

Calvinist Theology: An Opposing Review

by Ronald Gordon

BEGINNINGS

Martin Luther gave birth to the Reformation on October 31, 1517 when he posted 95 arguments concerning the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church, principally aimed at Pope Leo X who is mentioned thirty-six times. Other clergymen soon joined the movement, Huldrych Zwingli, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Beza, William Farel, and John Knox. They wanted to reform the Church, not separate from it. That is why we call them “Reformers.” German princes saw in Luther an opportunity to stop German money going south to finance the Church at Rome. Their protesting initiated the word Protestant which did not come from Luther.

John Calvin was not a schooled theologian. Urged by his father to study law, he enrolled in the University of Orléans and received his licentiate in 1532. Calvin developed friendships with Reform-minded individuals which resulted in his breaking with Catholicism. After fleeing France, he settled in Geneva, later to Strasbourg, and then back again to Geneva where he remained until his death in 1564. Calvin then turned his attention to religion and served the church in minor roles yet found his greatest satisfaction in writing.

In 1536 he published what later became a large four-volume work titled *Institutes of the Christian Religion* wherein he fervently promoted his version of predestination, the sovereignty of God, how grace overcomes the human will, and some historic Church traditions of that day. This work has been praised and belittled depending on which side of the religious fence you have been planted. He was no match for the scholastic education of Luther but vigorously threw himself into theology which helped to develop the Dutch Reformed Church. When the Netherlands was attacked by the Spanish general the Duke of Albas in 1568, many inhabitants fled to the German city of Wesel. Sometime later they convened a synod to formalize their beliefs, known as the Belgic Confession.

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch theologian and professor of theology at the University of Leiden. He was enjoined to defend Calvinism against the teachings of Dirck Coornhert, a writer, philosopher, translator, and father of Dutch Renaissance scholarship. While exchanging scholastic volleys, he began to doubt many of Calvin’s basic tenets which drew him into a protracted conflict with Franciscus Gomarus, a member of the Leiden faculty and strident defender of John Calvin. The scholastic battle eventually widened into a large-scale split within Calvinism.

Following the death of Arminius, his students assembled their mentors’ teachings into an organized protest against his Dutch adversaries. In response, the rivals convened an international synod at Dort (modern Dordrecht) in 1618. From their deliberations emerged the Canons of Dort: Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and the Perseverance of the Saints, also known as the five points of Calvinism. Many centuries later English-speaking devotees constructed the tulip acronym to simplify explanations.

Depravity, election, grace, and perseverance generally seem acceptable to most Christians to one degree or another, but Limited Atonement has been the subject of disagreement even into the modern era. Why? Because this tenet is not clearly found in Scripture. Logical conclusions are not necessarily biblical conclusions. John Calvin did not fully embrace Limited Atonement until much later in life. Upon reading his commentaries you might be led to think the commentator was not actually John Calvin.

He does not specifically mention Limited Atonement in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Yet, if we carefully investigate his biblical commentaries, it would appear that we are reading from a different author. Note how Calvin interprets the words *all, many, whosoever, without exception, and whole world*.

In his commentary on John 3:16, *CHRISTIAN CLASSICS ETHEREAL LIBRARY* 92

“And he has employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term World, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in the world that is worthy of the favor of God, yet he shows himself to be

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reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.”

In his commentary on Galatians 5:12, CCEL 127

“It is the will of God that we should seek the salvation of all men without exception, as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world.”

In his commentary on Colossians 1:14, CCEL 128

“By the sacrifice of his death all the sins of the world have been expiated.”

In his commentary on Romans 5:18, CCEL 180

“Though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him.”

In his commentary on Hebrews 9:28, CCEL 192

“To bear, or, take away sins, is to free from guilt by his satisfaction those who have sinned. He says the sins of many, that is, of all, as in Romans 5:15.”

If it were possible to find one irrefutable statement of John Calvin on Limited Atonement, there are a multiplicity of clear biblical statements to the contrary that would fill pages. Manuscripts rule over translations.

ALL, (παῶς, James Strong’s Greek Dictionary, G3956); WHOSOEVER, (ὅλος, Strong G3650):

John 12:32 *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw **all** men unto me.”*

Romans 11:32 *“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon **all**.”*

Romans 10:13 *“For **whosoever** shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

Acts 2:21 *“And it shall come to pass, that **whosoever** shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

Titus 2:11 *“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for **all** people.”*

1 John 5:1 *“**whosoever** believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and **everyone** that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.”*

WHOEVER (ὅστις, G3748); WHO, (ὅς, G3739); WHOSOEVER, WHATEVER (ἐάν, G1437):

Matthew 18:5 *“And **whoso** shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.”*

Mark 9:37 *“**whosoever** shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and **whosoever** shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.”*

Luke 17:33 *“**whosoever** shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and **whosoever** shall lose his life shall preserve it.”*

1 John 2:2 *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the **whole** world.”*

1 Timothy 2:1-6 *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for **all** men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have **all** men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for **all**, to be testified in due time.”*

Limited Atonement is the Achilles Heel of Calvinism. This tenet simply cannot be found in Scripture. There is a passive apprehension among some Calvinists that if Limited Atonement should be nullified, their entire belief

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system would unravel like a single thread pulled from a garment. Where then did it originate? Its history can be traced to Augustine, a 5th Century bishop from the Romans province of Numidia (modern Algeria). However, he also did not base it solidly on the Bible. It emerged somewhat as a necessity during his numerous theological arguments with the British monk Pelagius. Limited Atonement is not directly found in the Bible.

