spirit is agape love, and Paul details its unmistakable characteristics in 1 Corinthians 13.[15]

# THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

In addition to all of these passages that specifically support eternal security, there are many other Bible-based theological truths that ground this teaching. Some of the most prominent ones include the following.

### Salvation Is of the Lord

Jonah (2:9 KJV) summarized the soteriology of Scripture: "Salvation is of the Lord." Salvation does not derive from our strength but from the Lord's will. The saved are "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, *but born of God*" (John 1:13). As Paul said, "It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy" (Rom. 9:16). Once again, if salvation does not depend on our efforts but only on God, our security is as eternal as He is.

### God Cannot Deny Himself

The apostle declares: "*If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny himself*" (2 Tim. 2:13 NKJV). This is a particularly poignant text in support of eternal security, for it directly addresses the Arminian challenge by declaring that even if our belief falters, the Lord's faithfulness will not. We can no more lose our salvation than God can cease being God.

### Election Was From Eternity

Salvation was not decided or gained in time, and it cannot be dissolved or lost in time. "*[God] chose us in him before the creation of the world* to be holy and blameless in his sight" (Eph. 1:4). Christ was the "Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). "This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time" (2 Tim. 1:9). Salvation was effected *in* eternity and *for* eternity.

**God Has Infallible Foreknowledge**

Both Calvinists and traditional (classical) Arminians agree that God has infallible foreknowledge (cf. Isa. 46:10). If this is correct, it seems unreasonable to assume (as Wesleyans do) that God regenerated people He knows will not persevere.[16] The idea that God starts what He does not finish is contrary to His knowable character and recorded works.

**Salvation Was Completed by Christ**

What hymnist Elvira Hill wrote is strongly supported by Scripture: "Jesus paid it all"! Jesus, on the cross, said so Himself: "*It is finished*" (John 19:30). Anticipating His sacrifice, He declared to the Father: "*I have finished the work which You have given Me to do*" (John 17:4 NKJV). Again, the writer of Hebrews promised, "By one sacrifice *he has made perfect forever* those who are being made holy" (10:14).

From God's perspective, the work of the Cross was an accomplished fact from all eternity (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4). This means that in God's eyes—in the eyes of Him who sees with infallible foreknowledge—all our sins (past, present, and future) were already covered before we were born. This being true, even the sins Arminians deem to be worthy of "the loss of salvation" were paid for by Jesus prior to our arrival in this world. If the Arminian view of perseverance were accurate, the loss of a person's eternal life would by necessity also effect a loss in God's omniscient foreknowledge (that this person would receive the gift of salvation). Contrary to Arminian claims, never does the Bible qualify the "all sins" for which Christ died by asserting that it is only "all sins *up to the time believers were justified*." It is unwise to add to the Scriptures.

**Salvation Is an Irrevocable Gift**

As mentioned earlier, Paul emphatically states that “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:29), and he also says that salvation is “the gift of God” (Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:9). Hence, God can never overturn salvation: He is bound by His own unconditional covenant to be faithful even if we are faithless (2 Tim. 2:13).

## Salvation Is an Unconditional Promise

God’s unconditional promises are unbreakable, and salvation is an unconditional promise (Rom. 6:23; 11:29; Eph. 2:9). Hebrews declares:

> Because God wanted to make *the unchanging nature of his purpose* very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which *it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. (6:17–18)

## Salvation Cannot Be Gained or Lost by Our Good Works

We have seen, irrefutably, that salvation is not gained by good works (Eph. 2:8–9): “He saved us, *not because of righteous things we had done*, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). *If salvation is not gained by our works, then how can it be lost by our works*? Bad behavior, even the kind Arminians argue is sufficient for salvific loss, can no more cause us to lose eternal life than good behavior can help us to obtain it.

To the objection that salvation is received by our free choice and thus can be relinquished by our free choice, we note once more that salvation is an unconditional gift (Rom. 11:29) and, as such, cannot be taken back by God. Like the gift of physical life, after eternal life is received it cannot be given away. Only God has the power to reclaim it, and His character guarantees that He will never renege on His promise. Further, some tangible acts of freedom are one-way actions—obviously we *can* choose to get into situations that we cannot subsequently choose (i.e., have the power) to get out of (e.g., suicide).

Likewise, the fact that salvation is *received* by faith does not mean it can be *lost* by lack of faith. As we have already shown, receiving the gift of salvation is not dependent on a believer’s *continual* faith; the *initial* act of faith is the means through which justification is applied (cf. Rom. 13:11). Thus, the gift of salvation (Rom. 6:23) is a present possession (John. 5:24), and God’s gifts

cannot be *retracted* (Rom. 11:29).[17]

### Arminianism Presents an Implicit Denial of Salvation by Grace Alone

Closely associated with the previous point is the fact that if believers are *not* eternally secure and, thus, *can* lose everlasting life because of bad actions, then Arminianism is a tacit form of salvation by works. H. Orton Wiley admitted this when he said, "Arminians deny the merit of good works but insist upon them as a condition of salvation." He even notes, "Mr. Wesley's formula was, 'works, not as a merit, but as a condition' " (*CT*, 373). Why are works a condition? Because, according to the Arminian view, a believer must maintain good works in order to keep his salvation; to guarantee his glorification, he must not, after he is saved, perform the kind of actions that precipitate salvific loss.

In fact, the Arminian position on this issue is similar to the Roman Catholic view,[18] which demands that once one receives "initial justification" by grace alone, he must not commit a "mortal sin" or else he will lose his salvation. As already observed, if the performance of works is necessary for the maintenance of my salvation, how can I avoid the conclusion that I am saved by my good works?

## ANSWERING ARGUMENTS AGAINST ETERNAL SECURITY

Arminians use certain texts and arguments to show that a Christian can lose his salvation; it is to these that a moderate Calvinist must respond. At the heart of the Arminian position is the contention that all of the biblical "salvation passages" are either implicitly or explicitly conditional.

### The Argument That the Promise of Salvation Is Conditional

Noted Arminian Robert Shank (b. 1918) argues that there are at least eighty-five New Testament passages that establish the "Doctrine of Conditional Security."[19] He stresses texts that speak, for example, of "continuing," "abiding," and "holding fast." Colossians 1:22–23 teaches: "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight … *if you continue in your faith*, established and firm, not moved from

the hope held out in the gospel." First Corinthians 15:2 says, "By this gospel you are saved, *if you hold firmly* to the word I preached to you." And Hebrews 3:12–14 affirms:

> See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. *We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*

Moderate Calvinism counters that neither these nor any other passages assert that a true believer will ever lose his or her salvation. The context here indicates he is speaking about *practical, progressive* holiness rather than our *positional, perfect* holiness in Christ, though the former is to flow from the latter (cf. Eph. 1:4; Heb. 10:14). Paul speaks of being "presented blameless" and "irreproachable," terms reminiscent of those he used in Ephesians when he said:

> Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her *to make her holy*, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and *to present her to himself* as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (5:25–27)

Further, Paul's reference to "continue in [the] faith" does not mean simply "to continue believing" but also "to continue to live out the Christian faith." For example, he mentions being "grounded and steadfast" (Col. 1:23 NKJV), images that he uses elsewhere for a *fruitful Christian life*: "Stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to *the work of the Lord*, because you know that *your labor in the Lord* is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Since these figures of speech refer to working for God, and since we are not saved by works, the Colossians exhortation to continue steadfastly in the faith seems to be best taken as implying that *if we so continue in the Christian faith, we will be rewarded by Christ when we are presented before His judgment seat* (2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor. 3:11ff.).[20]

Likewise, Paul's admonition to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:2), implying that they would only be "saved" if they "hold firmly" to the word, doesn't refer to positional justification (being saved from the penalty of sin) but to practical justification (being saved from the power of sin). This is clear from the context.

*First*, he is speaking to "brothers" (1 Cor. 15:1) who are already saved, not the unsaved, who need justification.

*Second*, they are "holy," those who have been positionally set apart in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2).

*Third*, their salvation (justification) is referred to as past—"which you received" (1 Cor. 15:1).

*Fourth*, Paul concludes the fifteenth chapter by exhorting them to "stand firm" in the Christian life giving "yourselves fully to the work of the Lord," the performance of which does not bring justification (Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9). John Walvoord (1910–2002) correctly noted that "the pres[ent] tense of the verb *saved* focuses on sanctification" (*BKC*, 2.542).

Also, other passages dealing with continued faithfulness in the Christian life also refer to faithfulness that yields rewards for service, not the gift of salvation (e.g., Rev. 2:10).

Finally, there is a difference between *having faith to the end* and *being faithful to the end:* Perseverance in faith entails the former but not necessarily the latter.[21] If one is a true believer, he *will* continue to believe in Christ to the end.[22] Jesus placed those who "believe for a while" among those who were not saved, in contrast to those who persevere in belief (cf. Luke 8:13, 15). Hence, while continuance in the faith is a *demonstration* of salvation, it is not a *condition* for being saved.

**The Argument That Belief Is a Continual Process**

Arminians observe that the Word of God employs the infinitive *to believe* (Gk: *pisteuo*) in the present tense rather than as a once-for-all, completed act when we were first justified.[23] For example, the texts in John's gospel that promise eternal life for "believing" speak of "belief" in the present tense, namely, as a continual process. As such, they can be translated, for example: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever [continues to believe] in him* shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In response to this, moderate Calvinists make several significant points.

*First*, the present tense does not necessarily mean *perpetual* action, only *current* action.[24]

*Second*, Jesus' use of the present tense in regard to drinking physical water (John 4:13) is an obvious example of an initial act that does not go on forever. No one who is continuously drinking gets thirsty again, but John 4:13 says they will thirst. If they will thirst again, they are not constantly drinking water.

*Third*, the present tense is sometimes used of a onetime event, like the Incarnation (cf. John 6:33, 38, 41–42). A present participle[25] is often used of

actions that have stopped (cf. Matt. 2:20; 5:16; 6:14; John 9:8; Gal. 1:23).[26] So then, there is no contradiction in maintaining that the act of saving faith, a necessary condition for receiving salvation, is a moment of decision: *It simply means that "one begins to believe in the present."*

*Fourth*, if an initial act of belief were not sufficient for salvation—that is, if salvation required belief as a continual process—then there is no way Scripture could pronounce that one has already received the gift of eternal life as a present possession, which it does (e.g., John 5:24). Perpetual faith after the initial obtaining of salvation is not a condition for *retaining* eternal life but a *manifestation* of its veracity. As Wiley noted, "The initial act becomes the permanent attitude of the regenerate man" (*CT*, 375), for God is able to keep us in a state of belief by His power (1 Peter 1:5; cf. Phil. 1:6).

*Fifth*, not all references to belief that brings salvation (salvific faith) are in the present tense. Some are aorist and do indicate a completed action (e.g., John 4:39–41). Romans 13:11 declares: "The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation [glorification] is nearer now than *when we first believed*." Indeed, the famous Acts 16:31 passage is an example: "*Believe* [aorist] in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."[27]

*Sixth*, since salvation is in three stages, it should come as no surprise that the Bible stresses belief in the present. We *were saved* in the past from the penalty of sin (justification), we *are being saved* in the present from the power of sin (sanctification), and we *will be saved* in the future from the presence of sin (glorification). Again, even though we must work out our own salvation in the present (Phil. 2:12), it is God "who works in [us]" both "to will and to act according to his good purpose" (2:13). As Paul explained, "I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but *the grace of God that was with me*" (1 Cor. 15:10).

*Seventh*, and finally, nowhere does the Word say that anyone who once truly believed will ever lose his salvation; it says that those who believe should continue to refine the salvation they already possess (Phil. 2:13).

### The Argument for the Symmetrical Nature of Belief and Unbelief

Arminians also insist that if we can exercise faith to become "in Christ," then we can use the same faith to become "out of Christ." Just as we can get on and off a city bus at will, we can exercise our freedom to get off the salvation transit anywhere along the way. Allegedly, if we *couldn't* do this, it would mean that once we are saved, we are no longer free. Freedom is symmetrical; if you have it

to get saved, then you also have it to get lost.

However, as was shown above, this perspective is not biblically based; it is *speculative*, and therefore should be treated as such. In addition, it is not necessary to accept this reasoning even on a purely rational basis. As already established, some of our life decisions are one-way, with no possibility of reversal.

Furthermore, by this same logic, the Arminian would have to hold that we can be taken out of God's hand even after we enter heaven; if he did not, he would have to deny that we are free in heaven.[28] If we *are* free in heaven and yet cannot be lost, then why is it logically impossible (as the Arminian insists) for us to be free on earth and yet be unable to lose our salvation? In both cases, the answer is that if we freely submit to God through saving faith, His omnipotent power will keep us from falling in accordance with our freedom (cf. Jude 24).

# RESPONDING TO PASSAGES THAT ALLEGEDLY SHOW WE CAN LOSE ETERNAL LIFE

Many verses are used by Arminians to show that a believer can lose his salvation. Space does not permit a detailed explanation of each,[29] but all of them fall into two broad categories.

### Verses That Refer to "Professing but Not Possessing Believers"

First, there are the verses that deal with professing believers who never actually possessed saving faith.

*Matthew 7:22–23*

> Jesus said, "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, '*I never knew you*. Away from me, you evildoers!' "

In spite of their testimony and even wonders done in His name, it is clear from the emphasized words "*I* never knew *you*" that these people had not received salvation.

*Matthew 10:1, 5–8*

> [Jesus] called his *twelve disciples* to him and *gave them* authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.… These *twelve* Jesus sent out with the following instructions.… "Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, *preach this message:* 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' *Heal the sick, raise the dead,* cleanse those who have leprosy, *drive out demons*."

It seems evident that these gifts were given to all the disciples, *including* Judas (v. 4), who also preached the message of Christ. We know from other references that he was Jesus' treasurer (John 13:29) and that, after he betrayed Christ, he was lost, being called "the son of perdition" (KJV).[30] Jesus said it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Matt. 26:24), and Luke clarifies that, after hanging himself, he "left to go where he belongs" (Acts 1:25). Judas was obviously a professed follower of Christ, yet he finished in perdition (hell). Is this not an example of someone who received eternal life but then lost his salvation by betraying the Lord?

The answer is no. Judas was only a believer by profession (not by possession), a wolf in sheep's clothing. Jesus called him a "devil" (John 6:70) who was eventually indwelled by Satan himself (John 13:27). The Greek word used of his so-called *sorry* after his treachery against Christ (*metamelomai*) reveals that he was not a true believer—it means "regret," not "repentance."[31] Jesus, in His high priestly prayer, excluded Judas from those who were truly His own (John 17:12).

*Matthew 24:13*

"*He who stands firm to the end will be saved*." Matthew 10:22 says the same thing: "All men will hate you because of me, *but he who stands firm to the end will be saved*."

Some scholars take this as speaking of the perseverance of the saints. If this *were* accurate, it still wouldn't disprove eternal security but would merely affirm that the elect *will* persevere, since they are God's chosen ones. Again, their perseverance is a *sign* of salvation, not a *condition* of it.

However, in context it appears that these verses do not refer to losing either salvation *or* rewards—they likely point to the believers who live through the Tribulation that will come at the "end of the age" (cf. Matt. 24:3, 29). If this is correct, then Scripture is saying that only those who live through the Great Distress will live into the thousand-year reign of Christ (Rev. 20:4–5).

*Luke 8:4–15*

"Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. *They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away*" (v. 13). On the face of it, this passage would seem to favor the Arminian view, since the persons were believers "for awhile" but then backslid.

However, there are two kinds of faith: *nominal* (nonsaving) belief and *effectual* (saving) belief. The former is mere belief *that* something is so, and the latter is belief *in* it.[32] Again, James (in chapter 2) stresses that nominal faith does not lead to good works and is not saving faith. Zane Hodges, though, argues that James is not speaking of salvation from *hell* but from *death*; not justification but sanctification. Hodges believes the "dead" faith is the believer's faith that lacks vitality, and that the performance of works is necessary for God's blessing on our life. Therefore, he sees "justification" in James 2 as meaning justification *before men*, not *in the eyes of God*, as Paul meant in Roman 3–4 (*AF*, 74–75).

Nevertheless, even if this were so, James clearly says, "[Abraham's] faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (2:22), and James connects this with the same faith that alone justified Abraham. Where Hodges goes wrong is in assuming that we are justified by faith alone without works (true) but sanctified by faith plus works (false).[33] This is neither the biblical nor the Reformed position; contrary to Hodges, faith—the same faith that alone justifies us by God's grace—naturally and normally produces good works. *We are not saved by works but by a faith that works*.[34]

Peter said, true believers "*through faith* are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Only the faith that takes "root" produces "fruit" (cf. Luke 8:13, 15 KJV). Seed that does not become grounded in a heart of true belief is no better than seed that falls by the wayside, in which case "the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, *so that they may not believe and be saved*" (v. 12).

*2 Thessalonians 2:3*

Paul warned of a great apostasy from the faith, saying,

> Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for *that day will not come until the rebellion [apostasy] occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction*. (cf. v. 8)

It would appear from the context that apostasy leading to ultimate doom and destruction (i.e., hell) not only can but *will* occur. However, Paul indicates that those who comprise the "doomed group" were not true believers from the

beginning, for this deception will take place *among "those who are perishing… because they refused to love the truth and so be saved"* (v. 10).

*1 Timothy 4:1–2*

> The Spirit clearly says that in later times *some will abandon the faith* and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

Arminians point out that these people must have once had saving faith; otherwise they could not have later departed from it.

In response, "the faith" is used in the Pastoral Epistles (cf. 1 Tim. 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:18; Titus 1:13), in the Prison Letters (cf. 1 Cor. 16:13; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 2:7), and in Acts (cf. 6:7; 13:8; 14:22) as the equivalent of "the Christian faith," with all its essential doctrines (1 Tim. 3:9; 4:6) and ethics (1 Tim. 6:10). A person may give intellectual assent to *the* faith without making it *his* faith.

Further, in regard to "the faith," the New Testament speaks of those who have "wandered from" it (1 Tim. 6:10), "denied" it (1 Tim. 5:8), "destroyed" it in others (2 Tim. 2:18), "turned from" it (Acts 13:8), "rejected" it (2 Tim. 3:8), "departed" from it (1 Tim. 4:1 NKJV), and "overthrown" it (2 Tim. 2:18 NKJV). Why is it difficult to believe that these terms and phrases describe people who are truly lost? If there is identity between *the faith* and *the Christian faith*, what we are taught is that a person can depart from *the* faith without it being *his* faith.

Consequently, we need only ask if there is indisputable evidence that God's Word teaches that any of these individuals were ever true believers. An examination of these texts yields a negative answer. These were people who professed the Christian faith, but none of them were described as having once been actual Christ-followers. Like Simon the sorcerer, they may have "believed" and been "baptized" (Acts 8:13), but subsequent action demonstrated nominal (and not salvific) faith. Peter said:

> May your money *perish with you*, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because *your heart is not right before God*. (vv. 20–21)

Thus, like all unsaved people (cf. 17:30), Simon needed to "*repent of this wickedness* and pray to the Lord," because he was *full "of bitterness* and *captive to sin*" (22–23).

*Hebrews 12:14*

"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; *without holiness no one will see the Lord*." As a result, how can we avoid the Arminian

conclusion that sanctification is necessary for eternal life?

In response, there are several problems with taking this as a passage that teaches the possible loss of salvation. For instance, *how* holy does one have to be? Of whose holiness is Hebrews speaking? The answer is that *all true believers are positionally dressed in* Christ's *righteousness—they are as holy as anyone can become* (2 Cor. 5:21). Indeed, Paul assured a presently unholy Corinthian church that they were already "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1:2), and Hebrews mentions those who, in spite of currently "being sanctified," are nevertheless "perfected forever" (10:14 NKJV). If these passages are speaking of *our* righteousness (or holiness), then we are in eternal peril, for all of our supposed goodness is nothing but filthy rags in the eyes of God (Isa. 64:6).

It seems certain, despite Arminian claims to the contrary, that the New Testament does not mean every believer must attain perfection through practical holiness before he can be saved. Further, this would be a kind of salvation by works, which God's Word repeatedly condemns. Perhaps we can be enlightened by comparing the words *pursue* and *attain*. We should *pursue* practical holiness, though we cannot in this life perfectly *attain* it. Even if this concept is *not* in view in these specific passages, the idea that we should practically pursue what only Christ has positionally achieved (on our behalf) is biblical. One truth is without question: *Nowhere do these texts confirm that a believer will lose his salvation if he does not live a perfect life of holiness*. The Arminian conundrum, then, is "How *much* holiness is enough?" Once again, the answer is that salvation is not about our righteousness—the work of Jesus will forever be sufficient.

*2 Peter 2:1–22*

Peter speaks of those who *denied the "Lord who bought them"* (v. 1) and who had "*known the way of righteousness*" (v. 21). This would seem to indicate, as Arminians argue, that the people being discussed were once truly saved and that their denial still led to their ultimate doom, since the "blackest darkness is reserved for them" (cf. v. 17). They are *dogs* (a term used for unbelievers in Revelation), not *lambs* (see v. 22); they are called "slaves of corruption" (v. 19 NKJV) rather than a "new creation" of God (2 Cor. 5:17).

In reply, a closer look at the context reveals that those who are denying the Lord (v. 1) were never true believers but instead "false teachers" and "false prophets" (v. 1). Hence, their knowledge of the Lord (v. 20) was obviously one of mental assent rather than heart commitment. They knew Christ as "*the* Lord

and Savior" (v. 20 NKJV), not as *their* Lord and Savior. They were deceivers (Matt. 7:15).

**Verses That Refer to True Believers Losing Rewards but Not Salvation**

The second group of verses used by Arminians in regard to eternal security refers to those people who are truly saved but are said to be losing their rewards (fellowship, maturity, physical life) rather than their salvation.

*Psalm 51:4, 9–12*

After his terrible sins of murder and adultery, David prayed:

> *Against you [God], you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,* so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.… Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation* and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

It is suggested by some that when David chose evil he feared losing eternal life, as his prayer of confession might seem to indicate. The wording of his petition, though, is extremely important. Even in these gross sins, he did not lose his salvation but the *joy* of it (v. 12). *Believers who are in sin lack happiness and peace; even though they are under the fatherly discipline of the Lord, they are still sons* (Heb. 12:5–11; cf. 1 Cor. 11:28–32).

*Psalm 69:27–28*

"Charge them with crime upon crime; *do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life* and not be listed with the righteous." Some believe this psalm is referring to the Lamb's Book of [everlasting] Life (Rev. 13:8), which records the names of all the saved (cf. Rev. 3:5; 20:15). If this is the case, then David is praying that these people will lose their salvation. This is unlikely, however, for several reasons.

*First*, these individuals were God's "enemies" (Psa. 69:4, 18–19) who did not "share in … [His] salvation" (v. 27). Thus, they were unbelievers, whose names were never in the Lamb's Book of Life.

*Second*, there are many "books" referred to in the Psalms. For instance, there

is the book, or register, that counts all the living (87:6); the book, or scroll, that recounts the events of our life, even every tear (56:8); the book that holds all the days ordained for us (139:16); and the book that records the deeds of our life (51:1). *None of these is the Lamb's Book of Life, wherein the names of the elect are recorded from all eternity* (Rev. 21:27).[35]

*Third*, Psalm 69:28 cannot be referring to the Lamb's Book of Life because Jesus promised no name can be removed from it (Rev. 3:5). Again, all the names of the elect have been in the Lamb's Book of Life from all eternity (Rev. 13:8); since God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10), why would He, at any rate, initially enter their names if He knew He would eventually erase them?

Thus, it seems best to understand Psalm 69:28 in its Old Testament context of a book that records those who are alive. In addition, as God is in control of all life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21), David is referring to His book of physical existence, not eternal security. Charles Stanley summarizes succinctly:

> First of all, the other things David asks God to do to his enemies are physical in nature (see vs. 22–26).… Second, to interpret "book of life" as the Lamb's book of life implies that David's enemies were believers.… Third, in the previous verse, David asks that his enemies "not come into God's righteousness" (see Ps. 69:27). If their names were in the Lamb's book of life, they would have already come into His righteousness. (*ES*, 189)

*Matthew 10:33*

"Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven" (NKJV). Many Arminians believe this is proof that one can lose salvation by betraying Christ. There are other ways to understand this verse that better fit both the context and the rest of the New Testament.

The NIV translates *deny* (Gk: *arnesomai*) as *disown*, but this rendering is too strong, since it is the root of the same term used in 2 Timothy 2:12 (Gk: *arnesasthai*), where it is applied to believers whom God will *not* disown, due to His faithfulness.[36]

Also, a derivative of the same term is used of Peter's denial of Jesus (Gk: *aparnese*, Matt. 26:34–36), but as we have seen, he did not lose everlasting life as a result of his betrayal. He was restored to fellowship with God (John 21), but his relationship with God had never ceased—again, he was still considered "wheat" and not a "tare" (Matt. 13:25 KJV). Furthermore, he retained his "faith" in Christ (cf. Luke 22:31–32) even when he denied that he knew Him (vv. 47–62).

It should also be observed that these individuals (in Matt. 10:33) are "in

heaven"; they are being denied *special recognition* by the Father, not a *place in His family*. While they may not receive the approbation "Well done, good and faithful servant" from their Father (Matt. 25:23), they are His children and will forever live in His home.

*Matthew 12:31–32*

Jesus affirmed that there is unpardonable sin:

> So I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, *but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven*. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, *either in this age or in the age to come*.

Of the many facts that have been gleaned from this passage, nothing in them supports the Arminian position.

*First,* Arminians believe that one can regain salvation after losing it, but even if they were correct in maintaining that salvation can be undone, it is clear that eternal life could not, in any case, be "re-obtained" after a person has committed the unpardonable sin.

*Second*, there is no indication that believers *can* commit this sin. The context shows that what is unpardonable is done by *hardhearted unbelievers*, who attribute the work of the Holy Spirit through Christ to the devil (cf. Mark 3:30).

*Third*, it is possible that this sin cannot be committed today, that it was possible only when Jesus was physically present on earth and had the Holy Spirit working through Him.

*Fourth*, and finally, Jesus died for all our sins (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2). Consequently, if an unpardonable sin still exists, it must be the sin of not accepting Christ's forgiveness. Believers *have* accepted it, and Jesus has promised them that they will "never perish" (John 10:28).

*1 Corinthians 3:11–15*

> No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, *he will suffer loss*.

The Arminian usage of this text doesn't require much in the way of reply. Paul says true believers can lose their *reward,* not their salvation. Further, it speaks of a Christian's "work," which is never part of the basis for salvation

(Eph. 2:8–9). In addition, Paul emphatically declares that he *will be saved*.

*1 Corinthians 8:11*

"This weak brother [who has a weak conscience], for whom Christ died, is *destroyed* by your knowledge [of freedom in the Spirit]." Also, "If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating [of something that may cause him difficulty] *destroy* [Gk: *apollue*] your brother for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). The Greek *apollumi*,[37] translated *destroy* is sometimes (in the New Testament) used in regard to the condemnation of a person to hell (e.g., Matt. 10:28—*apolesai*). From this a careless interpreter might conclude that the "weak brother" can lose (or has lost) his salvation.

However, this is incorrect.

For one thing, grammatically the word *destroy* most often simply means to "lose something temporal," such as physical life (Matt. 26:52) or self-centered convenience (Matt. 10:39). Sometimes *apollumi* is used of the loss of a person's "reward" (Matt. 10:42) but never his salvation.

Further, the context in 1 Corinthians 8 (and Rom. 14) has to do with offending a weaker "brother" (v. 11) by partaking of food that had been offered to images of other gods. Paul is not referring to the loss of salvation because:

(1) He speaks of "wound[ing] their weak conscience" (v. 12), not eliminating their salvation and sending them to hell;
(2) This act of offense, while plainly a "sin against Christ," does not precipitate spirit-damning evil;
(3) The description describes a "stumbling block" (v. 9) in the weaker brother's life, not his eternal condemnation—it is unfathomable that the Arminian might truly mean to suggest that if he were to "stumble" (v. 13 NKJV) in his Christian life, he would be forever separated from God;
(4) The parallel passage in Romans 14 speaks of the offended brother being "made weak" (v. 21 KJV) or "distressed" (v. 15) (Gk: *lupeitai*) in his faith, not being stripped of (or relinquishing) everlasting life;
(5) Whatever it is that our unloving act causes the "weaker" one to do, he is still a "brother" in Christ—he has not been (and will not be) *unadopted*.[38]

*1 Corinthians 9:27*

"I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others,

*I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*." Again, Paul is speaking about loss of reward, not of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15; 2 Cor. 5:10)—note that he speaks of a "prize" to be won rather than a "gift" to be received (cf. Rom. 6:23). In any event, warnings to persevere are not inconsistent with our ability to have assurance of salvation any more than exhortations to "work out" our own salvation (Phil. 2:12) are contradictory to "God who works in you" (v. 13) to accomplish it (cf. 1 Cor. 15:10).

*Galatians 5:4*

"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; *you have fallen away from grace*." Many Arminians insist that this means the Galatians had lost their salvation. A careful contextual examination reveals the opposite.

For one thing, they are called "brethren" (6:1 NKJV) who had placed their "faith" in Christ (3:2 NKJV) for their justification (3:8). They were already saved.[39]

For another, they had "begun in the Spirit" (3:3 NKJV) but were now "alienated" from the Spirit of Christ (5:4) as the means of their sanctification; they had gone back under the bondage of keeping the law (3:5, 10). They had not lost their salvation but had abandoned the true process of purification, since they were attempting to work *for* sanctifying grace rather than working *from* it.

Furthermore, if falling from grace means the loss of salvation, why does Paul not refer to hell? The threat mentioned is that of becoming subject to the "yoke of slavery" (5:1), not to eternal torment (cf. Rev. 20:10, 15).

*1 Timothy 5:15*

The apostle says, "*Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan*." Even so, this verse does not support the Arminian view of salvific loss. "To follow Satan" is not a phrase that must mean a person is without eternal hope: Anyone who falls into sin, as all believers can (1 John 1:8), is following the devil's temptations (2 Cor. 2:11). For instance, Jesus responded to Peter's poorly motivated declaration with, "Get behind me, Satan!" for a sin nowhere close to apostasy (Matt. 16:22–23).

*2 Timothy 2:12*

"If we endure, we shall also reign with Him: *if we deny Him, He also will*

*deny us*" (NKJV). Some Arminians take this to mean that believers who deny Jesus will be denied heaven. There is a better way, though, to understand Paul's teaching.

The immediate context reveals that he is speaking about a denial of *reward*, not of eternal life. The preceding phrase says, "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him." Reigning is part of a believer's reward (cf. Rev. 20:6; 22:12), and he has already received eternal life, whether he is rewarded or not (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15). Further, once again, the very next statement makes it absolutely clear that we cannot lose our salvation (v. 13).

*2 Timothy 2:17–18*

> [The] teaching [of those who indulge in godless chatter] will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and *they destroy the faith of some*.

This text does not point to a loss of salvation.

*First*, as we have demonstrated, only a few sentences earlier Paul gives one of the strongest biblical affirmations of eternal security (2 Tim. 2:13).

*Second*, the context focuses on resurrection faith; therefore, it may refer simply to loss of belief in resurrection as a future event (see v. 18).

*Third*, even if this passage does point to a loss of faith in general, it is not highlighting genuine faith (1 Tim. 1:5), which endures forever, but formal faith (2 Tim. 3:5), which even demons have (James 2:19), and which is not sufficient for salvation (cf. James 2:14ff.).

*2 Timothy 4:7*

"I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*." Paul seems to imply that there are those who do *not* keep the faith and, hence, will be lost. However, while he speaks of keeping the faith, he doesn't say that those who fail to do so won't be saved. Furthermore, in the very next verse he confirms that the result of keeping the faith is not salvation but reward—"the *crown* of righteousness." While those who aren't faithful won't receive this crown (1 Cor. 3:15) or other "crowns" awarded for faithfulness (Rev. 2:10), Paul by no means suggests that they have their salvation taken away (cf. Rev. 2:10).

*Hebrews 2:1*

"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, *so*

*that we do not drift away*." As with the other warnings in Hebrews,[40] the context indicates that they are to believers and are once again about losing rewards, not salvation.[41] Hebrews calls them "heirs of salvation" (1:14 KJV) and "brethren" (2:17 KJV), and the use of "we" (2:1) signifies the author's inclusion. "Drift away" is not a figure of speech indicating an everlasting loss; later warnings to the same audience indicate the author is speaking of a depravation of "maturity" (6:1; cf. 5:13–14).

*Hebrews 6:4–6*

*It is impossible* for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, *if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance*, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

First of all, note that it is problematic to take this passage as referring to unbelievers. The writer calls those he is warning "beloved," a term hardly appropriate for non-Christians. Further, while the description of their spiritual status differs from other New Testament expressions, some of the phrases are difficult to interpret in any other way than that the addressees were saved:

(1) They had experienced "repentance" (6:6), which signifies salvation (cf. Acts 17:30);
(2) They were "enlightened, and [had] tasted the heavenly gift" (6:4 NKJV);
(3) They were "partakers of the Holy Spirit" (6:4 NKJV);
(4) They had "tasted the good word of God" (6:5 NKJV); and
(5) They had experienced the "powers of the age to come" (6:5 NKJV).

Of course, if they were *believers*, the question then arises as to their status after they had "fall[en] away" (v. 6). In response, it should be observed that this term (Gk: *parapesontas*) does not indicate a one-way (irreversible) action, which means that the status of those who have fallen away is not hopeless. In fact, that it is impossible for a fallen believer to repent again indicates the once-for-all nature of repentance—his already having "changed his mind" about (or "reversed his direction toward"[42]) Christ has brought him "eternal redemption" (9:12).

What the text (6:6) seems to teach is that there is no more need for *drifters* (or *backsliders*) to *re-repent* and get *re-saved* than there is for Jesus to be *re-sacrificed* (cf. 7:27; 9:12, 25–27; 10:5–10). Few Arminians believe that once a person has *backslidden*, it is impossible for him to still be a Christian. In

summary, this passage points not to loss of salvation but loss of maturity (6:1) and growth (5:13–14), which is precisely the context of the whole discussion.

*Hebrews 10:26–29*

*If we deliberately keep on sinning* after we have received the knowledge of the truth, *no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God*. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

This is likewise not a warning about loss of salvation but about loss of reward.

*First*, again, the persons involved are described as "brothers" (v. 19), "[God's] people" (v. 30), those who have a high priest (Christ—9:11), and those who have a confession of hope given only to the "faithful" (v. 23).

*Second*, the author explicitly speaks not of salvation but of a "*great reward*" (v. 35 NASB).

*Third*, they have "a better and an enduring possession … in heaven" (v. 34 NKJV).

*Fourth*, they had been "illuminated" by God (v. 32 NKJV) and possessed the "knowledge of the truth" (vv. 26, 32), indicating that they were believers.

*Fifth*, as believers they suffered with and had compassion for the author of the letter (vv. 33–34).

*Sixth*, they are described as those who were capable of doing the "will of God" (v. 36), something true only of believers (John 9:31).

*Seventh*, the reference to those who "insulted the Spirit of grace" (v. 29) implies that they were believers who had received Him.

*Eighth*, the illustration regarding those who died under the law of Moses (v. 28) speaks of physical death (an end of life in this world), not eternal death (everlasting separation from God), as a potential discipline for believers who disobey God (cf. 1 Cor. 11:30; 1 John 5:16).

*Ninth*, the "fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27) fits the description of believers coming before Christ (2 Cor. 5:10), when their works will be tried by fire and they could suffer loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:13–14).

*Tenth*, if this passage *does* teach that salvation can be lost, then it does not

support the Arminian view at any rate, for it says, in such a case, that "no sacrifice for sins is left." In other words, if what Hebrews means is that whoever was saved and subsequently sins in this way cannot be restored but has lost his salvation eternally, then such a one cannot be restored from having fallen (or "backslidden").

*Eleventh*, and finally, Hebrews 10 ends with the writer confidently affirming that believers will not be lost: "*We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved*" (v. 39).

*2 Peter 2:20–21*

> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. *It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them*.

That these people knew Christ as Lord and Savior and had "escaped the corruption of the world" seems to indicate that they were once believers.

In response, it should be observed that Peter does not say Christ was "their" Savior—he portrayed Him as "our" Savior. Thus, their "knowing" could have been nominal knowledge rather than saving belief, just as faith can be nonsalvific (cf. James 2:19). As we have seen, many believe that Christ is *the* Savior without making Him *their* Savior.

The persons in verse 22 are pictured as *dogs* (a symbol of the unsaved), not *sheep* (an image of the saved). Indeed, every description of them in this chapter speaks of those who do not belong to Christ: "false prophets," "false teachers," "[deniers of] the Lord," "unjust," "natural brute beasts," those who have "forsaken the right way," and those for whom "the mist of darkness is reserved for ever" (KJV).

*2 Peter 3:17*

"Therefore, dear friends … *be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position*." This sounds very much like falling from one's salvation, which is a secure position.

Upon examining the text, however, it is clear that the "fall" would be from a position of *maturity* ("steadfastness," v. 17 KJV), not from salvation. The addressees are called "beloved" (vv. 14, 17 KJV), spiritual brothers of the apostle Paul (v. 15). Their potential failure was a loss of being able to "grow" (v. 18), not a lack of being saved.

*2 John 1:8*

John wrote to believers called spiritual "children" (1:2), saying: "Watch out that you do not lose what you have *worked for*, but that you may be *rewarded* fully."

That this is speaking about loss of rewards is obvious from the emphasized words. They were warned about losing what they "worked for," and salvation is not from works (cf. Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–6).

*Revelation 3:5*

"He who overcomes will … be dressed in white. *I will never blot out his name from the book of life*, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Some take this to imply that it is possible to have one's name erased from the Book of Life—that is, those who do *not* overcome can lose their salvation.

In response, there are four other verses referring to the Book of Life (not counting Rev. 22:19 [see below], which may be rendered "tree of life"). Revelation 13:8 says, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—*all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world*." Revelation 20:12, 15 records:

> I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. *Another book was opened, which is the book of life*. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.… *If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire*.

And Revelation 21:27 confirms: "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but *only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*."

Several noteworthy observations about these texts:

For one thing, John affirmed that anyone's name, once written in the Book of Life, would *never* he erased (3:5). No believer, then, needs to fear losing salvation once he receives it.

Furthermore, as established previously, the names of the saved were written there from eternity (13:8); thus, there is literal eternal security for the elect. Once one knows that his name is there (viz., has personal assurance), he can be certain he will never lose his salvation.

In addition, as we have discussed, God indelibly entered the names of the elect into the Book of Life long before any of them did anything to either gain or

lose salvation: He knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10).

Hence, again, in His omniscient foreknowledge, God knew all sins that the elect would ever commit, yet He promised them everlasting life. He knew they would persevere, through *everything*, in their faith.

Therefore, rather than being denials of eternal security, these words from the Revelation are strong affirmations. The names of the elect are in the Book of Life (20:15), and God will never erase them (3:5).

*Revelation 3:15–16*

"I wish you were either [hot or cold]! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—*I am about to spit you out of my mouth*." This caution from Jesus, which seemingly supports the Arminian view that God rejects those who reject Him, appears to be confirmed by the facts that (1) it was given "to the churches" (v. 22) and (2) that it references God's warning to "chasten" (v. 19 KJV) any who do not repent of their sins.

In reply, even if true believers are in view, "spit you out" is not a phrase that speaks of hell. More likely it is addressed to those believers who have turned tepid in their walk with the Lord and need their fellowship restored.[43]

This is reminiscent of another figure of speech (cf. John 15:4) where believers who are not abiding in Christ are said to wither on the vine and, hence, become useless to God. Jesus admonished, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). Notice He does not imply they are thrown by angels into the eternal flames (hell), but by men into a temporal "fire."[44] Paul spoke of such people as "castaways" (1 Cor. 9:27 KJV); they were like cracked vases that were put on the shelf because they were not serving their Master usefully.

*Revelation 22:19*

"If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the *book of life*[45] and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (KJV).While some maintain that this indicates a loss of salvation, that conclusion does not follow for several reasons.

*First*, "book of life" is a disputed rendering; others (e.g. NIV,) render it "tree of life." One should not use a disputed passage to prove a doctrine.

*Second*, John says elsewhere that God will not blot anyone's name out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5).

*Third*, if "tree of life" is meant, then the warning is not about a loss of

salvation but of rewards, for it's not a question of *whether* they are in the holy city but *what part* they will have in it.

*Fourth*, if "book of life" is meant, then one can point to the indications that the warning is to unbelievers, since he also speaks of the "unjust" (v. 11) and those "outside" the city (v. 15). Regardless, it is not necessary to take this verse as proof that anyone can lose salvation.

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR ETERNAL SECURITY

Eternal security is rooted in the Augustinian position on grace and predestination. However, *before the Reformation*, it was believed that only the *elect*, not all the *regenerate*, were secure.[46] In its present formulation, eternal security of all the elect is a Reformation teaching, springing from John Calvin.[47]

## Early Fathers

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> Unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For, in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons? (*AH*, 1.3.18.7 in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*)

### *Clement of Alexandria (150–c. 215)*

> If one should captiously say, "And how is it possible for feeble flesh to resist the energies and spirits of the Powers?" well, let him know this, that, confiding in the Almighty and the Lord, we war against the principalities of darkness, and against death. "Whilst thou art yet speaking," He says, "Lo, here am I." See the invincible Helper who shields us. "Think it not strange, therefore, concerning the burning sent for your trial, as though some strange thing happened to you; but, as you are partakers in the sufferings of Christ, rejoice; that at the revelation of His glory ye may rejoice exultant. If ye be reproached in the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth on you." As it is written, "Because for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us" (*S*, II.IV.VII).

### *Tertullian (c. 155–c. 225)*

Tell me, is not all mankind one flock of God? Is not the same God both Lord and Shepherd of the universal nations? Who more "perishes" from God than the heathen, so long as he "errs?" Who is more "re-sought" by God than the heathen, when he is recalled by Christ? In fact, it is among heathens that this order finds antecedent place; if, that is, Christians are not otherwise made out of heathens than by being first "lost," and "re-sought" by God, and "carried back" by Christ. So likewise ought this order to be kept, that we may interpret any such [figure] with reference to those in whom it finds prior place.…

Nay, but this whole world is the one house of all; in which world it is more the heathen, who is found in darkness, whom the grace of God enlightens, than the Christian, who is already in God's light. Finally, it is *one* "straying" which is ascribed to the ewe and the drachma (and this is an evidence in my favor); for if the parables had been composed with a view to a *Christian* sinner, after the loss of his faith, a *second* loss and restoration of them would have been noted.…

I admit that the sinner portrayed in each parable is one who is already a Christian; yet not that on this account must he be affirmed to be … one [that] can be restored, through repentance, from the crime of adultery and fornication. For although he be said to "have perished," there will be the *kind* of perdition to treat; inasmuch as the "ewe" "perished" not by dying, but by straying; and the "drachma" not by being destroyed, but by being hidden. In this sense, a thing which is safe may be said to "have perished." Therefore the believer, too, "perishes," by lapsing out of [the right path]. (*OM*, IV.VIII)

### *Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

Paul, when enumerating the innumerable causes which generally separate men from the love of Christ and from the love of God in Christ Jesus (to all of which, the love that was in himself rose superior), did not set down argument among the grounds of separation. For observe that he says, firstly: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (as it is written, 'For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.') Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

And secondly, when laying down another series of causes which naturally tend to separate those who are not firmly grounded in their religion, he says: "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."

Now, truly, it is proper that *we* should feel elated because afflictions, or those other causes enumerated by Paul, do not separate us [from Christ]; but not that Paul and the other apostles, and any other resembling them, [should entertain that feeling], because they were far exalted above such things when they said, "In all these things we are *more* than conquerors through Him that loved us," which is a stronger statement than that they are simply "conquerors." But if it be proper for apostles to entertain a feeling of elation in not being separated from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord, that feeling will be entertained by them, because neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor any of the things that follow, can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (*AC*, I.III–IV)

## Medieval Fathers

### *Augustine (354–430)*

When we come to Him, we come to the Father also, because through an equal an equal is known; and the Holy Spirit binds, and as it were seals us, so that we are able to rest permanently in the supreme

and unchangeable Good. (*OCD*, 1.34)

Of two pious men, why to the one should be given perseverance unto the end, and to the other it should not be given, God's judgments are even more unsearchable.… In respect of all these things, they were of us. Nevertheless, in respect of a certain other distinction, they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they certainly would have continued with us.… They were not of them because they had not been "called according to the purpose." They had not been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world; they had not gained a lot in him. They had not been predestined according to his purpose who works all things. (*GP*, 9:21)

In short, "By free will, since [unbelievers][48] have not received the gift of perseverance, they are sent away in God's just and hidden judgment" (*AG*, 13).

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

Whether man possessed of grace needs the help of grace in order to persevere, I answer that Perseverance is taken in three ways. First, to signify a habit of the mind whereby a man stands steadfastly, lest he be moved by the assault of sadness from what is virtuous. And thus perseverance is to sadness as continence is to concupiscence and pleasure.… Secondly, perseverance may be called a habit, whereby a man has the purpose of persevering in good unto the end. And in both these ways perseverance is infused together with grace, even as continence and the other virtues are. Thirdly, perseverance is called the abiding in good to the end of life. And in order to have this perseverance man does not, indeed, need another habitual grace, but he needs the Divine assistance guiding and guarding him against the attacks of the passions, as appears from the preceding article. And hence after anyone has been justified by grace, he still needs to beseech God for the aforesaid gift of perseverance, that he may be kept from evil till the end of his life. For to many grace is given to whom perseverance in grace is not given. (*ST*, 1.2.109–10)

As Augustine says [*ONG*, xliii]: "In the original state man received a gift whereby he could persevere, but to persevere was not given him. But now, by the grace of Christ, many receive both the gift of grace whereby they may persevere, and the further gift of persevering." … Thus Christ's gift is greater than Adam's fault. Nevertheless it was easier for man to persevere, with the gift of grace in the state of innocence in which the flesh was not rebellious against the spirit, than it is now. For the restoration by Christ's grace, although it is already begun in the mind, is not yet completed in the flesh, as it will be in heaven, where man will not merely be able to persevere but will be unable to sin. (ibid.)

## Reformation Fathers

### *Martin Luther (1483–1546)*

Although I had the merit of all saints, the holiness and purity of all virgins, and the piety of St. Peter besides, I would still consider my attainment nothing. Rather I must have a different foundation to build on, namely, these words: God has given His Son so that whosoever believe in Him whom that Father has sent of love shall be saved. And you must insist confidently (*trotzen*) that you will be preserved; and you must boldly take your stand on His words. (*WLS*, 67)

That I am to die and to be saved, I know for sure (praise God!), and neither the devil nor the gates of hell shall take this conviction from me.… This is certain; and miserable, aye, damned, is the person who allows this to be made uncertain to him. Since then, this is certain, we should not allow that other

matter, which is uncertain, to worry us, namely how God will take us out of this life.… We should, therefore, not worry about this matter but should thank His grace day and night for the fact that we are taken care of after this life, (ibid., 372)

## *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

When the Apostle says to the Philippians, “Being confident of this very thing, that he which has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6), there cannot be a doubt that by the good work thus begun, he means the very commencement of conversion in the will. God, therefore, begins the good work in us by exciting in our hearts a desire, a love, and a study of righteousness, or (to speak more correctly) by turning, training, and guiding our hearts unto righteousness; and he completes this good work by confirming us unto perseverance. (*ICR*, 1.2.3.6)

“That intermediate movement which the sophists imagine, a movement which every one is free to obey or to reject, is obviously excluded by the doctrine of effectual perseverance” (ibid., 1.2.3.10).

When we say that faith must be certain and secure, we certainly speak not of an assurance which is never affected by doubt, nor a security which anxiety never assails; we rather maintain that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust, and are thus far from thinking that their consciences possess a placid quiet, uninterrupted by perturbation. On the other hand, whatever be the mode in which they are assailed, we deny that they fall off and abandon that sure confidence which they have formed in the mercy of God. (ibid., 1.3.2.17)

Paul says that, in the architecture of Christian doctrine, it is necessary to retain the foundation which he had laid with the Corinthians: “Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). What then is our foundation in Christ? Is it that he begins salvation and leaves us to complete it? Is it that he only opened up the way, and left us to follow it in our own strength? By no means, but as Paul had a little before declared, it is to acknowledge that he has been given us for righteousness. No man, therefore, is well founded in Christ who has not entire righteousness in him, since the Apostle says not that he was sent to assist us in procuring, but was himself to be our righteousness.

Thus, it is said that God “has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,” not according to our merit, but “according to the good pleasure of his will”; that in him “we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins”; that peace has been made “through the blood of his cross”; that we are reconciled by his blood; that, placed under his protection, we are delivered from the danger of finally perishing; that thus ingrafted into him we are made partakers of eternal life, and hope for admission into the kingdom of God. (ibid., 1.2.15.5)

The whole, then, comes to this: As soon as the minutest particle of faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to behold the face of God placid, serene, and propitious; far off, indeed, but still so distinctly as to assure us that there is no delusion in it. (ibid., 1.3.2.19)

I deny not, as I lately said, that faith occasionally suffers certain interruptions when, by violent assault, its weakness is made to bend in this direction or in that; and its light is buried in the thick darkness of temptation. Still happen what may, faith ceases not to long after God. (ibid., 1.3.2.24)

## *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

Arminius never denied eternal security (his followers did), and he strongly

affirmed the assurance of believers.

> With regard to the certainty [or assurance] of salvation, my opinion is that it is possible for him who believes in Jesus Christ to be certain and persuaded, and, if his heart condemn him not, he is now in reality assured, that he is a son of God, and stands in the grace of Jesus Christ. Such a certainty is wrought in the mind, as well by the action of the Holy Spirit inwardly actuating the believer and by the fruits of faith, as from his own conscience, and the testimony of God's Spirit witnessing together with his conscience. I also believe that it is possible for such a person, with an assured confidence in the grace of God and his mercy in Christ, to depart out of this life, and to appear before the throne of grace, without any anxious fear or terrific dread: and yet this person should constantly pray, "O Lord, enter not into judgment with thy servant!" (*WJA*, 1.6).
>
> My sentiments respecting the perseverance of the saints are that those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith, and have thus been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, possess sufficient powers [or strength] to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies—yet not without the assistance of the grace of the same Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ also by his Spirit assists them in all their temptations, and affords them the ready aid of his hand; and, provided they stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, Christ preserves them from falling.… It is not possible for them, by any of the cunning craftiness or power of Satan, to be either seduced or dragged out of the hands of Christ.…
>
> Though I here openly and ingenuously affirm I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish; yet I will not conceal that there are passages of Scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine of unconditional perseverance which are worthy of much consideration. ("PS" in *WJA*, I.254)

### *The Synod of Dort*

> Just as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can his chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced. (*CD*, article 11)
>
> Assurance of this, their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation, is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God's Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on. (ibid., article 12)
>
> In their awareness and assurance of this election God's children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of his mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to him who first so greatly loved them, (ibid., article 13)

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

> [One] effect attributed to faith in the Scriptures is security, or certainty of salvation. "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). "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" (John 5:24). "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever" (John 6:51). "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.… 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 6:37, 40). "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" [John 10:27–28] (*ST*, 3.110).

The whole of the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is designed to prove the certain salvation of all who believe. The proposition to be established is that there is "no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." That is, they can never perish; they can never be so separated from Christ as to come into condemnation. The Apostle's first argument to establish that proposition is that believers are delivered from the law by the sacrifice of Christ. The believer, therefore, is not under the law which condemns, as Paul had before said (Rom. 4:14).…

His second argument is that they have already within them the principle of eternal life. That principle is the Spirit of God; "the life-giving" as He was designated by the ancient Church. To be carnally minded is death.…

The third argument for the security of believers is that they are the sons of God. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. That is, they are partakers of his nature, the special objects of his love, and entitled to the inheritance which He gives. If sons then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. According to the Apostle's mode of thinking, that any of the sons of God should perish is impossible. If sons, they shall certainly be saved.

The fourth argument is from the purpose of God. Those whom He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, them He calls to the exercise of faith and repentance; and whom He thus calls He justifies, He provides for them and imputes to them a righteousness which satisfies the demands of the law, and which entitles them in Christ and for his sake to eternal life; and those whom He justifies He glorifies. There is no flaw in this chain.…

Paul's fifth argument is from the love of God. As stated above, the apostle argues from the greatness, the freeness, and the immutability of that love that its objects never can be lost. "He that spared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" "If He has done the greater, will He not do the less? If he gave even his Son, will He not give us faith to receive and constancy to persevere even unto the end?" A love so great as the love of God to his people cannot fail of its object.…

The sixth argument of the Apostle is that as the love of God is infinitely great and altogether gratuitous, it is also immutable, and, therefore, believers shall certainly be saved. Hence the conclusion, "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."

It will be seen that the Apostle does not rest the perseverance of the saints on the indestructible nature of faith, or on the imperishable nature of the principle of grace in the heart, or on the constancy of the believer's will, but solely on what is out of ourselves. Perseverance, he teaches us, is due to the purpose of God, to the work of Christ, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to the primal source of all, the infinite, mysterious, and immutable love of God. We do not keep ourselves; we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. [1 Peter 1:5] (ibid., 3.110–18)

## *Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)*

[The] eleven works of God demonstrate that a person who truly believes in Jesus Christ is eternally safe and will never lose his or her salvation. Four of these works relate to God the Father, three to God

the Son, and four to God the Holy Spirit. *The sovereign purpose of God.… The infinite power of God.… The immeasurable love of God.… The work of the Father.… The promise of the Son of God.… The Prayer of the Son of God.… The work of the Son of God.… The Holy Spirit regenerates us.… The Holy Spirit protects believers.… The Holy Spirit indwells His Church. The Holy Spirit seals His believers.* (*S*, 190–200)

# CONCLUSION

In contrast to Arminianism, moderate Calvinism demonstrates that there is strong biblical, theological, and historical support for the doctrine of eternal security. In distinction from the implication of strong Calvinism, moderate Calvinism shows that a believer can have real assurance that he is among the elect, that the issue is not his faithfulness but God's. Moderate Calvinists reject the view that there is security for the elect but no assurance that one *is* of the elect unless he endures.

In this regard, it is ironic that Arminians are more "Calvinistic" than strong Calvinists, for Arminianism holds that a believer can have assurance that he is now saved,[49] even if he does not have security that he will ultimately be saved. *By contrast, moderate Calvinism holds that we can have both present assurance* and *eternal security*.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

# THE EXTENT OF SALVATION (LIMITED OR UNLIMITED ATONEMENT)

While there is wide evangelical agreement on the origin, nature, and purpose of the Atonement, there is considerable difference on its extent: Strong Calvinists maintain limited atonement, while the rest insist that the Atonement is unlimited in its availability. That is, the former believe that Christ died only for the elect, and the latter contend that Christ died for the sins of all human beings. Since this work defends the unlimited view of atonement, this chapter will begin with the evidence for that perspective and will then respond to the arguments for limited atonement.

## THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

The grounds for unlimited atonement fall into three categories: biblical, theological, and historical. We will begin with the biblical basis, addressing along with it the alternative textual understanding by strong Calvinists.
*Isaiah 53:6*

Isaiah wrote of the Messiah, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and *the* LORD *has laid on him the iniquity of us all*.” The evident meaning of “all” is everyone in the human race since in the beginning of the sentence the same word *all* is used of those who go astray and are in need of salvation. Likewise, he uses the word *many*, which means *all* here and elsewhere (in Rom. 5:19), saying, “He bore the sins of many” (v. 12). Even John Calvin, commenting on this verse, said, “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.” (Calvin’s comments on Isaiah 53:12, emphasis added).

*Matthew 22:14*

Jesus said, “Many are called but few are chosen” (KJV). While God foreknew that only the elect would believe (Acts 13:48), He desired all people to be saved (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). Thus, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16 NKJV) to provide an atoning sacrifice for the sins of “the whole world” (1 John 2:2). God provided salvation for all and requires that all repent (Acts 17:30) and believe (Acts 16:31). It would be both deceptive and absurd for God to command everyone to be saved if He had not provided salvation for all.

Arguing for limited atonement, John Owen (1616–1683) offered the unlikely suggestion that “God’s commands and promises had revealed our duty, not his purpose; [that is, they revealed] what God would have us to do, and not what he will do” (*DDDC*, 200). However, this eloquent turn of phrase conceals hidden errors. For one thing, it implies that God commands the impossible, which would make the Omniscient irrational. For another, it overlooks the obvious, namely, that there is another alternative: God commands *not only* what He would have us to do *but also* what He desires (wills) to be done.[1]

*Matthew 23:37*

Weeping over the city, Jesus lamented:

> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, *how often I have longed to gather your children together*, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

How could it be more obvious that God wanted *all* of them, including the unrepentant, to be saved?

Extreme Calvinist John Gill (1697–1771) claimed that these words of Christ are to be understood not of *gathering to salvation* but only of *gathering to hear Him preach* and thus to be brought to historical faith "sufficient to preserve them from temporal ruin." Likewise, the desire of Christ for them to come to Him "is not to be understood of his divine will… but of his human will, or of his will as a man; which … [is] not always the same with [his divine will], nor always fulfilled."[2]

A clear exposition of this desperate interpretation is perhaps its most effective refutation: Its conclusion would have us believe that God's concern for our temporal condition is greater than His concern for our eternal souls! Some try to blunt this result by maintaining that such a view merely confirms Jerusalem's unwillingness to allow her "children" to respond positively, but this scarcely solves the problem. The truth remains: People who are not responding positively are doing so because of *their* unwillingness, not because *God* does not long for them to positively (willfully) respond to Him.

*John 1:29*

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, *who takes away the sin of the world*!' " In light of the context and other usage of the word *world* in John's gospel,[3] it is evident that the text does not mean only *the church* or *the elect* but *all human beings*. Again, Jesus said that "God so loved the *world*" that He gave His only Son, and He clarifies His use of *world* only three verses later: "This is the verdict: Light has come into *the world*, but men loved darkness instead of light because *their deeds were evil*" (3:19). Jesus also said (16:8) that "when [the Holy Spirit] comes, he will convict *the world* of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

Some extreme Calvinists have claimed that "often the Bible uses the words *world* and *all* in a restricted, limited sense.… It is clear that *all* is not 'all' " (see Palmer, *FPC*, 52). In attempting to resist the biblical teaching of unlimited atonement, they cite passages (e.g., Luke 2:1–2) from another book, in another context, that use *world* in a geographical (rather than *redemptive*) sense. However, if *all* does not mean "all" in regard to God's desire for our salvation, then what does it mean in Romans 3:23? "*All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." *Every* human has sinned; evil is clearly not restricted to the elect.

*John 3:16–17*

> *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son*, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the *world* to condemn the *world*, but to save the *world* through him.

The plain statement is that God loved the world, and the clear implication is that Christ was given to die for the world (cf. v. 14). What is more, verse 17 makes it evident that *world* here means the whole fallen world, for it is the same world that is under God's condemnation.

John Owen offered an astoundingly blunt retranslation on behalf of limited atonement: "God so loved his elect throughout the world, that he gave his Son with this intention, that by him believers might be saved" (*DDDC*, 214). For those who accept the clear meaning of the text, this needs only God's own reminder: "*Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it*" (Deut. 4:2; cf. Rev. 22:18–19).

*John 12:47*

"I did not come to judge *the world*, but to save *the world*." In both cases, *world* signifies the same fallen, sinful world that will be judged in "the last day" (v. 48).

As elsewhere, strong Calvinists claim that *world* is used in a limited sense, meaning "part of the world," namely, the elect. They point to John 12:19 as an illustration: "The Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!' " Nonetheless, this comparison fails.

For one thing, *world* in John 12:19 (Gk: *kosmos*) is used geographically, not generically.

For another, these are not the words of Jesus but of His opponents.[4]

Furthermore, the words of the brothers of Jesus in John 7:4 are obviously hyperbole, and even extreme Calvinists admit this is not true of John 12:47, where it is *Jesus'* statement that *does* refer to the whole fallen world.[5]

*Romans 5:6*

Paul writes, "Christ died for the ungodly," and in verse 10 he adds, "When we were God's *enemies, we were reconciled* to him through the death of his Son." Both the elect and the non-elect were ungodly enemies; therefore, either Christ died for the non-elect as well as for the elect, or Christ did not die for all His ungodly enemies. Further, if Paul meant to teach that Christ died only for the elect, he could easily have said so and thus avoided any potential

misunderstanding.[6]

The response of particularists (proponents of limited atonement) is that *indefinite* is not to be confused with *unlimited* (or *universal*). This misses the point: The issue is not whether everyone is *actually* saved[7] but whether the sacrifice of Jesus made salvation *available* to all. For instance, Paul affirms that God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5 NKJV), yet no one in this dispute believes that all the ungodly are actually justified. The context of Romans 5 indicates that Paul is speaking of *all* and *all men* as lost (5:12) and in need of salvation (v. 5:18).

*Romans 5:18–19*

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for *all men*, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all men*. For just as through the disobedience of the one man *the many* were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man *the many* will be made righteous.

Once again, observe the following comparison:

| Person | Adam | Christ |
|---|---|---|
| Act | Sin (vv. 12, 14, 16)<br>Offense (vv. 15–18)<br>Disobedience (v. 19) | Grace (v. 15)<br>Righteousness (v. 18)<br>Obedience (v. 19) |
| Physical results | Death for all (vv. 12, 14–15, 17) | Life for all (vv. 17–18, 21) |
| Moral results | Sin enters for all (v. 12)<br>Sin reigns on all (v. 21) | Grace enters for all (v. 15)<br>Grace reigns for all (v. 21) |
| Legal results | All made sinners (v. 19)<br>Judgment for all (v. 18) | All made righteous (v. 19)<br>Gift for all (v. 18) |

Verse 18 makes a direct contrast between those who were condemned because of Adam's sin and those who were provided life by Christ's death. In both cases they are called *all men*. Hence, by every valid rule of interpreting a phrase—by the same author, in the same book, in the same context, in the same passage, and

in direct parallel—the *all men* for whom Christ provided salvation is the entire human race who received condemnation as a result of Adam's disobedience.

Paul's reiteration of the point in verse 19 through the term *the many* clearly means "all," because:

(1) It is used in parallel with *all* (in v. 18);
(2) It is *the many* in contrast to *the few*, not *the many* in contrast to *the all*; and
(3) It is *the many* that is used of *all* in verse 15—or else we would have to conclude that only some humans die because of human sin, which is contrary to what Paul affirms in this very text (cf. v. 12).

Attempts to avoid this conclusion are even less convincing than those on other texts. Some otherwise articulate commentators don't truly address the point of what *all* means. John Gill's assertions are contradictory, since he refers to "both as extending to the whole of their several respective offspring—condemnation through Adam's offense to all his natural seed, and justification of life through Christ's righteousness to all his spiritual seed—the text makes no such distinction" (*EONT*, on Rom. 5:18). The passage does *not* say this; rather, it says *all men*, not merely all the elect, benefit from Christ's death. Insisting that only some people benefit from the work of Christ clearly is reading limited atonement into the text—*all men* means everyone.

Others, like John Calvin himself, saw that Paul's words taught unlimited atonement:

> Paul makes grace common to *all men*, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is *offered to all*. Although *Christ suffered for the sins of the world*, and is offered without distinction to *all men*, yet not all receive Him. (*CC*, 8.117–18)

Paul's contrast of Adam and Christ reveals that the Atonement is both *unlimited in its extent* and *limited in its application*. That is, all are savable, but only those who believe will be saved.[8] Paul twice uses the word *justification*[9] to describe what Christ provided for all human beings:

> The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought *justification*. … Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was *justification* that brings life for all men. (Rom. 5:16, 18)

Since it is scripturally evident that not all people will be saved,[10] Paul must

have meant, as already established, that because of what Christ did for them, everyone is *potentially* justifiable, not *actually* justified.

*First*, he clearly declares that some of the consequences of Adam's sin (such as physical death) are passed on to all human beings (5:12–14).

*Second*, as mentioned previously, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) shows that the parallel is not exact.[11]

*Third*, the phrase "those who receive" (v. 17) implies that not all *do* receive the gift of salvation and that *only* those who do will be saved.

*Fourth*, all of this fits with the context of the preceding chapter (cf. 4:3–5), which declares, as does the first verse of this chapter (5:1), that salvation only comes to those who believe.

*Fifth*, and finally, if the phrase "made righteous" (v. 19) is taken as *actual*, then universalism follows. Universalism is unbiblical;[12] hence, everything on the right side of the chart above (under "Christ") is *potential* for all persons: It is *available* for (offered to) all, but is only *appropriated* by (received by) some.[13]

*2 Corinthians 5:14–19*

According to the apostle Paul,

> Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died.… God was *reconciling the world* to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.… And *he died for all*, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again, (vv. 14, 19, 15)

From this it seems evident that this reconciliation of all ("the world") did not guarantee the *salvation* but the *savability* of all. Paul goes on to say that on the basis of what Christ accomplished through the Cross, we must still plead with the world: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: *Be reconciled to God*" (2 Cor. 5:20). Thus, reconciliation by Christ makes salvation *possible* (v. 14); it is our faith that makes it *actual*.

In spite of this, strong Calvinist Edwin Palmer (d. 1980) seems to have imposed his own theological system onto the text:

> Obviously, the *all* in both cases means all the believers—*not the whole world*, reprobate as well as elect.… The "all died" refers to the spiritual death of the believer.… [Hence,] the "all died" cannot refer to the natural death of all men, for Christ's death is not the cause of man's physical death. (*FPC*, 49)

This interpretation is eisegetical and extremely unlikely.

*First*, whatever the "all died" means in 2 Corinthians 5:14, it is clear that Paul identifies the object of Christ's reconciliation in verse 19 as "*the world*," not believers only (or "the elect").

*Second*, verse 15 contrasts the "those who live" (Christians) with the "all" for whom Christ died: "He died for *all*, that *those who live* should no longer live for themselves."

*Third*, the connection in verse 14 between the "one [Christ] died for all" and the "all [who] died" is to show why Christ's love should compel us to reach them with a message of reconciliation, pleading with "the world" to be reconciled to God (vv. 19–20). Paul isn't teaching about our spiritual death but about our compassion for "the world," which is spiritually dead and needs to be restored to a right relationship with God.

*1 Timothy 2:3–4*

"*God our Savior … wants all men to be saved* and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Even Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892), who believed in limited atonement, found it difficult to deny the clear meaning of 1 Timothy 2:3–4. Nonetheless, this text has been widely misconstrued by extreme Calvinists rooted in the later Augustine. Spurgeon summarized their attempts to avoid the obvious:

> [Here is how] our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. "All men," say they—"that is, some men": as if the Holy Ghost could not have said "some men" if he had meant some men. "All men," say they—"that is, some of all sorts of men": as if the Lord could not have said "All sorts of men" if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written "all men," and unquestionably he means "all men" ("CT" as cited by Iain Murray, *SHC*, 150).

