

OVERVIEW AND COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOTERIOLOGY OF  
CALVINISM, ARMINIANISM, AND AMYRALDIANISM

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## INTRODUCTION

The Bible doctrine of salvation is both the incomprehensible work of the infinite God and the truth desperately needed by every sinful man. The Philippian jailer expresses well both the incomprehension and the desperation of every sinner with his simple question, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). In view of this desperate soteriological need to understand what is largely incomprehensible, the goals of this study are three: (1) historically, to develop an appreciation for the contributions of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Amyraldianism toward an accurate understanding of salvation; (2) theologically, to compare and contrast these interpretative traditions in search of a standardized biblical understanding of salvation; and (3) practically, to assess the value of the various traditions in their response to the question of the Philippian jailer.

The history of the Church is in part a history of orthodoxy agonizing to come to a “common confession” (1Tim. 3:16) about many incomprehensible aspects of God’s person and work. Unity over doctrines such as the Trinity and the person of Christ did not come easily. Each definition represented a costly victory over incipient error. In regard to the doctrine of salvation, however, the story reads differently. Rather than the clear delineation of unifying ancient creeds, the student of the history of soteriology finds a gradual apostasy from biblical truth, in spite of noteworthy exceptions.<sup>1</sup> With the Protes-

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<sup>1</sup> Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* for example. William G.T. Shedd comments in this regard: “We have seen that the dogmatic substance of the Protestant theory may be traced from the beginning. The constituent elements are, it is true, much more apparent in some theories and ages, than in others; but the doctrine itself of vicarious satisfaction cannot be said to be the discovery of any one age. Having a Biblical origin, and finding all its data and grounds in the revealed word, we trace its onward flow from this fountain through the centuries, sometimes visible in a broad and gleaming current, and sometimes running like a subterranean river and unseen in the hearts and minds of a smaller number chosen by Providence to keep alive the apostolic faith, and to preserve unbroken the line of the invisible and true Church, even though the external continuity were interrupted and broken. Men like Anselm and Wessel prepare us for

tant Reformation came a real return to biblical soteriological doctrine, but this return necessitated a rejection of the corrupted universal mechanism that had been used to construct the common confessions of the past. The counter-reformation's attempt to enact such a confession in the Councils of Trent exposed the inadequacy of the old mechanism. Rather than achieve the results of the ancient past, it anathematized biblical soteriology.

We have the courage and sacrifice of the great Reformers to thank for any light we see today in regard to this important doctrine, but clearly their work required that the old mechanism for unanimity be left behind. Without that mechanism, the orthodox unity enjoyed in other categories of doctrine remains somewhat elusive in the area of soteriology for the post-reformation Church. Three broadly defined traditions have developed within evangelical theology since the days of the Reformers: particularity, universality, and mediating positions.<sup>2</sup> In this study, Calvinism represents the particularistic position, Arminianism the universalistic position, and Amyraldianism the mediating position. While clearly distinguishable and often violently disagreeable, these three traditions have a common essence. This commonality is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that Calvin at times articulated a universal mission,<sup>3</sup> that Arminius denied that all

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men like Luther and Calvin." *A History of Christian Doctrine* (1864; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), 2:335-336.

<sup>2</sup> B.B. Warfield finds these the most useful categories for the task: "Amid this variety of types it is not easy to fix upon a principle of classification which will enable us to discriminate between the chief forms which evangelicalism takes by a clear line of demarcation. Such a principle, however, seems to be provided by the opposition between what we may call the Universalistic and the Particularistic conceptions of the plan of salvation." *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Quoting Augustine Calvin asserts: "For as we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved." *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), III.xxiii.14. Warfield notes regarding Calvin's theology, "In one word, he was distinctly a Biblical theologian, or, let us say it frankly, by way of eminence *the Biblical theologian of his age*. Whither the Bible took him, thither he went: where scriptural declarations failed him, there he stopped short." *Calvin and Augustine* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 481. Few theologians, if any at all, have written as many commentaries on the books of the Bible as has John Calvin.

would be saved,<sup>4</sup> and that Amyraut insisted that his position was the same as Calvin's.<sup>5</sup> Each of these traditions rejects both the naturalistic assumption that mankind needs no saving or can save himself (Pelagianism) and the sacerdotal view that denies the direct mediation by God of salvation upon the individual soul (Roman Catholicism).<sup>6</sup>

So in absence of the decision of ancient councils, how must the study of these traditions of soteriology be done? The answer this study asserts is twofold. First, the examination of these traditions must be careful to appreciate the important contributions of each. The study of salvation involves a need to become foolish so that true wisdom may be found (1 Cor. 3:18). Each of the traditions here examined bears the name of a man greatly used by God in his day. A study of their disagreement should not be allowed to diminish their essential evangelical unity. Paul further warns us, "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas" (vv. 21-22). The interpretations of all three traditions belong to us who enjoy their legacy, who today stand on their shoulders and enter into their labors. We are not to reject any of these men with a disdainful and schismatic lack of appreciation.