If Limited Atonement is not biblical then how do Calvinists go about teaching it? Purely on assumptions drawn from Matthew 26:28, *many not all*; John 10:11, *15 sheep not goats*; John 17:9, *not the world*; Acts 20:28, *church only*; and Eph. 5:25-27, *church only*. These examples are not clear, unambiguous statements of doctrine. Definitions of words in the Greek New Testament stand in opposition to this baseless teaching. Squabbling over words of an English translation usually result in playing word games, such as the words *many* versus *all*.

If the word *many* (πολύς, G4183) best suits Calvinism, then *many* will prevail even if every manuscript contains the word *all* (πᾶς, G3956). Conversely, if *all* best suits their need then *all* will prevail over *many*. This could only occur in translation. Native Greek citizens would never permit this kind of alteration to their dictionary. Words have definite meanings in all languages. That is why we depend on dictionaries. In the ears of every English professor, *all* means *all* and *many* means *many*, at least during mid-term and final exams.

One example, of this word play can be seen in Romans 5, where verse eighteen twice contains the word *all* and verse nineteen, which is a repetition of eighteen, twice contains the word *many*. Paul is referring to Adam as the first person and Jesus as the second person.

(18) “Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for *all* men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for *all* men.”

(19) “For as by the one man's disobedience the *many* were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the *many* will be made righteous.”

The first occurrence of *all* (πᾶς) in verse 18 regarding the fall of Adam is acceptable to Calvinists because they believe in the Total Depravity of everyone. However, the second *all* (πᾶς) referring to justification by Jesus for everyone is unacceptable since they believe that Jesus died only for the *many* who were *pre-elected*. *Many* now prevails over *all*. In verse 19 the first occurrence of the word *many* (πολύς) is now unacceptable because *many* infringes on their belief in Total Depravity. *All* must now prevail over *many*. The second *many* will naturally be acceptable because they believe salvation is for *many* people but not *all*. Once again, *all* must replace *many*. Respectfully it must be argued that Calvinists are playing word games by choosing the English word that best suits their need, irrespective of the manuscripts that produced it.

LOGICAL NOT BIBLICAL

Conclusions may be logical but not necessarily biblical. For example, Calvinists view the following double construction of Romans 9:22-23 to logically explain predestination in the sense that God created some people for heaven and others for hell as Calvin writes in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Institutes: Volume 3, Chapter 21, Section 5, *Christian Classic Ethereal Library P 770*

“Prescience extends to the whole circuit of the world, and to all creatures. By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not CREATED on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been CREATED for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.”

To provide a doctrinal framework for the Church of England, the British Parliament called upon a select group of men in 1643 to convene at Westminster Abbey. Hence, it is called the Westminster Confession of Faith.

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CHAPTER III

III. "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto EVERLASTING LIFE; and others foreordained to EVERLASTING DEATH."

IV. "God has predestined and foreordained some men and angels to everlasting life out of His free grace and love WITHOUT ANY FORESIGHT OF FAITH OR WORKS in man or perseverance in either of them, and OTHERS ARE FOREORDAINED TO EVERLASTING DEATH and the number of either is so certain and definite that it cannot be INCREASED or DIMINISHED."

CHAPTER X

IV. "OTHERS, NOT ELECTED, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come unto Christ, and therefore cannot be saved. And to assert and maintain that they may, is very PERNICIOUS and to be DETESTED."

How could these men of Westminster draw such a conclusion, that if a man should accept Christ as his personal savior, exhibit fruits of the Spirit, use his gifts for the common good, and consider himself to be saved, that he should be labeled *Pernicious* and *Detestable* because he might be among the *pre-damned*? Where do we find in the body of Scripture that this man is going to the Lake of Fire no matter how genuine was his acceptance of the atoning work of Jesus Christ? Who has the temerity to say that someone could *never be saved*? How could recipients of God's grace be so quick to remove that grace from others? Does this not reveal a subtle propensity for arrogance? How can anyone know if they are *pre-elected* or *pre-damned* with any degree of certainty?

But does Calvin and Westminster reflect the grammar of Greek manuscripts? Many translators chose the word *prepare* or *fitted*. Calvinists assume these words to explain the condition of being *pre-elected* or *pre-damned*. Some even declare this double construction to be a prime example of their theology.

Let us carefully scrutinize the grammar of each verb. Greek verbs can have Person, Number, Tense, Aspect, Mood, and Voice. Notice particularly the Voice of each verb (active or passive).

Verse 9:22 "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath **prepared** for destruction..." (ESV)

εἰ δὲ θέλων ὁ Θεὸς ἐνδείξασθαι τὴν ὀργὴν καὶ γνωρίσαι τὸ δυνατόν αὐτοῦ ἤνεγκε ἐν πολλῇ μακροθυμίᾳ σκευὴ ὀργῆς **κατηρτισμένα** εἰς ἀπώλειαν

Verb root is **καταρτίζω** (*katartízō*, G2675) to place something in a condition which prepares it for completion
[Verb, **Passive**, Neuter, **Plural**, Accusative, Participle] **God is passive and singular ... they is plural**, so they must refer to vessels ... **preparing is active** so they are actively preparing themselves for God's wrath

Verse 9:23 "in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has **prepared** beforehand for glory." (ESV)

καὶ ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκευῇ ἐλέους **προητοιμάσεν** εἰς δόξαν

Verb root is **προετοιμάζω** (*proetoimázō*, G4282) to make ready or appoint for a desired outcome

[Verb, **Active**, **3rd Person**, **Singular**, Accusative, Imperfect] **He is active and 3rd person singular**... He is actively **preparing** vessels of mercy for glory

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God is the subject of verse 22 and the verb prepare is *passive*. God is not actively involved. *Prepare* is *plural* and must refer to *vessels of wrath*. God is passively observing them *prepare* themselves for destruction by their consistent sinful living marked by a profound indifference to the consequences.

