

The Doctrines of Grace Stand

By Dan Jensen (2023)

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Preface

This book is a response to *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique*.¹ Before I say anything else, let me say that I gladly accept all of the contributors to this book as my brothers in Christ. I rejoice that they all would accept me in the same manner. I can be pretty passionate and feisty in my polemical writings, but I promise to do my very best with God's help to keep myself in check in this book. One should notice a very stark difference between my tone in such works as my *A False Kind of Christianity* and *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity: A Response to Randal Rauser* (both of these works can be found on my website), and this current work. With that said, there is no secondary set of doctrines of the faith that I am more passionate about or that I believe to be more important to Christian faith than the doctrines of grace. Hence, one will notice my passion throughout this work. With that admitted, I want to say that I love and appreciate all of the contributors to this work as my brethren. Nothing I say in this work,

¹ David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, eds., *Calvinism: A Biblical and Theological Critique* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2022).

nor any clear passion displayed, should in any way be interpreted by anyone as me not truly believing what I have just laid out.

This work is not a review or even a general critique of the book under discussion throughout this work. It is a response book. Notice that I did not say refutation. I do not believe that the doctrines of grace can be proven beyond all doubt. If I did, I would consider them to be essentials of the faith and would not be able to consider the contributors my brothers in Christ. Therefore, this book is a passionate explanation of the reasons why I still remain very convinced of the doctrines of grace. While I believe that there is barely enough biblical evidence to say that one may not be convinced of the doctrines of grace, I believe that evidence is very, very slim. And this work will reflect that conviction on my part.

As far as a positive defense of Calvinism, the reader is directed to the following excellent works: *The Potter's Freedom* by James White and *Chosen by God* by RC Sproul. Countless other works, or sections from other works, could be given, but these two more than suffice. I do not agree with everything written in either of those works, and some of my disagreements will come out in this work here and there, but on the whole they more than adequately defend Calvinism. The reader is also strongly encouraged to read the second book of my "basics" series (it can be found on my website). This will provide the reader with a very basic, but solid idea of my overall theology. And more importantly, it will give to the reader an understanding of where I stand on certain issues that are debated among Calvinists. If one wishes to see my credentials and why I believe I am capable of writing this work, please see my "About Me" essay on my website. Finally, I ask the reader to bear in mind that this work is being written as an informal work for my website. I am not seeking to publish it and therefore it will not be professionally proofread. Thus, the likelihood of small mistakes is high. I ask the reader to focus on the substance of this work in light of that fact.

Chapter 1: The Sovereignty of God

The Absolute Sovereignty of God

The contributors to *Calvinism* are crystal clear about one thing: the system of Calvinism, in their very strong estimation, is unbiblical. However, the contributors are not united at all in the way they address one of the core pillars of the system. And that core pillar is the absolute sovereignty of God. Obviously in any work with multiple contributors there are going to be minor disagreements. If a number of current Calvinists put together a book defending Calvinism, certain minor disagreements between the various contributors would be evident. I will be presenting my views in this chapter on some very thorny issues where Calvinists do not all agree. With that readily admitted, it must be said that the disagreements between the various contributors to *Calvinism* on this particular point are so striking that it leaves the reader scratching his or her head.

For example, in chapter 11, by Olson, he makes himself quite clear in asserting that Calvinism makes God out to be a monster. He makes almost no biblical arguments throughout this chapter. He takes it as self-evident that if he can merely accurately represent the Calvinist position on the sovereignty of God, the reader will automatically see that Calvinism cannot be true. He makes a two-pronged attack. He attacks both the Calvinist position on election, but he also attacks the Calvinist position on God's meticulous providence. The problem is that the Calvinist position on providence, for the most part, is nothing more than the traditional position of the church. Most non-Augustinian and non-Reformed theologians throughout church history have adopted it. And some of the contributors to *Calvinism* (Laing and Wax) seem to hold to it in the main. Does this mean that Laing and Wax also make God out to be a moral monster? It would absolutely seem so based on Olson's chapter. And if that is the case, then one of Olson's prongs turns out to be a dud. Or if it is as strong a prong as Olson says that it is, it seems rather odd that Laing and Wax would even be contributors in the first place. Why would those who concede such a monstrous point to Calvinism be allowed to present that point? And that is only the most broad and blatant example of this inconsistency in the book. Often other authors make jabs at the Calvinist view of

providence, when in point of fact even some of the contributors to the work basically hold to the same view.

Because this confusion is found throughout the work and not in only one or two chapters for the most part, I will be defending the traditional view of the church in this subsection. Then, in the rest of the chapter, I will be presenting my particular views regarding the more debatable points among Calvinists regarding how to understand many of the very tricky items that automatically come up as a result of this traditional view of God's sovereignty. This will allow me to refer back to this chapter as these items are brought to the fore throughout *Calvinism*. I want to be clear that nothing I say in this initial subsection to this chapter is entirely unique to Calvinism. It is a mistake when many Calvinist theologians act like proving God's absolute sovereignty and meticulous providence thereby also proves the full system of Calvinism. I have even read theologians say that there are really only two varieties of meticulous providence. They say that these are the basic Augustinian view and Molinism. This is not so.

Countless medieval theologians held to meticulous providence without holding to the unconditional election of Augustine or Aquinas. They did so well before the dawn of Molinism as well. And countless non-Reformed theologians have held to meticulous providence post-Reformation without feeling any need to embrace Molinism. One can argue that they did so inconsistently, and that is fine. But, it is not historically accurate to say that there has only been two basic varieties of meticulous providence within the church. As stated, two of the contributors to *Calvinism* both seem to be examples of those who hold to meticulous providence, while rejecting both full Calvinism and Molinism. Now it is true that Wax seems to hold to the basic thrust of the Augustinian approach, but that does not seem to be the case with Laing.

So, can one hold to meticulous providence consistently (philosophically at least) without embracing either the Augustinian or Molinist approaches? In my opinion, absolutely. God had the freedom and ability to choose a world where He would leave barely enough goodness within humankind whereby people could choose to accept or reject His offer of salvation. The question between Calvinists and most non-Calvinists must be whether or not God did choose such a world. The debate should never be about God's meticulous providence. All views that reject God's meticulous providence

are treading terrifyingly close to heresy. I believe that the rejection of Calvinism is bad enough, but the idea that anything happens apart from God's sovereign will by definition has to seriously call into question God's omnipotence. That is really dangerous territory. Unfortunately, far too many non-Reformed theologians today happily play on this thin ice, and that includes many of the contributors to *Calvinism*. Olson basically jumps up and down on that ice. Even Catholic theologians regularly speak of God's permissive will. They understand that if God wills to permit anything, then He is clearly willing that it take place on some level. It is very unfortunate that so many orthodox theologians fail to see this most common sense point.

There is no need to bring Molinism into the mix either. One can hold to meticulous providence, reject the Augustinian doctrine of unconditional election, and still soundly reject Molinism. In God's necessary knowledge, He could have foreseen a potential world wherein He left an ounce of goodness in humankind whereby people could choose whether to accept or reject His offer of salvation. Let us say in this hypothetical world there was a woman named Joan. And in this hypothetical world Joan chooses to accept God's offer of salvation. The Molinist would say that as part of God's necessary knowledge, God would foresee both a world where Joan would accept God's offer of salvation and another one where Joan would reject it. Both would have been possibilities according to the Molinist and therefore, according to them, both worlds must be seen as part of God's necessary knowledge. Then when God sees that Joan would accept the offer of salvation, that world becomes part of God's middle knowledge, while the possible world of Joan rejecting this salvation falls off the docket. None of this follows.

If God knows that Joan will accept the offer of salvation, then God could not have any possible knowledge of a world wherein Joan would reject the offer. God's necessary knowledge does not include knowledge of actual contradictions or absurdities. In this possible world, God knows that Joan would choose Him. The idea of Joan not choosing Him in this possible world is never on the docket to begin with precisely because God knows that Joan would not make that choice. Molinism is entirely unnecessary and illogical.

With all of this made clear, all orthodox Christians should resoundingly embrace the doctrine of God's meticulous providence. And this is because God's omnipotence demands it. I am not going to defend that doctrine here as all of the contributors to *Calvinism* endorse it as true Christian theologians. This logic is not complicated and it is unassailable. If God knows that something will happen a certain way without Him stepping in to alter things, and He chooses not to step in, then God is willing that things will happen in that certain way on some level. There is no way around this. Even if one wishes to say that God only wills to allow evil in order to allow free will to run its course, He is still willing the allowance of evil nonetheless. He is willing it for a good reason, namely the greater good of allowing free will to run its course, but He is still willing to allow the evil all the same. Even if one wishes to argue that God cannot stop free will without violating His holy nature, He is still willing to allow the evil that comes from the free will. When God acts according to His holy nature, He does so willingly. To say otherwise is to say that God is not free. God cannot bring about contradictions or absurdities. But, God is not sitting around bewailing the fact that He cannot do so. He has zero desire to do so. To say that He could have the will to do so would be to say that God has evil desires. And that of course is impossible.

Even if one wishes to say that in God's holy nature He had to give us free will and therefore the results of that free will are in no way the result of His will, this theologian would still have to grapple with the fact that God was not compelled to create us at all. Hence, even if one says that if God was going to create us at all He was compelled to create us with free will, you still have to say that God chose to create us knowing that our free will would result in much evil. In that scenario, God would still be willing the allowance of evil on some level. Any notions that God had to create our world in order to bring about the best possible world overall come dangerously close to Pantheism. God does not need anything (both common sense and Acts 17:24-25), and therefore God was entirely free to create nothing at all and remain content to be Father, Son, and Spirit forever and ever. But, as we all know, God was also free to create and chose to bring about this world instead. This choice though, entails the allowance of evil because it is quite plain from both our experience and Scripture that this world is filled with evil.

The only remotely (and using the term *remotely* here is exceedingly kind) orthodox response to all of this is the theory of God's simple foreknowledge. The simple foreknowledge view is atrocious theology. It is about as bad as it gets without fully slipping into all-out heresy. In this view, God can freely choose to create or choose not to create. However, if He chooses to create, He initially has no idea how the creation will turn out. He is in every respect taking a complete risk. In this conception, every single human being and angel could have rejected God and God would have been an utter failure. The proponents of this position can argue until the cows come home that God is so powerful and creative that He made sure this did not occur. But, if that is the case, why then did God not work His magic so that no one would deny Him? There can be no answer to this in this viewpoint. All of the other viewpoints must say that God freely chose to allow evil for His own greater purposes. And that there was never any chance of failure because God chose a world wherein He would be supremely glorified. The advocates of the simple foreknowledge view cannot in any way consistently affirm such truths.

And the philosophical arguments against simple foreknowledge aside, the biblical arguments are devastating. One has to contort the following verses into the ugliest pretzels in order to make any attempt at sustainability for this view: Gen 50:19-21; Ps 33:8-11; 105:25; 135:6; Prov 21:1; Isa 10:5-17; 14:27; 28:6; 41:21-23; 44:25; 45:9; 46:9-10; 63:17; Jer 32:39; Ez 14:9; Dan 4:34-35; Matt 19:26; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-30; Eph 1:1-12 (especially verse 11); 2 Thess 2:11; and Rev 17 (especially verse 17). Let us examine one of these verses to see the massive stretches that have to be made in order to attempt to harmonize them with the simple foreknowledge view. That verse will be 2 Thess 2:11. It states: "Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness (ESV)." I am not a hyper-Calvinist. I do not advocate taking this verse or any of the others like it overly literally. I do not believe that God directly sends a delusion to anyone. God cannot tempt us (James 1:13). With that said, we are not at liberty to completely explain away this text or any other texts like it. The text is very clear that this delusion is not coming about apart from God. The text is explicit about the fact that in some manner God can be said to be sending this delusion.

The active nature of God in this evil cannot be entirely denied. It is clear that God has providentially orchestrated that this delusion take place and in that sense God can be said to be “sending” it. He does not merely know that it is going to take place. He does not foreordain it only in the sense of knowing it in advance and then proclaiming that it will happen. In some sense, He is “sending” it. A completely naked permission is eisegesis. If God did not will for this delusion to take place on any level, then He cannot be said to be “sending” it in any manner.

Many will respond that God only wills this evil as a punishment for prior evil. First of all, many of the contributors to *Calvinism* make statements throughout the book that God cannot be said to will evil in any sense whatsoever. But, if He wills to allow certain evils as a punishment for prior sin, then plainly He is willing to allow that subsequent evil on some level. Second, the position of the vast majority of theologians who have adopted the doctrine of meticulous providence is that God allows all evil after the fall as a punishment for the fall. Hence, once that principle is admitted, our opponents on this point cannot chastise us for believing that God wills to allow all of the evil that takes place post-fall on some level. They could only chastise us regarding the actual fall itself. The problem is that the Scriptures plainly teach that God willed the fall on some level as well (Romans 8:19-21 and Ephesians 1:11).

It is highly significant that the contributors deal with hardly any of the texts I have presented in this subsection, and Olson does not say a peep about any of them in his chapter. On the rarest of occasions when they are addressed, they are only addressed superficially or by Laing who holds to meticulous providence. Thus, it has been shown that all things come about by the sovereign will of God. This does not prove Calvinism, but Calvinism is dependent upon the doctrine and this is why so many of the contributors attack it. But, the book as a whole is quite inconsistent on this point and in the end many of the contributors are not just disagreeing with each other over minor peripheral issues to the core thesis of the book, they are shooting each other with their arrows.

Concurrence

When coupled with the doctrine of God's aseity, the doctrine of God's meticulous providence leads inexorably to the doctrine of concurrence. I will not here seek to prove the doctrine of God's aseity as all of the contributors to *Calvinism* hold to it as orthodox Christians. It is important to note that while the attribute has primary reference to God Himself, it is also saying that God *alone* has this attribute. As Christians, we are not Deists. We do not believe God got the universe rolling and then pretty much lets it operate on its own. We believe that not only did God not choose to work this way, but that such would have been impossible for Him because He alone has the attribute of aseity. All else only exists and operates by the constant sustaining hand of God (Acts 17:28).

This is why we can never speak of the bare permission of God when it comes to all that comes to pass. I agree that we should not speak of God ever ordaining or causing evil. I believe that we should say that God has ordained the allowance of evil and that He providentially brings about the allowance of evil according to His foreordination. However, this permissive language must be very carefully qualified. God is never entirely removed from any evil act. Whenever a rational being, whether human or angel, commits moral evil, God is sustaining the existence of this being along with all of the other external realities that have contributed to the evil choice. God never forces rational creatures to make these evil choices, but at the same time, God never sits back in any Deistic sense and allows these acts to take place in that manner. I understand that this truth often makes us very uncomfortable as Christians for obvious reasons. But, this certainly seems to be the biblical doctrine based on all the verses I have referenced thus far.

God's Will

Does all of this then mean that God wills sin? No, it does not. It means that He wills the allowance of sin. Those are not the same thing no matter how often many non-Reformed people wish to say that this is a distinction without a difference. It is an absolutely crucial distinction to make if we are going to be fully biblical. God hates sin and cannot will it in any direct sense. However, God clearly does will the allowance of

evil and uses that allowance for His higher purposes unto His glory. This leads to the distinction between God's sovereign will and His preceptive will. Other names are often given to these concepts, such as God's secret will and God's revealed will. I think most of these other labels are generally not helpful. For instance, concerning the examples I gave, God's secret will is not always secret. As soon as something takes place we immediately know that this something was part of God's secret will. It is true that much of God's sovereign will is secret to us. With that said, it is better to speak of God's sovereign will and clarify that it is often secret and that none of us (even in eternity) will ever know all of it (not even close).