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<sup>4</sup> James Arminius (1560-1609) was the University of Leyden professor whose followers were responsible for the Remonstrance response to 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch scholastic Calvinism in 1610. In regard to judgment of the lost, note Arminius' typical division between the punishment of the godly and the wicked: "he hath administered all things to the best ends; that is, to the chastisement [*sic*], trial, and manifestation of the godly -- to the punishment and exposure of the wicked, and to the illustration of his own glory." "The Righteousness of God's Providence Concerning Evil." <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius27.htm> (23 April 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Moise Amyraut lived from 1596 to 1664 and ministered as the theological successor to John Cameron at the Theological Academy of Saumur in France. Like Arminius, Amyraut's ministry constituted a reaction against the scholastic supralapsarian interpretation of Calvinism. One of his concerns was to unearth Calvin from under the legacy of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva. Brian Armstrong states concerning Amyraut's *Defensio doctrinae J. Calvini de absoluto reprobationis decreto* (Saumur, 1641): "In this writing Amyraut clearly identifies his own teaching with that of Calvin . . . Here Amyraut produces passage after passage from Calvin in support of his own teachings." *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 99-100.

<sup>6</sup> Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation*, 20.

Secondly, the methodology of this study of soteriology should recognize the value of the methodology of the men whose lives and ministries occasion it. Calvin, Arminius, and Amyraut were great exegetes of Scripture and thoroughly biblically oriented in their theology. Each constitutes a unique contrast to the dominant scholasticism of their age.<sup>7</sup> Endeavoring to follow their example, this study will utilize the organizing principle of the most highly organized treatment of soteriology in the New Testament, the book of Romans. In that letter, Paul carefully maps out an irrefutable progression of truth that clearly delineates God's work of salvation. Here we find perfect balance between the incomprehensible and the need to comprehend. Paul moves from man's need as a sinner, to Christ's provision, to justification by faith, to sanctification, to the doctrines of grace, and finally to consummation. More specifically, each chapter of this study will address one of the themes in Paul's great introductory verses to the book of Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, the just shall live by faith" (1:16-17).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Armstrong identifies four characteristics of the "Protestant scholasticism" of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries: "(1) Primarily it will have reference to that theological approach which asserts religious truth on the basis of deductive ratiocination from given assumptions or principles, thus producing a logically coherent and defensible system of belief. Generally this takes the form of syllogistic reasoning. It is an orientation, it seems, invariably based upon an Aristotelian philosophical commitment and so relates to medieval scholasticism. (2) The term will refer to the employment of reason in religious matters, so that reason assumes at least equal standing with faith in theology, thus jettisoning some of the authority of revelation. (3) It will comprehend the sentiment that the scriptural record contains a unified, rationally comprehensible account and thus may be formed into a definitive statement which may be used as a measuring stick to determine one's orthodoxy. (4) It will comprehend a pronounced interest in metaphysical matters, in abstract, speculative thought, particularly with reference to the doctrine of God. The distinctive scholastic Protestant position is made to rest on a speculative formulation of the will of God" (32).

<sup>8</sup> Scripture quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

## CHAPTER 1

### “NOT ASHAMED”: RIGHTLY DIVIDING MYSTERY

Paul begins his theme verse for Romans with the declaration that he is not ashamed of the gospel. For Paul, these words were clearly more than academic, for they were spoken on the eve of Paul’s dangerous trip to Jerusalem in order to deliver the collection for the saints (Rom. 15:25-29). The phrase he uses to make this declaration is οὐ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον. This word translated “ashamed” in Paul’s declaration also appears in his letter to Timothy with reference to the importance of care while handling the word of God: “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed (ἀνεπαίσχυντον), accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). When Paul spoke of “accurately handling” or “rightly dividing” (KJV) God’s word, he utilized a technical term describing the Jewish custom related to flaying carefully the sacrifice. This responsibility involved specific restrictions and procedural rules.<sup>9</sup> In the same manner, a responsible handling of the doctrine of soteriology must carefully admit to serious limitations and procedural restrictions.

Paul expresses some of these limitations in Romans. Although Rom. 1:16 does not refer to the concept of mystery, this concept still plays an important role in the presentation of the book. The letter breaks down into two components designed to make a resounding argument for consecration, “Therefore I urge you, brethren” (12:1). Chapter 11 concludes the doctrinal foundation that brings Paul to this pivotal point of the book.

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<sup>9</sup> Alfred Edersheim explains: “On the shedding of blood . . . followed the ‘flaying’ of the sacrifice and the ‘cutting up into his pieces.’ All this had to be done in an orderly manner, and according to certain rules, the apostle adopting the sacrificial term when he speaks of ‘rightly dividing the word of truth’ (2 Tim. 2:15).” *The Temple* (1874; reprint, Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 84.