God is also the subject of verse 23 but the verb *prepare* is now *active*. God is actively involved with the *vessels of mercy* and the verb is also *3rd person singular (He)*. God is *actively preparing* them for glory. What at first appeared to be a genuine example of Calvinist election is grammatically incorrect. Grammar always rules.

People living sinful lives are setting themselves up for eternity in hell. God is passively allowing them to make that choice to become vessels of His wrath. Quite the exact opposite. God is actively preparing those who confess their sins to become vessels of His mercy and inherit everlasting life. People willfully choose their eternity.

BOUGHT MEANS BOUGHT

If one accepts a theology where God elects some and not others, there are a few New Testament passages where this mindset needs to be forced on the text when definitions and grammar stand in opposition to it. Original languages can dispel confusion that develops from translation, such as 2 Peter 2:1, “*But there were **false prophets** also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that **bought** them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*” The word *bought* conflicts with Calvinist theology because it would seem to infer that these *false prophets* were purchased by the blood atoning work of Jesus. Since they believe that atonement is limited only to the *pre-elected*, they would contend that *bought* means something else. Delivered has been suggested. In other words, these false teachers were delivered by Jesus from a world of sin, after which they came into the Church and started preaching their heresies. However, these translators correctly preferred *bought* instead of delivered: AMP, ESV, ISV, HCSB, KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV, TLV, WEB, and YLT.

But here is the problem with this kind of forced interpretation. Behind the English word *bought* is the Greek word ἀγοράζω (*agorázo*, Strong, G59). It occurs 31 times in the New Testament and every time it means to purchase. Not one time does it refer to anything being delivered. A few times it is translated as redeem, which means to buy back. Matthew 13:44, 13:46, 14:15, 21:12, 25:9, 25:10, 27:7; Mark 6:36, 6:37, 11:15, 15:46, 16:1; Luke 9:13, 14:18, 14:19, 17:28, 19:45, 22:36; John 4:8, 6:5, 13:29; 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 7:30; 2 Peter 2:1; Revelation 3:18, 5:9, 13:17, 14:3, 14:4, 18:11. Bought simply means bought. Words have meanings and this also exposes a fundamental approach to sustaining Calvinism. If the text doesn't explicitly say what you want it to say, then permit your predilected, theological mind-set to govern the interpretation of that text against all plenary evidence to the absolute contrary.

MINDSET

A mindset is a general series of assumptions or methods of interpretation. In a larger scope it can also be seen as one's worldview or philosophy. Quite often these attributes become so entrenched in the mind that a person may deny exceptions to their process of thinking. Sometimes a set of beliefs is actually beneficial such as in Catholicism or Protestantism. Harmony tends to thrive when a group possesses the same theologies. On the contrary, a mindset can also be dangerous involving criminality, tardiness, egotism, addiction or prejudice. For Calvinists, the book of Romans chapter 9 is nearly a litmus test of orthodoxy.

Quite often this chapter will generate the first question a Calvinist will ask a non-Calvinist preceding their discussion of theology. *What are you going to do about Romans 9?* This chapter has become the echelon of proof for many Calvinists because it captures the essence of Calvinism. Or does it? Sometimes discussions of this nature

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are overloaded with assumptions from both sides. For example. If not a Calvinist then you must be an Arminian. This is called a false left-right paradigm. If you are not one thing then you must be another. If not a Democrat then a Republican. *Non-partisan?* If not Catholic then Protestant. *Eastern Orthodox?* If not Ford then Chevrolet. *Buick?* If not Nikon then Canon. *Sony?* If not Coke then Pepsi. *Root Beer?* *Ginger Ale?* This type of logic is flawed.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about the book of Romans. Ministers and teachers too often present this letter as being all about Christ and salvation. Much of it is, but largely it is about Paul infusing the Old Testament into this new covenant (Jer. 31:31) so Jews can better understand Jesus as the promised Messiah. After reading his letter, Jews in Rome might have said, “*Ah... so that’s how it all comes together. Now we get it.*” Gentile members would also benefit by understanding Jesus from the Jewish point of view. Observe the Jewish nature of his letter. Romans **1:16**, “Jew first and also the Greek;” **2:9-10**, “Jew first and also the Greek;” **2:29**, “Jew is one inwardly;” **3** Jewish advantage, Law, faith, grace, redemption; **4** Abraham mentioned 7 times; **5** Adam and Jesus; **6** Law, sin, death, grace, life; **7** Law and sin; **8** spirit of bondage, Spirit of adoption; **9** fellow Jews, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, Esau, Moses and Pharaoh, Jeremiah’s potter, Isaiah, Sabaath, Sodom and Gomorrah, Israel, Zion; **10** Israel, Moses, Law, Jew and Greek, Isaiah; **11** Abraham, Benjamin, Elijah, Israel fallen, Gentiles saved, Deliverer from Zion, natural branches, grafted branches; **12** living sacrifice, spiritual gifts, transformation, prayer, love, practical advice; **13** government, subjection, love neighbors, clothed with Jesus; **14** dietary compassion, sensitivity, and judgement; **15** Old Testament encouragement, root of Jesse, hope for Gentiles, Holy Spirit sanctification of Gentiles, financial contribution to Jerusalem; **16** greetings to coworkers. The preponderance of this letter concerns Jewish heritage (the natural branch) pointing to Jesus and how Gentiles (the grafted branch) benefit from the love of God through Jesus who emanated from that heritage. Law appears 78 times in 16 chapters.