The opponents of this position often assert that this leads to internal contradiction within God. It does no such thing. As with most terms and concepts, the term (and the concepts behind it) *will* can be used in various senses. God's preceptive will refers to His commandments and the Bible often uses the term in this sense. When we break God's commandments, we go against His will in the sense that we do what displeases Him. When God allows us to do so, His sovereign will is being done. This is because God's sovereign will refers to whatever God wills to take place at any given moment. When God allows us to sin, His preceptive will is broken, while His sovereign will is fulfilled. There is no contradiction though. When God chooses to bring His sovereign will to pass by allowing us to sin, He is still grieved and displeased by our sin. His sovereign will does not change that. God is displeased by our sin, but plans to use that sin for His overall purposes. Even if the common non-Reformed person wishes to say that this is solely so that free will can run its course, God is still choosing to allow the evil for that higher and holy purpose.

The opponents of this position will often say that all of this still has God orchestrating the occurrence of sin. They say that even orchestrating the allowance of sin makes God culpable. This is not so and allow me to give an analogy here. When I was 25 years of age, I took a teaching job at a small Christian school in Honolulu. My two youngest were not born yet, my oldest was almost six, and my daughter was only a baby. We were very excited about our new adventure, but we had no idea about the culture shock that awaited us. I understand that Hawaii is an extremely beautiful place and that it is a wonderful place to vacation. I had vacationed there before when my

family took me and my best friend on a celebration trip for graduating from high school to Maui. It was an absolute blast. Living in Hawaii as a non-local was a very different story. Now, I am not at all trying to be negative about Hawaii. It is a great state. We had a ton of fun there over the almost 10 years that we lived there. But, there was deep cultural tension there. The largely white United States had treated Hawaii horribly in the 1800's. That is not me being woke either. I despise wokism. That is merely to state a historical fact. Most of the locals have tried to move on from this and were very nice to us. My son immediately found a local friend on the playground. The two of them became very close. However, many of the locals harbored a great deal of animosity towards white people, especially those from the mainland.

I knew some of this, but I did not know how bad it was among some of the locals. I also did not know how popular boxing and mixed martial arts are among the locals as well. Many of them start these sports at very young ages. My son loved to go down to the playground to play with his new buddies, especially his new best friend. But, the most common thing the kids "played" was fighting. This was of course terrifying to me as a young parent. My dad and grandpa had always taught me and my brothers to be tough, mostly through sports, but nothing like this. To make matters worse, some of the kids would take things too far with my son because he was a new white kid from the mainland. Things got so bad at one point that I forbade him from continuing to play at the playground. My son was distraught. He loved the fighting and did not care when some of the kids took things too far. I tried to hold my ground for as long as I could, but the whole thing was too upsetting for my son. Hence, we agreed on a 6 year old compromise. I would allow him to play at the playground only when I was watching from a distance. And I would do all in my power to avoid intervening so as to not embarrass him, but that if it got too bad I would indeed intervene and he couldn't get mad at me.

When he would go to the playground and I watched from a distance, I fully knew that some of the kids were going to do bad things to him. And they often did. But, thankfully, I only had to intervene a handful of times over the next year until my son had enough friends to protect him that I felt safe letting him go by himself. Most of the time though, during that first year, I watched from a distance. Many times my son was not treated fairly and was called atrocious names. I hated that with all of my heart. I allowed

it for a higher purpose, namely because my son so desperately wanted me to let him go to the playground. In a sense you could absolutely say that I orchestrated my son being treated in these horrible ways because I could have stopped it. You could even say that I willed the allowance and occurrence of these actions because again, I allowed them to take place. And all of that would be true. Yet, the idea that I was in any way culpable for the actions of those boys against my son would be slander. I allowed their actions for a good reason.

I understand that the analogy is not perfect. One could say that this was only the case for me because we live in a fallen world. I did not have much choice on some level. One could object that God is all-powerful and so this would not apply to Him. The fact is that if God wanted to allow evil so that He could magnify His justice towards the reprobate and magnify His mercy to the elect by freeing them from His justice, He was absolutely free to do so.

The opponents of this position often say that this doctrine is nowhere found in Scripture. It is found all over Scripture. It is overtly implied by the long list of verses I gave above. Let us briefly look at one very clear example of it beyond the verses I have already provided. This example comes from Judges 14:1-4. Here Samson demands a sinful marriage. His parents rightfully protest and we all know from the rest of the story that Samson went through with his sinful plan. And yet verse 4, as plain as the noonday sun on a clear day, says that this was from the Lord. God had brought about this sinful union in some manner. One can object that God was making an exception for Samson here, but the text nowhere implies this, Samson nowhere says this to his parents, and we know from the pattern of Samson's life that this was one of the earliest instances of his disobedience and arrogance. Samson overtly broke God's preceptive will and yet God's sovereign will was done through that disobedience. God did not force Samson to sin and He took no pleasure in it. Yet, God was using Samson's disobedience for His greater purposes. This is merely one of countless examples that could be provided from the Scriptures.

Many will protest that this makes God the author or root cause of sin. No it does not. It only makes Him the author or root cause of the allowance of sin. The author and root cause of every sin is solely the rational creature, whether human or angel, that

commits the actual act of sin. Just as we saw that my orchestration and even willing on some level of the allowance of the bad actions of the boys at the playground did not make me culpable for their actions, so too is God not culpable for the sinful actions that He providentially brings about.

God's External and Internal Workings

Thus far, many non-Reformed theologians would heartily agree with most of what I have said. Most of what I have defended so far has been the traditional view of most orthodox theologians for two thousand years, even those that do not share the views of Augustine on unconditional election. However, many of these theologians would fiercely disagree with me on the doctrine that God can directly change the souls of humans in a positive direction without their permission. They agree that God changed the souls of humans in the fall by removing His sustaining hand to a large extent so that our souls would become corrupted by sin. And they agree that God is free to use external means to influence the souls of all humans at all times. And by *external* here, I am also including our bodies to some extent. Most would agree that God can cause a stomachache, for example, that can drastically alter the mood of our souls. But, most would say that God cannot directly change anything in our brains or our souls that would not merely influence our wills, but would directly change them, without our permission. They agree that God radically changes our souls in regeneration, but they insist that this is because we have given God permission to do so by faith. They also agree that God can directly change our souls and wills when we ask Him to do so as His children. As said though, they are very against the notion of God directly changing our souls in a positive direction without our permission. Both sides agree that God never directly changes our wills or souls in a negative direction.

As Calvinists, we insist that God not only has this right, but that He often employs it at His discretion. And we also insist that He does this not only with the regenerate, but with the unregenerate as well. While no human in this life can ever do anything that is truly good in God's sight because God demands perfection, the regenerate can do "good" things in a qualified sense in that they do many things for the glory of God, only

imperfectly. The unregenerate cannot do anything “good,” even in this secondary sense. However, the unregenerate can do civic “good.” This means that they can do things that are very helpful to their fellow humans from an earthly perspective. They can do things that are far, far less evil than other actions. And God will take these better actions into account at the final judgment. And often the unregenerate do more civic “good” because God has poured out more of His common grace upon them. He has, in many cases, changed their wills in a better direction, even if not by fully regenerating them.

Many, many cases of this could be shown from Scripture, but we will look at one here. This example comes from 1 Sam 10:9. We know from the rest of Saul’s life that he was not saved. However, clearly God changed Saul’s heart to the extent that he would obey the commandments of Samuel in regard to his future kingship. The text is quite clear that God gave Saul a different heart in this instance. Any notion that this only means that God used external means to change the outlook of Saul is utterly foreign to the text. God in that moment changed Saul’s heart. Now, none of this so far proves Calvinism. It only proves that God can change hearts in a direct and positive direction without our permission. It could be that God often employs this right, but chooses not to use it when it comes to salvation. As we will see as this work progresses, I strongly do not believe that to be the case.

The Will of Humans

Unlike many fellow Calvinists, I do believe in free will. I understand how passionately the Reformers spoke out against the concept, but even their views are often a lot more nuanced than many realize. Further, the two greatest defenders of unconditional election (it was not called that of course) before the Reformation were Augustine and Aquinas. And both of them held to the basic doctrine of free will. I understand how unpopular Aquinas was to most of the Reformers, and still is within much of the Reformed world, but that cannot be said of Augustine. Further, the Westminster Confession has an explicit doctrine of free will, at least in regard to our first parents. Hence, my view cannot be said to be completely at odds with Calvinism. I do not generally like the term *libertarian free will*, but I understand that many may say that

my view still falls under the generic species of that doctrine. And I agree that this is the case to an extent. With that admitted, it is still a term I generally try to avoid as I believe that it is often abused by many non-Reformed brethren. I understand that many Calvinists would say the same thing about the bare term *free will*, and I would largely concur. However, I believe that it is the best term we have to fully guard the honor of God against any notion that He was/is the author of sin.

My adoption of the term and the basic doctrine of free will should in no way be interpreted as me not heavily qualifying the doctrine as a Calvinist. So, with all of that laid out, allow me to explicate my particular doctrine of free will. I will not get into all of the deep aspects of this doctrine as that would take a book of its own. What I will do though, is lay out the core and basic elements of my doctrine and that will have to suffice for this work. I agree with Edwards as a matter of general revelation common sense that people only act according to their desires. If one does not have a desire for something, then one will never freely choose that something. For instance, I hate broccoli. Why on earth anyone would want to eat those nasty little bushy trees is beyond me. And no amount of free will can ever conjure up any desire in me to freely eat broccoli for the sole sake of taste enjoyment. I may choose to eat it as a matter of health. I may choose to eat it in order to prove a point that I have the free will to eat it. I may eat it if someone (for whatever insane reason) put a gun to my head and told me I had to eat it. But, in all of those cases I would be eating the broccoli for other reasons than taste enjoyment.

Sometimes I have the desire to be healthy. So, I may in certain cases eat broccoli for that reason. But, that would be according to my desire to be healthy. Sometimes I can be cocky and may want to prove a point. In that instance, I am eating in order to satisfy my desire to prove a point. And I never want to be shot and so I would eat the broccoli in that instance for sure. Again though, that would be according to my desire to avoid the pain and agony of being shot. I cannot currently choose to freely eat the broccoli solely for the sake of taste enjoyment precisely because I have no such desire. Maybe I will have that desire down the line. Palates can certainly change. Mine has changed a great deal since I was a kid and this has been awesome. When I was a kid I utterly hated mushrooms. Not as much as broccoli of course (I mean let's not get

ridiculous), but I was definitely not a fan. Today though, I love mushrooms. My son used to work at a restaurant and they had crab-stuffed mushrooms! Wow, are those things good. Today though, please still keep the broccoli away.

With all of that made clear, I believe that God created Adam and Eve (and all of humankind in them) righteous and upright. They would have only had good desires. But, by the time of the fall an evil desire had resulted. I do not believe that God planted this desire within them, but that He did allow it to arise within them. How this took place is beyond the scope of this work. I reject any notion that they were compelled to act upon this desire. In that sense, they absolutely had free will. We all know how they (us) chose to use that freedom. And as a Calvinist, I believe that the spiritual death that resulted from this choice was a complete and total loss of any desires for God. However, I reject any notion that this rendered them void of any semblance of free will after that fact. I believe that fallen man can still make many choices. My brother is an Atheist. Obviously I have been praying for years that God would change that. Currently though, that is the reality. And when my brother goes to the restaurant, I believe he can freely choose between the steak or the ribs (along with other options). He loves both steak and ribs. He has desires for both of them and I believe that he can freely choose between these desires when he goes to the steakhouse. When he makes that choice though, he is not doing so for the glory of God because he is in an unregenerate state.

I understand that people will argue that this is not truly free will. If many of his desires have been robbed of him, then it would seem he no longer truly has free will. This is not so. No desires were robbed of him. He freely forfeited all godly desires in the fall. God is doing no injustice to him by not giving him these desires. As far as the question of how we can choose between conflicting desires when it would seem that we must always choose between our greatest desire at any given moment, this is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say for now that I believe we do have this ability and the authors of *Calvinism* would not disagree with me.

I explain all of this to make clear that many of the arrows in the book would miss their mark with me. I actually agree with them on some of these points. Having said that, nothing in the book has convinced me to give up the doctrine of total depravity. It seems to me that the Bible clearly teaches that we lost all desire for God in the fall and that we

can only have a desire for God if God decides to place such a desire with us. And it seems to me that the Bible also clearly teaches that God places this desire within His elect in such an overpowering way that they will run to Him freely and joyfully. None of these points will be proved in these works. As I said in the preface, I believe Calvinism has already been more than positively proved by the works I referenced. As we proceed through this work, we will look at the attempts of the contributors to get around those defenses. I believe we will see those attempts found wanting.

The Universal Offer of the Gospel

I believe in the universal offer of the gospel as do most Calvinists. Most non-Reformed folks demand that this is wholly incompatible with the overarching system of Calvinism. I strenuously disagree. If I am selling hamburgers at the local fair, I am not going to ask the vegans over at their vegan food truck if they would like some hamburgers. That would not make any sense. And if I did, I would essentially be mocking them. Many non-Reformed people say that this is precisely what we as Calvinists have to posit in regard to God with our universal offer of the gospel in light of the overarching system of Calvinism. However, if the vegans come over and rudely start accusing me of not offering them any hamburgers, I can say that I did not do so because I assumed that they would not want any because they are vegans. If they insist that they still want me to at least extend the offer, I can do so even though I know they will reject it. At that juncture, I am in no way, shape, or form mocking them.

The same basic idea takes place with the reprobate. The unregenerate fancy themselves as not being unregenerate. They have no desire for God, but they say in their hearts that God should save them and extend His offer of salvation to them. So God does so. He is not mocking them. He is merely meeting them on their terms. God says to them, "If you believe you can come to me, then do so, I will not turn you away." God is not mocking them or being deceitful with them. If they were to come to His Son, He would not turn them away. He knows they won't come and He is under no obligation to regenerate them, but again, He is not mocking them or lying to them in any way.

Many non-Reformed people will still object by saying that they do not find the above argumentation compelling. They will say that the offer implies that all people can receive Him and that God means it without qualification. The problem is that we see the same basic phenomenon in Scripture regarding the law of God. No human can fulfill the law of God post-fall and yet God still calls and commands people to do that very thing (Matt 5:48 and 19:16-22). In the second text, Jesus explicitly says that to have eternal life the rich young man was to follow the commandments. We know from the rest of Scripture that this is impossible. Thus, the gospel. Was Jesus mocking this young man? Was Jesus lying to him? Of course not. Jesus was calling him out for his hypocrisy. This is made all the more clear when Jesus rebukes him for calling Jesus "good." Is Jesus denying that He is good? Of course He is not. He is calling out this young man's arrogance. That in no way changes the fact that Jesus' words still stand. If anyone perfectly fulfills the law of God, he or she will receive eternal life. That command and offer still stand post-fall. People flatter themselves that they can still fulfill the law of God and God essentially says to them, "Ok fine, go ahead and do so. You will be rewarded accordingly." Just because God still commands all people to fulfill the law does not thereby mean that they can actually do so. And just because God offers eternal life through the law does not thereby mean that God is actually telling people that anyone will receive eternal life in that manner. The same basic principles apply with the universal offer of the gospel.