The conclusion of chapter 11 is consequently the conclusion of Paul's formal treatment of soteriology. In that passage the apostle, who knew the Scriptures as only a student of Gamaliel could (Acts 22:3), who issued his opinion authoritatively at times when he had no command from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:25), who endured physical malady because of the sheer greatness of the revelations he received (2 Cor. 12:7), exalts the incomprehensibility of soteriology by declaring that God's judgments are "unsearchable" and God's ways are "past finding out" (KJV, 11:33). This is what the vertex of soteriology looks like; we can see only darkness there. Each of the soteriological traditions under consideration in this study is best represented when advocated by those who understand the importance of a limited view. To rightly flay the word of soteriological truth is to fail to find things out; to correctly understand is to stop searching the unsearchable. Calvin, Arminius, and Amyraut all agree in regard to the importance of this interpretive principle.

Calvin carefully sought to discriminate between the searchable and the unsearchable using the word of God as the dividing line:

First, then, let them remember that when they inquire into predestination they are penetrating the sacred precincts of divine wisdom. If anyone with carefree assurance breaks into this place, he will not succeed in satisfying his curiosity and he will enter a labyrinth from which he can find no exit. For it is not right for man unrestrainedly to search out things that the Lord has willed to be hid in himself, and to unfold from eternity itself the sublimest wisdom, which he would have us revere but not understand that through this also he should fill us with wonder. He has set forth by his Word the secrets of his will that he has decided to reveal to us. These he decided to reveal in so far as he foresaw that they would concern and benefit us.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his theology, Calvin's concern is unfailingly pastoral. He recognized the practical dangers of speculation beyond the clear content of the text. The Scriptures could be trusted not only for that which concerns us, but also for that which benefits us.

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<sup>10</sup> *Institutes*, III.xxi.1.

In addition, because Calvin determines to avoid the “labyrinth” of speculation, his theology bears everywhere the mark of confidence. As Warfield observes, “it was just because he refused to go one step beyond what is written that he felt so sure of his steps. He could not present the dictates of the Holy Ghost as a series of debatable propositions.”<sup>11</sup>

On this point especially, Moise Amyraut found an ally in his great predecessor from Geneva. A reading of Calvin’s *Institutes* convinced the onetime law student to take up theology and enroll at Saumur.<sup>12</sup> Here he became the disciple of John Cameron, “who in three short years could so inspire the sharpest theological minds in France, and, indeed, create at Saumur a theological approach which for more than half a century would challenge many of the teachings of orthodox Calvinism.”<sup>13</sup> Cameron’s approach to theology is today remembered as a return to a “principle of examination” with its focus on an inductive study of the Scriptures.<sup>14</sup> He asserted the fallibility of religion, and he backed his assertions with humanist principles of history.<sup>15</sup> What impressed Amyraut the most

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<sup>11</sup> *Calvin and Augustine*, 482. Charles H. Spurgeon, a Calvinist, understood the danger of making a system of theological interpretation paramount to the standard of the Word of God: “Dr. Gill declares just so much, and who shall venture to say more; or perhaps Calvin is made the standard and what business has any man to think a single thought beyond Calvin? Blessed be God, we have gone a little beyond that; and we can say, ‘Increase our faith.’ With all our admiration for these great standard divines, we are not prepared to shut ourselves up in their little iron cages; but we say, ‘Open the door, and let me fly—let me still feel that I am at liberty. Increase my faith, and help me to believe a little more.’” “The Necessity of Increased Faith” (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0032.htm> [16 February 2009]).

<sup>12</sup> Roger Nicole, “Amyraldianism, Amyraldism, Amyraldus, Amyraut,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Edwin H. Palmer (Wilmington, DE: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1964), 1:184-185.

<sup>13</sup> Armstrong, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Armstrong explains: “By ‘principle of examination’ is meant a critical investigation of an issue being discussed within the Church in order to determine (1) its origin and (2) whether or not the commonly held teaching conformed to the Scriptures. Cameron’s use of this principle was not novel in itself—what was new was the rigor with which he applied it and the absolute prominence it received in every phase of his argumentation. He seems to have applied it more consistently than even the early Reformers” (10).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

about his effective teacher was his emphasis on the need to understand the Bible as a theologian:

I declare to you that whatever little I am able to offer in the explanation of theology, I owe this, after the reading of Scripture, to the insights . . . that this great man has taught me. . . . I judge that in his time he has not been surpassed in that part of theology which consists in the understanding of the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps even more than the treatment of either Calvin or Arminius, the soteriology of Amyraut depends heavily upon a willingness to leave logical inconsistencies rest with the plain statements of Scripture. In a sermon designed to defend his first publication on predestination, Amyraut holds fast to the sufficiency of these even in the face of apparent contradiction:

. . . when He has revealed something to us in His word having to do with the dispensation of His will towards men, it is not our business to explore this in order to see whether or not it is agreeable to His nature, or to see whether or not this puts two wills in God which are opposed—as if His nature were something which could be comprehended by our understandings. . . . although my reason found there some things which seemed to be in conflict, although whatever effort that I exert I am not able to harmonize nor reconcile them, still I will not fail to hold these two doctrines as true.<sup>17</sup>

That passage goes on to describe God’s nature as an unsearchable “abyss” and to emphasize the importance of guarding “what is revealed.” He further warns that the presumption of reason can do grave “injury to His unspeakable grace toward men.”