ROMANS 9: JACOB AND ESAU

Reformed theology holds that Election or Damnation is interpreted from various Scriptures such as Romans 9:10-13 “*And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad – in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls – she was told, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’*” Calvinists would use this verse as a proof text to validate Unconditional Election. The word election is even included in the text, so what could be plainer? But God is actually referring to *nations* instead of individuals.

“*And the LORD said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older (nation) shall serve the younger (nation).’*” Genesis 25:23.

In their lifetime, *Esau never served Jacob!* No. Not even once. The elder brother never served the younger brother. Quite the opposite. When Jacob returned to his homeland, he was apprehensive as to whether Esau would still be angry over the loss of his birth right. Gifts of appeasement were offered to Esau in the hope of disquieting any lingering thoughts of vengeance. But rather, Esau joyfully exclaimed that this show of appeasement was unnecessary. “*And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself,*” Genesis 33:9.

Indirectly one might suggest that the younger was serving the elder. However, when Esau eventually produced enough descendants, he would become the nation of Edom; and likewise, when Jacob produced enough descendants, he would become the nation of Israel. Now, the elder *nation* will continue to serve the younger *nation*. Calvinists also suggest that a passage in Malachi also serves as a proof text of Unconditional Election.

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“The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi,” Malachi 1:1. Who is God speaking too? Israel as a nation not an individual. “I have loved you,’ says the LORD. But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’ ‘Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares the LORD. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.’ If Edom says, ‘We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,’ the LORD of hosts says, ‘They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever,’” Malachi 1:2-4.

Does the man Esau have wastelands? Jackals in deserts? Ruins to rebuild? No, but a *nation* does. The focus of God is still on nations not individuals. Love and hate are idiomatic to Judaism. It means God’s preference of one over the other, whether it be individuals or nations. Jesus also speaks these words, *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple,”* Luke 14:26. Are we really to hate our families and relatives to be a disciple of Christ? Jesus means that we are to love Him more than anyone else. Hate in Hebrew doesn’t easily translate into English.

Does this authenticate Unconditional Election? Calvin wrote that some were foreordained to hell and others to heaven and the Westminster Confession states *“so certain and definite”* is the total number of each group that those numbers *“cannot be increased or diminished.”* That being true then all of Esau’s *unelected* descendants should go to hell and all of Jacob’s *elected* descendants should go to heaven. But that is not the case. In the past two thousand years a large percentage of *elected* Jews refused to accept Jesus as Messiah, so the premise does not stand that all of Jacob’s *elected* remained *elected*. Contrary to Westminster, his numbers were *diminished*.

The centerpiece of the matter is that God elected a *NATION* to illumine the rest of the world with spiritual knowledge of God’s greatness and goodness. Israel’s divine purpose was to be a light to the Gentile world.

“I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the gentiles,” Isaiah 42:6-7.

“A light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel,” Luke 2:32.

ROMANS 9: PHARAOH AND FREEWILL

Calvinists frequently quote the following passage from Romans, in an attempt, to make the point that God overrules the will of individuals. Therefore, we are helplessly and inescapably subject to the sovereign intentions of God and incapable of altering our destiny. *“For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee,”* Romans 9:17. However, there was no need for God to overrule the will of Pharaoh. Consider that Egypt was deservedly the first world empire after the early city-states. Without opposition they had the privilege of detesting all foreigners as even described in the Bible.

Genesis 43:32 *“And they set on for him by himself (Joseph), and for them by themselves, and for the Egyptians, which did eat with him, by themselves: because the Egyptians might not eat bread with the Hebrews; for that is an abomination (תִּנְעוּבָה, H8441) unto the Egyptians.”* Without exception foreigners were regarded as abominations.

- Pharaoh was born in a nation that DETESTED foreigners.
- Pharaoh was raised in a nation that DETESTED foreigners.
- Pharaoh was tutored by the royal family to rule a nation that DETESTED foreigners.
- Pharaoh was finally the ruler of that nation which DETESTED foreigners and he subjugated them.

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The will of Pharaoh was consistent at every point. There was no need for God to overrule his will. But doesn't the Bible say that God harden Pharaoh's heart? His heart was hardened over each plague which God delivered and it is natural for anyone to have a negative reaction to a disturbing circumstance. Christians also have negative reactions when plagued by disturbing situations. How often has someone said: *"How can a loving God allow these things to happen?"* Hardened feelings are normal reactions for people who feel plagued by circumstances.

Does God overrule our will at those moments? Does God harden our hearts? He doesn't need to. We are solely responsible for our reactions to any circumstance. It's our decision. God foreknew that it would be natural for Pharaoh's heart to be hardened over each plague. God did not need to change anything. With divine foresight He was able to inform Moses on what to expect at a much later time.