Many object that this is tacitly unfair. How can God command that which we have no power to do? God of course most certainly cannot command any such thing in an initial sense. That would be decidedly unjust and cruel. However, we are the ones who put ourselves in our plight by our actions. Just because we sinned, this does not somehow negate God's requirements. If a teacher gives a test and a student rebelliously tears up the test, the teacher is under no obligation to give him a new one. She is also under no obligation to refrain from failing him. The requirement to take the test for her class has in no way changed or been abrogated by his actions.

It must also be said at this point that the continual rejection of God by the reprobate for all eternity is something that is displeasing to God. He takes no intrinsic pleasure in it. He does use their rejection for His greater purposes, but that does not

change the fact that the rejection taken in itself is still most displeasing to God. If I say to those vegans, "If you really want a hamburger, I'll make you one," their continued rudeness still hurts. If the recalcitrant student waves the pieces of his test at the teacher in mockery and says, "I can still take the test if I want," and she responds by saying, "If you can piece together the test and still finish it in time, I will accept it from you," his mockery still stings in spite of her genuine offer. God calling out the reprobate for their hypocrisy in no way changes how displeased He is with their hypocrisy itself. It also in no way changes the fact that God will never take any sick pleasure in punishing people in hell. He does not receive any pleasure from their pain in itself. He receives joy and glory from His justice being magnified.

Many will object by saying, "Fair enough. But if God truly loves the reprobate, He will not only call out their hypocrisy, He will give regeneration to them. The fact that not all are saved shows that there must be something else going on with the reprobate." This does not follow. Take, for example, many governors and presidents. They often have the power of full pardons. Does the fact that they often withhold the use of this privilege with most inmates make them harsh and cruel? Does it mean that they lack love? Of course it doesn't. They can show their love to these prisoners in many ways without granting a full pardon. They can work hard to improve the prison system. They can give their own money to certain prisons. They can visit these prisons and converse with the prisoners. They can show genuine love, care, and concern in all of these ways while still not granting a full pardon because justice is also extremely important to them as well. Many will object by saying that God's justice was satisfied on the cross. Therefore, if God could save all people, He would undoubtedly do so. This presupposes unlimited atonement, which is an exceedingly illogical doctrine that will be examined more in a moment and also later in this work. The cross is inarguably the greatest display of both justice and love. With that glorious truth readily admitted, that does not change that God is free to show both His justice and His mercy at His discretion. If He wants to administer much of His justice through hell instead of the cross, He is free to do so.

Many will object that the governmental pardon analogy does not fully work. They will say that when governing officials grant full pardons, they do not merely pick a

number of prisoners at random, while leaving out all the others. Usually they carefully weigh the reasons why they make any full pardons. And I agree. But this has not always been the case in history. Sometimes kings or queens, as one example, needed an immediate surplus of soldiers. In some of these instances, full pardons were granted for military service. And in some instances, not all of the soldiers were given these full pardons. It is true that sometimes concrete reasons were given as to why some were excluded, such as those that were guilty of the most heinous of crimes. Nevertheless, there have been instances where only a portion of those eligible were chosen and these were chosen at random. No injustice was being given to those left in prison. They continued to receive the justice that was deserved. And the arbitrariness of the decision is misleading. Yes, the actual choice of who would be freed was arbitrary. But, the decision was within a much larger context that was anything but arbitrary. The choice was made for the overall good of the kingdom. And the same is true with God's choice of His people. In itself, there is nothing in the elect that caused God to choose them over the reprobate. However, God is hardly being arbitrary in the big scheme of things. God is choosing His elect to magnify His freedom, love, grace, and mercy. And He is choosing not to choose the reprobate so that He can magnify His freedom, holiness, and justice.

Many will object that these kings and queens had no real choice. God does. He is the omnipotent King. This is true. No analogy is perfect. But if God wanted to bless His elect by granting them a full pardon apart from anything in them so that He could bless them beyond measure, He was free to do so. And if God wanted to withhold this blessing from the reprobate so that the elect would be all the more floored by God's grace to them by seeing how many people are going to receive God's justice and that this could have been them, He was also free to do that as well. People can object that this is unfair. God is not being unfair to anyone. The reprobate receive justice. God is free to bestow His mercy as He pleases.

With all of this laid out, I do want to be clear here that I interpret most of the "all" hammer passages from many of our non-Reformed brethren as referring to the genuine offer of the gospel. I understand that most Calvinists do not take this approach, but I believe that in our hermeneutics we should always try our very best to leave the *prima*

facie sense of all texts alone as much as we possibly can. I am well aware of the fact that this is not always possible in order to make all of the word of God harmonize. It is my position though, that we should seek to do all in our power to harmonize in such a way where the *prima facie* sense is left alone in as many texts as we possibly can. I believe that this must be done even when it leads to some tension. As long as that tension does not lead to blatantly illogical doctrines, we should leave the tension alone.

Therefore, I do believe that there is a very real sense in which we can say that Jesus died for every human being that has ever lived or will live. That is not the same thing as saying that He actually paid for the sins of all humans. I understand that both sides (Calvinist and non-Calvinist) may say that this is nonsensical, but it is not. If two of my children have speeding tickets and I go to the bank to take out enough money to pay both tickets (obviously I would pay with a card today, but roll with me here), I can clearly be said to have gone to the bank for the sake of both children. If I say to both of them that I am offering to pay for their tickets and I have just gotten out the money to do so, I have made a genuine offer to pay for both of their tickets and I have shown them that I have the funds to make good on my offer. Yet, only one of my children takes me up on the offer. So, I go down to the courthouse with that child and pay his fee. I then put the rest of the money that was not used on the other child back in my bank account. I sincerely went down to the bank for the sake of both children. I sincerely offered to pay both tickets. Only one ticket was paid though. The other child still remains under the obligation to pay that ticket and will have to pay it himself.

Unlimited atonement says that I paid the tickets of both children even though one of the children did not want me to pay it for him and that this child is still under the obligation to pay his ticket despite the fact that it has been paid. No amount of mental gymnastics can get around the fact that this is illogical in the extreme. If the benefits of the cross have not just been genuinely offered, but have actually been imputed to an individual, then this individual cannot then be made to meet the demands of his sins when those demands have already been satisfied by divine justice. And almost all of the "all" texts can easily be interpreted as referring to the universal and sincere offer of the gospel.

Obviously the analogy I gave in regard to myself and my children above is far from perfect. All analogies, even the best of them, are imperfect. Many aspects of the analogy do not correspond to other aspects of biblical truth and it should not be pressed too far. However, it does show the basic principle that the cross can legitimately be said to be offered to all and that Jesus specifically went to the cross, as one aspect of that work, to make that genuine offer possible, without at the same time saying that the benefits of His blood are imputed to all people.

I understand that there are a handful of texts that cannot be subsumed under the universal offer of the gospel interpretation. John 12:32 and 2 Pet 2:1 would be the most notable examples. I understand that the second text does not use the term “all” or any similar term, but the argument from non-Reformed folks is that it clearly implies that all people have been bought by Christ if even these wicked apostates were bought. I have already addressed both of these texts in the second book of my basics series that I referenced in the preface of this work (page 57 and pages 62-63). I know that many Calvinists will say that if I have no problem interpreting John 12:32 in a more traditionally Calvinist manner, why not interpret all of the “all” texts in that manner? Because with the John text, the common non-Reformed interpretation leads to a blatant contradiction with John 6, something that even many non-Reformed theologians themselves have admitted (and not just 4 pointers). As we will see, this is even basically conceded by one of the contributors to *Calvinism*. For most of the “all” passages though, we do not have that level of exegetical confidence.

To my non-Reformed brethren who would insist that any Reformed interpretations of the above texts must inevitably lead to eisegesis, let me say a few things. As far as the second text goes, it should be noted that Peter sometimes can be somewhat imprecise. He does not write as Paul does. Yes, Paul is sometimes rather confusing (as Peter himself notes), but this is almost always because he is dealing with rather complicated material that the rest of the apostles shied away from. But, Paul is generally pretty precise. Look at 1 Pet 3:18-20 and 4:6. Any exegete who says that he or she has no problems with these passages is fibbing a little bit at the very least. Hence 2 Pet 2:1 is only one text and it is coming from Peter and thus I believe that my interpretation is entirely plausible.

As far as the John text goes, it is clear that the Bible does not always use the term “all” in an exhaustive manner. One very clear example of this would be Rom 11:26. Almost all orthodox interpreters of all stripes agree that it is highly unlikely Paul means every single Israelite in that verse. Now, as I’ve already made clear, I agree with many of my non-Reformed brethren that most of the “all” texts should not be interpreted as they have so often been interpreted by most Calvinist theologians down through the centuries. I agree that unless we have good reasons from the immediate context, or very good reasons from the rest of the book in which a text is placed, or exceedingly good reasons from the rest of Scripture, the *prima facie* reading of any passage should be left intact. But, we do have very good reasons from John itself (John 6:44) for qualifying John 12:32.

Before diving into the next section, I want to address the fact that I know that some may think I am defending Amyraldianism. I am not. I hold to the traditional infralapsarian view. I simply believe that as part of God ordaining all of history towards fulfilling His decree to provide salvation for the elect, He provided the genuine offer of salvation to the non-elect to correct their hypocrisy. That does not mean that there is no genuine love involved in this sincere offer. It is not merely a rebuke, even if that is its primary function. God does have genuine love for the reprobate and He takes no pleasure in their punishment in itself. Hence, when God says to them that if they come to Him, He will not turn them away, He means it. This should be a reminder to us as Christians how much God loves all of His enemies, and that He commands us to love in the same manner. Therefore, the sincere offer not only displays the love of God on some level, it actually causes the love of God to extend to the reprobate in very real and practical ways through His church.

God’s Inner Consistency

One of the strongest objections that many non-Reformed theologians have to Calvinism is that they believe that it posits God as being an internally emotional mess. Hence, I wish to address this concern here. Many non-Reformed people object that Calvinism has God not wanting people to sin and being very displeased when they do,

but then sovereignly ordaining the allowance of that very sin. They also would object to those Calvinists like myself who say that God sincerely offers the gospel to all people, is grieved when they reject it, and yet sovereignly chooses not to save them when He is able to do so. Let us look at John 11 to see that we see this very thing in the life of Christ. From this chapter, we can see a number of highly relevant truths to this discussion. Jesus knows that Lazarus is ill. And He also makes it clear in advance that this illness will not ultimately end up in death for Lazarus, but will be used mightily for God's glory. Jesus obviously had the ability to heal Lazarus. He could have even done so immediately from the long distance. Yet, Jesus chooses not to do so. Jesus chooses to allow the natural evil of Lazarus' temporary death to take place for a greater purpose. And Jesus eventually heals Lazarus, thus fulfilling His overarching purpose from the beginning.

What is remarkable about this narrative though, is that Jesus still deeply grieves the death of His good friend and the grief that is exhibited by Mary and Martha. Jesus' sovereignty throughout this entire episode does not alter how grieved and displeased Jesus was with the death of Lazarus and the very, very real grief it caused Mary and Martha. In fact, as we all know, the narrative tells us that Jesus fully wept. None of this was a show or a sham. His weeping was quite real. Jesus was not internally conflicted about the overarching plan at any point. Jesus knew what needed to happen for God to be glorified and He acted accordingly. Again though, that in no way changed how displeased Jesus was with the death of Lazarus taken in itself. This is all we are saying as Calvinists with the tension I have spoken of throughout this chapter. We are saying nothing unbiblical.

Now I understand that all of this causes difficulty for the doctrine of God's impassibility. A full discussion of this point is beyond the scope of this work. Suffice it to say for now that all orthodox theologians believe in this doctrine to some extent. Even Grudem, who denies the doctrine in its traditional form, would still certainly agree that the doctrine of Moltmann wherein God can experience absolute despair, is heretical. Having said that, many theologians (both Calvinist and non-Calvinist) accept a more qualified version along the lines of Grudem. This would include Piper. Hence, they would say that what we see of Jesus also largely applies to the divine nature. They

would say that God is much more like how I was with my son at the playground. God is not torn to the point where He is not in control, but His grief and anger are seen as more literal. Many other theologians (both Calvinist and non-Calvinist) accept the more traditional form of the doctrine and would say that God cannot grieve the way Jesus grieves in this narrative. But, they would still say that all of the texts on God grieving, being angry, etc., cannot be swept under the rug. They must still have some meaning. And most would say that they are merely saying that God can be said to be displeased with the evil of this world along the lines of the analogy I will provide below.

I hate it when my kids leave garbage all over the backyard. Wrappers, plastic cups, popsicle sticks, you name it. And as someone who at least tries to be a good dad, I usually make them pick up the mess once I've noticed it. However, there are times when they are very busy and I pick it up myself. This is rather annoying, but such is parenting. However, if I am having an absolutely wonderful day, like if the Niners have just beaten up on someone the day before, I will often pick up that garbage quickly without a hint of annoyance. I'm so full of joy that almost nothing could dampen my mood. When that happens, I am still not positive about the garbage. It is still garbage. It has to go. But, it in no way takes away from my joy. The traditionalists on the impassibility of God would say that this is how God feels about all evil, both natural and moral. In itself, it is absolutely not pleasing to Him. He allows it for His overarching purposes, but He never ever sees it as intrinsically good. And eventually it must go. And all the texts on God grieving, becoming angry, etc., are said to be speaking anthropomorphically about how God is displeased with all evil. Yet, they would also be clear that evil never causes God to be anything but 100% filled with His own internal joy.

Both sides of this issue have to deal with difficulties. The traditionalists come close to making it sound like evil does not truly bother God. The opposing position comes close to making it sound like God is imperfect. I personally take the traditional position, but I realize that it is not without its problems. Regardless of which position each orthodox theologian takes, this tension does not solely exist for Calvinists. All theologians must grapple with the texts that describe God as grieving and the texts on God's intense wrath, along with other texts as well. Calvinism completely aside, when God says in Genesis that He was grieved that He made humankind, all theologians

have to wrestle with this tension. Why did God create in the first place if He knew He would go through this grief? The traditionalists like myself are not left off the hook here. One could still ask why I allow the garbage at all when I don't like it. Even if every time I felt like I do after a big Niners win, the question still remains. And I do so because I don't want to be a legalistic ogre. That is my higher purpose in that instance. I'm not torn about my decision either. That fact though, still doesn't change how committed I am to getting rid of the garbage. Jesus' grief in John 11 is still pointing to something very real in God even on a traditionalist take concerning the impassibility of God. It is still pointing to the fact that God is not pleased by any evil, natural or moral, in itself.

Does God's Love Trump His Justice?

Many non-Reformed theologians say that much of what I have said in this chapter must be false because God's love is His central attribute. They say that it is what truly constitutes God as God. Thus, they say that God cannot in fact distribute His love and justice as He sees fit. His justice must submit to His love. Therefore, they say that the only reason God does not save all people is because it would be unloving for Him to force Himself upon them. Everyone agrees that forced love is an oxymoron. One can only love freely. The problem is that no one is asserting anything so absurd as forced love. God changes hearts so that they long to love Him. I understand that none of us have the ability or right to do this. So any comparisons to the human realm on this front are bound to fail. God, as we have seen, does have this right. And if He wishes to use it in salvation, He is free to do so.