James Arminius was also aware of the limitations of the theologian. Upon acceptance of his post at the University of Leyden, the new professor wrote a treatise on “The Object of Theology.” In it he made clear that his duties would not include answering every cavil of human reason’s dissatisfaction with the truth of God. He wrote,

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<sup>16</sup> *Replique a M. de la Milletiere sur son offer d’une conference amiable pour l’examen de ses moyens de reunion* (Saumur, 1658); quoted in Armstrong, 43.

<sup>17</sup> *Sermons sur divers texts* (Saumur, 1653); quoted in Armstrong, 184.

For the reasons and terms of divine justice and mercy are not to be determined by the limited and shallow measure of our capacities or feelings; but we must leave with God the free administration and just defense of these his own attributes.<sup>18</sup>

Each of these three theologians professed a desire to silence themselves where the Bible did not speak. Rightly dividing the word involves recognition of mystery.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius2.htm> (23 April 2005).

## CHAPTER 2

### “GOSPEL”: GOOD NEWS

The word “soteriology” never appears in the Scripture. We do not read anywhere in the Old or New Testaments of the “study of salvation” per se. The book that best approximates a formal study of the doctrine of salvation is the book of Romans. Yet here the technical term that adequately summarizes Paul’s topic is not *the study of salvation* or *the work of Christ*, but *gospel*.<sup>19</sup> He uses the word four times in the 17 verses of the prologue to this epistle (1:1, 1:9, 1:15, 1:16). The difference between “soteriology” and “gospel” is that the former focuses on studying salvation truth, whereas the latter emphasizes the proclamation of salvation truth. Rather than merely studying salvation, New Testament believers are everywhere proclaiming it. Their concern is that unbelievers learn to study the Bible doctrine of salvation (Acts 17:11).

Clearly, Paul was the Holy Spirit’s choice to write the book of Romans in part because he had made a careful study of the doctrine of salvation. But in so doing, Paul never lost sight of the fact that this truth is gospel truth. The greatest theologian the Church has ever known also happens to be the greatest missionary/evangelist the Church has ever known. In the person of Paul, we have an example of what accurate Bible salvation doctrine produces, and we find here a man with a deep passion for lost souls. We read of his great sorrow and unceasing grief (Rom. 9:2), of his heart’s desire and prayer to God (10:1); and lest we conclude that these were mere hyperbolic effusions or academic contemplations, we also read of his lifelong aspiration and faithful execution,

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<sup>19</sup> εὐαγγέλιον “good news”, from εὐαγγελίζομαι “to proclaim good news.”

preaching the gospel where Christ had not been named (15:20). According to the example of the life of this great apostle, he who knows most accurately the soteriology of the Bible preaches most fervently the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Both the Calvinist and Arminian traditions have produced great evangelists throughout the history of the Church.<sup>20</sup> History does not treat the name of Amyraut such that it has an opportunity to rise to the same challenge. Yet the man himself evidenced a real concern for the lost. For the last ten years of his life, Amyraut liberally distributed his entire salary to the poor of various religions.<sup>21</sup> In addition, his publication on predestination, which created the firestorm that eventuated in a heresy trial, addressed a concern that Amyraut had developed during a conversation with an unbelieving nobleman. This man had heard about the supralapsarian view of predestination current among the orthodox Calvinists of that day. Amyraut mentions his reason for writing:

My intension has been only to extricate this doctrine, which is so often judged difficult and thorny, from the subtlety of controversy, where more often than not the heat of controversy alters the spirit, and the prejudices of the disputants hinder the functions of the intellect from furthering the practice of piety or from contributing to the edification and consolation of the conscience.<sup>22</sup>

The brand of Calvinism Amyraut responded to in *Brief Traitte'* also occasioned the objections of the followers of Arminius in the Dutch Remonstrance of 1610. The five articles proposed by these men were followed by a list of 5 contemporary Calvinist doctrines they rejected: 1) supralapsarian predestination; 2) sublapsarian predestination; 3)

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<sup>20</sup> The Wesleyan Methodists provide ample evidence of this on the Arminian side. In regard to Calvinists, Bruce Demarest lists "Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, Brainerd, Edwards, Carey, Spurgeon, and Kennedy." *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1997), 141.