Spurgeon added,

> I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away: he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, "Who *will not* have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth" (in ibid., 151).

Of course, the problem is that this is what the text *should* say if limited atonement were true—*but it does not*. Spurgeon was aware of his apparent inconsistency here, saying, "I do not know how that squares with this," and adding, "I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God."[14]

*1 Timothy 2:6*

Paul affirms that Christ "gave himself as *a ransom for all men*—the testimony given in its proper time." Whatever doubts one may have about Mark 10:45,[15] it is plain here (in 1 Tim. 2) that Christ is a ransom for *all*. That is, He paid the price with His own precious blood (1 Peter 1:19) for the sins of *everyone*.

John Owen, who again offered the standard particularist view that *all* does not mean "all," tactically diverted the issue to other passages where *all* is used geographically or hyperbolically.[16] However, no one has produced a single biblical text where *all* is used limitedly or narrowly when it applies to a generic or redemptive (rather than geographic or hyperbolic) sense. At any rate, even if they *had*, the interpretation *here*, in 1 Timothy 2, must be determined by what it means in *this* context, regardless of what *all* may be intended to mean anywhere else. That Paul refers to the entire human race in 1 Timothy 2:4–6 is amply evidenced.

*First*, he could have chosen to use the word *some*, but he did not.

*Second*, his reference to *men*[17] in verse 5 is clearly generic—meaning "all people"—since it is used as the opposite pole from God that the Mediator, Jesus Christ, brings together with Him. Generic utilizations of *all* in a redemptive context are usually, if not always, of the entire human race.

*Third*, God's desire for "all" to be saved is parallel with that same desire expressed elsewhere (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

*Fourth*, and finally, the Bible tells us that what hinders God's desire from being fulfilled is not the lack of a universal scope in His love (cf. John 3:16) but rather the willful rejection of Him by some of His creatures (Matt. 22:37).

*1 Timothy 4:10*

"For this we labor and strive, that we have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe*." This verse does not support limited atonement because the limited group is designated by the phrase "especially of those who believe." These are the elect to whom the blessings are *actual*, since they "believe" and, hence, have had the benefits of Christ's death applied to them. The word *believe* indicates that this text is to be understood soteriologically; thus, those who believe in Christ as Savior are the ones who are *actually* (not just *potentially*) saved (cf. Acts 16:31).[18]

The *outside* or *broader* group is called "all men." Since Paul clearly refers to more than the elect, there is no reason to believe it is any less than what he says —*all*. Christ is, in one sense, the Savior of *everyone*; however, as we have seen, He cannot be *actually* the Savior of all, since all are not saved. Indeed, Paul has

just urged prayer for “all men” (v. 1 KJV), because God “desires all men to be saved” (v. 4). Therefore, because Christ died for all, it seems reasonable to conclude that all are saved *potentially*.

Some proponents of limited atonement don’t respond to this reasoning at all. Those who do often say things similar to the words of John Gill: “[Jesus] is the ‘Savior of all men’ in a providential way, giving them being and breath, upholding them in their beings, preserving their lives, and indulging them with the blessings and mercies of life.” Gill added, without support: “That he is the Savior of all men, with a spiritual and everlasting salvation, is not true in fact” (*EONT*, on 1 Tim. 4:10). This implausible interpretation is ruled out:

(1) By its comparison to those who “believe” unto salvation;
(2) By the reference to the “promise of the life to come” in the immediate context (v. 8);
(3) By the standard New Testament meaning of the word *Savior*;
(4) By the earlier reference to pray for the salvation of all men (2:1–2);
(5) By the reference to Christ as the salvific Mediator (2:5);
(6) By the whole context of 1 Timothy (e.g., 1:1; 2:3–6), which is speaking about spiritual salvation, not social preservation; and
(7) By all the verses (given above) that support the unlimited *provision* (not *application*) of salvation.

Only raw theological dogmatism could be bold enough to contradict the plain meaning of this text: Christ’s redemptive work was for *everyone*.

*Hebrews 2:9*

“We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God *he might taste death for everyone*.” It is plain from this that Christ died for everyone, not only the elect.

Responses to this conclusion follow the same line as those just discussed; it will suffice to add here only a few words about the context. First of all, it is a generic use of *everyone* (humanity), as is indicated not only by the contrast of humans to angels (2:7) but also by the reference to human “flesh and blood” (i.e., infleshed human nature—v. 14). Also, since the result of the death (and resurrection) of Christ destroys death and defeats the devil (v. 14), it must have reference to all of Adam’s race; otherwise, Christ would not have been

victorious in reversing what Satan did. His victory would not have been complete, and therefore, God could not have been propitiated (satisfied) with His offering—but He is (2:17; cf. Rom 3:25; 1 John 4:10).

*2 Peter 2:1*

Here Peter speaks of Christ purchasing the redemption even of those who are apostate. Since all Calvinists agree that those who have truly been saved[19] will never lose their salvation—and since this passage speaks clearly of lost persons—when Peter affirms that Christ "bought" these lost souls, he means *the Atonement is not limited to the elect:*

> There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even *denying the sovereign Lord who bought them*—bringing swift destruction on themselves.

As mentioned previously, the terms used to describe these individuals leave little doubt that they are lost souls—none of these are scriptural descriptions of the elect.[20] What is more, even though for them "the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved" (v. 17 RSV), it is these apostate, reprobate, non-elects that Christ "bought" with his own precious blood! (cf. 1 Peter 1:19).

John Owen skillfully but unsuccessfully attempted to shift the burden of proof onto those who acknowledge that (1) *Lord* (Gk: *despotan*) refers to Christ and/or that (2) *bought* (Gk: *agorazo*) refers to our salvific redemption (*DDDC*, 250–56).

*As to the first point*, Owen admitted that *Lord is* used elsewhere of Christ, and, as a matter of fact, other than the few times it is used of earthly masters (cf. 1 Tim. 6:1–2; Titus 2:9; 1 Peter 2:18),[21] all other instances of *despotan* refer to Christ or God the Father.[22] In the parallel book of Jude (v. 4), the reference is made clear:

> Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and *deny Jesus Christ* our only Sovereign and *Lord* [*despotan*].

Two truths are evident: one, Jude *is* speaking of Christ, and two, Jude *is* speaking in a redemptive context, not just of earthly deliverance from the corruption of idolatry (as Owen suggests).[23] Owen, in disputing that *despotan* refers to Jesus in 2 Peter 2:1, still affirmed that the word *Lord* is used of God,

which amounts to the same thing. The Bible also speaks of *God's* blood that was shed for our salvation (Acts 20:28),[24] and even if it technically was not, since Christ *is* God,[25] His blood is the blood of God in the same sense that the blood of Mary is the blood of the mother of God (cf. Luke 1:43). Christ's blood is the blood of the person (Jesus) who is God, and Mary was the human mother of the person (Jesus) who is God.

*As to the second point* (whether *bought* [Gk: *agorazo*] refers to Christ's redemptive work), why should the lost ones be lost unless they had denied Christ's atoning sacrifice on their behalf? Other than when it signifies the buying of physical things (cf. Matt. 13:44; 21:12), *agorazo* is almost always used redemptively in the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:1; 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:9) and *never* of socially redeeming a person from the pollution of idolatry (which is what Owen said Peter meant in verse 1). In the Revelation, John recorded:

> No one could learn the song [of redemption] except the 144,000 who had been *redeemed* from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were *purchased* from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. (14:3–4)

Consequently, in view of this predominant usage, the burden of proof rests on the extreme Calvinist to demonstrate that Peter, in this case, is not using *agorazo* in a redemptive sense.

*2 Peter 3:9*

God is love and as such, "He is not willing that *any* should perish but that all should come to repentance" (NKJV). Indeed, He "wants *all* men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Contrary to the interpretation of those who hold to limited atonement, this does not mean "all *classes* of men" (viz., "the elect from all nations"). What meaning can language truly have if *any*, *all men*, and the *whole world* (cf. 1 John 2:2) are taken to represent only "some" or "a few"?[26]

There are some who attempt to avoid the obvious impact of these verses by creating the artificial distinction that Christ died for all people *without distinction* but not all people *without exception* (Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 46). This is merely a clever euphemism of their naked claim that *all* really means "some"—a distortion, again, that they would not tolerate in verses speaking of condemnation rather than salvation, such as Romans 3:23. Further, as we shall see, there is no basis in these texts to support such an interpretation.

Others, like R. C. Sproul (b. 1939), offer the even less plausible suggestion that "God does not will that any of us (the elect) perish."[27] God the Holy Spirit is unquestionably capable of saying *some* instead of *all*, if that is what He meant. He *did not:* "All people everywhere" are called upon to repent (Acts 17:30). Is it not absolutely absurd to suggest that "all people everywhere" actually means "some people everywhere" or "some people somewhere"?

*l John 2:2*

"He [Christ] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, *and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*." It is difficult to see how anyone, without already established theology to the contrary, could come to the conclusion that this verse does not support unlimited atonement.

John Calvin (1509–1564), whose untenable claim that *world* (Gk: *kosmos*) here refers to "the Christian world" (the elect), somehow came to this eisegetical understanding: "Under the word *all* [John the apostle] does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth" (*CC*, 244). As already observed, one need only consult the generic (general, unlimited) usage of *kosmos* in John's writings to confirm that he speaks here of the fallen, sinful world (cf. John 1:10–11; 3:19).[28] In fact, John himself defines his use of *kosmos* only a few verses later:

> Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For *everything in the world*—the *cravings of sinful man*, the *lust* of his eyes and the *boasting* of what he has and does—*comes* not from the Father but *from the world*. (1 John 2:15–16)

This transparent description of fallen, sinful humanity clearly includes the non-elect for whom Christ died (v. 2). Later, John adds: "We know that we are children of God, and that *the whole world* is under the control of the evil one" (5:19). It goes far beyond the strain of one's credulity to somehow conclude that *kosmos* in 1 John 2 refers only to the elect; if that interpretation is correct, only those whom God has chosen are under the power of the devil!

The doctrine of *limited* atonement claims that all for whom Christ died will be saved.[29] However, the above passages and many others reveal, in contrast to limited atonement, that Christ *did* die for all and *not* all will be saved (e.g., cf. Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10). Therefore, it obviously follows that not all for whom Christ died will be saved, and the doctrine of limited atonement is apparently contradictory to the teaching of Scripture.

# ANSWERING ALLEGED BIBLICAL OBJECTIONS TO UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

In spite of strong and repeated New Testament emphasis that Christ died for the sins of the entire world, proponents of limited atonement offer several passages that they believe support their view. A careful contextual examination reveals that evidence is lacking.

## The Objection That Ephesians 1:4 Teaches Limited Atonement

"He *chose us* in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." The Bible also asserts that Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8 NKJV). From this it is argued that the Lamb was sacrificed only for the elect; to have died for anyone else would be a waste of His precious blood, for only the elect will be saved.

## Response

That only believers were chosen in Christ before time began does not mean Jesus did not die for everyone. As we have previously established, God knows all things beforehand (Isa. 46:10) and thus knew exactly who would believe. Peter explicitly says that we "have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:2), and Paul affirms that "those God foreknew he also predestined" (Rom. 8:29). The Atonement is limited in its *application*, but it is unlimited in its *extent*. There is nothing in Ephesians 1:4 that teaches otherwise.

## The Objection That 1 Corinthians 15:3 Teaches Limited Atonement

"What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for *our sins* according to the Scriptures" (cf. John 10:11; Rom. 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21). The point made by extreme Calvinists is that when the Bible says Christ died for someone, it is pointedly limiting His work on the cross to only that group (believers): "lays down his life for the *sheep*" (John 10:11); "he chose *us*" (Eph. 1:4). Hence, it is said that the object of Christ's death is only those who do or

will believe in Him (cf. John 20:29; Gal. 1:3–4; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18).

**Response**

Once again, few New Testament truths are more evident than that God loves the world (John 3:16), that Christ died for the sins of all (cf. 1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 2:1), and that God desires everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4–6; 2 Peter 3:9). The fact that only believers (the elect) are mentioned in some passages as the object of Christ's death does not prove the Atonement is limited.

*First*, when the Bible uses terms like *we*, *our*, or *us* when speaking of the Atonement, it speaks of those to whom it has been *applied*, not of all those for whom it was *provided*. And in so doing, Scripture does not thereby limit the potential application of the Atonement to all people.

*Second*, the fact that Jesus loves and died for the church (Eph. 5:25) does not mean that God therefore does not also love the whole world (John 3:16) and desire everyone to be part of His bride (1 Tim. 4:4–6).

*Third*, this reasoning overlooks the passages declaring that Jesus died for more than the elect (e.g., John 3:16; Rom. 5:6; 5:18–19; 2 Cor. 5:19).[30]

**The Objection That John 5:21 Teaches Limited Atonement**

"Just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so *the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it*." The inference of extreme Calvinists is that Christ gives spiritual life only to the elect, proving that the extent of the Atonement is limited (see Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 51).

**Response**

*First*, John 5:21 makes no reference to the *elect*.

*Second*, the phrase "to whom he is pleased" does not mean Jesus wants to give life only to some; if it did, it would contradict the clear teaching of other Johannine statements (e.g., John 3:16; 1 John 2:2) as well as letters from other authors (e.g., Heb. 2:9; 2 Peter 2:1). All Calvinists believe that the Bible does not contradict itself.

*Third*, if John 5:21 referred only to the elect, it would be contrary to the context *here*, since Jesus said He would raise "*all* who are in their graves" (5:28), both saved and unsaved (v. 29).

*Fourth*, and finally, even if John 5:21 *does* refer only to the elect being regenerated (since only they believe), the Atonement is not shown to be limited in extent, for God loves all (John 3:16) and desires that all be saved (Matt. 23:37). The point of the passage is not to limit Jesus' love but *to show that His resurrection power is unlimited*.

**The Objection That John 6:37 Teaches Limited Atonement**

Jesus said, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Particularists argue that this verse is mistranslated, that *whoever* means "the ones coming to Christ," namely, *only* the ones whom the Father has given Him.

**Response**

*First*, even granting this point grammatically does not establish the particularist view theologically; it would merely affirm that all of the elect will come to Christ. It says nothing about whether Christ died for more than the elect or how the elect will come to Him, i.e., whether unwillingly forced by irresistible grace or willingly (freely) by God's persuasive and effectual grace. Bernard of Clairvaux said, "If there is no free will, there is nothing to save; if there is no free grace, there is nothing with which to save" (as cited in Ellicott, *ECWB*, 6.429).

*Second*, it should be carefully noted that the text does not say Christ died only for those whom the Father gives to Him. Indeed, if it did, it would contradict John and the rest of Scripture in the affirmations that God loves the world (cf. John 3:16), that Christ died for the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29), that the Holy Spirit is convicting the world of sin (cf. John 16:7–8), and that God desires everyone in the world to be saved (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4).

*Third*, the context itself indicates that those who come to Christ will be those who believe. Verse 40 says, "My Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and *believes* in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Therefore, those whom the Father gives will believe, and all who believe will be those whom the Father gives. Again, God's Word repeatedly calls upon *all* persons, not just the elect, to believe (cf. John 3:16, 36; Acts 16:31; 17:30; etc.).

## The Objection That John 17:9 Teaches Limited Atonement

"I pray for them. *I am not praying for the world*, but for those you have given me, for they are yours." The "them" in this verse is plainly a reference to Christ's disciples (v. 6), and extreme Calvinists claim that this is an explicit *denial* by Jesus Himself that He prayed for the "world" of unbelievers. If true, this would support the argument that the Atonement is limited to the elect (the only ones for whom Christ prayed), for if He had prayed for *more* (or even *all*), then *more* (or all) would have been saved, since God would not reject the prayer of His own Son.

## Response

*First*, that Christ prayed only for the elect in this passage doesn't prove that He never prayed for the non-elect. If, as even extreme Calvinists accept, Jesus could have received negative answers to His prayers (cf. Gill, *CGT*, 1.87–88, 2.77), why would John 17:9 demonstrate by necessity that He didn't also pray for those who would not believe? John himself later implies that the biblical authors recorded only a fraction of the things that Jesus did (21:25).

*Second*, there *is* recorded evidence that Christ prayed for non-elect persons; for instance, His request that His Father "forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34 KJV) could have included such people. Further, Luke includes Jesus' indirect prayer for the world, in which He directs us to "pray [that] the Lord of the harvest [will] send out laborers into His harvest" (10:2 NKJV), even though He knew that not all would be saved (Matt. 13:28–30).

*Third*, even if Jesus did *not* pray for the non-elect, other New Testament passages reveal that Paul did, and he exhorted us to do the same: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (Rom. 10:1).[31] "I urge … that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made *for everyone*" (1 Tim. 2:1).[32]

*Fourth*, and finally, Christ's praying or not praying for the non-elect does not nullify His love for them or His death for their sins. His specific prayer for those who *would* become believers (v. 20) no more demonstrates that He doesn't love the world than my saying "I pray daily for my children" proves that I don't love the world's children. My own have a special place in my prayers, just as Christ's disciples had a special place in His. *The important truth is that God wants everyone to become His child* (cf. Matt. 23:39; 1 Tim. 2:4–6; 2 Peter 3:9).

## The Objection That Ephesians 5:25 Teaches Limited Atonement

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The focus of Christ's love in this passage is the church, not the "unchurched"; Paul does not say that Christ loved "the world" and gave Himself up for her.

## Response

Christ loves the church—no argument there. However, this fact does not conversely demonstrate that He *doesn't* love the world. For one logical instance, that I love my children does not mean I don't love children who are not mine; "I love my children and would die for them" puts specific focus on my love for them, but it doesn't mean I wouldn't help save the lives of other children.[33]

In addition, Christ's bride—the church—is a corpus of all persons who accept Him (John 1:12) and are baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). The door of the true church is open to all who will enter and join themselves to this special group that experiences His special love: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' *Whoever* is thirsty, let him come; and *whoever* wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev. 22:17).

## The Objection That Romans 5:15 Teaches Limited Atonement

> If the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to *the many*! … Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man *the many* will be made righteous, (vv. 15, 19)

Extreme Calvinists argue that in both cases the benefit of Christ's death is only for "the many" [the elect], not for "all" (cf. Heb. 9:28).

## Response

As we have seen, it is noteworthy that the term *many* in Romans 5 is used in contrast with *one* (Adam or Christ) rather than in contrast to *all*. The fact that *many* is *interchangeable* with *all* is evident because:

(1) The term *all* is used *in this same passage* (vv. 12, 18) as interchangeable with *many*;
(2) On one occasion the two terms refer to the same thing—the "many died" in verse 15 refers to the same thing as the death came to "all men" in verse 12;
(3) The contrast is between "one" and "all" (v. 18), Just as it is between "one" and "many" (v. 19).
(4) If *many* means only "some" (as in *limited* atonement), then only some people, not all, are condemned because of Adam's sin (v. 19). Yet all true Calvinists believe in the universality of sin. By the same logic, with the same word, in the same verse, they should likewise believe in the universal extent of the Atonement.[34]

**The Objection That Mark 10:45 Teaches Limited Atonement**

"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as *a ransom for many.*"[35] Extreme Calvinists insist that, logically, if Christ died for all, then all should be saved, for if Christ's death substituted for the sins of all, then the debt is paid, and all are free. The Bible teaches that not all will be saved;[36] therefore, extreme Calvinists argue that Christ, in Mark 10:45, said "many" to signify that His death would not be a substitutionary ransom for the sins of *all* humankind.

**Response**

*First*, the conclusion that Christ did not offer Himself for everyone is not really an exposition of these passages (which say nothing about the Atonement being limited) but rather a speculative inference.

*Second*, the inference is not logically necessary. That a benefactor purchases a gift and offers it freely does not mean the intended receiver *must* receive it. Similarly, that Christ paid for our sins does not mean we must accept the forgiveness that was bought by His blood.

*Third*, as with Romans 5 (see above), the word *many* is inclusive: It is *many* as opposed to *few*, not *many* in contrast to *all*. Jesus said, "*Many* [all] are called but *few* chosen" (Matt. 20:16 NKJV).

*Fourth*, and finally, that Christ's death made everyone *savable* does not thereby mean everyone is *saved*. The sacrifice for all made salvation *possible* but

not *actual*—we receive justification by faith.[37] This is not difficult to understand: Even though the elect were chosen in Christ before creation (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4), they were not positionally saved until they were regenerated and justified. Before the chronological moment of regeneration, the elect were not *saved* but *savable*. Once again, salvation can be *provided* for all without its being *applied* to all. Jesus placed the Bread of Life on the world's table, even though not everyone wills to be made full, and the Water of Life is flowing for "*whoever*" will drink (John 4:14), even though many refuse to quench their thirst.

## The Objection That Romans 9:11–13 Teaches Limited Atonement

> Before the twins [Jacob and Esau] were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls—she [Rebekah] was told, "The older will serve the younger." Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

This passage appears to say that God not only loves the elect but that He hates the non-elect.

## Response

We have already addressed this passage in regard to God's omnibenevolence,[38] and few verses are more misused by extreme Calvinists (especially those who hold to double-predestination).[39]

*First*, again, God is not speaking about the *individual* Jacob but the *nation* of Jacob (Israel). In Genesis, when the prophecy was given (25:23 NKJV), Rebekah was told, "Two *nations* are in your womb, two *peoples* shall be separated from your body … and the older shall serve the younger." The reference is not to individual election but to the corporate election of the chosen nation (Israel).

*Second*, despite the corporate election of the Israelite nation, each individual had to accept the Messiah, by faith, to receive God's salvation (cf. Rom. 11:20). Paul said, "I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of *my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel*" (Rom. 9:3–4; cf. 10:1).

*Third*, God's "love" for Jacob and "hate" for Esau is directed to the *nations* of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). What is more, Paul, in Romans 9:13, is speaking of them not before they were born (c. 2000 B.C.) but long after they lived—the citation is not from Genesis but from Malachi 1:2–3 (c. 400 B.C.).

The deeds of the evil Edomites, perpetrated upon the Israelites, are well documented (e.g., Numbers 20), and even though it was for these actions that God "hated" them as a nation, Scripture does not teach that no Edomites would be saved. In fact, the Bible says there were believers from both Edom (cf. Amos 9:12) and the neighboring country of Moab (cf. Ruth 1), as there will be people in heaven from *every* tribe, kindred, nation, and tongue (Rev. 7:9).

*Fourth*, the word translated into English as *hated* means "loved less."[40] To reillustrate, Scripture says that Jacob "*loved also Rachel more than Leah*.… And when the LORD saw that *Leah was hated*…" (Gen. 29:30–31 KJV).[41] Similarly, Jesus said, "If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother … he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).[42] A parallel idea is expressed in Matthew 10:37: "Anyone who *loves* his father or mother *more than* me is not worthy of me."

*Fifth*, and finally, the statement "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy" (Rom. 9:15; cf. Ex. 33:19) should be understood as intensive, not limiting. That is, the emphasis is on the intensity of the merciful action, not on the limits of its object. Clearly God loves all (cf. John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4) and even "bore with great patience the objects of his wrath" (Rom. 9:22), waiting for them to repent (2 Peter 3:9).

Romans 9, then, does not teach that God hates the non-elect (or even that He does not love them) but instead that His love for those who do receive salvation is so amazing—so splendid, so magnificent—that His love for those who reject it looks like hatred by comparison.

The same loving stroke that makes a kitten purr seems like an expression of hatred if she turns the opposite direction and finds that her fur is being rubbed the wrong way. God's *expressed* love is the same for both believer and unbeliever: The believer is already experiencing God's love, while the Lord is patiently waiting for the unbeliever to repent (i.e., to turn his life in the right direction—toward Him) so that he can experience it as well.

"God is love" (1 John 4:16), and, as extensively demonstrated, while love can *morally* constrain (2 Cor. 5:14), it cannot *physically* compel. Love operates persuasively but never coercively. Once again, "forced love" is a contradiction in terms—forced love is not love, but assault. As I have said elsewhere, there are no shotgun weddings in heaven, and God is not a "Cosmic B. F. Skinner" who behaviorally modifies unwilling humans. If He *could* do so without violating both His integrity and the freedom He has given us, then everyone *would* be saved (2 Peter 3:9).[43]

## The Objection That 1 Corinthians 15:22 Teaches Limited Atonement

"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive." Some extreme Calvinists claim that *all* in this case must mean only the elect:

> Although it is clear that every person in the world died in Adam (Rom. 5:12), *it is equally clear that everybody in the world has not died in Christ*. There are many people who have not been crucified in Christ. They hate Him. (Palmer, *FPC*, 53, emphasis added)

Somehow, "*all* will be made alive" is supposed to support limited atonement.

## Response

There are at least three reasons why 1 Corinthians 15:22 does not teach that the extent of the Atonement is limited.

*First, all* means "all." *All* does not mean "some."[44]

*Second*, there is a tight logical connection between the two *alls* in this verse, and it is generally acknowledged that the first *all* means "all fallen human beings."

*Third*, the text is not even speaking about salvation but about the resurrection of everyone ("*all* will be made alive"). Some are resurrected to salvation, and some are raised to condemnation. As Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.… Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when *all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out*—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (John 5:25, 28–29)

Introduced by these words, it could not be more clear that 1 Corinthians 15:22 is speaking of resurrection:

> Christ has indeed been *raised from the dead*, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, *the resurrection of the dead* comes also through a man. (vv. 20–21).[45]

## The Objection That 1 Peter 3:18 and 2:24 Teach Limited Atonement

> *Christ died for sins* once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.… He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

This implies a substitutionary atonement, and, as stated above, many limited atonement advocates insist that if Christ was substituted for all, then all must be saved. Since *all* Calvinists believe that only some, not all, will be saved, it follows for *extreme* Calvinists that Christ must have died only for the elect (see McGregor, *NPS*, 149ff). They often point to *The Nature of the Atonement*, by John McLeod Campbell (1800–1872), as a demonstration of the incompatibility of universal and substitutionary atonement.[46]

**Response**

Because of its view of substitution, this objection is a form of special pleading.[47] *Of course* everyone for whom Christ is substituted will be saved *if* the application of substitution is automatic, but it need not be. A penalty can be paid without the payment taking effect, just as a prisoner can be offered a governor's pardon yet refuse to accept it, or a bankrupt man be offered money to pay his creditors and decline to receive it. Again, those (like me) who adhere to substitutionary atonement but reject limited atonement believe that Christ's sacrifice for the sins of all humankind did not automatically save anyone but rather made them savable. It did not release God's saving grace into anyone's life but satisfied (propitiated) God on their behalf (1 John 2:2), awaiting their faith to receive the unconditional gift of salvation made possible by Christ's atoning work.[48]

# THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

In addition to the extensive biblical support, *unlimited* atonement is also based firmly in the attributes of God, especially His omnibenevolence. The Bible affirms that He is all-loving, and since whoever is all-loving must love all, God must love all. *Limited* atonement (in general) claims that God loves *only* the elect salvifically, and double-predestination[49] maintains that He not only doesn't love but actually hates the non-elect. Hence, *God's omnibenevolence excludes limited atonement*.

**The Biblical Basis for God's Omnibenevolence**

The biblical foundation for God's omnibenevolence is extensive.[50] The following is only a selection of texts.

"God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Rom. 5:8).

"*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ*?… I am convinced that neither death nor life … nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:35, 38–39).

"*Christ's love* compels us, because we are convinced that *one died for all*, and therefore all died" (2 Cor. 5:14).

"When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, *he saved us*, not because of righteous things we had done, but *because of his mercy*" (Titus 3:4).

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Whoever does not love does not know God, because *God is love*.… This is love: not that we loved God, but that *he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*" (1 John 4:7–8, 10).

## The Theological Basis for God's Omnibenevolence[51]

God's love is a moral attribute, but the fact that He is omnibenevolent follows from several of His metaphysical attributes. The above verses amply demonstrate that love is not only a characteristic of God but that He is *all*-loving.

### *God's Infinity Implies Omnibenevolence*

God is infinite in His essence,[52] and as love is of the essence of God (1 John 4:16), He is *infinite* love. His love can no more be limited than can His nature, which is unlimited.

### *God's Simplicity Implies Omnibenevolence*

God is simple (indivisible, without parts) in His essence;[53] therefore, God cannot be partly anything. Whatever a simple Being is, it is that wholly and completely. God, then, is wholly and completely loving, for love is of His simple essence.

### *God's Necessity Implies Omnibenevolence*

God's necessity[54] implies His omnibenevolence as well. A necessary Being is what it is by necessity, and as God is love, God *necessarily* is love. It is impossible for God *not* to love, for love is of His very essence.

In summary, both biblical and theological evidence clearly show that God is all-loving; consequently, He must love all. Because anything else would be contrary to His very nature, God's omnibenevolence is contrary to the doctrine of limited atonement.

# ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO GOD'S OMNIBENEVOLENCE[55]

### Objection One—Based on the Argument That Necessary Love Is Contradictory

Love is a free act flowing from free will. Since forced love is contradictory, it is said that love cannot flow from the essence of God to all human beings, because His essence is necessary. Consequently, the argument goes, it cannot be of the essence of God to love everyone, for then God would be forced to love, which is untenable. Stated another way, God loves because He wants (chooses, wills) to love when and whom He desires, not because He must. Isn't unlimited atonement, then, in opposition to the very nature of God as love?

### Response to Objection One

Once again, love and *necessity* are not contradictory, but love and *compulsion* are. While it is necessary, then, that God loves all, it is also necessary that He loves *freely*. God's will is completely in accord with His nature; thus, His freely chosen love for all persons is in harmony with His necessary, unchanging nature. There is no conflict with God's love being both necessary and free.

### Objection Two—Based on God's Unique Love for the Elect

Those who deny unlimited atonement claim that God does not salvifically love all people, pointing to His special love for the elect (e.g., Eph. 1:4; 5:25; 1 Cor. 15:3; John 10:11).

## Response to Objection Two

In reply, we have already demonstrated that Christ's unique love for His bride does not negate His love for everyone else. Indeed, He desires all to be part of His bride, the church.

Further, as previously established, when the Bible speaks of those to whom the Atonement has been *applied*, it does not thereby limit the Atonement's possible application for all for whom it was *provided*.

What is more, again, that Jesus loves His bride and died for her does not mean He hates those who have not yet believed.

## Objection Three—Based on the Idea That Unlimited Atonement Necessarily Leads to Universalism

If an all-powerful Being can do whatever He wants to do,[56] and if a sovereign God is in control of all things,[57] then His will cannot be thwarted: He accomplishes whatever He purposes to do (Isa. 55:11). If God can accomplish whatever He desires, and if God desires to save all, then doesn't it follow that all will be saved (universalism)?

## Response to Objection Three

Even though God's *ultimate* will is always accomplished, His *immediate* will is not. God wills some things conditionally and some unconditionally: Our justification is willed on the condition of our acceptance of His gift (John 1:12; Rom. 3:25; Matt. 23:37).[58] God does not desire that anyone perish, wanting all to repent (2 Peter 3:9); nevertheless, not all *will* repent and, hence, not all will be saved (cf. Matt. 23:37).

In addition, God's omnipotence does *not* mean that He can do everything. As we have already noted, He cannot do what is contradictory, and He cannot go against His own nature (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13). God, in accordance with His own self, cannot force someone to love Him; while He is all-powerful, He exercises His power in accordance with His love. Unlimited atonement need not lead to universalism.[59]

## Objection Four—Based on God Having Unused Power

Extreme Calvinists still insist that God does not have to exercise love toward everyone just because He is omnibenevolent any more than He must exercise His power toward everyone just because He is omnipotent. God, allegedly, can have more love than He displays, just as He has more power than He applies.

### Response to Objection Four

Again, *love is a moral attribute of God; power is nonmoral*. Moral attributes, because they are moral, bind God to act in a certain way. Nonmoral attributes do not, and the confusion of the two is a category mistake.[60]

Furthermore, as stated previously, it is inconsistent to hold (as extreme Calvinists do) that even though God must always act justly because He is all just, He need not always act lovingly because He is all-loving. If this *were* the case, God's justice would not obligate Him to condemn all sin. But *it does*, just as His omnibenevolence compels Him to love all sinners. Love is as essential to God as justice, and whatever attribute He has, He must have completely, necessarily, and infinitely.

### Objection Five—Based on What Sinners Deserve

We are saved by God's grace, but grace isn't deserved by any sinner—*justice* demands that sin be condemned. Therefore, the doctrine of unlimited atonement, which maintains that God must love all, seems to be contrary to the doctrine of total depravity, which affirms that all human beings deserve God's condemnation.[61]

### Response to Objection Five

It is true that nothing *in any sinner* deserves or merits God's love. This is not the point; the point is that there is something *in God* that prompts His desire to save all sinners—His infinite love. God wants to save us because He is naturally (essentially, necessarily, unarbitrarily) all-loving, not because we have earned salvation or even His passion for our salvation (we haven't).

## ESSENTIALISM VS. VOLUNTARISM

A second theological reason for rejecting limited atonement is its basis on the premise of theological voluntarism. There are two primary views of the relationship between God's nature and God's will: divine voluntarism and divine essentialism. *Voluntarism*, in which the doctrine of limited atonement is rooted, insists that *something is right because God wills it*; that is, God decides something is right, and *then* it is right. *Essentialism*, on the other hand, declares that *God wills something because it is right*; that is, it is *already* in accord with His unchanging nature. Divine voluntarism is without philosophical (rational), biblical, or practical foundation.

**Philosophical Arguments for Divine Essentialism**

Traditional theists maintain that God is unchangeable in His nature ("morally immutable").[62] Thomas Aquinas offered three basic arguments for God's immutability.

*The Argument From God's Pure Actuality*

The first argument for God's unchangeability is based on the fact that a Being of *pure actuality* ("I AM-ness") *has no potentiality*.,[63] Only that which has potentiality can change. Accordingly, God cannot change (Ex. 3:14), for He, as Pure Actuality, has no potential to actualize through change.

*The Argument From God's Perfection*

The second argument for God's unchangeability stems from His absolute perfection.[64] Whatever changes acquires something new; God cannot acquire anything new, since He is, by His very nature, absolutely perfect (there is no way in which He could be better or improved). If God lacked any perfection, He would not be God, for to gain a new perfection is to have lacked it.

*The Argument From God's Simplicity*

The third argument for God's unchangeability follows from His simplicity.[65] Everything that changes is composed of what does change and what does not change, but there can be no composition in an absolutely simple Being. Hence, God cannot change.

If everything about a being changed, it would no longer be the same being. In fact, that would not be change at all but the annihilation of one thing and the re-

creation of something entirely new. If in every change something remains the same and something does not, the something that changes must be composed of these two elements. Since God, an absolutely simple Being, cannot have two elements, He cannot change.

## Biblical Arguments for Divine Essentialism

The scriptural passages that support theistic essentialism are those that declare God to be unchangeable in His nature.[66]

### *Old Testament Evidence of God's Moral Immutability*

The psalmist declared:

> In the beginning you [Lord] laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (102:25–27)

First Samuel 15:29 affirms, "He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." God confirmed, through the prophet, "I the Lord do not change" (Mal. 3:6).

### *New Testament Evidence of God's Moral Immutability*

The New Testament is equally strong about God's unchangeable nature. Hebrews 1:10–12 quotes Psalm 102 in confirmation. A few chapters later the author promises, "It is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). Paul adds, in Titus 1:2, "God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time." James (1:17) assures, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

If God's will is subject to His nature, and if God is unchangeable in His nature, then whatever God wills must be good and right in accordance with (and never contrary to) this nature. Consequently, divine essentialism must be correct.

## Practical Arguments for Divine Essentialism

Two practical arguments in favor of divine essentialism are (1) the need for moral stability and (2) the moral repugnance of voluntarism. These are supported by what we experience of God's trustworthiness and the scriptural testimony that God can be relied upon not to change.

*The Argument From the Need for Moral Stability*

If all moral principles were based on God's changing will, there would be no moral security. How could one be committed to something if there was always the possibility that the rules might be altered? Indeed, how could we love and serve God if He could will, for instance, that our ultimate good was not to love Him but to hate Him?

*The Argument From Moral Repugnance*

Divine essentialists insist that it is morally repugnant to assume, as voluntarists do, that God could change His will on whether love is essentially good and decide instead that hate become a universal moral obligation. It is difficult to conceive how a morally perfect Being could arbitrarily determine that rape, injustice, or genocide are morally right. Since it is morally repugnant for us, made in God's image, to imagine such a change in His will, how much more must it be for the God in whose image we are made?

*God's Trustworthiness*

The Bible presents God as eminently trustworthy: When He makes an unconditional promise, He never fails to keep it (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; Heb. 6:16–18). Indeed, the gifts and callings of God are without the possibility of His changing His mind (Rom. 11:29); God is not a man (1 Sam. 15:29), and He can always be counted on to keep His word (Isa. 55:11). This absolute reliability would not be possible if God could change His will at any time about anything. What makes God morally bound to keep His word is His unchangeable nature; otherwise, He could decide at any moment, for example, to send all believers to hell, or to reward the wicked for murder and cruelty. Such a God would not be trustworthy; *the God of the Bible is unchangeably good*.

**Objections to Divine Essentialism**

Voluntaristic arguments against essentialism, such as those put forward by William of Ockham (c. 1285–c. 1349), chiefly center on the supremacy of God:

(1) Either God wills something because it is right (essentialism), or else something is right because God wills it (voluntarism).
(2) If He wills something because it is right (essentialism), then God is not

supreme, because there is something outside Him to which He is subject.
(3) Hence, something is right because God wills it (voluntarism).

There are at least two problems with this argument.

First of all, the first premise presents a false dilemma. It need not be "either/or"; it could be "both/and." That is, if moral principles flow from the will of God as rooted in the nature of God, then a voluntaristic conclusion does not follow.

Also, the second premise wrongly assumes that the supreme ethical standard to which God's will is subject is "outside" of God. If it is "inside" God—if the standard is His *own* supreme moral nature—the dilemma vanishes.

In conclusion, extreme Calvinism's view of limited atonement is clearly based on a form of voluntarism,[67] a belief without rational, biblical, or practical foundation. God cannot change in His nature, so whatever He wills must be in accord with His immutable nature. Since His nature is to love all whom He creates, He cannot limit His salvific desire to only some.

**Irresistible Grace Plus Omnibenevolence Equals Universalism**

Another serious theological problem for adherents to limited atonement is their view of irresistible grace, for they hold the following premises:

(1) God can do anything He wills, including saving all He wills to save;
(2) God wills only to save some people (the elect), not all people.

There is only one logical conclusion:

(1) God is not all-loving. That is, He does not love everyone.

The problem can be restated as follows:

(1) If God is all-powerful, He *could* save all persons.
(2) If God is all-loving, He *would* save all persons.
(3) All persons will not be saved.
(4) Therefore, God is either not all-powerful or He is not all-loving.
(5) God *is* all-powerful.
(6) Thus, God is not all-loving.

If, on the one hand, an all-powerful God *can* save all but *will not* save all, then He does not love all. In this case, irresistible grace—exercised only on some, when it could be used on all—is a denial of God's omnibenevolence. If, on the other hand, God is all-powerful, *including* the ability to irresistibly overrule people's will in order to save them, *and* He is all-loving in that He wants to save all people, then irresistible grace creates universal salvation. Therefore, *the paradigm of extreme Calvinism, when held to consistency, either leads to the denial of an all-loving God or to the affirmation of universalism*.[68]

**Limited Atonement and Irresistible Grace Deny Free Will**

Further, the doctrine of limited atonement is a rejection of God-given freedom. Because in this life free will for human beings entails the power of contrary choice,[69] even an all-powerful God cannot force someone to act contrary to free choice. Forced liberty is an absurd notion, and irresistible grace on the unwilling is precisely that—contrary to the freedom God bestowed upon His human creatures.

To put it another way, since even an omnipotent Being cannot do what is contradictory, God cannot exercise irresistible grace on the unwilling. The only solution that preserves *irresistible* or *persuasive* grace is to hold that God exerts it only upon the willing.[70] In this view, God can exercise *persuasive* grace on everyone, and only those willing to accept it will be saved. This would eliminate the possibility of universalism—since God can love all without everyone willingly receiving His unlimited love—*and* uphold the omnipotence and omnibenevolence of God, something unattainable for proponents of limited atonement.

Irresistible grace is contrary to human free will *and* to divine omnibenevolence. The heart of freedom is self-determination,[71] and it is contrary to self-determination to have its actions determined (caused) by another being. Hence, if humans are free, then God, who *gave* them freedom, cannot exercise irresistible grace on them contrary to their will. This is precisely the result of extreme Calvinism's "irresistible grace on the unwilling."

# THEOLOGICAL QUERIES POSED BY

# DEFENDERS OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

## Spurgeon's Argument

Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) defended limited atonement by his insistence that it is the *opponent* who limits the Atonement: *First*, adherents to unlimited atonement do not believe that Christ died so as to secure the salvation of all, and *second*, they do not believe that Christ died to secure the salvation of any person in particular. Spurgeon then went on to boast that those who believe in limited atonement believe that Christ died for "multitudes [the elect] that no man can number" (cited by Steele and Thomas, *FPC*, 40).

In response, this inverted rationalization is an unfortunate illustration of Spurgeon's eloquence gone to seed: Only an upside-down logic could force anyone to think twice about the idea that limited atonement is more unlimited than unlimited atonement! The first assertion—that unlimited atonement doesn't teach Christ's death as securing the salvation of all—diverts the issue. It isn't a question of *securing* the salvation of all (as in universalism) but of *providing* salvation for all and *securing* it for the elect (as in moderate Calvinism and Arminianism). It is extreme Calvinism that maintains Christ died to *provide* and to *secure* the salvation *only* of the elect. Spurgeon, then, gave the right answer to the wrong question.

As to the second point—that unlimited atonement doesn't teach that Christ died to secure the salvation of any specific person—Spurgeon gives the wrong answer to the right question. Both moderate Calvinist and classical Arminian opponents of limited atonement believe that Christ *did* die to secure the salvation of the elect and that God foreknew, from all eternity, exactly who they would be.

## Sproul's Argument

R. C. Sproul, another defender of limited atonement, believes the opposition is trapped by asking: "For whom was the atonement *designed*?" (*CG*, 205). If it was intended for *all*, as in unlimited atonement, then why are not all saved? How can a sovereign God's intention be thwarted? If it was intended for only *some* (the elect), then limited atonement is correct. The dilemma can be stated as such:

(1) Either the Atonement was intended for all or only for some (the elect).
(2) If the Atonement was intended for all, then all will be saved (since God's

sovereign intentions will come to pass).

(3) If the Atonement was not intended for all, then it was intended only for some (the elect).

(4) Therefore, either universalism is true or limited atonement is true.

Therein lies the *trap:* Both moderate Calvinists and traditional Arminians deny universalism; therefore, they would seem by this logic to be driven to accept limited atonement.

In response, the first premise (*either* the Atonement was intended for all *or* only for some) is another false dilemma. As already stated, there is a third alternative: Christ's sacrifice was intended both to *provide* salvation for all and to *procure* salvation for all who believe. The false dilemma wrongly assumes that there could only have been one intention for the Atonement. The denial that God desires the salvation of all whom He has created is a grave error.

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR AN UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

With one significant exception,[72] the orthodox fathers of the Christian church have given unanimous support for the saving love of God for all human beings.

**Early Fathers**

*Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)*

"The whole human race will be found to be under a curse.… The Father of all wished His Christ, for the whole human family, to take upon Him the curses of all" (as cited in Bercot, *DECB*, 42).

*Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

"He endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. For He is a most holy and merciful Lord, and He loves the human race" (in ibid., 43). "In the last times, the Son was made a man among men, and He re-formed the human race" (in ibid.).

*Origen (c. 185–c. 254)*

"He takes away sin until every enemy will be destroyed and death last of all

—in order that the whole world may be free from sin" (in ibid., 45).

## Medieval Fathers

### *Early Augustine (354–430)*

> There is, then, no natural efficient cause or, if I may be allowed the expression, no essential cause, of the evil will, since itself is the origin of evil in mutable spirits, by which the good of their nature is diminished and corrupted; and the will is made evil by nothing else than defection from God—a defection of which the cause, too, is certainly deficient. (*CG*, 12.9)

"*God no doubt wishes all men to be saved* and to come into the knowledge of the truth" (*OSL*, 57, emphasis added). Again,

> If, indeed, it has happened that some are removed from the influence of this clearest light of truth, whose blindness requires its illumination, yet even to them, *we doubt not*, the same grace will find its steady way, however late, by *the merciful favour of that God "who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth*" (*OPP*, 48, xxiv, emphasis added).

### *Later Augustine*

Working from his belief that infants could be saved and that donatist schismatics could be forced to believe against their free will, Augustine drew out the logic of these positions in his later views, laid forth in the following quotations.[73]

" 'He wills all men to be saved,' is so said that all the predestined may be understood by it, because every kind of man is among them" (*ORG*, 44).

> Accordingly, when we hear and read in Scripture that He "will have all men to be saved," although we know well that all men are not saved, we are not on that account to restrict the omnipotence of God, but are rather to understand the Scripture, "Who will have all men to be saved," as meaning that *no man is saved unless God wills his salvation: not that there is no man whose salvation He does not will, but that no man is saved apart from His will*; and that, therefore, we should pray Him to will our salvation, because if He will it, it must necessarily be accomplished. (*E*, 103, emphasis added; cf. 97)
>
> Our Lord says plainly, however, in the Gospel, when upbraiding the impious city: "How often would I have gathered thy children together; even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" *as if the will of God had been overcome by the will of men*.… But even though she was unwilling, *He gathered together as many of her children as He wished: for He does not will some things and do them, and will others and do them not*; but "He hath done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth" (ibid., 97, emphasis added).

### *Contrasting the Early and Later Augustine*[74]

There are many contrasts between the early Augustine and the later Augustine that bear on the origin of extreme Calvinism. The essential differences can be

summarized as follows:

| Early Augustine | Later Augustine |
|---|---|
| God wills all to be saved | God wills only some to be saved |
| God never compels free will | God compels free will |
| God loves all | God loves only some |
| Saving faith is not a special gift to some | Saving faith is a special gift to only some |
| Fallen people can receive salvation | Fallen people cannot receive salvation |

Problematically, the later position of Augustine involves a denial of human freedom. As he himself stated earlier, "*He that is willing is free from compulsion*" (*TSAM*, 10.14, emphasis added). Again, "*God does not work out salvation in us as if he were working in insensate stones, or in creatures in whom nature has placed neither reason nor will" (OFW*, 2.6, emphasis added). He added insightfully, "*We may not so defend grace as to seem to take away free will, or, on the other hand, so assert free will as to be judged ungrateful to the grace of God*, in our arrogant impiety" (ibid., 2.29, emphasis added).

*Anselm (1033–1109)*

> Moreover, you have clearly shown the life of this man [Jesus] to have been so excellent and so glorious as to make ample satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and even infinitely more. It now, therefore, remains to be shown how that payment is made to God for the sins of men. (*CDH*, II.XVIII)

*Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> Christ, suffering in loving and obedient spirit, offered more to God than was demanded in recompense for all the sins of mankind.… Christ's passion, then, was not only sufficient but superabundant for the sins of mankind; as John says, "he is a propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for those of the whole world" (*ST*, 3a.48, 2).

## Reformation Leaders

There is a break, beginning with the Reformers, from the almost unanimous view of unlimited atonement. Nevertheless, it is significant that the "Father of Calvinism" himself was not a Calvinist on the doctrine of limited atonement. As we shall see, John Calvin made unequivocal statements that Christ died for the

sins of the whole human race. Rarely do other statements conflict with these emphatic pronouncements, and when they do, they can usually be understood as references to the application of the Atonement to the elect rather than the extent of the Atonement for all people.

### *Calvin: Christ's Blood Expiated (Satisfied) God for All the Sins of the World*

> This is our liberty, this our glorying against death, that our sins are not imputed to us. He says that this redemption was procured by the blood of Christ, for *by the sacrifice of His death all the sins of the world have been expiated*. (*CC*, on Col. 1:15)[75]

### *Calvin: Christ Provided Salvation for All Humanity*

> We must now see in what ways we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which *he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race* is of the least benefit to us. (*ICR*, 3.1.1)

### *Calvin: The "Many" for Whom Christ Died Is Everyone*

> We should note, however, that Paul does not here contrast the larger number with the many, for *he is not speaking of the great number of mankind*, but he argues that since the sin of Adam has destroyed many [all], *the righteousness of Christ will be no less effective for the salvation of many [all]*. (*CC*, on Rom. 5:15)

### *Calvin: The Guilt of the Whole World Was Laid on Christ*

> 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" (ibid., on Isa. 53:12).

### *Calvin: The "Many" Is the Whole Human Race*

> Mark 14:24 [says,] "This is my blood." I have already warned, when the blood is said to be poured out (as in Matthew) for the remission of sins, how in these words we are directed to the sacrifice of Christ's death, and to neglect this thought makes any due celebration of the Supper impossible. In no other way can faithful souls be satisfied, if they cannot believe that God is pleased in their regard. *The word "many" does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race:* he contrasts "many" with "one," as if to say that he would not be the Redeemer of one man, but would meet death to deliver many of their cursed guilt. *It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world. (EPG*, IX.5)

### *Calvin: Salvation Is Limited in Its Effect, Not in Its Offer*

If it is so (you will say), little faith can be put in the Gospel promises, which, in testifying concerning the will of God, declare that he wills what is contrary to his inviolable decree. Not at all; for *however universal the promises of salvation may be*, there is no discrepancy between them and the predestination of the reprobate, provided we attend to their effect. We know that *the promises are effectual only when we receive them in faith*, but, on the contrary, when faith is made void, the promise is of no effect. (*ICR*, 3.24.17)

## *Calvin: Christ's Death Is Applied Only to the Righteous (by Faith)*

Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him. And although it is true that *we obtain this by faith*, yet since we see that *all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel*, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings, (ibid., 3.1.1)

## *Calvin: Salvation Is Applied Only to Those Who Believe*

The apostle indicates that the fruits of it do not come to any but to those who are obedient. In saying this he commends faith to us, for neither He nor His benefits become ours unless, and in so far as, we accept them and Him by faith. At the same time he has inserted the universal term "to all" to show that no one is excluded from this salvation who proves to be attentive and obedient to the Gospel of Christ. (*CC*, on Heb. 5:9)

## *Calvin: Even the Lost Were Purchased by Christ's Blood*

"It is no small matter to have the souls perish who were bought by the blood of Christ" (*MG*, 83).

## *Calvin: No One Is Barred From Salvation*

[Paul] had commanded Timothy that prayers should be regularly offered up in the church for kings and princes; but as it seemed somewhat absurd that prayer should be offered up for a class of men who were almost hopeless (all of them being not only aliens from the body of Christ, but doing their utmost to overthrow his kingdom), he adds, that it was acceptable to God, who *will have all men to be saved*. By this he assuredly means nothing more than that the way of salvation was not shut against any order of men; that, on the contrary, *he had manifested his mercy in such a way, that he would have none debarred from it*. (*ICR*, 3.24.16)

## *Calvin: Christ Suffered for the Sins of the World*

"I would they were even cut off." [Paul's] indignation increases and he prays for destruction on the imposters by whom the Galatians had been deceived. The word "cut off" seems to allude to the circumcision which they were pressing for. Chrysostom inclines to this view: "They tear the Church for the sake of circumcision; I wish they were cut off entirely." But such a curse does not seem to fit the mildness of an apostle, who ought to wish that all should be saved and therefore that not one should perish. I reply that this is true when we have men in mind; for *God commends to us the salvation of all*

*men without exception, even as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world*. (*CC*, on Gal. 5:12)

When he says "the sin of the world," *he extends this kindness indiscriminately to the whole human race*, that the Jews might not think the Redeemer has been sent to them alone. From this we infer that the whole world is bound in the same condemnation; and that since all men without exception are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they have need of reconciliation, (ibid., on John 1:29)

### *Calvin: Unbelief Is the Reason That Some Do Not Receive the Benefits of Christ's Death*

Paul makes [the revelation of God's] grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although *Christ suffered for the sins of the world*, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, *yet not all receive Him*. (ibid., on Rom. 5:18)

To bear the sins means to free those who have sinned from their guilt by his satisfaction. *He says "many" meaning "all," as in Rom. 5:15*. It is of course certain that not all enjoy the fruits of Christ's death, but this happens because their unbelief hinders them, (ibid., on Heb. 9:28)

### *Calvin: Only Believers Enjoy the Benefit of Salvation*

"I am come a light into the world." The universal particle seems to have been put in deliberately, partly that *all believers without exception might enjoy this benefit* in common and partly to show that unbelievers perish in darkness *because they flee from the light of their own accord*, (ibid., on John 12:46)

### *Calvin: Universalism Is Untenable (Salvation Is Not Applied to All)*

[John] put this in for amplification, that believers might be convinced that *the expiation made by Christ extends to all who by faith embrace the Gospel*. But here the question may be asked as to how the sins of the whole world have been expiated. I pass over the dreams of the fanatics, who make this a reason to extend salvation to all the reprobate and even to Satan himself. Such a monstrous idea is not worth refuting. Those who want to avoid this absurdity have said that *Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world but effectively only for the elect*. This solution has commonly prevailed in the schools. Although *I allow the truth of this*, I deny that it fits this passage.[76]

### *Calvin: Christ's "Blood" Received in Communion Is Not for Unbelievers*

"How can the wicked drink Christ's blood 'which was not shed to expiate their sins' and Christ's flesh 'which was not crucified for them'?" (*TT*, 285).[77]

In short, for Calvin, the Atonement is unlimited in *extent* and limited in *application* (to those who believe). Christ died for all, but only the elect will receive salvation.

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *Philip Schaff (1819–1893)*

This is in harmony with the whole spirit and aim of this Epistle [Romans]. It is easier to make it prove a system of conditional universalism than a system of dualistic particularism. The very theme, 1:16, declares that the gospel is a power of God for the salvation, not of a particular class, but of "every one" that believeth. In drawing a parallel between the first and the second Adam (5:12–21), [Paul] represents the effect of the latter as equal in extent, and greater in intensity than the effect of the former; while in the Calvinistic system it would be less. We have no right to limit "the many" (*hoi polloi*) and the "all" (*pantas*) in one clause, and to take it literally in the other.

If, by the trespass of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one, much more shall they that receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one, even Jesus Christ. So, then, as through one trespass the judgment came unto *all men* to condemnation; even so through one act of righteousness the free gift came unto *all men* to justification of life. For as through the one man's disobedience *the many* [i.e. *all*] were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one shall *the many* [*all*] be made righteous. (5:17–19)

The same parallel, without any restriction, is more briefly expressed in the passage (1 Cor. 15:21): "As in Adam *all* die, so also in Christ shall *all* be made alive"; and in a different form in Rom. 11:32 and Gal. 3:22.…

These passages contain, as in a nutshell, the theodicy of Paul. They dispel the darkness of Romans 9. They exclude all limitations of God's plan and intention to a particular class; they teach not, indeed, that all men will be actually saved—for many reject the divine offer, and die in impenitence—but that God sincerely *desires* and actually *provides* salvation for all. Whosoever is saved, is saved by grace; whosoever is lost, is lost by his own guilt of unbelief. (*HCC*, VIII.XIV.114)

## *Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)*

This universal offer is also a genuine offer. The cross of Christ is broad enough and deep enough to cover all the sins of everyone who will come to Him. This general call to salvation is a part of common grace. It may or may not lead to saving faith in the mighty work that Christ accomplished on the cross for the sinner's eternal salvation. Even though the offer of this great gift from God is genuine and available to all, many do not receive it by believing in Jesus Christ. (*S*, 92)

## *Millard Erickson (b. 1932)*

"We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement" (*CT*, 835).

Advocates of limited atonement face the somewhat awkward situation of contending that while the atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the non-elect, Christ did not die for them. It is as if God, in giving a dinner, prepared far more food than was needed, yet refused to consider the possibility of inviting additional guests. Advocates of unlimited atonement, on the other hand, have no difficulty with the fact that Christ's death is sufficient for everyone, for, in their view, Christ died for all persons, (ibid.)

The view that we are adopting here should not be construed as Arminianism. It is rather a moderate form of Calvinism. It is the view that God logically decides first to provide salvation, then elects some to receive it. This is essentially the sublapsarian position of theologians like Augustus Strong. Those who would construe this position as Arminianism need reminding that what distinguishes Calvinism from Arminianism is not the view of the relationship between the decree to provide salvation and the decree to confer salvation upon some and not upon others. Rather, the decisive point is whether the

> decree of election is based solely upon the free, sovereign choice of God himself (Calvinism) or based also in part upon his foreknowledge of merit and faith in the person elected [Arminianism]. (ibid.)

# CONCLUSION

The biblical, theological, and historical bases for the universal (*unlimited*) extent of the Atonement are solid. With one notable and explainable exception (the later Augustine), there is no significant voice in the whole history of the church up to the Reformers that defended *limited* atonement. Indeed, the Bible is emphatic that God loved the whole fallen world and that Christ died for the same. The theological arguments springing from God's omnibenevolence are powerfully in favor of unlimited atonement—that Christ died for the sins of all human beings. Any denial of this truth arbitrarily limits God's love to only some and is based on an indefensible form of voluntarism.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

# THE EXTENT OF SALVATION (UNIVERSALISM)

We now move from one end of the spectrum to the other. The last chapter examined the view that God desires to save and actually does save only some persons (limited atonement). This chapter addresses the position that God desires to save and actually does save all persons (universalism). Another view affirms, contrary to both of these extremes, that God desires to save all but that He actually saves only some—those who believe.

Unlike the other two views, the provision of *unlimited* atonement is in accord both with God's omnibenevolence (which affirms His desire to save all) and with the human freedom of those who reject God's offer (which makes it impossible for Him to save all). That is, the Atonement is unlimited in its extent (Christ died for all), but it is limited in its *application*, since not all believe, and God has willed that only those who believe can be saved.

## DEFINITION OF UNIVERSALISM

Universalism, derived from the word *apokatastasis* (i.e., "restoration," in Acts 3:21), is the belief that eventually everyone will be saved. It was first proposed by Origen (c. 185–c. 254), a partially unorthodox church father. One of the most famous theologians in modern times to embrace universalism was the

neo-orthodox thinker Karl Barth (1886–1968); noted philosopher John Hick (b. 1922) is also a proponent of the view (see his *EGL*). Many liberal theologians, a good number of cults, and several aberrant religions hold to some form of universalism or annihilationism.[1] Like universalists, annihilationists believe that no one will suffer eternal punishment, since everyone who does not believe will be annihilated.[2] Even some noted evangelicals, such as Clark Pinnock (b. 1920), John Wenham (b. 1913), and John Stott (b. 1925) have embraced forms of annihilationism. Nevertheless, universalism is heretical, having been condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in A.D. 553.[3]

# BIBLICAL ARGUMENTS OFFERED FOR UNIVERSALISM

To support their position, universalists generally appeal to widely held sentiment about God's love. While they cite several passages of Scripture, as we shall see, the verses offered for universalism are taken out of context. We will state and examine each.

### The Contention That Psalm 110:1 Teaches Universalism

David said:[4] "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' " The inference drawn by some universalists is that if all Christ's enemies are eventually submissive to Him, then they must be saved: Salvation involves submission to the lordship of Christ.

### Response

Despite the universalists' claim, this text does not support their position.

*First*, the lost are called "enemies," which is not a description of the saved, who are called "friends" (John 15:15) and "sons" of God (John 1:12).

*Second*, in addition to their being "enemies," they are spoken of as subjugated, not saved. They are called God's "footstool"—hardly an appropriate description of saints, who are co-heirs with Christ and have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Him (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:17).

*Third*, in the context, David is not speaking of the salvation of the lost.

Rather, he refers explicitly to God's "wrath" on his "enemies" (Ps. 110:1, 110:5), not His blessings on His people.

**The Contention That Acts 3:21 Teaches Universalism**

Peter speaks of Jesus, who "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets." This reference to the "restoration of all things" (NKJV) is taken by universalists to mean that all people will eventually be saved. Mormons say this passage points to a restoration of the church (through Joseph Smith), following a total apostasy.

**Response**

The context does not support any such conclusions.

For one thing, this verse does not uphold universalism. While the same author (Peter) affirms that God desires that all men be saved (2 Peter 3:9), as does the apostle Paul (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4), some people are simply not willing to accept God's grace (cf. Matt. 23:37). Once again, since God is love (1 John 4:16) and humans are free, God cannot force them to freely love Him. God will allow the unrepentant to have it their way. As noted by C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), those who do not say to God, "Your will be done," will eventually hear God declare to them, "*Your* will be done." Such is the nature of hell, a place where the will of those who reject the Lord is fulfilled in opposition to His.[5] The Bible nowhere holds out hope for those who refuse to accept God's love.[6]

In addition, Acts 3 does not even remotely hint that there will be a total apostasy of the entire church, and other passages of Scripture totally refute such an idea. Jesus said the gates of hell would not prevail against the church (Matt. 16:18). He also promised His followers, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20 NKJV). Jesus could not be with His followers to the end of the age if the church went into complete apostasy at some point after its founding. In Ephesians 3:21, Paul says, "To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus *to all generations, forever and ever*" (NKJV). How could God be glorified in the church throughout all ages if the entire body abandoned and/or renounced Him? Ephesians 4:11–16 speaks of the church growing to spiritual maturity, not spiritual degeneracy.

What then does "the restoration of all things" mean? Peter, making reference

to the "restoration of all things, *which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*" (Acts 3:21 NKJV), said it is speaking of the "covenant which God made with our [Jewish] fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed' " (v. 25). This Abrahamic covenant is unconditional, including the promises of possessing the Holy Land "forever" (Gen. 13:15). It is to the future fulfillment of this covenant that Peter refers. It is the restoration of all *things* to Israel, not to the salvation of all *people*.[7] This is the restoration expected by Jesus' disciples; the last thing they asked Him before He ascended to heaven was "Lord, are you at this time going to *restore* the kingdom to Israel?" His answer can be summarized as "Not yet, but meanwhile preach the gospel to the ends of the earth" (see Acts 1:6–7). Again, nothing is said here about the ultimate salvation of all human beings. To affirm otherwise is to totally deny the context. Jesus also spoke of this restoration when He said to the Twelve,

> I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Matt. 19:28)

This will be fulfilled in His literal future reign on earth.[8]

### The Contention That Romans 5:18–19 Teaches Universalism

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.

From these verses many universalists infer that Christ's death for all guarantees the salvation of all.

### Response

This conclusion, however, is contrary to the setting here and in Romans as a whole, as well as to the rest of God's Word.

*First*, even in this context Paul speaks of being "justified *by faith*" (v. 1), and not automatically by what Christ did for us. He also refers to salvation as "the gift" (v. 16), which is something that needs to be received.[9] And in the preceding verse he declares that salvation comes only to those "who receive … the gift of righteousness" (v. 17); not all receive the gift (cf. Matt. 23:37; 25:40–41).

*Second*, the rest of the epistle makes it unmistakably clear that not everyone will be saved. Romans 1–2 speaks of the heathen who are "without excuse" (1:20), upon whom the wrath of God falls (1:18). Paul declares that "as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law" (2:12 NKJV).

*Third*, the many [all] being "made righteous" does not refer to their actually being saved but rather their being made savable by the removal of judicial guilt inherited from Adam.[10] That is, what the first Adam did by bringing legal condemnation to all humanity is reversed by what Christ, the "last Adam," accomplished—the savability (*potential* justification) of everyone.[11] *Actual* salvation does not come automatically but by an act of "faith" (cf. 5:1).

*Fourth*, in the very heart of his argument, Paul concludes that apart from justification by faith the world is "guilty before God" (3:19 NKJV). Later, speaking of the destiny of both the saved and the lost, Paul affirms that "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23). Likewise, Paul recognized that in spite of his prayers, not all of his kinsmen would be saved (11:1ff)., but some would be "accursed" (9:3 NKJV). Indeed, the whole point of Romans is to show that only those who believe will be justified (1:17; cf. 3:21–26).

*Fifth*, Romans 9 declares that only the elect (not everyone) will be saved (cf. v. 14ff.) The rest God "endured with much longsuffering," waiting for them to repent (v. 9:22 NKJV; cf. 2 Peter 3:9) so they would not be "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction."

*Sixth*, and finally, there are numerous passages of Scripture that speak of the eternal destiny of lost people,[12] including John's vivid vision at the end of the Revelation:

> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (20:11–15)

In short, the evidence for universalism is lacking in Romans 5, and it is contrary to the clear teaching of other Scriptures. Furthermore, since the Bible does not contradict itself,[13] the verses that can be interpreted in more than one way must be understood in the light of those that cannot.

## The Contention That 1 Corinthians 15:24–25 Teaches Universalism

> Then the end will come, when he [Jesus Christ] hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

Universalists claim this supports their thesis that eventually, in the end, everyone will be saved. On this text, Origen wrote:

> If even that unreserved declaration of the apostle does not sufficiently inform us what is meant by "enemies being placed under His feet," listen to what he says in the following words, "For all things must be put under Him." What, then, is this "putting under by which all things must be made subject to Christ?" … I am of the opinion that it is this very subjection by which we also wish to be subject to Him, by which the apostles also were subject, and all the saints who have been followers of Christ. (*OFP*, 1.6.1)

## Response

It is clear from this text that Paul had no such idea in mind.

*First*, Paul is not speaking of the salvation of the lost but rather their condemnation. This is evident in words and phrases like *destroy, put under his feet, put an end to all rule* NKJV, and *enemies*. As we have seen, by contrast, the saved are called "friends" of God (cf. John 15:15).

*Second*, once again, these enemies are subjugated to God, not saved by Him. They are called God's "footstool," which doesn't befit saints who will reign with Christ (cf. 2 Tim. 2:12), some even on their own thrones (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 19:17–19).

*Third*, it is "death" that will be "destroyed," not the free choice of those who refuse to believe in God (cf. Matt. 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9). The only way to guarantee the ultimate salvation of all is for God to force the impenitent and reprobate, against their will, to submit to Him; He will not do this.[14]

*Fourth*, that God will be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28) does not mean that all will be in God. Paul means that the Lord will reign supreme in all the universe, whether for salvation (of those who accept Him) or for subjugation (of those who reject Him).

*Fifth*, the phrase "all things" must be understood in its context. It does *not* say that all things will be saved, rather it simply asserts that "all things are made subject to Him" (v. 28 NKJV). But, again, they are made subject as "enemies" (v. 25). In fact, "all things" is used in parallel with "enemies" (in successive verses, 26–27).

*Sixth*, in this very passage Paul declares that *only* those who "believed" are

"saved" (15:2). Indeed, he says in 1 Corinthians: "Do you not know that *the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God*?" (6:9).

*Seventh*, and finally, heaven is not a place for God's enemies, those He will have allegedly overpowered and forced against their will into the fold to love Him. This is precisely what a God of love cannot do; Jesus said so (cf. Matt. 23:37). First Corinthians 15 contains no hint of salvation for unbelievers.