Further, love is not God's preeminent attribute. This doctrine denies the traditional doctrine of God's simplicity and that is very problematic. As one example, the Bible also makes it clear that God is truth and life (John 14:6). Notice that Jesus does not say here that He merely has truth, or points us to truth, or is even the quintessential human example of truth. No, He says that He is the truth. The same thing is true with Jesus being life. He does not merely have life, He is the life. Even further, let us grant that the simplicity of God is not correct. Let us further grant that love is God's most fundamental attribute. All this would mean is that God can never be unloving toward

anything, that He must show immense amounts of love towards all of His creation, and that the preeminent reason He does all things is because of love. No Calvinist would quibble with the first two points. And the last point can still certainly be true in the Calvinist system in that God's love is so abundantly poured out upon the elect. Even when God magnifies His justice in the reprobate, this is not entirely divorced from His love. His justice towards them will always cause us as the elect to be overwhelmed by the love God has bestowed upon us when we so easily could have been in hell like the reprobate. The idea that just because God is love, this must mean that He has to show His love equally to all, simply does not follow.

Final Thoughts

With this chapter sort of serving as an umbrella for the rest of this work, I do want to make it clear before plowing forward, that in the interest of streamlining this work as much as possible, I will not be addressing every Calvinist text or argument the contributors seek to address. This should not in any way be taken by the reader as a concession on my part that the text or argument is not actually all that convincing from a Calvinist perspective. With some of these, I would actually concede that. With many others, I would say that I still think they provide good evidence for our case, but that I'm not willing to be too dogmatic about them. And with many of them, I still wholeheartedly hold to the traditional Calvinist exegesis or argument. But, in all of the above cases, the Calvinist case is not dependent upon these texts and arguments, and so I will not be addressing them. I will be focusing on what I believe to be the most clear and convincing texts and sections of Scripture, especially Romans 9, along with what I believe to be the strongest overall Calvinist arguments.

Chapter 2: Response to Introduction-Appendix (Minus Chapter 9)

Introduction

As an expert on historical theology, it is rather tempting to spend a lot of time on the historical arguments made throughout the book. However, I am going to refrain from doing so in order to keep this work as streamlined as possible and because, for the most part, they are not definitive of anything absolutely necessary to defend Calvinism biblically and philosophically. As Frame has so often pointed out in his many writings, Protestants are not traditionalists. Yes, we take the history of theology very seriously. Yes, where we see strong historical support for any doctrine, this provides very strong confirmatory evidence for that doctrine. But, at the end of the day, the historical arguments must always be secondary. And the contributors to this book could not ultimately disagree with me. Almost all of them hold to the Baptist position. Witherington is basically Wesleyan in his theology. Many of the contributors seem to adopt either Molinism or the simple foreknowledge view. All of these positions are very late in church history. For my views on the development of doctrine, see my *The Idolatry of Progressive Christianity* (pages 78-82; and 90-92).

I completely agree that we do not see much of the spirit of the doctrines of grace until Augustine. In some respects that can be seen as somewhat late in church history, but in other respects Augustine is rather early and was a monumentally seminal figure in the development of doctrine. And it must be remembered that the full doctrine² of the Trinity was not hammered out until the 4th century, only shortly before the time of Augustine in the big scheme of things. And the full doctrine of the hypostatic union was not even fully developed until after Augustine. Augustine repudiated what would later be 2 of the key pillars of Calvinism (the *L* and *P*), and was fuzzy on what would become two other pillars (the *T* and *I*). However, he was quite clear on the foundational pillar of what would become the system of Calvinism, namely the *U*. Later Augustinians, most notably Aquinas, brought needed development and were much clearer and more sound

² It should be noted that when I often refer to a *full doctrine* or *full development* throughout this work, I am not intending to convey the idea that no further development took place whatsoever. Doctrine is always developing throughout the history of the church, sometimes in very significant ways. I only use such phrases to indicate the core of the doctrine. The basic elements of the doctrine of the Trinity, for example, were always present, at least in germ form, from the beginnings of the church. But, the core definition of the doctrine did not come about until the 4th century. Yet, a tremendous amount of secondary development has occurred since then. And key developments and debates about many secondary issues continue today.

on the *T* and the *I*. I am not saying that either Augustine or Aquinas used the labels behind these letters, but they did essentially teach the doctrines that would become those letters. Calvin and most of the other major Reformers brought about needed development regarding the *P*, although I admit that the Lutherans basically rejected it and that even many of the Reformed were still somewhat fuzzy concerning it. Finally, Dort brought about needed development regarding the entire system.

And the *L* was not merely developed in connection with the doctrine of unconditional election, it was also very much in connection with the doctrine of substitutionary atonement. Here again, we can see why pointing to this late development is somewhat misleading. I agree that the full *L* comes late in history, but this is partially due to the fact that the full doctrine of substitutionary atonement comes late in church history. But, it must be said that the core doctrine behind substitutionary atonement, namely that the cross delivers us from the wrath of God, was present in the church from day one. Most of the church held to some version of the ransom theory for some time until Anselm. Then Anselm brought about much needed development in the West, and most Western theologians followed him until the Reformation. Then the Reformers took Anselm's doctrine a step further into substitutionary atonement. And Reformed theologians realized that to be consistent with both that doctrine and the doctrine of unconditional election, *L* followed as a matter of course.

Therefore, with all of this laid out, I will for the most part only make passing comments here and there regarding the historical arguments that were presented in *Calvinism*. As far as the introduction goes, I agree that slapping the label semi-Pelagian indiscriminately on our opponents lacks nuance. Although, I do think that the overarching presentation of *Calvinism* on this point lacks nuance as well. But that is a discussion for another day. Out of respect for my brethren, I will stick to the terms *non-Reformed* and *non-Calvinist* throughout this work. I agree with the editors that there exists variation within the Calvinist world. I have already alluded to that in this work. I understand that there are 5 pointers that reject original guilt and regeneration as preceding faith. But, these are extreme minority positions and I reject them along with most Calvinists. I do not agree, however, that total depravity can exclude total inability. That is historical revisionism in my strong estimation. Yet, even if I am mistaken there,

the reader should understand that I define the *T* as referring to the doctrine of total inability. For me, total inability and total depravity are essentially synonymous.

Section 1

Chapter 1

I agree with Harwood that the full Western doctrine of original guilt is not fully developed until Augustine. But, I largely see this as irrelevant. I also agree that Augustine had some very unbiblical and odd views in connection with his overarching doctrine. Again though, I don't see this as terribly relevant. Luther had many bizarre and horrible views on many matters. So did Calvin. So did Aquinas. So did Wesley. It should also be noted that even within the Western tradition there is and has been a lot of diversity on how to properly understand the rationale for the justification of this guilt. I take the position that it is justified because if we were there in the garden, we would have acted exactly like our first parents. Hence, we are every bit as guilty before the omniscient God. As far as the biblical, theological, and philosophical arguments Harwood tries to make against the Western doctrine, they are weak indeed. The wages of sin is death. We all agree there. Human beings are human beings from the moment of conception. We all agree there as well. And humans die at every stage of development. This leads inexorably to the conclusion that all humans are sinners from the moment of conception. And the idea of being imputed as a sinner apart from the guilt of sin is a horrible doctrine. It makes God unjust. As far as I'm concerned, game over.

Now, this does not thereby prove total inability. That must be done via other evidence, and I believe that Calvinists have sufficiently provided that evidence. However, it is astonishing to me that in the very chapter on total depravity, Harwood does not interact with almost any of this evidence. His case is almost solely focused on original guilt. And getting back to original guilt, that doctrine, in my strong estimation, is basically proven by what I said above and is strongly supported by Ps 51:5-6; 58:3; and Rom 5:12-14. I will not address Harwood's treatment of these texts as I believe that

everything he said there, along with all that is said by those he references, is deeply unsustainable based on what I have already stated.

Further, I would add that the position that states that original sin does not entail guilt, must also state that there will be many people in eternity who were never personally guilty of any sin. If original sin does not include guilt, then all those who died in infancy will be given eternal life as sinless creatures. It does not matter how much theologians who defend this position wish to say that these people were under the sentence of death and corruption, and that the cross freed them from these realities, it nevertheless stands that these people would be guilty of no personal sin of their own. Such a concept is utterly foreign to the biblical witness. The Bible everywhere presents us with the truths that all people are guilty before their righteous judge, and that this guilt can only be removed by the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even saying that these people would have sinned eventually and would have been guilty like the rest of us resolves nothing. The fact would still remain that they never came to this point and that God never imputed them as guilty in this conception of things. Hence, again, they would enter eternity never having any guilt for sin of their own.

It may be objected that many things die apart from personal guilt. This is certainly true. The suffering of the creation, especially of the higher animals, is indeed a very difficult theological and philosophical problem. But, any attempted solution to that problem has no bearing on the fact that we are no mere animals. We are human beings, created in the image of God. For any of us to be under the sentence of death and moral corruption apart from personal guilt is a repugnant doctrine. And I must reiterate that such a doctrine must posit both guilty sinners and sinless human beings other than Jesus Himself in the eternal state. Now, of course we will all be sinless in the sense that we will all be forgiven and glorified. I am in no way denying that glorious truth. Please don't misunderstand me. What I am saying is that in the eternal state there would be people who never personally had any guilt themselves. In that sense they would absolutely be sinless. How is that a biblically defensible position?

As far as the 6 basic categories Harwood lays out from McCall on page 37, I obviously hold to #3. It should be said though, that even within this position there is variety. Hodge, for example, is extremely opaque in his writings on this subject

regarding how we can be guilty for this sin simply because Adam represented us. Again, I hold to the position that it is because we would have done the same exact thing had we been in the garden. This position may not sound all that different from those who assert that dying infants would have sinned had they been allowed to live long enough to sin. I agree that if God wanted to impute the guilt of sin to them on that basis, He certainly could have done so and this would indeed account for their guilt in a just manner. The key point is that this is not what is asserted by the opposing side and there is no biblical evidence for such a doctrine.

Harwood's discussion on our inheritance of a sinful nature and the humanity of Christ is quite confused. The idea that because we inherit a sinful nature, this must thereby mean that Christ would have to inherit the same in order for Him to be fully human, does not follow. It is not essential to humanity to have a sinful nature. We were created without one in our first parents. We only inherit this because of the guilt of sin. Jesus had no such guilt and therefore He could be entirely without this sinful nature and still be wholly human. I certainly would agree that the naked term *sinful nature* is not devoid of problems. But, this is true of almost any theological term. The term *person* in the doctrine of the Trinity is far from precise. We simply don't have a better term in English. The concept of sinful nature can sound like humans were created intrinsically sinful. This problem is all the more acute when we consider the fact that we use the term *nature* to describe both the divinity and humanity in the hypostatic union. With all of that admitted, theologians have always clarified that by this term is merely meant that human nature has become pervasively corrupted morally due to the fall. And Jesus is free from this corruption because He was not represented by Adam.

As far as Harwood's case for the ability of sinners to repent and believe for salvation, this section has already been answered by all that I've said in this work so far, especially what I said in the section on the universal offer of the gospel in the first chapter.

I certainly agree that systematic theology has its potential pitfalls. So does every branch of theology. But, I don't agree that Calvinists are guilty of flattening out all references to God's choices throughout all of the Scriptures. We have always recognized that not every time God's choice or choices are referenced, are these always allusions to the choice to save His people. For instance, we have always understood that God made a very clear and conscious choice to choose Judas to be an apostle. And we are at the same time quite firm that Judas was never saved. Indeed, we would say that as a separate choice God chose not to save Judas and allowed him to take his own dark course.

I don't agree that God only makes 4 types of choices. It seems to me that He chooses many things. But, I agree that the 4 Flowers lays out are found in Scripture, except for the fact that I would of course define the 4th choice as God's choice to save those He is going to give faith. Further, God's choice can be said to be arbitrary in itself, but it is not entirely divorced from God's nature. God freely makes a holy choice to leave many in their sins while choosing to pour out His mercy on many others. As far as partiality or favoritism within Calvinism, there is no inconsistency. God certainly shows favoritism to the elect, but this is not based upon anything inherent within them. God can never show favoritism in that sense. The choice itself is arbitrary, but it is couched within God's overall workings, which are never arbitrary in an overarching sense. The favoritism only comes as a result of the choice; the choice itself is not based upon God showing favoritism to any inherent characteristics within the elect.

Flowers continues to demonstrate his lack of understanding of arbitrariness in his warden analogy. Yes, the decision is part of an overall set of workings that is laced with purpose. But, the decision in itself is arbitrary unless the warden chooses this prisoner for some specific reason, which does not seem to be the case in Flowers' analogy. As far as Flowers' elaboration on the 4th choice, he in very typical non-Reformed fashion, tries to say that the choice to save sinners is unconditional in the sense that it is not in any way based upon the merit of the individuals (we all agree there), but it is conditional upon faith. Fine. I fully agree that God was free to do things this way if He wanted to do so. But, there is a condition. There is no way around this in most iterations of the

non-Reformed system (obviously 4 point Calvinists would be excluded there). And that is the point at issue between us. Flowers needs to prove this and he fails to do so.

The parable of the banquet does not prove the non-Reformed position. It is a parable about how things work here on the ground and does not have reference to God's eternal decree before the foundation of the world. Yes, people are chosen in the sense that they are justified and thus chosen to be welcomed into God's kingdom and family based upon their faith. We all agree there. That does not in any way decide the issue as to whether God chose to give people that faith or whether He leaves barely enough goodness within them post-fall whereby they can choose to have faith themselves or not.

As far as any Calvinist exegetes interpreting the reference to *chosen* as referring to unconditional election, I cannot help the fact that Calvinists are not perfect any more than any other theologians. No one is saying that every interpretation from every Calvinist concerning any passage whatsoever is correct. No one could say this because Calvinists often disagree with each other over many specific verses. And if anyone wants to say that this shows the flawed nature of the system, all systems have theologians within them that disagree. This only reflects the freedom in Christ that we all have. As I have already pointed out, the contributors to this volume have very sharp disagreements, including over issues that go far deeper than what is found between most Calvinists.

The view of many Jews at the time of Christ that they were safe simply because they were Jews is not the same thing as the doctrine of election in Calvinism. God elects to save us and in so doing providentially fulfills that election by giving us saving faith. Therefore, no one can think that he or she is safe by trusting in anything other than the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Anyone who trusts in anything else is deluding himself. Yes, we know that we only have faith because God gave faith to us, and we rejoice in that wonderful truth, but no one can trust in his or her own election based on anything other than his or her own trust in Christ alone for salvation. That is the only way to know one is elect. To trust in one's own nationality is to be deceived. Even if it is one as privileged as was the Jewish nationality.

On page 78, Flowers provides a number of texts in an attempt to prove why God shows His favor to some and not to others. All of these texts are looking at things from an on-the-ground perspective. We all agree that people can only come to Christ to be saved in humble, fearful faith. That does not decide the issue of whether or not God gives people that faith. And think of how much Flowers shows his hand here. All the descriptions in these texts are of people doing holy things. Humble and fearful faith is a holy act. That does not mean that we are justified based upon the holiness of that act. God will only ever accept perfect actions at His judgment bar. And our faith is far, far from perfect. But, it is still holy.

According to most articulations of the non-Reformed conception, God ultimately chooses us based upon the condition of putting forth this holy action. Some choose this holy act, while some reject it. On that small level, Christians are indeed better than non-Christians. Again, I freely admit that God could have done things this way if He so pleased. He would still be given tremendous glory by reflecting His will to give humans the freedom to make this choice. But, it cannot be denied that in that world Christians would have that small boast. No one is saying that they could use that boast in grandiose ways. That itself would lack humility and would be sinful. It is to say though, that the Christian could rejoice that he made the holy choice to choose Christ. And we are merely saying that God chose not to give us even this small boast. We are no better than our non-Christian friends. Period. As far as the first full paragraph on page 79, I have already answered this in my first chapter.