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Brief Traitte' de la predestination et de ses principales dependences* (Saumur, 1634); quoted in Armstrong, 81.

limited atonement; 4) irresistible and particular grace; and 5) eternal security.<sup>23</sup> Their stand was not made easily. After they lost their case, two hundred of the remonstrants were deposed from their ministries, and one of their foremost leaders, John of Barneveldt, was beheaded. The personal stakes were very high for these men, but their love for the Lord and souls ascended higher still.<sup>24</sup>

The Calvinism that both Amyraut in France and Arminius in the Netherlands opposed grew out of a shift away from the original methodology of John Calvin. Bruce Demarest explains:

Scripture, however, presents the doctrine of election not as a rebuke to the world at large but as a comfort for the Lord's *saints*. The doctrine of election is to be discussed after the person has come to faith in Christ, not before. For this reason thoughtful Christians treat the biblical doctrine of election under the heading of salvation wrought by Christ, rather than under the heading of the divine nature or decrees [emphasis his].<sup>25</sup>

John Calvin was one of these “thoughtful Christians.” The placement of his treatment of predestination in the *Institutes* is most significant.<sup>26</sup> Book I of that work delineates the doctrine of God and is entitled “The Knowledge of God the Creator.” It is followed by Book II, which contains a study of Jesus Christ and His work of redemption.

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<sup>23</sup> George L. Curtis, *Arminianism in History* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1894), 68-69. Note that in regard to the rejection of eternal security, the Arminians were not agreed. Article 5 of the Remonstrance equivocated on the issue: “But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginnings of their life in Christ, or again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, --that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scriptures, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our minds.”

<sup>24</sup> Each of the first two articles of the Remonstrance quotes John 3:16.

<sup>25</sup> Demarest, 138.

<sup>26</sup> Armstrong agrees: “I believe that the location of predestination at the end of book III of the *Institutio* is the proper and logical setting for Calvin’s doctrine. In the light of his remark in the epistle to the reader that only in the last edition was he satisfied with the order of topics, it appears untenable that Calvin did not carefully consider the final disposition of this doctrine, and most defensible that he probably would have disapproved of the relocation of it in the doctrine of God as was done by the Protestant scholastics” (162).

Not until the end of Book III, which covers how salvation is received, do we have Calvin's discussion of predestination. In contrast, the Protestant scholastics who succeeded Calvin moved the doctrine of predestination to the first category, the doctrine of God, the Creator. Supralapsarian<sup>27</sup> predestination teaches that God decreed the salvation of saints and the reprobation of sinners prior to His decree of the fall of Adam. This brings particularity into the act of creation. God's decree of reprobation becomes part of His plan to create, no longer a righteous response to the sinfulness of mankind.

Supralapsarian predestination is undeniably the most consistent affirmation of the principle of particularity in evangelical theology.<sup>28</sup> Some plain statements of Scripture, which teach that believers were chosen prior to the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), state the temporal precedence of election to creation clearly. From here it is only a small step for creatures of time, before their journey takes them to a conclusion involving the logical priority of particularity as well. How can saints be chosen and sinners be reprobated prior to the creation of the world apart from the conclusion that these realities were together a part of God's original creative design? When it comes to the good news of salvation, only equally plain statements of Scripture regarding God's universal gospel love can balance against the fatalism of the supralapsarian view (Jn. 3:16).

Although supralapsarianism is miles away from Calvin in terms of emphasis, it is less so in terms of substance. Rather than expressions of the emotional yearnings for the lost we hear from the apostle Paul, the pages of the *Institutes* voice concern over the defense of the sovereign power of God in regard to the condition of the lost: "Hence it is clear that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be reserved solely and individually

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<sup>27</sup> From the Latin *supra* meaning "above, beyond" and *lapsus* meaning "fall"

<sup>28</sup> Sublapsarian Calvinist B.B. Warfield admits as much, but then he adds, "The most consistent embodiment of the principle of particularism is not therefore necessarily the best form of Calvinism." *Plan of Salvation*, 93.



for the sons of the church, is falsely debased when presented as effectually profitable for all.”<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that Calvin’s theology in this regard is cold-hearted and calculating, for Calvin’s defense of God’s freedom and justice is truly passionate. It is only to say that the expressions of the heart of Paul for the lost do not receive a full theological treatment in his soteriology.<sup>30</sup> According to the apostle, the gospel he declared to the lost of Corinth stated unequivocally that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). In so doing, he “falsely debased” that gospel according to the Calvin doctrine. Perhaps the difficulty Calvin seems to have in expressing the burden of Paul for the lost, in his section on the universal call above, stems from the fact that this single section is succeeded by 15 sections on the reprobation of sinners in the plan of God.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, one of the important lessons of the history of the rise of Amyraldianism and Arminianism is the fact that soteriology fails to remain gospel when on the one hand it no longer admits to incomprehensibility, and when on the other it no longer engenders a genuine burden for the lost in the hearts of those to whom God has committed the ministry of reconciliation. While it is clear that the brand of Calvinism

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<sup>29</sup> *Institutes*, III.xxii.10