ROMANS 9: THE POTTER

Paul offers another analogy, *"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"* Romans 9:21. God is sovereign and unopposed but does this prove election of one group and rejection of another as Calvinists would contend? Hermeneutical hint! When you read an Old Testament passage in the New Testament, go back to the source and digest the full context. *"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so, he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it,"* Jeremiah 18:4. The *clay* itself was *marred*. The hand of the potter was determined by the properties of the clay, not the capricious whim of the potter. In Jeremiah 18:8, God was asking people (*clay*) to turn from their *marred* evil. *"If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them."* God revises His intentions based on the nature of people (*clay*). *"If my people...turn from their wicked ways...will forgive their sin...heal their land,"* 2 Chronicles 7:14.

INNOCENCE OR ABOMINATION

The state of childhood was viewed by John Calvin as the epitome of sinfulness. He held the unborn, newborn, and pubescent before regeneration with undiluted contempt.

Institutes: Volume 2, Chapter 1, Section 8, CCEL 217

"Original sin, then, may be defined a hereditary corruption and depravity of our nature, extending to all the parts of the soul, which first makes us obnoxious to the wrath of God, and then produces in us works which in Scripture are termed works of the flesh."

Institutes: Volume 4, Chapter 15, Section 10, CCEL 1084

"Hence, even INFANTS bringing their condemnation with them FROM THEIR MOTHER'S WOMB, suffer not for another's, but for THEIR OWN DEFECT. For although they have not yet produced the fruits of their own unrighteousness, they have the seed implanted in them. Nay, their whole nature is, as it were, a SEED-BED OF SIN, and therefore cannot but be ODIIOUS and ABOMINABLE to God."

Institutes: Volume 2, Chapter 1, Section 6, CCEL 216

"Paul never could have said that all are "by nature the CHILDREN OF WRATH," (Eph. 2:3), if they had not been CURSED FROM THE WOMB. And it is obvious that the nature there referred to is not nature such as God created, but as vitiated in Adam; for it would have been most incongruous TO MAKE GOD THE AUTHOR OF DEATH. Adam, therefore, when he corrupted himself, transmitted the contagion to all his posterity. For a heavenly Judge, even our Saviour himself, declares that all are by birth vicious and depraved, when he says, "that which is born of the flesh is fleshy" (John 3:6), and that therefore THE GATE OF LIFE IS CLOSED AGAINST ALL until they have been regenerated."

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Calvinism has a very low regard for infants and small children. He says the very young are *DEFECTED* and *CURSED* from within the womb, *CHILDREN OF WRATH*, *CORRUPTED* by the sin nature coming from Adam, *VICIOUS* and *DEPRAVED*, therefore a *SEED-BED OF SIN*. Hence, they contain the *ODOR* of *WRATH* and therefore an *ABOMINATION* to God. He contends that nothing can redeem a person from sin except the process of regeneration. Calvin does not hold children to be innocent but rather damnable and estranged from God. Only children who have been *pre-elected* will be deemed worthy of regeneration. Calvin stated quite clearly that before regeneration can take place, the *GATE OF LIFE IS CLOSED AGAINST ALL*.

A large portion of Calvin's reasoning is based on tenuous assumptions of a few Scriptures that are indirect and open to various interpretations. Could any words be more condemning when referring to children than *Odious*, *Depraved*, *Vicious*, *Defected*, *Abomination*, *Wrath*, or *Cursed*? We need a much wider scope of resources. It is vitally important that the entire body of Scripture be evaluated instead of assumptions based on that of one man or one verse. And does the Bible present us with a more direct correlation between God and small children? Yes.

"Moreover your little ones...and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall go in thither, and unto them will I give it, and they shall possess it," Deuteronomy 1:39.

"But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly." Psalm 22:9-10.

And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood," Psalm 106:38.

"Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent," Jeremiah 19:4.

"Moreover, thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, that thou hast slain my children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?" Ezekiel 16:20-21

"Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matthew 18:3-4.

"And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me," Matthew 18:5.

"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them," Mark 10:13-16. See also Matthew 19:13-14 and Luke 18:16.

Jesus took little children into His arms to bless them. Where in the Bible does it specifically state with ontological certitude that God embraced and blessed evildoers and their perversity? Nowhere. It is against the nature of a holy God to embrace, bless, or give tacit approval to that which is immoral, evil, vile, or perverse.

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea," Matthew 18:6.

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Jesus severely warned people that if you mess with little children – *you are messing with Me!* Children are *innocent in the womb* as cited in Psalm 22:9-10. God states with unalterable certitude that the unborn and the newly born are *my children* as cited in Ezekiel 16:21. Jesus taught multitudes that entrance into the Kingdom of God is possible only if they strive to become as little children. Jesus *embraced* and *blessed* children. Something that Jesus would never have done for anyone who is abominable and not already a part of the Kingdom.

Calvin stated that everyone is guilty of sin because of the disobedience of Adam. This is universally true, but does this also mean that someone might bear the punishment of the sins of someone else? Israelite captives in Babylon had a saying regarding what happened back in Israel. Our forefathers sinned against God but now we the children must suffer in this foreign land because of what they did. God's response was to condemn this saying.

“The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, what mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord God, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Ezekiel 18:1-4.