Flowers shows his ignorance of much of historical theology in his section on corporate election, something that is often seen in his writings and presentations. The Reformed have always said that the first step in the *ordo salutis* is union with Christ. We entirely agree that no spiritual blessing can be given to us here on the ground apart from Christ. It is Flowers and most of the non-Reformed who have to say that we can do something quite holy apart from Christ, namely place saving faith in Him. But, Jesus plainly repudiated any such notion (Jn 15:5). Flowers may object that the Bible clearly talks about our union with Christ as being dependent upon faith. We agree. The doctrine of union with Christ is multifaceted. We are first betrothed to Christ. This is the first step of salvation. Our union with Christ does not become completely legally formalized

though, until justification, a concept that would have been entirely natural to Jews in the first century. And we grow in our union with Christ spiritually throughout the sanctification process. Further, our union with Christ spiritually will reach a crescendo upon glorification.

Eph 1 is looking at things from both an on-the-ground perspective and a bird's-eye view vantage point. We are only given concrete spiritual blessings in real time in Christ. However, God made the choice to give us (the elect) these spiritual blessings down the line before the beginning of the world. Both truths are taught in Eph 1. As far as God's secret love for the elect before God unites them to Christ, yes this is a spiritual blessing. But, it is one that is only concretely realized by the elect upon being united to Christ. Until that point, any blessings God bestows upon His elect are only earthly blessings that He will eventually use once the elect person is united to Christ. This secret love does not mean that unbelievers are secretly in Christ. Flowers is reading that concept into Calvin. God secretly loves them because of His election, but they are still under the sentence of condemnation until they are actually united to Christ. And the Father will only fully proclaim them just and forgiven in heaven unto the angels in their justification by faith. If Flowers or anyone else wishes to say that I am still positing the notion of an unbeliever being in a non-condemned state because he or she would be united to Christ before faith, there is no time gap between these steps of salvation. There is only logical priority. The moment we are united to Christ, we place saving faith in Him.

As far as the statement at the beginning of verse 4 that states God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, this is a figure of speech. Paul is essentially saying that God chose us to be in Christ before the foundation of the world. And this was merely an emphatic way of saying that. Paul is basically saying that God's election can never be conceived apart from salvation in Christ. Flowers can say all he wants that I'm reading things into that text, but the text is quite clear that we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world and in some sense this was in Christ.

According to his own exegesis, he has to qualify this statement, otherwise he also would have us being fully in Christ well before the moment of salvation. Most who take the corporate election view respond to this by saying that this is not so because

Jesus was indeed fully chosen before the foundation of the world. He is *the* Chosen One, before the foundation of the world, and we only become the chosen when we are included in the Chosen One by faith. That is *not* what the text says though. It never remotely implies that we only become chosen in this life when we place our faith in the Chosen One. The passage specifically says that God chose specific human beings, in Christ, and that He did so before the foundation of the world. If Flowers and others wish to say that the text must be qualified based on the rest of Scripture, fine. That is legitimate. But, then they cannot fault us for doing the same thing.

Eph 2: 1-10 never mentions the law. It does mention works, and I agree that there is no such thing as a good work apart from God's law, but the focus is on us not being able to boast about anything in ourselves, including faith. Calvinist exegetes have long since demonstrated that the second half of verse 8 should include saving faith as being part of what is not of ourselves. Even if Flowers and others wish to say that they still find this exegesis unconvincing, it would still mean that we could have the small boast of faith as stated earlier. And that certainly seems to go against the entire tenor of Scripture, not merely Eph 2:8.

As far as Flowers' 3 alleged flaws with our argumentation on this front, the answer to the first flaw is yes God has effectually brought about our acceptance of the doctrines of grace as Calvinists. As far as why He does not give this to all of His children, He will eventually in the eternal state. As far as why He does not give this to all of His children in this life, God does not bless all of His children in the same ways. Non-Reformed Christians have many blessings that I do not have. Some have more faith than I do. Some have been used of God more than me. Some have more godly children. As far as #2 goes, again, no one is saying that any Christian could boast in any grandiose way. But, the Christian could secretly say to himself that he is so glad he chose Christ. That would be perfectly true and would be a genuine boast on some level against unbelievers. As far as #3 goes, yes we all do unfortunately. But, this Calvinist has no grounds for his boasting, whereas most non-Reformed Christians would on some very small level if unconditional election is false.

The section on God's righteousness has already been answered by all that I've said in this subsection. The section on God's sovereignty has been answered by my

first chapter. In the section on John 10, Flowers has to make an utter mess of this chapter. Everything he says is entirely refuted by his doctrine of free will. If people can change in a moment and choose to receive Christ, then it follows inexorably that it would not matter how much they have hardened themselves in the past, they could receive Jesus at any time in this life. If that were the case, then Jesus plainly would have said something along the lines of, "You do not believe because you insist on continuing in your unbelief. If you insist on having a hard heart, there is nothing I can do for you." That is not what He says though. He says that they do not believe because they are not of His sheep. It is as simple as that.

As far as the conclusion goes, law and love are never to be separated. Love is the essence of the law. This truth is found all over Scripture. We are to obey the law out of love for God and people. God uses us to evangelize the lost. He does not have to do it that way, but He has chosen to do so. The common non-Reformed conception does not render its adherents off the hook here either. The non-Reformed believe in the sovereignty of God. The non-Reformed person could just as easily say to himself that if God knows someone will receive Him, He will assuredly send someone to preach the gospel to that person whether I personally do it or not. And that would absolutely be true in the common non-Reformed understanding. The non-Reformed person that says this would be every bit as callous and disobedient as the hyper-Calvinist. God doesn't need us for anything. He can do all things by Himself, whether Calvinism is true or not. Does this truth relieve us of our duty to eat, wash ourselves, work, etc.? Does it relieve us of our duty to take care of our children and teach them the word of God? Of course it does not. God is a God of means. He doesn't have to be, but He has chosen to be. And that truth is every bit as true in a non-Reformed world as it is in a Calvinist one.

Chapter 3

The first paragraph of this chapter is nothing more than bluster. There is no one text of Scripture that states clearly and unequivocally that God is one being in three persons. No one can point to any one text that clearly and unequivocally states that Christ is one person with two natures. No one can point to any text that clearly and

unequivocally states that we are not to baptize our infants. Limited atonement is based on multiple lines of evidence, as is the case with any overarching doctrine found in the Bible.

The doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election both imply it. The first chapter of *Calvinism*, as we saw, barely even addressed hardly any Calvinist texts on total depravity. And Flowers failed to disprove unconditional election in his chapter. John 10 also provides very strong support for the doctrine of limited atonement. As I've said in my writings and in the first chapter to this work, I do believe that there is a very real sense in which we can speak of Christ dying for all human beings. With that said, the idea that John 10 does not also teach that Christ died for His sheep in a more specific and fuller sense is quite a stretch. It bursts the air out of the texts where Jesus is saying that He specifically died for His sheep and the entire chapter is distinguishing between the sheep and those that are not Christ's sheep. John 17 also provides very strong evidence for the doctrine and we will discuss that chapter more in this subsection. Finally, if Christ paid the penalty for all human beings on the cross, and did not merely offer to pay the penalty through His sacrificial death, then no one would end up in hell. Yet, universalism is plainly contradicted by many sections of Scripture, most notably the end of Matt 25.

As far as everything else said before the section on arguments for limited atonement, Allen has a fairly strong grasp of the history of the doctrine and the debates surrounding it. I would quibble with some things here and there, but for the most part I won't say too much. I do want to defend my Calvinist brethren who do not believe that God has any desire to save the reprobate on any level from the charge of hyper-Calvinism. I do not agree with them, but I do not believe it is fair to call them hyper-Calvinists. Such a position has always been seen as acceptable within Reformed circles. And I would add that my position is that part of the intent of the atonement was to make the universal offer of the gospel possible.

As far as the rest of this chapter, I believe that I have already answered almost everything he says either in this work so far or in the second book of my basics series. Many of the arguments from Calvinists that he addresses, I agree, are rather weak. Many others I think are strong, but are not definitive. Many others I think are definitive,

but are not essential to my overall case and so I will not belabor them. If anyone feels that I really needed to address something that I will not be addressing as we proceed, he or she can email me and I will do so. With all of that made clear, I do want to address a few things from the rest of chapter 3.

On pages 106-109, under C, Allen seeks to address one of the strongest arguments in favor of limited atonement. And this argument comes from John 17:9. I am not asserting limited atonement here based upon sheer logic. I agree that if this was done, logical fallacies would result. I am doing so based upon the spirit of the text. It makes no sense whatsoever for Jesus to specifically say that He was not praying for the world when He was about to go and pay for the sins of the world and that He desires them to be saved in almost every sense of the word. If the common non-Reformed conception were true, Jesus would certainly pray for all human beings. There is absolutely no reason to limit verse 9 to the 11 remaining apostles. Yes, Jesus is of course talking to these apostles, but they are not being spoken to as apostles, but as believers throughout John 17. It is true that even many Calvinists assert that Jesus is only speaking about the apostles throughout this chapter unfortunately. They do so based on verse 12. That is an erroneous interpretation. The words concerning Judas should either be seen as a play on words or a later interpolation. The entire context of John 17 is about the ones God has given to the Son (verses 2; 6; 9; and 24), and the ones God will give to the Son (verse 20). In light of John 6, there is no possible way to interpret all of those verses as referring solely to the apostles.

And Jesus does not pray for the world in verse 23. This is not a prayer on behalf of the world, it is a prayer that the reprobate world will see the true church for what it is. This will happen to some extent in this life, but will fully and finally take place at the final judgment. As far as verse 21 goes, Jesus is not saying that He is praying that the world would believe unto saving faith, but only that it will intellectually believe that the Father has sent the Son. And this prayer is fulfilled partially in this life, and it will ultimately be fulfilled in the next. We are not reading the concept of the reprobate into Jesus' references to the world throughout this chapter. It is demanded by the chapter as a whole. Jesus distinguishes between those given by the Father, and the world, throughout the chapter. And according to Jesus' own words in John 6, only those given

to Him by the Father will come to Him for salvation. The world obviously refers to those not given to Jesus by the Father in John 17. Everyone agrees that Jesus also uses the term *world* to describe creation in this chapter. It is always plain from the context when Jesus uses it in that sense and when He uses it to describe those who have not been given to Him by the Father.

Next, I would like to discuss *F* and *G* on pages 114-120. Allen displays an enormous amount of confusion in these subsections. As far as the discussion on original sin, Jesus did not pay the penalty for original sin for the reprobate, plain and simple. In my conception, and I think this is ultimately what Romans 5 is driving at, He went to the cross for original sin in the sense that the cross is offered to all human beings. But, He did not actually pay for the sins of the reprobate, original or actual.

I fully agree with Allen that the commercial transaction language used in Scripture is figurative and should not be pressed too far. That does not change the fact that the doctrine of substitutionary atonement plainly states that the punishment due for our sins is imputed to Christ on the cross. I will not be here proving that doctrine as I believe it is the doctrine of either all or most of the contributors. If anyone would like me to prove it, please email me. And given that fact, his analogies fall completely flat. No one is saying that if Allen stole 500 bucks from the restaurant and I paid the restaurant back that 500, he is off the hook. Justice would demand more than the 500 dollar payment. The point though, is that if Allen goes to jail for a few years to pay this criminal debt, the debt has been paid. Neither he or anyone else can be made to pay it again. Let us say that he gets let off easy for this infraction. Let us say that the court decides that because he had no prior criminal history, he had a long record of being an excellent citizen, there was nothing violent about the crime (say he just ran by the open cash register and grabbed the cash very quickly), and it was determined that he temporarily had a breakdown because he was under intense stress, he is not going to be given any prison time. The court says that the 500 has to be paid back (it already has been by me), and that he must pay society a restitution fine of 10K. And let us say that Allen could not pay this and so I paid it on his behalf. Once I have paid that fee, the fee has been paid. Done deal.

As far as me being falsely accused of the crime, the debt that I pay in prison only goes towards my debt. Once it is discovered that I was innocent, that has nothing to do with Allen's debt. I have been wronged by the society that wrongly found me guilty. And I could seek restitution for this wrong. Allen would still be liable for his own sentence. But, let us say that our society was willing to let me serve Allen's prison time for *his* debt. If I willingly serve that prison time, Allen cannot be made to serve it later. That would be unjust. It is as simple as that. Even if one wants to attach a condition to things by saying that society is only willing to allow me to serve this time if I am willing to do so and Allen is willing to accept my offer to do so, once I have served the prison time, the debt has been paid and cannot be demanded in any sense down the line.

Allen is also confused regarding the timing of the imputation of our sins to the cross. This imputation does not take place until we are united to Christ. And it is not officially proclaimed until we are justified. Granted these two things take place at the same time, but there is a logical priority here that is important. Just because Christ actually pays for the sins of the elect does not thereby mean that the imputation takes place at that moment. If I go down to the courthouse and pay the traffic fee for one of my children, it is paid at that moment. But, it may take the system two days to fully process this. The full imputation only takes place two days later when things have completely processed.

On page 117, Allen states that it is not the case that in the unlimited atonement understanding that the same person is charged and punished with the same crime. But, that is absolutely the case. The sinner is charged for his sins and is then punished for those very sins when the punishment for those sins has already been discharged by another, namely Christ. Everyone agrees that there is not an exact unilateral equivalence between the cross and hell. The point though, is that God is more than satisfied to accept the punishment of the cross in place of our punishment in hell. The punishment on the cross is of more just value before the bar of God than all of humanity suffering in hell for all eternity combined. The replacement punishment only needs to be of equal or greater value than the punishment it is replacing for it to be just. And that is precisely the case with the cross.

I want to address one final item from this chapter. On page 132, Allen states that the distinction between God's love towards the elect and His lesser love towards the non-elect is arbitrary. It is nothing of the sort. It is plainly what is taught in Romans 9. God loved Jacob and hated Esau. I agree that we should not take the reference to Esau too literally. God loves His enemies and we are commanded by Him to do the same. Thus, God did love Esau on some level. It is quite plain though, that He did not love Esau as much as He loved Jacob. Even if one wants to insist on the conditional nature of this love, it still remains that the distinction stands. I am sure Allen and others would say that the arbitrariness is found in the fact that God chose to love Jacob more than Esau without any regard to the actions of either of them. Again, this decision is arbitrary in itself, but it is most certainly not arbitrary in an overarching sense. This decision is couched within God's greater purpose to glorify Himself by being merciful to some and showing justice to others. That decision is not arbitrary, but is rooted in God's desire to glorify Himself.

Chapter 4

As stated earlier, I do not want to dwell too much on the historical issues in this work. But, it must be said that while I am willing to grant that there is debate concerning Calvin's view on certain matters that have become staples of later Reformed doctrine, there is no question that the Remonstrants departed from Calvin and the Calvinists that came after him on the most crucial issue of irresistible grace. The idea that it was their opponents who drifted is not historically accurate. Calvin may not have always used the precise language that was later developed and used by the Calvinists, but he most certainly taught that God changes the hearts of the elect and that He does so because He has elected them unconditionally. To deny this most fundamental point was to deny the Calvinist tradition itself.