**The Contention That 2 Corinthians 5:19 Teaches Universalism**

Paul told the Corinthians "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." (Romans 11:15 also speaks of the reconciliation of the world.) On this basis universalists argue that "the world" was reconciled to God by Christ's salvific work. Thus, all are saved on the basis of His sacrifice.

**Response**

In reply, one need only look at the context to see that universalism is not affirmed.

*First*, Paul indicates that actual reconciliation is for those who are "in Christ," not for all human beings (v. 17).

*Second*, reconciliation is regarded as a process according to God's purpose, not an accomplished fact for the whole world. It is God's desire to save all (cf. 2 Peter 3:9), but all will not be saved (cf. Matt. 7:13–14; Rev. 20:11–15). The sense in which the whole world is reconciled to God is potential, not actual. That is, Christ's death for all human beings made them *reconcilable* to God; otherwise, Paul would not be calling on them to "*be* reconciled to God" (v. 20).

*Third*, if all were already saved by what Christ did for them, what do we make of Paul's exhortation to be "ambassadors for Christ" and to be "pleading" with the world to "be reconciled to God" (all (NKJV)? It is senseless to beg them to be reconciled to Him if in fact they already are in right relationship.

*Fourth*, and finally, to interpret this passage in favor of universalism is to say that Scripture contradicts itself, since many other passages clearly teach that all will not be saved.[15]

**The Contention That Ephesians 1:10 Teaches Universalism**

Another verse misconstrued by universalists is Paul's statement to the Ephesian Christians that in "the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth; in Him" (NKJV).

**Response**

A careful examination of this text reveals that Paul is speaking here of believers, not unbelievers.

*First*, the context is about those "He chose … in Him before the foundation of the world" (1:4 NKJV).

*Second*, the phrase *in Christ* is never used by Paul, or anywhere else in Scripture, of anyone but believers.

*Third*, that unbelievers are excluded is clear in that Paul does not refer to those "under the earth" as he does elsewhere when speaking of the lost (e.g., cf. Phil. 2:10).

*Fourth*, and finally, as already shown above, there is abundant evidence elsewhere in Paul's writings (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7–9) and in the rest of Scripture that some will go to their eternal destiny without Christ.[16]

**The Contention That Philippians 2:10–11 Teaches Universalism**

Paul foretells that one day

> at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth, and those under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, (NLT)

Universalists insist that unbelievers are clearly in view in the phrase "under the earth." And if so, then all persons, even the wicked, will eventually be saved.

**Response**

While it is admitted by all that unbelievers will eventually confess that Jesus is Lord, nonetheless, there is no evidence here or elsewhere that they will be saved.

First of all, they will confess the *fact* that He is Lord; there is no reference to their believing *in* Him, which is necessary for salvation.[17]

Also, even demons believe that God *is*, but they do not believe *in* God (cf. James 2:19). Likewise, believing that Jesus is Lord will not save anyone; only

belief *in* Christ (James 2:21–26) brings salvation.[18]

Furthermore, as for "those under the earth" in this text (i.e., the lost), their acknowledgment of Jesus will be a confession from their mouth. For *salvation*, Paul insists that one must both "confess with your mouth … and *believe in your heart*" (Rom. 10:9). Again, unbelievers will be *subjugated*; which indicates an unwilling act, whereas salvation is a free act.

### The Contention That 1 Peter 3:18–20 Teaches Universalism

> Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water.

### Response

Taken in its proper context, there is no support here for universalism.

*First*, there is no suggestion that Jesus offered the hope of salvation to these "spirits in prison." The text does not say that Christ *evangelized* them,[19] but simply that He *proclaimed*[20] the victory of His resurrection to them. This view fits the setting (the previous verse speaks of Christ's victorious death and resurrection) and is in accord with the teaching of other New Testament texts (cf. Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15).

*Second*, Peter is not speaking of all persons but a limited group "who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (v. 20).

*Third*, the Bible is clear that there is no second chance after death (cf. Heb. 9:27). The Revelation records the Great White Throne Judgment, in which those who are not found in the Book of Life are sent to the lake of fire (20:11–15). Luke records Christ's teaching that once a person dies, he goes either to heaven or to hell (16:19–31), and that there is a great gulf fixed "so that those who want to pass" from one to the other cannot (v. 26 NKJV). The whole urgency of responding to God in this life, before we die, further supports the fact that there is no hope beyond the grave (cf. Prov. 29:1; John 3:36; 5:24).

*Fourth*, and finally, there is no good evidence that the phrase "spirits in prison" even refers to human beings. Nowhere else is such a phrase used of human beings in hell. Many scholars believe that the "spirits" who invaded humanity in "the days of Noah" were the "Sons of God" (used of angels in Job

1:6; 2:1; 38:7). This fits with 2 Peter 2:4, where, immediately before he refers to the Flood, he mentions the angels sinning (v. 5; cf. Gen. 6:1–4). Whatever these "spirits" are, whether human or angelic, there is no foundation for the ideas that Peter is referring to all humankind or that all humans will be saved.

**The Contention That 1 Peter 4:6 Teaches Universalism**

"For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (KJV). It is argued by universalists that this passage is both (1) clearly referring to preaching the gospel and (2) preaching it to the dead. If so, then it implies a chance to be saved after death, which many universalists see as necessary to accomplish the salvation of all human beings.

**Response**

However, even granting these two points, it does not follow, for several reasons, that all will be saved.

*First*, Peter does not say that the gospel was preached to them *after their death*. This is an assumption not supported by the context or by other biblical texts. Indeed, the passage is better rendered,[21] "For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to *those who are now dead*, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit." In favor of this is the fact that the gospel "was preached" (in the past) to those who "are dead" (now, in the present).

*Second*, nowhere does Peter say that this alleged gospel preaching resulted in the salvation of all to whom it was given. This is another assumption not justified by this or any other scriptural statement. Indeed, there are numerous texts to the contrary.[22]

*Third*, the implication of the passage is that not all will be saved. The preceding pronouncement (v. 5) speaks of the dead being judged and giving an "account" to God, not of their being unilaterally saved.

*Fourth*, and finally, the phrase "live according to God in the spirit" (NKJV) or "live according to God in regard to the spirit" does not necessarily denote salvation. When such phrases in the New Testament are used in connection with resurrection, they are teaching that, like Christ and because of His resurrection, everyone will be *resurrected*—not that everyone will be saved (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–

22). Indeed, Jesus said:

> Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, *and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned*. (John 5:28–29)

In summary, all the texts offered in favor of universalism are found to be wanting. When each passage is carefully and contextually examined, there is no ground for concluding the ultimate and universal salvation for all humankind. In truth, when *other* passages of Scripture are also put forward, there is complete support of the view that *not* all persons will eventually be saved. Tragic as it is, the Bible clearly teaches that some persons will be lost forever.[23]

# THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS OFFERED FOR UNIVERSALISM

Faring no better are universalism's theological arguments, which are likewise inaccurate and insufficient. Each is based on a misconception of the nature of God and/or the nature of human beings.

### The Argument From God's Omnibenevolence

Universalism is usually based on the notion that a God of love would never allow any of His creatures to perish. Love never fails, and it never gives up. The Hound of Heaven never stops pursuing until He captures us by His love. An omnibenevolent God not only loves all but does so for all time, both in this life and in the life to come. However long it takes His love to reach all His rebellious creatures, an all-loving God will take. So the universalist argues.

### Response

However, as C. S. Lewis demonstrated,[24] just the opposite is the case. While God *does* love the world (John 3:16) and *doesn't* desire that any should perish (cf. 2 Peter 3:9), nonetheless, His very nature *as love* demands that He not force His love on anyone (cf. Matt. 23:37).

> When one says, "All will be saved," my reason retorts, "Without their will, or with it?" If I say,

> "Without their will," I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say, "With their will," my reason replies, "How, if they will not give in?" (Lewis, *PP*, 106–07).

Once again, Lewis observed:

> There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done" (*GD*, 69).

Further, since God is omniscient and knows all future free acts,[25] He knows that some people will never freely repent. Knowing they are irredeemable and reprobate, He knows His love will never win them over, no matter how long He pursues them. Hence, His "Spirit shall not strive with man forever" (Gen. 6:3 NKJV). There is a point of no return, and God knows it. Hence, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27 NKJV).

What is more, the Bible makes it very clear that there will be an eternal hell[26] and that there will be people in it (Matt. 25:41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:11–15). In fact, Jesus had more to say about hell than He did about heaven. He warned, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). He added of those who reject Him, "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age" (Matt. 13:40). In His great Mount Olivet Discourse, our Lord declared, "Then he [God] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels' " (Matt. 25:41). Elsewhere He affirmed: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out" (Mark 9:43). In a vivid, self-telling story that, unlike the parables, uses an actual person's name (Lazarus), Jesus said:

> In hell, where [the rich man] was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."
>
> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."
>
> He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."
>
> Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (Luke 16:23–29).

## The Argument From God's Omnipotence

Some have also argued for universalism from God's omnipotence. Origen declared: "Nothing is impossible to the Omnipotent, nor is anything incapable of restoration to its Creator" (*OFP*, 3.6.5). This, of course, implies that God desires by His goodness to do so, a position supported by many Scriptures (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). If God wants to save all, and if He can save all (i.e., He is all-powerful), it would seem to follow that He will save all.

## Response

Two points should be made in reply.

*First*, God's attributes[27] do not operate in contradiction to one another. As we have repeatedly observed, He is internally consistent in His nature. This is why the Bible insists that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). This is also the reason that His power must be exercised in accord with His love; that is, God cannot do what is unloving.

*Second*, as already demonstrated above, it would be unloving and contradictory for God to force people to love Him. Love by its very nature can work persuasively but not coercively. If some refuse to be persuaded (as the Bible says some will), then God will not coerce them into His kingdom. Satan, in *Paradise Lost* by John Milton (1608–1674), declares: "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." To add a final word, God will respond, "Have it your way."

## The Argument From the Reformatory View of Justice

Origen also argued that God's justice has in view reformation, not punishment. He claimed that "the fury of God's vengeance is profitable for the purgation of souls.… The punishment, also, which is said to be applied by fire, is understood to be applied with the object of healing" (*OFP*, 2.10.6). He added,

> Those who have been removed from their primal state of blessedness have not been removed irrecoverably, but have been placed under the rule of those holy and blessed orders which we have described; and by availing themselves of the aid of these, and being remolded by salutary principles and discipline, they may recover themselves, and be restored to their condition of happiness. (ibid., 1.6.2)

## Response

There are several problems with using God's obvious desire that persons reform their lives to prove that all will be saved in the end.

*First*, contrary to both Scripture and fact, the reformatory view of justice assumes that all persons freely choose to be reformed (cf. Matt. 23:37; Rev. 20:10–15).

*Second*, again contrary to Scripture and fact, the reformatory view of justice predicates that no decisions are final. This is incorrect; as we have seen, suicide, for example, is both one-way and final. As previously cited, the Bible declares, regarding the afterlife, that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

*Third*, the reformatory view of justice is contrary to the reality of justice, which is penal, not reformatory. God's absolute justice demands that a penalty be paid for sin (see Lev. 17:11; Ezek. 18:20).

*Fourth*, the reformatory view of justice is contrary to the substitutionary death of Christ.[28] "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Peter 3:18). "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). To claim God is only interested in reforming sinners, and not punishing unrepentant sin, is contrary to the very concept of Christ's vicarious atonement. If sin need not be punished, why did Jesus have to pay the awful price for sin?

*Fifth*, and finally, God is indeed interested in reformation: Reformation is what *this* life is all about. But if people refuse to be reformed during this life, then punishment is what the *afterlife* is about. This is why God is so longsuffering, not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

## The Argument From God's Wisdom

Origen offered an argument for universalism from God's wisdom:

> God, by the ineffable skill of His wisdom, transforming and restoring all things, in whatever manner they are made, to some useful aim, and to the common advantage of all, recalls those very creatures which differed so much from each other in mental conformation to one agreement of labour and purpose; so that, although they are under the influence of different motives, they nevertheless complete the fullness and perfection of one world, and the very variety of minds tends to one end of perfection. [For] it is one power which grasps and holds together all the diversity of the world, and leads the different movements towards one work, lest so immense an undertaking as that of the world should be dissolved by the dissensions of souls. (Origen, *OFP*, IV.II.I)

### Response

Here again the universalist overlooks several important truths.

For one thing, God's wisdom[29] does not act contrary to His love, which cannot force anyone to do something they do not choose to do.

For another, the fact that God is infinitely wise allows Him to know that not everyone will freely choose to serve Him. This being the case, it would be contrary to God's wisdom to attempt to save people He knows will never freely accept His gracious offer of salvation.

In addition, there is a contradiction within the universalist view at this point. Many, like Origen, argue,

> God, the Father of all things, in order to *ensure the salvation of all* His creatures through the ineffable plan of His word and wisdom, so arranged each of these, that every spirit, whether soul or rational existence, however called, should *not be compelled by force*, against the liberty of his own will, to any other course than that to which the motives of his own mind lead him (lest by so doing the power of exercising free-will should seem to be taken away, which certainly would produce a change in the nature of the being itself). (*OFP*, 2.1.2, emphasis added)

But this is precisely what God cannot do, namely (1) "ensure the salvation of all" and (2) "compel by force." As long as someone refuses to freely accept His love, a loving God cannot ensure he will be saved. In this case, as C. S. Lewis aptly put it, there must be a "great divorce."

## AN EVALUATION OF UNIVERSALISM

In addition to the lack of biblical and theological support for universalism, there are many additional biblical and rational arguments against it.

### Universalism Is Contrary to the Image of God

God made humankind in His image,[30] which includes the freedom to choose. In order to guarantee that everyone will be saved, those who refuse to love God would have to be forced to love Him against their will, and "forced freedom" isn't freedom at all.

### Universalism Is Contrary to God's Love

Forced love is not only contrary to freedom, it isn't love at all, but hate. Forced love is a kind of assault. No one who is truly loving forces him-or herself on another.[31]

### Universalism Is Contrary to God's Justice

God is absolutely holy,[32] and as such He must punish sin. Therefore, as long as people are living in sin and rebellion against God, He must punish them.[33]

### Universalism Is Contrary to Biblical Teaching on Hell

Once again, Jesus taught that not only is there a hell that was created for Satan and his angels, but, tragically, there will also be persons in it.[34]

### Universalism Is Without Scriptural Foundation

As shown above, universalism (1) is based on verses wrenched out of context, and (2) it ignores other clear passages that teach the opposite.

### Universalism Is Based on a Kind of Freudian Illusion

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) taught that any belief based on a mere wish that something be true is an illusion (see *FI*, chapter 6). No loving person would *want* anyone else to suffer in hell forever; however, strong desire to the contrary seems to be a primary impulse in universalist thinking, setting up an implausible and unbiblical system of belief.

## THE HISTORIC FOUNDATION AGAINST UNIVERSALISM

As stated earlier, with rare exceptions (like Origen), it is difficult to find significant fathers in the long centuries of the church, up to and through the Reformation, who embraced this unorthodox teaching. Not until the rise of modern liberalism[35] do we encounter substantial denial of eternal suffering for the unrepentant.

## Early Fathers

Down through the centuries, the stalwarts of the church have almost universally supported the biblical position that some human beings (viz., the lost) will undergo conscious, eternal punishment. This is in contradiction to universalism, which insists that eventually all persons will be saved. As we have seen, those few who held contrary views (like Origen) fortunately were condemned by orthodox theologians and councils of the church.

### *Justin Martyr (c. 100–c. 165)*

> For among us the prince of the wicked spirits is called the serpent, and Satan, and the devil, as you can learn by looking into our writings. And that he would be sent into the fire with his host, and the men who follow him, and would be punished for an endless duration, Christ foretold. (*FA*, I. XXVIII in Roberts and Donaldson, *ANF*)

### *Irenaeus (c. 125–c. 202)*

> "Moreover," he says, "the book of life was opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works; and death and hell were sent into the lake of fire, the second death." Now this is what is called Gehenna, which the Lord styled eternal fire. "And if any one," it is said, "was not found written in the book of life, he was sent into the lake of fire" (*AH*, I.V.XXXV in ibid.).

### *Cyprian (200–258)*

> For God, as He is merciful, so He exacts obedience to His precepts, and indeed carefully exacts it; and as He invites to the banquet, so the man that hath not a wedding garment He binds hands and feet, and casts him out beyond the assembly of the saints. He has prepared heaven, but He has also prepared hell. He has prepared places of refreshment, but He has also prepared eternal punishment. He has prepared the light that none can approach unto, but He has also prepared the vast and eternal gloom of perpetual night. (*EC*, V.XXX.VII in Schaff, *NPNF*)

### *Lactantius (c. 240–c. 320)*

> Both therefore spoke with truth, but yet both incorrectly; for the ways themselves ought to have been referred to life, their ends to death. We therefore speak better and more truly, who say that the two ways belong to heaven and hell, because immortality is promised to the righteous, and everlasting punishment is threatened to the unrighteous. (*OTW*, VII.III)

## Medieval Fathers

### *Augustine (354–430)*

> For then he perceives that the whole human race was condemned in its rebellious head by a divine judgment so just, that if not a single member of the race had been redeemed, no one could justly have questioned the justice of God; and that it was right that those who are redeemed should be redeemed in such a way as to show, by the greater number who are unredeemed and left in their just condemnation, what the whole race deserved, and whither the deserved judgment of God would lead even the redeemed, did not His undeserved mercy interpose, so that every mouth might be stopped of those who wish to glory in their own merits, and that he that glorieth might glory in the Lord. (*E*, 99)
>
> It is in vain, then, that some, indeed very many, make moan over the eternal punishment, and perpetual, unintermitted torments of the lost, and say they do not believe it shall be so; not, indeed, that they directly oppose themselves to Holy Scripture, but, at the suggestion of their own feelings, they soften down everything that seems hard, and give a milder turn to statements which they think are rather designed to terrify than to be received as literally true. (ibid.)

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> The will, of its own accord, may tend to an evil, through the removal of some obstacle: for instance, if a man be prevented from sinning, not through sin being in itself displeasing to him, but through hope of eternal life, or fear of hell, if hope give place to despair, or fear to presumption, he will end in sinning through certain malice, being freed from the bridle, as it were. (*ST*, II.78.2)
>
> Further, a sin does not deserve greater punishment through being united to another sin; for Divine justice has allotted its punishment to each sin. Now a venial sin deserves eternal punishment if it be united to a mortal sin in a lost soul, because in hell there is no remission of sins. Therefore venial sin by itself deserves eternal punishment. (ibid., II.87.5)

## Reformation Fathers

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

> God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.… He has barred the door of life to those whom he has given over to damnation. (*ICR*, III.21.7)
>
> Indeed many … accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned. But they do this very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation. (ibid., III.23.1)

"Man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault" (ibid., III.23.8).

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

> For if sin is a worse evil than damnation … since the former is opposed to divine good, and the latter to human good, then truly it is greater to ordain one to sin than to ordain to hell, to create a man that he might sin, than that he might perish. If, however, accuracy of statement is to be sought, it should be affirmed that, if a man is ordained to commit sin, then he cannot sin. For sin is a voluntary act, and the decree of God in reference to sin introduces a necessity of sinning.
>
> Further, if a man is created that he may be condemned, then he cannot be condemned by God. For condemnation is the act of a just judge. But a just judge does not condemn one unless he is wicked by his own fault, apart from necessity; and he is not wicked, apart from necessity, and of his own fault, who is created that he may sin, and thus perish. (*WJA*, III.377)

## *Charles Hodge (1797–1878)*

When addressing the issue, "It is urged that it cannot be consistent with the justice of God to inflict a really infinite penalty on such a creature of man," Hodge wrote:

> We are incompetent judges of the penalty which sin deserves. We have no adequate apprehension of its inherent guilt, of the dignity of the person against whom it is committed, or of the extent of the evil which it is suited to produce. The proper end of punishment is retribution and prevention. What is necessary for that end, God only knows; and, therefore, the penalty which He imposes on sin is the only just measure of its ill deserts.

He continued:

> It is often said that sin is an infinite evil because committed against a person of infinite dignity, and therefore deserves an infinite penalty.… If the evil of a single sin, and that the smallest, lasts forever, it is in one sense an infinite evil, although in comparison with other sins, or with the whole mass of sin ever committed, it may appear a mere trifle. The guilt of sin is infinite in the sense that we can set no limits to its turpitude or to the evil which it is adapted to produce.…
>
> Relief on this subject is sought from the consideration that as the lost continue to sin forever they may justly be punished forever. To this, however, it is answered that the retributions of eternity are threatened for the sins done in the body. This is true; nevertheless, it is also true, first, that sin in its nature is alienation and separation from God, and as God is the source of all holiness and happiness, separation from Him is of necessity the forfeiture of all good; secondly, that this separation is from its nature final and consequently involves endless sinfulness and misery. (*ST*, III.878)

## *William G. T. Shedd (1820–1894)*

> The punishment inflicted upon the lost was regarded by the Fathers of the Ancient Church, with very few exceptions, as endless.… The [Medieval] Church received the traditional doctrine respecting endless retribution. Heaven and hell were separated by an absolute and impassable gulf, but the intermediate space between them was subdivided into purgatory, which lies nearest to hell.… The Modern Church has accepted the traditional faith upon this subject. In proportion as the inspiration and infallibility of Revelation have been conceded, the doctrine of an absolute and therefore endless punishment of sin has maintained itself, it being impossible to eliminate the tenet from the Christian Scriptures, except by a mutilation of the canon, or a violently capricious exegesis. The denial of the eternity of future punishments, in modern times, has consequently been a characteristic of those parties and individuals who have rejected, either partially or entirely, the dogma of infible inspiration. (*HCC*,

II.414–19)

### *Millard Erickson (b. 1932)*

> Just as in the past, the question of the future state of the wicked has created a considerable amount of controversy in our day. The doctrine of an everlasting punishment appears to some to be an outmoded or sub-Christian view. It, together with angels and demons, is often one of the first topics of Christian belief to be demythologized. Part of the problem stems from what appears to be a tension between the love of God, a cardinal characteristic of God's nature, and His judgment. Yet, however we regard the doctrine of everlasting punishment, it is clearly taught in Scripture.…
>
> If there is one basic characteristic of hell, it is, in contrast to heaven, the absence of God or banishment from his presence. It is an experience of intense anguish, whether it involve physical suffering or mental distress or both. There are other aspects of the situation of the lost individual which contribute to its misery. One is a sense of loneliness, of having seen the glory and greatness of God, of having realized that he is the Lord of all, and then of being cut off. There is the realization that this separation is permanent.
>
> Similarly, the condition of one's moral and spiritual self is permanent. Whatever one is at the end of life will continue for all eternity. There is no basis for expecting change for the better. Thus, hopelessness comes over the individual. (*CT*, 1234–35)

### *Earl Radmacher (b. 1933)*

> Ultimately, everyone, unregenerate and regenerate, will be judged by their works. At the Great White Throne Judgment the unregenerate dead, "small and great," will be resurrected to stand before God and to be "judged according to their works" (Rev. 20:12–13). Their works will demonstrate that they deserve eternal condemnation (20:15). Somehow in the infinite mind of God every work ever performed by every unsaved person is a matter of record. People who have taken their chances on their works as a means of gaining entrance to heaven will find that their works fall short of God's righteous demands for eternal fellowship with Him. When the "books" in heaven reveal that unbelievers fall short of what is required, another book, the Book of Life, will be opened to show that their names are not written there. (*S*, 173)

# CONCLUSION

In summary, there is no support in Scripture for the illusory hope that everyone will be saved. The basic reason is rather simple: God created human beings with free will, and those who choose not to believe cannot be forced to believe. God is love, and love works persuasively, but never coercively. There is a hell; in the words of C. S. Lewis,

> I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. I do not mean that the ghosts may not *wish* to come out of hell … but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved. (*PP*, 115–16)

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN

# THE EXCLUSIVITY OF SALVATION (PLURALISM)

Christianity claims to be the true faith. Jesus says there is only one God (Mark 12:29) and that He is the only way to salvation (John 14:6; cf. 3:18; 10:1, 9–10). This is at odds with the dominant trend in modern comparative religion. Alister McGrath (b. 1953) succinctly summarizes the protest of pluralism:

> How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when "truth" itself has become a devalued notion? … [Allegedly,] no one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong. ("CPCCC" in *JETS*, 365)

For the exploration of this issue, several terms need to be distinguished.[1]

*Pluralism* is the belief that every religion is true: Each provides a genuine encounter with the Ultimate, and while one may be better than others, all are adequate.

*Relativism*, similar to pluralism, claims that every religion is true for the one adhering to it. If there is no objective religious truth,[2] then there are no criteria by which we can discern that one religion is true or better than another.

*Inclusivism* maintains that one religion is explicitly true, and all others are implicitly true.[3]

*Exclusivism* holds that only one religion is true and that what is opposed to it in other religions is false.[4]

That the unparalleled saving work of Christ is the only means of salvation is one of the great principles of Protestantism. Along with "Scripture alone" (Lat: *sola scriptura*) and "faith alone" (Lat: *sola fidei*), "salvation by grace alone through Christ alone" stands at the heart of evangelical theology.

# THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR THE EXCLUSIVITY OF CHRIST'S SALVIFIC WORK

The fully bloomed New Testament doctrine that our salvation is possible only through the work of Christ is rooted in the Old Testament. From the very first Old Testament prediction about Jesus (Gen. 3:15) to the final prophecy (Mal. 4:3, 5), there is one and only one way by which human beings can be restored to relationship with God—through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### The Exclusive Soteriological Claims of Christ

Jesus unequivocally states that He is the only means of salvation: "Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*" (John 3:18). "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects the Son will not see life*, for God's wrath remains on him" (3:36).

> I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.… *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved*. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. (10:1, 9)

Again: "*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins*" (8:24). The declaration of Jesus couldn't be more clear: "I am the way and the truth and the life. *No one comes to the Father except through me*" (14:6).

### The Exclusive Soteriological Claims of Scripture

Not only does Jesus claim to be the only way to God, but His immediate followers also confirm His message: "Salvation is found in no one else, for *there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" (Peter,

in Acts 4:12). Paul adds, “There is one God and *one mediator* between God and men, *the man Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim. 2:5). The writer of Hebrews declares that “when [Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God … because *by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy*” (10:12, 14). John concludes:

> Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life*. (1 John 5:10–12)

### The Soteriological Necessity of Believing in Christ

It is noteworthy that not only is the work of Christ needed for our salvation, but so is believing in the Christ who performed that work.[5] Peter says there is no salvation apart from His *name* (Acts 4:12). John emphasizes that believing in “the Son” [Christ] is salvifically mandated (John 3:18, 36; 1 John 5:10–12). As we have seen, Jesus Himself explicitly confirms this (John 8:24), and Paul also speaks about the need for *knowledge of and belief in Christ*:

> “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”[6] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:13–14)

## ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO THE EXCLUSIVE CLAIMS OF CHRIST

Many protests have been raised against Christological exclusivism. From a biblical point of view, three are noteworthy.

### Objection One—Based on Old Testament Saints Not Having Explicit Belief in Christ

It seems evident that not all of the Old Testament believers had explicit knowledge of the death and resurrection of Christ for their sins, yet the New Testament teaches that this is essential to salvation (cf. Rom. 10:9). Indeed, Paul claims this is the heart of the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–6), which alone is the power of God to save (Rom. 1:16). In spite of some early predictions about Christ’s death

(Dan. 9; Isa. 53; Zech. 12) and resurrection (Ps. 2, 16) and of somehow foreseeing His day (John 8:56), there is no indication that every pre-Christian believer understood and overtly believed that Jesus would die for his or her sins and then be raised from the dead. Certainly the Ninevites who repented in response to Jonah's preaching did not have this knowledge (Jonah 3), but they were saved.[7]

In addition, it is beyond unlikely that every Israelite who brought a lamb to the temple understood that the sacrifice foreshadowed the Messiah, the coming Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29). Hebrews 11:6 seems to indicate what is salvifically sufficient: "Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." That is, soteriological necessity appears to be fulfilled if we believe (1) that God exists, and (2) that He will graciously save those who believe in Him. If this is correct, faith in Christ seems not to be needed for salvation.[8]

**Response to Objection One**

*First*, there is a difference between what is *absolutely* necessary and what is *normatively* necessary. It does not appear from Scripture to be absolutely necessary for God to require all people in all times to have explicit belief in the death and resurrection of Christ for salvation. Nonetheless, there is no reason God cannot have decreed that such faith is normatively necessary after Christ came and was proclaimed to the world. Paul implies exactly this: "[God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

What was implicit in the Old Testament became explicit in the New Testament: Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, was the long anticipated Passover Lamb (cf. John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). When Old Testament typology (implicit) became New Testament reality (explicit)—when the One prophesied became present—God apparently required[9] that everyone must now "believe in the Lord Jesus" in order to "be saved" (Acts 16:31). Paul confirmed, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21).

*Second*, there is a biblical progress of revelation.[10] As time passed, God, the Creator of time, revealed more and more about His plan of redemption. For example, at first it was revealed that the coming Savior would be the seed of the

woman (Gen. 3:15), then the descendent of Shem (9:26), the offspring of Abraham (12:3), from the tribe of Judah (49:10), the son of David (2 Sam. 7:12), and so forth. With each new revelation comes a new obligation for believers to embrace it, just as when a new law is officially promulgated, citizens are obligated to incorporate it and live by it. "Ignorance" of the law (or truth) is not a valid excuse; "*now* [God] commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30).

Specifically, then, Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and typology makes it incumbent upon us to accept this revealed divine truth. For example, when the disciples of John the Baptist (who knew only of John's baptism and hadn't yet heard that the ascended Christ had sent the Holy Spirit) heard the message of Paul about this subsequent revelation, they were obligated to believe it. They did, and hence, received the Spirit (Acts 19:1–6).

Indeed, that progressive revelation brings progressive responsibility to believe seems to be the overall emphasis of the book of Hebrews. After showing the Jewish believers that Christ was "better than" the angels, Moses, Joshua, and the Old Testament priests, the author strongly exhorted them to believe this or they would receive the judgment of God. In no uncertain words, after instructing them that Christ offered "one sacrifice for sins forever" (10:12 NKJV), he warned them that "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (10:26 NKJV). Thus, in view of progressive revelation, while it may not be *absolutely* necessary for a person to have explicit faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in order to be saved, God has willed such belief to be *normatively* necessary.

### Objection Two—Based on the Difference Between *Fact* and *Knowledge of the Fact*

Inclusivists argue that exclusivism overlooks the difference between the *fact* of Christ's salvific work and the *knowledge of the fact*: They insist that a person *cannot* be saved without the former but *can* without the latter. For example, I can receive shoes as a gift, mailed to me from an unknown donor, without knowing who sent them (or, for that matter, which cow died to provide the leather). Why, then, can't a person receive the gift of salvation, provided by the death of Christ, without knowing about His sacrifice or why it was made?

### Response to Objection Two

Exclusivists do not deny the logical possibility of being saved without the knowledge of how salvation was made possible. In fact, as already mentioned, it appears that many Old Testament believers were not fully aware of Christ's someday sacrifice and resurrection. However, the question is not *what is logically possible but what is actually true*. What we're really asking is this: How much knowledge of His plan of salvation does God require of us *in this present age* as a condition for our receiving His gift of salvation? The answer, as the above verses indicate, appears to include explicit knowledge of the gospel.[11]

### Objection Three—Based on the Accusation That Exclusivism Is Unfair to the Unreached

If explicit knowledge of Christ's salvific work is a necessary condition for salvation, then isn't it unjust of God to condemn the unevangelized to eternal separation from Him? It seems blatantly unfair to punish people for irresponsibility in an area they didn't know they were responsible.

### Response to Objection Three

A more complete response to this objection is provided later.[12] It is sufficient here to note that the premise of the objection is wrong, for it assumes that the unevangelized are without awareness as to what God requires of them. To the contrary, He declares that they know, and know "clearly," and thus are "without excuse" (Rom. 1:19–20). Further, they have truth "written on their hearts" and will *justly* perish if they refuse to respond (2:12–15). The light of creation and conscience is sufficient for their condemnation, yet the Bible promises that should they respond to the light they have, God can provide the knowledge sufficient for salvation.[13] As Peter said, "In every nation whoever fears Him [God] and works righteousness is accepted by Him" (Acts 10:35 NKJV). Hebrews adds that "he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (11:6 NKJV). Abraham reminds, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25 KJV).

## AN EXAMINATION OF THE CLAIMS OF

# RELIGIOUS PLURALISM[14]

Against exclusivism, religious pluralism[15] claims that every religion is true, since each one provides a genuine encounter with what its adherents consider to be the Ultimate [God]. One religion may be more or less better than the others, but all are adequate. As such, pluralism is diametrically opposed to biblical exclusivism, which claims that Christianity is true and that anything opposed to it is false. Again, herein is the problem that McGrath accurately captures:

> How can Christianity's claims to truth be taken seriously when there are so many rival alternatives and when "truth" itself has become a devalued notion? … [It is alleged that] no one can lay claim to possession of the truth. It is all a question of perspective. All claims to truth are equally valid. There is no universal or privileged vantage point that allows anyone to decide what is right and what is wrong. ("CPCCC" in *JETS*, 365)

Pluralists set forth their arguments on several fronts. Each will be stated and treated in order. First, we will examine the claim of the alleged moral and spiritual equality of all religions.

## The Argument That All Religions Teach Similar Truth

Pluralist John Hick (b. 1922) argues,

> I have not found that the people of the other world religions are, in general, on a different moral and spiritual level from Christians.… The basic ideal of love and concern for others and of treating them as you would wish them to treat you is, in fact, taught by all the great religious traditions. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 39)

Hick contends that this is proven by statements found in other religions that are similar to the Golden Rule (ibid., 39–40).

## Response

*First*, it is questionable that "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22) can actually be found in non-Christian doctrines. While no one denies there are "good people" who adhere to other faiths, their "goodness" does not demonstrate that they are manifesting the highest moral standard of love (*agape*). A man's generosity, kindness, and even death for his beliefs does *not* show that he lives out of true love (e.g., 1 Cor. 13:3). God's common grace *does* enable even evil people to do

good (e.g., Matt. 7:11); nevertheless, it is apparent that only God's supernatural love (*agape*) can compel a person to express it (cf. John 15:13; Rom. 5:6–8; 1 John 4:7).

Likewise, while many believe that William James (1842–1910) proved the equality of all forms of goodness in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), in *Religious Affections*, convincingly showed that Christian godliness provides unique manifestations. My own decades of observation seem to confirm that there is a difference in the highest level of Christian and non-Christian piety in favor of Christianity. For example, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Islam have produced neither a Mother Teresa (1910–1997) nor the self-sacrificing *agape* love Jesus singles out as being unparalleled (John 15:13).[16]

*Second*, even a demonstration of some sort of practiced moral equality among most adherents of the world's prominent religions would not establish either the equality or inferiority of the Christian faith's moral teachings.

For one thing, a person flawlessly practicing a lesser moral code may appear to be "better" than a person imperfectly living in accordance with a higher one. In order to make a fair comparison, one must do two things: (1) Consider the highest moral teachings of each religion, and (2) compare the lives of the adherents who best exemplify the standards of each. For instance, doing so with Christianity and Hinduism and then evaluating the lives of Mother Teresa and Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) demonstrates the matchlessness of Christian compassion for the needy.

What is more, we must differentiate between what was *inherent* in another religious paradigm before Christian influence and what was *incorporated* into it as the result of Christian example. Hinduism as a system does not generate social compassion; the societal beneficence found in some current forms of Hinduism are not indigenous. Such humanitarianism is an import from Christian faith and practice; in fact, the degree to which Gandhi himself displayed such compassion can be traced to his Christian training and to his self-confessed admiration for the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Also, finding a moral principle akin to Judeo-Christianity's Golden Rule (cf. Matt. 7:12) does not demonstrate the moral equality of all religions. *This is a manifestation of general revelation*, that is, the law of God written upon the hearts of all (Rom. 2:12–15). But general revelation neither contradicts *nor* equals special revelation.[17] While applied Christian morality has produced dynamic social compassion, Eastern religions have produced stagnant societies,

and Islam has created abusive and unloving ones.[18]

*Third*, Hick's analysis begs the question:[19] Only by assuming that the moral common denominator of all religions is the standard by which they should all be judged does he arrive at the obvious conclusion that they are all equal. He had to negate the unequaled aspects of Christian morality in order to show that Christianity is not superlative, which he seems to acknowledge in this confession:

> [The] acceptance of some form of the pluralistic view prompts each to de-emphasize and eventually winnow out that aspect of its self-understanding that entails a claim to unique superiority among the religions of the world. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 51)

*Fourth*, the *moral* manifestation of a belief does not settle the *truth* question. For example, the fact that there are "good" Mormons does not prove Joseph Smith (1805–1844) was a true prophet.[20] Indeed, it is likely that he wasn't, since, for instance, he gave demonstrably false prophecies.[21] How adherents live is, *at best*, a. manifestation of their moral code, which may or may not have anything to do with whether their religion's central teachings about God and salvation are true. *Truth is what corresponds to reality*;[22] consequently, a worldview is true only if its fundamental tenets correspond to the real world, not if its followers live "good" lives.[23]

*Fifth*, and finally, the moral preeminence of Christianity does not rest on the imperfection of Christ's followers but on the perfection of Jesus Christ Himself. The ultimate test is not based on our fallible morality but on His unblemished character.[24] Accordingly, Christianity has a moral peerlessness that is recognized by even strongly non-evangelical theologians, such as Paul Tillich (1886–1965):

> Is Jesus unique only because history or historical factors converge in a certain way—in a uniquely significant way—at the time of his life? … No, no, no! I have now given already at least three answers to this. My chief answer was the lack of any "scar" which would show [in Jesus] an estrangement from God.… Another was the total self-sacrifice of him who is the Christ … The third answer was that he shows the presence, in his suffering on the cross, of an utter humility. (*UC*, 156)

One could also add a life full of incomparable miracles that climaxes in Jesus' resurrection from the dead.[25]

## The Argument for the Alleged Redemptive Equality of All Religions

Another argument set forth by pluralists insists that there is no significant

salvific difference among the world's renowned religions. Regarding the Christian belief in an exceptional mode of salvation, Hick suggests this either begs the question or is not practically evident:

> If we define salvation as being forgiven and accepted by God because of Jesus' death on the cross, then it becomes a tautology[26] that Christianity alone knows and is able to preach the source of salvation. [And] if we define salvation as an actual human change, a gradual transformation from natural self-centeredness (with all the human evils that flow from this) to a radically new orientation centered in God and manifest in the "fruit of the Spirit," then it seems clear that salvation is taking place within all of the world religions—and taking place, so far as we can tell, to more or less the same extent. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 43)

Furthermore, what is allegedly common to all religions is an adequate response to the Ultimate:

> [All religions] seem to constitute more or less equally authentic human awareness of and response to the Ultimate, the Real, the final ground and source of everything.… [There are] a plurality of religious traditions constituting different, but apparently more or less equally salvific, human responses to the Ultimate. These are the great world faiths, (ibid., 45, 47).

## Response

Examination reveals several errors in his analysis.

*First*, Hick again begs the question—his whole argument is based on the a priori assumption that all religions have a proper (correct, acceptable) relation to what is truly Ultimate. In truth, perhaps they are *not* properly related or even connected at all to what is actually Ultimate. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) pointed out in *Future of an Illusion* that deception is possible, and Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) observed that "religion" can potentially be a simple projection of one's own imagination (*EC*, chapter 1). Also, Paul Tillich noted that a person can have an ultimate commitment to what is less than Ultimate, which he calls "demonization" (*UC*, 5).

*Second*, Hick incorrectly posits that all religions are nothing but human response to the Ultimate. This too begs the question, this time in favor of an antisupernatural perspective.[27] In fact, it assumes a pantheistic view of the Ultimate as that which, in the various world religions, transcends all particular (cultural) manifestations of It.[28]

*Third*, denial of the truth of any specific religion is itself a form of exclusivism; in this case, the argument favors the *particular* view known as pantheism in order to deny the *particularity* of a view known as Christian

theism. Even the pantheist makes a *particular* (specific, nongeneral, exclusivist) truth claim when his assertion opposes nonpantheistic views. Assuming this kind of pantheistic position as a basis for one's analysis of all religions, including nonpantheistic worldviews, once again simply begs the question. *When the pluralist* denies *that one particular religion is true as opposed to any others—in an effort to refute exclusivism—he himself thereby makes an exclusivist truth claim*; the objection, therefore, is self-defeating.

*Fourth*, pluralism frequently degenerates to the position that whatever is sincerely believed is true. However, this would mean, for example, that it matters not if one is a passionate Satanist or white-supremacist—in any event, his view is truth. In refutation, *sincerity is not a test of reality*. As has been said countless times, many sincere people, on many issues, have been sincerely wrong. All truth is true, no matter how we choose to respond to it.

*Fifth*, and finally, Hick's contention implies that all truth claims are a matter of both/and, not either/or. The fact is that opposites cannot both be true, for the opposite of true is false.[29] For instance, Hindu pantheism and Christian theism cannot both be true, since they affirm mutually exclusive worldviews.[30] Likewise, Christianity, which affirms Christ's literal death and resurrection, and Islam, which denies them, cannot both be correct.

## The Argument That Christ Is Not Unique

Another pluralist objection to exclusivism is the allegation that Christ's excellence does not surpass that of other religious leaders. This attempt to destroy the uniqueness of Christianity is based on a denial of the historicity of the New Testament.[31] As for the Christian teaching about Christ as God incarnate in human flesh, Hick states that there are two primary problems.

### *The First Allegation*

> The first problem is that the historical Jesus did not teach this doctrine… Among mainline New Testament scholars there is today a general consensus that these are not pronouncements of the historical Jesus but words put in his mouth some sixty or seventy years later by a Christian writer expressing the theology that had developed in his part of the expanding church. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 52–53)

Hick then presents a number of biblical writers who supposedly agreed that "Jesus did not claim deity for himself" (ibid., 53).

*Response*

Hick is dreadfully misinformed on the matter. The historicity and reliability of the New Testament documents have been abundantly confirmed.[32] The related New Testament books were not written after the eyewitnesses were dead but while they were still alive. The gospel of John was written by John the apostle (21:24). The gospel of Luke was written by Doctor Luke, a contemporary disciple who knew the eyewitnesses (1:1–4). First Corinthians (which even biblical critics admit was written in A.D. 55–56) speaks of five hundred eyewitnesses (15:5–7), most of whom were living when Paul wrote it less than twenty-five years after Jesus' death. Even the late John A. T. Robinson (1919–1981), a liberal New Testament scholar, dated some of the Gospels as early as A.D. 40–60,[33] much too early to support Hick's view of documents written by a later generation that had already formulated a view contrary to that of the historical Jesus. Therefore, since the Gospels are reporting, not creating, the words and deeds of Christ, there is firm support for His unique and specific claims to be God incarnate, and, thus, indescribably superior to other religious leaders.[34]

*The Second Allegation*

> The second problem is that it has not proved possible, after some fifteen centuries of intermittent effort, to give any clear meaning to the idea that Jesus had two complete natures, one human and the other divine.… Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain? … Do we really want to claim that Jesus was literally omnipotent but pretended not to be, as in Mark 6:5? …[35] While he was good, loving, wise, just, and merciful, there is an obvious problem about how a finite human being could have these qualities in an *infinite* degree. A finite being cannot have *infinite* attributes. ("PV" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 55–56)

*Response*

Hick falls short of claiming that the Incarnation involves an outright logical contradiction, though his language could be taken to imply the same. Even so, if the Incarnation is *not* a logical contradiction, then there is no demonstrated incoherence in the exclusivist view. Hick himself admits that "it is logically permissible to believe anything that is not self-contradictory" (*MGI*, 104).

As for the claim that it is difficult to show just how the Incarnation is a reality, on the same grounds one would have to reject much of our common experience *and* some of modern science, which has difficulty explaining how

light can be both waves and particles. No scientist has been known to give up his belief in light in response to this challenge.

Also, Hick appears to be misinformed about the orthodox theistic view of the two natures of Jesus Christ, embracing an unorthodox view known as monophysitism,[36] which confuses the divine and human natures. His question "Is it really possible for infinite knowledge to be housed in a finite human brain?" reveals this untenable entanglement, for classical theism does *not* claim there was infinite knowledge in the finite brain of Christ. Rather, it affirms that Christ possessed two distinct natures, one infinite and the other finite. The person of Jesus, then, had infinite knowledge only in His infinite nature. As God, He knew all things; as man, Jesus grew in knowledge (Luke 2:52). The same applies to His other attributes; for example, He was omnipotent as God but limited as man.[37]

### The Argument for the Supposed Intolerance of Exclusivism

A more severe tone is struck by pluralists when they engage in name-calling by charging that nonpluralists are *intolerant*. (Exclusivism, by nature, maintains that one view is true and that what is opposed to it in other views is false.) Why should one paradigm possess the truth while the others are disenfranchised?

### Response

*First*, if holding an exclusivist view makes one intolerant, then pluralists are also intolerant, for they claim that their view is true to the exclusion of opposing views (like exclusivism). They certainly wouldn't tolerate the position that their pluralistic view *and* opposing (nonpluralistic) views were both true.[38]

*Second*, if the charge of intolerance is leveled not because of the *content* of the view but rather the *manner* in which one holds it, then the argument is irrelevant—there is no single view that dominates intolerance, and a pluralist can be as intolerant as anyone else. For that matter, there could be both tolerant exclusivists and intolerant pluralists. All of this notwithstanding, *the attitude with which one holds a view has no bearing on its truth value*. Being intolerant about truth does not make it false any more than being tolerant about error makes it true. Studying under a dogmatic mathematician does not mean $7 \times 3$ isn't 21, and studying under a broadminded mathematician does not mean $8 + 6$ is 15.

*Third*, the very concept of tolerance implies an actual disagreement. We don't tolerate that with which we agree—we already affirm it. Tolerance suggests that there are opposing views in the first place; the very concept presupposes a *nonpluralistic* (i.e., exclusivist) view of truth.

**The Argument for Exclusivism's Alleged Narrow-Mindedness**

Pluralists constantly allege that nonpluralists are *narrow-minded:* They claim that their view is true, and everything that opposes it is in error. Again, this seems utterly presumptuous: Why should only exclusivists be in possession of the truth?

**Response**

Pluralists (P) and exclusivists (E) make an equal claim to truth and error—both claim that their view is true and whatever opposes it is false. For instance, if E is true, then all non-E is false. Likewise, if P is true, then all non-P is false. *Exclusivism and pluralism are equally "narrow"; all truth is narrow*. After all, 2 + 3 is not 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 or any other number to infinity except 5. There is only one true answer: This *is* narrow, and whether or not we like it, that's the way truth is.[39]

**The Argument for Exclusivism's Supposed Intellectual Imperialism**

Another charge against exclusivism is that of intellectual imperialism: Exclusivists, allegedly, are totalitarian with regard to truth, and they should be more open to input from other sources. Some pluralists go so far as to claim that not only *truth* but the very idea of *meaning* smacks of fascism (cited by McGrath, "CPCCC" in *JETS*).

**Response**

While this allegation has appeal, it is without merit with regard to determining what is true and what is false.

*First*, this accusation is often fallaciously presented ad hominem, attacking the person rather than the position.

*Second*, the objection has an unjustified presumption, namely, that truth should be more *democratic*. Reality check: Truth is not decided by majority

vote! Again, truth is what corresponds to reality, whether most of us believe it or not.[40]

*Third*, do pluralists really believe that all views are equally true and good? Are fascism and/or marxism as desirable as the preservation of human freedom? Should we have accepted the burning of Hindu widows during the funeral rites of their husbands? No, no, and no.

# THE UNEVEN GROUND OF PLURALISM

Pluralism maintains several dubious premises, among which are the following.

### That There Are Universally Agreed-Upon Trans-Religious Moral Criteria

In order to validate the argument for trans-religious moral equality, one must assume a set of moral criteria, not unique to any particular religion, by which all of them can be measured. However, pantheistic pluralists generally refuse to accept *any* universally binding moral law. If there were such an absolute morality, then there would also be an absolute Moral Lawgiver. As mentioned in Volume 1, only theistic-type religions accept these criteria, and even then some deny the absolutely perfect nature of God.[41]

### That All Religious Phenomena Can Be Naturalistically Explained

Beneath the pluralisms disdain for exclusivism is the preconceived premise that all religious phenomena can be accounted for through naturalistic explanation: Anything supernatural is simply and completely unacceptable. This before-the-fact naturalism, though, is without basis—miracles cannot be discounted a priori.[42] Neither are miracles incredible, as was maintained by David Hume (1711–1776—see *ECHU* and *THN*). As we noted in Volume 1, not only is there evidence for miracles, but there is *substantial* evidence for both the astounding supernatural act of the world's *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing") creation[43] and the earthshaking miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.[44]

### That the World Is "Religiously Ambiguous"

Again, John Hick maintains that "the universe, as presently accessible to us, is capable of being interpreted intellectually and experientially in both religious and naturalistic ways" (*IR*, 129). "The Real is perfectly undifferentiated; that is, it has no properties to which our concepts veridically [truly or truthfully] apply" (Geivett, "RJH" in Okholm and Phillips, *FVSPW*, 77).

In response,[45] *first*, it is self-defeating to claim that *we know that we cannot know* the Real.[46]

*Second*, that we do not know reality *exhaustively* doesn't mean we cannot know it *actually*. Douglas Geivett (b. 1959) confirms: "To the extent that God is known at all, he is known truly" (ibid.).

*Third*, the very notion of an undifferentiated Real[47] is at least implausible if not self-defeating. Hick's suggestion that the Real can be illustrated by the concept of Buddhist sunyata[48] is a case in point: If the Real (Ultimate) is undifferentiated—if it has no correlation with our interpretation and understanding—how, then, can any symbol represent it?

*Fourth*, neither can the Real be manifested in various traditions (which Hick contends). In order for something to be *manifested* (displayed, presented, demonstrated), at least some of its characteristics must be *revealed*; the Real, as totally undifferentiated, has no discernible characteristics and, hence, could not be experientially expressed in any meaningful way (ibid.).

*Fifth*, and finally, there is a kind of mystical epistemology presumed in this "God is unknowable" approach, an imperialistic decree on how God can and cannot reveal Himself. One wonders what pipeline to metaphysical truth supplied this absolute information (ibid.).

## That Pluralistic Dialogue Is the Only Way to Truth

Another erroneous presupposition is that pluralistic interreligious dialogue is the best (if not the only) valid way to discover truth. A concomitant fallacy is the assumption that no genuine religious discussion is possible if one assumes his belief is true in advance of the dialogue—this is taken as sure proof that he is not "open to truth." True dialogue assumes that one is tolerant, open, humble, willing to listen and learn, engaging in a shared search for truth in a self-sacrificing, other-oriented love (Hick, *IR*, 239); exclusivism, allegedly, allows for none of these.

In response to this charge, it is necessary to point out, for one thing, that true dialogue is *not* dependent upon the adoption of a pluralistic position on truth.

One can (and, according to Christian belief, must) have the attitude of love, humility, and openness without sacrificing his convictions. For example, one can have a philosophical discussion about the law of noncontradiction[49] without giving up his belief that this precept is absolutely necessary for all cogent thought on either side of the dialogue. Furthermore, the pluralist violates his own imperative in that he is not willing to give up his commitment to pluralism as a condition for such dialogue. Again, the very concept of "tolerance" implies that some views are wrong—it is evil and error that are tolerated. It makes no more sense to say that we "tolerate truth" than it does to say that we "tolerate goodness."

### That Hick's View Is Religiously Neutral

Pluralists like John Hick are frequently disguised in religious neutrality, yet *no such thing exists*. Pluralism is not religiously neutral but is patterned after Hinduism's conception of the Transcendent and is antagonistic to the core principles of Christianity. Furthermore, pluralism does not actually encourage genuine dialogue between the traditions—it renders vacuous the *notion* of being part of a given "religious tradition." According to pluralists, every tradition is essentially the same; to accept pluralism is not to "embrace openness" but to reject one's own tradition for another—that is, the pluralist's.

### That a Relativistic View of Truth Is Correct

Beneath the pluralistic assertion that all major religions have equal claim to the truth is a relativistic view of truth itself. As we have seen, the denial of absolute truth is self-defeating. It claims that relativism is true for everyone, everywhere, and always. What is true for everyone, everywhere, and always is an absolute truth. Therefore, relativism suicidally claims that *relativism* is absolutely true.[50]

## CONCLUSION

Pluralism's claim that all religions are true is self-refuting, for the undeniable law of noncontradiction affirms that opposites cannot both be correct.[51] Consequently, for instance, since Islam claims there is only one person in God,

and Christianity says there are three, both religions cannot be right on this point. Likewise, since Islam teaches that Jesus did not die on the cross and rise from the dead on the third day, and Christianity teaches that He did, one of them is wrong.[52] The same is true of all core beliefs of all religions—some affirm there is a theistic God (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), while others hold to a pantheistic God (e.g., Hinduism, Zen Buddhism, and Taoism). God cannot be both transcendent over the world (as in theism) and not transcendent over it (as in pantheism). If theism is true, then pantheism is false.[53]

Further, pluralism's claim that all religions are equal is unsubstantiated, for in the process of making this charge pluralists maintain unproven presuppositions (such as naturalism and pantheism). They further argue contrary to fact by denying the historicity of the New Testament.[54] What is more, they reduce all religions to their basic common denominator and then claim that none is unique. This begs the question because we cannot determine whether one religion is unique by neglecting uniqueness in favor of comparing it with other religions on the basis of what it has in common with them. In brief, pluralism fails both in fact and in philosophy.

Finally, and fatally, pluralism is hanged on its own gallows, for while it denies exclusivism on the grounds that no view can make an exclusive claim to truth, nonetheless, it claims that pluralism is exclusively true—that is, true to the exclusion of all forms of nonpluralism (such as exclusivism). If pluralism is exclusively true, then it is not actually pluralism but a form of exclusivism.

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# THE RESULTS OF SALVATION (Infants and Heathen)

Salvation is all-encompassing, including the past, present, and future. It also affects all of creation, saved and unsaved, animate and inanimate, human and angelic. Part of this chapter is a summary outline designed to provide a more comprehensive and unified soteriological perspective. Most of it, however, directly and more thoroughly deals with two important topics: the redemptive status of the unborn and the state of the unevangelized (the heathen).

## THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON HUMAN BEINGS AND CREATION

Human beings are the definitive focus of God's magnificent plan of salvation. Nevertheless, the physical world, which stages the salvific saga, and the angelic world, which surrounds it, are likewise significant participants in the overall drama.

### The Results of Salvation on the Saved

Of course, as demonstrated in part 1, salvation presupposes the Fall—there is

no need to restore perfection unless we no longer have it. Therefore, salvation begins where the Fall ends; salvation is not a single event but an overarching process beginning in Genesis 3 (paradise lost) and continuing through Revelation 22 (paradise regained). Historically, salvation includes its Old Testament *anticipation* and its New Testament *realization*.

Salvation includes three spectacular events:

(1) The *official victory* over sin by the Cross;[1]
(2) The *practical victory* over sin within believers;[2]
(3) The *final victory* over sin at the Second Coming.[3]

As we observed in chapter 6, the first step provides *justification* (by which we are saved from the *penalty* of sin), the second is the process of *sanctification* (by which we are rescued from the *power* of sin), and the last will achieve *glorification* (by which we are delivered from the very *presence* of sin).

**The Results of Salvation on the Lost**

While those who reject Christ cannot be saved after death,[4] nonetheless, they will be affected by the process of salvation. All humans, saved and unsaved, will be resurrected (cf. Dan. 12:1–3; John 5:28–29; Rev. 20:1–3); as we have seen, all people are made justifiable by virtue of Christ's death and resurrection (cf. Rom. 5:15–19; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 4:10). Even angels are affected by the marvel of God's plan of salvation for the world (cf. Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12).[5]

Lost angels will be judged by human beings (1 Cor. 6:3), and lost human beings will be condemned by their refusal to accept the testimony of the saved (2 Thess. 1:1–9): "This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ" (Rom. 2:16). The very word of God is a savor of life unto life to those who believe, but it is a savor of death unto death to those who reject it. Jesus said, "There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (John 12:48). In brief, Christ's work of salvation has an extensive influence on both the saved and the lost, positively and negatively.

*The Condemnation of the Lost Is Just*

God's condemnation of the lost will serve justice because His message was

sent to all the world (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). Paul said, “This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant” (Col. 1:23). Jesus also told His disciples: “This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). Those who did not hear the gospel *could* have,[6] for God rewards those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6) and, as Peter said, “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right” (Acts 10:34–35). When people respond to the light of creation (Rom. 1:19–20) and/or conscience (Rom. 2:12–15), God provides the light of redemption—He knows exactly who will be where when the gospel is preached (Acts 17:26), and He knows that no one who would have received salvation did not have the opportunity.

*The Condemnation of the Lost Is Final*

As we have seen, Hebrews 9:27 teaches that every person “is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” In a story regarding the separation of heaven and hell, one of Jesus’ characters said, “Between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us” (Luke 16:26). Reflecting on the eternal state, John declares: “Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy” (Rev. 22:11). Both destinies are final—in the end the wheat will be separated from the chaff, the good from the evil, and the sheep from the goats.

*The Condemnation of the Lost Is Eternal*

The eventual state of the wicked is not only final, but it is also eternal (everlasting):[7]

> All the nations will be gathered before him [Christ], and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.…” Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:32–34, 41).

Paul adds,

> This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power. (2 Thess. 1:7–9)

Two additional categories emerge for discussion: infants and the heathen. Both deserve special attention because of the unique difficulties they present.

## The Question of Salvation for Infants

The eternal status of infants has always been a thorny issue in orthodox Christian theology. On the one hand, to many it seems eminently unjust to condemn babies to eternal flames. On the other hand, they are conceived in sin (Ps. 51:5) and, like the rest of Adam's race, they are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV). Likewise, the Bible proclaims that faith is a condition[8] for receiving God's gift of salvation (John 3:16–18; Acts 16:31), and infants are not able to believe. What is more, Scripture seems to teach that all persons must make their decision in this life for the next one; infants who die as infants in this life are not old enough to have faith. The pros and cons of various views are discussed below in some detail.

## The Question of Salvation for the Heathen

The matter of salvation for the unevangelized (heathen) poses a potential problem for God's omnibenevolence.[9] If God is all-loving, how can He send to an eternal hell people who have never heard the Good News of salvation? This dilemma is made more acute by some estimates that a large portion of the world's more than six billion people have never heard a clear gospel presentation, at least not in their own language.

Christian apologists have offered two basic answers. Some believe the heathen can be saved apart from the gospel by responding to the light of general revelation (creation and conscience). Others believe that God provides the truth of the gospel (special revelation) to those who earnestly seek Him. This issue is also discussed more fully below.

## The Results of Salvation on Angelic Beings

Angels, like human beings, have free will.[10] Some used it to serve God, and

others exercised it to rebel against Him. Those who chose to serve their Creator received the beatific vision; Jesus said that they "always see the face of my Father" (Matt. 18:10). Those who chose to follow Satan in his rebellion against God, leaving their "first estate" (Jude 6 KJV), received the wrath of the Father and are condemned to eternal damnation (Matt. 25:41). Both groups—faithful and unfaithful are affected by the Cross.

*The Results of Salvation on Good Angels: The Beatific Vision*

The reward of good angels is to see God face-to-face. In this beatified state, having beheld an absolute Good, they cannot now choose evil.[11] Even though the angels who never sinned do not personally need the work of the Cross for their salvation, nonetheless, they rejoice when humans are saved (Luke 15:10) and join in when the song of redemption is sung in heaven (Rev. 5:9–11). God's salvation of the church, the bride of Christ, is the object of their heavenly inquiry (1 Peter 1:12; Eph. 3:10).

*The Results of Salvation on Evil Angels: Eternal Suffering*

Even though the wicked angels are irredeemable (Heb. 2:16), it is by the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus that His victory over them is pronounced:

> Having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:14–15)

By virtue of our redeemed status, even we will be used in God's judgment on the angels of evil (1 Cor. 6:3).

## The Results of Salvation on Creation

Although human beings (and only human beings) are the object and focus of biblical salvation (cf. Heb. 2:14–16), their physical surroundings were involved in the Fall (cf. Rom. 8:18ff.), and we will be the beneficiaries of their redemption. There will be both a restoration of paradise on earth and a renovation of the whole created heaven and earth (cf. Rev. 21).

*The Restoration of Paradise*

According to the Revelation, paradise lost will become paradise regained. What was lost by the first Adam will be regained by the Last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45). Death will be reversed, sin will be defeated and banished, and pain will be eliminated. As we have seen, John described it in these words:

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:1–4).

Again, Paul saw it in terms of the liberation of all creation that had been subject to the Fall:

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.
>
> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:18–23)

### *The Renovation of the Universe*

Following Isaiah's prediction (Isa. 65:17), Peter recorded the broadening of the scope of salvation to include the entire created universe that has been infected by sin (cf. Job 15:15; Eph. 2:2; Dan. 8–9):

> The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.
>
> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:10–13)

This will be the ultimate ecological redemption to which our most noble and commendable contemporary efforts will pale in significance.

## THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON INFANTS

We now return to soteriological questions regarding infants and the heathen. As to the former, several views have been proposed; we will examine the merits and difficulties of each.

## The Baptized-Infant View (God Saves Only Baptized Infants)

This view is held only by sacramentalists who believe both (1) that infant baptism is efficacious and (2) that baptism is necessary for salvation. Some Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans espouse this position, and Ambrose (339–397) set it forth:

> No one ascends into the kingdom of heaven, except by means of the sacrament of baptism.… Moreover to this there is no exception, not the infant, nor he who is unavoidably prevented [from being baptized].… They have, however, immunity from pains, (cited by Sanders, *NON*, 291)

Herein are the seeds of the limbo doctrine.[12]

Augustine (354–430) has been given the dubious honor of being the first to teach the damnation of all *unbaptized* infants—essentially, the wrath of God abides on them (*E*, 46; 1.28, 33–35). He did allow, however, that unbaptized infants who die do not suffer as severely as those who live to adulthood and commit actual sins (ibid., 1.21).

The argument for the baptized-infant view is stark and straightforward: Baptism is essential for salvation; therefore, no unbaptized person—including infants—can be saved. Consequent to the position's harshness, modifications were forthcoming. Pelagius (c. 354–c. 420), Augustine's nemesis, reacted against the teaching of unbaptized infant damnation: "Where they are not, I know; where they are, I know not" (cited by Sanders, *NON*, 292).[13] Eventually a "middle place" between heaven and hell was developed that was later called *limbo*. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) upheld Augustine's view but softened it by claiming that unbaptized infants who die do not experience the pain of hell. This, in practice, is virtually indistinguishable from limbo.

Other theologians have put forth the Catholic idea of "baptism of desire" to solve the problem—that is, people can be saved by their desire for baptism if they are prevented from obtaining it. Since the concept of infants desiring baptism is untenable, these apologists posit that the desire of their parents or the church is sufficient. "This idea goes back at least to Hincmar of Rheims (A.D. 860)" (Sanders, *NON*, 293). How, though, can the desire of someone else be effective, when an individual's salvation is a personal matter? To many, vicariously desired baptism seems as meaningless as vicarious marriage.

## Critique of the Baptized-Infant View

*First*, the entire scenario is dependent on a sacramental theology that demands infant baptism as a condition for salvation. Anabaptists[14] reject this in favor of the premise that personal faith is the only condition for salvation.[15] After all, baptism is a work of "righteousness" (Matt. 3:15), and the Bible makes it clear that we are not saved by righteous works (cf. Rom. 4:5; Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7). If baptism does not save,[16] then neither does infant baptism.

*Second*, the baptized-infant view (that the only infants saved are those who are baptized) seems harsh and cruel because it portrays a merciless God. By contrast, the Bible reveals a God of infinite mercy, grace, and love.[17]

*Third*, some have asked how a child who is innocent of any personal (actual) fault can be banned from heaven and cast into hell. Are not people held responsible only for their own sins? Ezekiel wrote: "The soul who sins is the one who will die.… The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him" (Ezek. 18:20; cf. Rom. 2:6; 14:12).

*Fourth*, and finally, the baptized-infant view does not adequately account for the body of scriptural teaching used to support the view that all infants, irrespective of baptism, go to heaven.[18]

**The Elect-Infant View (God Saves Only Elect Infants)**

Another position asserts that the only deceased babies who go to heaven are the ones who are elect. Since Protestants believe in only two possible destinies,[19] the elect-infant view implies that all non-elect infants go to hell. John Calvin (1509–1564), who rejected the baptized-infant view in favor of the elect-infant position (*ICR*, 4.16.17), contended that while salvation is *ordinarily* obtained through hearing the Word of God,[20] nonetheless, God is not limited to that means. Infants who are saved are not granted salvation because they are innocent —no one is. The entire human race sinned in Adam (Rom. 5:12); some of the elect die in infancy, while others grow to become adults.

As for the argument that faith is *absolutely* necessary for salvation, Calvin replied that Paul (in Rom. 10:14ff.) is "only describing the *usual economy* and dispensation which the Lord is wont to employ in calling His people, and *not* laying down *an invariable rule*, for which no other method can be substituted" (*ICR*, 4.16.19, emphasis added). Infants, like adults, are saved by the divine regeneration of their souls, and Calvin taught that God can do this with or

without their knowledge of His salvific plan or their placing of conscious faith in Christ (ibid., 4.16.17, 20–21).

In addition, Calvin believed that Jesus personally assured the salvation of elect infants: “Christ bids them be brought to him. Why so? Because he is life. Therefore, that he may quicken them, he makes them partners with himself” (ibid., 4.16.17). Further,

> Christ was sanctified from earliest infancy, that he might sanctify his elect in himself at any age, without distinction.… If in Christ we have a perfect pattern of all the graces which God bestowed on all his children, in this instance we have proof that the age of infancy is not incapable of receiving sanctification. (ibid., 4.16.18)

Commenting on Matthew 19:14,[21] Calvin said:

> From this we gather that His grace reaches to this age of life also.… It would be too cruel to exclude that age from the grace of redemption.… From this it follows that they were regenerate by the Spirit in the hope of salvation. And finally, that he embraced them was a testimony that Christ reckoned them in His flock. (*CC*, 2.252)

Calvin nowhere affirmed that this regeneration extends to *all* children. We are left with the logical interpretation that as with adults, salvation is possible only for the elect: Non-elect children, like non-elect adults, will be lost.

Concurrently, the Calvinistic Canons of Dort[22] offered the reassurance that “godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleased God to call out of this life in their infancy” (article 17). *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646–1648) likewise affirmed that “elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ” (10.3). This does not *necessarily* limit elect infants to elect parents, but it can be and *has been* taken to imply the same. Even so, the straightforward implication is that non-elect infants are eternally doomed.