Here we learn God's perspective on the penalties for sinful behavior. The person who willfully transgresses is the one who incurs the penalty. We also learn from Ezekiel that penalties for the guilty may occasionally affect the innocent. Similarly, children may suffer for the sin of a drug addicted parent but that does not make the child guilty of the same sin. Does the Bible mention an age or level of accountability? Not directly yet Isaiah 7:16 comes very close, *“For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good...”* Is it then possible to sin unknowingly? Jesus also said, *“if ye were blind, ye should have no sin,”* John 9:41. The very young have no such awareness of divine precepts nor do they comprehend the repercussions for sinful behavior. God has made it abundantly clear that, *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* In these eleven verses the Holy Spirit firmly indicates that before a level of comprehension, very young children are innocent.

LEXICAL SEMANTICS

John Calvin incorrectly interprets *“children of wrath”* as only that of a young child and later assumes them to be the unborn. The Greek word τέκνον (Strong's Greek Dictionary, G5043) is non-restrictive. It may refer to any age or group. A translated work does not always require the most literal sense unless the grammar is more specific as παιδίον (small child, Matthew 2:11, G3813) or βρέφος, (infant, Luke 2:16, G1025).

Let us address this assumption of Calvin that τέκνον must always be interpreted as small children. In the following verses, it can be shown to mean individuals, small and large groups, or even an entire nation.

Nation of Israel – *“It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs,”* Matthew 15:26.

Twelve Apostles – *“Little children, I am with you a little while longer,”* John 13:33.

Descendants – *“Then answered all the people ... His blood be on us, and on our children,”* Matthew 27:25.

Religious Leaders – *“They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham,”* John 8:39.

Scattered Israelites – *“And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad,”* John 11:49-52 (Caiaphas inadvertently prophesying about Jesus)

One Individual – *“To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord,”* 1 Timothy 1:2 and also *“To Titus, mine own son,”* Titus 1:4.

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FOREKNOWLEDGE

The favorite passage of most Calvinists is Ephesians 1:4-5 “*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.*” God exists from eternity past to eternity future and everywhere in between. God has no beginning and no end. He is linear in nature. God *exists* before Genesis 1:1 and *exists* beyond Revelation 22:21. God knows the outcome of everything because He is looking forward and backward from both ends of the present Age. God always exists in the present tense. The name given to Moses was “*I AM*” and the name that Jesus claimed for Himself was also “*I AM*” in John 8:58. When Jesus said wide is the road to destruction and narrow the way to life, He wasn’t making that up at that moment. He was looking forwards and backwards from both ends of this Age and knew those who willingly accepted His atonement and those who rejected it. Those decisions to accept or reject had already taken place.

Calvinists are looking only from the beginning of this Age (*before the foundation of the world*). They do not see God existing from eternity past to eternity future, but God exists at every moment along our timeline of life. He made decisions before this Age because He was looking backward at freewill outcomes from the end of this Age. Perhaps we should let God say it in His own words, “*Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure,*” Isaiah 46:10. “*For whom he did foreknow (προγινώσκω, G4267), he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son,*” Romans 8:29. God knows everyone who will accept Christ’s offer of atonement. What is most important from this verse is that He predetermined that all believers should be *conformed to the image of Jesus*.

ATONEMENT FOR ALL

If John Calvin is correct that some people were *created* for the Lake of Fire then what is the necessity of Jesus’ atonement? What was the purpose of the incarnation if destinies were already decided *before the foundation of the world*? Calvinists do not believe that Jesus died for everyone. They believe His atonement on the cross provided salvation to *many* but not to *all* people.

Many languages are gender based. A word can be masculine, feminine, or neuter and this has nothing to do with sex. It is assignment that has developed since the earliest formation of communication by words. An example of grammar ruling the interpretation and translation can be found in Ephesians 2:8, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*” Calvinists believe that God is the only free-willed agent. People have no freewill of their own. God is sovereign. He decides everything. We just play out what He has previously ordained. Calvinists hold that not only is grace a gift from God but faith as well. Otherwise, faith would be seen as works on our part which diminishes God’s sovereignty. Both gifts must be dispensed by God as this text seems to indicate, “*and that not of yourselves.*” However, *faith* is from the Greek word πίστις which is feminine and *that* is from the Greek word τοῦτο which is neuter. In Greek, *that* cannot refer to *faith* because of the difference in gender. Faith actually refers to salvation which is uniquely our response to God’s grace.

Calvinists insist that Apostle Peter intended for the word *ALL* to refer only to those members of the church that originally received his letter, 2 Peter 3:9 “*but that all should come to repentance.*” In fact, some insist that it is one of the best verses affirming Reformed theology. If this logic is correct then this rule should also apply to other books of the New Testament as well. Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome (1:7). Does *ALL* in 3:23 “*all have sinned*” refer to only the members of that church? Does *ALL* in Galatians 3:22 “*the scripture hath concluded all under sin*” refer to only the members of these churches? Does *ALL* in James 1:5 “*let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally*” refer to only the scattered twelve tribes? God is very concerned for the spiritual welfare of

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everyone, not just a select few. *“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him,”* 2 Chronicles 16:9. Not just the chosen.

CONDITIONAL ELECTION:

Programmers understand conditional statements very well. IF a condition is true THEN do something. If not, then do something ELSE. This construct is labeled an IF–THEN–ELSE routine. Logical operators are also used to bind two or more conditions together. In Romans 10:9 there are two conditions, divinity and resurrection, joined with the logical operator AND. Therefore, both conditions must be true for the process to be valid.