<sup>30</sup> Calvin certainly believed in the importance of Paul’s burden. In his commentary on Romans he writes regarding Rom. 9:1: “But the perdition of the Jews caused very great anguish to Paul, though he knew that it happened through the will and providence of God. We hence learn that the obedience we render to God’s providence does not prevent us from grieving at the destruction of lost men, though we know that they are thus doomed by the just judgment of God; for the same mind is capable of being influenced by these two feelings: that when it looks to God it can willingly bear the ruin of those whom he has decreed to destroy; and that when it turns its thoughts to men, it condoles with their evils. They are then much deceived, who say that godly men ought to have apathy and insensibility . . . lest they should resist the decree of God.” *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, vol. 19 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. John Owen (1615; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 335. Note however the difference between Paul’s “continual sorrow” and Calvin’s “when it looks to God” vs. “when it looks to men.” Paul’s sorrow persisted even when he looked to God (Rom. 10:1). A soul-winning burden was an important part of Paul’s theology, not merely part of his anthropology.

<sup>31</sup> *Institutes*, III.xxii.11 and III.xxiii.1-14

that provoked the defections of Amyraut and Arminius was a distant cousin of its great predecessor, it is also true that Calvin's emphasis contributed to the history. In regard to gospel as mystery, few theologians have displayed the dedication this pastor, parent, and scholar did to the plain text of Scripture; but in regard to gospel as a burden for the lost, it is difficult to hear the heartbeat of Paul responding to the condition of lost men and women in the pages of Calvin's *Institutes*. The history shows that, without the balancing statements of Scripture regarding God's desire for the salvation of all, an emphasis on free sovereignty and God's will as the necessity of all things can degenerate quickly into the fatalism and fallacy of supralapsarianism. Calvin exhibits this balance on a personal level, undoubtedly because few knew the Bible the way he did; but his successors, many of whom retained and amplified Calvin's theological system without his biblical methodology, found themselves in that labyrinth of confusion their predecessor had warned about, where soteriology is no longer unsearchable and the gospel is no longer proclaimed.

## CHAPTER 3

### “GOSPEL”: THE BAD NEWS FIRST

What has preceded this point has examined the nature of soteriology in the context of the three traditions of evangelical interpretation. According to Paul’s inspired treatment and godly example in the book of Romans, the gospel is on the one hand an incomprehensible mystery and on the other a desperately needed proclamation. Calvin, Amyraut, and Arminius all recognized these truths with varying emphasis. With chapter three, this study turns from the nature of soteriology to its content. Where exactly are the limits to be drawn that give us an accurate delineation of the meaning of the gospel, and what exactly ought we to proclaim when we preach good news?

As discussed previously, Paul’s presentation of the gospel in Romans displays the organization of a careful plan. For Paul, soteriology is good news, but the presentation of this good news must begin with the bad news first (Rom. 1:18-3:20). The apostle’s concluding concern in this regard is to show sinners that “by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (3:20). It is not surprising that the first part of the content of the gospel in Romans is an explanation of man’s need for it. Two issues do pose some surprising complexities, however, with which the interpretive systems of Calvinism, Arminianism, and Amyraldianism have wrestled in different ways. These are the issues involved with original sin and holistic depravity.

Calvin defined original sin as man’s hereditary corruption. Against the Pelagian false teaching that the sin of Adam hurt no one but himself, except in terms of example, Calvin stressed the impact of Adam upon the entire race: “we are not corrupted by

acquired wickedness, but bring an innate corruption from the very womb.”<sup>32</sup> The sin issue does not concern activity, but “the depravation of a nature formerly good and pure.”<sup>33</sup> He summarizes with a formal definition: “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.”<sup>34</sup> Calvin was not at all ignorant of medieval theories regarding mechanisms for the transmission of the sinner’s inherited sin nature, but his methodology saved him from engaging their speculations. Instead, he is content to comment: “The cause of the contagion is neither in the substance of the flesh nor the soul, but God was pleased to ordain that those gifts which he had bestowed on the first man, that man should lose as well for his descendants as for himself.”<sup>35</sup>

Amyraut largely followed Calvin’s lead in regard to defining original sin as intrinsic to the nature of man and as hereditary from Adam. Within the context of this understanding, he also drew a distinction between the aspect of sin that requires justification and the aspect of sin that requires sanctification. Though sin is a single concept, Amyraut viewed the line between these aspects of sin as inviolable:

Sin is but one and the same thing, though it is so described that it may be considered as having two aspects. For it is a corruption of our nature, and is the cause of our condemnation. . . . To condemnation is opposed justification, which consists in the remission of sins; to corruption is opposed sanctification. But there is no sanctification where sins have not first been pardoned . . .<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Institutes*, II.i.5

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> II.i.8

<sup>35</sup> II.i.7

<sup>36</sup> *Exposition du chapitre VI et VIII de l’epistre aux Romains* (1659); quoted in Armstrong, 237-238.