The rationale for only elect infants being saved is that since God chose the elect before they were born, even before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4; cf. Rom. 8:29), it is reasonable to infer that He chose certain infants to be saved and not others. Ultimately, salvation does not come from human will (Rom. 9:16). Indeed, most Calvinists believe that God has to give faith itself to the elect, often citing Ephesians 2:8–9 and Philippians 1:29 in support. This being the case, it matters not that infants are too young to believe.

As for the justice of God, according to the elect-infant view, God justly condemns the whole human race because of Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12ff.). We are

all, from the moment of conception (Ps. 51:5), sinners by nature (Eph. 2:3), who are deserving of eternal isolation from God. He has no obligation to save anyone, and it is only by His grace that He saves some. Among these, God chose to elect some who would die in infancy and some who would live to adulthood. These elect—and these elect alone—will be accepted into heaven.

## Critique of the Elect-Infant View

The elect-infant view has not been met with wide acceptance outside extreme Calvinist circles; in fact, even some strong Calvinists oppose it.[23]

*First*, the elect-infant view denies universally accessible salvation. Christ did not die only for the elect but for all,[24] and salvation is not offered only to the elect but to all. As we have seen, John says that Christ "is the propitiation for our sins, and *not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world*" (1 John 2:2 NKJV). In the same context, he adds that *world* (from Gk: *kosmos*) means the entire unbelieving, fallen world (vv. 15–17). Peter spoke of the apostate as being "bought" by Christ's blood (2 Peter 2:1). If salvation is for all, then why posit its availability only for elect infants, excluding potential soteriological application for the rest? Indeed, as cited previously, John Calvin himself, the oft-called "father of Calvinism," insisted:

> We must now see in what ways we become possessed of the blessings which God has bestowed on his only begotten Son, not for private use, but to enrich the poor and needy. And the first thing to be attended to is, that so long as we are without Christ and separated from him, nothing which *he suffered and did for the salvation of the human race* is of the least benefit to us. (*ICR*, 3.1.1, emphasis added)

Furthermore,

> We should note, however, that Paul does not here contrast the larger number with the many, for *he is not speaking of the great number of mankind*, but he argues that since the sin of Adam has destroyed many [all],[25] *the righteousness of Christ will be no less effective for the salvation of many [all]. (CC*, on Rom. 5:15, emphasis added)

Thus,

> I approve of the ordinary reading, that [Christ] 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*" (ibid., on Isa. 53:12, emphasis added).

He added,

> *The word "many" does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race:* [Paul] contrasts "many" with "one," as if to say that [Jesus] would not be the Redeemer of one man, but would meet death to deliver many of their cursed guilt. *It is incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world. (EPG*, IX.5, emphasis added)

*Second*, Peter states that God desires to save everyone (2 Peter 3:9), and Paul confirms that God "wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). If God desires all to receive salvation, and if it is possible to save *some* infants (i.e., the elect) apart from personal faith (as taught by the elect-infant view), then why would He not elect *all* of them to salvation?

*Third*, it is of little comfort for anyone other than elect parents to be assured that elect infants are saved. For example, teaching that infant salvation is limited to only those of believing parents offers no hope for the unevangelized.[26] The heathen have not yet heard the gospel and, as such, are not part of *the* covenant family in general or covenant families in particular. It's possible that God is calling out a people for His sake—from "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Rev. 7:9)—from among infants in heathen lands as well.

*Fourth*, the elect-infant view presents an indescribably severe conceptualization of God's justice and mercy. While all orthodox theologians accept that humans are born in sin, not all of them see this as sufficient grounds for excluding God's love from *anyone*. Once again, while there is nothing in fallen humans that merits salvation, there is something in God—omnibenevolence—that prompts Him to seek the salvation of everyone He has created (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:6–8).

*Fifth*, the elect-infant view fails to distinguish between an inherited sin nature (on which all orthodox Christians agree) and a personal rebellion against God, which only those old enough to consciously sin can choose (cf. John 9:41). That is, the natural bent toward evil is one thing; living in rejection and defiance of God is another. Since infants have not exercised the latter, they are not in the same category as willfully rebellious adults.

*Sixth*, while our definition of "total depravity"[27] entails all infants being born in sin, nevertheless, the Bible teaches that Christ reversed this curse (which we inherited from Adam—Rom. 5:12–19) and that God will judge human beings only on the sins they have actually and personally committed in this life.[28] Infants have not committed such sins; hence, it seems to follow that God does not condemn those who die before adulthood.

*Seventh*, and finally, it is problematic to reconcile the elect-infant view with the seemingly universal demand that one must believe in order to be saved (e.g., John 3:36; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:17). There appears to be no way a baby can express conscious, explicit faith in God.[29] Relatedly, on two grounds, the verses that allegedly support the position that saving faith is a gift of God are rejected as evidence for the elect-infant view.

For one thing, none of them clearly teaches that saving faith is a gift God gives only to some. For example, in Ephesians 2:8–9 it is not *faith* that is God's gift but *salvation*.[30]

Furthermore, it would contradict the rest of God's Word to say that saving faith is a gift given only to some: Scripture calls on all people to believe (e.g., Acts 16:31; 17:30; Rom. 10:13–14) and condemns them if they do not (John 3:18–19). This biblical mandate presumes that they have the ability to believe.[31]

## The Foreknown-Infant View (God Saves Only Those Infants He Foreknew Would Have Believed)

According to the foreknown-infant position, God, the omniscient Being, foreknows which infants would have believed if they had lived long enough to choose to do so. Accordingly, He will save *only* those infants; the rest are lost, since they would not have believed even if they had lived to adulthood.

The foreknown-infant argument has commonalities with both the electinfant view (see above) and the evangelized-after-death-infant view (see below). For instance, it affirms that God is omniscient (Ps. 139:1–6), and, as such, He knows "the end from the beginning" (Isa. 46:10); indeed, He "foreknew" the elect (Rom. 8:29). Adherents point out that there seems to be no logical reason why these foreknown ones could not have included those elect who would die in infancy.

One advantage the foreknown-infant position has over the elect-infant view is that it avoids the suggestion that God is unmerciful and/or unjust.[32] Another strong point is that it takes faith into account as a condition for receiving salvation (cf. John 3:16–19) and thus avoids the declaration (or implication) that God saves some apart from their willingness to receive everlasting life. Another value of the foreknown-infant view is that it preserves God's omnibenevolence, His universally manifest love.

## Critique of the Foreknown-infant View

While the drawbacks with this position are perhaps not insurmountable, nonetheless, there are some difficulties that should be noted.

*First*, from a strong Calvinist perspective, it is objected that in the foreknown-infant view God's foreknowledge is *based on* human freedom rather than on His absolute sovereignty (see Nash, *WBD*, 79). That is, the foreknown-infant view holds that God saves these babies *because of* their foreseen faith. This appears to negate the *unmerited* grace of God, who acts solely "according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph. 1:5 NKJV) and not due to anything we determine or accomplish (Eph. 2:8–9).

Even for a strong Calvinist, though, this objection is not telling. One need not hold that God's foreknowledge is *based on* anyone's free will but simply, as the Scriptures say, *in accord with* it (cf. 1 Peter 1:2). In other words, foreknowledge and election are coordinate, co-eternal properties of God; for instance, He may have simply (and graciously) ordained that for the elect, potential free choice would be the means through which He would elect them.

*Second*, if the act of believing is a necessary condition for anyone to receive salvation, it is difficult to understand how it is sufficient for their salvation that God simply foreknew these infants *would have* believed had they lived longer lives (i.e., that He saves them in view of their *potential* faith). Of course, on the assumption that babies "grow up" in heaven (it's difficult to picture eternal infants), they will have a chance to *actually* believe, which would resolve the question of how potential faith can be accepted (in advance) for actual faith. However, if this *is* the case, then technically the matter is no longer within the realm of *infant* salvation (salvation *as* infants), since they would not actually be saved until after infancy, namely, when they were old enough to believe for themselves.

*Third*, like the baptized-infant view, the foreknown-infant position lacks explicit biblical support. There are no passages declaring this is in fact what God will do with infants; hence, it seems to be more suited to the category of theological possibility.

*Fourth*, how can someone be saved by *potential* faith? Again, if faith is a necessary condition for salvation,[33] either in this life or in the next, then God's foreknowledge alone—His knowing that they *would have* believed—is insufficient. To respond by arguing that not only *would* they believe, given time in this life, but also that they *do* believe after death (when they "grow up") is to reduce the foreknown-infant view to the evangelized-after-death-infant

position.[34]

*Fifth*, some modern Catholic theologians (and others) speak of infants as exercising "implicit faith," but how can sense be made of this concept? How can someone whose cognitive and conscientious faculties are undeveloped possibly express *any* kind of faith? For example, while infants are dependent on their parents for meeting their many needs, they make no deliberate choice to trust or believe for this: it is instinctive. Faith, at least saving faith as scripturally described, is *not* automatic; it is a conscious, voluntary act.

*Sixth*, to many opponents this view involves the seemingly horrible injustice of condemning—to eternal damnation—those non-foreknown infants who have never actually sinned. In this sense it is comparable to the extreme Calvinist elect-infant view; to critics, such teaching seems eminently unloving.

In response, a proponent of the foreknown-infant view could argue for the undeniable possibility that *all* who die in infancy would have believed had they lived long enough. This modified position would blend into the all-infant salvation views.

## THE ALL-INFANT SALVATION VIEWS

Since the seventeenth century more people (of variable theological persuasions) have held to universal infant salvation than to any other position, so much so that, strangely, even some Calvinists who maintain limited atonement embrace a form of it (e.g., see Nash, *WBD*, chapter 5). The all-infant salvation view has three basic types of adherents:

(1) Those who base it on the premise that all infants either *would have* believed in this life or eventually *will* believe after death;
(2) Those who base it on the premise that God has elected all infants (just as He has elected some adults) and, by the irresistible grace of regeneration (apart from faith), He will save everyone who doesn't reach the age of accountability;[35]
(3) Those who base it on the premise that God, because infants cannot believe, will save all of them (apart from the condition that they would have believed in this life).

Since the first view (that all infants either would have or will believe) has already been discussed above,[36] the other two will be examined here.

**The View That God Elects All Infants and Saves Them by Irresistible Grace Apart From Faith**

This position, as presented by five-point Calvinist Ronald Nash (b. 1941), goes something like the following:

(1) All who die before the age of accountability are incapable of moral good or evil;
(2) God will only punish people (in the next life) on the basis of evils they have committed in this life;
(3) All who die before the age of accountability, then, will not be punished in the next life (that is, they will be saved);
(4) Arminians, however, hold that faith is a necessary condition for salvation;
(5) Those who die before the age of accountability cannot believe (that is, have faith);
(6) Hence, according to *Arminian* doctrine, no one dying before the age of accountability can be saved;
(7) *Calvinism* teaches that God can regenerate people without their consent (faith);
(8) Consequently, only a Calvinist can consistently maintain that all who die before the age of accountability will be saved. (ibid.)

To support Nash's *first* premise (that all who die before the age of accountability are incapable of moral good or evil), both Scripture and reason can be mobilized. The Bible speaks of an age before which an individual is not morally accountable. For instance, Nash cites Deuteronomy 1:39: "The little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it."

The *second* premise (that the only punishment in the next life will be on the basis of evils committed in this life) is also scripturally based. Second Corinthians 5:10 declares that "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for *the things done while in the body*, whether good or bad." Since many believe that this passage specifically refers to believers, Revelation 20:12–13 is more to the point:

> I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book

> was opened, which is the book of life. *The dead were judged according to what they had done* as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each person was judged according to what he had done*.

The *third* premise (that all persons dying before the age of accountability will be saved) follows logically[37] and is likewise biblically grounded. Nash cites Matthew 19:13–14—"The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (little children, v. 14)—and Mark 10:13–16 and Luke 18:15–17, where "babies" (infants) were brought to Jesus and He said: "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Following John Calvin, Nash also offers more disputable examples such as Jeremiah 1:5[38] and Luke 1:15.[39] While these texts do indicate that God, from the womb, had set these children apart, they neither say that *these* infants were regenerated at this time nor that *all* babies in die womb are saved. Given that, according to strong Calvinism, God only loves, elects, and irresistibly saves *some* adults (the elect), Nash offers no solid evidence for his belief that *all* infants are elect. Nonetheless, his conclusion to this point (as stated by the third premise—that all who die before the age of accountability will be saved) appears to be sound.

The remaining premises and conclusion, though, are seriously problematic and should be rejected on several grounds.

*First*, the *fourth* premise (that "Arminians" believe faith is a necessary condition for salvation)—is not exclusively "Arminian." Many moderate Calvinists, for example, also maintain this view.[40]

*Second*, and more to the heart of the issue, Nash's presentation of the fourth premise is based on an unjustified presupposition, namely, that belief *in this life* is an absolute condition for salvation. Even John Calvin denied this (as cited above), pointing out that faith may be the *customary* salvific condition but not an *absolute* one. In addition, Nash and most other strong Calvinists insist that regeneration logically occurs *prior to* belief.

To put the rebuttal in different terms, there is no heaven for those who *will not* believe—that is, rebellious persons who are morally accountable in this life. However, there is heaven for those who *cannot* believe—that is, persons who are not morally accountable and hence are not yet able to believe in this life.

*Third*, there is reason to believe that those who were morally unaccountable in this life will "grow up" in the next; hence, they will be able to believe after they are in heaven. Even Nash agrees that infants will mature:

> The Bible describes the redeemed in heaven as possessing glorified bodies.… [These] bodies will represent that dimension of our humanity *at its best*. I believe this means that children who die in infancy will greet us in heaven as mature adults. (ibid., 105)

Nevertheless, how could they be "mature" without being rationally and morally accountable? Consequently, Nash has no sufficient basis on which to *deny* that those elect who cannot believe in this life *will* believe in the next. In short, faith—as a condition for receiving salvation—is only absolute in *this* life for those who are old enough to believe.[41] It can be stated, then, that for the elect who don't live long enough to believe, faith is an ultimate condition in the *next* life.

*Fourth*, Nash's *sixth* premise (the conclusion that, *according to Arminian teaching*, no one who dies before the age of accountability can receive salvation) fails, because it assumes the truth of the *fifth* premise (that those who die before they reach moral responsibility cannot believe), which, on Nash's conditions,[42] is not justified. On the grounds that babies who die will one day have the ability to believe, Arminians and moderate Calvinists *can* hold to infant salvation (even universal infant salvation) without contradiction.

*Fifth*, the *seventh* premise (the extreme Calvinist dogma that God can regenerate people apart from their will) is untenable, contradicting the clear biblical teaching that faith is prior to regeneration rather than the reverse. We are "justified by faith" (Rom. 5:1 NKJV); meaning faith leads to justification, not vice versa. This is the uniform New Testament pattern: A person must believe in order to be saved (e.g., John 3:16, 18; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 16:31; et al.). Again, *no one has ever scripturally demonstrated that we must be saved in order to believe*.[43]

*Sixth*, in connection with the previous point, Nash's overall paradigm is based on the incoherent premise that God's grace can be irresistible without being coercive (*WBD*, 96). This is in opposition to a biblical and rationally justifiable view of human freedom as self-determining.[44] Extreme Calvinism argues that infants can be saved without their consent in the same way God allegedly saves adults (by regenerating them before they believe). However, if someone does not will to believe, irresistibly forcing him to "believe" is to force his choice. Again, a "forced choice," not being a free choice, is an absurd proposition.[45]

*Seventh*, and finally, even if all of his premises were correct, Nash cannot legitimize the salvation of *all infants* and still maintain the consistency of his own position, since he adheres to a limited atonement (ibid., 93).[46] Accordingly, because of this stance, he has no reliable reason to believe that God's election is

any broader among infants than it is among adults. If Christ only died for *some* adults, as extreme Calvinism posits,[47] then why should we assume that He died for *all* infants?

## The View That God Will Save All Infants Because They Cannot Believe

Proponents of this teaching affirm that there is no heaven for those who *will not* believe; those who willingly reject God's offer of salvation will perish (cf. 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:18). The Bible nowhere teaches, however, that those who don't live long enough to *be able* to believe will be excluded from heaven. Defenders of this view, such as Robert Lightner (b. 1931),[48] appeal to a number of passages for support.

### *Little Children Are Part of the Kingdom of God*

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). Jesus also made it clear that "no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). Thus, it would follow that "little children" will be in heaven, and since the text places no limits on the children who will be there, it is suggested that Jesus includes *every* little child in His kingdom.

Those who object to this position argue there is no proof that the term *children*[49] refers to infants or to those prior to an "age of belief." Further, opponents contend that Christ's words ("the kingdom of God belongs to such as these") could be a form of similitude rather than literalism; that is, in order to enter the kingdom, we all must become *like* little children (in humbling ourselves—cf. Matt. 18:4). However, Luke, *by name* (explicitly), mentions "infants" or "babies"[50] as being included among those who will be in the kingdom.

### *David's Infant Son Went to Heaven*

King David prayed fervently for his dying infant son; when the baby died, David immediately ceased praying: "Now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? *I will go to him, but he will not return to me*" (2 Sam. 12:23). David went to heaven (cf. Ps. 16:10–11; Heb. 11:32), and surely his knowledge of being reunited with his child encompassed more than their deceased bodies being placed in the same grave. If this inference is correct, then David's baby went to heaven.

Critics of this interpretation point out that “I will go to him, but he will not return to me” might mean nothing more than “The dead do not return to us; rather, we go to be with the dead.” They also note that the Old Testament conception of the afterlife was not highly developed. Even so, neither of these is a telling point, since David clearly anticipated a blissful afterlife (Ps. 16:10–11), as did other Old Testament writers (cf. Job 19:25–26).

*Babies Are Known of God and Are Written in His Book*

David, in Psalm 139:13–16, speaks of God having created him in his mother’s womb and being written in “your [God’s] book” (v. 16). David refers to himself as a person, an “I” in the womb. This is taken by some to mean that God personally knows embryos and infants and eternally covers them with His love.

Critics argue that “your book” may simply be a figure of speech regarding God’s omniscience or the “book” of His remembrance. True, there is no clear textual indication that David is pointing to the Book of Life, in which are written all the names of the saved (Rev. 20:12). Nonetheless, this caveat does not negate that the child who dies is a person known and loved *from conception* by a God who wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4).

*The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil*

As to the age of accountability, Isaiah refers to a little child before “he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” (Isa. 7:15). As mentioned previously, Moses does the same: “The little ones that you said would be taken captive, your children who do not yet know good from bad—they will enter the land. I will give it to them and they will take possession of it” (Deut. 1:39). These texts seem to imply that there is an age of moral accountability. Even of adults, Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (John 9:41). How much more would this apply to infants who cannot yet know right from wrong.[51]

In response, opponents observe that even if Isaiah *is* highlighting an age of accountability, it does not thereby show that all infants are saved. There are still at least two other all-infants-are-saved premises that must be proven: (1) that inherited depravity *in and of itself* is not sufficient for eternal condemnation, and (2) that faith *in this life* is not absolutely essential for eternal salvation. Stated briefly, then, Isaiah’s reference to a young child without moral awareness may refer only to personal or social guilt rather than to either inherited sin or ultimate salvation.

### *Romans 5 Says "All" Were "Made Righteous"*[52]

As previously observed,[53] Paul declares:

> Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of *one* act of righteousness was justification that brings life for *all* men. For just as through the disobedience of the *one* man the *many* [i.e., *all*] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the *many* [i.e., *all*] will be made righteous. (vv. 18–19)

Since Paul's unmistakable teaching is that we *all* are somehow "made righteous" by Christ's obedient death, it remains then for us to ask *in what sense* this is true.

Since universalism is clearly excluded by both the immediate context and other passages,[54] Paul cannot mean that all were *actually* (rather than potentially) made righteous. Further, it does not appear that Paul is referring to the declaration of our righteousness *in the sense of justification*, which comes only by faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; 3:21–26), and which infants, being infants, cannot exercise. It *can* mean, however, that the original sin brought about by Adam's choice is canceled by the work of Christ. If this is the case, humans are no longer hell-bound solely due to inherited depravity; they must commit their own personal sins to eventuate in condemnation.[55] Consequently, since infants have not committed actual sins, they could all be saved even though not yet able to believe.

According to this argument, the judicial condemnation brought by Adam upon all humanity (Rom. 5:12) was reversed by Christ, and thus God, no longer bound to condemn, need not condemn any infant. Be this as it may, as was contended earlier, God's condemnation is *not* based on inherited depravity[56] but on the evil that one actually chooses in this life (cf. Rev. 20:12–13). Infants have committed no morally accountable sinful deeds; therefore, God can save all infants because they have been made savable through Christ's finished work.

Critics of this view emphasize its novelty and deny its necessity, noting that it tends toward universalism[57] and eliminates faith as an absolutely necessary salvific condition in this life.[58] They also contend that it is both possible and traditional to interpret Romans 5:18–19 in other ways.

## Summary Evaluation of Universal Infant Salvation Apart From Belief

One merit of this view is that it both satisfies God's justice and magnifies His omnibenevolence. In addition, it presents a conceivable biblical basis. Nonetheless, opponents raise several criticisms.

*First*, critics object that, according to this view, infants are saved without faith, while the Bible seems to teach that faith is a necessary condition for receiving the gift of eternal life (e.g., John 3:36; Acts 16:31; Heb. 11:6).[59]

In response, as already observed, some have argued that faith is a *normative* but not *absolute* requirement for salvation. Or, it may be absolutely necessary in this life for those who *can* believe but not for those (like infants) who *cannot*. For those who die prior to accountability, the choice could be left to the next life; this takes nothing away from the emphatic scriptural exhortations to those who can believe that they must believe before death (cf. John 3:18, 36; 5:24; Heb. 9:27).

*Second*, it is argued that, by its very nature, the salvation of free creatures involves a free consent. Saving infants against their will is no more possible than saving adults against their will (cf. Matt. 23:37; John 5:40).

In response, defenders make two observations. For one thing, according to this position, infants are not saved *against* their will but *apart from* their will—they are too young to believe. For another, it is always possible that all infants are in the class of those who would have believed had they been old enough to do so; that they will be given the opportunity to do so when they "mature" in heaven, it is contended, resolves the problem of faith and freedom.[60]

*Third*, critics insist that nowhere does God's Word spell out any age of accountability and, thus, it is purely speculative.

In response, there *is* some biblical evidence that there is some point in one's life at which he or she becomes morally responsible (cited above). Furthermore, both experience and common consent inform us that tiny children are not morally responsible, which is why they do not stand trial for their wrongs. Psychologically, infants and small children do not have sufficiently developed rational faculties to discern good from evil.

Also, that we may not be able to point to a *precise* age at which moral accountability begins is not an overwhelming difficulty. Consider, for example, self-consciousness: Even if we do not know precisely *when* it occurs, we nevertheless know *that* it occurs. The exact age of accountability may differ for individuals, depending on their moral development. Perhaps it is earlier for those who are more quickly exposed to explicit truth. At any rate, while it theoretically occurs for most people between the ages of four and twelve, it doesn't arrive at

all for those who never reach that stage of intellectual and moral maturity. *The age of accountability arrives when an individual is able to understand the difference between right and wrong and the consequences of making moral choices.*[61]

The criticisms of this view are by no means definitive. That God will save all those who never (in this life) reach the point of moral accountability is both theologically possible and biblically plausible. The most problematic issues are (1) the need for these infants (or small children) to eventually exercise their own conscious faith and (2) the apparent exception to the necessity for making a decision, before death, to believe in Jesus Christ. These questions, however, are not unanswerable, especially in view of the possibility that God foreknew that those who die too young to have faith would all be among those who would eventually mature and believe.[62]

**The Limbo-Infant View (Infants Are Neither Saved Nor Lost)**

The positions presented above all assume that there are only two possible destinations for infants. Perhaps there is a third place (or condition)—*limbo*. Some Roman Catholic theologians have posited limbo for babies who die unbaptized (and, accordingly, unsaved). It is possible to detach the doctrine of limbo from a sacramental paradigm[63] and instead simply argue that all non-elect babies who die go there, or at least all those who would not have believed had they reached the developmental point of being able to exercise faith.

However, even proponents find it difficult to locate scriptural support of any kind of limbo, which is more than anything a result of theological speculation. The hypothesis seems to be that regarding infants who die, God can neither justly allow them into heaven nor mercifully send them into hell, so He sends them to a sort of neutral state.[64]

**Critique of the Limbo-Infant View**

*First*, even some contemporary Catholic theologians reject limbo, admitting to both its lack of support and its speculative status.

*Second*, the Bible is void of references to any such view; any statements that can be adduced to support limbo speak merely of the baby not yet having reached a state of world-consciousness (e.g., Job 3).

*Third*, why should God not do the same for those who have not heard the

gospel? After all, like infants, they have not rejected Christ, since they haven't even heard of Him. Neither is there evidence, however, that God has a *limbo* for the unevangelized.[65]

*Fourth*, and finally, the very nature of limbo is hazy, raising both serious questions and objections.[66] For instance, would it be a place of annihilation? Are its inhabitants alive but not conscious, as though comatose?

**The Evangelized-After-Death-Infant View**

The remaining position contends that infants will mature after death (perhaps immediately) and will then be given an opportunity to believe. Those who believe will be saved, and those who do not (if there are any) will be lost. The possibility that all infants who die before the age of accountability are those whom God knew would have believed involves so-called *implicit* or *potential* faith, which will mature into actual faith at the moment of their decision.

According to the evangelized-after-death-infant view, those who die before moral responsibility will be allowed, after death, to "grow up," hear the Gospel, and decide for themselves where they will spend eternity. This belief, going back at least to Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-c. 395) and now held by some Roman Catholic theologians,[67] has four primary bases:

(1) People are condemned to hell for their own willful sin; (2) Jesus died for all people, including young children who die; (3) all people receive sufficient grace for salvation; and (4) the act of faith is necessary for salvation. (Sanders, *NON*, 298)

Proponents of the evangelized-after-death-infant view contend that it is one of few positions upholding justice to all four premises.

**Critique of the Evangelized-After-Death-Infant View**

*First*, there is a conspicuous absence of biblical texts asserting that infants will mature after death, although, in response, this is not an uncommon belief as applied to the resurrection body. It is reasonable to assume that small children (who have believed) will "grow up" and have adult bodies in heaven; why, then, cannot those who die in infancy be given an opportunity to believe at that time? Furthermore, proponents of the view note that neither are there biblical texts explicitly stating, for instance, the doctrine of the Trinity, and this does not mean it has no scriptural foundation.[68] Doctrines can be properly deduced or inferred

from other, more overt biblical teachings.

*Second*, even if infants do mature after death, there is no evidence that they will then be evangelized: The only biblically cited evangelistic forum is earth (cf. Matt. 28:18–20, etc.). In response, however, it is possible that these texts refer only to the evangelization of those who do not die in infancy and the like.[69] Thus, the necessity that the decision for salvation must take place before death could be normative but not absolute.[70]

*Third*, Scripture plainly teaches that there is no hope for salvation beyond the grave (e.g., Heb. 9:27; cf. Luke 16:26–31; John 8:24). In response, perhaps these texts apply only to those who have lived to reach an age of moral accountability and have rejected the light God has given them.

*Fourth*, and most to the point, the evangelized-after-death-infant view, in not positing that all infants will be saved, overlooks the array of passages (presented above) that point to the universal salvation of everyone who dies without realizing accountability.

## Summary and Conclusion

None of the views is without difficulties. The baptized-infant and elect-infant positions have serious problems. The limbo-infant doctrine lacks any real basis. The foreknown-infant, all-infant, and evangelized-after-death-infant views seem to be the most viable in terms of theological merit and biblical support. There are at least three crucial factors in determining which of these positions is correct.

### *Is Faith an Absolute Condition for Salvation?*

There is a distinction between the personal innocence of infants and the conscious rejection of salvation by adults, *if* faith is not *absolutely essential* but is instead *normatively necessary* for salvation. If the latter (normative necessity) is correct, it makes sense to speak of all infants being saved without believing simply because of the work of Christ on their behalf.

On the other hand, if faith is an absolute essential for salvation before death—and many biblical passages (cited above) have been understood this way—then there is no heaven for those who *cannot* believe any more than for those who *do not* believe. Infants cannot believe, and we know that some, if not all, will be saved. In this case, it makes more sense to believe that infants will mature after death and be given a chance to make their decision.

*Does God Always Offer Everyone the Opportunity to Believe?*

If God does *not* give everyone the chance to believe, then the baptized-infant and elect-infant views make sense. However, the Bible is filled with affirmations that God offers salvation to all;[71] therefore, it appears to logically follow (as well as be inferred by God's love) that those who would believe if they could but die before they can will be given a chance to do so after they leave this life.

*Is Inherited Depravity Alone Sufficient for Condemnation?*

If original sin is enough to send anyone to hell, then the baptized-infant and elect-infant views are more plausible. If, however, one's own personal decision in rejecting God's message is necessary, then those two positions lose their credibility. The feasibility of the all-infant salvation views depends on this fact, for without it universal infant salvation cannot be easily justified. As demonstrated above, (1) the arguments for the savability of all infants (Rom. 5:18–19), (2) the fact that people are only condemned on the basis of acts done in this life (Rev. 20:12–13), and (3) God's omnibenevolence and perfect justice all argue against inherited depravity as solely sufficient for sending people (including infants) to hell.

It is worth noting that the views allowing for the possible salvation of all infants are not only compatible with God's justice and love, but they also help solve the question of heathen salvation. Since God is just, and since no one can be saved without Jesus Christ,[72] and since many heathen lands have not heard the Gospel, it is reasonable to infer that God's elect—who will come from *every* tribe, kindred, and tongue—could include those who die in infancy. Because it is estimated that among some heathen peoples up to half of all babies die before becoming morally accountable, it potentially follows that there will be innumerable heathen in heaven who never heard the Gospel while on earth.

## THE RESULTS OF SALVATION ON THE HEATHEN

As to the salvation of the unevangelized, we will examine two main perspectives. The traditional orthodox view is that salvation is only possible by special soteriological revelation from God; general revelation is sufficient only for condemnation.[73]

Other theologians, however, hold that if one does *not* receive God's special

revelation regarding the plan of salvation, then what he understands and accepts through general revelation is sufficient for eternal life. Of course, the basis for his salvation is still the work of Christ, even though he may not be aware of what Christ has done for him.

## The General-Revelation View (That the Heathen Can Be Saved Through God's Creation)

Those who believe today's unevangelized can be saved apart from hearing the gospel (that Jesus died for their sins and rose from the dead—cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–5) reason in the following manner.

*The Love and Justice of God*

Arguing from God's attributes of love and justice, some Christian apologists insist that He would not condemn those who have never heard the gospel of Christ. They emphasize biblical affirmations of God's justice (e.g., Gen. 18:25; Ps. 33:5), that He is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34 KJV) and "does not show favoritism" (Rom. 2:11). Further, God is omnibenevolent (2 Peter 3:9); He loves the whole world and sent His only Son to die for it (John 3:16).

*Acts 10:35*

Peter told Cornelius, a Gentile who had never heard the gospel, that God "accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right." The text indicates that Cornelius had "feared God" (v. 2 KJV) and was accepted by Him even though he had not yet explicitly heard the Good News.

*Hebrews 11:6*

"Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." This would seem to include those who have never heard the gospel.

*Acts 19:2–5*

This passage tells of believers, years after the time of Christ, who were saved even though they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. When Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" they replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit" (v. 2). So Paul declared the truth to them and, "on hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (v. 5). They were called "disciples" (i.e., believers) even before Paul

preached to them (v. 1).

*Galatians 3:8*

According to Paul, “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ ” There is no evidence that the “gospel” Abraham heard contained the explicit message that Christ would die and be raised from the dead. When Abraham believed, the text simply says, “[The LORD] took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.…. So shall your offspring be’ ” (Gen. 15:5). Abraham was not required to believe on the death and resurrection of Jesus before he could be saved.

*Revelation 14:6*

John recorded: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the *eternal gospel* to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.” If the gospel by which these people were saved is eternal, then it was the same ultimate *proclamation* as in the Old Testament (which, as the next text indicates, did not have the same developed *content* as the more-fully-revealed New Testament gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–5).[74] Nevertheless, people were saved by believing the good news that God is gracious.

*Jonah 3:1–10*

The Old Testament contains an explicit account of heathen salvation. Jonah, the Israelite prophet, was told to go to Nineveh (in Assyria) and announce their coming doom:

> [Jonah] proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.” The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.… When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened, (vv. 4–5, 10)

Jonah later said of their conversion, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity” (4:2). There is no indication whatsoever that the content of the message they believed was more than trust in a gracious God who forgives those who turn to Him in faith from their sins.

*Psalm 19:1–4*

David indicates that the very heavens proclaim the gospel to all people:

> The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

This passage appears to teach that everyone, everywhere, has heard the "gospel of creation" (general revelation) by which they can be saved. Interestingly, however, this is the very passage Paul references in saying that no one can hear without a preacher (i.e., special revelation—Rom. 10:18).

*The Gospel in the Stars*

Some, following E. W. Bullinger (1837–1913) in *The Witness of the Stars*,[75] have even contended that the gospel is spelled out in the constellations, later distorted into what we know as the signs of the zodiac.[76] There are several serious problems with this view.

*First*, the so-called "gospel in the stars" obviously is not clear to everyone, as the Bible says general revelation is to all (Rom. 1:19). Many people, including this author, confess to not being able to see the plan of salvation in the sky, even when it is explained by proponents of the view.

*Second*, there are no lines between the stars or numbers on them for guidance in drawing them. Lines can be drawn in ways that do not spell out the gospel.

*Third*, even when the lines are drawn in a way favorable to the view, it still falls short of a clear gospel presentation.

*Fourth*, it is a form of astrology, a practice that is often biblically condemned (cf. Ex. 22:18; Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10; Jer. 50:36; Ezek. 13:7; Dan. 2:2ff.) whether it is "Christianized" or not.

*Fifth*, the stars were given for signs and seasons (Gen. 1:14), not for days and years. They were given neither to foretell human events nor to proclaim the gospel.

*Sixth*, the so-called "gospel in the stars" is a false gospel, since Centaur, who is supposedly a picture of Christ, is part horse and part man, not wholly God and wholly man. (In reality, this is a Greek myth about illicit sex between humans, animals, and the gods.)

*Seventh*, and finally, the view is contrary to the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, which says that God's Word alone is our source of information about salvation. Again, general revelation brings condemnation but not salvation

(Rom. 1:20; 2:15).

*Romans 2:6–7*

Paul affirms that "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done.'[77] To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality he will give eternal life." This is in the context of "Gentiles, who do not have the law" (2:14), that is, the heathen, which appears to mean that the unevangelized can receive "eternal life" apart from special revelation through God's law.

*An Important Distinction*

All evangelicals believe that Christ's death and resurrection (the fact of His finished work) are necessary for anyone's salvation. However, those who maintain that salvation can be obtained through general revelation insist that it is not necessary to *know* about what Christ has done. Accordingly, all verses (see below) indicating that Christ's death and resurrection are soteriologically necessary are taken to refer to the *fact* of Christ's sacrifice rather than to explicit *knowledge of* that truth.[78]

**The Special-Revelation View (That Salvation Comes *Only* Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ)**

The standard orthodox position down through the centuries—held by Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, and their followers—is that, in this age, salvation is not possible apart from *knowledge of and belief in* the death and resurrection of Christ.

*Evidence That Salvation Is Only Through Knowledge of Jesus Christ*

This position regarding the eternal destiny of the heathen seems to call into question God's justice and omnibenevolence. Nonetheless, there are several biblical passages pointing in this direction.

*John 3:36*

As we have seen, Jesus made it clear that "whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him*." This, too, appears to emphasize knowledge of (and belief in) Christ as necessary for salvation.

*John 3:18*

"Whoever believes in [me] is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe [in me] stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*." Explicitly, belief "in the name of God's one and only Son" is laid down as the salvific condition.[79]

*John 8:24*

"*If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be*, you will indeed die in your sins." Once more, the condition for avoiding eternal death is faith in Jesus.

*John 10:1, 9, 11, 14*

Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, *the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.… I am* the *gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.…* I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.… *I know my sheep and my sheep know me*.

The fact that the sheep (believers) must "know" Christ and "enter" the gate indicates salvation requires specific knowledge of Him.

*Acts 4:12*

The apostles of Jesus boldly declared, "*Salvation is found in no one else*, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Since there is overt reference to the *name* of Christ, it is difficult to believe that explicit knowledge of Christ is not demanded here as a condition for eternal life. Meaning, it is not simply the *fact* of Christ but the very *name* of Christ that is soteriologically necessary.

*Romans 10:9*

Paul teaches that you will be saved "*if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead*." This seems to mandate confession of the very name of Jesus for salvation.

*Romans 10:13–14*

The apostle follows up by adding:

> Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. *How, then, can they call on the one they*

> *have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them*?

The emphasis on the truths that the heathen must "call" on Jesus and that they must "hear" the gospel being preached appears to eliminate the possibility that anyone in this age can be saved apart from hearing the gospel.

*1 John 5:10–13*

John repeats the same truth in his epistles:

> *Anyone who does not believe God* has made him out to be a liar, because he *has not believed the* testimony *God has given about his Son*. And this is the *testimony:* God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life*.

The emphasized words clearly demonstrate that John is teaching explicit knowledge of Christ as necessary for salvation.

*Response to Verses Used to Support the General-Revelation View*

Proponents of salvation-only-through-special-revelation are aware of the verses put forward by those who believe salvation of the heathen is possible through general revelation alone. They respond by pointing to other verses and observations, summarized as follows.

*Acts 10:35*

Two things are often mentioned about the case of Cornelius.

*First*, Cornelius is proof that those who seek God in view of the light they have will then be given special revelation by which they can come to know Jesus Christ. After all, the whole point of the story is that God sent Peter by special revelation and Cornelius did not become a Christian until after he heard and believed that special revelation.

*Second*, the book of Acts is a transitional period between the two Testaments during which those who were saved on Old Testament grounds were provided with the New Testament light of Christ by which they could become Christians. This is brought out clearly in the response to the next text.

*Acts 19:2–6*

This passage has nothing to do with the heathen; it is about disciples of John

the Baptist who had not yet heard about the coming of the Holy Spirit to baptize believers in Christ into His body (the church). It was earlier demonstrated that these disciples were already *believers*; Paul's declaration of further truth was necessary for them to become *Christian believers*. Before hearing (and believing) the rest, those who had not yet heard the full Christian message were saved on the grounds of the *special revelation* they had received up to that point.

*Hebrews 11:6*

According to this verse, "Anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

*First*, while the reference is to knowledge of God, not of Christ, it does not exclude the latter.

*Second*, since the context involves Old Testament saints rather than New Testament believers, it is understandable that the broader statement about explicit knowledge of Christ was not included. Hebrews 11:6 is a proclamation of the minimal salvific requirement in *any* age; it does not exclude the possibility of God making belief in Christ an explicit requirement of New Testament salvation.[80]

*Third*, in the same vein, using this verse to deny that explicit belief in Christ is soteriologically necessary ignores progressive revelation, wherein God, for example, requires more of New Testament believers than of Old because of the additional revelation He has given (cf. Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4).

*Galatians 3:8*

Again, this text says the gospel was preached to Abraham, but when the contents of what Abraham believed are examined, they turn out to fall short of believing upon Christ's finished work, which the New Testament declares is essential to the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–3).

Proponents of special revelation respond in two ways.

*First*, some hold that even in the Old Testament era, believers did have explicit knowledge of Christ. They point to Paul's statement that the "seed" of Abraham was Christ (Gal. 3:16). Further, some believe that when Jesus said to the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56), He meant that Abraham knew about what Christ would do for him.[81]

*Second*, other apologists take Galatians 3:8 as a simple description of the minimal content (not including explicit knowledge of Christ's death and

resurrection) necessary for Old Testament salvation. In any event, it was more than general revelation, since God gave a special revelation to Abraham; even if this "gospel" did not include *everything* that is salvifically spelled out in the New Testament, it was still an earlier stage in the progress of revelation wherein God did not yet demand belief in the fuller revelation about Christ.

*Revelation 14:6*

John's reference to the *eternal gospel*, whatever else it may mean, does not support the view that salvation of the heathen is based only on general revelation.

*First*, this message came to them by special revelation—God sent an angel to preach it.

*Second*, the content of this gospel was about those who believed in the Christ (the "Lamb") who "redeemed" them by His blood (14:1, 4 KJV).

*Third*, that the gospel is everlasting may mean no more than that Christ was "the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). There is no indication that John is speaking about an eternal gospel known only by general revelation.

*Jonah 3:1–10*

As already mentioned, Old Testament saints did not necessarily have the same content of knowledge required by God for New Testament salvation. The doctrine of *progressive* revelation indicates that God progressively unfolded His plan by giving more and more revelation until the full and final revelation in Christ (Heb. 1:1–2). Special revelationalists need not (and most *do* not) deny that God requires more knowledge of Christ's work as a condition for New Testament salvation than He did in the Old Testament.

*Psalm 19:1–2*

David is not speaking of God's special revelation but of general revelations through the "heavens," which are the "work of his [creative] hands." He is not speaking of the Cross, which is the work of God's redemptive love (Rom. 10:14, 18). Psalm 19:1 is illustrative of both messages (general and special revelation) being *universal*, not *identical*. Indeed, according to Romans, general revelation informs us about God's "eternal power" (1:20), not about the plan of everlasting life. General revelation is sufficient for condemnation, since it finds everyone "without excuse," and insufficient for salvation.

*Romans 2:6–7*

This passage does not affirm that the unevangelized can be saved by general revelation but rather that those who seek immortality will find it. Later Paul says it is only Christ "who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). General revelation and other means are part of the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). In short, the heathen who respond to the light of general revelation are subsequently given special revelation by which they can be saved (cf. Acts 10:34–48; Jonah 3).

# A VINDICATION OF THE JUSTICE AND LOVE OF GOD

Is it right for God to send people to hell who have never heard the only gospel by which they can be saved? This question actually entails several others, which we will analyze individually.

### Are the Heathen Lost?

All human beings are born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and are "by nature the children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3 KJV), for "just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned [in Adam]—" (Rom. 5:12). Explicitly referring to the heathen (who have only general revelation), Paul clarifies, "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, *so that men are without excuse*" (Rom. 1:20). Likewise, "*All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law,* and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law" (Rom. 2:12). Then, summing up his conclusion from the whole section, Paul pronounces that "there is no difference, for *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:22–23). Yes, the heathen are lost apart from Christ.

### Can the Heathen Be Saved Apart From the Work of Christ?

On this question all orthodox Christians agree: There is no salvation apart from Christ's redemptive work.[82] Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the

life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Paul adds, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). The writer of Hebrews agrees:

> Christ … has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself.… When this priest [Christ] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God … because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (9:26; 10:12, 14)

"Salvation is found in *no one* else, for there is *no other name* under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

## Can the Heathen Be Saved Apart From Accepting Christ?

According to the special-revelation view, with which we concur, in our age there is no way to be saved without believing in Christ (cf. Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9ff.; John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24). This leads to the next crucial question.

## Is It Just to Condemn Those Who Have Never Heard the Gospel?

Yes, for at least three reasons.

*First*, they have received God's general revelation. They know about His "eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1:20 KJV). They are informed that He "made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them" (Acts 14:15). They are aware that God "has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons" (Acts 14:17). Again, although they do not have the law, nevertheless,

> All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law.… Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law [of Moses], since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. (Rom. 2:12, 14–15)

*Second*, God has revealed Himself to the unevangelized both in creation and in conscience; if they reject that light, God is not obligated to give them more, since they have turned against the light they already have (cf. Rom. 1:18). If man were lost in the darkness of a dense jungle and had just one glimpse of light, he should go for it; if he turns his back on it and then is forever lost in the blackness, he has no one but himself to blame: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

*Third*, as we have seen, God will provide the heathen with special revelation sufficient for salvation if they seek Him through the general revelation. Broadly, this can be done in at least two ways: (1) sending a believer to share the gospel with them or (2) using dreams, visions, and specific special revelation.

*Sending a Missionary/Evangelist*

In favor of this view are the following:

(1) It harmonizes with scriptural examples of God sending a preacher to those whom He knows will respond to the gospel; for example, Peter being led to Cornelius (cf. Acts 10). The writer of Hebrews (11:6) tells us that those who seek will find.
(2) It is in accordance with the command of God in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) and also with the standard laid down in 2 Timothy 2:2 to "entrust [the truth] to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."
(3) It fits Paul's statement in Acts 17:26 that God has "determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" so that those who desire can hear the gospel and be saved.
(4) It affirms the prayer of our Lord that believers will be produced through the community of other believers: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me *through their message*" (John 17:20).

It is implied by Paul's words in Romans 10:14: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

*Using Visions, Dreams, or Specific Special Revelation*

While it is normative (and perhaps even more fruitful) for God to use believers to bring the gospel to the unevangelized, it is possible that He may use other means at His disposal to deliver the message of the gospel to those who would believe if they heard it.

(1) God has employed many such means—for instance, radio, TV, recordings, and literature.
(2) One day God will use an angel to preach the gospel "to every nation,

tribe, language and people" (Rev. 14:6).

(3) Historically, God has miraculously conveyed special revelation through visions and dreams. *God is more willing that all be saved than we are* (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). His justice demands that He condemns all sinners, but His love compels Him to provide salvation for all who, by His grace, will believe: "*Everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

**Will There Be People in Heaven From Every Nation?**

Those who reject special revelation as being necessary for salvation generally point to heathen and non-Christian people groups as examples of the implausibility of this view. What about China, India, and many formerly communist countries? Surely it is not right to suppose that there will be so many in heaven from Western countries and so few from Eastern lands.

In response, Christian apologists make notable observations.

*First*, it is possible that since God, in His foreknowledge, knew exactly who would and who would not believe, only those who would not believe live in places where they will not hear the gospel. Acts 17:26–27 has been used to make this point:

> From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

Further indication that this may be the case is taken from Christ's prayer (in John 17:20) that those who believe in Him hear from other believers ("those who will believe in me *through their message*").

*Second*, there is no reason why the percentage of people saved must be the same from all nations any more than it has to be the same within any given country. Who is saved depends on who believes, and that will vary from place to place. Just as in farming and fishing, some areas prove to be more fruitful than others.

*Third*, again, God's Word assures us that there will be "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). While the percentages may vary, it is just as unrealistic for there to be *no one* from a given country desiring to be saved as it would for *everyone* from another country wanting to be saved. God has given us freedom, and free will is exercised freely. Some will believe, and some will not.

*Fourth*, as argued above, most Christian theologians believe that some and possibly all children who die in infancy are saved. Due to high infant mortality rates alone, there could be as many or more in heaven from unevangelized peoples as from evangelized ones.

*Fifth*, many who are not personally reached by missionaries, nevertheless do come into contact with the gospel through various media. Again, God has often revealed Himself through dreams, visions, and in other miraculous ways on much lesser matters than an individual's salvation (cf. Ex. 3; Jude 13). There seems to be no good reason why He could not or even would not, if necessary, do the same for someone's eternal life.

*Sixth*, and finally, there could yet be revival in these unevangelized areas. Since a large percentage of all the people who have ever lived are alive today (the current population is well over six billion), a massive move of the Spirit could significantly increase the total percentage of all people who will be in heaven. Indeed, all of today's largely Christian nations were once pagan. Even the great orthodox theologian B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) argued that there may be more in heaven than in hell, contending that passages (e.g., Matt. 7:13–14) that speak of "few" finding the "narrow gate" refer to the immediate and local response to Jesus, not to the ultimate number of people who will be in heaven.[83]

**Is There a Second Chance After Death?**

A few apologists and many cults believe that God will give a second chance after death for adults[84] who have never heard the gospel. However, most orthodox Christians reject this.

*First*, once again, the Bible declares that every person "is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

*Second*, the urgency with which Scripture speaks of making one's decision now—in this life, before it is too late—is strong evidence that there is no second chance.[85]

*Third*, the fact that upon death people immediately go to a final destiny (cf. Luke 16:19ff.; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:20) indicates that a decision must be made in this life.

*Fourth*, since God has so many means at His disposal to reveal Himself to unbelievers *before* death, it is unnecessary that He do so in the *afterlife*.

*Fifth*, belief in a second chance undermines the missionary mandate. Why order the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) if people can be saved apart from

receiving Christ in this life?

*Sixth*, and finally, the verses used to support second-chance salvation are, at best, hermeneutically dubious and are contradicted by other clear scriptural teachings.

For example, in his first epistle, Peter writes:

> Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water. (3:18–20)

There are several reasons why this text should not be put forward to prove a second chance after death.

*First*, again, Peter does not say Christ *evangelized* (from Gk: *euaggelizo*) them, but simply that He *proclaimed* (from Gk: *kerusso*) the victory of His resurrection to them (cf. Col. 2:15).

*Second*, there is no reference to anyone being saved as a result of this proclamation.

*Third*, those who received the announcement were not unevangelized human beings but "spirits in prison" who may have been fallen angels (cf. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7).

*Fourth*, at any rate, the group to whom He preached were not *all* people but only those who "were disobedient … in the days of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20 KJV; cf. Gen. 6:1–4). In this connection it is noteworthy that in 2 Peter 2:4, he mentions the *angels* sinning immediately before he refers to the Flood (v. 5).

Thus it seems best to take this passage as a reference to Christ's announcement of His triumph to the departed spirits after the Resurrection. This fits the context and is in accord with the teaching of other verses (cf. Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15); as stated, Peter uses the term for *proclaim* or *announce*, not *evangelize*.

As for the declaration in 1 Peter 4:6 that "the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead," it seems best to take this as a reference to the fact that the gospel "was preached" (in the past) to those who "are now dead" (in the present).

*First*, there is no hope held out anywhere in Scripture for salvation after death. Death is final, and there are only two destinies—heaven and hell—between which there is an impassible gulf (see above).

*Second*, this is an unclear passage, subject to many interpretations, and no

doctrine should be based on ambiguity. As already established, difficult texts must be interpreted in light of clear ones rather than vice versa.

*Third*, there are plausible interpretations of this passage that do not conflict with other scriptural teaching. For example, some believe this might not be a reference to human beings but to the "spirits in prison" (angels) of 1 Peter 3:19 (cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Gen. 6:2). Or again, possibly it refers to those, now dead, who heard the gospel while they were alive. Although they suffered the destruction of their flesh (1 Peter 4:6), yet they still live with God by virtue of what Christ did through the gospel (namely, His death and resurrection). This victorious message was announced by Christ Himself to the spirit world after His resurrection (cf. 1 Peter 3:18–20).

In view of all this, there is no real evidence that God will give a post-death second chance (cf. John 8:24) to those who already rejected His general (or special) revelation.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The results of Christ's work of salvation are all-encompassing: They include the past, present, and future. His saving work affects all of creation, saved and unsaved, animate and inanimate, human and angelic. The physical world (which stages the salvific events) and the angelic world (which surrounds them) are significant players in the overall drama. Salvation affects not only the saved in a positive way, since they accept its benefits, but also the lost in a negative way, since they reject it. Salvation involves both infants, who cannot believe it, and the unevangelized, who haven't heard about it. Even the fallen natural creation reaps the soteriological benefits by its ultimate renovation as "the new heaven and the new earth."

As for infants and the heathen, evangelicals hold differing views. However, common to most (except to those holding a limited atonement) is the belief that God is just and merciful and has provided a way for all to be saved.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION

The condition (or conditions) for salvation has long been hotly debated on several fronts. The Reformation was centered on whether the condition of salvation is faith alone or faith plus works. There is also the contemporary "lordship salvation vs. free grace" dispute over whether one must accept Christ *only* as Savior (free grace) or *also* as Lord (lordship salvation) in order to be saved.[1] In addition, on the borders of evangelicalism,[2] is the question of whether, besides faith and repentance, confession (verbal witness) and baptism are necessary to be saved.

## IMPORTANT DISTINCTIONS REGARDING THE QUESTION AT HAND

Focusing the question will be of considerable help in answering it. To do so, some important distinctions must be made.

### Between Conditions for Giving and Conditions for Receiving

The first and most basic differentiation is that between the condition(s) for *God giving* the gift of salvation vs. the condition(s) for *humans receiving* it. According to all forms of Calvinism and most forms of Arminianism, *there are*

*no conditions for God's provision of salvation*. It is a free gift—no strings attached. Eternal life is not conditioned on *anything* but God's grace (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5–7; Rom. 4:5; 11:29). Our gracious Creator does not offer salvation on the basis of any foreseen merit in us or in our deeds: "Salvation is of the LORD" (Jonah 2:9 NKJV).

Therefore, the question we're asking does not affect *God's* unconditional provision; the question is "Are there any conditions for *our* reception of everlasting life, and, if so, how many?" To this question there are several answers, even within evangelicalism.

### Between Condition for Getting Salvation and Condition for Keeping It

Further, the question here is not whether we can (in any manner) lose salvation after having received it. That is the matter of eternal security,[3] and it has already been discussed.[4] *This* inquiry is for the purpose of discovering what conditions must be met in order for a person to receive eternal life in the first place.

### Between Freedom to Choose Salvation and the Need for Divine Aid

Nor is the question whether anyone can accept salvation on his own, apart from the prompting and grace of God. It has already been agreed that this is impossible.[5] Again, Jesus says, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 NKJV), and Paul confirms, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13). What we now seek to know, *granting the necessity of God's grace*, is whether an act of free will (i.e., faith) is necessary to receive eternal life.

Five main perspectives will be presented: Roman Catholic, strong Reformed, Church of Christ, lordship salvation, and free grace. After the statement of and arguments for each, an evaluation will be given. Afterward, a biblical and critical overview will be set forth.

## THE ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

Since Roman Catholic soteriology has already been treated at length,[6] only a brief summation will be given here. It should be noted that this presentation is of the *official* Roman Catholic view, not necessarily what individual Catholics may offer or discuss in dialogue.

The "infallible" pronouncements of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) regarding salvation have never been (and for that matter never can be) revoked. Trent insisted that the condition for receiving the gift of salvation is faith plus good works. As we have seen, Catholics made it dogma that "*by his good works the justified man really acquires a claim to supernatural reward from God*" (Ott, *FCD*, 264, emphasis added). Roman Catholic authority Ludwig Ott argued,

> According to Holy Writ, *eternal blessedness in heaven is the reward for good works performed on this earth, and rewards and merit are correlative concepts* … (Matt. 5:12; 25:34, et seq.).… St. Paul, who stresses grace so much, also emphasized, on the other hand, the meritorious nature of good works performed with grace, by teaching that the reward is in proportion to the works: "He [God] will render to every man according to his own labour" [Rom. 2:6] (ibid., 264–65, emphasis added).
>
> As already mentioned, Ott then cites other similar passages (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:8; Col. 3:24; Heb. 10:35; 11:6) and concludes, "[Paul] thereby shows that the good works of the just establish a legal claim (*meritum de condigno*) to reward on God" [cf. Heb. 6:10] (*FCD*, 265).

Of course, by Catholic teaching, this demand upon (or requirement of) God is not intrinsic;[7] rather, God has placed *Himself* in this situation through His promise to reward good works. Nevertheless, eternal life is allegedly given to us on merit. As already cited, Trent declared,

> Those who work well "unto the end" [Matt. 10:22], and who trust in God, life eternal is to be proposed, both as a grace mercifully promised to the sons of God through Christ Jesus, "and as a recompense" which is … to be faithfully given to their good works and merit.… *If anyone shall say that the good works of the man justified are in such a way the gift of God that they are not also the good merits of him who is justified, or that the one justified by the good works … does not truly merit increase of grace, eternal life, and the attainment of eternal life (if he should die in grace), and also an increase of glory; let him be anathema*. (in Denzinger, *SCD*, 809.257, 842.261, emphasis added)

The Council of Trent additionally affirmed that "nothing that precedes justification, whether faith or works, merits the grace of justification" (in ibid.).[8] Again, when Catholic scholars cite James 2:24 (that we are justified by works), they do not refer to initial justification (at the sacrament of baptism), which comes only by grace. Rather, they are referring to progressive justification (growth in righteousness), which Protestants call *sanctification*. On the other

hand, Trent did maintain that works *are* necessary for salvation in the progressive (sanctificational) and ultimate (glorificational) senses—and with this Protestants disagree strongly.

## Protestant Response to the Roman Catholic View

The Protestant response to the Roman Catholic position may be divided into two parts: *First*, a response to verses misused by Catholics attempting to prove that the performance of works is necessary for salvation; *second*, verses that show we are saved by faith alone.

### *Verses on "Works" Used by Catholics*

The main verses employed by Roman Catholics to show that the doing of good works is necessary for salvation are: Matthew 5:12; 25:34; Romans 2:6–7; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Philippians 2:13; 3:21; Hebrews 6:10; 10:35; 11:6; and James 2:24. In response, several comments are in order.

*First*, as already clarified, none of these refers to an initial justification by works, so on this point there is no real salvific debate.[9]

*Second*, verses used by Catholics to support the necessity of works for justification do not concern what they call *initial justification* but what Protestants call *sanctification*.[10]

*Third*, even here Catholics commit a serious error: Galatianism. We are not only *justified* by faith alone, but we are also *sanctified* by faith alone, as Paul teaches:

> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by *believing* what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by *human effort*? … Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? (Gal. 3:2–3, 5).

As we've clearly established, the kind of faith (saving belief) by which we are alone justified and sanctified is the kind that *naturally* produces good works.[11] Hence, it is no surprise that there are verses that make such statements as "by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24 KJV), for "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (2:17 NKJV). What James means is that *only the kind of faith that manifests itself in good works can save us*. Nonetheless, it is faith alone that does the sanctifying, even as the faith that sanctifies is accompanied by good works.[12] Paul likewise writes that God " 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for … immortality" (Rom. 2:6–7 NKJV).

Paul and James emphasize that we are not saved by works but by the kind of faith that naturally results in good works. In this sense, none of the passages that speak of works as the ground for God's evaluation of them is in conflict with the Protestant principle of faith alone (Lat: *sola fidei*).[13]

*Fourth*, as for verses speaking about reward, there is a serious misunderstanding by Roman Catholics, an equivocation between merited reward (*payment*) and unmerited reward (*gift*). Salvation is only a reward in the latter sense (i.e., as a gift); in this sense, for example, an earthly inheritance is a reward. Hebrews 11:6 fits into this category: "Without *faith* it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must *believe* that he exists and that he *rewards* those who earnestly seek him." *Faith* obtains this reward, not works. An inheritance is a gift, not something for which we work. Working *out* our salvation is not the same as working *for* it. It is "God who works it in" us by faith, and we by that faith work it out (cf. Phil. 2:12–13). That is to say, saving faith manifests good works.

Other verses about rewards, such as 1 Corinthians 3:8, are referring to rewards *in* heaven, not the reward *of* heaven. Even in this same text, those who suffer loss of reward will not lose their salvation: "If [a man's work] is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (3:15).

*Verses on Faith Alone*

Not only is Scripture lacking in any support for any kind of a works-contingent salvation (whether it be justification or sanctification), but the Bible is also *explicit* that we are saved by faith alone. As we have observed repeatedly, "It is *by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works*, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9). Salvation is granted "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5 NKJV). Romans 4:4–5 could hardly be clearer:

> *When a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does* not *work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*

Finally, one of the strongest New Testament affirmations: "If by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Once again, the same can be said of faith—if salvation is by faith, then it is no longer by works, for if it were of works, then salvation would no longer be of

faith (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38).

Based on the foregoing analysis, the Protestant arguments against Roman Catholic insistence on works as salvifically necessary are summarized thus:

(1) It confuses gift and merit.
(2) It makes works a condition of eternal life.
(3) It makes works of sanctification a condition of one's ultimate salvation.
(4) It confuses working *for* and working *from* salvation.
(5) It makes a false distinction between "works of the law" (which they say *are not* necessary) and "works" (which they say *are* necessary).
(6) It embraces the error of Galatianism (cf. Gal. 3) by making works necessary for ultimate justification (glorification) before God.
(7) It confuses salvation and service.
(8) It loads works into its concept of faith.
(9) It sacramentalizes salvation, thereby making the Catholic Church to be the administrator of grace.
(10) It institutionalizes salvation, making the Church the official institution through which salvation is received, piecemeal, through its seven sacraments.[14]

In short, the Protestant response is that *faith* is the *sole* condition for receiving salvation. The reception of Christ's saving work is in no way, at any level,[15] conditioned upon works of any kind. We work *from* grace, not *for* it. We are saved by faith alone, even as the faith that saves us is manifest in good works. This truth was affirmed by the Second Council of Orange (529):

> We also believe and profess for our salvation that in every good work it is not we who begin and afterwards are helped by God's mercy, but He Himself who, without any previous merits on our part, first instills in us faith in Him and love for Him so that … we may with His help accomplish what is pleasing to Him. Therefore we must clearly believe that the wonderful faith of the thief whom the Lord called to His home in paradise (cf. Luke 23:43) … did not come from nature but was a gift from the bounty of divine grace, (as cited in S. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, eds., *CF*, 608–09)

# THE STRONG REFORMED VIEW ON THE CONDITION FOR SALVATION

Ironically, while one of the central principles of the Reformation was

justification by faith alone (*sola fidei*), some who strongly claim to be heirs of the Reformation (i.e., the Reformed) do not believe there is even one condition necessary for a human being to receive salvation. This tradition follows Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and the Synods of Dort (1618–1619). In response to Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) and his followers, these theologians developed what has come to be known as "T-U-L-I-P," an acrostic that, as we have seen, stands for five fundamental beliefs:

- *T*otal depravity
- *U*nconditional election
- *L*imited atonement
- *I*rresistible grace
- *P*erseverance of the saints

Given these five points, extreme Calvinists have concluded that there are absolutely *no conditions* for a person to meet before he or she can receive the gift of salvation. As the argument goes, humanity is so totally depraved that we cannot understand or receive the gospel. Persons "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1 NKJV) are incapable of doing anything with respect to receiving salvation. Humanity (in Adam) had the ability to kill itself, but once dead, it cannot be any part of its revitalization.[16] What is more, *election is unconditional*,[17] so there are no soteriological conditions for salvation, either for God or sinners. Further, the provision of *the Atonement is limited* to the elect,[18] and *the grace by which the elect are regenerated is irresistible*, and thus, comes before faith.[19] Indeed, faith itself is God's gift to only the elect and only after they are regenerated; once this has taken place, they are guaranteed to *persevere in their salvation*.[20] Justification (regeneration) is *logically* prior to faith, not the reverse.[21] In brief, according to strong Calvinists, one is not really justified *by* faith.[22]

One of the most popular proponents of the strong Reformed view, R. C. Sproul, makes the following related assertions in *Chosen by God*:[23]

> [Jesus says,] "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (John 6:44).… Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines [the word *draws*] to mean "to compel by irresistible superiority." Linguistically and lexicographically, the word means "to compel." To compel is a much more forceful concept than to woo. (69)

How does the Holy Spirit exercise irresistible grace on the unwilling? By regeneration:

> *One does not first believe, then become reborn*, and then be ushered into the kingdom. How can a man choose a kingdom he cannot see? How can a man enter the kingdom without being first reborn? … A cardinal point of Reformed theology is the maxim: "*Regeneration precedes faith*." Our nature is so corrupt, the power of sin is so great, that unless God does a supernatural work in our souls we will never choose Christ. *We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe*. (ibid., 72–73, emphasis added)

In response to the strong Reformed position on the condition(s) for salvation, several tenets and assumptions call for evaluation, including

(1) the belief that justification is prior to faith;
(2) the contention that God uses irresistible grace on the unwilling; and
(3) the idea that faith is a gift of God only to the elect.

## Justification Is Not Prior to Faith

Scarcely anything could be clearer in Scripture than the logical order of faith first, *then* justification. Indeed, this is inherent in the very Protestant principle of "justification *by* faith alone." This is not only the general order, but it is universally true that in Scripture faith is the means by which we receive justification from God, not vice versa. Consider again the following verses (all emphasis added).

*John 1:12*

"To all who received him, to *those who believed* in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

*John 3:16*

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

*John 3:18*

"*Whoever believes* in him is not condemned, but *whoever does not believe* stands condemned already because *he has not believed* in the name of God's one and only Son."

*John 3:36*

"*Whoever believes* in the Son has eternal life, but *whoever rejects* the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

*John 5:24*

"I tell you the truth, *whoever hears my word and believes* him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."

*John 5:40*

"*You are not willing to come to Me* that you may have life" (NKJV).[24]

*Acts 13:39*

"Through him *everyone who believes* is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses."

*Acts 16:31*

"*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, *and you will be saved*."

*Romans 3:22*

"This *righteousness from God comes through faith* in Jesus Christ *to all who believe*."

*Romans 3:26*

"[God offered Jesus] to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies *those who have faith* in Jesus."

*Romans 4:3*

"What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' "

*Romans 4:5*

"To the man who does not work but *trusts* God who justifies the wicked, *his faith* is credited as righteousness."

*Romans 5:1*

"Therefore, since we have been justified *through faith*, we have peace with

God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

**Verses Used by Strong Calvinists**

*Acts 5:31*

"God exalted [Christ] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior *that he might give repentance* and forgiveness of sins to Israel." This is supposed to support the extreme Calvinist contention that repentance is God's gift only to the elect. Second Timothy 2:25 adds that we "must gently instruct [those who oppose us], in the hope that *God will grant them repentance* leading them to a knowledge of the truth" (cf. Acts 11:18).

**Response**

*First*, according to Acts 5:31, repentance is a gift in the same sense that forgiveness is a gift, since they are tied together. If the strong Reformed position is soteriologically correct, then all Israel must be saved, since repentance *and* forgiveness were given to Israel. In reality, only a remnant of Israel will be saved (cf. Rom. 9:27), not all. The same is true of Acts 11:18: "God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life." This clearly does not mean that all Gentiles will be saved but rather that all Gentiles have the opportunity to be saved. In like manner, it means that all have the God-given opportunity to repent (cf. 2 Peter 3:9).

*Second*, repentance itself is not the gift of God—the *opportunity* to repent is His gift. He graciously grants us the chance to turn from our sin, but we must do the repenting. Repentance is an act of our will *supported and encouraged* by His grace.

*Third*, if repentance is a gift, then it is a gift in the same sense that forgiveness is a gift. Forgiveness was obtained by Jesus on the cross for "everyone who believes" (cf. Acts 13:38–39), not only for the elect.[25] Hence, by the logic of extreme Calvinism, every human being must have been given saving faith—a conclusion emphatically rejected, of course, by extreme Calvinists.

*Acts 16:14*

"One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to respond* to Paul's message." Acts 18:27 adds that salvation is "to those

*who by grace had believed*." Allegedly, without this gracious work of God, no one would believe and be saved.

**Response**

One need not deny that God moves upon the hearts of unbelievers to persuade and prompt them to faith; what we deny is that God does this coercively (by irresistible grace) and that He only does it on some persons (the elect). The Holy Spirit is convicting "the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8), but God does not force anyone to believe in Him (cf. Matt. 23:37; John 5:40). While the Lord opened Lydia's heart to believe, Luke does not say that He did so against her will.