*“That **IF** thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, **AND** shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, (**THEN**) thou shalt be saved.”* What is the first condition in order to be saved? The Holy Spirit says that we must acknowledge that Jesus is God. The phrase Lord Jesus (Κύριον Ἰησοῦν) is a direct reference to His divinity. Jesus is God. And, you must also believe a second condition that God raised Him from the dead. By this you have acknowledged His resurrection which grants you victory over death. If you agree with both conditions, the Holy Spirit guarantees that you shall be saved. See also 1 John 5:11-13.

RESISTIBLE GRACE

Calvin enhanced the concept of the overpowering work of grace. He believed that man is incapable of turning to God by himself. Salvation is entirely the work of God. Man is spiritually helpless. Only through the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit a *“heart of stone”* is turned into a *“heart of flesh”* to be able to receive grace by the faith which God also provides. Calvin argued that it is impossible for a man to change his heart of stone into a heart of flesh. He states, *“I say the will is abolished.”* Salvation is entirely the work of God who overpowers the will of the *pre-elected* so that grace will be so irresistible, they have little choice but to submit to the Holy Spirit. Reformed theology holds that all interaction is solely that of God. Man has little or no say in these matters. Our destiny has been foreordained with no hope of alteration. We have been *created* for either heaven or hell.

Institutes: Volume 2, Chapter 3, Section 6, CCEL 254

“His words are, A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and i will take away the STONY HEART out of your flesh, and i will give you an HEART OF FLESH. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”
(commenting of Ezek. 36:26, 27)

“I SAY THE WILL IS ABOLISHED, but not in so far as it is will, for in conversion everything essential to our original nature remains: I also say, that it is created anew, not because the will then begins to exist, but because it is turned from evil to good. This, I maintain is WHOLLY THE WORK OF GOD, because, as the Apostle testifies, we are not “sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.”

In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Volume 1, Chapter 6, Verse 44. Calvin writes, *“The statement amounts to this, that we ought not to wonder if many refuse to embrace the Gospel; because no man will ever of himself be able to come to Christ, but God must first approach him by his Spirit; and HENCE IT FOLLOWS THAT ALL ARE NOT DRAWN but that God bestows this grace on those whom he has elected.”*

No, it does not follow that *all* people *will not* be drawn to Christ. This is an unwarranted assumption which the text of John 6:44 does not infer. Calvin is correct in that God must initially draw us to Himself but this verse does not suggest that only the *pre-elected* will be drawn. Calvin is consistently careful to select only those Scriptures which appear to fortify his beliefs, and then infuses his assumptions to make it appear as though his assumption validates the citation, not the other way around. God draws everyone. *“For the grace of God that*

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bringeth salvation hath appeared to all (πᾶς G3956) men,” Titus 2:11. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me,” John 12:32. “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you,” James 4:8.

Is it possible to resist the Holy Spirit? Is the grace of God always irresistible? Steven was in a synagogue talking about how Jesus fulfilled the Laws of Moses and God bestowed grace. These men were no match for his wisdom so they secretly instigated others to say that Steven was blaspheming both Moses and God. When they had stirred up enough people, scribes, and elders, he was apprehended by the authorities and brought into the Council. When sternly asked to explain himself, Steven responded by saying, “*You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,*” Acts 7:51-52 (ESV).

Not only were these authorities *resisting* the Holy Spirit but their forefathers had also been *resisting* the Holy Spirit and doing it for centuries. Calvinists would assert that these men belonged to the *pre-damned* and therefore incapable of *resisting* the Holy Spirit. That’s not the point. Steven said *they were resisting* the Holy Spirit and it was the Holy Spirit that inspired these words of Stephen to become a part of Holy Scripture. Thus, it is the Holy Spirit who is making the claim that *it is possible to resist the grace of God*. Grace is not always irresistible.

DUPLICITY

John Wesley believed that Calvinism forced a duplicity on God. Scripture repeatedly tells us that we are to love everyone. But if God has *pre-damned* some to hell, is that representative of *agape* love? Likewise, God tells us to resist sin but if He has predestined some to a life of sin and then hell, does this not make God inconsistent? We know what Satan offers: evil, pain, suffering, and death. Satan is very consistent. Jesus said, “*The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy,*” John 10:10. It appeared to Wesley that Calvinism offers the world an inconsistent God and a consistent devil which should be incongruent. Calvinism emphasizes the Sovereignty of God, but how may they explain God grieving over events that He engineered? What type of Sovereignty is this?

- God was sorry and grieved in His heart that He had created people, Genesis 6:6
- God was sorry that He had made Saul king over Israel, 1 Samuel 15:11,35
- God lamented that all His protective care for Israel was in vain, Isaiah 5:1-7
- God was hurting because He must break what He had built and pluck what He had planted, Jeremiah 45:4
- God was heartbroken over the waywardness of Israel, Hosea 11:8
- God lamented with outstretched arms to a rebellious Israel, Isaiah 65:2, Romans 10:21

John Piper, a well-known apologist for Reformed theology at one time released daily 5-8 minute podcasts titled *Ask Pastor John*, wherein he answered questions submitted to him through his website. On Oct 21, 2013, he responded to the question, “*How does it glorify God to predestine people to hell?*” Piper did not directly address the question. Most if not all adherents to Reformed theology do not want to directly answer this question because it exposes the clarion assertion of John Calvin that some people were indeed *created* for hell (Ins. 3.21.5):

“All are not CREATED on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been CREATED for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestinated to life or to death.”