It is true that some Calvinists over the years have been too soft in their articulation of irresistible grace or effectual calling. Many have indeed taught that God merely woos and persuades, but does so in such a powerful and effective way that the elect will freely come to Him. And they say that God does not woo and persuade in this

precise manner towards the reprobate. I agree that this doctrine is not the historic doctrine of Calvinism, and I would argue that it most certainly is not the doctrine of Scripture either.

There is no contradiction between the notion of irresistible grace and the fact that God does not force people to believe in Him against their will. And the idea that Calvinists have not painstakingly explained this time and again is simply false. God sovereignly changes hearts. When God does this, it is irresistible. The sinner cannot stop it. But, at the moment of faith, God does not drag the sinner kicking and screaming against his will to Christ. The sinner freely and joyously and fearfully runs to Jesus because his heart has now been changed. Going back to my broccoli analogy earlier, if God right now in an instant changed my taste buds so that they would love broccoli and also gave me a deep craving for broccoli, I would go and freely eat some broccoli and I would love it. I would not in any way be forced to eat the broccoli. I would be acting in accord with my new desires. The key issue is that God does not need to ask for my permission to do this. God can never actively change our desires towards evil, but He can change our desires in a holy direction or over morally neutral matters, such as the desire for broccoli. My resistance to broccoli would be sovereignly and effectively overcome without my permission. In that sense, it would be irresistible. I could not resist it or stop it. But, once that change has taken place, God would not be forcing me to eat the broccoli. I would do so freely and would very much enjoy the snack.

It is absolutely true that God regenerates sinners against their will. This is the point that Lemke is very hung up on. But regeneration and faith are not identical. Lemke often seems to conflate the two. Regeneration logically precedes faith. In regeneration God goes against our wills. In faith, we freely and willingly come to Christ. I understand that the common non-Calvinist cannot stand the notion of God regenerating us apart from us willing Him to do so, but too bad. God has that right. We have already seen that in Scripture. And it is not like God argues with the sinner in the moment of regeneration. God doesn't ask the sinner if he wants to be regenerated, the sinner says no, and then God basically says too bad, I'm going to do it anyway! God works behind the scenes without our permission every moment of the day. He is King, we are not. Period.

Lemke and others may object that my broccoli analogy doesn't work. They may say that while I hate broccoli, certainly I would have no objection to God changing my desires on that front. That would be a good thing and would make me more healthy. Why would I be against that? This is to not fully understand how badly I hate broccoli. I am not at all saying that I hate broccoli anywhere near as much as the sinner hates God. Not even close. However, the mere thought of broccoli makes me gag. I cannot even be around it when someone is cooking it in the kitchen. If God were to ask me if I wanted that desire changed, and He was genuinely giving me the option, I would respectfully decline. I cannot subjectively fathom liking broccoli. And I like plenty of other fruits and vegetables. So, if the issue was health, I would rather God give me stronger desires to eat those, and lessen my desires to drink so many Peach Tea Snapples (man those things are good). Plus, there are always vitamin supplements! At the same time, I fully understand that God has every sovereign right to change my desires regarding broccoli. Again, He is King, I am not. The common non-Calvinist may say that is fine, but that would not apply to salvation. Certainly God desires to save everyone in every way. That is the issue you need to prove, and I don't believe you have done so.

If Lemke and others want to insist that our view of regeneration still has God forcing us to do something against our will in a manner of speaking, I think that is sloppy language, but if they want to insist on it, fine. As long as they accurately define our position, I am not going to continue to quibble with them. God can force people to do things against their will. God will force people to go to hell against their will. The idea of Lewis and others that people will willfully walk into hell is not biblical. Sinners will of course not will to worship God forever, but that hardly means they will willingly go to hell. I don't even take the descriptions in Revelation literally, and yet the idea that any human or angel will willingly walk into the lake of fire is absurd. Lemke and others can say that this really isn't forcing someone to commit a moral action against his will though. And I would agree, and would again reiterate that we are not saying that God forces people to commit moral actions in the sense of grabbing their arms, forcing them to steal something while they are trying to resist the action, and then holding them responsible for the deed. That is ridiculous and we are not saying this. This is all we mean when we say that God does not force anyone to place faith in Christ. God

sovereignly changes natures, souls, or hearts (whatever descriptor you want to use), and that causes us to freely act in very new and different ways. So, if you want to say that God forces people to receive Jesus, fine, as long as you only mean this in the sense that God regenerates people against their will and without their permission.

I have already detailed my views on libertarian freedom vs. compatibilist volition. I do not hold to either view strictly speaking. The fact of the matter though, is that there are times when we will irresistibly choose one option. If someone has gotten lost in the woods and has long since eaten all of his food, when he is found and offered food, he is not going to turn it down. Lemke and others can say no, there could be variables. It may be food (like with me and the broccoli[!]) that he hates and so he is willing to wait a little longer before he is offered food that is more palatable to him. Or he may know his survival skills and may know that if he eats too much too quickly that it can be very dangerous. I agree that these variables could be present. So, let's remove them in the analogy, which could be quite plausible. He is unbelievably hungry, but he's not starving yet. And he is offered food he loves and not too much of it. And there are no other variables that would cause him to not want the food. The idea that his "free will" can conjure up enough desire to turn down the food for whatever reason is illogical in the extreme. He is going to receive the food. And when God regenerates us, He so overwhelms us with a desire for Jesus and His salvation, that we irresistibly, effectually, and inevitably come freely running to Jesus.

Lemke objects that all of this leaves little room for human volition in response to God's grace. That is not true. As repeatedly said, the sinner flees to Jesus with passion. His volition is entirely involved at that point. Yes, our volition is not involved in the manner that Lemke wants it to be, but that is not the issue. God does not have to give us absolute libertarian freedom. He is not obligated to do so. And that was not a jab that non-Calvinists who believe in libertarian freedom believe that we as humans have absolute freedom. I agree with Lemke that Calvinists should not misrepresent our brethren who are our theological opponents (we shouldn't misrepresent anyone, but especially not our brethren). I merely mean it in the sense in which most non-Calvinists often define the term. I see no philosophical or biblical reasons why God is obligated to give us that freedom at all times.

As far as the doctrine of effectual calling sounding nicer than the doctrine of irresistible grace, I agree that this is how many Calvinists try to use the doctrine. But, that is a minority position and Lemke should be aware of this. The overwhelming vast majority of Calvinists are not at all trying to pit the doctrines against each other, or are trying to use the former term to displace the latter term. For most Calvinists, the two terms are closely related, but are not identical. They are describing two distinct doctrines and we are not ashamed of either term. Irresistible grace is primarily referring to regeneration. This is where God sovereignly changes our natures from evil ones to holy ones (albeit still very imperfect ones). Effectual calling is referring to the fact that God does not give regeneration to adults who have never heard the gospel. That would make no sense. Such a person would have an overpowering desire for God and His salvation, but would have no idea how to receive it.

Effectual calling refers to when the word of God, specifically the gospel, becomes effective to a hardened sinner because God is going to regenerate this sinner. Again, there is no time gap, but there is a logical priority. Most Calvinists, myself included, believe that effectual calling is logically prior to regeneration. Either this sinner is hearing the gospel preached at that moment, or God brings to mind the gospel that has already been preached to this sinner, and in that moment God regenerates him so that he freely receives it. No softening of the doctrine of irresistible grace is needed in order to affirm effectual calling. And Lemke and others can say that all of this only proves that I'm a hyper-Calvinist all they want. I am no such thing. What I have laid out is historic Calvinism and is the doctrine of most Calvinists. I'm not saying that all of my positions are the positions of most Calvinists. My position on libertarian free will would not be shared with most Calvinists. I am only here referring to the distinction between, and embrace of, both irresistible grace and effectual calling.

We say that the doctrine of irresistible grace has often been misunderstood because it constantly is. Lemke does not fully represent it accurately here despite his valiant attempts as I have shown. You can quote and paraphrase certain things all you want, but that does not mean that you are fulfilling your goal of accurate representation. I agree that Lemke has shown the inconsistency of many softer Calvinists, but that does

not mean that he has demonstrated the philosophical and logical inconsistency of most Calvinists.

Throughout the rest of the chapter, from “The Bible and Irresistible Grace” to the last page, Lemke says a whole lot, but in the end I believe I have sufficiently answered most of it in my first chapter of this work. There are a number of key things I want to address from this long portion of his chapter, but much will be left out for the reason just stated. If the reader feels like there is any particular point I should have addressed, please email me and I will do so.

The first thing I want to say is that it is very, very frustrating when most non-Calvinists will deal with very few traditional Calvinist texts directly, and instead choose to run over to the many passages on the universal offer of the gospel, God’s love for all, and the fact that we are justified by faith. To his credit, Allen in his chapter did cover almost all of the traditional texts on limited atonement. Again, I don’t think he made his case in the final analysis, but he does deserve credit for interacting with almost every single Calvinist text and argument regarding limited atonement. With that said, the chapter on total depravity addresses almost none of the passages on total depravity, as we saw. And the entire rest of the Calvinist case is largely rooted in that starting point. And Lemke in this chapter only deals with 3 sets of Calvinist texts on irresistible grace. There are far more that we offer and again, we also state that the case for unconditional election, limited atonement, and irresistible grace, all flow from the case for total depravity.

I am not accusing Lemke or any of the other contributors of heresy. I have already made this clear. But, I have been witnessing to LDS folks, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Catholics, and unitarians for years now, and this same tactic is used by all of them all of the time. It gets positively maddening after a while. Before moving forward, I do want to clarify why I did not capitalize the term *unitarian*. I only capitalize the term when referring to those that are part of the official organization known as the Unitarian Universalist Association. I don’t capitalize the term when only referring to those that are part of the very popular and growing movement of those that claim to be unitarian, but are not part of the organization above. This movement is growing rapidly among younger people online, especially YouTube, and I regularly interact with them.

And I can't tell you how many times I have witnessed to those in these groups and they will willfully ignore the texts I provide and will quickly flee to quote passages that only prove doctrines I already believe in. For example, when I provide passages on the deity of Christ to the unitarians discussed above, they will almost instinctively fly over to passages that discuss the human nature of Christ and its submission to the Father. It does not matter how many times I point this out to them, they insist that the texts I have referenced just *can't* mean what they so clearly seem to be saying because of their prooftexts. I will give one example of this. Often, among a lot of other evidence, I will point to the extremely strong evidence for the full deity of Christ found in John 5. In that chapter, Jesus is explicitly said to be equal to the Father and He says that we are to honor Him just as we honor the Father. That is about as clear as it gets. The unitarians though, will almost immediately point to the passages in that very chapter that highlight the submission of Christ in His human nature to the Father. When I tell them that those verses do not in any way change or negate the other verses in John 5, they only complement them and show the richness of the person of Christ, the unitarians usually just repeat those verses to me in a circle.

It is not ok to dismiss the evidence for the doctrine of irresistible grace by pointing to the evidence for the universal offer of the gospel, God's love for all, and the fact that we are justified by faith. The overwhelming vast majority of Calvinists, myself very much included, already believe in all of those doctrines. If you want to say that we do so inconsistently, fine. I understand that Lemke has and does try to say this. But, often he merely strings together a number of passages that only prove doctrines that we already embrace. And I reject the notion that we hold to them inconsistently based on all that I said in chapter 1. Even when passages of this nature are found in the same context as passages on total depravity and/or irresistible grace, as is the case in both John 6 and Romans 9, merely pointing this out proves nothing. Pointing to all of the texts on how salvation only comes by faith at the end of Romans 9 in no way, shape, or form, changes or negates all that Paul says about election in the first part of the chapter. This tactic is plain bad theology.

Next, as far as Jesus sometimes not reacting how we would expect a "Calvinist" to react, I again point the reader to John 11. The common non-Calvinist will retort that

this narrative is about physical resurrection and not spiritual resurrection. I agree, but this does not mean that we cannot see a clear parallel between the two once irresistible grace has been established. And that is not even why I am pointing the reader to this section of Scripture. General principles from this narrative can be used to explain a great deal of the phenomena in Scripture in light of the doctrines of grace. With all that said, let's dive into that narrative once more.

Did Jesus really love Lazarus? Does not the narrative plainly seem to present that He did? We all agree that it does. But, given that fact, does that not make much of Jesus' actions rather odd to us? Why does Jesus specifically allow Lazarus to die? Why does He even say that He is glad that He was not there? Jesus says that all of this was so that the disciples would believe and for the glory of God. Ok, fair enough. But, then why would Jesus still be so upset when He sees that Lazarus has died up close and personal, and also sees the reaction of Lazarus' sisters? If this was all part of His plan from the beginning for a specific purpose, and He literally knew that He was going to raise Lazarus in just a few moments, why such a strong response? Does this not seem terribly odd from our finite perspective? And it's not like Jesus just showed a little natural sadness at the sight. That would make some semblance of sense to us. As the contributors to *Calvinism* well know, the text says that Jesus wept. And they also assuredly know how strong this is in the Greek. The narrative not only says that Jesus wept in the strongest sense, but it says that He was deeply moved and greatly troubled.

Even further, some of the Jews asked if Jesus could not have kept Lazarus from dying in the first place when Jesus was able to heal the blind. How many times have we as Calvinists heard very similar objections? How many times do we hear similar objections throughout *Calvinism*? How many times do we hear this same basic objection from Lemke in this very chapter! If God can pour out His irresistible grace upon all people, why are not all people saved? And even if we grant that this is how God does things, why would He still love the reprobate and be upset with their sin and rejection? After all, hasn't God ordained it?! All of these questions and responses are the questions of sinful, finite humans trying to fully comprehend the ways of God. But, we cannot comprehend them. We need to believe what God's word says about Himself.

Lemke and others may object that the comparisons don't hold. Lazarus and his sisters were believers. The reprobate are not and never will be. This is true, but it does not change the fact that we still see in this narrative Jesus hate and weep over a death that He clearly willed and brought about in some sense. That cannot be denied from the narrative. And while of course Jesus' love for Lazarus was greater than His love for the reprobate, this in no way changes the fact that Jesus acted towards Lazarus and his sisters, whom Jesus plainly loved, in ways that at first glance don't seem very loving to us. Jesus willed the suffering of Lazarus and his sisters on some level because He had a greater purpose for that suffering. But, that suffering still displeased Him greatly nonetheless. Yes, there is great tension here in this narrative. Yet, the narrative is the narrative and it cannot be explained away. And it sheds a tremendous amount of light on so many passages and sections of Scripture (many of which Lemke references in this very chapter) when set against the backdrop of the doctrines of grace. I freely admit that much of these passages and sections don't seem to belong at first against that backdrop. John 11 makes it plain though, that these themes are biblical themes and therefore cannot be swept under the rug or explained away.

Lemke again repeats the canard that has been repeated so often by many of the contributors throughout this work. And this is that God allegedly has no reason for going about election in the manner that He does. This is not what we are saying as Calvinists. We are saying that God absolutely has a reason for doing things in this manner. And that reason is His glory. I agree that God did not have to glorify Himself in this manner. But, He was also free to do so and clearly did in fact choose to do so. God magnifying His holiness, justice, and righteousness through the punishment of the reprobate brings Him glory! God is not only glorified when He magnifies the attributes of His that we like. And God is mightily glorified through the magnifying of His love, grace, and mercy to the elect. It is that simple my friends. Yes, whom God chooses and whom God doesn't choose is in itself arbitrary. But, this arbitrary choice is couched within a much broader framework that is anything but arbitrary.