*Romans 10:17*

"*Faith comes from hearing the message*, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Here it appears that faith is actually produced in a person by the Word.

**Response**

*First*, there is no reference to faith as a gift given by God—this is an assumption that can only be read into the text.

*Second*, the order of events is sending the evangelist, preaching the Word, hearing the gospel, believing the truth, calling upon God (cf. Rom. 10:14–15), but the prior is not universally the cause of the latter, for not everyone who is sent goes, and not everyone who hears the Word of God believes unto salvation (cf. Matt. 13:19).

*Third*, whatever role the Word of God has in prompting saving faith, the faith itself must come from us—the context says so. Just a few verses earlier Paul writes, "If *you … believe* in your heart that God raised [Jesus] from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with *your heart* that *you believe* and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:9–10).

*Romans 12:3*

"Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, *in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you*."

**Response**

Paul is speaking to believers (cf. 1:7; 12:1), not to or about unbelievers. This is not the faith that unbelievers exercise for salvation (saving belief—see Acts 16:31); it is a special *gift of faith* given to some believers. Paul lists it among the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12.

*1 Corinthians 4:7*

"What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" The strong Calvinist insists that if *everything* we receive is from God, then so is faith.

**Response**

*First*, it should be noted that Paul makes no contextual application of this verse to the saving faith that receives God's gift; he is referring to spiritual gifts given to believers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4–11) that should be exercised in humility. There is no idea of giving faith to unbelievers so that they can be saved.

*Second*, even if faith for unbelievers *were* envisioned here, there is no affirmation that God gives it only to some (i.e., the elect). In *any* sense in which faith is given, it is given to *all*. Some choose to exercise it, and some do not.

*Third*, once again, Scripture's uniform presentation is that faith is something unbelievers are to exercise to receive salvation (cf. John 3:16, 18, 36; Acts 16:31), not something they must wait upon God to give them.

*1 Corinthians 7:25*

"I give my judgment, as one that hath *obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful*" (KJV). Augustine, for instance, used this verse to support his belief that faith is a gift of God prior to regeneration (*E*, 31).

**Response**

In actual fact, Paul is not speaking about unsaved persons receiving faith unto salvation but about believers receiving mercy from God that enables them to be faithful (trustworthy). The context (given in the very same verse) involves believing virgins having the grace to remain sexually faithful. The NIV captures

the meaning: “Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy.”

*1 Corinthians 12:8–9*

“To one *there is given* through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another *faith* by the same Spirit.”

**Response**

To be sure, “faith” here is a gift from God. However, again, Paul is not talking about faith given to *unbelievers* by which they can be *saved*; rather, he is speaking of the gift of faith given to some *believers* by which they can *serve* (cf. vv. 5, 12).

*Ephesians 2:8–9*

“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and *this* not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” According to strong Calvinists, from the Synod of Dort to R. C. Sproul (e.g., *CG*, 119), this verse proves that saving faith is God’s gift.

**Response**

Oddly, extreme Calvinists completely ignore what John Calvin himself said about this text: “[Paul] does not mean that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God” (*CC*, 11.145). The great linguistic scholar A. T. Robertson (1863–1934)[26] pointed out that in the Greek,

> “Grace” is God’s part, “faith” ours. *And that (kai touto)* [is] neuter [in gender], not feminine *(taute)*, and so refers not to *pistis [pisteos*— “faith,” feminine] or to *charis [chariti*—“grace,” feminine also], but to the act of being saved by grace [*sesosmenoi*] conditioned on faith on our part.[27]

While some have argued that a pronoun may agree in *sense*, though not in *form*, with its antecedent, this view has been soundly refuted:

> If Paul wanted [*kai touto*, “and that”] to refer to *pistis* (“faith”), he could have written the feminine *taute* instead of the neuter *touto*, and its meaning would have been clear.[28] [Further,] this position is supported by the parallelism between *ouk ex hymon* (“and this not of yourselves”) in 2:8 and *ouk ex ergon* (“not of works”) in 2:9. The latter phrase would not be meaningful if it referred to *pisteos* (“faith”). Instead, it clearly means salvation is “not of works.”[29]

*Philippians 1:29*

"*It has been granted to you* on behalf of Christ not only *to believe* on him, but also to suffer for him." This is taken by some strong Calvinists to mean that faith is a gift of God to unbelievers, namely, the ones who are of the elect.

**Response**

There are at least three indications that Paul had no such thing in mind.

*First*, the point is simply that God has not only provided us with the opportunity to trust Him but also to suffer for Him. The word *granted* (Gk: *echaristhe*) means "grace" or "favor." That is to say, both opportunities—to suffer for Him and to believe on Him—are favors with which God has graced us.

*Second*, Paul is not speaking of initial faith that brings salvation but of the daily faith and daily suffering of a Christian.

*Third*, it is noteworthy that both the suffering and the believing are our responsibility. Paul says it is granted for you to do this, not something God does for us.

*Philippians 3:8–9*

Paul said, regarding his "merits,"

> I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—*the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith*.

**Response**

It is not *faith* that comes from God but *righteousness*, and righteousness comes "by faith," namely, by the exercise of our belief.

*1 Thessalonians 1:4–6*

Paul assured the believers in Thessalonica,

> We know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because *our gospel came to you* not simply with words, but also *with power*, with the Holy Spirit *and with deep conviction*.… You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

**Response**

It should be plain to anyone who takes time to read this text carefully that it says nothing about faith being a gift of God only to the elect. Neither "faith" nor "gift" is mentioned, and, furthermore, the gospel is "the power of God … *for everyone who believes*" (Rom. 1:16 NKJV). Or as verse 6 points out, it is God's power to those who *welcome* it. Faith precedes salvation.

*1 Peter 1:21*

"*Through him you believe* in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

**Response**

The phrase "through Him you believe" does not mean that faith is a gift of God to die elect but that apart from Christ no one would ever have come to believe. A. T. Robertson rendered it, "Who through him are believers in God" (*WPNT*, 6.91). Or, "It is in that same God that *you have been led thereby to believe*."[30] There is no affirmation here or anywhere else in the Bible that God gives faith unto salvation only to a select few.

*2 Peter 1:1*

"Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. *To those who* through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ *have received a faith as precious as ours*."

**Response**

*Faith*, in this case, can be *objectively* understood as "the Christian faith," which all believers have received as a gift from God (cf. Jude 3). The plural *ours* fits with this view, as does Peter's earlier reference to "the faith" (1 Peter 5:9). Or, even if "faith" is viewed *subjectively*,[31] Peter neither says *how* we received it nor *that* we received it apart from our volition. Neither does he say God desires that only some have it; both Paul and Peter clearly teach God's salvific desire for *everyone* (cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), so if extreme Calvinism *is* correct on this matter, then God gives faith to all who will accept it (which extreme Calvinists reject).

*1 John 5:1*

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." Since "is born" is a perfect participle (past action with continuing results), it is argued by some strong Calvinists that believing is a result of being regenerated.

**Response**

First of all, this text says nothing about how one becomes born of God. It is simply noting that all who confess Jesus as the Messiah have been converted; that is, born of God.

Second, John makes it clear elsewhere that one has to believe in order to be born of God. He told Nicodemus that one had to "believe" (John 3:15–18) in order to be "born again" (vv. 3:5, 7). Indeed, the very theme of his gospel declared that faith was prior to salvation. He wrote: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that by believing* you may have life in his name" (20:31; cf. 5:24).

In every New Testament instance, faith is prior to salvation: Faith is the means, and salvation is the end. Nowhere does God's Word teach that we must be saved in order to believe; by contrast, everywhere it affirms that we must believe in order to be saved. Extreme Calvinism has the soteriological cart before the horse.

**Two Important Points**

Even *if* it *could* be scripturally demonstrated that saving faith is a gift of God, there are still several crucial errors in the extreme Calvinist view.

For one thing, salvation involves gifts that must be *received or rejected*. Contrary to popular belief, Jacob Arminius himself was so Calvinistic that he maintained grace as absolutely necessary for bestowing salvation; nonetheless, he rightly acknowledged that an act of human freedom is necessary for receiving it:

> "What then," you ask, "does Free Will do?" I reply with brevity, "It saves." Take away Free Will, and nothing will be left to be saved: Take away Grace, and nothing will be left as the source of salvation.… No one, except God, is able to bestow salvation; and nothing, except Free Will, is capable of receiving it. (*WJA*, 2.196.11)

Again, John wrote, "He came to that which was his own, but his own *did not*

*receive* him. Yet to all who *received* him, to those who believed in his name, *he gave* the right to become children of God" (John 1:11–12).[32]

Furthermore, if faith *is* a gift from God, then it is offered to everyone, not just some (i.e., "the elect"—cf. John 3:16; 1 John 2:2). As already established, numerous passages affirm that the atoning work of Jesus Christ is unlimited in its extent.[33]

**God Does Not Exercise Irresistible Grace on the Unwilling**

Another biblically implausible premise of extreme Calvinism is the belief that God exerts irresistible grace on the unwilling, which He allegedly does in the act of justifying people apart from will and against their will before they are able to believe. Once again, Scripture universally requires faith as the prior condition to being justified. In addition, there are many passages that speak of unbelievers having the ability to turn down the grace of God.

*Matthew 23:37*

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but *you were not willing*."

*Luke 7:30*

"The Pharisees and experts in the law *rejected God's purpose [will] for themselves*, because they had not been baptized by John."

*John 5:40*

"*You refuse* to come to me to have life."[34]

*Acts 7:51*

Stephen accused the Sanhedrin, "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: *You always resist the Holy Spirit!*"[35]

*2 Peter 3:9*

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but [wanting] everyone to*

*come to repentance*."[36]

There are many other texts indicating that a person can defy the will of God.[37] Of course, God's ultimate will is always established (Isa. 55:11), but sovereignly He has willed to allow His gospel invitation to be resisted. God wills some things conditionally and others unconditionally; salvation falls into the latter category. As noted previously, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) wrote, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, '*Thy* will be done' " (*GD*, 69). Again, Lewis elsewhere set forth the reason for this:

> The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of [God's] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will… would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo. (*SL*, 128)

## Saving Faith (and Repentance) Can Be Exercised by Anyone

Nowhere does the Bible teach that saving faith is a special gift of God to only a select few. Further, everywhere God's Word assumes that anyone who wills to be saved can exercise saving faith. Every scriptural passage that calls upon unbelievers to believe or repent for salvation implies this truth. A few familiar passages will suffice to make the point.

*Luke 13:3*

"Unless *you repent*, you too will all perish."

*John 3:16*

"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever believes* in him shall not perish but have eternal life."[38]

*John 6:29*

"This is the work of God, that *ye believe* on him whom he hath sent" (KJV).

*John 11:40*

"Did I not tell you that if *you believed*, you would see the glory of God?"

*John 12:36*

"Put *your trust* in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light."

*John 20:31*

"These [actions of Jesus] are written *that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *and that by believing you may have life in his name*."

*Acts 16:31*

"*Believe* in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

*Acts 17:30*

"In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now *he commands all people everywhere to repent*."

*Acts 20:21*

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must *turn to God in repentance and have faith* in our Lord Jesus."

*Hebrews 11:6*

"Without faith it is impossible to please God, because *anyone who comes to him must believe* that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

Myriad other references affirm the same truth; consider Romans 3:22; 4:11, 24; 10:9, 14; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 1:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:7; 4:14; and 1 Timothy 1:16.

**Exercising Faith Is Not a Meritorious Work**

The dispute here is not over whether salvation is based on works: All orthodox Protestants agree that it is not. The question is whether an act of human faith constitutes a meritorious work. The answer is no, supported by both Scripture and good reason.

First of all, faith is clearly contrasted with works in the Bible; that faith is placed in opposition to works is evident in the passages just cited and many more (cf. Rom. 3:26–27; Gal. 3:11). Romans 4:4 affirms that "when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation."

Justification is either of faith or of works, but not both. Thus the faith exercised to receive the gift of salvation is not a work; rather, salvific belief is the admission that we cannot work for God's gift but must accept it by pure

grace.

What is more, the act of receiving a gift by faith is no more meritorious than a beggar receiving a handout; it is illogical to assert that a receiver gets credit for accepting a gift rather than the giver who offers it. The act of faith in receiving God's unconditional salvation accrues no merit to us—*all* praise and glory goes to the Giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17).

J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston have said that "Reformed theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work)."[39] R. C. Sproul seems to agree:

> The Arminian acknowledges that faith is something a person does. It is a work, though not a meritorious one. Is it a good work? Certainly it is not a bad work. It is good for a person to trust in Christ and in Christ alone for his or her salvation.… [Thus,] the Arminian finds it difficult to escape the conclusion that ultimately his salvation rests on some righteous act of the will he has performed. He has "in effect" merited the merit of Christ, which differs only slightly from the view of Rome. (*CG*, 25–26)

This is an inaccurate description of Arminianism. As earlier cited, Jacob Arminius long ago replied to this charge:

> A rich man bestows, on a poor and famished beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it? Can it be said with propriety that "the alms depend partly on the liberality of the Donor, and partly on the liberty of the Receiver, though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand?" … If these assertions cannot be truly made about a beggar who receives alms, how much less can they be made about the gift of faith, for the receiving of which far more acts of Divine Grace are required! (*WJA*, 2.52.27)

## No One Can Receive the Gift of Salvation Without the Aid of Grace

Finally, extreme Calvinism often mistakenly assumes that the exercise of faith as a condition for receiving the gift of salvation[40] must mean they can do this unaided by God's grace. As noted earlier,[41] *no one can believe unto salvation without the aid of God's grace*.[42] Although not all these verses refer to prevenient grace,[43] the point is the same: In the final analysis, no one can believe unto salvation without God's gracious initiative. However, while salvation comes from Him, it is actualized in our lives by our cooperation; again, His grace is not exercised on a passive object but on an active agent.

So in the final analysis, extreme Calvinists have denied one of the central premises of the Reformation: *faith alone*. According to them, we do not believe in order to be saved; we are saved in order to believe.

# THE CHURCH OF CHRIST VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

With regard to soteriology, many consider the Church of Christ denomination to be part of the broader evangelical movement, while others believe it is borderline or even over the line. In most essential doctrines, the Church of Christ is clearly evangelical. The rub comes with their insistence that there are four necessary conditions for being saved.

The Churches of Christ[44] are independent congregations that share a common heritage in the Restoration Movement, organized by and spiritual heirs to Alexander Campbell (1788–1866). Most Churches of Christ believe the four necessary acts of obedience to God for salvation are *faith*, *repentance*, *confession*, and *water baptism by immersion*. Church of Christ Professor Jack Cottrell (b. 1938) gives an excellent summary of the position in his book on Bible doctrine, *The Faith Once for All*:[45] "We shall [now] present the following acts as conditions for salvation in the New Covenant (post-Pentecost) age: faith, repentance, confession, and baptism" (349).

## *Faith* As a Condition for Salvation

Cottrell contends that "the primary condition for receiving (and retaining) God's saving grace always has been and continues to be *faith*" (ibid.). This faith includes obedience to the command to believe the gospel (John 6:28–29; Acts 16:31; cf. Acts 6:7), and in this sense faith is the opposite of disobedience (cf. John 3:36), while unbelief is synonymous with disobedience (cf. Heb. 3:18–19). Even so, he adds,

> This does not mean that faith includes obedience, however; it merely shows that *obedience includes faith*.… While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys. (*FOA*, 352)

Faith is unique among the four supposed conditions of salvation, for "faith as a condition for salvation is the means by which grace is received" (ibid., 353). Hence, faith is more than a qualification—it is the medium by which salvation is obtained.

## *Repentance* As a Condition for Salvation

Cottrell continues, “The second condition for receiving (and retaining) salvation is *repentance*” (ibid.). Numerous verses are listed in support of this, including Matthew 3:2; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 5:32; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 17:30; 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:10; and 2 Peter 3:9.

> Specifically, [repentance] is a change of mind or attitude toward sin, one’s own sin in particular. It includes remorse (sorrow, grief—2 Cor. 7:9–10). [It also] includes a sincere *desire* to be rid of it (the kind David expresses in Psalm 51), as well as a determination *to forsake [sin]* and walk before God (Acts 14:15). (*FOA*, 354, final emphasis added)

However,

> To speak of repentance as a turning from sin does not mean that repentance itself includes the actual change of lifestyle or reformation of life that flows from regeneration and constitutes sanctification. Faith does not include obedience, and neither does repentance, (ibid.)

There are several reasons repentance is said to be necessary for salvation.

> First of all, the very nature of salvation requires it. Salvation is salvation from *sin*, and we cannot be saved from our sin while we are still holding on to it in our hearts.… Second, the very nature of saving faith requires that it be accompanied by repentance.… The point is that we cannot sincerely accept what Jesus did for us on the cross without hating the sin that put him there, (ibid., 355)

If repentance is necessary for salvation, though, then why does the Bible mention faith alone? Cottrell’s response is to argue that faith does not include repentance as a “flip side”:[46] “This approach must be rejected; the integrity of both faith and repentance as distinct mental states must be preserved, as in Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21” (ibid.). He adds,

> It is true that faith is often mentioned by itself, but this is because faith is the one act that is the specific *means* (instrument, vehicle, channel) through which God’s saving grace is received.… Faith is thus singled out as the sole *means*, but not as the sole *condition* for receiving salvation. All means are conditions, but not all conditions are means.[47] (ibid., 356)

## *Confession* As a Condition for Salvation

According to Church of Christ teaching, “The third condition for salvation is *confession*, specifically, a confession before the world of one’s faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord” (ibid.). Many verses are listed in support, such as Matthew 10:32–33; Romans 10:9–10; 2 Corinthians 9:13; Philippians 2:11; 1 Timothy

6:12–13; Hebrews 3:1; 1 John 2:23; 4:2–3, 15; and 2 John 7.

This confession must be that Jesus is *Lord*,[48] because *Lord* means "Deity"; therefore, "What are we actually saying when we confess Jesus as Lord? We are ascribing to him two things: *ownership* and *deity*" (ibid., 357).

This confession must be spoken before others:

> It is important to note that this confession of Jesus as one's personal, divine Savior and Lord must be oral and public. Paul says this confession is with "your mouth" (Rom. 10:9–10). Jesus says our confession must be "before men" (Matt. 10:32). Timothy's good confession was "in the presence of many witnesses" [1 Tim. 6:12] (ibid., 358).

A prime contention for Cottrell's view comes from Paul:

> In Romans 10:9 the verbs "confess" and "believe" are both aorist tense, suggesting that Paul has in mind a specific past act associated with the sinner's initial and decisive confession of faith. In Romans 10:13 confessing Jesus as Lord is equated with "calling on the name of the Lord," which is the sinner's initial baptismal prayer for salvation. Thus it is appropriate for a new convert to announce his faith upon his acceptance of Christ and as a preparation for baptism. The two verbs[49] are identical in form[50] and are related to "if in exactly the same way, i.e., as equal conditions for salvation. If faith is a condition, then so must confession be. (ibid., 358–59)

He goes on,

> This is not to say that these two acts [faith and confession] are related to salvation in the same way. Both are conditions, but they do not both play the same role in bringing the sinner to salvation. Faith is still the primary condition because it is the sole *means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of other conditions that serve other purposes.… [The role of confession is that] it is a confession of faith, a faith that is directed specifically toward Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, (ibid., 359, emphasis added)

## *Baptism* As a Condition for Salvation

> The fourth and final condition for salvation in the NT age is baptism. The Bible is very clear about this. In every NT passage that says anything at all about the meaning of baptism, the only purpose with which it is connected is the salvation of sinners.… This is also why we speak of baptism (along with faith, repentance, and confession) as a *condition* of salvation" (ibid., 359–60).

Cottrell rejects the widespread view that baptism is a symbolic outward sign of an inward reality or something that primarily affects the psychosomatic state of the saved person, sealing assurance to his heart:

> Some have gone to the extreme of affirming a *causal* connection between baptism and salvation. They have attributed to the baptismal water or to the baptismal act the power to cleanse the soul from sin, or at least the power to convey that divine cleansing to the soul, (ibid., 361)

He goes on to say,

> There is no basis for attributing any saving power to the baptismal water or to the act of baptism itself. God's power and God's action alone can save; the sinner is saved when God applies the blood of Christ to his heart and gives him the gift of the Holy Spirit.… Most importantly, we affirm that the clear and specific teaching of the NT is that baptism is the *time during which* God graciously bestows upon the sinner the double cure of salvation. As such it is a divinely appointed condition for salvation during this New Covenant era. (ibid., 361–62)

Several related verses are then put forward, including John 3:3–5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; and Colossians 2:12. In Acts 2:38, Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

As to the mode of baptism, "We may state unequivocally that in its physical form, baptism is by definition the momentary immersion of the body into a pool of water. Nothing else really counts as baptism" (*FOA*, 368).

In response, the Church of Christ position is decidedly outside the evangelical mainstream as to how we receive the gift of salvation.[51] Since there is predominant soteriological agreement on the need for faith, we can move immediately to repentance.

### Repentance Is Not a Separate Condition for Salvation

While most evangelicals *do* believe that repentance is a necessary part of (or condition for) salvation, they *do not* view it as a distinct and second step. Repentance is inseparable from true saving faith.[52] To support repentance as distinct and separate from faith, the Church of Christ has taken Scripture out of context. Cottrell specifically points to Mark 1:15 and Acts 20:21.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus said, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (1:15). This (and other passages) cannot be taken in support of the Church of Christ view for several reasons.

*First*, Jesus didn't say belief and repentance are separate steps. Repentance, part of faith, may have been listed separately for clarity, in the same way that loving the Lord with all our "mind" is added to "heart" (in Matt. 22:37).[53] Often the Bible lists several things without implying that they happen at different times or are different events.[54]

*Second*, when Paul said, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they

must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21), here again Greeks are in view: It had to be made explicit to them that they repent (Gk: *metanoian*, "change their mind") about God and accept monotheism in opposition to polytheism. Hence, it was necessary to single out the kind of faith that involved a change of mind about God as needed for salvation. Nowhere does the New Testament list repentance as a second, separate step after faith, necessary for salvation.

*Third*, ironically, Cottrell accepts the New Testament affirmation of faith as the *means* of receiving the gift of salvation: "Faith is still the primary condition because it is the *sole means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of other conditions that serve other purposes" (*FOA*, 359, emphasis added). However, he does not appear to see the inconsistency of adding three more conditions for being saved. If faith is the only means of salvation, why is something else necessary?

*Fourth*, and finally, the New Testament lists faith and faith alone as the means of being saved. Accordingly, any other conditions (such as confession and baptism) cannot actually be salvific conditions—at best, they are soteriological *results*. Indeed, Cottrell recognizes this same relationship when it comes to the relationship between faith and obedience: "While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys" (ibid., 352). Why then, cannot faith be the sole means of salvation, and confession and baptism be a matter of obedience in the Christian life after one exercises faith alone for salvation?

## Confession Is Not a Separate Condition for Salvation

The most significant difference from evangelical soteriology is what the Church of Christ maintains as the third and fourth steps necessary for salvation: confession and baptism.

*First*, while the Bible speaks of confession unto salvation (cf. Rom. 10:9), it nowhere lists this as a separate and necessary step to being saved. Again, Cottrell admits,

> Certain NT references make a clear distinction between faith and obedient works (e.g., Rom. 3:28; 4:4–8; Eph. 2:8–10). This makes it impossible to include obedience in the definition of faith.… While we cannot say that faith *includes* obedience, we must indeed say that it *produces* or results in obedience. The faith that saves is a faith that obeys. (*FOA*, 352)

But if this is the case, why should confession be seen as a condition rather than a result of salvation? Someone who has saving faith will naturally want to manifest it in obedience (such as confessing Christ), but that doesn't make being obedient in confessing Christ a condition for being saved.

*Second*, Cottrell contends that faith is the means of salvation; consequently, a person is already saved by faith before he confesses his faith. Confession is a manifestation of salvation, not a stipulation for receiving it.

*Third*, verses used by the Church of Christ to support its belief that open confession of Christ is a necessary condition of salvation are taken out of context. These texts fall into two broad categories. The first category speaks of confession as *in connection with* saving faith, not as *a condition for* salvation. In Romans 10:9,[55] Paul is not saying that without a public confession of Christ one cannot be saved.[56] Confession is a natural outward concomitant of saving faith, but as Paul himself made clear, *saving faith alone saves* (cf. Eph. 2:8–9; Rom. 4:4–5). Furthermore, the Bible speaks of secret believers who did not confess Christ openly, while according to Church of Christ teaching, one must confess "openly" and "orally" in order to be saved. Here again, while open, oral confession is a natural *result* of salvation, it is nowhere given as a necessary *condition* of everlasting life.

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* clarifies the issue correctly:

> Confessing *with the mouth* that *Jesus is Lord* is mentioned first to conform to the order of the quotation from Deuteronomy 30:14 in Romans 10:8. [Thus,] the confession is an acknowledgment that God has been incarnated in Jesus (cf. 5:6), that Jesus Christ is God.… The true order is given in verse 10: *For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified*. [Therefore,] these are not two separate steps to salvation. They are chronologically together.[57]

Indeed, if confession were a separate step, then the vast majority of the New Testament statements on how we become saved (including the whole gospel of John) would be wrong, since confession is not included in them at all.

*Fourth*, as to the second category of verses used, one is Matthew 10:32–33,[58] where Jesus exhorted His followers to confess Him before men. Nevertheless, confession is not laid forth as a condition to becoming a believer: Those to whom He spoke (His twelve disciples, vv. 1–5) were already saved (except Judas—cf. John 17:12). Confession here is a condition for receiving a reward, that of being honored by Christ before the angels: It is not a condition for being welcomed into heaven but for rewards once there.[59]

This is what Paul declares in 2 Timothy 2:12–13: "If we endure, we will also

reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself." There are two important reasons not to take this as a condition for salvation. For one thing, Paul is speaking of our reign with Him—which again is a matter of reward, not salvation. For another, even our unfaithfulness does not negate God's faithfulness to His promise of salvation: If this were not true, then salvation would not be a free gift, as the Bible says it is, but would be dependent on our good works. Peter denied the Lord three times before men, yet he was saved. As mentioned, there were secret believers even in Jesus' day (cf. John 19:38). Failure to confess Christ might lessen our reward in heaven, but not our place there (which comes only by faith in God's grace).

*Fifth*, and finally, confession of Christ is part of our work for Him. Unlike faith, it is not merely a heart-belief (Rom. 10:10), but is an overt action that flows from faith just as any other good work. Once again, God's Word clearly says that we are not saved by any "works of righteousness" (Titus 3:5 NKJV) but by faith apart from good works (Eph. 2:8–9).

**Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation**

The most controversial of all the conditions set forth by the Church of Christ is its insistence that water baptism is a necessary condition for receiving salvation. Before addressing the texts it uses to support this position, we will look at the plain biblical teachings affirming that baptism is not necessary for salvation.

*First*, faith and faith alone is scripturally set forth, repeatedly, as the only condition for salvation. Just as Luther discovered, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17 KJV; cf. 4:4–5;Acts 16:31; Titus 3:5–7). This cannot be overstated:

> It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8–9)

*Second*, in John's gospel, only faith is listed as a condition for receiving eternal life (cf. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 20:31). As noted before, if there were more conditions, then his entire narrative is not only seriously misleading and inadequate but never once presents the actual plan of salvation. This is absurd; John himself said, "*These [works of Jesus] are written [in my gospel] that you may believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, *and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (20:31). The fact that repentance is not mentioned is

no exception, since true faith *includes* repentance;[60] therefore, to add repentance as a distinct and separate step is wrong, and both confession and baptism are separate acts that are nowhere Johannically mentioned as further conditions of salvation. *Faith* is the sole salvific requirement.

*Third*, Jesus called baptism a work of righteousness (Matt. 3:15), and Scripture emphatically rejects any work of righteousness as a condition for salvation (cf. Titus 3:5; Eph. 2:8–9). Water baptism is clearly a work we perform in obedience to God; hence, baptism (like any other work of righteousness) is not a *soteriological* mandate.

The Church of Christ's attempt to distinguish between *works* and *things we do* (like baptism—see Cottrell, *FOA*, 371) fails, since, again, the New Testament explicitly includes baptism as a work of righteousness (cf. Matt. 3:15). Further, the New Testament makes no such distinction between *works* and *outward acts we do* for salvation. Faith as an inward act in the heart is not an outward act or work. The latter naturally follows from the former (see chapter 10), but should not be confused with it. In addition, as Cottrell admits, faith, as the *sole* means of receiving salvation, is not an outward act or *thing we do*, but is simply the act of *believing* "in your heart" (Rom. 10:10 NLT) what *Christ has done* for us. Also, Paul separates baptism from what does save us—the gospel[61]—so what saves us cannot include baptism.

Nor, for several reasons, does the Church of Christ position avoid the problem by claiming that works (such as baptism) are to be distinguished from works of the law, which alone are opposed to faith (see *FOA*, 370).

For one thing, Cottrell defines works of the law as "any response of a man as creature to the law commands of the Creator" (ibid., 372), but he acknowledges that the Creator commanded all His creatures to believe in Christ (cf. Acts 16:31). Hence, on this definition, even saving faith would be a work, which God's Word says is not able to save us. Again, this distinction contains no actual difference.

In addition, the only way to avoid this dilemma is to make further distinction without a difference between God's law commands and non-law commands. The truth is that *whatever* the Creator commands His creatures to do is a law for us, since it is binding.

Cottrell implies another distinction, saying, "The primary sense in which baptism is a work is that it is a *work of God*. The only saving work accomplished in baptism is being done by God" (*FOA*, 372). Nonetheless, besides being for his argument a kind of "death by a thousand qualifications," this shifts the focus

from the topic at hand, which is: What we must do to be saved. Of course, it is God who does the saving—the question is, what must *we* do to receive the salvation only God can give? If water baptism (which is something *we* do, not God) is necessary for salvation, then it is not a work of God—it is a work of ours, and the Bible is emphatic as to the salvific insufficiency of any such effort.

*Fourth*, baptism is not part of the gospel. Paul said so himself. Even though he was baptized (Acts 22:16) and baptized others (cf. 1 Cor. 1:14, 16), he separated the gospel from baptism in these words: "Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Cor. 1:17). If baptism is not part of the gospel, and if the gospel "is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16 KJV), then baptism is not part of what saves us. Baptism then, like confession, is not a condition for eternal life but a manifestation of it. Baptism is a work that flows from the faith that alone brings salvation through the gospel.

*Fifth*, Paul was saved before he was baptized. Paul received salvation in Acts 9 on the road to Damascus, when he saw Jesus and acknowledged Him as his Lord (vv. 1–9). He points to this in later testimony as his conversion (cf. Acts 22, 26), yet he was not baptized until sometime later by Ananias (Acts 22:16).

*Sixth*, Peter affirmed that Cornelius was saved before he was baptized: "Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? *They have received the Holy Spirit* just as we have" (Acts 10:47, cf. 11:16–18). The order here is clear and distinct: First they "received the Holy Spirit," and then they were "baptized with water." This is exactly the opposite of what the Church of Christ teaches. In a subsequent passage, commenting on this event, Peter declares that they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not later when they were baptized: "If God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17). Once more, *baptism was not a condition, but a result of their salvation that came by faith alone*.

*Seventh*, and finally, baptism is a directive to those who are saved, not a condition for their being saved (cf. Matt. 28:18–20). It is *believers* who are commanded to be baptized: *Baptism is an act of a believer's obedience to Christ's command*. The order is belief (faith, involving repentance) that brings salvation, followed by an outward confession and obedience in baptism (cf. Acts 8:35–38; 10:47; 16:31–33). Saving faith (involving repentance) is the *only* condition for receiving the gift of everlasting life. Outward confession and baptism are the later acts of one who is already saved (i.e., a believer) and is

acting in obedience to Christ. *Baptism follows salvation*.

**Response to Verses Used to Support Baptism for Salvation**

Several verses are employed out of context to support the belief that baptism is a condition for salvation. The following are foremost among them.

*Acts 2:38*

Peter said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

**Response**

*First*, while the word *far* (Gk: *eis*) often does connote "to" or "toward," it can also mean "because of" or "in accordance with,"[62] in which case, regarding Acts 2:38, forgiveness would come before baptism.

*Second*, granted a broader sense,[63] *eis* does not necessitate that baptism come before forgiveness in Acts 2:38, since the view may be backward (to already being saved) instead of forward (to being saved through baptism).

*Third*, this may be a special command to Jews ("men of Israel" [cf. v. 22]) whose baptism (purification) was necessary for the national restoration of Israel (cf. 1:6; 3:21), something John the Baptist had told them earlier (cf. Matt. 3:1–8).

*Fourth*, even if Acts 2:38 does apply to everyone, the baptism was not before the converts were saved but after: "Those who *accepted his message* were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day" (v. 41). It is acceptance of the Word of God that brings salvation (cf. Rom. 10:17).

*Fifth*, the text doesn't say that those who were not baptized were not saved.

*Sixth*, since Scripture cannot contradict itself, and since, for example, baptism clearly follows salvation in Acts 10:47, an unclear passage (Acts 2:38) should be interpreted in the light of the clear one rather than the reverse.

*Seventh*, and finally, there are at least seven obvious biblical reasons[64] for rejecting the view that baptism is a condition for salvation. Acts 2:38, then, should be understood in harmony with these, not used to negate them.

*Acts 22:16*

Ananias said to Paul, " 'What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.' "

**Response**

These words do not prove that baptism is a salvific condition. As indicated above, Paul was already saved (in Acts 9); his baptism was an act of an obedient Christian, not an act by which he *became* a Christian. *The washing away of sins is ceremonial, not actual*. Sins are taken away "through faith" in Christ's finished work (cf. Eph. 2:1, 8); Paul himself said,

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the *forgiveness of sins* is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who *believes* is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (Acts 13:38–39)

As we have seen, Paul also declared that baptism is not part of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:17). Thus, his baptism here must be separated from the earlier time when he was saved. *Baptism is an outward act symbolizing the salvation that had already taken place*. Baptism was Paul's public identification with the "name of the Lord," which he had once so vehemently opposed.

*1 Peter 3:21*

Peter wrote of the flood of Noah's time: "*This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also*—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

**Response**

Including that the phrase "now saves you" is taken out of context, everything in this passage speaks against baptism as a salvific condition.

For one thing, the persons being baptized are no more saved by water baptism than Noah was through the Flood. Salvation is by God through faith: "*By faith* Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. *By his faith* he condemned the world and became heir of *the righteousness that comes by faith*" (Heb. 11:7). To be sure, Noah acted on his faith in obedience to God, but his salvation ("righteousness") came through his faith, not as a result of his obedience in building the ark.

In addition, the salvation spoken of in 1 Peter 3:21 is not from the penalty of sin (i.e., justification) but from a soiled conscience (i.e., sanctification). Since

Christ has commanded baptism for all believers, any who have heard His command and could be and yet have not been baptized are living with a bad conscience. Being obedient to God in baptism will save them from the knowledge of wrong in their conscience; Peter isn't talking here about saving souls from everlasting torment.

*John 3:5*

Jesus said to Nicodemus, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God *unless he is born of water* and the Spirit." This is said to prove that baptism is a necessary condition for salvation.

**Response**

There are many reasons to reject this interpretation.

*First*, the word *baptism* is not included, and the phrase "born of water" isn't used of baptism anywhere else in the New Testament.

*Second*, this position is contrary to the immediate context and, indeed, of the whole gospel of John. As we have repeatedly seen, only faith is mentioned in John as a condition (cf. 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 20:31). If baptism is part of what is necessary to be saved, then John's entire gospel fails to present God's plan of salvation.

*Third*, taking John 3:5 as a reference to the soteriological necessity of baptism is contrary to the rest of the New Testament, and God's Word does not contradict itself.[65]

*Fourth*, there are other possible ways to interpret John 3:5 that do not involve baptism as necessary for eternal life. (1) "Born of water" may refer to the *water of the womb*, that is, the first birth. This fits with the context; Jesus has just said that one's physical birth is insufficient, that one must have a spiritual birth as well. (2) "Born of water" may refer to the *water of the Word* (cf. Eph. 5:25), meaning, one can only be saved by the transforming power of the Word of God (cf. 1 Peter 1:23). Or, (3) since Jesus is speaking to a Jewish leader, just after the Baptist has announced that his baptism is not enough to enter the kingdom but that Christ would baptize with the Spirit (John 1:33), "born of water" may refer to the *baptism of John* mentioned earlier (1:26). This fits with John's message that listeners must "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2) and that otherwise Nicodemus would not "see" the visible coming kingdom (cf. Matt. 19:28; 24:30). In any event, there is no reason to take this passage as teaching that baptism by water is required in order to be saved.

*Titus 3:5–7*

Paul wrote of God:

> He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit*, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

**Response**

Looking at the whole text, it is strange that anyone would attempt to use it to support the necessity of baptism for salvation; Paul teaches exactly the opposite.

*First,* Paul declares that we are *not* saved by "righteous things we had done," that is, works of righteousness.[66]

*Second*, Paul affirms that we are saved by "rebirth," viz., by spiritual regeneration.

*Third*, Paul also says that we are "justified by his grace," not by any action of our own.

*Fourth*, immediately following (v. 8), Paul refers to those who "have believed in God" (NKJV) as the recipients of this salvation.

There are, of course, verses that refer to our being saved by baptism, but the baptism of the Holy Spirit, not water baptism, is in view. Paul clarifies this in the following verse.

*1 Corinthians 12:13*

"We were all *baptized by one Spirit* into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."

**Response**

This baptism first occurred on the Day of Pentecost (cf. Acts 1:5), when the initial believers were placed in Christ's spiritual body (of which He is the Head—cf. Eph. 1:22–23). Each subsequent believer is added by the same baptism into the same body at the moment he or she believes (cf. Rom. 8:9).

*Ephesians 4:4–5*

"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when

you were called—one Lord, one faith, *one baptism"*

**Response**

The expression "one baptism" seems to be best understood as water baptism: (1) The baptism of the Spirit is already implied by the reference to the "one Spirit" who places us into "one body" (v. 4) upon our acceptance of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); (2) the "one baptism" *follows* the "one faith" in the "one Lord," which is the order of priority throughout the New Testament (cf. Acts 8, 10, 16).

*Colossians 2:11–12*

> In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, *having been buried with him in baptism* and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

**Response**

The comparison of baptism with Old Testament circumcision makes it clear that *baptism does not save*. As Paul, the same writer, argues elsewhere, Abraham was saved long before he was circumcised; circumcision was a *later* sign of his *earlier* salvation (cf. Rom. 4:9–12). This is precisely the status of New Testament water baptism.

Furthermore, to carry the analogy through, circumcision was only required for males: If Old Testament circumcision *were* the same as New Testament baptism, then only males, accordingly, need to be baptized for salvation. In light of the Church of Christ's teaching on Colossians 2:11–12, *either* all women are unsaved *or* baptism is unnecessary for salvation.

*Romans 6:1–7*

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection*. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

**Response**

Although some take this as a reference to Spirit baptism (since it refers to being united with Christ), it can refer to water baptism without being a support of its necessity for salvation.

*First*, "baptized into Christ Jesus" need not mean salvation; the same word *into* (Gk: *eis*) can also mean "unto," or "with a view to."[67] Indeed, Israel (in 1 Cor. 10:2) was said to be baptized "into Moses[68] in the cloud and in the sea," but they were not actually put into (or "saved by") the covenant at that moment. Rather, they were identified with him who had also previously shown them that salvation comes from the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12; cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). Here again, *redemption comes before baptism*, and baptism is a later sign of our identification with Christ.

*Second*, the key word here is *like*.[69] The baptism of the Spirit into the body of Christ is the *actual* reality; water baptism is "like" Spirit baptism in the sense of being a *symbolic* reenactment of the occurrence of salvation.

*Third*, "buried with,"[70] as in Colossians 2:12, is indicative of the mode of water baptism, which here symbolizes Christ's burial and resurrection (v. 4). Obviously, the ones "buried with" Christ are not actually killed and then actually raised from the dead. Baptism by immersion is a symbolization of the saved person having passed from death unto life.

When the relevant texts are examined, these facts stand out:

(1) Nowhere does God's Word teach that water baptism is salvifically necessary.
(2) Only faith is required for salvation; and
(3) Water baptism is a symbol of our identification with Christ, an act performed in obedience to Christ *by believers* after salvation.[71]

# THE LORDSHIP-SALVATION VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

In the contemporary North American theological climate, the issue of the condition(s) for salvation centers on another question: Is it sufficient to accept Christ as Savior only, or is it also necessary to accept Him as Lord in order to become a Christian? John MacArthur (b. 1939) has championed the latter

position, called *lordship salvation*.

Soteriologically, according to the lordship view, we must accept Christ as Lord (i.e., Master) of our lives (as well as Savior) in order to be saved.[72] In MacArthur's own words,

> Lordship salvation … is "the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority." It is astonishing that anyone would characterize that truth as unbiblical or heretical.[73]

Faith is not merely a cognitive assent without subsequent good works (*GAJ*, 186), nor is it a momentary act but rather a permanent one (ibid., 189). True faith involves both trust and obedience: Faith and faithfulness are the same (ibid., 190–92). Therefore, no one can receive justification without sanctification (ibid., 198).

Likewise, faith without repentance does not bring salvation. True repentance is more than a change of mind (ibid., 178); it involves turning from one's sin and forsaking it (ibid., 177), as well as the change of one's character (ibid., 37). There is no distinction between salvation and discipleship (ibid., 35–36).

For MacArthur, acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord means more than belief in His deity: "He does not become anyone's Savior until that person receives him for who he is—Lord of all (Acts 10:36)" (ibid., 35). Lordship involves a believer's accepting Christ's sovereignty over his life (ibid., 229–36). Thus, for one who is truly saved, good works are an essential and inevitable result (ibid., 260, 277–78).

Even though MacArthur teaches that those who fall away permanently or deny Christ were never saved in the first place (ibid., 252–53), he acknowledges that a true Christian can be a secret believer (ibid., 224) who, like Paul (in Rom. 7), can struggle with sin and may even backslide (ibid., 274, 281), for long periods of time (ibid., 274). Nevertheless, no one is truly saved unless he bears fruit (ibid., 211–12), and no one has eternal life who does not accept Jesus as the Lord of his life (ibid., 280): "Any doctrine that makes surrender to Christ optional is bad teaching" (ibid., 272).

### Response to the Lordship-Salvation View

The most pointed reply to the lordship stance has come from the free-grace position, led by Zane Hodges (b. 1932). Criticisms of lordship salvation include the following:

(1) It overtly confuses salvation and discipleship.
(2) It makes the promise of doing good works (by submitting to Christ's lordship) a condition for receiving the free gift of everlasting life.
(3) It fails to distinguish what is implicit in faith (e.g., obedience) from what is explicitly necessary to be saved (faith alone).
(4) It overstates the important connection between faith and works by claiming that there is an "inevitable connection" between them.
(5) It stereotypes the free-grace view by labeling it *easy believism*.
(6) It fails to see that there can be a distinction between justification and sanctification without there being a dichotomy between them.
(7) It makes faithfulness to the end (perseverance) a condition for certain knowledge of individual salvation.
(8) With seeming inconsistency, it admits that a true Christian can be a secret believer and may even extensively backslide.

# THE FREE-GRACE VIEW ON THE CONDITION(S) FOR SALVATION

The free-grace view, as expressed by Zane Hodges in *Absolutely Free*,[74] contends that saving faith cannot be distinguished from nonsaving faith by its fruits (*AF*, 27). Faith alone is the condition for our salvation. Repentance is neither a separate act nor a part of saving faith.[75]

## The Free-Grace Position on Faith

False *faith*[76] is an empty term, unless it means "pretended" or "misplaced" faith (ibid., 28). *Saving faith* is ordinary faith (ibid., 207): There is no salvific difference between belief *that* and belief *in*. One can be saved simply by believing that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose again (ibid., 42–43). Neither is there a legitimate distinction between intellectual faith and volitional faith (ibid., 30). The reason the faith of demons is not salvific is that it is faith only in the unity of God; human faith is not nonsalvific *merely* due to being an intellectual assent (ibid., 38–39). A Christian may have true faith that does not produce good works (ibid., 73); he is saved forever by a single act of faith (ibid., 57), not by a continual act of believing. He might even completely lose his faith,

yet he will still be saved (ibid., 105–06, 108–11).

At the same time, however, Hodges does accept that faith involves trust (ibid., 32, 60) and that Christ must be received in the believer's heart (ibid., 60). True faith involves a personal appropriation (ibid., 40), and a person with true faith ought to manifest it in good works (ibid., 63, 73). Even so, it is not inevitable that he will do this,[77] and he can be truly saved with no outward manifestation of his faith.

## The Free-Grace Position on Repentance

As for repentance, Hodges claims it isn't necessary for salvation; only faith is (ibid., 145–46), and repentance is not part of faith (ibid., 145). Repentance may, but need not, precede the faith that saves us (ibid., 146); repentance *results* from salvation (ibid., 222). Repentance is for Christians rather than non-Christians (ibid., 153); repentance is designed to restore fellowship with God (ibid., 158, 160), not to obtain a saving relationship with Him. Repentance does not mean "to change one's mind"; instead, it means "to regret" (ibid., 146).

## The Free-Grace Position on Obedience and Works

According to Hodges' free-grace view, obedience is not soteriologically required (ibid., 18); obedience is something that believers should embrace after they are saved, but it is not a condition for becoming a Christian (ibid., 132). Further, neither obedience nor works are a sign of one's salvation (ibid., 176); again, it is not inevitable that faith will produce good works (ibid., 216). God's grace teaches us to do good works, but works are not a result of faith (ibid., 215ff.); faith should, but need not, produce good works (ibid., 63). Obedience is necessary to become God's friend, but not to be His child (ibid., 176).

As we have seen, contrary to the traditional interpretation of James 2, Hodges believes that James is speaking about salvation from death, not from hell (ibid., 124). Dead faith (2:17, 26) signifies Christian faith without vitality rather than nonsaving faith (ibid., 126). "Can such faith save him?" (2:14) does not mean James is talking about nonsaving faith; rather, faith can't save a Christian from a dead spiritual life (only good works can [ibid., 125]).[78]

While a Christian should seek to perform good works, biblical exhortations for good works are given so that we can be fruitful, not so that we can be assured of our salvation (ibid., 120–21). The performance of works helps the believer to

make progress in his spiritual life (ibid., 122).

**Summary and Contrast of Lordship Salvation and Free Grace**

Once again, the traditional Protestant view (strongly supported by Scripture) is that there is only one condition for salvation: faith. Nonetheless, there has been a significant discussion as to precisely what is meant by *faith*. Several elements need to be discussed before a final conclusion can be drawn.

| Lordship Salvation | Free Grace |
|---|---|
| Faith and repentance are necessary | Only faith is necessary |
| Must accept Christ as Lord and Savior | Only need to accept Christ as Savior |
| Faith itself involves obedience | Faith itself does not involve obedience |
| True faith necessarily brings change in one's life | True faith does not necessarily bring one's life |
| Works flow inevitably from saving faith | Works don't flow inevitably from saving faith |
| Real believers can't deny Christ | Real believers can deny Christ |

In critique of the free-grace position, objections have been numerous, including those in the following list:

(1) It denies the vital and natural connection between faith and good works.
(2) It denies the scriptural relationship between faith and obedience.
(3) It denies the biblical truth that repentance (as part of faith) is a salvific requirement.
(4) It denies that a believer needs any works as evidence of saving faith.
(5) It makes the unsubstantiated claim that one may absolutely deny Christ and still be saved.
(6) It fails to acknowledge the difference between faith *that* (which does not save) and faith *in* (which does save).
(7) It reduces faith to a mere cognitive (rather than life-changing) decision.

These criticisms help to focus the differences between the views and call for some clarification.

## The Difference Between Saving and Nonsaving Faith

The Bible contains many examples of faith that did not save those who exercised it. James said, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder" (2:19). It is obvious that the kind of faith demons have (relating to God) is not the faith that would save us if placed in Christ (cf. Acts 16:17). Jesus warns against those who profess His name and yet never have belonged to Him:

> Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt. 7:22–23).

James cautions against nominal faith that produces no good works:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? … But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. (2:14, 18)

Peter describes apostates who possessed a kind of "knowing" the Lord that did not lead to their salvation:

> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. (2 Peter 2:20)

Likewise, Simon the sorcerer "believed" in some sense, but he is described in terms that best exemplify one who is unsaved:

> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.…
>
> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."
>
> Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:13, 18–23).

Jesus says that the person who believes with a stony heart was never saved:

> The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (Matt. 13:20–21)

Thus, there *are* significant differences between saving and nonsaving faith.[79] The following chart illustrates:

| Nonsaving Faith | Saving Faith |
|---|---|
| Act of mind only | Act of mind and will (James 2:19) |
| Mind understands; will does not accept | Will accepts (Rom. 1:18) |
| Mind only perceives | Will receives (1 Cor. 2:14) |
| Sees only its meaning | Sees its significance (James 2:14, 19–20) |
| Merely mental assent | Heart commitment (Rom. 10:9) |
| Only objectively apprehended | Subjectively applied as well (2 Peter 2:20) |
| Faith that is not willing to work | Faith that is willing to work (John 7:17) |
| Does not tend to produce good works | Does tend to produce good works (James 2:17) |
| Does not lead to salvation | Does lead to salvation (James 2:14, 18) |

To summarize, saving faith isn't merely an act of one's mind (understanding) but also of his will (acceptance). Saving faith doesn't simply perceive the truth but receives it as well. Saving faith sees not only the meaning but also the significance of the truth. Saving faith involves a heart commitment, not merely intellectual assent. Saving faith sees beyond the meaning to the significance of the truth. Saving faith is not only objectively apprehended but also subjectively applied. Saving faith is willing to work, prompts actions, tends to produce good works, and results in salvation.

**How Much Saving Faith Does It Take to Be Saved?**

Our Lord made it clear that true faith was not a matter of quantity but of quality. He said the smallest amount is sufficient: "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt. 17:20). It is not only the *nature* of faith but the *object* of faith that makes it effective. For instance, if we're walking on a frozen lake, it isn't the strength of our faith in the ice that matters but the strength of the ice on which we stand that makes the difference.

## How Can a Christian Know He Has Saving Faith?

There are two spheres in which a believer can be aware that he has saving faith: internal and external.

*First*, in the internal sphere, one must ask whether his faith is in the right object. Saving faith must be in God, not in faith itself. True faith is trusting God's faithfulness, not ours (2 Tim. 2:13; cf. 2 Cor. 13:5).

*Second*, one must ask whether he has the right motive, since even the greatest faith in the universe with the wrong intention will not be efficacious. Paul said, "If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

*Third*, true faith will be confirmed by the right Spirit (the Holy Spirit) witnessing in our hearts that we are children of God (Rom. 8:16; cf. 1 John 4:1).

There are also external tests of true faith.

*First*, true faith manifests the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).

*Second*, true faith naturally results in good works (James 2:14–18; 1 John 3:17). We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves us is not alone. It naturally produces good works.[80] We are saved *by* faith but *to* works (Eph. 2:8–10; Titus 3:3–8).

*Third*, true faith lasts (Matt. 13:21–23; 1 John 3:9; 2:19).

*Fourth*, true faith learns by discipline (Heb. 12:5, 11).

*Fifth*, true faith manifests love (1 John 3:18–20).

However, the relationship between true faith and works is not automatic, though it is *natural*; not inevitable but *normal*. Saving faith may be dormant, even for long periods of time. Nonetheless, it is difficult to hide life: If it is there, it will tend, naturally and normally, to manifest itself.

## What Is the Relationship Between Saving Faith and Repentance?

There is considerable debate over the relationship between saving faith and repentance. While some evangelicals deny the need for repentance in salvation, others argue that repentance is a necessary step along with faith.[81] In order to get to the heart of the matter, a look at the biblical usage of both terms is necessary.

There are a number of views that can be summarized under the following major categories.

*The View That Repentance Is Not Necessary for Salvation*

On the one end of this spectrum is Zane Hodges' extreme free-grace view, which holds that repentance is in no way necessary to becoming saved. Only faith (without repentance) is salvifically required, and the role of repentance in the believer's life is after he is saved from the penalty of his sins. The scriptural references to repentance are either speaking of repentance from temporal and earthly matters (having nothing to do with salvation) or else with regard to what a believer needs to do after justification.

*The View That Repentance Is a Precondition to Saving Faith*

Some who maintain that repentance is not necessary for salvation, though, do admit that "repentance *may* precede salvation by way of preparation" (Radmacher, *S*, 135). They argue that we are saved by faith alone but that the precondition of saving faith is repentance from sin. While such repentance does not deliver salvation, it does set the stage for it. One must leave sin (in repentance) before he can cleave (by faith) to Christ; no one can accept Christ unless he is willing to relinquish sin, as clinging to sin and clinging to salvation from sin are incompatible. Repentance, then, does not save, but it clears the salvific path. Leaving sin does not automatically save, but it is a necessary condition for becoming saved through accepting the Savior.

*The View That Repentance of Sin Is Necessary for Salvation*

On the other end of this spectrum is John MacArthur's lordshipsalvation position, which insists that repentance of sin is a salvific demand. Mere faith without true repentance is not enough to save anyone; this is a form of easy believism that is the essence of nominal (not genuine) Christianity. All authentic saving faith has repentance as a necessary precondition.

*The View That Repentance Is a Necessary Part of Saving Faith*

One last view can be placed broadly between the extreme free-grace view and the lordship-salvation position. Charles Ryrie (b. 1925) holds a moderate view, claiming that faith and repentance are two facets of one saving act. Repentance is a change of one's *mind*, not a change in one's *life*.[82] But Radmacher notes, "If changing one's mind doesn't change one's life, what does it do? …. Surely there is an inviolable principle that our actions are nothing more than the blossom of our deepest thoughts" (*S*, 132). Thus, it is suggested that there is more to saving faith than repentance about Christ and obedience to the gospel. It also has an

implicit willingness to obey Christ's commands and an implicit willingness to repent of our sin. While no overt obedience and willingness is *soteriologically* necessary, nonetheless, the very nature of saving faith and true repentance is such that it *naturally* tends to lead people to become willing and obedient.[83] In order to resolve this issue, a study of the New Testament meanings of the key terms *faith* and *repentance* is necessary.

## THE MEANING OF *REPENTANCE*

The root meaning of *to repent* (Gk: *metanoeo*) is "to think differently" or "to reconsider."[84] Virtually all the Greek lexicons agree that to *metanoeo* is "to reconsider" or "to change one's mind." Joseph Thayer (1828–1901) said it means "to change one's mind, i.e., to repent (to feel sorry that one has done this or that)" (*GELNT*, 405). William Arndt (1880–1957) and F. Wilbur Gingrich (1901–1993) affirmed that the sense is to "change one's mind …. then feel remorse, repent, be converted" (ibid., 513). William E. Vine (1873–1949) listed its meaning as "to perceive afterwards (*meta*, after, implying change, *noeo*, to perceive). [Hence, *metanoeo* is] to change one's mind or purpose, always, in the N.T., involving a change for the better, an amendment, and always, except Luke 17:3–4, of repentance from sin" (*EDNTW*, 951–52).

Gerhard Kittel (1888–1948) noted:

> The popular Gk. sense is most likely at [Luke 17:3ff.], where *metanoiein* denotes regret for a fault against one's brother, and [2 Cor. 7:9ff.], where with the combination with *metamelomai* … suggests remorse.… Elsewhere, the only possible meanings are "to change one's mind," "change of mind," or "to convert," "conversion" (*TDNT*, V, 999).

In short, as used in the New Testament of Christian conversion, repentance entails not only a genuine change of mind about whether we are sinners and need Jesus as our Savior, but also a willingness to have our lives changed by Christ so as to bear fruit for Him. This is evident from Acts 26:20: "They should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." John the Baptist preached the same, exhorting unbelievers to "produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3:8).

Louis Berkhof (1873–1957) observed that true repentance involves intellect, emotion, and will (*ST*, 486). This should be no surprise, since repentance is what a *person* does, and *personhood* is defined as the makeup of one who has

intellect, emotion, and will.[85] Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) commented,

> Of the three words that are used in the Greek Gospels to describe the process [of repentance], one emphasizes the emotional element of regret, sorrow over the past evil course of life, *metamelomai* (Matt. 21:29–32). [Then,] a second expresses reversal of the entire mental attitude, *metanoeo* (Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32; 15:7, 19). [Finally,] the third denotes a change in the direction of life, one goal being substituted for another, *epistrephomai* (Matt. 13:15 [and parallels]; Luke 17:4; 22:32). [Thus,] repentance is not limited to any single faculty of the mind: it engages the entire man, intellect, will and affections. (*KGC*, 92–93)

## Biblical Usage of *Repentance*

As free-grace proponents often rightly observe, biblical repentance frequently relates to temporal and moral matters that are not connected with the reception of eternal salvation. Many verses are simply referring to believers repenting of their post-salvation sins. The famous text of 2 Chronicles 7:14 fits in this category, since it begins with "If my people.…"

Nonetheless, repentance is also commanded of non-Christians as a condition for their salvation.[86] The point, however, is that whether *repentance* is used of believers or unbelievers, it involves a change of both mind and heart (which leads naturally to a change of life). *Aided by God's grace*, repentance is within the grasp of fallen human beings.

*2 Chronicles 7:14*

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." Clearly repentance here involves turning from wickedness, seeking God, and choosing humility. However, the reference to "my people" indicates that believers are in view.

*Isaiah 1:16–17*

"Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." This is more than a change of mind—sincere desire to change one's life is entailed. But again it seems to be referring to believers.

*Isaiah 55:6–7*

"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the

wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon." Forsaking sinful ways and seeking God are both part of true repentance. The reference to "the wicked" would seem to indicate that the unsaved are also in view, as well as the fact that they are out of covenant relation to God (v. 3) and are offered the free gift of salvation (v. 1).

*Ezekiel 33:18–19*

"If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and does evil, he will die for it. And if a wicked man turns away from his wickedness and does what is just and right, he will live by doing so." True repentance involves an actual change in life, whether for an unbeliever or a believer.

*Jonah 3:10*

"When God saw what [the Ninevites] did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened." The kind of repentance that brought salvation to the pagans of Nineveh was clearly more than an alteration of their minds; it resulted in a radical change in their lives.

It seems unlikely that, as free-grace people hold, Nineveh's conversion was related only to temporal things and not to their eternal salvation, for many reasons:

(1) Eternal salvation was their biggest need; to send Jonah there for less trivializes his mission.
(2) "Salvation is of the LORD" (2:9 KJV) seems to have a definite salvific ring to it.
(3) Jonah's confession about the grace of God (4:2) goes deeper than mercy in mere temporal matters.
(4) Jesus' statement about the people of Nineveh rising up on Judgment Day (Matt. 12:41) indicates that God had their eternal destiny in view in the mission of Jonah.
(5) Jesus' use of Jonah as a prime sign of His death and resurrection, which are necessary to salvation (Rom. 10:9), reveals a soteriological connection.

*Mark 1:15*

"The time has come," [Jesus] said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and

believe the good news!" Both repentance and faith are inherent in accepting the gospel. And unbelieving Jews were clearly included in the call to repent.

*Luke 3:3*

"[Jesus] went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Salvific repentance is linked to salvific forgiveness. And to limit this only to temporal and national matters is to trivialize Jesus' mission.

*Luke 5:32*

Christ said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." This is usually taken as a contrast between the saved and the lost, meaning that repentance is necessary for sinners to become saved.

*Luke 13:3*

Jesus warned, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." Here too it is unlikely that unbelievers are exempt, since the text refers to "sinners" (v. 2) and "all" who dwell in Jerusalem (v. 4).

*Luke 24:47*

"Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in [Christ's] name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." This is an important passage because it connects both repentance and faith with the Great Commission to the entire world. It stretches logic to claim that these words refer only to the discipleship of believers.

*Acts 2:38*

"Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.' " Difficult to interpret as this text may be on the relationship between baptism and salvation,[87] it is clear that repentance is necessary to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

*Acts 3:19*

Peter said to the unrepentant Jews, who had not accepted Jesus Christ as the Messiah: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

*Acts 5:31*

"God exalted [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel." Here again, the unsaved and salvation from sin seem to be in view regarding the call to repent.

*Acts 8:22*

Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, "Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart." While it is possible that Simon was a true believer (cf. 5:13), the description Peter gives of him sounds very much like that of a lost person (cf. vv. 20–23).

*Acts 11:18*

"When [the leaders in Jerusalem] heard [Peter's affirmation of the Caesarean Christians' salvation], they … praised God, saying, 'God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.' " The context indicates that Peter is referring to the conversion of "Gentiles" through repentance. Hodges' suggestion is that this isn't a reference to eternal life (AF, 153); others argue that since Peter is relating how these believers had received the Holy Spirit, it refers to salvation.

*Acts 17:30*

Paul said to the Athenians: "While God has [in the past] overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (NRSV). It is agonizing to try to follow the contorted reasoning that this somehow refers to repentance after salvation (ibid., 145–46, 160). Paul is obviously speaking to unbelieving Greeks who mocked his message (v. 32) and plainly were not believers; others who were saved as a result of Paul's evangelization (v. 34) were clearly unbelievers before their conversion. *Paul's exhortation about repentance was directed toward unbelievers*; his words are for "all people everywhere," and not all people everywhere were (or are) believers.

*Acts 19:4*

"John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." Rather than repentance preparing the way for faith, it would appear that they are linked by interchangeable parallels. Thus, just as John the Baptist preached repentance followed by baptism, even so the Christian message prescribes the same for unbelievers toward Jesus (cf. Acts

2:38).

*Acts 20:21*

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." It is hard to understand this in any other way than as an exhortation for all unsaved persons to repent and believe in order to be saved. Nor can it be limited to Jews, since it explicitly mentions Greeks. While some take repentance and faith as two steps, Ryrie's comment is to the point; he notes that both words "are joined by one article, which indicates that the two are inseparable, though each focuses on a facet of the single requirement for salvation" (*SGS*, 87–88).

*Acts 26:19–20*

Paul testified, "I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds." Once again both Jewish and Gentile unbelievers were commanded not only to repent but also to demonstrate through good deeds that they had repented and been saved.

*2 Corinthians 7:10*

"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." In context, this seems to be a call upon believers who have fallen into sin to repent of it, since Paul is writing to "the church of God" at Corinth (cf. 1:1).

*2 Timothy 2:25*

"Those who oppose [the Lord's servant] he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth." This could be taken as referring either to believers who have fallen into error or to unbelievers who have not yet accepted the truth of the gospel.

*Revelation 2:5*

Jesus exhorted the professing believers who had fallen into sin to "remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." This too could be a call either for believers to repent of sin in their lives

or for professing (though not possessing) Christians to repent. Other exhortations to repent fall into the same category (cf. 2:21; 3:3).

In summary, while some of the above texts refer to believers repenting of sins after they are saved, others may be taken either as referring to true believers or otherwise, and *some seem clearly to be directed toward unbelievers* (e.g., Luke 24:47; Acts 17:30; 20:21). Repentance, then, is a salvific condition, which raises two remaining questions: What does faith mean? And what is the relationship between repentance and faith?

## The Meaning of *Faith* (Belief)

As for the meaning of faith, *to believe* (Gk: *pisteuo*) is a common New Testament term meaning "to have faith (in, upon, or with respect to a person or thing) … by implication to entrust (especially one's spiritual well-being to Christ) … commit (to trust), put in trust with" (Strong, *NSECB*). With this all the major Greek dictionaries are in agreement.

Thayer said,

> "To believe" means to think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit, [to] place confidence in. [And in] a moral and religious reference, *pisteuein* [from pisteuo] is used in the N.T. of a conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul. (*GELNT*, 511)

Arndt and Gingrich claimed *pisteuo* means to " 'believe (in) something,' 'be convinced of something.' And in certain combinations 'to be dependent on' or 'give credence to' " (*GELNT*, 666). Kittel maintained that "*pisteuein* means 'to rely on,' 'to trust,' 'to believe' " (*TDNT*, 6.203): "The fact that 'to believe' is 'to obey,' as in the OT … is particularly emphasized in [Hebrews] 11" (ibid., 6.205). *Belief* also involves to obey, to trust, and to hope (ibid., 6.205–07). In specifically Christian usage, belief "is thus the saving faith that recognizes and appropriates God's saving work in Christ" (ibid., 6.208). In short, *faith* (belief) implies trust in, commitment to, obedience to, and hope (confidence) in its object. As applied to faith in Jesus, the implications for saving faith are clear: It is the kind of belief that has trust and confidence in Christ for salvation and thereby implies a commitment to follow and obey Him.

## The Relationship Between Faith (Belief) and Repentance

As for the second question,[88] there is a tight connection between faith and

repentance, as two facets of the same action. Rather than being two separate acts—which violates the Protestant (and biblical) principle of "faith alone"—both faith and repentance are necessary for salvation, but each is a part of one saving act by which a person receives the gift of everlasting life. Faith implies the kind of commitment to and trust in Christ that will naturally make an actual change in one's life. Likewise, true repentance (a real change of mind about our sin and about who Christ is, viz., our Savior) is life-altering as well.

As we have seen, faith and repentance are inseparable in the same way that the command to *come here* cannot be fulfilled without *leaving there*.[89] True faith and repentance regarding one's salvation involve embracing right *and* rejecting wrong—one cannot be exercised without the other. Genuine repentance toward God contains faith, and true faith in God entails repentance. Accordingly, *there is only one condition for receiving God's gift of salvation: saving faith* (the kind of faith that entails repentance).

Again, salvific faith involves a true change of mind about sin and the Savior, so that by the appropriation of faith, He becomes one's own Savior. Unlike nonsaving faith, saving faith naturally tends to redirect one's life; under normal conditions it *will* result in change. True faith is not simply "belief that" but also "belief in." My belief *that* Jesus saves does not rescue me (cf. James 2:19); it is my belief *in* the finished work of Christ that delivers me (cf. John 3:16).

# THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH

In view of the foregoing discussion, several characteristics of saving faith can be unpacked. Together, these traits reveal why saving faith is significantly different from nominal faith (see chart above).

### Saving Faith Involves Trust

True faith involves trust in God. Jesus commanded, "Put your trust [faith] in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light" (John 12:36). Likewise, Paul shows in Romans 4:5 there is trust in true faith,[90] which, again, even free-grace defender Zane Hodges admits (*AF*, 32, 60).