Natural sin connected to Adam was also the doctrine of Arminius and his Wesleyan descendants. In the midst of Wesley's first major revivals in the early 1740's, conferences were established to decide important matters of faith and practice. The minutes from the first of these conferences reads concerning original sin:

In Adam all died – *i.e.* (1) our bodies then became mortal; (2) our souls died – *i.e.* were disunited from God; (3) and hence we are all born with a sinful, devilish nature, by reason whereof (4) we all are children of wrath, liable to death eternal.<sup>37</sup>

The doctrine of original sin demonstrates again the essential unity of evangelical soteriology. Against Pelagian heresy, all three traditions agree that man is sinful by nature and by birth, and that the cause for this condition lies in the disobedience of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

By way of contrast, unanimity breaks down in regard to the second complexity of the doctrine of sin, the issue of holistic depravity.<sup>38</sup> The question involves the definition of man's need for salvation as concerns his response to the gospel. As a result, the answers proffered stem less from direct statements of Scripture regarding the nature of sin, and more from the soteriological necessities of the respective tradition's interpretation of salvation doctrine. The debate becomes the classical argument regarding the freedom of the will. On the one hand, the particularistic tradition (followed in this case by Amyraut) asserts consistently the holistic depravity of man, that the sinner in his pre-faith state remains unable to believe until a particular and efficacious work of grace is performed immediately upon his soul.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, the universalistic tradition claims that

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<sup>37</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 139.

<sup>38</sup> "Pravity" comes from the Latin, *pravitas*, meaning "crooked, evil". The "de-" prefix in this case is intensive.

<sup>39</sup> Calvin illustrates the methodology when he teaches: "The same thing appears more clearly from the mode of renovation. For the spirit, which is contrasted with the old man, and the flesh, denotes not only the grace by which the sensual or inferior part of the soul is corrected, but includes a complete reformation of all its parts (Eph. 4: 23). And, accordingly, Paul enjoins not only that gross appetites be suppressed, but that we be renewed in the spirit of our mind (Eph. 4: 23), as he elsewhere tells us to be

all sinners have obtained enough by grace already to render the debilitating aspects of original sin irrelevant. Following Rom. 5:19, they conclude that the merits of Christ on the cross were applied to all mankind in a less than completely redeeming way.<sup>40</sup> Though divergence is obviously apparent, it is important to understand that in both cases care is maintained to distance these systems from the error of Pelagianism, which has for centuries born the mark of heresy since the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431). Two issues make a man a Pelagian in this regard. First, Pelagius taught that man would not be human unless he possessed the ability to obey the commands of God. He argued largely from natural experience that man often demonstrates this ability.<sup>41</sup> Second, Pelagius calculated that prevenient grace was merely the sum total of natural capability, God's commands in the law, and the example of Jesus Christ.<sup>42</sup> None of the traditions under discussion here believe with Pelagius that a sinner has the power to save himself through the works of the law, and all agree that salvation must be a supernatural act of grace, a gift from God.

The evangelical debate argues over how men actually come to receive this supernatural gift of salvation, and the question is older than any of the traditions under consideration here. Luther's *Bondage of the Will* offers the classical position espoused by the

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transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom. 12:2). Hence it follows, that that part in which the dignity and excellence of the soul are most conspicuous, has not only been wounded, but so corrupted, that mere cure is not sufficient. There must be a new nature." *Institutes*, II.i.9

<sup>40</sup> The minutes of Methodism's first annual conference explains: "That text, 'As by one man's disobedience all men were made sinners, so by the obedience of one all were made righteous' [Rom. 5:19], we conceive means, by the merits of Christ all men are cleared from the guilt of Adam's actual sin. We conceive farther that, through the obedience and death of Christ: 1. The bodies of all men become immortal after the resurrection; 2. Their souls recover a capacity of spiritual life; 3. And an actual seed or spark thereof" (Outler, 139).

<sup>41</sup> This assertion denies Paul's conclusion mentioned above, that by the works of the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20). The second assertion denies the clear teaching of Paul in Eph. 2:8, "and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Demarest, 51.

Calvinist. Here, in disputation with the advocacy of Erasmus for freewill, Luther argues strongly for holistic depravity. His emphasis is twofold: (1) God's will is the necessity of all things; and (2) that the commands of God "declare, not man's *ability*, but his *duty*."<sup>43</sup> One of the powerful themes in Luther's argument against freewill states that in order for the freedom in "freewill" to be truly free, it must be free in a plenary sense. Countering the Erasmus view that the imperatives of Scripture imply an ability to respond, Luther shows that these commands concern not only faith in Christ, but also obedience to the entire law.<sup>44</sup> The Scriptures make clear that man is not able to keep the law, to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself, and yet God commands Him to do exactly that. This command therefore indicates duty, not ability. The imperatives of the law show a man what he cannot do, not what he can. So also with the command to repent and believe the gospel, the command must imply only duty, not ability. For if a man were free to believe, one would have to conclude thereby that this man were free to work the works of the law. Freewill, if truly free, must be free in a plenary sense. According to Luther, no man is free to work the works of the law; therefore, no man is free to believe.