As far as Acts 7 and other clear instances of people resisting God's grace are concerned, I have already answered this in my chapter on the doctrines of grace in the second book of my "basics" series. As far as Calvinist covenant theology seeing the

entire nation of Israel as God's chosen people, this reflects a staggering degree of confusion. First of all, not all Calvinists today hold to traditional Reformed covenant theology. MacArthur and his Master's movement have led to countless Semi-Dispensational Calvinists. Second, traditional covenant theology believes that the true nation of Israel, the elect, are God's chosen people. We do not believe that all ethnic Jews are. We do believe that they are God's chosen people in the sense that they are the ethnic group God chose to primarily work through, but we absolutely reject that all ethnic Jews are of the elect unto salvation. On the very same page (page 170), Lemke continues with his staggering confusion. Effectual calling only refers to the moment of salvation. All Calvinists agree that the elect constantly and persistently resist and reject the grace of God until the moment that God regenerates them.

As far as persuasion is concerned, I have already answered this in my chapter on the doctrines of grace referenced above. However, I do need to add a note on the rich because Lemke makes a big deal out of this. Jesus' point is merely to say that the rich will always be the most resistant to the gospel even from a persuasion standpoint because of their riches. Even further, God does not choose very many rich people as is shown in 1 Cor 1. The disciples are astonished by Jesus' words and ask who then can be saved, and Jesus tells them that what is impossible with man is possible with God. As Calvinists, we would see in that a clear statement on the concept of irresistible grace.

As far as the parable of the sower goes, I fully agree that the variable factor is the soil. But, Luke says that the receptive soil is good soil. It is not bad soil that is barely good enough to be receptive. Notice that the soil is good *prior* to the seed falling into it. This is exactly what Calvinists are saying. We have good hearts and natures that receive Jesus because we have been regenerated. God radically changes our natures in regeneration. This does not mean that our natures are perfect or could in any way merit eternal life on the basis of this goodness. Our natures are still imperfect and thus only produce imperfect works that cannot be accepted at the bar of God. Thus, they are not truly good in that sense. But, they are good in the sense that they are now intrinsically holy for the most part and long to love and serve Jesus Christ. It is because of this change that the regenerate run to Jesus. The common non-Calvinist says that we

receive Jesus while in a wicked state and that God only regenerates us after faith. That is not what Luke 8:8 says.

Everything said in the previous paragraph may seem to contradict what I said earlier about effectual calling logically preceding regeneration. This is not the case. The doctrine of effectual calling is not saying that the gospel in itself causes regeneration. Regeneration is only caused by the Holy Spirit. The point that is being made in the doctrine of effectual calling is what was stated earlier, namely that God is not going to regenerate someone before he or she has heard the gospel. God is not going to change the soil well before the seed is distributed. Obviously, this point is not being made in this parable. The parable is about people only fully receiving the seed because they are the good soil. However, we know from the rest of Scripture that God brings to the forefront of the elect person's mind the gospel at the moment He is going to save him or her, and when that is done God regenerates this elect person so that he or she automatically receives that gospel. In that sense, effectual calling precedes regeneration.

Lemke approvingly quotes from Olson on page 175 to the effect that God and Satan are really not all that different in Calvinism, a regular canard from Olson. In this quote, Olson basically states that in Calvinism, Satan wants all people damned to hell and God wants only a certain number damned to hell. Yes, but Satan wants them all damned to hell because he loves to see people suffer for the sake of suffering. He hates all people and wants them to sin and suffer as much as possible. But, he does not want them to suffer for their sins, he just wants them to suffer. And he does not will the allowance of sin for a greater purpose, he just loves sin. God only wants a certain number damned in order to justly punish them for their sins in order to magnify his holiness, justice, and righteousness. He does not enjoy their suffering merely for the sake of suffering. I knew those boys on the playground were going to mistreat my son if I let him play with them. I could have stopped that, but chose not to for the sake of my son. I hated their actions. But, I did will their occurrence on some level. Those boys only willed to mistreat my son for the sake of mistreating him. That mistreatment in itself gave them pleasure. Lemke complains that we as Calvinists often get perturbed when we are so routinely misrepresented, but this is because we are so routinely misrepresented!

Let us now look at Lemke's responses to the Calvinist proof texts he assesses. As far as the texts from John 6 and 12, I agree that we cannot make too much of the lexical evidence behind *helkuo*. I would say the same thing regarding the usage of the concept of *dead* in Eph 2. I believe that both pieces of evidence provide very strong confirmatory evidence for Calvinism, but I would not say that either piece of evidence is definitive or should be used as a first line of attack. With that admitted, I think it is extremely strong evidence that in John 6, Jesus makes it clear that people are not able to come to Him unless God draws them and they are given to Him by the Father, and that all who are given and thus drawn will come to Jesus and be salvifically raised on the last day. All of that evidence very strongly favors total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. It is highly telling that Lemke basically admits that all who are given and drawn will come to Jesus. Most non-Calvinists throughout church history have vehemently protested that all are drawn to Jesus, but most simply refuse to come. That is not what Jesus says and these non-Calvinist theologians have to twist themselves into all sorts of pretzels in order to mount any semblance of a defense on that front. I appreciate that Lemke is being more honest with the text by saying that being given and drawn only apply and refer to believers, but that cuts against his overall case pretty drastically.

For those non-Calvinists like Lemke, they have to say that God only gives and draws believers to Jesus because He knows they will in fact believe. That is certainly a possible interpretation of the narrative, but it is nowhere found in the narrative itself. It is fine that the common non-Calvinist is using what he believes to be evidence from elsewhere in Scripture to make this possible interpretation, but he should be more honest about this and a little more cautious about chastising us Calvinists when we so often interpret many verses and sections of Scripture in light of the doctrines of grace. A major further problem for Lemke and other minority non-Calvinists like himself is that this also means that John 12:32 must be interpreted to mean that the "all people" there refers to Jews and Gentiles. And that is borne out by the context. This shows that when Calvinists often interpret other passages in this same manner, they are not stretching Scripture. Now, as stated earlier, I don't think we always need to interpret the "all" passages in this manner. My point though, is that this is clearly not always illegitimate.

Amazingly, Lemke then goes on to approvingly quote from Lenski who at the beginning of the quote recognizes that the drawing in John 6 is only for believers, but then at the end of the quote says that in John 12 the drawing is for everyone! This is total confusion on the part of both Lemke and Lenski. One cannot have it both ways. If every single human being is drawn to Jesus, then every single human being will be saved according to John 6. In John 6, those that are drawn come to Jesus and will be salvifically raised on the last day. It should be further noted here, in light of what later contributors say in this book, that while one can possibly make the case that God only draws those whom He knows will receive Jesus in John 6, there is no way to reconcile John 6 with any doctrine that rejects the perseverance of the saints. We all agree that no one can come to Jesus unless drawn to Him. But for those who say that people can lose their salvation, they would have to say that God draws those to Jesus whom He knows will receive Him, but then some of them may fall away later, never to return. In such a system, you would have people being drawn to Jesus that will not be raised salvifically on the last day. I'm sorry, but there is no way to reconcile that with John 6 as a whole.

As far as Romans 8 is concerned, I agree that it alone does not prove irresistible grace. I do think though, that it offers very strong support for the distinction between the general call and the effectual call of God, something Lemke says is basically made up. In this text, all those that are called are justified. That limits the call. But, we all agree that there is a general call as well. Hence, the distinction. This is not the only text that I think teaches that distinction, but it is a strong one. Now, if the common non-Calvinist wishes to insist that this call is only effectual because God knows who will receive it, fine. I agree that we cannot prove from this text alone the traditional Calvinist exegesis. With that admitted, that would still be a clear distinction between the general call and the effectual call. While we would have a very different doctrine of effectual calling, I don't see how the common non-Calvinist can escape the distinction. The only way to do so is to say that this calling is referring to God naming us. And I do not believe that is what is being taught by Scripture and we will address that attempt later in this work.

As far as the term *foreknew* is concerned, I'm more than content with traditional Calvinist exegesis here. But, for the sake of argument, let us say that I am wrong. Even

if the term only refers to God's knowledge in the abstract, the text nowhere says (nor does any other text in all of the Bible) that the foreknowledge here is of God knowing in advance who would choose Him. That is utterly read into the text. Most non-Calvinists repeatedly chastise us for reading our view into the text, but they have to do the same. If they are going to insist on the bare knowledge understanding, we can just as easily say that all Paul is referring to here is God's knowledge of all possibilities. God knew that if He chose to create this particular world, the only people who would know Him would be those He chose to save. Hence, Paul could be saying something along the lines of, "For those whom He foreknew would be His people if He chose this world, He also predestined...." If the common non-Calvinist wishes to protest against my addition of "would be His people if He chose this world," because it is nowhere in the text, I must retort by saying that the words, "would choose Him," are nowhere in the text either.

If the common non-Calvinist says that the term itself inherently means this, that is indefensible. As Lemke himself explicitly admits, the naked word merely means to know something in advance. I am convinced that the notion of intimately knowing His people in advance is within the semantic range of the word. As stated though, if I am wrong on that front, fine. I am also willing to admit that the semantic range of the word can include knowing those who will choose God in advance. But, don't tell me that the word itself demands that interpretation in every instance. That is quite a stretch brothers. Hence, both sides must read their theology into the usage of the term in Romans 8. Both sides must do so based on other biblical evidence. And I'm convinced that this other biblical evidence is decidedly on our side even if the word is not being used by Paul in that context to refer to His intimate knowledge of His people in advance.

As far as God predestining His foreknowledge, we must speak of God's foreknowledge in two senses: His necessary knowledge and His free knowledge. Both are forms of foreknowledge as God had them both before the foundation of the world. This has always been the traditional position of the church. Any objection to this must either lead to heresy or to the simple foreknowledge view. I have already explained why myself, most theologians throughout church history, and even some of the contributors to *Calvinism*, reject the extremely problematic and dangerous view that is simple foreknowledge. With all that said therefore, it is clear that God does predestine His free

knowledge. To clarify, I do not believe that this is what is being said in Rom 8. I believe Paul is talking about God's intimate knowledge of His people He possessed before the foundation of the world (based on His predestination), and that Paul only begins a strict chronological list in verse 30. My point is that the alternative exegesis I offered is entirely possible.

Next, I would like to respond to Lemke's vaccine analogy. Most non-Calvinists never tire of using analogies like this. The problem with each and every single one is that they always presuppose the innocence of those being left out. Failing to give vaccines to the innocent when they can be given is indeed a horrible crime. But, while I may be innocent before my government, I am most certainly not innocent before God. Hence, the analogy does not hold.

Finally, as far as Lemke's references to Romans 9, we will address that section of Scripture in the next chapter when I respond to the chapter in *Calvinism* on Romans 9. For now, suffice it to say that Lemke's interpretations are very eisegetical and that will become quite evident in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Write out the gate Keathley shows some confusion about historical theology when he says that traditionally both Arminians and Calvinists have said that assurance is based on sanctification. This is, with respect, a very shallow read of church history. It is true that far too many Calvinists have articulated themselves in that way and that is indeed unbiblical and deeply unfortunate in my estimation. This was especially a problem with many Puritans. However, to completely flatten out the entirety of the Calvinist tradition is plain mistaken. In fact, many of the earliest Calvinists, basically equated assurance with faith, also a mistake (something Keathley later recognizes). As I've already stated, my goal in this work is not to address the many complex and nuanced historical issues that *Calvinism* brings up. Many of these issues are far more intricate than the book makes out. Therefore, I will briefly detail my doctrine of assurance and I can assure you that it is not outside of the mainstream of the Calvinist tradition.

The assurance of salvation is primarily based on the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit and not upon our sanctification (Rom 8:12-17). With that made very clear, I would make a distinction between what we know beyond doubt deep down, and how we often subjectively feel on the surface. How to fully explain this distinction is rather difficult both philosophically and psychologically, but we have all experienced it. And I don't only mean regarding assurance, but in many areas of life. We often doubt on the surface what we know to be true deep down. Hence, I do believe that our assurance on the surface can often waver greatly. Satan knows this and so he goes after us in this area. And the more we sin, the more he can make us doubt our assurance. Therefore, I would not say that our assurance, even on the surface, is dependent upon our sanctification, but it is absolutely highly influenced by it. I would place prayer on a higher level as far as helping our assurance on the surface. And of course prayer and sanctification cannot be divorced anyway. We can pray that God would strengthen our assurance on the surface and also that He would more and more sanctify us, for multiple reasons, but one of those reasons can certainly be so that Satan won't have so much ammunition against us.

I understand that because of the antinomianism that was inherent in Dispensationalism from the outset, and that still plagues Semi-Dispensationalism to a large extent to this day, that this doctrine is repugnant to many Conservative Evangelicals today. This is especially true in the United States, and it is most especially true among white Conservative Evangelicals in the Old South. I am not saying that people, many Calvinists very much included, have not taken the sanctification element in assurance and given it far too much prominence. They certainly have. But, the far bigger problem in the church is the remnants of the antinomianism that goes back to Darby.

One of the primary ways Satan attacks us is by making us feel like we were never saved in the first place. And this tactic of his is quite effective because apostasy has always been rampant in the church. The modern American Conservative Evangelical church tends to be so woefully ignorant of church history that far too many younger ones often feel that all the apostasy they see is some new thing. It might be called new hip names like *deconstruction*, but apostasy has always plagued the church.

We see this in the NT and Jesus warns us about it in the parable of the sower. Many, many people will profess Jesus for a time, but they will fall away because they were never saved in the first place. And the NT repeatedly warns us to make sure that this is not us. By examining ourselves in this manner, we keep Satan at bay and we greatly strengthen our relationship with Jesus.

I would quickly like to note that the position of Berkhof was not as novel in the Reformed tradition, or even in historic Protestantism more broadly, as Keathley makes out. Other than that, what I have laid out should answer for the reader how I would respond to Keathley throughout the rest of his chapter. I of course agree with a great deal of what he says. On the core point of whether or not a true Christian can lose his or her salvation, we both heartily agree. Obviously though, I would disagree with some of his presentation.

The final item I would like to touch upon is the fact that any view of eternal security that does not hold to all five points of Calvinism is grossly inconsistent. Perhaps Keathley is a 4 point Calvinist; I don't know very much about him as a theologian I regret to say. Wax, for example, seems to be a 4 pointer in line with Erickson. Therefore, from my limited perspective, it is possible that Keathley is as well. If that is the case, then he would certainly be far less inconsistent than many of the other contributors who reject all five points other than the final one, and even then they would highly qualify the fifth. My point is that if free will is considered an absolute right of ours in the sense that God must always give us the choice whether to love Him or not at all times in order not to be an ogre, then any doctrine of eternal security is manifestly incoherent. I understand that many clever arguments have been put forth to the contrary, but none of them work in the end. Traditional Arminians are decidedly consistent here for the most part (they are not consistent about the eternal state). The fifth point cannot be severed from the other 4; they all belong together as a unit. And the fact that there is so much evidence for the fifth point is extremely strong evidence in favor of the entire system of Calvinism. And the fact that Arminians have to be so inconsistent in their articulation of their doctrine by saying that people can fall away and come back to Christ numerous times despite the fact that many of the warning

passages make it quite clear this is not the case, also shows that the biblical data is on the side of the Calvinist.

One may retort that if I believe the warning passages are only warning us to make sure we are not a deluded unbeliever, I cannot then say that these texts are saying that a true believer cannot fall away and then later return. This is not so. The texts, especially Heb 6, are saying that false professing believers that have become so deeply entrenched in the church cannot return if they fall away. They have committed a form of the blasphemy of the Spirit. And if that is true, that would be all the more true of someone that was a true believer. And yet, traditional Arminians have always rejected this fact. They must eisegete the warning passages, especially Heb 6, plain and simple.