In the New Testament, the interweaving of faith and trust is expressed not only by the meaning of the word *pisteuo* as "trust" but also by the oft-repeated directives to "believe *in*" Christ[91] and "believe *on*" Christ.[92] Kittel, who took

such phrases as generally meaning “to believe” Christ or “to believe” Christ’s message, acknowledged:

> Certain verses show that a personal relation can really be expressed by the initially formal phrase *pisteuein eis Christon Iesoun* [to believe in Christ Jesus]. One may refer first to [Romans] 10:9, which proves clearly that to believe in Jesus Christ is to acknowledge Him as Lord.… [Again,] in [Romans] 10:14 the *pisteuein eis auton* [to believe in Him] leads to calling upon Him, so that *pisteuein* … brings [one] into a personal relation with Christ [cf. Acts 14:23; Rom. 6:8 and Gal. 2:20; Phil. 1:29; 1 Peter 1:8]. (*TDNT*, 6.212)

### Saving Faith Involves Commitment

David wrote: “Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him” (Ps. 37:5). Paul’s faith led him to say, “I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted [committed] to him for that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Faith is not merely acknowledging that Christ can bring us to heaven; faith is also the willingness to place our very lives in His hands, to fully commit ourselves to Him as the means of delivering us to our destiny.

### Saving Faith Involves Obedience

An act of true faith involves obedience to God; Paul uses *belief* and *obedience to the gospel* in parallel: “Not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’ ” (Rom. 10:16). The apostle also writes of “what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to *obey God* by what I have said and done” (Rom. 15:18). He says of unbelievers that God “will punish those who do not know God and *do not obey* the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:8). Hebrews declares that obedience follows from faith, for “by faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, *obeyed* and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (11:8).

Certainly, then, saving faith involves obedience to the gospel. In addition, saving faith leads to an obedient life. However, there is no evidence that one must express obedience to the lordship of Christ as *a condition for receiving salvation* (justification). As shown above,[93] obedience leading to good works is a natural result of saving faith but not a qualification for being saved.

### Saving Faith Involves Love

True faith involves love, which is the greatest commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37). Unbelievers “perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Paul speaks of “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6). And John said,

> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. (1 John 3:18–20)

### Saving Faith Involves Humility

Jesus said,

> I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3–4)

As previously mentioned, even Hodges (while holding to the extreme free-grace position) acknowledges that true faith involves childlike trust entailing humility (*AF*, 32, 60). Saving faith in Christ is a childlike action in which one acknowledges that he or she is a sinner and in desperate need of the Savior.

## SUMMARY OF THE THREE PRIMARY VIEWS ON FAITH, REPENTANCE, AND OBEDIENCE IN REGARD TO SALVATION[94]

| Lordship | Moderate Free Grace | Extreme Free Grace |
|---|---|---|
| John MacArthur | Charles Ryrie | Zane Hodges |
| Faith and repentance of sin are necessary | Faith and repentance about the Savior are necessary | Only faith is necessary, not repentance |
| Must be willing to obey all Christ’s commands | Must be willing to obey Christ’s command to believe | Faith itself does not involve obedience |
| True faith brings | True faith brings change | True faith does not |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| change in one's life | in one's life | necessarily bring change in one's life |
| Works flow inevitably from saving faith | Works flow naturally (not inevitably) from saving faith | Works do not flow inevitably or naturally from saving faith |

In the lordship-salvation view, one must repent of one's sins in order to be saved; the moderate free-grace position demands only repentance about whether Christ is the Savior from sin, not repentance of all one's sins;[95] no repentance of any kind is necessary for the extreme free-grace view. Those who follow John MacArthur claim that one must be willing to obey all Christ's commands as a condition for being saved. Charles Ryrie affirms that one must be willing only to obey Christ's command to receive eternal life. Zane Hodges does not believe that obedience is involved (in any way) with the conditions for salvation—only faith. While lordship proponents hold that a change in one's life and good works inevitably flow from saving faith, and the moderate free-grace view affirms good works naturally (though not inevitably) follow saving faith, the extreme free-grace position denies that good works and a changed life result either inevitably or naturally.

# CONCLUSION

Contrary to the Roman Catholic view, the performance of works is not a condition for salvation. The extreme Reformed view, in the final analysis, has *no* conditions for receiving the gift of salvation. And, in opposition to the view of many Churches of Christ, there are not four conditions of salvation (justification). Soteriologically, true faith and repentance are part of one and the same act; confession and baptism are results of (not conditions for) salvation. Those who truly believe will have the natural desire to openly confess Christ and to follow His command to be baptized.

Since saving faith is an act of trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ regarding the gospel, it is evident from its very essence that saving faith (which involves repentance) will naturally tend to produce good works—a nominal, noncommittal, purely intellectual-type faith will not. Therefore, *whereas we are saved by faith alone, saving faith is not alone but is inclined to produce good works*.[96]

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# THE CONTENTS OF SALVATION

The question in this chapter revolves around the *content* of belief that is necessary for salvation in this age. This is related to (but not identical with) the issue of the *condition* of salvation, which answers the question, What does one need to do in order to receive the gift of eternal life? This we have already answered: One does not need to *do* anything, only believe, for *faith alone* is sufficient.[1] The focus now is on *how much* one must believe in order to be granted salvation.

## DISTINCTIONS

Before we can resolve this matter, we need to establish several important distinctions for the purpose of clarifying the discussion's terms.

### Conditions for Giving vs. Condition for Receiving

As previously explained, there is a big difference between the condition(s) for *giving* something and the condition for *receiving* it. If a parent bequeaths an inheritance (for instance, a lump-sum check) with no conditions attached, the heir must meet no conditions to *qualify* for the inheritance, but if he does not accept the check and cash it, he has not met the conditions for actually *receiving*

what is, from the giver, an unconditional gift.[2]

**The Object of Faith vs. the Basis of Faith**

There is also a difference between the *object* of one's faith and the *basis* for that same faith. For example, *believing* that a chair will support me and *knowing* for a fact that certain laws of physics make it possible are not the same. All the physical conditions for the chair's solidity can be true without my explicitly believing that the chair is sufficient to support me.

**The Object of Faith vs. the Content of Faith**

Another significant distinction is between the *object* of my faith and the *content* of my faith. The chair is the object; I may believe it will keep me from crashing to the floor, but I might not know whether it is constructed from steel or wood, whether it is old or new, whether it is an antique or contemporary, how often it has supported or failed to support others, and so forth.[3]

**Conditions for Obtaining a Gift vs. Conditions for Losing a Gift**

It is also evident that there is a difference between conditions for *receiving* a gift and conditions for *keeping* it. If I receive a gift of jewelry with no strings attached, subsequent effort may need to be invested in order to keep the treasure from being stolen or lost.

**Absolute Conditions vs. Normative Conditions**

*Absolute* conditions are not synonymous with *normative* conditions. For instance, it is normatively necessary to wear seat belts to save lives, since that is the law in certain states. However, it is not absolutely necessary to do so, both because some states don't have laws requiring it and because some people survive an accident without having used their seat belts.

**One-Time Normative Conditions vs. All-Time Normative Conditions**

Some stipulations may be normatively necessary for *one time* but not for *all time*. Laws change, and when they do, what is normatively necessary is likewise

altered. During the Prohibition era, the sale of alcoholic beverages was illegal in the United States; now it is not. The standard was changed between that time and this time.

### Explicit Necessary Conditions vs. Implicit Necessary Conditions

What is *implicitly* necessary is not always *explicitly* necessary. In order for human interaction to take place, it is implicitly necessary for there to be at least two minds and a common medium (e.g., a language). Nevertheless, it is not explicitly necessary for the people involved to believe that this is true, since they might communicate without ever actually thinking about what makes their connection possible.

### Consistent Beliefs vs. Inconsistent Beliefs

Certain beliefs are necessary in order for a given paradigm (model) to be *consistent*; however, a person might hold to some of the necessary beliefs within a model while not accepting them all—while this is *inconsistent*, the truth or falsehood of the ones he does acknowledge is not contingent on whether he eventually becomes willing to embrace the rest. For instance, maintaining belief in an absolute moral mandate (the law) without having belief in God (the Lawgiver) is inconsistent; there cannot be a moral prescription (law) without a Moral Prescriber (Lawgiver). Even so, it is possible to hold to a moral law (as many unbelievers do) without making this logical connection.

### Denying vs. Not Believing

Denial of a certain reality is to be distinguished from nonbelief of that same truth. Not all people in ancient times denied that the world is round—some of them simply didn't know. Consequently, *not believing* that the world is round wasn't the same for them as *denying* its round shape.

## APPLICATIONS OF THESE DISTINCTIONS TO THE QUESTION OF SALVATION

Applying these distinctions to salvation helps to clarify the question of what a

person must necessarily believe in order to obtain eternal life.[4] Each differentiation brings further focus in our efforts toward a final conclusion.

## Faith Is the Only Condition for Receiving Salvation

As discussed earlier, there are no conditions for God *giving* salvation (cf. Rom. 11:29; 2 Tim. 2:13) and only one for our *receiving* it.[5] We are saved by God's magnificent grace, "and if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Rom. 11:6). Accordingly, our attention here is centered not upon God's unconditional bestowal of salvation but upon our reception of it by faith alone (Rom. 4:5).

## The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith

Again, there is a difference between the *object of* and the *basis for* one's faith. For example, a man might believe that God (the object of saving faith) will save him, even though he may not have awareness of and, therefore, belief in all the theological truths (the basis for saving faith) that needed to be upheld and fulfilled for his justification to be made possible. In other words, he could have God as the object of His saving faith without knowing the basis by which the potential for his deliverance was accomplished. This seems to have been the case in the Old Testament, where not everyone understood that Christ's death and resurrection were necessary for their salvation.[6]

## The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Content of Faith

The differentiation between the object of faith and the content of faith is significant. For example, a person could have faith in God (*object*) without knowing (or, hence, believing in) all that was actually necessary (*content*) to believe in order for God to save him, namely, that Christ died for his sins and rose again (1 Cor. 15:1–6). During the Old Testament era, as well as for some even after the time of Christ, at least throughout the transitional period before the more complete gospel message had been officially and widely promulgated (cf. Acts 19), not everyone fully understood the content of the gospel.[7]

## The Difference Between Conditions for Obtaining and Losing a Gift

We have established the difference between the conditions for receiving and retaining a gift. Relatedly, only faith is required of us in order to *receive* the gift of salvation; however, some Christians (e.g., Roman Catholics and Arminians) believe that we must expend effort to keep from *losing* it. However, the focus of this inquiry is not whether salvation can be lost[8] but on the necessary content of belief for receiving eternal life.

**The Difference Between Absolute and Normative Conditions**

It is normally but not absolutely necessary to use dry wood in order to build a fire. Similarly, God could will as *normatively necessary* what is not *absolutely necessary* for someone to be saved. For example, He could will as a *normative* salvific condition that all people believe in Christ's substitutionary death (atonement) on their behalf, even if this particular belief were not an *absolute* necessity for salvation.[9] The present issue is not whether *in fact* Christ needed to die for our sins in order for us to be saved[10] but whether *belief* in that reality is an absolutely necessary condition for salvation.[11]

**The Difference Between Onetime and All-Time Normative Conditions**

Likewise, God can determine a particular belief to be a normatively necessary salvific condition for one time and not for another time. For example, God could will that faith in Christ's death and faith in Christ's resurrection are normative conditions for salvation in the present New Testament era, while not in Old Testament times. Indeed, as we will argue below,[12] this seems to be exactly what God did (cf. Gen. 15:5–6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9).

**The Difference Between Explicit and Implicit Normative Conditions**

What is implicitly necessary for salvation is not always explicitly so. It would seem that all essential salvific (saving) truth *itself*[13] is necessary for salvation in its comprehensive sense.[14] However, even granting this (as most evangelicals do) does not mean that a person must explicitly *believe* every element of it in order to receive the gift of everlasting life. It is possible, for example, that a certain truly saved person never heard about (let alone believed in) Christ's virgin birth or ascension at the time he believed the gospel and was saved (cf.

Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1–6).

### The Difference Between Denying and Not Believing

Another question is, Can someone know about these truths, deny any of them, and still be saved? One thing seems apparent: Explicit denial of any essential doctrine of the Christian faith is classically unorthodox and/ or heretical. There are differences of opinion among conservative scholars as to whether a person can reject any of these teachings and still be saved.

Some would claim that no fundamental doctrine can be denied without putting one's salvation in jeopardy. This seems unfounded, since some of Christianity's basic teachings are nowhere explicitly listed as absolutely essential *soteriological* conditions. For instance, the Virgin Birth, the bodily Ascension, and the Second Coming apparently are not part of the gospel message that one must explicitly believe in order to be saved. Paul's spelled-out gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6 does not include any of these, nor are they listed in any of the New Testament presentations of what must necessarily be believed for salvation (e.g., John 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; Acts 16:31). As a result, the denial of them, though inconsistent and aberrant, does not jeopardize one's salvation.[15]

For now, it appears evident that one must *at least* believe (and cannot deny) that Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead (as in 1 Cor. 15:1–6). Further, Paul's insistence upon our confession that Jesus is *Lord* would also make belief in Christ's deity a necessary salvific condition (Rom. 10:9; cf. Acts 16:31).

### The Difference Between Consistent and Inconsistent Beliefs

Certain beliefs are necessary in order for our theological framework to be *consistent*, but this in itself doesn't make them necessary beliefs for our *salvation*. The truth of all major orthodox soteriological teachings is necessary for our salvation to be possible; nevertheless, it is salvifically conceivable (even though ideologically inconsistent) that a person could reject one or more and still be granted eternal life. For example, that it is inconsistent to deny the Virgin Birth does not thereby mean that the person who refuses to believe it cannot be saved.[16] Illogical belief does not negate actual reality, and while some Christians argue that the rejection of such a fundamental doctrine makes salvation impossible, neither Jesus nor the New Testament authors affirmed this to be true.

At any rate, if objectors insist upon a dichotomy, better to be inconsistently saved[17] than consistently lost.[18]

In view of the foregoing discussion, it is *logically possible* that people could be saved without explicitly embracing every major salvation doctrine (except perhaps the teachings as to their own sinfulness and God's necessary grace—cf. Heb. 11:6). It depends upon which beliefs are salvifically absolute, which are salvifically normative, and which are essential to the Christian faith but not directly related to salvation (soteriology).[19] Again, many Old Testament believers did not believe what we now know to be essential teachings about salvation, yet they were saved. Even if all of these doctrines must be true for salvation to be possible—and even if it is inconsistent to deny any of them—people *could* be saved on the basis that they are true, even if they have no explicit knowledge of or explicit belief in their truthfulness.

However, even though it may be *logically possible* for someone not to believe all or any of these things and still be saved, nevertheless, it may not be *normatively possible,* if God has normatively willed that it should be so. For the evangelical, it all boils down to what the Bible teaches about salvation. As we shall see, many of the above distinctions are helpful in explaining and illustrating what Scripture does and does not mandate on this matter.

# BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON THE NECESSARY CONTENT OF BELIEF FOR SALVATION

Several observations are crucial in understanding what the Bible reveals as to which beliefs are necessary for salvation. It appears that there are absolute conditions for all times and normative conditions for certain times.

### Absolute Conditions

It seems that there are at least four sine qua non[20] explicit soteriological beliefs (or "elements of saving faith") for all times:[21]

(1) God exists.
(2) We cannot save ourselves from our sinfulness.
(3) God's grace is necessary for our salvation.

(4) We must believe in God and in His grace to receive salvation.

All of these are found in one crucial text: “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb. 11:6). The first, third, and fourth qualifiers are stated—(1) God exists, and (3) He graciously rescues those who (4) seek Him by faith—and the second is implied, i.e., (2) we sense the need to come to Him in faith and ask for His help, recognizing that we cannot overcome sin on our own. Without these aspects of faith (belief), it seems impossible for anyone, at any time, to be saved.

This is the “universal plan of salvation.” While God’s *stated content* of salvation differed for Abraham and Paul, the same basic message was preached to both. Paul says there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:8), but he quickly clarifies that Abraham believed this one gospel (Gal. 3:8). The content as revealed to Abraham was,

> [God] took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” *Abram believed the* LORD, *and he credited it to him as righteousness*. (Gen. 15:5–6)

This act of faith is used in the New Testament as an example of how we receive justification before God (cf. Rom. 4:3). When Paul *spelled out* the contents of this same gospel (cf. Gal. 1:8), he included far more revelation; namely, explicit belief in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for our sins (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–6). The gospel itself did not change; however, required salvific belief regarding the content of that gospel did change.

Even if it could be argued from certain verses (e.g., John 8:56; Gal. 3:16) that Abraham somehow foresaw the Messiah someday coming as his Seed,[22] it would still not be demonstrated that all believers in the Old Testament era had to know and believe the gospel as later (more fully) revealed in order to be saved. There is no evidence that every saved person from that time comprehended and embraced this,[23] nor did any of them know that Jesus of Nazareth was the foretold Promised One.

The New Testament makes believing in Jesus’ name explicitly necessary for salvation (cf. Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:9; John 3:16–18, 36). Therefore, while the mandated content of belief is different from one age to another, there is a minimal, absolutely necessary soteriological content of faith for all people during all ages in all places. For instance, Adam’s son, Seth, “also had a son, and

he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen. 4:26). This is still required in the present era; Paul declares that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13), which he describes as confessing, "Jesus is Lord" (v. 9).

### Normative and Dispensational Conditions

As noted above, what is normatively necessary sometimes differs from what is absolutely necessary. God, if He wishes, can require that persons at later times believe more than others at earlier times in order to receive eternal life.

*Normative for One Time*

The strongest reasons for this possibility appear to be based on progressive revelation and the corresponding responsibility for human beings to accept and believe the newer revelations as they are given.[24] Whatever the basis, it is God's prerogative to state the normative conditions for His plan of salvation—the Bank of Heaven sets the conditions by which debtors can draw upon its funds. During Old Testament times, apparently it was not normative to believe, in order to be saved, that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who died for our sins and rose from the dead.

*Normative for Another Time*

Nonetheless, Scripture states that explicit acknowledgment of the Atonement and Resurrection are now necessary salvific conditions. Hence, in the progress of revelation, God not only revealed additional truth but also revealed new qualifications for explicit saving faith. Now we must not simply "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26), but also "confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" (Rom. 10:9 NLT) and "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:31 KJV), that He died and rose again for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1–6).

## THE CONTENT OF THEOLOGICAL BELIEF NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

Assuming the foregoing conclusions, there are at least four truths we must keep in mind while answering the question regarding the minimal necessary theological *belief content* required for salvation today.

*First*, we are not asking what is absolutely necessary but what is normatively necessary. That is, we are not asking what God *must* require of us for salvation but what He has chosen, for His own reasons, to require of us so that we can receive everlasting life.

*Second*, we are not asking what was the normatively necessary content of saving faith in Old Testament times (or any other age) but what is the normatively necessary content of saving faith today.

*Third*, we are not only asking what is *implicitly* a normative necessity but also what is *explicitly* a normative necessity.[25]

*Fourth*, and finally, we are not asking about what someone may *not* affirm and still be saved but rather what he *must* affirm in order to be saved.

With this focus, we can look at the list of crucial Christian doctrines and ask which ones are *normatively, necessarily* part of salvific belief in this present age. For brevity we'll call this the *terms of salvation*.[26] That is, what are the beliefs required today in order for a person to receive the gift of eternal life?

The list of fundamental soteriological teachings in the broad sense[27] includes the following:

(1) Human depravity;[28]
(2) Christ's virgin birth;[29]
(3) Christ's sinlessness;[30]
(4) Christ's deity;[31]
(5) Christ's humanity;[32]
(6) God's unity;[33]
(7) God's triunity;[34]
(8) God's necessary grace;[35]
(9) The necessity of faith;[36]
(10) Christ's atoning death;[37]
(11) Christ's bodily resurrection;[38]
(12) Christ's bodily ascension;[39]
(13) Christ's present high priestly session;[40]
(14) Christ's second coming.[41]

**Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense**

As we have seen, salvation in the broad sense, from here to glory, includes justification, sanctification, and glorification:[42] It includes salvation from the past penalty of sin, the present power of sin, and the future presence of sin—the whole redemptive package.[43]

For this comprehensive salvation to be possible, it appears that all of these doctrines (1–14 in the list above) must be true. That is, they are *ontologically* (actually) necessary,[44] for without the reality of any one of them, some aspect of salvation would not be plausible. In short, either the whole of basic orthodox soteriological theology must be true or else complete salvation is not available. Again, this does not mean that all of these are *epistemologically* mandated for our reception of everlasting life.[45] That all of the tenets must *be true* (ontologically) in order for our salvation to be possible does not make it absolutely necessary that a given person *believes* all of them (epistemologically) in order to be saved.

It is noteworthy that scriptural inspiration and inerrancy[46] are not part of this fundamental salvific doctrinal package. *Biblical inspiration is not a soteriological doctrine but an epistemological truth*. The Bible is the basis on which we know the essential soteriological doctrines are accurate; hence, while inspiration and inerrancy are appropriately listed as fundamental in terms of being elemental to Christianity, they are not soteriologically fundamental but epistemologically fundamental, the basis on which rests the reliability of the faith's other foundational teachings (not all of which are directly connected to salvation).[47]

## Doctrines Absolutely Necessary to Be True for Salvation in the Narrow Sense

Not all doctrines necessary for salvation in the broad sense (of justification, sanctification, and glorification) are necessary for salvation in the narrow sense (of justification alone). For example, it is not necessary for Christ to now be in heaven interceding for us (doctrine 13, above) or for Him to be bodily returning to earth (doctrine 14, above) in order for our *justification* to be possible. Doctrines 1–12, above, however, *must be* either explicitly or implicitly true by necessity (ontologically) to make our justification possible.

Further, it does not appear to be *absolutely* necessary that all doctrines 1–11 be true in order to make our justification possible,[48] but rather only that they be

*normatively* necessary, that is, because God has willed it this way. For example, God may have achieved our justification without Jesus being virgin-born (doctrine 2, above); His sinlessness (doctrine 3, above), soteriologically, is absolutely necessary, but virgin birth is not an absolute *condition* for His sinlessness (virgin birth is *evidence* of it). God instead could have had Christ born through an immaculate conception,[49] for example, but this would not have drawn the same attention to His supernatural origin, since a virgin birth is more empirically obvious than an immaculate conception. All that is absolutely necessary in this regard is for Christ not to have inherited Adam's sin nature; a virgin birth is one way (but not the only way) to accomplish this.[50] Thus, while the Virgin Birth is not absolutely necessary for Christ's sinlessness, either it or something like it is necessary (as willed by God) in order to ensure His sinless perfection of not inheriting Adam's sin. However, while the Virgin Birth (or its like) is actually necessary for salvation to be possible, it is nowhere specified in Scripture as either an absolute or normative belief that is explicitly necessary for one to be saved.[51]

**Doctrines Normatively Necessary to Believe for Salvation in All Ages**

We need to distinguish between (1) what must absolutely or normatively be *true* (ontologically) in order for us to be justified and (2) what we must absolutely or normatively *believe* (epistemologically) in order to be justified. God wants us to understand and embrace all orthodox truth, but He has not set belief in every orthodox truth as a condition for our redemption.[52] For example, there is no convincing evidence that it was normatively necessary for everyone during the Old Testament era to believe in God's triunity or Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, sacrificial atonement, bodily resurrection, bodily ascension, present session, and second coming.[53]

A case *can* be made, however, that most if not all of these truths are found at least implicitly in the Old Testament. Indeed, New Testament writers appeal to it in support of many doctrines, such as Christ's virgin birth (Matt. 1:23), death and purity (1 Peter 2:22–24), resurrection (Acts 2:30–32), and deity (Mark 12:36). We are *not* alleging that none of these truths had been made known before Christ came; we *are* observing that evidence is lacking for normative explicit saving faith in these truths being necessary for salvation in the case of Old Testament believers.

Nothing indicates that the average Israelite (or Jew) was required to have faith in all of these doctrines as a condition for his justification. Even the stated content of the gospel as revealed to Abraham (cf. Gen. 15:4–6; Gal. 3:8) does not include some of these teachings. Once again, certainly in the days when people began to "call on the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:26) there was no stated requirement that they express explicit belief in God's triunity or Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, atonement, resurrection, ascension, present session, and return.[54] Of course, one could argue from silence that they were required to believe these doctrines; nevertheless, because the text does not say so, this argument from silence is exactly that—an argument without any evidence.

Walter Kaiser (b. 1933) clearly overstates the case in arguing that "the object of the OT believer's faith was no different from our own except for the fact that his [the object's] name was not yet announced as Jesus" ("SOT" in *JBT*, 11). This is the typical Reformed covenantal position. John Calvin said, "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is as much like ours in substance and reality as the two are basically one and the same" (as cited in Feinberg, *CD*, 169). Charles Hodge likewise saw no basic difference between the content of the gospel necessary to believe for salvation in the Old Testament and that in the New:

> The Redeemer is the same under all dispensations. He who was predicted as the seed of the woman … is our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.… He, therefore, from the beginning has been held up as the hope of the world, the SALVATOR HOMINUM. (ibid., 170)

However, this conclusion is not borne up by the biblical evidence. As Allen Ross notes, "It is most improbable that everyone who believed unto salvation [in the Old Testament] consciously believed in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (ibid.). John Feinberg (b. 1946) adds, "The people of the Old Testament era did not know that *Jesus* was the Messiah, that *Jesus* would die, and that His death would be the basis of salvation" (ibid., 171). Charles Ryrie aptly summarizes the issue:

> The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* of salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations. (*DT*, 23)

In short, it appears that at most, the normative Old Testament salvific requirements (in terms of explicit belief) were (1) faith in God's unity, (2) acknowledgment of human sinfulness, (3) acceptance of God's necessary

grace,[55] and possibly (4) understanding that there would be a coming Messiah.[56]

## Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age

Because revelation is progressive, and because with more light comes more responsibility, God has required more soteriological belief (either explicitly or implicitly) since the Advent than before it (cf. Heb. 1:1; 2:3–4). After a transitional period,[57] when the new message of Jesus Christ as the long-awaited Messiah and Fulfiller of prophecy was being promulgated, the "mandatory saving-faith content" was increased. Apparently, *the doctrines that must be either explicitly or implicitly believed for salvation (justification) appear to include those listed as 1–11, above: God's unity and triunity, human depravity, the necessity of God's grace, the necessity of faith, and Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, humanity, atoning death, and physical resurrection*.

While explicit saving faith in the bodily ascension, present session, and second coming of Jesus (doctrines 12–14, above) does not seem to be required for our *initial justification*, it is essential to our *ongoing sanctification* and *ultimate glorification*. Belief in these three doctrines is not related to our deliverance from the *penalty* of sin. However, without Christ's ascension, His present heavenly intercession for our sanctification and glorification would not be possible, and we could not then obtain victory over the *power* of sin: "Because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:24–25; cf. Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:18; 1 John 2:1–2). Likewise, His return (cf. Rev. 19) is essential for our salvation from the *presence* of sin: "We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

> We eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Phil. 3:20–21)

An example in which our explicit belief is not required for salvation is Christ's humanity. While Christ's humanity is absolutely necessary to make salvation *possible*, it does not appear to be an explicitly necessary faith condition for *receiving* the gift of everlasting life.

From the very beginning, the coming Savior was to be the Seed of the woman

(Gen. 3:15 NKJV). He was to be born of the virgin (Isa. 7:17) and "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV). The only way He could reconcile God and man was to be *both* (see chapter 9): "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Indeed, to deny Christ's humanity is a heresy. John wrote:

> This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ *has come in the flesh* is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. (1 John 4:2–3; cf. 2 John 7)

However, again, while the humanity of Christ is a necessary basis for our salvation, *explicit* belief in it does not appear to be a condition for our receiving eternal life. There is ample evidence throughout the New Testament that *implicit* belief in Christ's humanity was a necessary condition for being saved. After all, it was obvious to everyone that He was a human being: He had a mother, was born, grew up as a child, had siblings, and did all the things that human beings do, except sin (Heb. 4:15). Since His humanity was predicted, expected, and observed, it did not need to be presented as an explicit condition for being saved. *Because* heretical docetists began later to deny it, the humanity of Christ was explicitly affirmed by the Christian church, based on Holy Scripture. Hence, all who truly believe in Him unto salvation must have either explicit or implicit faith in Christ's humanity; none can explicitly deny it and be saved.

## Doctrines That Must Be Explicitly and Normatively Believed for Salvation in the Present Age

In addition to human sinfulness, God's unity, and the necessity of God's grace,[58] it seems there are three necessary explicit beliefs and one necessary implicit belief for salvation today. The *explicit* conditions of saving faith are Christ's deity, atoning death, and physical resurrection.[59] The *implicit* faith condition, acceptance of the Trinity,[60] is connected to belief in the deity of Christ, since believing that He is the Son of God implies that He has a Father who is God. The only basic element for the Trinity[61] not implied here is the exact number of persons involved.[62]

In the narrow sense (in terms of justification), it is not *absolutely necessary* to believe in Christ's atoning death (1 Cor. 15:1–16) and bodily resurrection (Rom. 4:25), since there are no real grounds for the idea that people prior to His first

coming were required to have saving faith in these truths.[63] Nonetheless, it seems evident that for salvation today, it is *normatively necessary* to place salvific faith in both His death and resurrection. As we have seen, Paul lists each as an inseparable part of the gospel message (1 Cor. 15:1–6; cf. Rom. 10:9), which alone is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16 KJV). Those who disobey this one and only gospel are lost forever (2 Thess. 1:7–9), and "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17).

# IS FAITH IN CHRIST'S DEITY NECESSARY FOR SALVATION?

While there is wide agreement among evangelicals that explicit belief in the *death and resurrection* of Christ is a soteriological mandate,[64] there is still considerable debate over whether belief in the *deity* of Christ is a salvific requirement for today. Two points are crucial in the discussion: First, is it necessary to believe that Jesus is Lord in order to be saved? Second, does the New Testament usage of *Lord*, in regard to Jesus, signify deity?

### Is It Salvifically Necessary to Believe That Jesus Christ Is Lord?

The first question is the easiest to answer, since, again, this is precisely what Paul teaches in Romans 10:9: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is *Lord*,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Acts 16:31 says, "Believe in the *Lord* Jesus, and you will be saved," and Acts 2:21 declares that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved" (NKJV). In the same sermon (cf. v. 34), Peter calls Jesus *Lord* and adds: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ*" (v. 36). Acts 3:14–16 reads:

> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed *the author of life*, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. *By faith in the name of Jesus*, this man whom you see and know was made strong.

Furthermore, they are told to "repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord" (v. 19 NKJV). In a later message Peter adds, "The God of our

fathers raised up *Jesus* whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. *Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior*, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30–31 NKJV). Again, when speaking to Gentiles, he asserts: "You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is *Lord of all*" (10:36); "whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (v. 43 NKJV).

Paul affirms in Romans 1:1–4 that the "gospel," which alone is "the power of God unto salvation" (v. 16 KJV) is "concerning *[God's] Son Jesus Christ* … who was … declared to be *the Son of God* with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by resurrection from the dead" (NKJV). He adds in 1 Corinthians 2:8 that "the rulers of this age" had "crucified the *Lord of glory*." In 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 he declares:

> Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of *the gospel* of the glory of Christ, who is *the image of God*.

In the next verse he speaks of "Jesus Christ the Lord." He also mentions the salvation of his Jewish kinsman, "of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, *Christ* came, who is over all, *the eternally blessed God*" (Rom. 9:5 NKJV). It is this same "Lord over all" on whom people must "call" to be saved (10:12 NKJV). He adds elsewhere that "no one can say *Jesus is Lord* except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). In brief, there are numerous passages that call Jesus both *Lord* and *God* in connection with our salvation; therefore, faith in Jesus Christ as God is salvifically required.

### Does the Term *Lord* Used of Jesus Christ Mean "Deity"?

The remaining question is whether *Lord* (Gk: *kurios*) in reference to Christ means "deity."[65] The New Testament evidence points to an affirmative answer. Consider the following.

*First*, the Jewish Messiah that Israel believed in was regarded to be God-even in the Old Testament. Psalm 45:6 refers to Him as "God," saying, "Your throne, *O God*, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom." Confirmation that this was understood as a reference to the deity of Christ is its citation in Hebrews 1:8: "About the Son [God the Father] says, "Your throne, *O God*, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom." This in the context of the author asking,

> To which of the angels did God ever say, "You are *my Son*; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be *my Son*"? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "*Let all God's angels worship him*" (vv. 5–6).

From this it is clear that they understood the Messiah to be the Creator rather than a creature like Michael the archangel.[66]

*Second*, Jesus silenced his opposition (the Pharisees) by citing Psalm 110:1, which He affirmed spoke of His deity:

> Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ [Messiah]? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls [the Christ] '*Lord*'? For [David] says, " 'The Lord [the Father] said to *my Lord* [the Son]: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' If then David calls [Christ] '*Lord*,' how can [Christ] be [David's] son?" (Matt. 22:41–45).

Isaiah 9:6 is another clear affirmation of Christ's deity:

> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, *Mighty God*, *Everlasting Father* [i.e., Father of eternity], Prince of Peace.

Likewise, Isaiah 7:14 confirms that Christ is God: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel," which, according to Matthew 1:23, means "*God* with us."

Proverbs 30:4 speaks of God's "son":

> Who has gone up to heaven and come down? Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and the name of *his son*?

Psalm 2 also refers to God the Son:

> "You are *my Son*; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." … Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss *the Son*, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (vv. 7–9, 11–12)

*Third*, the Gospels affirm the deity of Jesus. Peter confessed Him to be "the Christ [Messiah], *the Son of the living God*" (Matt. 16:16). The Pharisees instantly recognized Jesus' divine claim—"Why does this fellow talk like that?

He's blaspheming! *Who can forgive sins but God alone*?" (Mark 2:7)—and so did the high priest when he asked Jesus if He was the Messiah:

> "*I am*," said Jesus. "And you will see the *Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven*." [At this] the high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "*You have heard the blasphemy*. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death. (Mark 14:62–64)

The apostle John, in his gospel, designates Jesus Christ as both God and Creator:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made*. (1:1–3)

Jesus stunned the Jews when He claimed to be the "I AM," that is, Yahweh (Heb: *YHWH*), who revealed Himself to Moses by that Name (in Ex. 3:14).

> "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "*before Abraham was born, I am*!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.…
>
> [Later, Jesus said,] "*I and the Father are one*." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?"
>
> "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but *for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God*" (John 8:58–59; 10:30–33).

Thomas confessed to Jesus, "*My Lord and my God*!" (John 20:28). Even at Jesus' birth He was divinely acclaimed. Matthew calls Him "Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us' " (Matt. 1:23 NKJV). The angels announced, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is *Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11). The Magi treated him as Deity, for "on coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and *worshiped him*" (Matt. 2:11). *Worship was reserved for God alone* (Matt. 4:10).

*Fourth*, throughout the early book of Acts Jesus is called *Lord* (Gk: *kurios*),[67] which denotes *God*, as is indicated by the fact that it is the Greek translation of the Hebrew term LORD (*YHWH*). *YHWH* always means "Deity." In Acts Jesus is not only called *Lord* but is also treated as Deity. Peter's use of Psalm 110:1, which attributes divinity to Christ by means of the term *Lord* (*kurios*), confirms that it was not only understood to mean "Deity" but also that it was normative for early believers to confess that Jesus is God:

> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. *Exalted to the right hand of God*, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord [the Father] said to *my Lord* [the Son]: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.' " Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, *both Lord and Christ*. (Acts 2:32–36)

Therefore, since the New Testament claims that Jesus is *Lord*, and since in this context *Lord* means "Deity," it remains only to ask whether belief in the lordship or deity of Christ is a New Testament requirement for justification.[68] If "confess[ing] with your mouth, '*Jesus is Lord*' " (Rom. 10:9) means acknowledging that Jesus is Deity, it follows logically that belief in His deity is normatively necessary for New Testament salvation. Even in Acts it is evident that belief in the deity of Christ is presented as an explicit part of the gospel. As mentioned earlier, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed, "*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*" (7:59), and other references to His deity are abundant (e.g., 2:32, 34, 36, 39; 7:60).

From the earliest New Testament times, then, believers understood that calling Jesus *Lord* was attributing deity. Accordingly, Paul's directive to confess that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9) is referring to His divine status. Such confessions were not casual tribute in early Judaic Christianity, which is confirmed by the almost exclusive Christological use of *kurios* for Deity and in the context of worship. Again, the Philippian jailer was told: "Believe in *the Lord* Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

## Summing it Up

At this point, we will attempt to summarize the rather complex theological issue of salvation's terms. The chart below does *not* deal with what was necessary in the Old Testament to be saved, nor does it treat what needs to be *true* about Christ before salvation is made possible. Rather, it deals with what is necessary to *believe* today in order to be saved (justified)—the necessary conditions of belief stated in the New Testament as normative for salvation (justification) for the present age.

The fourteen items in the left column must be *true* before salvation in the broad sense (of justification, sanctification, and glorification) is possible, but only 1–11 are necessary for justification itself to be possible. Not all of these must be *believed* in order for us to be saved (justified).

*Yes* or *no* in the column marked *Absolutely* refers to what is or isn't an absolute necessity for belief today to be saved; that is, whether God could or couldn't save someone unless he or she believed it.[69]

*Yes* or *no* in the column marked *Normatively* refers to whether something is mandated by God but is not absolutely necessary; that is, whether the belief is required by God for His own reasons, not because salvation wouldn't be possible without that specific belief.[70]

*Yes* or *no* under *Explicitly* refers to whether a person must overtly believe in a specific truth in order to receive salvation. *Yes* or *no* under *Implicitly* refers to whether or not a certain truth, while not an explicit part of the belief content necessary for salvation today, is implied in *another* truth in which belief *is* explicitly necessary for salvation today.

**What Is Necessary to *Believe* Today to Be Saved**

| | Absolutely | Normatively | Explicitly | Implicitly Only |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) Human Depravity | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| (2) Christ's Virgin Birth | No | No | No | Yes |
| (3) Christ's Sinlessness | No | No | No | Yes |
| (4) Christ's Humanity | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| (5) Christ's Deity | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| (6) God's Unity | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| (7) The Trinity | No | Yes | No | Yes |
| (8) The Necessity of Grace | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| (9) The Necessity of Faith | Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| (10) Christ's Atoning Death | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| (11) Christ's Bodily Resurrection | No | Yes | Yes | No |
| (12) Christ's Bodily Ascension[71] | No | No | No | No |
| (13) Christ's Present Session[71] | No | No | No | No |
| (14) Christ's Bodily Second Coming[71] | No | No | No | No |

In summation, for salvation today, it is necessary that a person explicitly believe doctrines 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, and 11: these are human depravity, God's unity; Christ's deity, atoning death, and bodily resurrection; the necessity of God's grace; and the necessity of our faith. Doctrines 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7—human depravity; Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, and humanity; and the Trinity—need only be believed implicitly and not denied explicitly in order for a person to receive salvation.[72]

# THE HISTORICAL BASIS FOR THE CONTENT OF SALVATION

The question of the content of salvation was not a major issue with most of the major fathers of the church. They generally concentrated on more pressing issues[73] and outright denial of the faith.[74] Nonetheless, a basic understanding of their perspectives can be culled from their writings.

## Early Church Fathers

### *John Chrysostom (347–407)*

> At the same time the Apostle [Peter] strikes fear into them [in Acts 2], by reminding them of the darkness which had lately occurred, and leading them to expect things to come. "Before that great and notable day of the Lord come." For be not confident, he means to say, because at present you sin with impunity.… For if these things are the prelude of that day, it follows that the extreme of danger is impending. But what next? He again lets them take a breath, adding, "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved." [cf. Rom. 10:13]. This is said concerning Christ. (*HA*, 5)

## Medieval Fathers

### *Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)*

> The salvation of man could not be achieved otherwise than through Christ, according to Acts 4:12: "There is no other name … given to men, whereby we must be saved." Consequently the law that brings all to salvation could not be given until after the coming of Christ. But before His coming it was necessary to give to the people, of whom Christ was to be born, a law containing certain rudiments of righteousness unto salvation, in order to prepare them to receive Him. (*ST*, II.1.2.91)

## Reformation Leaders

### *John Calvin (1509–1564)*

> All that we have hitherto said of Christ leads to this one result, that condemned, dead, and lost in ourselves, we must in him seek righteousness, deliverance, life and salvation, as we are taught by the celebrated words of Peter, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). The name of Jesus was not given him at random, or fortuitously, or by the will of man, but was brought from heaven by an angel, as the herald of the supreme decree; the reason also being added, “for he shall save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). In these words attention should be paid to what we have elsewhere observed, that the office of Redeemer was assigned him in order that he might be our Savior. (*ICR*, II.16.1)

## Post-Reformation Teachers

### *Jacob Arminius (1560–1609)*

> The necessity of faith in the cross does not arise from the circumstance of the doctrine of the cross being preached and propounded to men; but, since faith in Christ is necessary according to the decree of God, the doctrine of the cross is preached, that those who believe in it may be saved. Not only on account of the decree of God is faith in Christ necessary, but it is also necessary on account of the promise made unto Christ by the Father, and according to the Covenant which was ratified between both of them. This is the word of that promise: “Ask of me, and I will give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance” (Psalm 2:8). But the inheritance of Christ is the multitude of the faithful; “the people, who, in the days of his power shall willingly come to him, in the beauties of holiness” (Psalm 110:3); “in thee shall all nations be blessed; so then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” [Galatians 3:8–9] (*WJA*, I., Oration 2).

### *Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)*

> Another remarkable place wherein it is plainly foretold, that the like method of professing religion should be continued in the days of the gospel, is Isaiah 14:22–25:
>
> Seek unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else: I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, EVERY TONGUE SHALL SWEAR: surely shall one say, In the Lord have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come—in the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.
>
> What is here called swearing, the apostle, in citing this place, once and again calls confessing; Romans 14:11—“Every tongue shall confess to God.” Philippians 2:10—“That every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Which is the word commonly used in the New Testament, to signify making a public profession of religion. So Romans 10:9–10.…
>
> Where a public profession of religion with the mouth is evidently spoken of as a great duty of all Christ’s people, as well as believing in him; and ordinarily requisite to salvation, not that it is necessary in the same manner faith is, but in like manner as baptism is. Faith and verbal profession are jointly spoken of here as necessary to salvation, in the same manner as faith and baptism are, in Mark 16:16. (*RWG* in *WJE*, III.2.2)
>
> In opposition to these different views the common doctrine of the Church has ever been, that the

> plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning. There is the same promise of deliverance from the evils of apostasy, the same Redeemer, the same condition required for participation in the blessings of redemption, and the same complete salvation for all who embrace the offers of divine mercy. (as cited in Hodge, *ST*, 2.367)

### *Philip Schaff (1819–1893)*

> It is the Gospel of LOVE. Its practical motto is: "God is love." In the incarnation of the eternal Word, in the historic mission of his Son, God has given the greatest possible proof of his love to mankind. In the fourth Gospel alone we read that precious sentence which contains the very essence of Christianity: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" [John 3:16] (*HCC*, I.1.12.2).

### *Westminster Shorter Catechism*

> How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ? "We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit" (Question 29). How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ? "The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling" (Question 30).

# SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The question of the terms of salvation is a complex and difficult subject over which there is much evangelical disagreement. It seems that this is due in large part to the failure to clearly distinguish various issues, but even then, residual differences remain. Regarding what is explicitly necessity and what is only implicitly necessary, the implied content of *fidei implicitus* is not as plainly spelled out in the New Testament as many would like it to be. *The broadest borders of orthodoxy contain those who confess the normative requirement of belief (either explicit faith or implicit faith) in all truths necessary for salvation, which in our view include at least doctrines 1–11, above.*

## Two Important Texts

There are more pivotal issues that call for further examination than has been covered in the space allotted here. There are two, however, that we must briefly consider.

### *John 8:56*

Jesus affirms that Abraham saw His day and rejoiced. Did Abraham see Christ's "day" from heaven, as Moses and Elijah did during the Transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:1–3)? Or did Abraham see it from Old Testament times, looking ahead to the Cross? Did Abraham see it explicitly or only implicitly? In addition, no matter which way Abraham "saw" it, did everyone else in the Old Testament era also see it? And, was what Abraham believed normatively necessary for salvation in the Old Testament? Evidence seems to be lacking for an answer of yes to the last two questions; accordingly, what was normatively necessary then appears to have been less than what is normatively necessary today.

*Galatians 3*

Paul confirms that the gospel was preached to Abraham (v. 8). Was the content of this "gospel" the same as that spelled out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6? An examination of what the text says Abraham believed would suggest that it was not. While Galatians 3:16 NKJV speaks of a fulfillment in Abraham's "Seed," who is Christ, it is not clear that Abraham understood it this way, though this may be implied in the dual usage of *seed* in the text, once of Christ and once of Israel. Professor Thomas Howe, my colleague, has suggested that there are two different usages of *seed* in the related Old Testament texts, one referring to Abraham's Seed (Christ) and another referring to the multiplying of Abraham's seed (Israel). The word *seed* (Gk: *sperma*), both in the Greek Old Testament, from which Paul probably quoted, and in the New Testament, is *singular* (though it can refer either to an individual or to a collective group as one). This would account for Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 that "Seed" refers to Christ, and yet also leave room for the obvious references to "seed" as the multitude of offspring Abraham would produce (cf. Gen. 15:5; 22:17–18).

Even if this is the case, it appears to be one of the Old Testament mysteries once concealed and now revealed (cf. Eph. 3:4–5). In any event, there is no evidence that Christ's person and salvific mission were normatively known in Old Testament times. It may be that just as He was the fulfillment of the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7) without everyone who sacrificed knowing the full content of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–6), even so Christ fulfilled the "seed" promises to Abraham without everyone who believed them (including Abraham) having explicit understanding and faith in His death, resurrection, and deity.

If Abraham *did* have the same content of the gospel that Paul possessed, did all Old Testament believers have the same understanding? Again the lack of evidence favors the view that they did not. Further, even if some (or most) of

them understood the full content of the New Testament gospel—including the death, burial, resurrection, and appearances of the Lord Jesus Christ—was this kind of knowledge normative *for salvation* at that time? There is no evidence to support such a contention. At best, they had an implicit faith in this understanding of the gospel that with suitable understanding and opportunity would have come to fruition in explicit faith. Thus, it seems correct to affirm that while there is only one gospel (Gal. 1:8) and that this gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), nonetheless, there was a progressive understanding of the content of this one gospel that was not revealed in fullness until the New Testament.

**One Final Question**

Since we have concluded that it is normatively necessary today for a person to salvifically believe not only in the death and resurrection of Christ but also in His deity, it remains to ask, Can a person be saved today if he does not believe in the deity of Christ? Here also we must separate two questions.

First, Can one be saved today and *not believe in* Christ's deity? Second, Can one be saved today if he *denies* Christ's deity? As to the first question, in view of the above discussion, we must answer that it is *normatively* not possible, but it may be *actually* possible—if God wills to do so. God has done it in the past,[75] and He can do it again, if He so pleases. Whether He ever does must be left to Him. Our duty is to proclaim what is normatively necessary, which is to believe in Christ's deity as part of the faith condition for salvation.

As to the second question, it is difficult to see how someone who explicitly denies Christ's deity can be saved while he remains in this denial, since, unlike those who may not know about it and, hence, do not yet believe it, he does know about it but chooses to disbelieve it.[76] Of course, it is always possible that he disbelieves it because, for instance, he was poorly taught by an unorthodox teacher. What then? Again, first of all, we must fall back on what is normatively prescribed—any exceptions must be left up to the Prescriber rather than to us who subscribe. We can say that we have no explicit biblical teaching on which to pronounce the salvation of such a person. This being the case, it is best left to the God who knows the secrets of every heart as to who will ultimately stand in His presence. Meanwhile, we must teach and practice what we know to be true, including that no one who denies the deity of Christ qualifies for salvation by normative New Testament standards.[77]

In conclusion, it is possible that God could save someone without explicit faith in Christ's deity, provided if that one had a correct understanding, he or she *would* believe. Nevertheless, given the nature of God, heaven, and the need to believe in order to enter, it does not seem possible that God could save anyone today who, with proper understanding and subsequent opportunity, *does not* have (or *would not* have come to) explicit faith in Christ's deity.

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APPENDIX ONE

# DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN AT CONCEPTION?

The evidence that there is a human soul (life) from the moment of conception is both biblically and scientifically strong.

## SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT THE HUMAN SOUL BEGINS AT CONCEPTION

At the United States congressional hearings on April 23, 1981, scientific experts testified concerning the origin of human life.[1] The following are samples of what they said.

> In biology and in medicine, it is an accepted fact that the life of any individual organism reproducing by sexual reproduction begins at conception, or fertilization. (Dr. Micheline M. Matthew-Roth, Harvard Medical School's Department of Medicine)

Matthew-Roth's testimony was supported from more than twenty embryological and other scientific texts. No one at the hearing, even those who were pro-abortion, provided evidence that human life begins at some other point.

Dr. Hymie Gordon (Chairman of the Department of Genetics at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota) added:

> Now we can say, unequivocally, that the question of when life begins is no longer a question for theological or philosophical dispute. It is an established scientific fact. Theologians and philosophers may go on to debate the meaning of life or the purpose of life, but it is an established fact that all life, including human life, begins at the moment of conception.

Modern fetology has brought to light some amazing insights into the growth of this tiny person[2] in her mother's womb. The following summary is vivid witness to the full humanness of the prenatal child.

## FIRST MONTH—ACTUALIZATION

- She is conceived.
- All her human characteristics are present.
- She implants or "nests" in her mother's uterus (at one week).
- Her heart muscle pulsates (at three weeks).
- Her head, arms, and legs begin to appear.

## SECOND MONTH—DEVELOPMENT

- Her brain waves can be detected (at forty to forty-two days).
- Her nose, eyes, ears, and toes appear.
- Her heart beats and blood flows (her own type).
- Her skeleton develops.
- She has her own unique fingerprints.
- She is sensitive to touch on her lips and has reflexes.
- All her bodily systems are present and functioning.

## THIRD MONTH—MOVEMENT

- She swallows, squints, and swims.
- She grasps with her hands and moves her tongue.
- She can even suck her thumb.
- She can feel organic pain (at eight to thirteen weeks).

## FOURTH MONTH—GROWTH

- Her weight increases 600 percent (to 1/2 birth weight).
- She grows up to eight to ten inches long.
- She can hear her mother's voice.

## FIFTH MONTH—VIABILITY

- Her skin, hair, and nails develop.
- She dreams (i.e., has rapid eye movement [REM]).
- She can cry (if air is present).
- She can live outside the womb.
- She is only halfway to her scheduled birth date.

These characteristics make the human identity of the unborn unmistakable from the moment of conception: It is a human soul (life) from its very inception.

## BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FULL HUMANITY (PERSONHOOD) OF THE FETUS

Since most of the scriptural data has already been presented, the arguments pertinent to this position will simply be summarized here.

(1) Unborn babies are called *children*, the same word (Gk: *brephos*) used of infants and young children (e.g., Luke 1:41, 44; 2:12, 16; cf. Ex. 21:22) and sometimes even of adults (e.g., 1 Kings 3:17).
(2) The unborn are created by God (Ps. 139:13), just as God created Adam and Eve in His image (Gen. 1:27).
(3) The life of the unborn is protected by the same punishment for injury or death (Ex. 21:22) as that of an adult (Gen. 9:6).[3]
(4) Christ was human (the God-man) from the point when He was conceived in Mary's womb (Matt. 1:20–21; Luke 1:26–27).
(5) The image of God includes "male and female" (Gen. 1:27), and it is a scientific fact that maleness or femaleness (sex/gender) is determined at the moment of conception.
(6) Unborn children possess personal attributes, distinctive of humans, such as sin (Ps. 51:5) and joy (Luke 1:44).
(7) Personal pronouns are used to describe unborn children (Jer. 1:5 [LXX]; Matt. 1:20–21) just as they are of any other human being.
(8) The unborn are said to be known intimately and personally by God in the

same way He would know any other person (Ps. 139:15–16; Jer. 1:5).

(9) The unborn are even called by God before birth (Gen. 25:22–23; Judg. 13:2–7; Isa. 49:1, 5; Gal. 1:15).

Taken as a whole, these texts leave no doubt that unborn children are just as human—persons in God's image—as are babies or adults. They are created in His likeness from the very moment of conception, and their prenatal life is precious in God's eyes, protected by His prohibition against murder.

## SOCIAL EVIDENCE FOR THE FULL HUMANITY (PERSONHOOD) OF THE UNBORN

In addition to the biblical and scientific evidence, there are many social arguments for protecting the human rights of unborn children. The following are the most significant.

No one disputes that human embryos have human parents. Why, then, should anyone insist that a human embryo is not human? No biologist has any difficulty identifying an unborn pig as a pig or an unborn horse as a horse. What is it that compels anyone to decide that an unborn human should be considered anything but human?

Human life doesn't stop and then restart—there is a continuous, uninterrupted flow of human life from generation to generation, from parent to child. New individual human life appears through conception; hence, the newly formed life is as fully human as his or her parents.[4]

The father of modern fetology, Dr. Albert W. Liley (1929–1983), noted that "this is the same baby we are caring for before and after birth, who before birth can be ill and need diagnosis and treatment just like any other patient" ("CAA" in *LS*, cited in Willke, *AQA*, 52). If it is the same baby and the same patient both before and after birth, then it is just as human before birth as after (see Geisler and Beckwith, *MLD*, 90).

Modern medical care has made it possible for premature babies to live much earlier outside the womb—some twenty-week-old fetuses have survived. If they are human when they come out of the womb at five months, then they are human if they stay in the womb. There are no grounds, consequently, for killing them up to nine months, which is what U.S. law permits. This contradiction can be dramatized in a modern hospital, where staff members in one room rush to save

a five-month-old preemie, while in another room others murder a baby who is younger or older than five months.

All the arguments in favor of abortion apply equally to infanticide and euthanasia. If unborn children can be killed because of deformity, poverty, or undesirability, then both infants and the aged can be disposed of for the same reasons. There is no legitimate difference between abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia—they all involve the same patient, undertake the same procedure, and end with the same result.

Abortion has been declared wrong by many societies, Christian and pagan, since the dawn of civilization. The Code of Hammurabi (eighteenth century B.C.) even contained a penalty for unintentionally causing a miscarriage. The Mosaic Law (fifteenth century B.C.) exacted the same penalty for injury to both baby and mother. The Persian ruler Tiglath-pileser (c. twelfth century B.C.) punished women who caused themselves to abort. The Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460–377 B.C.) opposed abortion by oath, swearing, "I will neither give a deadly drug to anyone if asked for, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. Similarly I will not give to a woman an abortive remedy" (Krason, *APMC,* 132).

Seneca (c. second century), whose stoic compatriots allowed for abortion, praised his mother for not killing him. Augustine (354–430), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and John Calvin (1509–1564) all considered abortion immoral. English common law exacted a punishment for taking life by abortion, as did early American law; in fact, before 1973, laws in nearly all fifty U.S. states opposed abortion.

Discrimination against anyone's life based on circumstantial matters (such as size, age, location, or functional ability) is morally wrong. *These are the actual grounds on which abortionists consider the unborn child to be non-human*. On this basis, we could discriminate against pygmies because they are too small, or against ethnic minorities because of where they live, or against the handicapped and elderly because they lack certain faculties. *If we can eliminate babies from the human community because they are unwanted, there is nothing to stop the elimination of other so-called societal undesirables.*

# ARGUMENTS ATTEMPTING TO DEMONSTRATE SCRIPTURALLY THAT LIFE DOESN'T BEGIN AT CONCEPTION

A number of biblical texts are cited to support the position that an unborn child is not human. Brief comments can be made about and conclusions drawn from the most significant passages used for this viewpoint.

*Genesis 2:7*

Genesis declares that man "became a living being" only after God gave him life. Since breathing does not occur until birth, it is argued that the unborn are not human until they leave the womb.

*Job 34:14–15*

Elihu said that if God "withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish." Here again, since life is connected with breath, it is reasoned that there is no human life before a baby begins to breathe.

*Isaiah 57:16*

The text refers to "the breath of man that I [God] have created." This also seems to make the beginning of breath the point of the creation of a person.

*Ecclesiastes 6:3–5*

Solomon declares that "a stillborn child" comes into the world "without meaning, it departs in darkness.… It never saw the sun or knew anything." This is taken to indicate that the unborn are no more than the dead, who also know nothing but lie in the darkness of the grave (cf. 9:10).

*Matthew 26:24*

Matthew records Jesus' statement about Judas that "it would be better for him if he had not been born." The implication drawn from this is that human life begins at birth; otherwise, allegedly, Jesus should have said it would have been better for Judas never to have been *conceived*.

# CONCLUSION

Some have attempted to argue that a conceptus is a human being but not a person.[5] As already established, this differentiation is arbitrary, a distinction without a difference. There are no actual, essential differences between being

human and being a human person—there are only functional differences. All attempts to distinguish personhood from humanness would lead, on the same grounds, to the denial of the personhood of the handicapped, the unconscious, and the senile.

Both Scripture and science support the view that an individual human life begins at conception, and both special and general revelation declare it is wrong to murder an innocent human life. Furthermore, the same arguments used to justify abortion apply also to infanticide and euthanasia; these reasons all violate the sanctity of human life.

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APPENDIX TWO

# DOES HUMAN LIFE BEGIN AT IMPLANTATION?

In his important, thought-provoking *When Did I Begin*?[1] Norman M. Ford argues that while *genetic* human life begins at conception, nonetheless, *individual* human life does not begin until some two weeks after conception. His thesis deserves careful attention, since many significant scientific, ethical, and theological issues are at stake: Pre-embryonic experimentation, embryonic freezing, genetic engineering, and abortifacients[2] all bear on this two-week preconception period. Theologically, if true, this view would also support the creationist view (as opposed to the traducian view) of the origin of the human soul, demonstrating that the soul is created by God at the point of implantation.[3]

## EXPOSITION OF FORD'S VIEW

According to Professor Ford, "It is necessary to distinguish between the concept of genetic and ontological individuality or identity" (*WDIB*, 117). Genetic identity is established at fertilization; however, Ford does not believe this is to speak "philosophically about the concept of a continuing ontological individual" (ibid.).

> [The] establishment of the new genetic programme at the completion of fertilization is a necessary,

> but not a sufficient, condition, for the actualization or coming into being of the new human individual at the embryonic stage of existence, (ibid., 118)

At the pre-embryonic stage,[4] "we could legitimately ask whether the zygote itself would be one or two human individuals" (ibid., 120). Why? Ford offers several reasons.

For one thing, as we have seen, twinning can occur up to the embryo stage (fourteen days after conception). Consequently, to Ford it seems implausible to speak of an individual human being where there is still the possibility of two. In such a case we would have to assume, for example, that the original individual (zygote) dies when it becomes twins:

> [The hypothetical] Susan, as in the case of the zygote, would cease to exist in giving origin to her identical twin offspring, [the hypothetical] Margaret and Sally. In this case these would be the grandchildren of their unsuspecting mother and father, (ibid., 136)

Ford adds, "There is no evidence to suggest an individual person ever ceases to exist when twinning occurs" (ibid.).

Furthermore, Ford maintains that experiments on sheep and mice (which, like humans, have intrauterine pregnancies) show there isn't one individual being before the completion of implantation into the uterus (fourteen days after human conception): "The early blastomeres of sheep and mouse embryos could easily be disaggregated and be variously combined by techniques of micromanipulation" (ibid., 139). That is to say, by taking cells from one embryo and combining them with those from another, scientists have been able to produce wholly new individual beings. For example, by this method "chimeric" animals have been produced that are part sheep and part goat. If different embryos can be "taken apart" and "reassembled" during the pre-implantation period, obviously there is not *necessarily* one continuing individual human being from the point of conception.

Ford concludes:

> Though these experimental manipulations have not been performed on human embryos, they do shed light on the character of the developmental and regulatory potential of the human embryo as well. This is because of the acknowledged similarity existing in the early stages of embryonic development of all eutherian mammals. [For example,] the mouse and sheep embryo in particular very closely resemble, but are not identical to, the human embryos … both before and after the implantation stage, (ibid., 144)

Ford, in view of this evidence, believes,

> It is very difficult to sustain that the human embryo could be a human individual prior to the blastocyst stage when it differentiates into that which will develop into the embryo, fetus and adult human.…[This] collection of cells, though loosely strung together, is hardly yet one thing, nor is it several. It is not yet determined to be either one or several.… [Only] from the fourteenth or fifteenth day onwards, there is no doubt that it is Tom or Dick or Harry that is developing, or all three of them, but as three individuals, (ibid., 156, 178)

What, then, is the conceptus before the end of the second week if not an individual human being? According to Ford, it is a "potential" human person (ibid., 122–23). It is genetically human but not actually and individually human; that is, it has all the human characteristics necessary for individual life, but it is not yet an individual human person.

Borrowing from Aristotle and Aquinas, who distinguished between form and matter and claimed that the soul is the form of the body, Ford believes that an individual human soul could inhabit a body that is not yet formed. Since the individual body does not appear until the "primitive streak" stage (about two weeks after conception), it is at this point that Ford contends the zygote becomes an actual, individual human person. Quoting Anne McLaren[5] with approval, Ford says:

> If we are talking not about the origin of life … but about the origin of an individual life, one can trace back directly from the newborn baby to the foetus, and back further to the origin of the individual embryo at the primitive streak stage in the embryonic plate at sixteen or seventeen days [after conception]. If one tries to trace back further than that there is no longer a coherent entity. Instead there is a larger collection of cells, some of which are going to take part in the subsequent development of the embryo and some of which are not. (ibid., 174–75)

So, according to Ford, it is at this "primitive streak" stage when an individual, indivisible[6] human life begins. It is here that he likewise places the origin of the human soul, which serves as the form of that body until death separates the two. Here the *ontological* individual begins, as opposed to the *genetic* individual (ibid., 179). After this point, no twinning is possible—there is one individual who is in continuity as an embryo, fetus, child, and adult.

## CRITIQUE OF FORD'S VIEW

While Norman M. Ford is Catholic, claims to be pro-life, and even confesses that he cannot be dogmatic about his position, there are serious problems with his conclusions. Notwithstanding the many positive features, there are several

serious shortcomings that are worthy of note.

*First*, at best, Ford's conclusions show only that *individual* human life begins two weeks after conception, not that *actual* human life begins there. Indeed, he admits that there is a living human nature from the very moment of conception (ibid., 115). This being the case, the next point follows.

*Second*, if human life begins from conception, it is moot to debate when a continuous individual (person) begins. Human life has sanctity whether or not it is yet individuated.[7] Therefore, even if Ford were correct about when a *continuous* individual life begins, nonetheless, *protectable* human life admittedly begins at conception.

*Third*, Ford acknowledges that his argument is ultimately philosophical, not purely factual. This is precarious when dealing with life-and-death matters, for decisions to terminate or sustain life cannot be left to philosophers. Some philosophers (and/or theologians) argue that life begins at conception, some at or after implantation, some at animation, some at birth, and some later at self-consciousness. In short, unless a scientific (factual) basis is used to determine when human life begins,[8] there is no practical way to reach an agreement on which to formulate laws that protect human life.

*Fourth*, as Ford accepts, his opinion on this matter is not the only possible one:

> Though I believe my arguments show that the human individual begins with the appearance of the primitive streak, and not before, it would be presumptuous to declare that my claim was definitely right and opposing opinions were definitely wrong. (ibid., 182)

Indeed, in spite of Ford's arguments, it is possible, for instance, that individual human life begins at conception. Several points are relevant here.[9]

(1) The later splitting into twins could be a nonsexual type of "parenting" that is similar to cloning. (Ford acknowledges the possibility of this.)

(2) Every zygote before twinning is still a genetically unique individual distinct from the parent. That is to say, when identical twins result from a zygote split, it does not logically follow that a zygote prior to twinning is not fully human. To draw this conclusion is to beg the question. In other words, twinning seems to be neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to reject the full humanness of the zygote.

Professor Robert Wennberg provides a parable that is helpful on this point:

> Imagine that we lived in a world in which a certain small percentage of

teenagers replicated themselves by some mysterious natural means, splitting in two upon reaching their sixteenth birthday. We would not in the least be inclined to conclude that no human being could therefore be considered a person prior to becoming sixteen years of age; nor would we conclude that life could be taken with greater impunity prior to replication than afterward.…

However, in all of this we still would not judge the individual's claim to life to be undermined in any way. We might puzzle over questions of personal identity … but we would not allow these strange replications and fusions to influence our thinking about an individual's right to life. Nor therefore does it seem that such considerations are relevant in determining the point at which an individual might assume a right to life in utero.[10]

(1) Ford's argument is based on the unproven assumption that human generation is the same as that of mice and sheep. He admits there is no experimental proof for this assumption.

(2) Ford's theory assumes the aristotelian premise that humans can generate a genetically distinct but nonhuman offspring that only later becomes human.

(3) Ford overlooks the fact that a new, unique, genetically individual human being is produced at the moment of conception (fertilization). This is not a potential human individual but an actual one. Ford even calls it an individual (*WDIB*, 102) and admits that it is alive and possesses all its genetic characteristics for life at fertilization: "At fertilization there begins a new, genetically unique, living *individual*, when the sperm and the ovum lose their separate individualities to form a single living cell, a zygote" (ibid., emphasis added).

(4) In this regard, Ford falls into the same trap as many pro-abortionists who argue that the zygote (or, for many, even the later embryo) is like an acorn, only a potential life (ibid., 124). This is incorrect. An acorn, similar to a human zygote, is a tiny, living oak tree in a dormant state. Planting the acorn does not begin the *life* of an oak tree; planting begins its *growth*. Likewise, a living human zygote being implanted in its mother's womb does not begin its unique, individual life but simply facilitates its further growth.

(5) As Ford seems to imply, if human life is protected not from conception but only from implantation, then a number of grave moral and legal implications follow. Noncontraceptive birth control (e.g., IUDs, RU-486)

and even experimentation on human zygotes are not absolutely ruled out. In brief, the after-implantation position results in the "unalienable" right to life being thereby alienated from an admittedly individual human person for the first two weeks of his or her life.

# CONCLUSION

Philosophers and theologians will continue to discuss the precise point at which the human soul joins with the human body. Meanwhile, both biblical and scientific evidence points to unique human nature beginning at the point of fertilization (conception). As Professor Jerome LeJeune states, "A human nature … is entirely constant from fecundation [fertilization] to normal death" (as quoted by Ford, *WDIB*, 127). Ford's citation of a report by the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry Into Contraception, Sterilization, and Abortion (1977) says it well:

> From a biological point of view there is no argument as to when life begins. Evidence was given to us by eminent scientists from all over the world. None of them suggested that human life begins at any time other than at conception. (ibid., 115)

From a theological perspective, there is no scientific evidence that contradicts the traducian view, which holds that the human soul is generated by a God-ordained process through the parents.[11] Indeed, the fact that animal cloning is possible would support traducianism. Human cloning also would seem to confirm the traducian position, since it would be entirely ad hoc and implausible to suppose that God would directly intervene and create a soul every time a clone is produced, particularly since the process itself carries heavily negative ethical implications.