Piper avoids the direct and uncomfortable implications of the question by employing a tactic of substitution whereby one constructs their own question after defusing or negating the original question. Regrettably, it seems as though Calvinists just cannot or will not wrap their heads around the word *created*. Piper responds...

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“Here's a qualification that I want to put on the question before I answer the question. There will be no one in hell who does not deserve to be there. No one will be there who can give a good reason why they shouldn't be there. And all of the world will know this and will vindicate God in it. No one will be in hell who is not in a state of rebellion against God. People are being thrown there who are not in rebellion against God, but they're lovers of God, or they're repenting toward God, or they're embracing God? That's just a foreign concept to the Bible.”

Every point of his response is predicated on conditions that one acquires *after* being *created*. Piper has subtly circumvented the original question of God being glorified by predestining people to hell. It was John Calvin who made the original assertion (Ins. 3.21.5) that some people were *created* for hell. Yet he never cited a biblical proof to affirm his opinion. Calvinists routinely avoid this perplexing matter because it places them in an uncomfortable if not indefensible position. Why is it so difficult for Calvinists to defend the very words of John Calvin? Would a Calvinist dare preach a sermon that many people were created to burn in a Lake of Fire without recourse that God will be glorified? The whole focus of the submitted question centered on the word *created* for this is the bedrock foundation of Calvin's theology on Unconditional Election. The following are Piper's substitutionary words.

- **Deserve** – If people are created for hell, then how can they *deserve* a condition for which they have been created? They haven't been given the opportunity to *deserve* anything.
- **Good Reason** – How can people *give a good reason* for not being in hell if they haven't willfully done anything to put them there? More correctly stated would be, *“What IS the reason for me being in hell?”*
- **Vindication** – How can God be *vindicated* if the entire process of *election* is of His own doing?
- **Rebellion** – How can people be in *rebellion* if they have not been given the opportunity to *rebel*?

Piper is finally correct in stating that people need not fear the suffering of hell if they sincerely love God, confess to God, or embrace God, for Piper said, *“That's just a foreign concept to the Bible.”* Yes, it is foreign to the Bible but it's not foreign to John Calvin. He originated the concept. Piper has adroitly evaded the word *created*.

SUMMARY

It would seem that many Calvinists place a greater emphasis on the acceptance of their theology above that of the importance of grace. We are saved by grace through our faith, not our theology. Everyone has a slightly different theology than another. If theology were the determining factor for salvation then some of us would cancel our own destiny by our own doing. This brief explanation of Calvinism or Reformed theology should enable the serious Bible student to consider the trustworthiness of the following particulars.

- Calvin assumed we were created for heaven or hell which deprecates the atonement of Christ.
- Calvin routinely failed to examine the entire body of Scripture and thus formulated misleading conclusions.
- Calvin frequently omitted Scriptural references when making pertinent theological statements.
- Calvin occasionally developed erroneous opinions from just one verse.
- Calvin tenaciously holds to his own interpretation when numerous Scriptures assert quite the opposite.
- Calvin explains some Greek terms incorrectly by ignoring case, number, gender, and voice.
- Calvin seriously contradicts himself on several occasions.
 - ❖ Compare 3.21.5 *God created some for hell* versus 2.1.6 *God is not an Author of death*.
 - ❖ Compare 1.15.8 *Man was given Freewill* versus 2.3.6 *Freewill is completely Abolished*.
 - ❖ Compare 2.16.10 *God is angry and vengeful to Jesus* versus 2.16.11 *God is not hostile to Jesus*.
- Calvin generated confusion based on multiple definitions as in *τέκνον* referring only to small children.
- Calvin forced Scripture to validate his theology when it should be Scripture developing one's theology.
- Calvin asserted conditions which Reformed proponents must evade or refuse to adequately explain.
- Calvin proposed theology which no Calvinist would dare preach to any congregation.

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- Calvin proposed theology which non-Calvinists would be comfortable to preach or teach.
- Calvin was schooled to be a lawyer. He possessed no degrees in high scholastic theology as Luther.
- Calvin and Westminster affirmed Limited Atonement which is not directly found in the Bible.

Calvinism as defined that some are *pre-elected* and others *pre-damned* without these numbers being *increased* or *diminished* quickens anxiety, confusion, and fear in non-Calvinists. Where is the boldness for evangelism if one lives in anxiety or torment of being cast into the Lake of Fire with no chance of altering that destiny? How may one boldly take the gospel to the world if one is unsure of their own salvation? Far too many people shrink from evangelism because they lack the boldness to overcome their fear of unknown circumstances. If anxiety is layered upon timidity, how does one acquire boldness to serve the Lord? The Apostles came out from behind locked doors to boldly proclaim their faith and die for what they believed. It is boldness that makes the difference.

Many in the Reformed faith are sincerely devoted to Jesus Christ and the furtherance of His kingdom, clearly an asset for any pastor. But some manifest a subtle aloofness that is a definite put-off to others. It is no mark of a Christian to intentionally offend someone on matters of salvation. Why? Because there exists no guaranteed litmus test to substantiate anyone's certainty of *pre-election* or *pre-damnation* without a heavy dose of self-reliance upon works and assumptions. Salvation is a *gift* from God through *grace* which we receive through our *faith*. Theology does not change the divine nature of the *gift*. Calvinism is a theology, not in any way a means to salvation.

John Calvin wrote that many are created for heaven and many for hell, and the Westminster Confession insists that the number of each group "*cannot be increased or diminished.*" It would appear that the simplest way to refute Calvinism is to quote John Calvin.

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