Section 2-Appendix

I am all for the altar call as long as it is used with caution. I fully agree that we must join together for the gospel. I also agree that the term *semi-Pelagian* is often used far too broadly and sloppily. With those points made clear, I believe that the overwhelming vast majority of what is said throughout the rest of the book, other than chapter 9, has already been sufficiently answered by what I have said thus far in this work or what I will say in the next chapter. Again though, if the reader does not agree, please email me any point you would like me to further clarify and I will happily do so.

Chapter 3: Response to Chapter 9 and My Conclusion

Chapter 9

No one is denying the fact that Jesus is our covenant head or that He is the ultimate Chosen One. No one is denying the fact that we share in the election of the patriarchs when we become saved. But, it is incorrect to conflate our salvation in real time on the ground with all of its attendant blessings and God's choice of who would be

part of that salvation and who would not. Abasciano's entire presentation up to the point where he begins his exegesis of Romans 9 is untenable. He has people coming and going from Christ and the elect changing on that basis. There is no way to reconcile this with Heb 6, John 6, and John 15, among many other sections of Scripture. We have already discussed Heb 6 and John 6. If people can fall away from Christ, then they cannot return according to Heb 6. Period. Hence, the being cut off in Romans 11 must not refer in every instance to the truly saved. People can and often do join the institutional church and are considered a part of it in very real ways, even by God Himself. Some partake of the goodness of God because of this to such a high degree that their apostasy is permanent. Many others however, only join the institutional church for familial or cultural reasons (or both), and can later be brought to faith after their apostasy.

This interpretation is confirmed by the fact that Rom 11 is mostly talking about the cutting off of the Jews at the time of Christ. And it is quite plain from the record of the Gospels that most of the Jews at the time of Jesus were most certainly not truly saved. Their unbelief became completely manifest to the institutional church because of the ministry of Christ and thus they were cut off *en masse*. Because most of those Jews fell into the cultural category, they could later return to the tree through faith. This is even further confirmed by what we see in John 15. Jesus explicitly says that those branches that bear fruit will be pruned by the Father so that they will bear even more fruit. And Jesus says that the apostles were already clean, reiterating what He had told them in John 13 in contrast to Judas. Judas was not clean (not saved), he had not been saved (even going by a reading that is opposed to the doctrine of any form of eternal security) going all the way back to the feeding of the 5K (John 6), and thus he was not chosen in that sense (John 13:18). The notion that this last verse is merely saying that Judas was chosen as an apostle and Jesus is saying that He knows the hearts of His chosen ones, is quite a stretch. In light of the entire Gospel of John, it is far more sound to say that Jesus is saying He knows who He has chosen unto salvation (the 11), and whom He has not (Judas). I am not denying that Judas was chosen as an apostle. Again, I fully agree that the Bible uses the notion of being chosen in multiple ways.

Yet, Judas was obviously a part of the institutional church (the vine/tree) on some level until his apostasy had become wholly revealed to the 11. He was only fully cut off at that point. And he of course was not merely a cultural follower of God. He was part of Jesus' inner circle and so the judgment of Heb 6 applied to him in a preeminent sense. Those that are part of the vine/tree that never produce true Christian fruit will eventually be exposed and cut off. In some cases, this may not take place until their death. But, in many cases, it will take place in this life. Either way though, they will eventually be cut off. And these false branches that are never fully joined to the vine/tree are not the elect merely by virtue of being connected to the vine/tree on some level. Those that are of the elect are only such because God chose them before the foundation of the world. And as such, they will eventually place true faith in Christ and will be fully attached to the vine whereby they will receive the nourishing sap from the vine (the Holy Spirit).

All of this may seem to be mitigated against by Jesus' repeated warnings in John 15 to remain in Him. This is not so. Jesus's warnings are in keeping with the warnings found throughout the NT. We are to make sure that we are in fact saved (2 Cor 13:5 and 2 Pet 1:10 as two key examples). This is all Jesus means by those repeated statements. Make sure you are truly attached to the vine. You do not want to delude yourself simply because you are part of the institutional church. Many that are part of the institutional church are not truly saved, they do not produce true Christian fruit, and they will eventually be cut off.

I agree with Abasciano that Paul has made it clear throughout the epistle leading up to Rom 9 that Jesus is the true Israel, the true seed of Abraham, and that we become heirs of the blessings of the covenant by being in Jesus. I also agree that this is why Paul anticipates the objection that this would at first blush seem to indicate that God's promises to the Israelites had failed and this is why he writes what he does in Rom 9. However, I of course strongly disagree with Abasciano that any of this has to lead to a non-Calvinist interpretation of Rom 9. Let us now turn to Abasciano's exegesis (really eisegesis) of Rom 9, starting on page 363.

I don't have any major objections to Abasciano's discussion on Rom 9:1-5 and agree that Piper overstates his case there. I am in basic agreement with his statements on verses 6-7, up until the quote from Genesis. And I rejoice that he recognizes that

Pauls' discussion here certainly does encompass individual salvation and is not some generic choosing of the nation of Israel as is the case with so much traditional Arminian exegesis. However, his eisegesis really gets cooking with his discussion on the quote from Gen. Abasciano reads election into this quote even though it is nowhere mentioned in that quote. The quote and Paul's use of it is merely to say that the saved will only be reckoned as such because they are the true seed of Abraham. They are the true seed of both Abraham and Isaac because they are the true Israel, namely Christ and all those that are in Him. That has to do with imputation, justification, and adoption. We are only named the children of God because of this prior adoption. We cannot be called the children of God until we actually formally are the children of God. It does not answer the question concerning election.

I agree with both Abasciano and Schreiner that the naming sense is what is in view at the end of verse 7. I also agree that this is the sense in verses 24-26. However, I vehemently reject that this is the sense in verse 11/12 or in Rom 8:30. *Kaleo* can certainly carry the meaning of naming and often does not only in Paul, but throughout the NT. It does not always carry that meaning though. Matthew 22:9 would be a good example where it does not carry that meaning. And the fact that Paul uses the term in both senses in Romans is confirmed by the fact that the naming sense is a result of faith. By faith we enter into full union with Christ and are thus imputed as the true seed of Abraham and Isaac. Based on this imputation God can now justify us, adopt us, and name us His own. And yet Paul makes it clear that calling in another sense comes before justification in Romans 8:30. This must refer to the call of the gospel, and this call will be effectual in the elect at the moment of salvation. That is the plain meaning of Rom 8:30. Abasciano makes it out like the naming sense can easily fit into Rom 8:30. It cannot. Our naming as the children of God is clearly based on our formal adoption. And adoption is logically after justification and grounded upon it.

Verse 11/12 is found in the context of verses 10-13, while verse 7 is found within the context of verses 6-9. There is a transition of thought at the beginning of verse 10 when Paul says, "And not only so...." He is amplifying what has been said in verses 6-9. Verses 6-9 are making it clear that salvation and being a true child of God were never entirely coordinate with being a biological descendant of Abraham. Verses 10-13 are

going even further and saying that the root cause of salvation not only is not dependent upon biology as the true children of God are reckoned through Isaac, but also because God freely chooses who will be given this blessing and who will not. I am not at all implying that Paul has entirely moved on from the Isaac motif. Clearly he has not. His point is that even being reckoned through Isaac is not a matter of biology as is evinced by the case of Jacob and Esau. However, it still remains that he is amplifying this theme by saying that those who are given this privilege are those that God has freely chosen to give it to and not because of anything God saw in them beforehand. I'm sorry, but this is the plain sense meaning behind Paul's reasoning for referring to the fact that Rebekah was told the fate of her sons before they had done anything good or bad.

If Paul was talking about the fact that God was going to love and choose Jacob because He foresaw that Jacob would meet the criteria for election, namely faith, the statement about Rebekah being told what she was told beforehand is rendered superfluous. The opponents of Paul could just as easily say that God had the future works of Jacob in mind when He made this statement if the statement is being made based upon God's foreknowledge. Paul's obvious sense is that if foreknowledge were the ground for this statement, God would have made that clear to Rebekah. But, God did not. The import of the Gen text is that God's choice of Jacob had nothing to do with Jacob himself. The opponents of unconditional election can say all they want that when Paul says that the statement was made before the two sons had done anything good or bad only refers to good works beyond faith, but this attempted explanation in no way can explain why Paul felt that the Gen text supports his contention in the first place. Further, as we have seen, faith is a good, holy, and wonderful act. It therefore must be included in Paul's statement about the boys not having done anything good or bad yet. As we will see, this interpretation is wholly confirmed by verses 14-24. In light of all of this, the calling in verse 11/12 must be referring to effectual calling.

Abasciano and others can object that it is highly unlikely that Paul would use the same term in the same chapter in two very different senses. This is not so. The same terms are used in different senses in many chapters of the Bible. We already saw this with John 17 as one example.

I agree with Abasciano that the most natural next section in this chapter from Paul is verses 14-18. However, the most important verse in this section by far, and one of the most important verses in this debate (if not *the* most important in all honesty; even more so than verses 19-20), is verse 16. In this verse, in the plainest language imaginable, Paul says that the bestowal of God's mercy and compassion is not based on human will. This verse utterly shatters any and all forms of non-Calvinism. It teaches unconditional election as clearly as can be done. God's choice as to whom He shows mercy and compassion is not based on our will. All of the other points of Calvinism follow as a matter of course after this. Any forms of partial Calvinism are illogical. And if the choice of God is not dependent on our will, then it logically must come before the actual bestowal of this mercy and compassion. And if God is omniscient, then He must have made this choice before the foundation of the world, otherwise this would imply God did not know that He would make this choice for some time, which would be a denial of His omniscience. As far as the objection that this would still mean there was a time when God was without this knowledge before this choice before the foundation of the world, I have already answered this in the second book of my "basics" series on my website. Hence, it is plain that God freely chose us apart from our will before the foundation of the world. Thus, all doctrines of conditional corporate election that are pushed by many of the contributors to this volume and that have become so popular within much of present-day American Evangelicalism, are proven false.

If it is objected that I said earlier that the case for full Calvinism begins with the *T* and yet here I'm saying that the case flows from the *U*, there is no actual inconsistency. If the *U* is true, the entire system is true logically. If the *T* is true, the entire system is true logically as well. It doesn't matter where one starts logically, the system flows from proving any of the points other than the *L*. Limited atonement must be embraced by all consistent theologians who adopt the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement. What I was saying earlier is that while it is true that proving any of the points other than the *L* leads to the full system, the best place to begin our case is with the *T* because we have such a wealth of biblical evidence for that particular point.

Returning to verse 16, what is the "it" in verse 16? It is plainly the bestowal of mercy and compassion referenced in verse 15. I agree with Abasciano that the word

“depends” does not have to be present in English in order to properly translate the text. I am also aware of the fact that the word “it” is not in the Greek. But the plain sense of *not of the one-willing* (*ou tou thelontos*) is that it is not of the one willing in English. What is not of the one willing though? That is the absolutely crucial question. It is the bestowal of mercy and compassion from God. The vast majority of non-Calvinists say that the bestowal is absolutely dependent upon our will. It is contingent on the one condition that God has placed upon us for receiving this mercy, namely faith. How often is that said throughout *Calvinism* and by Abasciano himself? Far more times than I can count. And the inconsistent non-Calvinist, such as 4 pointers, agree with us here, but then say that one can hold to unconditional election without holding to limited atonement. That makes no sense. Why would God have Christ fully pay for the sins of those God had ordained to hell? Not to mention the problems with unlimited atonement apart from the system of Calvinism.

Abasciano only spends one single paragraph directly addressing this most important of verses. Let us quote it in full:

The situation is much the same with 9:16: “So therefore, [it is] not of the one who wills nor of the one who runs, but of the mercy-bestowing God.” This is Paul’s interpretation of his quotation of Exod 33:19b in Rom 9:15. God’s bestowal of mercy, specifically in this instance, his election of his covenant people, is at his discretion as the one who bestows that mercy. He can have mercy on whom he chooses. He can disregard works and ancestry and choose those who believe in Christ as his covenant people. This obvious truth, inferred from Exod 33:19b, upholds Paul’s denial of unrighteousness in God for naming his new covenant people by faith rather than works or ancestry in Rom 9:14.³

The text does *not* merely say that God gets to bestow His mercy at His discretion. Everyone agrees there. And so would have Paul’s opponents. The text does *not* merely say that God can have mercy on whom He chooses. Again, we all agree there and so would Paul’s opponents. The text does *not* merely say that God can

³ Brian J. Abasciano, “Romans 9 and Calvinism,” in *Calvinism*, 373-374.

disregard works and ancestry. Again, we all agree there. And even Paul's opponents would have agreed with that sentiment in principle. They would have simply said that this is not how God did things. That aside, that is not what the text says. Listen carefully to what Abasciano says here. Above, he states, "[God] can disregard works and ancestry *and choose those who believe in Christ as his covenant people* (emphasis mine)." That would make God's bestowal of mercy dependent upon our choice to believe in Christ! That means that the bestowal is utterly dependent upon our will in the final analysis. It will not do to say that God's choice of *how* He would bestow His mercy was His sole choice to make. We all agree there. The key issue is what is the exact nature of that decision once it has been made. And Paul says that the exact nature of this decision is that God would bestow His mercy in such a way that it will not be based on the will of those whom God pours it upon.

God, Moses, and Paul all could have been far more clear here if the contention of most non-Calvinists was correct. God could have said something along the lines of, "I am free to distribute my mercy as I see fit." And Paul could have said, "So, God gives out His mercy in the manner in which He pleases. He is not answerable to man." That is not what Paul says. Paul explicitly says that the actual bestowal of the mercy and compassion is not based upon our will. End of story. Unconditional election and thus Calvinism certainly seems to be the doctrine of Scripture. I understand that we cannot base our theology on just one verse. I am not saying that. With that made clear, this verse cannot be divorced from all that preceded it in this chapter that we discussed. And it also cannot be divorced from the rest of the Calvinist case. With that said, this is the most decisive verse in favor of Calvinism and it is decisive indeed.

In light of all of this, everything Abasciano says throughout the rest of his chapter falls woefully flat. I see no reason to detail all of that. The rest of Romans 9, especially verses 17-24, flow from verse 16 and all that led up to it. And pointing out how so much of the rest of the chapter and the epistle in general refer to our justification by faith, establishes nothing. That is a red herring. We all believe that we are only justified by faith. The question is how do we come to faith. The latter part of Romans is only saying that the Jews have not sought righteousness properly through faith. They have sought it through law. And this is because most of them were not of the elect. That is Paul's point.

He makes it very clear that the Gentiles did not find their righteousness by faith because they in any way sought God. The clear implication of such a statement is that God sought them. And no, not in any initial prevenient grace manner, but fully brought them to Himself. And that is in keeping with the chapter as a whole. If God gave the Gentiles His prevenient grace, and many of them were responsive to it, then they pursued God for salvation on some level. Paul says the opposite in verse 30.

My Conclusion

I believe that this work has sufficiently shown that *Calvinism* does not come close to reaching its goal. As I've said many times in this work, if anyone would like me to expand on any point further, please email me, and I will gladly do so. I hope this little book has strengthened the faith of my fellow Calvinists, and I hope that it has challenged my brethren who do not fully hold to the doctrines of grace. I love the doctrines of grace and I sincerely hope that all Christians will one day come to see their truth even before the return of Christ. God bless my friends.