APPENDIX THREE

# DOUBLE-PREDESTINATION

**A***ll* Calvinists must believe in *some* form of double-predestination—the logic of their position demands it. Augustine said of God, "As the Supreme Good, he made good use of evil deeds, for the damnation of those whom he had justly predestined to punishment and for the salvation of those whom he had mercifully predestined to grace."[1] R. C. Sproul confirms, "If there is such a thing as predestination at all, and if that predestination does not include all people, then we must not shrink from the necessary inference that there are two sides to predestination."[2]

This fact notwithstanding, there is an intramural debate among strong Calvinists as to whether God actively predestines both the elect and non-elect or whether the non-elect are predestined only passively. Moderate Calvinists call the *active* predestination of both the elect and the reprobate "double-predestination." Those who maintain it are called hyper-Calvinists.[3] Regarding the sense in which predestination is willed by God, hyper-Calvinism can be differentiated from other forms of Calvinism as follows:[4]

| Hyper-Calvinists | Other Strong Calvinists |
|---|---|
| Elect and non-elect are actively predestined | Only elect are actively predestined |
| God is active in choosing both | God is passive in not choosing the non-elect |

| | |
|---|---|
| Unbelief given to the non-elect | Faith given to the elect |
| Symmetrical relation | Asymmetrical relation |
| Predestination is positive of both | Predestination is positive of the elect and negative of the non-elect |
| Equal ultimacy | Unequal ultimacy[5] |

# COMMON BELIEFS OF STRONG CALVINISTS

Both hyper-Calvinists[6] and other strong Calvinists hold to the doctrines presented by the acronym T-U-L-I-P.[7] They believe total depravity means that all people are so sinful they cannot volitionally take part in salvation. As to unconditional election, they maintain God chooses, on the basis of unconditional grace alone, that some will be saved and that some will not be saved. Likewise, they hold that the Atonement is limited (i.e., that Christ died only for the elect), and that God will work with irresistible grace so as to ensure that all the elect will believe. Finally, they believe that He will do so with efficacious grace to ensure that all the elect will persevere in their faith and enter heaven.

### Hyper-Calvinists on Predestination

There is, however, a significant difference between the hyper-Calvinists and other Calvinists regarding election. It can be summarized as follows:

| Hyper-Calvinists | Other Calvinists |
|---|---|
| God also elects unbelievers | God elects only believers |
| God also elects to hell | God elects only to heaven |
| God's election of unbelievers to hell is active | God's election of unbelievers to hell is passive |

*The Second Council of Orange (529)*

The earliest council to speak against double-predestination was the anti-Pelagian Second Council of Orange:

> Not only do we not believe that some are predestined to evil by divine power, but if there are any

who wish to believe such an enormity, we with great abhorrence anathematise them.[8]

### *The Belgic Confession of Faith (1561)*

> God then did manifest Himself such as He is: that is to say, *merciful* and just: merciful, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; *just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

### *The Synod of Dort (1618–1619)*

"Of Divine Predestination" Article VI states: "He [God] graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to behave; while he *leaves* the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy."

### *The Westminster Confession of Faith (1648)*

> As God has *appointed the elect to Glory*, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereto.… *The rest of mankind* God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extends or withholds mercy, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, *to pass by*; and to ordain them to dishonor and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice. (III.6–7, emphasis added)

## Hyper-Calvinists on God's Redemptive Love for Only Some

Hyper-Calvinists also deny that God has any redemptive love for the non-elect. Even strong Calvinist Charles Spurgeon opposed this, saying,

> Beloved, the benevolent love of Jesus is more extended than the lines of his electing love.… That [i.e., the love revealed in Matthew 23:37] is not the love which beams resplendently upon his chosen, but it is true love for all.

In addition, God has a special love for the elect that

> is not love for all men.… There is an electing love, discriminating, distinguishing love, which is settled upon a chosen people … and it is this love which is the true resting place for the saint.[9]

The hyper-Calvinist believes only in electing love, accepting no general redemptive love for the non-elect. Arminians (Wesleyans), on the other hand, believe in no special elective love but only in a general redemptive love for all sinners.

As we have seen, Spurgeon seemed to be aware of the inconsistency of his moderating view; in comments on 1 Timothy 2:3–4, he stated, "I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent

with the word of God."[10] After all, this passage does say, "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

## THE BIBLICAL ARGUMENT AGAINST HYPER-CALVINISM

All the arguments provided elsewhere against extreme Calvinism also apply to hyper-Calvinism.[11] In addition, a few can be added in particular.

First, hyper-Calvinism makes God the direct author of evil. Allegedly, God does not merely permit evil, He causes it. In response, God is absolutely good (Matt. 5:48), and He cannot perform, promote, or produce evil.[12]

Second, hyper-Calvinism explicitly teaches that God is not only *not* all-loving but that He also hates the non-elect. John Owen (1616–1683) bluntly confessed, "God, having 'made some for the day of evil' … 'hated them before they were born' … 'before [He] ordained them to condemnation.' "[13] Puritan theologian William Ames (1567–1624) affirmed, "There are two kinds of predestination: election and rejection or reprobation."[14] He added,

> God *hates* them (the non-elect; Rom. 9:13). This hatred is negative or privative, because it denies election. But *it has a positive content*, for God has willed that some should not have eternal life.[15]

May it never be! Perish the thought! God forbid!

## A PASSIONATE PLEA

Charles Spurgeon, himself an ardent Calvinist, saw the dangers of the deadly doctrine of hyper-Calvinism. He said,

> I cannot image a more ready instrument in the hands of Satan for the ruin of souls than a minister who tells sinners it is not their duty to repent of their sins [and] who has the arrogance to call himself a gospel minister, while he teaches that God hates some men infinitely and unchangeably for no reason whatever but simply because he chooses to do so. O my brethren! may the Lord save you from the charmer, and keep you ever deaf to the voice of error.[16]

APPENDIX FOUR

# WAS JESUS A PHYSICAL DESCENDANT OF ADAM?

Some theologians have argued that Jesus was not a genetic descendant of His mother, Mary, but that His human nature was directly created by God in Mary's womb. While this view has the decided advantage of explaining how Jesus avoided the inheritance of depravity, it has a serious, if not heretical, downside in that it appears to be a denial of His true humanity as part of Adam's race. If Jesus was created *ex nihilo* in Mary's womb, then He is *not* a physical descendant of Adam, which raises the question of whether He is qualified to be the redeemer of the human race.

In response to this issue, we will first examine the arguments for the creation view, then set forth the reasons for the traditional orthodox view.

## ARGUMENTS FOR THE CREATION VIEW

Since Henry Morris (b. 1924) has written a widely circulated booklet on the matter, his perspective will be used as a contemporary representative for the view.[1] His position can be summarized as follows:

The virgin conception of Christ in the womb was not a supernatural fertilization of Mary's ovum; rather, it was a direct act of creation. The body of

Jesus was not genetically connected to Adam. In Morris's own words,

> The body growing in Mary's womb must have been specially created in full perfection, and placed there by the Holy Spirit, in order for it to be free of inherent sin damage.… He is truly "the seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15), His body [was] formed neither of the seed of the man nor the egg of the woman, but grown from a unique Seed planted in the woman's body by God Himself. ("CVB" in *I*, 5)
>
> Thus, the body of Christ was prepared by the great Creator, with no dependence on prior materials, and was made in total perfection, ready to receive Him as the occupant.… That is, God directly formed a body for the second Adam, just as He had for the first Adam (Genesis 2:7). This was nothing less than a miracle of creation, capable of accomplishment only by the Creator Himself, (ibid., 9, 6)

In support of his view, Morris offers several arguments. *First*, this is said to be the only way to avoid inherited sin (ibid., 5). *Second*, the argument from analogy with the First Adam, who was directly created by God (ibid., 6). *Third*, the argument from analogy with our creation by God in the womb (Ps. 139); His preparation must have been even greater for His own Son (op. cit., 7–8). *Fourth*, Hebrews 10:5 speaks of God preparing (i.e., creating) a body of Christ in Mary's womb (ibid., 8). *Fifth*, the argument from analogy with the spiritual "body of Christ," the church, which is a supernatural creation of God (1 Cor. 12:13; John 1:13).

## A RESPONSE TO MORRIS'S ARGUMENTS

Before defending the classical orthodox view, a point-by-point response will be offered to the reasoning of Morris.

*First*, direct creation is not the only way to avoid inherited sin—there are other possibilities. For instance, perhaps Jesus did not inherit sin because He had no human father, and both parents are necessary to inherit depravity. Further, the cause of His sinlessness does not have to be a direct creative act of His human nature in order for it to be supernatural. The birth of Isaac was supernatural, yet Isaac was genetically connected to his parents. And it is no more difficult for God to do the same with one parent than with two. Likewise, God could simply have intervened supernaturally to prevent Jesus from inheriting a sinful nature.

*Second*, the first argument from analogy fails. Arguments from analogy are often weak, especially since there are crucial differences. For example, Jesus was God, and Adam was not. Christ was not a *new* Adam (as Morris says) but the "*last* Adam" (as the Bible says—1 Cor. 15:45). Thus, He was in genetic continuity with Adam, not the discontinuity of a new creation.

*Third*, the second argument from analogy also fails; we were not directly

created by God in the womb. We inherit both our body and soul (and sin) through our parents;[2] otherwise, God would have to create a sinful soul each time a new baby is conceived. Since we were not thus created, it does not follow that Christ's human origin was by a direct act of creation.

*Fourth*, neither does the third argument from Hebrews 10 succeed; *preparation* does not mean *ex nihilo* creation. The Bible says Christ's body was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV); it was not directly made by God's creative act. "Made of" certainly implies that the physical and genetic makeup of Mary's child was rooted in her, however great a miracle it required to accomplish this without a human father.

*Fifth*, and finally, the last argument from analogy fails because, like other bad arguments from analogy, it overlooks crucial differences. God's Word never makes such a comparison. Christ's spiritual body (the church), which did not originate the way His physical body did, is composed of many individual human beings who already existed. They were not created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) when placed in Christ's body by the Holy Spirit.

## BIBLICAL REASONS FOR THE TRADITIONAL ORTHODOX VIEW

The traditional orthodox view—that Jesus is genetically connected to Adam through Mary—is demonstrated by several facts.

*First*, Jesus is said to be the "son of … Adam," who is the first name in the family tree of Jesus (Luke 3:23, 38). This indicates, as for everyone else on the list, that Jesus was a genetic descendant of Adam.

*Second*, again, Jesus was the "seed of the woman" (cf. Gal. 4:4), a phrase, biblically, that always implies genetic connection, from Genesis 3:15 onward. Indeed, when Eve had her first child (Seth) after Cain killed Abel, her response indicates that she expected her own physical child would be the redeemer: "Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, 'God has granted me another child [seed] in place of Abel, since Cain killed him' " (Gen. 4:25).

*Third*, as we have seen, the human body of Jesus was "made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4 KJV), not directly created by God. The word *made* (Gk. *ginomai*) means "to generate" or "to cause to be." This strongly favors a physical connection with Mary, not a separate creation in her womb.

*Fourth*, Jesus came from the *loins* of David (1 Kings 8:19), a term whose meaning is clearly genetic. The Hebrew word *loins* (*chalats*) means "to pull off," "to strip," "to draw out," or "to deliver." All of these fit well with the classical idea that there is a physical (genetic) connection between the mother (Mary) and the child (Jesus).

*Fifth*, Jesus was the *last* Adam (not a *new* Adam), a term indicating continuity. The same is true of the close comparison between what Adam did and what Christ did for the whole race in Romans 5:12–21. As first and last, both Adam and Christ stand as the heads of the same human race, one for condemnation and the other for salvation. This too reveals a physical continuity between Christ and Adam that isn't possible if Jesus was a special creation in Mary's womb, genetically unrelated to her.

*Sixth*, Jesus was Jewish, and, as such, He had a distinctly genetic component, being the "seed" of Abraham (Rom. 4:13 KJV; Heb. 2:14–17). He apparently even looked Jewish, for the woman of Samaria immediately recognized him as such: "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (John 4:9).

*Seventh*, once more, Jesus could not be the mediator for Adam's race if He was not a genetic member of it. Yet the Bible declares that "there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5).

*Eighth*, Hebrews affirms that "since the children have *flesh and blood*, he too *shared in their humanity* so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil" (2:14). To put it in modern scientific terms, a blood sample from Jesus would have shown His connection with Mary. In short, He was her blood relative. Hebrews adds,

> For this reason *he had to be made like his brothers in every way*, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. (2:17).

Succinctly put, He could not save us unless he was really one of us.

*Ninth*, Jesus had human "flesh" (John 1:14), showing that He shared our nature apart from sin (Heb. 4:15). In His incarnation, He took on our human nature, becoming one of us (Phil. 2:7).

*Tenth*, Jesus is called *man* (1 Tim. 2:5), the race of which Adam was the "first" (1 Cor. 15:47). This implies His unity with Adam and, therefore, His ability to redeem any of Adam's race. This could not be the case unless he was truly a descendant of Adam (Rom. 1:3; Gen 3:15).

In conclusion, it is a serious doctrinal error to deny either the humanity (1 John 4:1ff.) or deity (Col. 2:8–9) of Christ. To deny His genetic connection with Adam is implicitly and logically to deny His humanity. Therefore, despite its appeal, the creation view is a grave mistake. The miraculous nature of the virgin conception of Jesus is not that it was a direct creation of a whole new human being *ex nihilo*. Rather, it is that God did something along the lines of supernaturally fertilizing an ovum in Mary's womb, bypassing the natural need for a male sperm. Any denial that Mary's genes were in Jesus is a denial of His true humanity and, consequently, our redeemability.

If, as the creation view posits, Mary gave birth to Jesus without His being her genetic descendant, it would no more show that He is truly human than a fertilized ovum from Caucasian parents transplanted in an African-American woman's womb, following birth, would prove that her baby is African. Mary was not simply a conduit for something that, genetically, was totally foreign to her. Mary's baby was "made" from her (Gal. 4:4), was "like" her (Heb. 2:17), and therefore shared her human nature, just as all physical descendants share the nature of their mothers.

APPENDIX FIVE

# WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM

John Wesley (1703–1791) explicitly addressed his doctrine of Christian perfectionism in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*.[1] First we will expound Wesley's teaching, largely in his own words. Then we will offer the classic response to Wesleyan perfectionism from the Reformed tradition by B. B. Warfield (1851–1921). This will be followed by a brief critique of some of Warfield's teachings on sanctification and then concluding comments on Wesleyan perfectionism.

## A DEFINITION OF PERFECTIONISM

According to Wesley,

> [Perfectionism] is that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies being cleansed from sin, "from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit"; and, by consequence, being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; being so "renewed in the image of our mind," as to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect" (*PACP*, 12).

Further,

> In this is perfection, and glory, and happiness: the royal law of heaven and earth is this, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." The one perfect good shall be your one ultimate end. (ibid.)

Perfection is also said to be described in the words of Paul:

> "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." He is "holy as God who called" him "is holy," both in heart and "in all manner of conversation." He "loveth the Lord his God with all his heart," and serveth him "with all his strength" (ibid., 37).

Wesley stated perfectionism yet another way:

This it is to be a perfect man, to be "sanctified throughout"; even "to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God" (to use Archbishop Ussher's words), "as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ" (ibid.).

In short, perfection is "deliverance from inward as well as from outward sin" (ibid., 26).

## Perfection Is a State of Sinlessness

> What is it to be sanctified? To be renewed in the image of God, "in righteousness and true holiness." What is implied in being a perfect Christian? The loving God with all our heart, and mind, and soul (Deut. 6:5). Does this imply that all inward sin is taken away? Undoubtedly; or how can we be said to be "saved from all our uncleanness"? [Ezek. 36:29] (ibid., 41).
>
> [Perfect people] are freed from self-will, as desiring nothing but the holy and perfect will of God … continually crying in their inmost soul, "Father, Thy will be done." They are freed from evil thoughts, so that they cannot enter into them, no, not for a moment. Aforetime, when an evil thought came in, they looked up, and it vanished away. But now it does not come in, there being no room for this, in a soul which is full of God. (ibid., 29)

Wesley continued,

> In times past, they had wandering thoughts darting in, which yet fled away like smoke; but now that smoke does not rise at all. They have no fear or doubt either as to their state in general, or as to any particular action.… They are in one sense freed from temptations; for though numberless temptations fly about them, yet they trouble them not. At all times their souls are even and calm, their hearts are steadfast and unmovable. (ibid., 30)

Furthermore,

> Now they see all the hidden abominations there, the depths of pride, self-will, and hell; yet having the witness in themselves… which continually heightens both the strong sense they then have of their inability to help themselves, and the inexpressible hunger they feel after a full renewal in His image, in "righteousness and true holiness." … Now, Saviour, now the power bestow, and let me cease from sin! (ibid., 32–33)

Wesley disallowed that perfectionism could be disproved by the fact that even great saints in the Old Testament sinned: "For what if the holiest of the ancient Jews did sometimes commit sin? We cannot infer from hence, that, 'all

Christians do and must commit sin as long as they live' " (ibid., 23).

## Perfection Is Possible in This Life

> "True," say some, "but not till death, not in this world." Nay, St. John says, "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because, as He is, so are we in this world." … [It is] not only at or after death, but "in this world," they are "as their Master" (ibid., 26–27).
>
> And it is equally evident, that if any sin remain, we are not cleansed from all sin. If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from all sin. If any unrighteousness remain in the soul, it is not cleansed from all unrighteousness. Neither let any say that this relates to justification only, or the cleansing us from the guilt of sin. (ibid., 27)

In short, "A Christian is so far perfect as not to commit sin" (ibid., 25).

## Any Believer Can Attain Perfection

Though sanctification begins at justification, perfection is never made complete at that time; it always comes later. Wesley said,

> We do not know a single instance, in any place, of a person's receiving, in one and the same moment, remission of sins, the abiding witness of the Spirit, and a new, a clean heart.… [However,] St. John affirms [perfection] expressly; and it cannot be disproved by the examples of the Old Testament, (ibid., 31, 23)

Perfection, said Wesley, should be preached to those who are growing in godliness (ibid., 42).

## How One Attains Perfection

Perfection is "spoken of as receivable by mere faith, and as hindered only by unbelief." Further, "this faith, and consequently the salvation which it brings, is spoken of as given in an instant.… It is supposed that instant may be now" (ibid., 34).

> Oh that I now, from sin released, Thy word might to the utmost prove, Enter into Thy promised rest; The Canaan of Thy perfect love! … To sin entirely dead. [For] He walks in glorious liberty, to sin entirely dead: the Truth, the Son hath made him free, and he is free indeed, (ibid., 39–40)

Wesley asked,

> When does inward sanctification begin? In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin,

and grows in grace.

[But it can be sooner.] Why not? For, although we grant, (1) that the generality of believers, whom we have hitherto known, were not so sanctified till near death; (2) that few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so at that time; nor, (3) He himself at the time of writing his former Epistles; yet all this does not prove, that we may not be so today. (ibid., 42)

## What Perfection Is Not

In what sense can Christians *not* be perfect?

They are not perfect in knowledge. They are not free from ignorance, no, nor from mistake. We are no more to expect any living man to be infallible, than to be omniscient. They are not free from infirmities, such as weakness or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination.…

[Nor] such in another kind are impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behavior. From such infirmities as these none are perfectly freed till their spirits return to God; neither can we expect till then to be wholly freed from temptation; for "the servant is not above his master." [But] neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. There is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase, (ibid., 23)

Wesley clarified,

We willingly allow and continually declare, there is no such perfection in this life, as implies either a dispensation from doing good, and attending all ordinances of God, or a freedom from ignorance, mistake, temptation, and a thousand infirmities necessarily connected with flesh and blood. (ibid., 35)

We secondly believe that there is no such perfection in this life, as implies an entire deliverance, either from ignorance, or mistake, in things not essential to salvation, or from manifold temptations, or from numberless infirmities, wherewith the corruptible body more or less presses down the soul. (ibid., 36)

But whom, then, do you mean by "one that is perfect"? … The mind which was in Christ.… But neither in this sense is there any absolute perfection on earth. [Again,] there is no perfection of degrees, none which does not admit of a continual increase. (ibid., 36, 23)

## Agreements and Differences With Non-Perfectionists

Wesley set forth some agreements and differences between perfectionists and non-perfectionists. He acknowledged that both agree:

(1) Everyone gets perfection at death.
(2) Until then we grow nearer to perfection.
(3) We should continually press on and exhort others to perfection.

Wesley also conceded certain things to the non-perfectionists, namely:

(1) Most believers never get it before death.
(2) The term *sanctified* is often used of justification.
(3) By *sanctified* Paul rarely, if ever, meant "saved from all sin."
(4) We should use *wholly* and *entirely* of sanctification when speaking of this state of perfection (ibid., 42–43).

However, Wesley insisted, over against the non-perfectionists, that we should expect to be saved from all sin before death and that there is a clear promise of this in Psalm 130:8: "He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities" (ibid., 43).

# WESLEY'S SIGNIFICANT ADMISSIONS ABOUT PERFECTIONISM

Wesley made a number of fascinating concessions about perfectionism. Perhaps the most revealing is the first one.

### Perfection Does Not Eliminate "a Thousand Nameless Defects"

As we earlier observed,[2] one of Wesley's most revealing acknowledgments is that supposedly one can be absolutely perfect and sinless and yet "not free from *infirmities*, such as *weakness* or slowness of understanding, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination." Nor "impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add *a thousand nameless defects*, either in conversation or behavior (ibid., 23, emphasis added).

### Even Chief Apostles Had Not Attained Perfection

Another noteworthy admission is that even the apostles Paul and Peter sinned and so were not wholly sanctified:

> The Apostles themselves committed sin; Peter by dissembling, Paul by his sharp contention with Barnabas. Suppose they did, will you argue this: "If two of the Apostles once committed sin, then all other Christians in all ages, do and must commit sin as long as they live?" Nay, God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sin was laid upon them; the grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. (ibid., 24)

### Perfectionism Was Scarcely Preached to Those Not Pressing On

Wesley also professed that he scarcely urged perfection to those who were not rapidly growing: “In what manner should we preach sanctification? Scarce at all to those who are not pressed forward” (ibid., 42).

### Inward Sanctification Begins at Justification—Death to Sin Is Gradual

Further, as we have seen, he also said that “inward sanctification” begins at justification:

> When does inward sanctification begin? In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies to sin, and grows in grace.… But may we expect it sooner? Why not? For, although we grant, (1) that the generality of believers, whom we have hitherto known, were not so sanctified till near death; (2) that few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so at that time; nor, (3) he himself at the time of writing his former Epistles; yet all this does not prove, that we may not be so today, (ibid., 42)

Wesleyan scholars have debated whether “entire sanctification,” or Christian perfection in this life, is a matter of eradication or of empowerment—that is, whether sin is *destroyed* or merely *suppressed*. Are passions such as anger and envy *removed* or merely *redirected*?[3] Texts can be cited on both sides. Wesley did believe, however, that all believers can reach a state of sinless perfection before death and that they should all seek to do so.

Blame for the eradication view is laid by some Wesleyan scholars at the door of more radical elements in the American Holiness movement. For instance, J. Kenneth Grider (b. 1921) points to J. A. Wood (*Perfect Love*, 1861), H. C. Morrison (*Baptism With the Holy Ghost*, 1890), and S. S. White (*Eradication*, 1954) as leaders.[4]

Wesleyan scholar Vic Reasoner argues that Wesley did not believe in eradication, citing his emphasis on the need for believers to continue the process of breaking sin’s power in their lives. He cites Wesleyan David Seamands[5] in claiming that sanctification is both the ultimate crisis and a never-ending process.

## B. B. WARFIELD’S RESPONSE TO WESLEYAN PERFECTIONISM

The famous Princeton scholar B. B. Warfield (1851–1921) wrote the classic response to Wesleyanism,[6] though he did not directly address John Wesley so much as Wesley's disciples who were his contemporaries, such as Charles Trumbull (1872–1941), A. B. Simpson (1844–1919), Robert Pearsall Smith (1827–1898), and Hannah Whitall Smith (1832–1911). The following criticisms of Wesleyan perfectionism have been culled from War field's weighty tome.

**Perfectionism Is a Quick-Fix Sanctification**

Wesleyan perfectionism contends that perfect sanctification not only can be obtained in this life, but it can be received by an immediate act of God. Warfield chided this view for springing from spiritual restlessness, noting that "men grow weary of serving the Lord; they do not wish to fight to win the prize; they prefer to be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease" (*P*, 244–45). He called this "victory by freedom rather than victory by fight" (ibid., 380). Rather than fight against temptation, by this quick-fix sanctification they "simply let Christ dispose of it, while we stand by like onlookers" (ibid.). Further, "they were unwilling to await God's slow methods of developing this fuller salvation through the conflicts of life" (ibid., 264). Again, "Men are unable to understand why time should be consumed in divine works.… They demand immediate tangible results" (ibid., 349).

**Perfectionism Separates Justification and Sanctification**

Formally speaking, while justification (salvation from the penalty of sin) and sanctification (salvation from the power of sin) are different, nevertheless, Warfield maintained that there is no "sharp separation" between them (as perfectionists argue). According to perfectionists, justification and sanctification "are definitely separated as two distinct gifts of grace" (ibid., 356); "to wrest these two things apart and make [them] separable gifts of grace evinces a confusion in the conception of Christ's salvation which is nothing less than portentous" (ibid., 357). Indeed, "Mr. Trumbull is accustomed to begin the exposition of his teaching by actually [asserting] that justification and sanctification are two separate gifts of God, to be separately obtained, and by separate acts of faith" (ibid., 355). In short, "We are freed from the guilt of sin by one act of faith, and we are freed from the power of sin by another act of

faith" (ibid., 265).

Warfield cites A. A. Hodge (1823–1886) as saying,

> It is wholly a false view, never accepted by the Church, that the Christian undergoes two conversions—that the first accepts Christ for justification, and *afterwards*, by a separate act, accepts Him for sanctification.… No more, in any act of true faith, can forgiveness be separated from purification, (ibid., 358)

## Perfectionism (by Its Own Admission) Is a New Doctrine

Piggybacking on Hodge's point, even perfectionists have admitted the lack of support for their doctrine in the teachings of the church fathers. John McClintock (1814–1870) said, "We are the only church in history, from the apostle's time until now, that has put forward as its very elemental thought … the holiness of the human soul, heart, mind and will" (ibid., 350). Warfield added, "Nothing less than a new epoch in the history of the Church has thus, in the view of Wesley's followers, been introduced" (ibid.). This alone, Warfield implies, should give cause for pause.

## Perfectionism Is a Form of Spiritual Passivism

By insisting that one surrenders his will to God in an act of faith by which he obtains this supposed state of perfection, there comes "a cessation of moral effort on our part" (ibid., 397). Warfield insisted that the human will is active in the process of sanctification:

> Christ dwells within us not for the purpose of sinking our being into His being, nor of substituting Himself for us as the agent of our activities; *much less of seizing our wills and operating them for us in contradiction to our own immanent mind*; but to operate directly upon us, to make us good, that our works, *freely done by us*, may under His continual leading, be good also, (ibid., 390, emphasis added)

## Perfectionism Is a Form of Quietism

Warfield also attacked the quietism that emerged from Wesleyanism in which "surrender is our part in the Victory" (ibid., 361). Warfield asserted that this is reducible to "a general attitude of renunciation, of apathetic inactivity, which has no specific reference to God and only supplies to Him an unresisting field in which He may freely work." This, he said, "is more mystical than Christian" (ibid.). He rejected the view that "the condition of the victorious life is that we must do nothing, absolutely nothing, except submit ourselves to Christ. Any

attempt to do anything further not only does not help on the work of our perfecting; it absolutely hinders it" (ibid., 377).

> Paul's view was different, for he continually exhorts us to efforts to realize our holiness, as for example in II Corinthians 8:1, where he urges us precisely to purify ourselves and thus bring our holiness to its completion. (ibid.)

## Perfectionism Leads to Mysticism and Pantheism

Warfield also criticized a form of perfectionism, proposed by A. B. Simpson, that claims a mystical union with Christ, implying that "Christ thus does our very believing for us, and we live not by faith in Him, but by His faith in us" (ibid., 386–87). Warfield called this "unintelligible mysticism" (ibid., 384) and cited a passage from Wesley that if taken seriously is pantheistic:

> God seemed to speak to me so sweetly, saying, "Never mind, my child, you have nothing. But I am perfect Power, I am your life.… I am all within and all without, and all forever" (ibid., 386).

In brief, perfectionism "asserts that our individuality has been abolished and Christ has taken its place. We are told that He has 'constituted' Himself our very being.… Clearly 'we' no longer exist" (ibid., 383).

## Perfectionism Opens the Door to Antinomianism

Further, Warfield believed that the state of moral passivism resulting from perfectionism may lead to lawlessness: In ceasing moral activity "that merely betrays the little regard we have for righteousness … it may even be but to open the door to antinomianism" (ibid., 397). Likewise,

> Quietism may easily run over into antinomianism. [For] all history teaches us how dreadfully easy it is to persuade ourselves that, if we have received as a sheer gift from Christ absolute freedom from sinning and need not concern ourselves further about it—then, of course, the things we do (whatever they are) cannot be sins, (ibid., 379)

## Perfectionism Is a Form of Pelagianism

Warfield alleged that in Wesleyan perfectionism,

> Everywhere and always the initiative belongs to man; everywhere and always God's action is suspended upon man's will. We wish to make concealment of the distress with which this mode of representation afflicts us. (ibid., 398)

As Luther told Erasmus, Warfield believed that this is “outpelagianizing Pelagius” (ibid.).

## Perfectionism Is a Form of Religious Magic

In an almost prophetic foresight into some of the more wild extremes that would be carried a century later into the contemporary Word of Faith Movement,[7] Warfield charged that perfectionism “is something far worse than Pelagianism, something the affinities of which are with magic rather than religion” (ibid., 397). The whole tendency is

> to place God at the disposal of man, and to encourage man to use Him in order to obtain results which he cannot attain for himself.… This is of course to stand things on their head, and in doing so to degrade God into merely the instrument which man employs to secure his objects. [In effect,] God stands always helplessly by until man calls Him into action by opening a channel into which His energies may flow, (ibid.)

## Perfectionism Is Intrinsically Fallible

Further, Warfield contended that “perfectionism” is a classic misnomer, for it actually teaches “an intrinsically fallible perfection, a perfection out of which it is possible for us to fall—out of which, in point of fact, we may fall any minute—if we should not even say every minute” (ibid., 395). Warfield asked how we can trust God to keep us from falling again when, despite His promise (Jude 24), He did not do so on previous occasions (ibid.).

## Perfectionism Is Self-Contradictory

Warfield pinpointed what he believed to be an inherent inconsistency in perfectionism:

> How can he who is free from even the desire of sin possibly resist Christ? Is not resisting Christ sin? And if resisting Christ is sin, how can he who may at any time resist Christ be said to be free from all necessity of fighting against sin? … Obviously, Mr. Trumbull cannot maintain both of these dogmas—the dogma of the substitution of Christ for us as the agent in all our activities, and the dogma of the possession by us of an ineradicable power to resist Christ, (ibid., 389)

## Perfectionism Minimizes Sin

By claiming that sinless perfection is possible, Wesleyanism lowers the bar on evil and excuses many sins. One way this is done is by limiting the alleged state of perfection to only "known" sins (ibid., 392–93). Further, "All experience teaches us that it is terribly easy not to recognize sins when we see them; not to 'know' sins to which we are chance to be prone, to be sins" (ibid., 379). Indeed, it is one of "Satan's devices" to "get us to think that sin is not sin" (ibid.).

### Perfection Is a Future Hope, Not a Present Reality

Warfield not only pointed to the gradual nature of biblical sanctification (see above) but to its future nature: "It is a thing not yet possessed but in petition" (ibid., 462). He noted,

> It is clear, therefore, that Paul, though promising this perfection as the certain heritage of every Christian man, presents it as a matter of hope, not yet seen; not as a matter of experience, already enjoyed.… [In this life] we are fighting the good fight; we are running the race. The prize is yonder, (ibid., 462–63)

Citing 1 Thessalonians 5:23, Warfield reminded his readers that complete sanctification is something we get "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (ibid., 463). Indeed, he observed that perfect sanctification comes only when the soul, spirit, and body are sanctified:

> It is the perfecting of the whole man that [Paul] prays for, and this expressly includes the body as well as the resurrection, at the last day, which is the day of the second coming of Christ. Until then the body is mouldering in the grave. (ibid.)

Any sanctification before this point is gradual and incomplete. And it is a gross misnomer to call it *entire sanctification*, *complete sanctification*, or any such thing.

## A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF SOME OF WARFIELD'S TEACHINGS ON SANCTIFICATION

Despite his many pointed criticisms of Wesleyan perfectionism as he understood it, there are some serious flaws in Warfield's own view. Briefly, several are worth noting.

## Warfield Overstated the Danger of Antinomianism

It would seem that Warfield exaggerated the possible danger of Wesleyan antinomianism. Not only is there no firm logical connection between them, but there is little historical evidence that this has actually happened. To the degree that isolated examples may be available, one could argue that Warfield's strong Calvinism can and has led to antinomian extremes as well. Hence, his argument seems to be a self-canceling, double-edged sword. By the same logic, Warfield's predestinationism could be said to lead to fatalism.

## Warfield Charge of Pelagianism Is Exaggerated

While some splinter group in Wesleyanism may be more Pelagian, the charge of Pelagianism is overstated as applied to Wesley or to many of his faithful followers. At the very worst, the Arminian view could be labeled semi-Pelagian, but no ecumenical council of the Christian church has ever condemned semi-Pelagianism as a heresy.[8] So it is simply an inaccurate exaggeration to claim that Wesleyanism, in general, is "outpelagianizing Pelagius" (*P*, 398). Only if one presupposes the strong Calvinist's view of monergism as the norm can one press the charge of Pelagianism against Wesleyans—and then it applies equally to plenty of non-Wesleyans and even moderate Calvinists. For all of them agree that God's grace works cooperatively, not just operatively, on the human will in salvation.[9]

## Warfield Embraced a Form of Eradicationalism

Ironically, while Wesley is often accused of holding to an *immediate* form of eradicationalism, Warfield himself has a *process* form of the same teaching; he insisted that salvation involves a "deliverance from sin itself" (ibid., 367). This involves "our deliverance from the central thing—the corruption of man's heart" (ibid.). For "He [God] cures our sinning precisely by curing our sinful nature; He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good" (ibid., 368). Indeed, Warfield went so far as to say that in Romans 7 there is no "deadly warfare between the two natures." Rather, "*that chapter depicts for us the process of the eradication of the old nature*" (ibid., 371, emphasis added). He criticized Griffith Thomas (1861–1924) for teaching that our new nature merely "counteracts" the old nature now, awaiting its eradication in the "hereafter." By contrast, said

Warfield, "*It is progressively extirpating it now*, and that is the fundamental fact in supernatural sanctification" (ibid., 372, emphasis added). However, this is contrary not only to Paul's constant struggle with sin in his life but to the concept embraced by Warfield that our whole life is one of fighting the good fight of faith (ibid., 378).

## Warfield Was Inconsistent on the Role of Free Will

Warfield fell prey to his own criticism of not allowing humankind to play an active role in salvation. Over and over, he criticized Wesleyan perfectionism for passivating the human will in sanctification (see above); he argued that there is a synergism between the human will and God's grace in the purification process. However, when it comes to the first step of salvation (justification), Warfield ceased quickly to be a synergist and became a monergist, suggesting that God alone acts apart from our free choice. He said boldly,

> *It is not true that "God forces the salvation of no man." It would be truer to say that no man is saved on whom God does not force salvation*—though the language would not be exact.… It is not true that the "eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord," which is the "free gift of God," is merely put at our option and "our wills are free" to accept or reject it. (ibid., 392, emphasis added)

He derided the view that "Christ's call to Lazarus must have been ineffective until dead Lazarus, by a voluntary and deliberate act of his will, decided to take what God offered him in that call" (ibid., 391). As was shown earlier, this is a misuse of the phrase "dead in sins,"[10] which means "without spiritual life" and "separated from God," and not "total inability to respond to God's grace and gift of salvation."

## Warfield Accepted Lordship Salvation

While it is improper to separate the natural connection between justification and sanctification,[11] Warfield seems to have seen an almost automatic connection between them: "Justification and sanctification are indissolubly bound together" (ibid., 356). Indeed, he criticized the view that separates accepting Christ as Savior from accepting Christ as Lord (ibid., 375). But nowhere does the New Testament demand that making Christ the Lord (Master) of one's life is a condition for receiving the free gift of salvation. This is tantamount to demanding that a person promise to work for Christ as a ground

for being saved (justified), which, as shown earlier,[12] is an unbiblical denial of justification by faith alone. It is to front-load justification with sanctification and to deny in effect the classic Reformation principle of *sola fidei*.

# CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Notwithstanding Warfield's overstatements, unbiblical premises, and the misdirection of some criticisms, most of his points are penetrating and well taken, particularly when addressing the Wesleyanism of his day, if not always John Wesley himself.

What is more, Wesley's own admissions about "entire sanctification" or perfectionism are telling. Consider again the following admissions from Wesley: "Entire sanctification" does *not* mean

(1) that we will never sin again;
(2) mat we cannot lose our salvation;
(3) that we cannot have/make "a thousand" different "weaknesses," "defeats," "mistakes," and "infirmities" (which cover a multitude of sins);
(4) that the great apostles Paul and Peter had it;
(5) that any more than a few believers of all time have ever attained it;
(6) that most who get it do so not much before death; and
(7) that Paul rarely, if ever, uses the term *sanctified* in this sense.

In short, the Wesleyan belief that we can reach a point of sinless perfection (whether by eradication or not) in this life is unbiblical, unrealistic, contrary to experience—and it minimizes sin. Perfectionism is a quick-fix scheme, can lull a person into a false sense of spiritual attainment, and undermines the God-ordained gradual process of sanctification. Nonetheless, the spirit of Wesleyanism's quest for true holiness is biblical, commendable, and has been very fruitful in both spiritual formation and social action through the last three centuries.



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[1] See Volume 2, chapter 14.

[2] Cf. James 1:17; see also Volume 2, chapter 19, under “The Nature of Humankind.”

[3] Again, the word *anthropology*, meaning “the study of human beings,” comes in part from the Greek word *anthropos*, which frequently occurs (biblically) in either original or derivative form. While some translations unilaterally render variations of *anthropos* as “man” or “men” (e.g., Rom. 5:18, above), there are scriptural instances where *anthropos* refers to “a human person” (of either gender) or “people” (of both genders). Lexigraphically, this is widely confirmed; for instance, Harold K. Moulton defines *anthropos* as “a human being,” “an individual” [metaphorically], “the inner man” (*Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 30). When plural, then, the derivatives of *anthropos* can also mean “human beings” or “individuals.” Cf. William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 77–78. In regard to the soteriological (salvific) usages of *anthropos*, those who argue that this word, in all its forms, *only* and *always* refers to “men” are thus compelled to maintain that God desires to save only males.

[4] All scriptural emphasis added.

[5] It is contradictory to propose that God gave Adam supernatural righteousness at Creation while also suggesting that there was a “disease or languor of human nature.”

[6] However, Adam’s righteousness was *original*; Job, though upright and pure, lived *after* the Fall. The fact that Job “shunned evil” demonstrates his awareness of evil, which Adam, according to Genesis, did not initially have.

[7] See chapter 3, below.

[8] ibid.

[9] See Volume 2, chapter 14.

[10] See Volume 2, chapters 3–5.

[11] See Volume 1, chapters 7–9 for more detail.

[12] See Volume 2, chapter 2.

[13] A being *becoming* something other than what it *is* is an example of substantial change; a being *obtaining* something other than what it *has* is an example of accidental change. See also Volume 2, chapter 4, under the arguments of Thomas Aquinas for God’s immutability.

[14] See Volume 2, chapter 2.

[15] The others are the *creation* view and the *traducian* view, explained below.

[16] See Volume 2, chapters 18–19.

17 See appendix 1.

18 ibid.

19 Again, fourteen days after conception in humans.

20 See appendix 2 for further explanation.

21 A product of conception, at any point between fertilization and birth.

22 That is, where a new individual life begins without any sexual act by parents.

23 We reject this differentiation.

24 For more on the inheritance of original sin, see chapters 3 and 5.

25 Gnosticism held the erroneous belief that all matter is inherently evil.

26 Some of Augustine's later views contradicted his earlier ones. This is further explained in subsequent chapters.

27 When the rational soul is created.

28 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 for a treatment of causes.

29 Some traducianists are inconsistent and do not see these as logical entailments of their view.

30 ibid.

31 ibid.

**32** Most of these arguments are also found in William G. T. Shedd's *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1894), 2.19ff.

33 Abraham was Levi's ancestor.

34 See chapter 2.

35 See appendix 4.

36 See chapters 3 and 5.

37 See chapter 3 for detailed definition, explanation, and analysis.

38 See appendix 1.

39 See chapter 2, under "The Analogy With Animals." Recall that (above) we denied the alleged difference between "animal soul" and "rational soul."

[40] See chapter 3.

[41] See chapter 2 for a broader treatment of *soul* and *spirit*.

[42] Again, see Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 for definition and explanation of causes.

[43] Op. cit.

[44] As opposed to certain creative acts being indirect and intermediate.

[45] See Volume 2, chapter 3.

[46] Soul and body in opposition.

[47] Soul and body in unity. See chapter 2.

[48] "Previous agreement" referring to the dialogue's prior conclusion, immediately above.

[49] Knowledge previous to birth.

[1] See Volume 2.

[2] The terms *soul* and *spirit* are compared and contrasted below.

[3] See chapter 16.

[4] The Old Testament writers used the same word for *body* and *flesh* (Heb: *basar*), while the New Testament writers used both *soma* (*body*) and *sarx* (*flesh*). The authors of the Greek texts used two words because they were lingually available and provided additional clarification.

[5] The term *flesh and blood* is used as an idiom for mortal human beings (cf. Matt. 16:17; 1 Cor. 15:50).

**6** Recall that *anthropology* is "the study of human beings."

[7] Or "metaphysical monist"—see Volume 1, chapter 2.

**8** This view is also known as "anthropological parallelism."

[9] See below; also called *recollectionism*.

[10] The following three views—interactionism, occasionalism, and pre-established harmony—are varying forms of dualism.

[11] A monad is a singular metaphysical entity perceived to be the basic, primary element of reality. On monism, see Volume 1, chapter 2.

[12] *Hulo* (or *hulas*)—*matter*, and *morphos—form*.

13 Trichotomy, not addressed above (defined and explained below), accepts a dualism between soul and body, even though it also sees a dualism within the soul.

**14** Anthropological epiphenomenalism is here treated as a modified form of materialism.

15 Rev. 6:9; James 2:26; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Heb. 12:23. See also vol. 4, chap. 8.

16 See *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), chapter 3.

17 Or, "operating *above* material existence."

18 Or, "operating *within* material existence."

19 Idealists attempt the opposite—see below.

20 In Volume 1, chapter 2.

21 See Volume 1, chapter 2; and Volume 2, chapters 18–19, 21, appendices 3, 6.

22 Op. cit.

23 ibid.

24 See C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 17–19.

25 Including extra-mental beings.

26 *Begging the question* (Lat: *petito principii*) is the logical fallacy committed when one assumes, as a premise, the same conclusion that the argument is intended to demonstrate.

27 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

28 See Volume 2, chapters 7 and 14.

29 Note that the "mon" in *monism* signifies the belief that the human being has one part. The "di" in *dichotomy* (or "dual" in *dualism*) postulates two parts, while "tri" in *trichotomy* indicates three.

30 Again, even though idealism (see above) was promulgated by a Christian theist (George Berkeley), it does not fit into the Christian theistic framework.

31 In contrast to a deceased person passing into the next world as only a soul.

32 See below, under "An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism."

33 "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

[34] This response is covered more fully in Volume 4, chapter 8.

[35] “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ”

[36] *Above* or *beyond* the physical.

[37] Volume 1, chapter 2.

[38] This, however, has already been disproved (see Volume 1, chapter 9).

[39] This is a partial list, containing the major problems with anthropological monism.

[40] See above, sections under “Various Biblical Terms Used to Describe Human Beings.”

[41] Referring to both Jesus and believers—e.g., Eccl. 12:6–7; Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 6:9.

[42] The eventual elimination of being.

[43] See Volume 4.

[44] See above, under “Response to the Biblical Arguments Given for Anthropological Monism.”

[45] Again, parallelism, pre-established harmony, interactionism, and occasionalism are included as forms of anthropological dualism (dichotomy).

[46] Indeed, this is the inversion of the false-disjunction fallacy within monism, against dualism.

[47] Anthropological trichotomy is addressed below.

[48] Cf. 1 Corinthians 5:3; 6:20; 7:34; Matthew 10:28; Acts 2:31; 2 Peter 2:11.

[49] Cf. Mark 8:12; John 11:33; 12:27; Matthew 26:38.

[50] See below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

[51] These teachings are also set forth below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

[52] For a succinct comparison of the platonic and biblical views on soul/body, see chart below: “Two Contrasting Views of Human Nature.”

[53] See above, under “Other Evidence Against Anthropological Dualism (Dichotomy),” 2nd and below, under “An Examination of Anthropological Hylomorphism.”

54 *Special pleading* is the logical fallacy in which someone (or a particular view) applies standards or principles to others (or a different view) while taking himself to be exempt from those same standards or principles (without adequately and acceptably explaining the exemption), creating a double standard.

55 The fact that *soul* is not used in a similar context does not mean it couldn't be; it simply means that it isn't.

56 See above, under "Terms Used of the Immaterial Dimension of Human Beings."

57 Again, from the Greek *hulo* (or *hulas*), which means "matter," and *morphos*, which means "form."

58 Remember that Augustine's occasionalism (recollectionism or illuminationism) implies that the connection between matter and form is one-way; the lower (body) cannot directly impact the higher (soul). God allegedly illumines the mind (or soul) as to the body's experience.

59 See Volume 1, chapter 9.

60 See Volume 2, chapter 20.

61 George Eldon Ladd, "The Greek Versus the Hebrew View of Man" in *The Pattern of New Testament Truth*.

**62** By *Christian* is meant a unity view as expressed in the Bible, especially the Hebrew Old Testament.

63 Plato, *Republic*, Book I.

64 Above, we noted that dualism differentiates between soul and body, while trichotomy also posits a dualism within the soul itself.

65 1 Thess. 5:23.

66 Psalm 104:26.

67 Peter Lombard (1100–1160) and the schoolmen.

68 In referring to God's "created nature," Melanchthon is simply communicating that the stoics believed Him to have one.

69 See Volume 1, chapter 5 on logical thinking.

70 See chapter 1.

71 See chapter 5.

72 See Volume 1, chapter 2.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 4 on general and special revelation.

74 See Volume 4.

1 For more information on the various worldviews, see Volume 1, chapter 2.

2 ibid., chapter 3.

3 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

4 ibid., chapter 14.

5 When Isaiah quoted God as saying, “I make peace, and create evil” (Isa. 45:7 KJV), he did not imply that God does anything that is *morally* evil. Rather, he is speaking about *physical* evil or calamity. The NIV more properly renders the verse, “I bring prosperity and create disaster.” For an excellent definition and explanation, see the citation from Tertullian in chapter 4.

6 See Volume 2, chapter 13.

7 Likewise, when God permitted the lying spirits to go to deceive King Ahab (in 1 Kings 22), He was neither sinning nor encouraging sin. He simply allowed the evil spirits to do what He knew they, as followers of the father of lies, would do when given the freedom to carry it out. God accomplished His sovereign purposes through these lies, as He also did through the sin of Joseph’s brothers (see Gen. 50:20).

8 Below, and in chapter 5, we discuss how God’s allowance for sin *not only* accomplishes His greater good *but also* preserves the love demonstrated by the giving of freedom to His creatures.

9 “Free will” and “free choice” are here used synonymously.

10 See also Volume 1, chapter 10, for detailed treatment.

11 The scholastics were medieval scholars who taught in the schools, and hence were called schoolmen.

12 See also chapter 5.

13 This inquiry, as well as others, will be addressed in chapter 5.

14 See chapter 1, under “The Biblical Basis for the Original State of Innocence and Perfection,” especially “A State of Moral Responsibility” and “The Presence of the Tempter.”

15 Again, an efficient cause is the cause *by which* something (in this case, sin) comes to be. See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10, for further illustration of the principle of causality.

16 Meaning, God is the efficient cause of His own choices.

17 That is, according to the self-determinism view, God is different from humans in the category of “contrary act” (see “Human Free Will: Three Views” table above).

18 For a detailed explanation of God’s all-goodness (omnibenevolence) and its implications, see Volume 2, chapter 15.

19 See Volume 4, chapter 9.

20 The ideas that either God or the devil is responsible for causing human sin are *determinist.*

21 It is noteworthy that John uses the word *prompted*, not *forced*, in regard to the decision of Judas. That Judas's act was free and uncoerced is evident from the use of the word *betray* (Matt. 26:16, 21, 23), which signifies a deliberate act (cf. Luke 6:16). And, even though Satan had put the idea into the heart of Judas (John 13:2), Judas performed the act freely—he admitted later that he had "sinned" (Matt. 27:4). Jesus directed him, "What *you* are about to do, do quickly." Mark even says that what Judas did, he did "conveniently" (Mark 14:10–11 KJV).

22 *Chosen by God*, 31.

23 The criminal's completely evil ("totally depraved") nature—*as* posited by extreme Calvinists—could not have caused his actions, for if it did, he would not have been free, in which case he should not be held responsible by God for his choices (which, of course, he is). The extreme Calvinist and moderate Calvinist understandings of total depravity are described in chapter 5.

24 The idea that a lack of wholeness or completeness in the original humans is responsible for causing human sin is *indeterminist*.

25 See chapter 2.

26 The concept of human sin resulting from human free will is *self-determinist*.

27 See Volume 2, chapter 9, under "Objections to God's Wisdom."

28 It should not be hard for even an atheist to believe that something can be uncaused, since many maintain that the universe is uncaused. If the universe can be uncaused because it was always there, as atheists allege, then so can God be without a cause because He was always there. Of course, the primary problem with this atheistic claim is that there is overwhelming evidence that the universe had a beginning, since it is running down and thus had an original cause. See Volume 2, chapter 18, and William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

29 Of course, there can be a cooperation of one's will with someone else (e.g., God), by which the person is a free but cooperating cause. In this sense, God can be the primary cause and a creature the secondary cause. Nevertheless, this secondary cause (a free agent) is not a mere instrument through which the primary cause operates; rather, a secondary cause is an efficient cause whose causal powers were given by the primary Cause (God), and who freely exercises its power of choice.

30 The only significant deviation from this, up to the Reformation, came from the later Augustine (354–430), whose views on human choice (formulated in response to the donatist controversy) were contrary to the standard of church history, both before and after him, up to the time of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther's systematic theologian, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), reversed his view, as have Lutherans since. This leaves the extreme Calvinist school, following Jonathan Edwards, isolated from mainstream orthodoxy on the nature of free will in fallen human beings (see chapter 5).

31

John Calvin (1509–1564) consciously pitted himself against Chrysostom and the rest of the Fathers in

saying,

"*We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, 'Whom he draws, he draws willingly'; insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid*. We grant that, *as man was originally constituted, he could incline to either side*, but since he has taught us by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure?" (*ICR*, 1.2.3.10, 260–61, emphasis added).

[32] These texts are taken from Augustine's earlier writings, those that he penned before his position changed following the controversy with donatist schismatics; Augustine came to believe that they could be coerced into accepting the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

[33] Additional specific views of Luther, Calvin, and others will be examined in later chapters.

[1] See chapter 2.

[2] See chapter 3.

[3] From the time of the Fall until the law was received.

[4] Although David's sin pointedly affected many other people, besides himself, he recognized that transgression against God's law is sin against God Himself.

[5] That is to say, illicit bodily cravings ("lust of the flesh"), covetous desires ("lust of the eyes"), and boasting about what one has and does ("pride of life") are not of God.

[6] For definition, explanation, and analysis, see chapter 11, especially under "Matthew 12:31–32."

[7] See Volume 2, chapter 4.

[8] See Volume 2, chapters 18–21

[9] This was shown to be untenable in Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapter 18. See also Volume 2, chapter 9, under "Objections to God's Wisdom."

[10] See Augustine, *Two Souls, Against the Manichaeans*.

[11] See Volume 2, chapters 1–12 and chapters 13–17, respectively. See especially Volume 2, chapter 1 for a listing of God's attributes and characteristics.

[12] For example, Ps. 71:22; 78:41; Isa. 5:19; 29:23; 43:3; Jer. 51:5; Hos. 11:9, 12; 1:12; 3:3; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69

[13] Acts 2:33; 4:31; 5:32; 7:55; 10:38; 15:8; 20:28; Rom. 14:17; 15:13, 16; 1 Cor. 6:19; 12:3; 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 4:8; Heb. 2:4; 2 Peter 1:21

[14] 1 Chron. 16:35; 2 Chron. 29:16; Ps. 106:47

[15] Deut. 32:2; Job 15:15; Acts 10:22

16 2 Chron. 30:27; Ps. 46:4; 68:5; Rev. 21:2, 10, 19

17 See part 2, “Salvation.”

18 Even what God has entrusted to the care of someone else is ultimately still His.

19 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

20 The sin of untruth can be committed omissively as well as commissively.

21 See chapter 3.

22 See chapter 1, under “The Original Created Conditions.”

23 See above, under “The Metaphysical Nature of Sin” as well as Volume 2, chapter 19.

24 See part 2, on justification, sanctification, and glorification.

25 For an explanation of why this freedom is superior, see chapter 3, under “The Nature of Human Freedom in Heaven” and “Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom.”

26 See chapter 3.

27 See chapters 5 and 16.

1 Adam eventually died physically at the age of 930 (Gen. 5:5)

2 It appears that they did accept it, since God covered them in the skins of animals (Gen. 3:21), which had undoubtedly been sacrificed for their sins. Further, in an act of faith, Adam called Eve “the mother of all the living” (Gen. 3:20). Finally, Eve expressed her faith in the messianic promise of the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15) when she said at the birth of Seth that he was a “seed” from the Lord (Gen. 4:25 KJV).

3 In Revelation 20:14, this is called “the second death.”

4 Indeed, some have suggested that if a “day” is taken as a thousand years (see, for example, Ps. 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8), Adam literally died within that time frame (930 years).

5 Christ’s physical death was not a result of being naturally born but as a result of His offering of Himself as our replacement.

6 Called “the second death” because it is the second death involving a body.

7 Because all humans are *already* spiritually dead when physically born, they only *actually* undergo physical and eternal death *in terms of experience* (implying, then, that the spiritual death of everyone occurred *in the sin of Adam*.

8 That is, in seed form (cf. Hebrews 7:9–10).

9 Or “federal head”; see chapter 9.

10 To *impute* means to “attribute” or “give,” meaning that responsibility must be taken for what has been imputed.

11 See chapter 9 on the nature of salvation, and chapter 12 on the extent of salvation.

12 That *the many* (Gk: *hoi polloi*) means “all” in Romans 5:18–19 is clear from the facts that, first, *many* is used in contrast to the *one* (Gk: *enos*, from *heis*), rather than in contrast to the *few*, and that, second, *the many* and *all* are used interchangeably (see chapter 12 for an expanded discussion).

13 See part 2.

14 See chapter 1.

15 See chapter 3 for an examination of traducianism.

16 Also, spiritual *death* (here, as elsewhere; e.g., Rev. 20:14), does not mean “annihilation” (or “nonexistence”—see chapter 13 below) but rather “separation from God” and “lack of spiritual life.”

17 Titus 2:14; Heb. 1:3; 9:14; 10:22.

18 Isa. 53:5; Mark 2:17; 1 Peter 2:24.

19 John 8:12; 12:36, 46; 2 Cor. 4:4–6

20 See chapter 16.

21 *Guilt* coming from the reality of his failure and *shame* coming from his recognition of the failure.

22 Again, spiritual *death* in the Bible does not mean “annihilation” but “separation”: “Your iniquities have *separated* you from your God” (Isa. 59:2). Likewise, the “second death” (Rev. 20:14; cf. 19:20; 20:10) is not permanent non-existence but eternal conscious separation from God.

23 See chapter 4.

24 Note that Genesis 9 is *post*-Fall; see also James 3:9.

25 That is, they willfully “hold it down.”

26 See Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, especially 75–76; 126–28; 198; 216; 316–18 and Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, especially 1.1.15; 1.1.18; 1.2.4.

27 See chapters 12 and 16.

28 As to how one can be saved.

29 See chapter 16

30 *Efficacious* means “producing (or capable or producing) the effect that is desired.”

31 As has been established, the ultimate standard of truth is God’s own nature, to which He is fully accountable, and, therefore, according to which He must act. See chapter 12 on voluntarism and essentialism.

32 Whether or not saving faith itself is a gift from God is an intramural debate among those opposed to extreme Calvinism. Certainly the Bible is lacking in clear verses demonstrating that it is (see chapter 16). Nevertheless, even if saving faith to believe *is* a gift, then it is one offered to *all* and can be freely accepted or rejected (see chapters 7 and 10). Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) also spoke of “the gift of faith,” but he added that it must be “received” by free will (*WJA*, 2.52.27). When Paul refers to “the gift of faith” (cf. 1 Cor. 12:9), he is not speaking of a gift to unbelievers enabling them to be saved (by exercising salvific faith), but rather a spiritual gift to some believers that empowers them to trust God for the common good of the body (cf. vv. 7, 12). With this the vast majority of Church Fathers have agreed.

33 From Isaiah 53:1

34 From Isaiah 6:10

35 Including the resurrection of Lazarus—see John 11

36 That is, have *saving* faith.

37 See Volume 2, chapter 22.

38 See also chapter 3.

39 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

40 In Volume 2, chapter 20.

41 There is, of course, the curious case of the “sons of God” (Heb: *nephilim*, in Gen. 6:1–4), whom many believe involved angels sinning with humans (cf. Job 1:6; Job 2:1; 38:7; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Even so, besides the fact that many other scholars believe that the “sons of God” were not angels, there is no clear biblical indication of any direct effect that humans had in luring them into sin.

42 Op. cit.

43 ibid.

44 See Volume 2, chapter 6.

45 Some have argued that angels can marry, based on Genesis 6:1–2, where the “sons of God” (angels in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7) married the “daughters of men.” The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) translates this (Gen. 6:2) as “angels,” and the New Testament seems also to refer to these beings as angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6–7). However, there are other possible interpretations of the Genesis 6 passages (such as “sons of God” being believers or great men on the earth). Further, even if this *is* a reference to angels, they may have been fallen angels who possessed human beings, who then intermarried. In any event, it seems best, in view of the unequivocal statements of Jesus that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35–36), to

reject the view that angels as such engaged in physical marriage with humans.

46 Characteristics that are not essential to them.

47 The "annihilation" of angels being posited *potentially*, not actually.

48 See Volume 2, chapter 20, under "Objections."

49 That is, these actions are avoidable.

50 For more information on both classical and Wesleyan Arminianism, see chapter 11 and appendix 5.

51 "Strong Calvinism," as a title, is used to acknowledge some distinction between extreme Calvinism (or "hyper-Calvinism"), those who believe in double predestination, and those who do not (see chapter 7)

52 For an explanation of how both moderate Calvinism and strong Calvinism use the term *total depravity* but intend different meanings, see below, under "The Image of God in Humans Is Effaced but Not Erased" and "Total Depravity Is Extensive, Not Intensive."

53 Some strong Calvinists speak of a "natural likeness" to God remaining in fallen humans, while the spiritual image is supposedly gone (erased), but no such division is made in Scripture. The one and only image of God clearly remains in fallen human beings (e.g., Gen. 9:6; James 3:9).

* Many strong Calvation deny this in principle, but in practice their view amounts to this, since they deny unsaved people have even the ability to understand and/or accepted the gosple.

54 See chapter 2

55 From the Greek *nous*, "mind."

56 Or, "to our credit."

**1** This chapter deviates from the normal format (of this series) for treating the biblical, theological, and historical evidences separately, since it is a summary and expansion of the groundwork laid in other chapters. As such, then, the biblical and historical are woven together, while the historical can be found in the other areas (referenced below).

2 See Volume 2, chapters 19–20

3 See Volume 2, chapter 4

4 See Volume 2, chapter 8

5 See Volume 2, chapter 15

6 See Volume 2, chapter 7

7 See chapter 3

[8] See Volume 2, chapter 9

[9] This problem is agitated for an evangelical, since the orthodox doctrine of eternal punishment (see Volume 4) posits that many people will never be saved but will suffer conscious, never-ending torment. (See Volume 4, chapter 10)

[10] Since God is all-knowing (see Volume 2, chapter 8), He knew what would happen if He created this world.

[11] That is, has the *possibility* of sinning.

[12] That is, has the *inevitability* of sinning.

[13] If God *can* do less than His best, then the critic loses the basis for his objection that God should have done better. *Why* should He have "done better," if He does not have to do His best?

[14] A *category mistake* is a fallacy that takes place when a person ascribes to an object (or idea) characteristics or properties that it does not (or cannot) possess, such as asking how blue tastes.

[15] *Amoral* as neither moral nor immoral but rather nonmoral.

[16] It is also important to point out that conversely neither is *something* (i.e., *being*) better than *nothing* (i.e., *nonbeing). Nonbeing* does not exist, and hence there is no basis on which to compare it with *being*.

[17] See chapter 3.

[18] See Volume 2, chapter 7.

[19] This is the essence of morality; see chapter 2.

[20] See also chapter 13.

[21] Heaven; see Volume 4, part 2.

[22] Even if it were, it would not be a world where the greatest possible good is achieved, which would seem to be incumbent upon the greatest possible Being to accomplish.

[23] Or, again, if it has, then the opponent loses the basis for his argument that the best achievable world has not been realized.

[24] See chapter 13.

[25] Once more, if it is, then the objection (that there could have been a better world had God chosen differently) fails.

[26] See Volume 4, part 2.

[27] The ending of one period (dispensation) with God's judgment does not mean that the condition

(standard) of that era has passed away, but rather simply that the special test God set up for them has been applied and that they failed. For example, humans are *still* on probation, even though that special period (of probation) ended. Also, we still have conscience after the age of conscience ends, just as human government after *that* period is superceded by the next, and so on. The special *time* of each period ends, but the *conditions* under which people are tested continue until the close of history.

28 See Volume 4, chapter 1.

29 Likewise, this promise given during the patriarchal administration continues on after the period is over (see Volume 4, chapter 15).

30 See Volume 4, chapter 17.

31 See Volume 4, chapter 13.

32 See Volume 2, chapter 8.

33 See Volume 4, chapters 9–10

34 See chapters 1–2.

35 For more detail on this Christ-centered approach to the Old Testament, see Norman L. Geisler, *To Understand the Bible, Look for Jesus* and *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*.

36 See Volume 1, chapter 10.

37 See chapter 9.

38 Isa. 53:4–7; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18 See chapter 9.

39 Luke 9:51, in which Jesus is looking forward to Jerusalem, where He will be crucified, and to the final assumption into heaven after His resurrection.

40 Citing Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians.

41 As to the question of where Christ's physical body is at the present time, see Volume 2, appendix 1.

42 Or "Last Things"; see Volume 4.

43 See part 2, "Salvation," for further discussion.

44 See Volume 4, chapter 16

45 ibid., chapters 9 and 16.

46 ibid., chapter 11

47 See Volume 2, chapter 20.

1 See part 1.

2 *Decrees* meaning *eternal decisions*.

3 See chapter 3.

4 See below, under “The Nature of God’s Freedom.”

5 See part 1.

6 See also chapters 16–17

7 See chapter 16

8 The question as to whether *faith itself* is a gift of God is discussed elsewhere (see chapter 12). It is sufficient to note here that even if saving faith is a gift, then since it is a gift received by a free creature, it must be received freely.

9 *Amyraldianism* (or *Amyraldian Calvinism*) comes from the name of Moise Amyraut (1596–1664), a French theologian. Its most critical difference from extreme Calvinism relates to the Atonement; supralapsarianism necessitates limited atonement, while sublapsarianism maintains unlimited atonement (see chapter 12).

10 *Predestination* means that God has chosen some to be saved. *Double-predestination* means that God has both chosen some to be saved *and* some to be damned (see appendix 3).

11 See chapter 11.

12 See Volume 2, part 1.

13 See Volume 2, chapters 2 and 8.

14 See Volume 2, chapter 2.

15 See chapter 12.

16 ibid.

17 See chapter 13.

18 See Volume 2, chapter 13.

19 See Volume 2, chapter 7.

20 See chapters 3 and 5.

21 See chapter 2.

22 See chapter 5.

23 See chapter 3 for an explanation of determinism, indeterminism, and self-determinism, and Volume 2, chapter 3, for a distinction between *self-caused being* and *self-caused action*.

24 See Volume 1, chapters 2 and 10.

25 See Volume 1, chapter 5.

26 Likewise, of course, God cannot love evil (Hab. 1:13; James 1:13)—He loves sinners, but He hates sin. To love evil would be contrary to His nature as the absolute Good.

27 See Volume 2, chapter 15

28 ibid., chapter 5.

29 ibid., chapter 2.

30 ibid., chapter 3.

31 See chapter 5.

32 See also chapter 13, below.

33 See chapter 2.

34 1618–1619; see chapter 16.

35 The Canons of Dort, articles 11–12.

36 See chapter 6.

37 See chapter 16.

38 See chapter 12.

39 For other objections and responses, see Volume 2, chapter 15, as well as chapter 3, above.

40 See Volume 2, chapter 3.

41 John Calvin acknowledged this in *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.2.2.5.

**42** For a more complete response to the doctrine of limited atonement, see chapter 12.

43 Cf. Rom. 5:6; 2 Cor. 5:14, 19; 1 Tim. 2:6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2.

44 Cf. Luke 14:26, where Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not *hate* his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

45 See Volume 2, chapter 23.

46 See note on *category mistake* in chapter 6.

47 See Volume 2, chapter 1, for definition and explanation of God's moral and nonmoral attributes and characteristics.

48 Unlike *power* and love, *justice* and love are both moral attributes.

49 See Volume 2, chapter 3.

50 See chapter 3, under "The Nature of God's Free Will," for an explanation of libertarian vs. self-determining freedom.

51 See Volume 2, chapter 8

52 See Volume 2, chapter 4

1 *Recapitulation*, according to *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, is "the process by which according to Irenaeus the Logos [Jesus, the Word] passed through all phases of human experience thus reversing the evil caused by sin and winning complete salvation for man."

2 See below, under "The Necessary-Satisfaction Theory of the Atonement."

3 To *remit* is to "pardon," "cancel," or "lay aside."

4 Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* (New York: Scribner, 1886) and Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1920).

5 Hence, his response to the moral-example (Socinian) view.

6 Irenaeus.

7 Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine.

8 Pelagius, Socinius.

9 Anselm.

10 Abelard.

11 Calvin.

12 See chapter 12.

13 Aquinas.

14 Grotius.

15 Schleiermacher.

16 See also the necessary-satisfaction view.

17 See chapter 9, below, and “eschatology” in Volume 4.

1 See below, under “The Three Stages of Salvation.”

2 Matt. 22:14, 22, 24, 31; cf. Mark 13:20, 22, 27; 2 Tim. 2:10; Titus. 1:1; 1 Peter. 1:2; 2 Peter. 1:10

3 For example, Rom. 8:33; 11:5; Eph. 1:11; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; James. 2:5; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:9; 5:13; 2 John 1:1, 13; Rev. 17:14.

4 For instance, Matt. 22:14; Rom. 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:2, 9, 24, 26; Gal. 1:6; Eph. 1:18, etc.

5 Cf. Rom. 5:17, 21; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 9:14; 12:9; Eph. 1:5–6; 2:9–10; Phil. 1:6; 2:13; Titus 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10.

6 See chapter 9, under “The Three Stages of Salvation,” and chapter 17.

7 Luke 21:28—ultimate; Rom. 3:24; 8:23—bodily; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30—ultimate; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15—general.

8 See chapter 8.

9 See below, under “Sacrificial (Substitutionary) Atonement.”

10 Such as Ezek. 37:1–10; Matt. 17:11; John 1:13; 3:6–7; Acts 3:21; Rom. 8:21; 1 Cor. 15:27; 1 Peter 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18; Rev. 21:1.

11 *Huiothesia*: Rom. 8:15, 23—of resurrection; 9:4—of Israel; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5.

12 Far from being a denigration of women, Galatians is a revolutionary declaration of their equality and freedom (cf. 3:26–29).

13 Rom. 5:10 [twice]; 1 Cor. 7:11—regarding marriage; 2 Cor. 5:18–20.

14 Rom. 5:11; 11:15—of Gentiles; 2 Cor. 5:18–19.

15 Matt. 3:15; 5:6, 10; 6:13–20; Phil. 1:11.

16 Rom. 1:17; 4:3–13, 22; 5:17; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 2:21; 3:6, 21; 5:5; Phil. 3:9; Heb. 11:7; James 2:23.

17 Acts. 13:39; Rom. 2:13; 3:4, 20–30; 4:2–5; 5:1, 9; 8:30, 33; Gal. 2:16; 3:8, 11, 24; James 2:21–25.

18 See chapter 13.

19 ibid.

20 See also chapters 11 and 16.

21 See also *Regeneration*, above.

22 NKJV, hearkening back to the Old Testament image of God meeting the sinner at the mercy seat and blood atonement being made for his sins.

23 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

24 See chapter 5, above.

25 See Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, *A Concordance of the Septuagint*, 1.890–91.

26 For example, Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 2:9; 1 Peter 2:21; 3:18; 4:1.

27 The use of *anti* in the sense of substitution is also found in other passages—e.g., Rom. 12:17; Heb. 12:2; 1 Peter 3:9.

28 Cf. Rom. 1:18; 2:5, 8; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5; Eph. 2:3; 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:16; 5:9.

29 See chapter 5.

30 See chapters 10–11.

31 See appendix 5 for more detail.

32 In the Greek aorist tense.

33 Op. cit.

34 See appendix 5 for further discussion.

35 See chapter 3.

36 ibid., under “Freedom to Do Only Good Is Not the Loss of True Freedom.”

37 See Volume 4, chapter 3.

38 See chapter 6.

39 See Volume 2, chapters 13–15.

40 ibid., chapters 4–5.

41 See chapter 4.

42 See Volume 2, chapters 4 and 15.

43 See Volume 2, chapter 12, and Volume 1, chapters 16 and 26.

44 See chapter 13.

45 See chapter 12.

46 See chapter 16.

47 See chapter 13.

48 Op. cit.

49 That is, for it to be applied.

50 We all die—Romans 5:12.

51 See chapter 16.

52 By preferring hell, which is absolute separation from God.

53 See Volume 2, chapter 12, and Volume 1, chapters 16 and 26.

54 See above, under *Atonement*.

55 Recall also that it is incorrect to make *salvation* wholly synonymous with *justification*. Salvation also includes sanctification and glorification, and sanctification (purification) is indeed what "redirects human behavior" and "alters our propensity to sin."

56 To have nominal faith is to have faith in name only rather than true or actual faith.

57 See chapter 16.

58 See also citations from chapter 8 and from earlier in this chapter.

59 See chapter 8.

1 The first part of this chapter is based on the discussion in Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

2 See chapters 16–17 for an extensive examination of these and other beliefs about salvific conditions.

3 That is, while God does not save us *as a reward* for our works, He does save us for good works—see, for instance, Ephesians 2:10.

4 Named after the city in which it was held—Trento, about seventy miles northwest of Venice. Trent (1545–

1563, in discontinuous sessions) confirmed and restandardized Catholic doctrines that its attendees felt were threatened and/or denied by the Protestant Reformation. Its established liturgy, to be exclusively used by the Church, was called the *Tridentine Mass*.

[5] Luther was a devout Catholic monk whose original intention was to reform the Roman Catholic Church, not to start a new movement outside of it. The Church took that step itself by excommunicating him.

[6] However, extrinsic justification was not totally absent, particularly in the writings of the early church fathers. Thomas Oden has unveiled patristic material that reveals Paul's teaching on "salvation by grace alone through faith alone" was by no means foreign or unfamiliar (see his *Justification Reader* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]).

[7] John Calvin was one of these "others."

[8] Meaning that justification is not immediately complete or final but is carried into the process of sanctification (purification).

[9] Meaning, then, that justification is not complete without sanctification.

[10] Adherents to the comprehensive doctrine of Thomas Aquinas.

[11] This is true, but it is necessary to further affirm that He does so without eliminating human freedom.

[12] Justification through God's work, and then justification through our own work, respectively.

[13] Or at least the "quality" of it—"the reward is in proportion."

[14] While Protestants sometimes refer to the "reward" of eternal life in the sense of it being a gift graciously given by God, they do not believe *salvation* is based on our works—eternal life is founded on God's grace, received through our faith.

[15] Catholics believe justification occurs at infant baptism. See Trent, "Decree on Justification," chapter 8.

[16] That progressive justification (i.e., sanctification) is obtained by good works.

[17] See chapter 16.

[18] Recall that the English word *salvation* refers to three stages: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

[19] The Second Council of Orange (A.D. 529) stated: "We also believe and profess for our salvation that in every good work it is not we who begin and afterwards are helped by God's mercy, but He Himself who, without any previous merits on our part, first instills in us faith in Him and love for Him so that… we may with His help accomplish what is pleasing to Him. Therefore we must clearly believe that the wonderful faith of the thief whom the Lord called to His home in paradise [Luke 23:43] … did not come from nature but was a gift from the bounty of divine grace." (See Neuner and Dupuis, eds. *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*.

[20] A belief we do not share—see chapter 11.

[21] e.g., John Wesley, William Carey, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Hudson Taylor, William and Catherine Booth, Charles Finney, Billy Sunday, Dwight Moody, Billy Graham, Bill Bright, Luis Palau.

[22] See Volume 1, chapter 5, for a detailed explanation of the principles of rational thinking.

[23] Scripture also condemns homosexual activity among pagans who did not have the law of Moses (cf. Lev. 18; 20). That moral law (e.g., natural law) exists outside the Mosaic Law demonstrates the Protestant point that "works" in Romans 3 is not limited to works of the Mosaic Law; the condemnations of sin are more broadly applicable than the immediate context in which they arose.

[24] *Eisegesis* is the interpretation of a text using preconceived ideas—reading *into* a text rather than reading *out of* a text (which is *exegesis*). In this case, eisegesis is reading into the text a distinction that isn't there. (From the Greek *eis, into* or *in,* and *ek from* or *out from*.)

[25] That is, declared forensically or legally righteous.

[26] If we are wrong—that is, if Paul *did* mean the Galatians could lose their justification (as Arminians contend)—it would not help but would merely intensify the problem for the Catholic view. In such a case, for Christians, failure to do good works leads to the loss of both sanctification (progressive righteousness) *and* justification (initial righteousness), meaning that lack of good works is a forfeiture of eternal life.

[27] In this case, not only reading into the text what isn't there but reading exactly the *opposite* of what's there.

[28] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its teaching on sin (mortal and venial), says, "*Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it."

[29] For more on the role of repentance in justification, see chapters 16–17.

[30] Again, some even admit to God's forensic declaration of the believer's righteousness.

[31] "After All He's Done for Me," words and music by Betsy Daasvand and Wendell P. Loveless.

[32] Vatican II was the most prominent Catholic council after Trent.

[33] The seven sacraments administered by the Roman Catholic Church are *baptism, confirmation, communion (Eucharist), marriage (matrimony),* the *priesthood (Holy Orders), penance (confession, reconciliation)* and *extreme unction*.

[34] *Fiducial* faith is faith involving trust or confidence.

[35] Yet not in the same way as through the Catholic Eucharist.

[36] For an explanation of the various views on this sacrament, see Volume 4.

[37] The need for priestly consecration of the elements.

38 See Volume 1, chapters 6 and 10 on causes.

39 Again, Protestantism contains intramural differences on this—subsequent works are variably believed to be *natural, automatic, inevitable,* or *necessary*. See under "True Believers Manifest Their Faith in Good Works," below.

40 As stated earlier, according to Roman Catholics, works are normatively but not absolutely necessary, since a convert may die immediately after regeneration at baptism.

**41** In this section, biblical, theological, and historical dimensions are examined together.

42 Through the process, intramural debate among evangelicals will become apparent.

43 Strong Calvinists insist they affirm that synergistic acts (by which we are sanctified) are *free* acts; in response, we note that strong Calvinism does not mean these acts are free in the sense that a person could have chosen otherwise (i.e., libertarian freedom); for strong Calvinism, such decisions flow from a God-given desire that cannot be resisted or rejected. Hence, it is meaningless for strong Calvinists to call these choices "free" while holding that they ultimately resulted out of "irresistible grace on the unwilling." See Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, chapters 2, 6; appendices 1, 4–5, 9.

44 New life can be stunted if it is not cultivated (cf. Heb. 5:12–6:1); thus, the Bible urges us to feed this natural desire for growth (1 Peter 2:2).

45 Cf. Eph. 2:8–10; Phil. 2:12–13; Titus 2:11–13; 3:5–8; James 1:26–27; 2:12–13; 2 Peter 1:5–8; 1 John 3:16–18.

46 See chapter 17.

47 For instance, Zane Hodges writes: "The faith that receives so great a salvation has the utter directness of childlike *trust*" (*AF*, 60, emphasis added). Also, of Abraham's act of saving faith, "this act of *trust* was put down to his account as righteousness" (ibid., 32, emphasis added).

48 Regarding faith and repentance, Ryrie makes a solid point in teaching that repentance without faith does not save, since *repentance*, on its own, simply means "to change one's mind" (about anything). Thus, "the only kind of repentance that saves is a change of mind about *Jesus Christ*" (*SGS*, 88, emphasis added).

49 Hodges' attempt to make "repentance" refer only to the believer *after* conversion (*AF*, chapter 12) is without foundation. For specifics, see chapter 17, below. For a more balanced view, see Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 82–90.

50 Acts 5:32; 2 Thess. 1:8; cf. Rom. 15:18; Heb. 5:9; 1 Peter 4:7.

51 A symbol for believers, as opposed to "tares," which are unbelievers; cf. Matthew. 13:25 KJV.

52 Since there is no Greek indefinite article (*a* or *an*), the sentence might better be translated, "There is sin that leads to death."

53 James addresses them as "brothers" (v. 19); the context is about believers who sin (v. 16) and "wander

from the truth" (v. 19).

54 See chapter 11.

55 See his *Absolutely Free* 105–12.

56 Hodges' view on James 2 (see his Epistle of James, 62–63) is that James is not referring to the nonsaving faith of an unbeliever but to sterile faith of an actual believer. While this is a textually possible interpretation, it is against the mainstream historical interpretation of James' letter (see chapter 17, below). At any rate, this is not a critical link in the overall argument that works flow naturally from true faith.

57 Hodges takes this as a reference to the seed of a new life planted by God in believers that is incapable of sin. In other words, a believer controlled by the new nature cannot sin; if he continues in sin, it is evidence he is not controlled by his new nature. Since interpretation of this section of 1 John is difficult and hotly debated, one cannot be dogmatic about it.

58 See Volume 2, part 1.

59 See Volume 2, part 2.

60 See chapters 4–6.

61 See chapter 16.

62 Some Wesleyans sould balk at putting it this way, but they do admit that certain bad works can prompt the loss of salvation.

63 "Serious" means a deliberate sin but not apostasy.

64 *Classical* Arminians (the followers of Arminius) disagree.

1 The others are *T* for *total depravity*, *U* for *unconditional election*, *L* for *limited atonement*, and *I* for *irresistible grace*.

**2** For a more elaborate discussion of the positions addressed here, see J. Matthew Pinson, ed. *Four Views on Eternal Security*.

3 Thomas Brooks offered these as signs of "well-grounded assurance": (1) Be active in exercising grace; (2) Obtain assurance by obedience; (3) Follow diligently the instructions of the Holy Spirit; (4) Be diligent in attendance upon [Christ's] ordinances; (5) Pay particular attention to the scope of God's promises of mercy; (6) Excel in those particular things that may clearly and fully distinguish you not only from the profane, but also from the highest and most glittering hypocrites in all the world; (7) Seek to grow and increase in grace more and more (*Heaven on Earth*, 150–71).

4 To be sure, many strong Calvinists speak about both the reality of present assurance and the evidences for it (e.g., see William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, 172, and R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 167–68). However, they then proceed to remind themselves that such assurance could be false and that Christians must endure faithfully to the end in order to be sure.

[5] Some take these verses as referring to confirmation of a believer's election *to outsiders* (e.g., see Hodges, *AF*, 174ff., 200). Be that as it may, this would only make the confirmation indirect (through outsiders). Further, given the many warnings about false believers (e.g., cf. Matt. 7:22), every confessing believer is well advised to know what genuine saving faith is and whether he has exercised it.

[6] See Volume 1, chapter 5, on practical logic.

[7] He is—see Volume 1, chapters 15–16, 26, and Volume 2, chapter 12, appendix 1.

[8] See also Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:11, 22–24; 5:13–21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9.

[9] Contrary to the claims of strong Calvinism, Romans 8:29–30 does not prove that the Atonement is limited in its *extent*; what it demonstrates is that the Atonement is limited in its *application*. The "call" here refers to the *effectual* calling of the elect, not the *general* call, offer, or command for all to be saved (cf. Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9; see also chapter 12).

[10] God still loves even people who are in hell, but they are *separated* from His love, having refused it in favor of isolation. See, for example, C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

[11] See chapter 16.

[12] *Sanctified* (Gk: *egapemenois*) is in the perfect tense, which indicates here a past action with continuing results in the present.

[13] Calvinists of various varieties interpret the "warning passages" differently. Some, following John Calvin, take them as hypothetical rather than actual (meaning that *falling* cannot truly happen, even though the concept is posed theoretically). Others, like this author, consider them to be actual (literally possible) but regarding the loss of our *rewards* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15) not the forfeiture of our *salvation*. See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant King*, for a treatment of "loss of rewards."

[14] Remember too the distinction that has been made between *faith* and *faithfulness*.

[15] Robert Gromacki has a similar list in *Salvation Is Forever*, 177–83.

[16] This implausibility is precisely what Paul, in Romans 8:29–30, implies isn't accurate.

[17] The reasons that salvation cannot be *returned or relinquished* are contained in the responses below.

[18] See Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences*, chapter 12.

[19] *Life in the Son*, 334–37.

[20] That is, this passage refers not to the possibility of a believer losing eternal salvation but to the possibility of a believer losing eternal rewards.

[21] See below; see also chapter 16.

[22] Even though, again, true faith may be dormant at times.

[23] In which case, it is argued, if Scripture wanted to designate past action, it would contain the aorist tense.

[24] On this matter, see Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* chapter 9.

[25] An example of a present participle is *realizing*, which can refer to an ongoing action, but not necessarily.

[26] See Zane Hodges, 210–11.

[27] The aorist indicates a decisive kind of action, not the duration of the action.

[28] Not only has this been shown to be incorrect, but we have actually demonstrated that this would be the opposite of the truth—see chapters 3 and 5.

[29] See Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 882–86, for a complete listing of such verses. Also, consult Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security*, for a discussion of the most important of these passages.

[30] Or *hell* (John 17:12); this phrase is also used of the antichrist in 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

[31] *Metanoeo* means "repentance."

[32] As mentioned earlier, free-grace proponent Zane Hodges recognizes that true faith involves "trust" (*AF*, 32, 60). But what we truly trust, we naturally act upon—true faith involves repentance and obedience (cf. Acts 20:21; Rom. 16:26). Hodges also acknowledges that true faith "appropriates" Christ (*AF*, 40), thereby implying that there is a kind of faith that does not. Hodges' admittance that there is a difference between a dead faith and an operative faith amounts to tacit acceptance of the "belief *that*/belief *in*" distinction (which he rejects), namely, the former does not bring salvation while the latter does.

[33] The fundamental point of Galatians is that progressive sanctification, like initial justification, is by faith and not by works. The emphasized and bracketed words help bring out the contextually correct meaning: *Did you receive the Spirit [initial justification] by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?* Are you so foolish? *After beginning with the Spirit [by faith], are you now trying to attain your goal [of progressive sanctification] by human effort?*… Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard? … All who rely on observing the law are under a curse.… "*The righteous will live* [the life of sanctification as well as the act of justification] *by faith*. (3:2–3, 5, 10–11)

[34] See chapter 10.

[35] The references to these "books" are possibly figures of speech describing God's omniscience about all things.

[36] See above, under “God Cannot Deny Himself.”

[37] *Apollutai*, in 1 Corinthians 8:11, is derived from *apollumi*.

[38] Paul says in 1 Cor. 8:13 that “if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.” The word translated *fall* is the Greek *skandaliso*, from which the English terms *scandal* and *scandalize* net derived. Paul, in teaching that we must not scandalize a weaker brother, is not implying that we can be the cause of his *salvific* loss; to *skandaliso* is “to cause to stumble, to offend, to shock, to pain.”

[39] Paul called them “brethren” (6:1) *after* he told them they had “fallen away from grace” (5:4).

[40] See below on 6:4–6 and 10:26–29.

[41] Which is an “eternal redemption,” 9:12.

[42] From the Greek *metanoia*.

[43] Notice that the church is then invited by Christ to “dine” (i.e., “commune”) with Him in verse 3:20 KJV.

[44] A survey of the Gospels shows that when the subject of hell *was* relevant, Jesus addressed it.

[45] The rendering “book of life” does not follow the best manuscript tradition; “tree of life” is better attested. Either way, it possesses no insurmountable problem for eternal security; it could be another way to designate unbelievers by noting that they have no place in the kingdom.

[46] That is, not everyone who is initially saved (regenerated) will ultimately be saved.

[47] Martin Luther did not accept eternal security, since he maintained, like Augustine, that some of the regenerate were not elect (see Augustine, *CG*, XX.8).

[48] Or “untrue believers.”

[49] H. Orton Wiley notes, however, that “the assurance is the fruit, and not the essence, of faith” (*CT*, 375–76).

[1] See under “Response to Objection Three” (below) for an explanation of God’s *ultimate* will and His *immediate* will.

[2] John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980, new ed.), 1.87–88; cf. 2.77.

[3] From Greek *kosmos*; for example, cf. 3:16–19; 6:33; 6:51; 8:12; 8:23–26; 12:46–47; 14:31; 16:8; etc.

[4] Likewise, it was not Jesus but His unbelieving brothers who used *world* in an exaggerated sense when they said: “No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world” (John 7:4). Here, “show yourself to the world” is used as a figure of speech meaning to act in public and not in secret, to use the very words of the text.

[5] Paul used *world* in Romans 1:8 in a generic (unlimited) sense and in Colossians 1:5–6 (cf. v. 23) in a specific (limited) sense. Even so, strong Calvinists don't suggest that Paul does not use *world* generically of the *condemnation* of the whole human race in Romans 3:19; why, then, should they deny that *world* is used generically when in regard to *providing salvation* for the world in Romans 5:18–19? (see below).

[6] The word *elect* is a regular part of New Testament vocabulary (cf. Matt. 24:24, 31; Luke 18:7; 1 Peter 1:2, 6), including Paul's (cf. Rom. 8:33; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 5:21; Titus 1:1). The same is true of the words *some* and *few*, which Paul did not use in this case.

[7] Only universalists say yes; see chapter 13.

[8] See chapters 16–17.

[9] From Greek *dikaioma*, *dikaiosis*.

[10] See chapter 13.

[11] See chapter 9, under "Justification."

[12] Op. cit.

[13] It does not follow from this, as some Arminians infer, that everything in the opposing column (under "Adam") is *also* only potential for all persons until they actualize it by their own sins: (1) Again, the phrase "not like" (vv. 15–16) differentiates the two sides of the comparison; (2) Paul says that some of the consequences of Adam's sins (such as physical death) are automatic, without any choice on our part (vv. 12–14); and (3) no such qualifying terms like *receive* (v. 17) are used of the consequences of Adam's sin (as they are of appropriating the *gift* of salvation that Christ provided for all).

[14] From "A Critical Text—C. H. Spurgeon on 1 Timothy 2:3–4" as cited in Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching*, 150, 154.

[15] "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The doubts regard the question as to whether *many* means "all" or "few."

[16] See above, under "John 1:29" and "John 12:47."

[17] Greek *anthropon*, from *anthropos*, meaning "human being, individual, person."

[18] See chapters 16–17, below.

[19] See chapter 11.

[20] They are called "false prophets," "false teachers," those "denying the Lord" (v. 1 KJV), those who bring on themselves "destruction" (v. 1) and "judgment" (v. 4), those compared to fallen and unredeemable angels cast into "hell" (v. 4), the "wicked" (v. 7 NKJV), the "unjust" (v. 9 NKJV), "natural brute beasts" (v. 12 KJV), "dog[s]" (v. 22), and "slaves of corruption" (v. 19 NKJV).

[21] The Greek word *kurios* (*Lord*) is also sometimes used of humans.

[22] For instance, Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Timothy 2:21; Jude 4; Revelation 6:10.

[23] Jude likewise establishes soteriological context by writing of "salvation" and God's "grace" (vv. 3–4).

[24] "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of *the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*."

[25] See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1; and Volume 1, chapters 15–16, 26.

[26] See Volume 1, chapter 9, on the linguistic precondition for systematic theology.

[27] See R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 197. R. K. McGregor offers the same reasoning in *No Place of Sovereignty*, 169.

[28] We have noted that extreme Calvinists unsuccessfully attempt to avoid this conclusion by pointing to the geographical instances of words like *world*, such as *all* in Romans 1:8 or *every nation* in Acts 2:5. This, again, is a diversion from the issue. Demonstrating that geographical usage is limited has no bearing on the universality of generic and *salvific* usage (e.g., Rom. 3:19, 23; 5:12).

[29] Leaving the doctrine's adherents in the aforementioned situation where either (a) Christ didn't die for everyone or (b) universalism is valid.

[30] See also chapter 9, under "Objection Two."

[31] Paul had this passionate love for them *even though* he knew only a remnant would be rescued (Rom. 11:1–5).

[32] "For everyone" as opposed to "for only the elect."

[33] Supplementing Ephesians 5, other verses likewise reveal a unique love of Christ for His church, which is the belief of all Calvinists (in distinction from Arminians). What separates moderate Calvinists from extreme Calvinists is that the former affirm and the latter deny that Christ also died for the non-elect and desires that they too experience this unparalleled love (of which marriage is an illustration).

[34] Again, it is the *application* of the Atonement that is limited, and that by the will of rebellious humankind.

[35] We have observed that many other New Testament passages also teach substitutionary atonement (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Peter 2:22; 3:18).

[36] Cf. Matt. 25:40–41; 2 Thess. 1:7–9; Rev. 20:10–15.

[37] See chapters 16–17.

[38] See chapter 7, under "Objection Three."

[39] For example, see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 148–50. On double-predestination, see appendix 3, below.

40 As mentioned in chapter 7, *hate* (Gk: *emisesa*, from *miseo*), more accurately means “to love less” or “to regard with less affection,” rather than “not to love at all” or “not to will the good of the person.”

41 “The former [*loved*] implies strong positive attachment and the latter [*hated*], not positive hatred, but merely less love” (Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God’s Strategy in Human History*, 60).

42 Inversely stated, “If anyone loves me less or regards me with less affection than his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple.”

43 See chapters 3 and 13.

44 We have already established that this is the pattern when *all* is used generically or in the context of salvation in the New Testament.

45 Indeed, the entire *chapter* is about physical resurrection.

46 John McLeod Campbell, however, rejected limited atonement.

47 See note under “Romans 8:16” in chapter 2.

48 For an excellent treatment of this whole matter, see Robert Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*.

49 See appendix 3.

50 See Volume 2, chapter 15.

**51** Again, the essential grounds for God’s omnibenevolence were stated in Volume 2, chapter 15, but several are germane to this discussion.

52 ibid., chapter 5.

53 ibid., chapter 2.

54 ibid., chapter 3.

**55** The basic objections to God’s omnibenevolence were also answered in Volume 2, chapter 15, but they are sufficiently significant as to require restatement.

56 ibid., chapter 7.

57 ibid., chapter 22.

58 See chapter 16.

59 See chapter 13.

60 See note under “Response to Alternative One” in chapter 6.

61 See part 1.

62 See Volume 2, chapter 4.

63 ibid., chapter 2.

64 ibid., chapter 14.

65 ibid., chapter 2.

66 The contrast, again, being between voluntarism, which holds that something is right because God (voluntarily) wills it, and essentialism, which maintains that God wills something because it is (essentially) right.

67 This poses an interesting conundrum between extreme Calvinism and open theism. If God’s attributes are *not* essential, then He could change them—for instance, He could voluntarily decide not to know future free acts. But strong Calvinists, arguing against open theism, insist that God *cannot* do this. Can they have it both ways? It would seem that if God can voluntaristically limit one of His attributes (e.g., love), then He could also choose to limit other attributes (e.g., knowledge). If so, strong Calvinists must either give up their argument against open theism or give up their belief in limited atonement.

68 Both of which are entirely unacceptable. See Volume 2, chapter 15, and chapter 13, below.

69 See chapter 3.

70 Note, however, that this option is not available to the extreme Calvinist, for while it would affirm God’s omnibenevolence, it would invalidate his view of God’s omnipotence.

71 Op. cit.

72 See below, under “Later Augustine.”

73 The best refutation of Augustine is Augustine. Earlier he wrote: “*Sin is so much a voluntary evil that it is not sin at all unless it is voluntary*” (*OTR*, 14, emphasis added). “Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will, since this consideration also would have helped me, that justice holds guilty those sinning by evil will alone, although they may have been unable to accomplish what they willed” (*TSAM*, 10.12). “Either, then, *will is itself the first cause of sin*, or the first cause is without sin” (*OFW*, 3.49, emphasis added). “*Free will*, naturally assigned by the Creator to our rational soul, *is such a neutral power*, as can either incline toward faith, or turn toward unbelief” (*OSL*, 58, emphasis added). “*Whoever has done anything evil by means of one unconscious or unable to resist, the latter can by no means be justly condemned*” (*TSAM*, 10.12, emphasis added).

*74*

John Calvin, noting the difference between Augustine’s initial and subsequent views, observed that earlier Augustine explained God “hardening” unbeliever’s hearts as His foreseeing their act of will, while later Augustine held that God was actively hardening their hearts (*ICR*, II.IV.3): “Even Augustine was not always

free from this superstition, as when he says, that *blinding and hardening have respect not to the operation of God*, but to prescience (*Lib. De Predestina. Et Gratia*). But this subtlety is repudiated by *many passages of Scripture, which clearly show that the divine interference amounts to something more than prescience*" (emphasis added).

Calvin continued, "Augustine himself, in his book against Julian, contends at length that sins are manifestations not merely of divine permission or patience, but also of divine power, that thus former sins may be punished. In like manner, what is said of permission is too weak to stand. God is very often said to blind and harden the reprobate, to turn their hearts, to incline and impel them, as I have elsewhere fully explained" (*ICR*, II.IV.3).

75 Emphasis added in the following quotations.

76

Calvin went on to say, "John's purpose was only to make this blessing common to the whole Church. Therefore, under the word *all* he does not include the reprobate, but refers to all who would believe and those who were scattered through various regions of the earth" (*CC*, on 1 John 2:2).

By this Calvin clearly denies universalism *and* affirms the sufficiency of Christ's death for the whole world, even though it is "common to" (i.e., shared by) "the whole Church," since they alone have actually received the gift of salvation.

77 Calvin seems to have verbally overstated his point here in the heat of the battle against the heretical claim made by Tilemann Heshusius (1527–1588) that even the wicked can receive benefit from communion "by the mouth bodily without faith." In context Calvin's intention is clear, namely, to say that only those who believe actually enter into the benefits of Christ's death.

1 A close cousin to universalism—see Volume 4, chapter 13.

2 Put out of existence.

3 The teachings of Origen were the object of this condemnation. Some believe that the "eleventh anathema," which condemned Origen, was a later interpolation (see F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., 340).

4 And Christ repeated—see Matthew 22:44.

5 See Volume 4, chapter 15.

6 See also comments on Ephesians 1:10.

7 See also comments on Rom. 11:26.

8 See Volume 4, chapters 14 and 16.

9 See chapter 16.

10 See chapter 9.

[11] It is possible that this is what makes children who die before the age of accountability savable, since Christ died for the judicial guilt imputed to them because of Adam's sin, and they have not yet actualized their own sinful rebellion against God (see chapter 15).

[12] See Volume 4, chapter 11.

[13] See Volume 1, chapter 27.

[14] In fact, He *cannot*, as it would violate His own nature. See Volume 2, chapters 7, 15, and 23, as well as chapters 3 and 12, above.

[15] See also "Theological Arguments Offered for Universalism," below.

[16] See Volume 4, chapter 11.

[17] See chapter 16.

[18] ibid.

[19] From the Greek *euaggelizo*, "to evangelize, to preach the Gospel to."

[20] From the Greek *kerusso*, "to herald," "to proclaim."

[21] As the NIV upholds.

[22] See "Theological Arguments Offered for Universalism" and "An Evaluation of Universalism," below.

[23] See Volume 4, chapter 10.

[24] See C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

[25] See Volume 2, chapter 8.

[26] See Volume 4, chapter 10.

[27] See Volume 2, part 1.

[28] See chapter 9.

[29] See Volume 2, chapter 9.

[30] Cf. Gen. 1:27; see Volume 2, chapter 19.

[31] See Volume 2, chapter 15.

[32] ibid., chapter 13.

[33] ibid., chapter 16.

[34] Cf. Matt. 5, 10, 25; see also Volume 4, chapter 10.

35 Which has rejected other fundamental teachings as well.

[1] Pluralism, relativism, inclusivism, and exclusivism are here defined as applied to *the discussion of religious truth*.

[2] Meaning: truth that exists independently from (and regardless of) our understanding or acceptance of it.

[3] That is, while one worldview clearly and unambiguously presents truth, others possess the same truth, even though it is undeveloped, underlying, and perhaps even unexpressed.

[4] See Volume 1, chapter 8, for more background on exclusivism as the oppositional precondition for systematic theology.

[5] See chapters 16–17.

[6] Citing Joel 2:32.

[7] Both the text in Jonah and the words of Jesus imply that their salvation was from more than mere temporal judgment, that it was deliverance from eternal condemnation (cf. Jonah 3:10; 4:2; Matt. 12:41).

[8] For further discussion of salvific requirement, see the more extensive treatment of condition (chapter 16) and content (chapter 17) below.

9 As referenced by the above verses.

[10] See Volume 1, chapter 4, on general and special revelation.

[11] As spelled out in 1 Cor. 15:1–6.

[12] See chapter 15.

[13] Among the myriad means at His disposal to accomplish this are missionaries, literature, angels, visions, and dreams. See chapter 15.

**14** The following material is excerpted from Volume 1, chapter 8.

15 The alleged moral and spiritual equality of all religions.

[16] As did Paul in his teaching regarding the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23), and as did John regarding God's love (1 John 4:7).

[17] See Volume 1, chapters 4 and 9.

[18] See also Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy*, 61.

19 As we saw in Volume 2 (and in chapter 2, above), begging the question (Lat: *petito principii*) is the logical fallacy committed when one assumes, as a premise, the same conclusion he aims to prove with his argument.

20 It may show that there is good in the lives of Mormons, but it says nothing about the truth claims of their faith.

21 See Gerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism*, chapter 14.

22 See Volume 1, chapter 7 on truth as the epistemological precondition for systematic theology.

23 Or, even "better" lives than adherents of other religions.

24 Cf. John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 1 John 3:3.

25 See Volume 1, chapter 3, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

26 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (Houghton-Mifflin Electronic Publishing, 2000, 4th ed.) denotes *tautology* as "an empty or vacuous statement composed of simpler statements in a fashion that makes it logically true whether the simpler statements are factually true or false; for example, the statement 'Either it will rain tomorrow or it will not rain tomorrow.' "

27 See Volume 1, chapter 3, regarding the alleged incredibility of miracles.

28 See ibid., chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapters 18 and 24.

29 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 10.

30 ibid., chapter 2.

31 ibid., chapter 26.

32 ibid.

33 See his *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

34 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

35 "He could not do any miracles [in Nazareth], except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."

36 See Volume 2, chapter 12, under "Heresies Regarding God and Christ."

37 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

38 The fact that truth is exclusive, however, gives no one license to apply it unlovingly (e.g., Luke 11:42; 1 Cor. 13:3)—the truth is true on its *own* merit, and while someone who possesses truth *discovered* it, he didn't *create* it.

39 See Volume 1, chapter 5.

40 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

41 For instance, certain finite godists—ibid., chapter 2.

42 ibid., chapters 1 and 3.

43 See Volume 2, chapter 18.

44 See Volume 1, chapters 3 and 26, and Volume 2, chapter 12.

45 These issues are addressed more thoroughly in Volume 1. See chapter 6 on semantics (and on realism as opposed to essentialism or conventionalism) and chapter 7 on truth and epistemology.

46 See Norman L. Geisler, "Agnosticism" and "Truth, Nature of" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

47 The idea that there is nothing in the Real (or "the Ultimate") that correlates with our ideas or conceptualizations of It.

48 *Void* or *emptiness*, often as applied to the self.

49 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 10.

50 See Volume 1, chapter 7.

51 See Volume 1, chapters 5 and 8.

52 See Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, part 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993).

53 See Volume 1, chapter 2, and Volume 2, chapters 18 and 24.

54 See Volume 1, chapter 26.

1 See chapters 8–9.

2 See chapter 10.

3 See Volume 4.

4 See chapter 13.

5 Commenting on "things the angels desire to look into"—the curious phrase in 1 Peter 1:12 (KJV)—Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905) wrote: "Here then, the intention is to show that we are in a better position to understand the mysteries of redemption … than angels; and they covet to [move] from their own point of view to ours. And why so? Not because of the inherent mysteriousness … but because they are

incapable of fully understanding human nature, flesh and blood, with its temptations and pains, its need of a Saviour. In [Francesco] Francia's great picture, the two angels kneel by weeping Mary and dead Christ without a trace of grief on their countenances" (*Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 7, 393–94).

6 See Volume 1, chapter 4, on general and special revelation, and below, under "The Results of Salvation on the Heathen."

7 See Volume 4, chapter 11.

8 See chapter 16.

9 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16, and chapter 12, above, under "The Theological Basis for an Unlimited Atonement."

10 See Volume 2, chapter 20, and chapter 6, above.

11 See Volume 4, chapter 9.

12 *Limbo* comes from the Latin *limbus*, literally meaning "border" or "edge." The doctrine of limbo is discussed below.

13 That is, he was certain they were not in hell, but he was not certain they were in heaven.

14 The Anabaptists, historically, rejected infant baptism and "re-baptized" (Gk: *ana* and *baptizo*) adult believers. (Anabaptists also rejected certain other Catholic and Lutheran doctrines.) Contemporarily, the term broadly applies to Christian denominations that baptize believers *after* their decision to follow Christ.

15 See, for example, John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:35, 40; 11:25–26; Acts 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 4:5.

16 See chapter 16.

17 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16.

18 See below, under "The All-Infant Views."

19 Generally speaking, Protestants are those who maintain the basic salvation teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. Catholics, for instance, believe also in purgatory, a doctrine derived in part from the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees (cf. 12:43–46).

20 That is, through special revelation.

21 This verse depicts Jesus taking little children into His arms and blessing them.

22 The doctrinal statements of the Synod of Dort (or "Dordrecht," 1618–1619), officially titled "The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands." The decrees were issued in response to the growing prominence of Arminianism.

23 For example, see Ronald Nash, *When a Baby Dies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

[24] See chapter 12.

[25] See chapter 5, under “The Judicial (Legal) Effects of Adam’s Sin,” and chapter 12 on salvation’s extent.

[26] See below, under “The Results of Salvation on the Heathen.”

[27] See chapter 5.

[28] Cf. Rom. 2:6; 1 Cor. 6:9–19; 2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11–12.

[29] *Implicit* faith, necessarily, would sooner or later (in heaven) have to become explicit and conscious, otherwise an infant would be in eternal limbo.

[30] *That*, in the phrase “that not of yourself,” is *neuter* in form (gender), but *faith* (Gk: *pisteos*) is *feminine* in form. *Faith*, then, cannot be the gift from God. For further explanation, see the quote from A. T. Robertson (and subsequent note) under comments on Eph. 2:8–9 in chapter 16.

[31] See chapter 16.

[32] In not endeavoring to save all He possibly can.

[33] Op. cit.

[34] The argument that the only infants saved are those who believe when given the opportunity to do so after death (see below).

[35] See below, under “The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil.”

[36] As a modified form of the foreknown-infant view; see *Fourth* under “Critique of the Foreknown-infant View.”

[37] Assuming, as we do, that third alternatives like annihilation (see Volume 4, chapter 12) and limbo (see below) are unacceptable.

[38] “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”

[39] “He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.”

[40] See chapters 16–17.

[41] That is, have reached the age of accountability—see below, under “The Bible Speaks of Children Too Young to Know Good or Evil.”

[42] For instance, that holding to faith as necessary for salvation precludes the possibility of belief after death.

[43] See chapter 16.

[44] See chapter 3.

[45] See chapter 12, under “Objections to Divine Essentialism.”

[46] His conclusion, cited above, is that only a Calvinist can consistently maintain the salvation of all who die before the age of accountability.

[47] Op. cit.

[48] See his *Safe in the Arms of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000).

49 From Gk: *paidion*, in Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16–17.

[50] From Gk: *brephos* in 18:15.

[51] That is, have not developed to the point of having moral awareness (conscientiousness).

[52] Logically, this includes infants.

[53] See chapters 5 and 12.

[54] See chapter 13.

[55] See chapter 9 for further discussion.

56 Regardless of whether or not it was overturned by the sacrifice of Christ.

57 In fact, universalists do put forth this same phrase (“made righteous,” in Rom. 5) to support their position.

[58] See chapter 16.

[59] See chapter 16.

[60] This parallels the modified foreknown-infant view.

[61] In biblical terms, we are morally accountable when we are aware of the law written upon our hearts (Rom. 2:15); that is, when we know that what we do is either in keeping with or against God’s standard (cf. Isa. 7:15).

[62] Again, at this point, the position merges with both the foreknown-infant view (see above) and the evangelized-after-death-infant view (see below).

63 Meaning that for Roman Catholics, specifically, the deceased infants who eventuate in limbo are placed there *because* they were not baptized and, therefore, could not be granted (heavenly) salvation.

[64] If not fully or officially *neutral*, then, at the very least, *painless*.

65 See below, under “The Results of Salvation on the Heathen.”

66 See Volume 4, chapter 13.

67 For example, see Ladislaus Boros, *The Mystery of Death*, 109–11.

68 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

69 Such as those with severe mental deficiency.

70 See chapter 17.

71 See chapter 12.

72 See chapter 14.

73 See Volume 1, chapter 4.

74 See chapter 17.

75 *The Witness of the Stars*.

76 See Kenneth C. Fleming, *God’s Voice in the Stars*.

77 Confirming Psa. 62:12 and Prov. 24:12.

78 See chapter 17.

79 See chapter 16.

80 See chapter 16.

81 ibid.

82 See chapter 14.

83 See B. B. Warfield, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, reprint 1988).

84 For the view that infants who die before the age of accountability are given the opportunity to believe after they die, see the discussion above.

85 For instance, Prov. 29:1; Heb. 3:7–8; John 8:24; 2 Peter 3:9.

1 See also chapter 10.

2 That is, evangelical on issues not directly related to soteriology.

3 Or “perseverance of the saints.”

[4] See chapter 11.

[5] See chapter 5.

[6] Op. cit.

[7] That is, Catholicism does not teach that there is something *inherently* meritorious in good works.

[8] That is, while we supposedly "earn" *progressive justification* (sanctification) through our efforts, we obtain *initial justification* solely by God's grace.

[9] Except the disputes over baptismal regeneration without faith and the need for an adult to do penance (i.e., works) before baptism.

[10] *Progressive justification*, for Catholics.

[11] See chapter 10.

[12] Again, this is because saving faith naturally produces good works.

[13] In regard to both justification and sanctification.

[14] Catholic dogma states that "except for Baptism and Matrimony, a special priestly or episcopal power, conferred by Holy Orders, is necessary for the valid ministration of the Sacraments" (Ott, *FCD*, 341).

[15] Either justification, sanctification, or glorification.

[16] See chapter 5.

[17] See chapter 7.

[18] See chapter 12.

[19] See chapter 10.

[20] See chapter 11.

[21] Neither can be *actually* prior to the other, or else someone could have saving faith but not be saved or be saved without having saving faith.

[22] Numerous volumes have been written in support of extreme Calvinism, including *The Five Points of Calvinism* by Edwin H. Palmer, another of the same title by David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, as well as *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* by D. Edward Spencer. Some current books critiquing five-point Calvinism include George Bryson's *The Five Points of Calvinism: Weighed and Found Wanting*; Robert Lightner's *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*; Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston's *God's Strategy in Human History*; and Norman L. Geisler's *Chosen But Free*.

[23] Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1994.

[24] Plainly, their unwillingness to believe was the reason they did not receive salvation.

[25] See chapter 12.

[26] The conservative A. T. (Archibald Thomas) Robertson is not to be confused with the liberal John A. T. (Arthur Thomas) Robinson (1919–1981).

[27] Meaning, Paul's phrase "and that" (*kai touto*) doesn't agree in gender with either "faith" (*pisteos*, which is ours) or "grace" (*chariti*, which is God's) but instead is tied to the act of being saved (*este sesosmenoi*, lit. "you all are having been saved"). See *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 4:525.

[28] Paul did not.

[29] See Gregory Sapaugh, "Is faith a gift?" A study of Ephesins 2:8, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society* 7, no. 12 (Spring 1994):39–40.

[30] See Charles John Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 8.397.

[31] That is, as referring to our personal faith in Christ.

[32]

Conversely, R. C. Sproul succinctly describes extreme Calvinism: "To receive the gift of faith, according to Calvinism, the sinner also must stretch out his hand. But he does so only because God has so changed the disposition of his heart that he will most certainly stretch out his hand. By the irresistible work of grace, he will do nothing else except stretch out his hand" (*Willing to Believe*, 133–34).

As we have seen, *irresistible* means this condition is forced upon the sinner, and there is no plausible explanation for the idea of forced freedom.

[33] See chapter 12.

[34] Literally, "*You are not willing* to come to Me that you may have life" (NKJV).

[35] Even John Calvin, commenting on this text, said, "Luke is speaking of their 'desperate inflexibility' when 'they are said to be resisting the Spirit.' " See *Calvin's Commentaries*, David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, eds. 6.213.

[36] Some have suggested, on the basis of the phrase "toward us" (v. 9 NKJV), that Peter is speaking here not about unbelievers but about believers repenting of their sins (in view of Christ's coming). This is unlikely because (1) in verse 3, the same context, he is speaking of unbelieving scoffers; (2) verse 7 speaks of those who have not repented as "ungodly men"; (3) their destiny is said to be "perdition," not an appropriate description of the destiny of the saved; (4) the use of *any* (in God's stated desire that no one perish) indicates a broader group than believers; and (5) the critical Greek text reads "to you," which separates the class of unbelievers (who need to repent) from the author and other believers (who do not).

[37] For example, Matthew 7:21; 12:50; John 7:17; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 John 2:17.

[38] Astoundingly, one extreme Calvinist says of this passage: "The text says nothing about who will believe

or who can believe" (see Sproul, *WB*, 99). In spite of the fact that Sproul's next sentence modifies this statement by acknowledging that though "it may imply that *some* can or will believe" (emphasis added), this is still contrary to the inspired affirmation, the very words of Jesus Himself, that *whoever* (i.e, *anyone*) can and should believe (cf. John 3:18; 5:40).

39 "Historical and Theological Introduction" in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Packer and Johnston, 59.

40 As posited by classical Arminians and moderate Calvinists.

41 See chapter 5.

42 Cf. John 15:5; 1 Cor. 15:10; 2 Cor. 3:5; 1 Chron. 28:14.

43 That is, divine grace influencing our will before we seek after God.

44 The Churches of Christ are connected with the Disciples of Christ (also known as the Christian Church) and the Independent Christian Churches. The COC came about through a "movement of restoration" that sought to restore the church in America to its interpretation of what they believed was the New Testament gospel.

45 See Bibliography.

46 Meaning, as two elements of the same action.

47 As mentioned above, while the Church of Christ holds that faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are all conditions for salvation, faith goes beyond the status of stipulation to become the method or conduit of eternal life.

48 Cf. John 20:28; Acts 2:36; 10:36; Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; 2 Cor. 4:5; Phil. 2:11.

49 *Confess* (Gk: *homologeses*) and *believe* (Gk: *pisteuses*).

50 Aorist in tense, active in form, subjunctive in mood, and second singular (you) in person.

51 Even granting that some in the Reformed tradition believe in baptismal regeneration (which is inconsistent with "faith alone"), it is still significantly different from the Church of Christ, which also demands both confession and baptism by immersion as a condition of an adult being justified.

52 See below, under "The Relationship Between Faith (Belief) and Repentance."

53 So that those in a Greek culture would understand that in the Hebrew (Old Testament) culture, the "mind" is included in the "heart" (cf. Deut. 6:5).

54 For example, again, Jesus said you should love God with "all your [1] heart, with all your [2] soul, and with all your [3] mind" (Matt. 22:37) without implying that these are three separate steps.

55 "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

56 Nor does he say this elsewhere.

57 John Walvoord, et al., eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 2.481.

58 Cited above, under both "The Roman Catholic View on the Condition(s) for Salvation" and "The Church of Christ View on the Condition(s) for Salvation."

59 As in 1 Cor. 3:11–15, where Paul says, "No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive *his reward*. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved*, but only as one escaping through the flames."

60 See below, under "The Meaning of *Repentance*."

61 See below, under "*Fourth*."

62 See, for instance, Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*.

63 That is, even if *eis*, in this case, is correctly translated "with a view to" or "in order for."

64 These are listed above under "Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation."

65 See Volume 1, chapter 27.

66 One of which, again, is baptism (cf. Matt. 3:15).

67 For example, see Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament;* William D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament;* Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*.

68 That is, "unto Moses," meaning into a relationship with Moses as their spiritual leader.

69 "If we have been united with him *like* this"—Gk: *homoiomati*, from *homoioma*, "likeness" or "similitude."

70 "We were therefore *buried with* him through baptism into death" (Gk: *sunetaphemen*).

71 See also Volume 4, chapter 4.

72 By contrast, the free-grace view (see below, under "The Free-Grace View on the Condition[s] for Salvation") claims that salvation (justification) does not require one's acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Lord but simply acceptance of Him as Savior. Of course, to be given eternal life you must "confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' " (Rom. 10:9) in the sense of proclaiming that Jesus is Deity (meaning, that He is God—see Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1, as well as chapter 17, below), but this is a different matter. The question here is whether one must enthrone Christ as Master of (i.e., *over*) his life in order to become saved.

73 See *The Gospel According to Jesus*, 33–34. The quotation is from Livingston Blauvelt Jr., "Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Jan—Mar 1986), 37.

74 See Bibliography.

75 Later in this chapter (see below, under "What Is the Relationship Between Saving Faith and Repentance?"), two forms of the free grace model are noted—extreme (championed by Hodges) and moderate (championed by Charles Ryrie).

76 Referring to the so-called faith of those alleged to never have truly believed.

77 See below, under "The Free-Grace Position on Obedience and Works."

78 That is, the issue isn't justification but sanctification; James, supposedly, is talking about a lack of growth within the life of one who is already a believer, not about the dark destiny of one who has some kind of "false faith."

79 These differences flow from the nature and object of the faith in question.

80 See chapter 10.

81 Some of these believe repentance is part of faith, while some believe repentance is an additional step.

82 See *So Great Salvation* (Chicago: Moody, 1997).

83 See chapter 10.

84 *Metanoeo* comes from *meta* ("after") and *noeo* ("think," "consider" "perceive," "understand," "comprehend" [see Strong, *NSECB*]).

85 As well as conscience. See chapter 2, under "Various Elements of Human Personhood," and also Volume 2, chapter 12, under "Objection Four—Based on the Traditional Definition of Personhood."

86 This is the evident meaning of some of the following passages.

87 See above, under "Baptism Is Not a Condition for Salvation."

88 "What is the relationship between repentance and faith?"

89 This is somewhat oversimplified, but nevertheless contains significant truth.

90 "To the man who does not work but *trusts* [has faith in] God who justifies the wicked, *his faith* is credited as righteousness."

91 Or, "believe *with a view to*" Christ (Gk: *eis*); cf. John 3:16; Acts 10:43.

92 Or, "believe *upon*" Christ (Gk: *epi*); cf. Acts 16:31; 1 Tim. 1:16.

93 See also chapter 10.

**94** The first three views presented in this chapter—Roman Catholic, extreme Calvinist, and Church of Christ—were demonstrated above to be untenable.

95 Even though he or she must acknowledge sinfulness.

96 See chapter 10.

1 See chapter 16.

2 An intrinsic differentiation is being made in this case between (1) the heir having been given the *opportunity to receive* the money (he wasn't simply handed the cash—he was given the choice either to disregard the voucher or to benefit from it) and (2) the heir *actually having received* the money by cashing the check. Analogously, we have been granted the unconditional opportunity to receive salvation, but we actually receive eternal life through the appropriation of our faith in God's grace.

3 These specific details about my faith in the chair (which is the *object* of my faith) would be the *content* of my faith; again, the *basis* for my faith would be the laws of physics.

4 Or, stated a different way, the absolute minimal belief (faith) needed for salvation.

5 See chapters 12 and 16.

6 As with, for instance, the people of Nineveh (cf. Jonah 3), Rahab the harlot (cf. Heb. 11:31), or Ruth the Moabite (cf. Ruth 1).

7 This, of course, is separate from the question of what God's normative grounds for salvific belief are in *this* era (since the time of the apostles). As indicated earlier (see chapter 14), the answer is belief (faith) in the contents of the gospel as spelled out in 1 Corinthians 15:1–6, which include the death, resurrection, and deity of Christ (for more specifics, see below, under "The Content of Theological Belief Necessary for Salvation").

8 A conclusion we reject on biblical grounds; see chapter 11.

9 That is, the fact of Christ's work would stand even if someone didn't know (and, thus, didn't have faith or belief) that He had done it.

10 We answer yes; see chapters 9, 14–15.

11 We answer no—see below, under "Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age."

12 See under "Biblical Teachings on the Necessary Content of Belief for Salvation."

13 Including, for example, God's existence, God's necessary grace, the necessity of faith, human sinfulness, Christ's virgin birth, Christ's deity, Christ's humanity, Christ's sinlessness, Christ's atoning death, Christ's physical resurrection, Christ's bodily ascension, and even Christ's physical return.

14 *Comprehensive* meaning justification, sanctification, and glorification. See chapter 15, and "Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense," below.

15 See also chapter 11 on eternal security (or *perseverance of the saints*). Below, under "Doctrines That Must Be Explicitly and Normatively Believed for Salvation," we discuss which beliefs are required.

16 See below, under "Doctrines Absolutely Necessary for Salvation in the Broad Sense."

17 For instance, by having faith in the death and resurrection of Christ, while denying the Virgin Birth.

18 For instance, by holding that all orthodox teachings on salvation are true, but never exercising salvific faith in Christ.

19 We address this below in various sections under "The Content of Theological Belief Necessary for Salvation."

20 (Lat.) Literally, "without which not."

21 See chapter 6, on dispensations.

22 See below, under "Two Important Texts."

23 See above, under "The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith."

24 See Volume 1, chapter 4, and chapter 15, above.

25 We address this below, under "Doctrines Normatively Necessary (Explicitly or Implicitly) for Salvation in This Age."

26 Popularly known as the *plan of salvation*.

27 That is, relating to justification, sanctification, and glorification.

28 See part 1 (especially chapter 5).

29 See Volume 1, chapter 29, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

30 See Volume 2, chapter 14 and appendix 1, as well as chapters 9 and 12, above.

31 See Volume 2, chapter 12 and appendix 1.

32 See Volume 1, chapter 16, and Volume 2, appendix 1.

33 See Volume 1, chapter 25, and Volume 2, chapter 12.

34 See Volume 2, chapter 12.

35 See Volume 2, chapters 15–16, and also chapters 6–7, above.

[36] See chapters 12 and 16.

[37] See chapter 12.

[38] See Volume 1, chapters 3, 26, and 29, as well as Volume 2, appendix 1.

[39] See Volume 2, appendix 1, and chapters 6 and 11, above.

[40] ibid.

[41] See chapter 6 as well as Volume 4, chapters 16–17.

[42] See chapter 6.

[43] See chapter 9.

[44] Ontology is the study of being or existence.

[45] Epistemology is the theory or method of knowledge.

46 See Volume 1, chapter 27; cf. Volume 1, chapters 13–14, 22, and 29.

[47] That is, while it would be inconsistent for a person to believe unto salvation and then reject other essential teachings, what we are dealing with here is how a person becomes saved, not how he builds a consistent theology.

[48] For them to be absolutely necessary, God would have to have had no other option (s) to initiate our redemption.

[49] Roman Catholic dogma holds that *Mary* was immaculately conceived. While there is no evidence that this is actually true of her, nonetheless, it is logically possible for God to have done this.

[50] There is substantial debate as to how the Virgin Birth itself helped Christ to evade inheriting Adam's sin nature, since He was genetically connected to His mother (see appendix 4), and she (contrary to Catholic teaching) was sinful, in need of a Savior (cf. Luke 1:46; Rom. 3:23). Some have suggested that God may have created Christ afresh in Mary's womb, thus avoiding His being genetically connected with her and, thereby, with Adam, but this appears to involve a denial of Christ's true human nature as a member of Adam's race and would thereby disqualify Him as the Redeemer of that very race (see appendix 4).

[51] Of course, it is implicit in the belief in Christ's sinlessness.

[52] In other words, our desire for theological consistency does not give us clearance to mandate standards for salvation that God has not established.

[53] Doctrines 7, 2–4, and 10–14, above. At any rate, it would seem that they did not believe in these explicitly.

[54] ibid.

55 Doctrines 6, 1, and 9, above.

56 Though these were not explicitly present in all cases—see above, under "The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith."

57 Recorded in the book of Acts (cf. 19:1ff.).

58 Doctrines 1, 6, and 9, above.

59 Doctrines 4, 10, and 11, above.

60 Doctrine 7, above.

61 A multiplicity of persons within a unity of essence (see Volume 2, chapter 12).

62 Again, all of this suggests that doctrines 2, 3, 12, 13, and 14–Christ's virgin birth, sinlessness, bodily ascension, present session, and second coming—are not *soteriologically required* but still are *ontologically necessary* for salvation in the broad sense.

63 As already stated, it is, of course, absolutely necessary *ontologically* for Christ to have died and been resurrected to make salvation possible.

64 Some deny that explicit belief in Christ's death and resurrection is necessary for salvation today. Even so, they admit that it is necessary for these to be true for our salvation to be possible. Our reasons for rejecting this view in the intramural debate among evangelicals are stated in chapter 15.

65 See also chapter 12, under comments on 2 Peter 2:1.

66 As some cults maintain.

67 Occasionally the New Testament, in other contexts, uses *kurios* of creatures, which in such instances means "master" or "sir." For example, 1 Peter 3:6 records that Sarah called Abraham *kurios*, but the context reveals the difference, not having any of the other attributions like *God*, *worship*, or *prayer to*, as is the case with Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:3; John 19:37).

68 This is not the same as the lordship-salvation debate (see chapter 16), where the question is whether one must enthrone Christ as the Master of his life in order to receive salvation.

69 A *yes* also means it is absolutely necessary for all persons to believe today in order to be saved.

70 A *yes* likewise means that this belief is normatively necessary for salvation for persons in the present, not the past.

71 Again, doctrines 12–14 (Christ's bodily ascension, present session, and second coming) must necessarily be true in order for us to be sanctified/glorified, but not in order for us to be justified. Also, they are necessary beliefs in order for us to be *orthodox*, but not in order for us to be *saved*.

72 These doctrines are part of *fidei implicitus* (implicit faith).

73 Internal heresies.

74 External rejections of Christianity.

75 For example, see above, under “The Difference Between the Object of Faith and the Basis of Faith.”

76 As we have repeatedly seen, Jesus said, “If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins” (John 8:24; cf. 5:28).

77 However, in the absence of clear teaching to the contrary, we can *speculate* as to whether someone who denies Christ’s deity because of improper teaching can be saved. Nothing hinders one from supposing that a gracious God who sees a heart and observes an implicit faith there (that is, a faith that would come to fruition in an affirmation of Christ’s deity, should he or she be more excellently instructed in the way of the Lord) is free to save such a person if He so desires. But, of course, this is mere speculation.

1 Subcommittee on Separation of Powers, report to Senate Judiciary Committee S-158, Ninety-Seventh Congress, first session.

2 Whom fetologists call their second “patient.”

3 See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 275.

4 Otherwise, human life would have a discontinuity between conception and birth (or whenever it would begin again).

5 See chapter 1, under “The Creation View: The Soul Is Created Directly by God.”

1 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

2 An abortifacient is a drug or other substance that facilitates (induces) abortion.

3 See chapter 1.

4 The first fourteen days, or two weeks, after conception.

5 Born in 1927, an Oxford scholar widely acclaimed for her work in biology and genetics. Recently she has served as a member of the U.K. Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority and as chair of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group of the World Health Organization’s Human Reproduction Programme.

6 Except by death.

7 See chapter 1.

8 Over which there is no legitimate debate—see appendix 1.

9 See also chapter 1.

10 See *Life in the Balance: Exploring the Abortion Controversy*, 71.

11 See chapter 1.

1 *Enchiridion* in Philip Schaff, ed. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, 1st series, 100.

2 *Chosen by God*, 141.

3 *Hyper-Calvinism* is a term that encompasses much more than this. In its English manifestation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hyper-Calvinism involved those such as James Wells (1803–1872) and Charles Waters Banks (1806–1886); earlier it was revealed in the works of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726) (see *God's Operations of Grace*) and John Gill (1697–1771) (see *The Cause of God and Truth*). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) identified and opposed four characteristics of the hyper-Calvinist movement (see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: A Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (1) A denial that God's offer of salvation is universal; (2) A denial that the warrant for humans to salvifically believe lies in the command and promise of Scripture; (3) A denial that sinners are responsible to trust Christ; and (4) A denial that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity, 1689–1765*.

4 This chart is similar to one by R. C. Sproul in *Chosen by God*, 143.

5 That is, they are either equally or unequally ultimate decisions of God.

6 Or "extreme" Calvinists.

7 See chapters 4–5, 12.

8 As cited in S. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1992.

9 Cited by Iain Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, 98.

10 In Murray, ibid., 150.

11 See also chapter 12.

12 Cf. Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13. See also chapter 6.

13 *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 115.

14 *The Marrow of Theology*, 154.

15 ibid., 156, final emphasis added.

16 In Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism*, 155–56.

1 See Henry Morris, "Creation and the Virgin Birth" in *Impact* (30: Dec. 1975).

2 See chapter 2.

1 1968 reprint.

2 See chapter 11.

3 Although Wesley never used the word *eradication*, he did use terms that have been taken as the equivalent, such as *destroyed* (from Rom. 6:6).

4 See Grider's *Entire Sanctification: The Distinctive Doctrine of Wesleyanism*.

5 *Putting Away Childish Things: Reaching for Spiritual and Emotional Maturity in Christ*, 10, 13, 17, 49.

6 *Perfectionism*.

7 See Hanegraaff, *Counterfeit Revival*.

8 The Second Council of Orange (529), which condemned semi-Pelagianism, was a local (not universal) council. The later Catholic Council of Trent did allow the semi-Pelagian view.

9 See chapter 5.

10 ibid.

11 See chapters 10 and 16.

12 See chapter 16–17

n Remember that Augustine's occasionalism (recollectionism or illuminationism) implies that the connection between matter and form is one-way; the lower (body) cannot directly impact the higher (soul). God allegedly illumines the mind (or soul) as to the body's experience.

n The only significant deviation from this, up to the Reformation, came from the later Augustine (354–430), whose views on human choice (formulated in response to the donatist controversy) were contrary to the standard of church history, both before and after him, up to the time of Martin Luther (1483–1546). Luther's systematic theologian, Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560), reversed his view, as have Lutherans since. This leaves the extreme Calvinist school, following Jonathan Edwards, isolated from mainstream orthodoxy on the nature of free will in fallen human beings (see chapter 5).

n *Hyper-Calvinism* is a term that encompasses much more than this. In its English manifestation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, hyper-Calvinism involved those such as James Wells (1803–1872) and Charles Waters Banks (1806–1886); earlier it was revealed in the works of Joseph Hussey (1659–1726) (see *God's Operations of Grace*) and John Gill (1697–1771) (see *The Cause of God and Truth*). Charles Spurgeon (1834–1892) identified and opposed four characteristics of the hyper-Calvinist movement (see Iain H. Murray, *Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: A Battle for Gospel Preaching*. (1) A denial that God's offer of salvation is universal; (2) A denial that the warrant for humans to salvifically believe lies in the command and promise of Scripture; (3) A denial that sinners are responsible to trust Christ; and (4) A denial that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Non-Conformity, 1689–1765*.

n

John Calvin (1509–1564) consciously pitted himself against Chrysostom and the rest of the Fathers in saying,

"*We must, therefore, repudiate the oft-repeated sentiment of Chrysostom, 'Whom he draws, he draws willingly'; insinuating that the Lord only stretches out his hand, and waits to see whether we will be pleased to take his aid*. We grant that, *as man was originally constituted, he could incline to either side*, but since he has taught us by his example how miserable a thing free will is if God works not in us to will and to do, of what use to us were grace imparted in such scanty measure?" (*ICR*, 1.2.3.10, 260–61, emphasis added).

n

John Calvin, noting the difference between Augustine's initial and subsequent views, observed that earlier Augustine explained God "hardening" unbeliever's hearts as His foreseeing their act of will, while later Augustine held that God was actively hardening their hearts (*ICR*, II.IV.3): "Even Augustine was not always free from this superstition, as when he says, that *blinding and hardening have respect not to the operation of God*, but to prescience (*Lib. De Predestina. Et Gratia*). But this subtlety is repudiated by *many passages of Scripture, which clearly show that the divine interference amounts to something more than prescience*" (emphasis added).

Calvin continued, "Augustine himself, in his book against Julian, contends at length that sins are manifestations not merely of divine permission or patience, but also of divine power, that thus former sins may be punished. In like manner, what is said of permission is too weak to stand. God is very often said to blind and harden the reprobate, to turn their hearts, to incline and impel them, as I have elsewhere fully explained" (*ICR*, II.IV.3).

n The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in its teaching on sin (mortal and venial), says, "*Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him. *Venial sin* allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it."

n The Churches of Christ are connected with the Disciples of Christ (also known as the Christian Church) and the Independent Christian Churches. The COC came about through a "movement of restoration" that sought to restore the church in America to its interpretation of what they believed was the New Testament gospel.

n *Predestination* means that God has chosen some to be saved. *Double-predestination* means that God has both chosen some to be saved *and* some to be damned (see appendix 3).

n Commenting on "things the angels desire to look into"—the curious phrase in 1 Peter 1:12 (KJV)—Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905) wrote: "Here then, the intention is to show that we are in a better position to understand the mysteries of redemption … than angels; and they covet to [move] from their own point of view to ours. And why so? Not because of the inherent mysteriousness … but because they are incapable of fully understanding human nature, flesh and blood, with its temptations and pains, its need of a Saviour. In [Francesco] Francia's great picture, the two angels kneel by weeping Mary and dead Christ without a trace of grief on their countenances" (*Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Vol. 7, 393–94).

n Calvinists of various varieties interpret the "warning passages" differently. Some, following John Calvin, take them as hypothetical rather than actual (meaning that *falling* cannot truly happen, even though the concept is posed theoretically). Others, like this author, consider them to be actual (literally possible) but regarding the loss of our *rewards* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:15) not the forfeiture of our *salvation*. See Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant King*, for a treatment of "loss of rewards."

n See Norman L. Geisler, “Agnosticism” and “Truth, Nature of” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

n For instance, Zane Hodges writes: “The faith that receives so great a salvation has the utter directness of childlike *trust*” (*AF*, 60, emphasis added). Also, of Abraham’s act of saving faith, “this act of *trust* was put down to his account as righteousness” (ibid., 32, emphasis added).

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n Martin Luther did not accept eternal security, since he maintained, like Augustine, that some of the regenerate were not elect (see Augustine, *CG*, XX.8).

n Among the myriad means at His disposal to accomplish this are missionaries, literature, angels, visions, and dreams. See chapter 15.

n Some have argued that angels can marry, based on Genesis 6:1–2, where the “sons of God” (angels in Job 1:6, 2:1, and 38:7) married the “daughters of men.” The Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) translates this (Gen. 6:2) as “angels,” and the New Testament seems also to refer to these beings as angels (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6–7). However, there are other possible interpretations of the Genesis 6 passages (such as “sons of God” being believers or great men on the earth). Further, even if this *is* a reference to angels, they may have been fallen angels who possessed human beings, who then intermarried. In any event, it seems best, in view of the unequivocal statements of Jesus that angels do not marry (Matt. 22:30; Luke 20:35–36), to reject the view that angels as such engaged in physical marriage with humans.

n

Conversely, R. C. Sproul succinctly describes extreme Calvinism: “To receive the gift of faith, according to Calvinism, the sinner also must stretch out his hand. But he does so only because God has so changed the disposition of his heart that he will most certainly stretch out his hand. By the irresistible work of grace, he will do nothing else except stretch out his hand” (*Willing to Believe*, 133–34).

As we have seen, *irresistible* means this condition is forced upon the sinner, and there is no plausible explanation for the idea of forced freedom.

n For example, see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*, 148–50. On double-predestination, see appendix 3, below.

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