At one point, Luther charges Erasmus with a failure to distinguish between the law and the gospel in regard to his interpretations of some passages,<sup>45</sup> but it may be such a failure that lies at the base of his conclusions about plenary freewill. If freewill be defined as the ability to exercise faith, it cannot be defined also as the ability to accomplish works in view of the clear scriptural dichotomy between faith and works (Eph. 2:8-

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (1525; reprint Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1957), 156.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-169.

9). No tradition of soteriological interpretation believes that a man is ever saved against his own will. For the Arminians, the work of prevenient grace, and for the Calvinist, the work of irresistible grace or regeneration changes the will of a man so that he freely desires to believe. Neither tradition, however, teaches that this freedom to believe necessarily implies a freedom to do the works of the law, for that would by default make believing in the work of Christ unnecessary. Grace enables faith, but not works, unto salvation. The scriptural distinction between faith and works in a soteriological context must be rigidly maintained (Rom. 3:27-28). Consequently, when defined as the ability to believe, freewill does not necessarily entail the ability to do the works of the law in view of this biblical dichotomy. Freewill in this sense is less than plenary, whether endowed as a direct gift of particular grace or resident in man by virtue of a more general grace.

Both the particularistic and universalistic traditions of evangelical soteriology conclude against the Pelagians that sinful man cannot save himself through the works of the law, and that he cannot believe apart from grace. Divergence in regard to the nature of sin as depravity results from differences between the respective necessities of their soteriological systems. The particularistic tradition finds evidence in the text of the New Testament that faith is a gift of God, and they therefore conclude that men cannot believe unless directly given the ability to do so. The universalistic tradition finds evidence in the text that faith is the responsibility of man, and they therefore conclude that men can believe, for they have already been given the ability to do so. On balance, the emphasis of the New Testament coincides more clearly with the universalistic focus than it does with the particularistic.<sup>46</sup> Most of the passages indicating that faith is a gift from God

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<sup>46</sup> Michael P.V. Barrett summarizes some of the passages that give indication that faith is a direct gift of God. Agreeing with the hymn writer, "I know not how this saving faith to me He did impart," he insists that impartation is exactly what has taken place, although he confesses that he too does not understand completely how. In support of this view, Dr. Barrett cites Acts 5:30-31, "to give repentance to Israel," Acts 11:18, "grant repentance to the Gentiles," the opening of Lydia's heart (Acts 16:14), the phrases "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27) and "believe according to his power" (Eph. 1:19-20), and 2



could be interpreted as a provision of God's providence rather than a regenerating work of God's salvation. This is true, for instance, of Acts 5:30-31, where Peter proclaims that Christ died in the plan of God to "grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins." Clearly, there is more to that phrase than an immediate gift of salvation, for the rule regarding Israel is that only a remnant has been saved (Rom. 11:5).<sup>47</sup>

Ephesians 2 is another important passage for the assertion that faith is an immediate gift of God. While it is true that this chapter calls sinners spiritually dead, and while it may also be true that dead people cannot believe (although the rich man of Luke 16 seems to have no trouble), must we therefore conclude that this is what Paul is trying to say in the passage in question? Nowhere does the passage say that dead people cannot believe. On the contrary, the passage teaches that dead people cannot work (the opposite of believing—an important emphasis in the chapter), and that we must be created in Christ Jesus "for good works" (2:9-10). Paul's emphasis does not seem to be that we are created in Christ Jesus so that we can believe, but rather that we are created in Christ Jesus so that we can work. According to Ephesians 2, dead people cannot work. This is the point of comparison in the analogy Paul is using.<sup>48</sup>

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Timothy 2:25, "if God peradventure will give them repentance." Without detailed treatment of the grammar, the author includes Ephesians 2:8 in this list, "it [faith] is the gift of God." Finally, Philippians 1:29 says, "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." *Complete In Him* (Greenville, S.C.: Ambassador-Emerald, 2000), 53.

<sup>47</sup> To say that Peter was referring to the remnant in his phrase "to Israel" is to beg the question and leave the context. Peter was answering a question regarding what they were doing to "Jerusalem" (v. 28). They answered by describing what God was doing for "Israel," including "Jerusalem." To say that and mean only a spiritual remnant would have been to mislead the Sanhedrin with the answer. Peter was simply answering the question in a straightforward way. All in Israel were given the opportunity to repent in the providence of God, but the Holy Spirit was given only to those who obeyed (i.e., repented; v. 32). God's "granting repentance" in Acts 5 is the same work of God as described in Acts 17:30, "God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent." Another example of this truth may be found in Philippians 1:29, where the gift of faith is compared to the gift of suffering. Just as the gift of suffering is an act of God's providence, so also is the gift of faith. God does not immediately inflict the gift of suffering, nor does he immediately enact the gift of faith. Christians can refuse to accept the gift of suffering, and sinners can refuse to accept the gift of faith.

<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence for the assertion that faith is an immediate gift of God's work of salvation comes from the experiences of Lydia (Acts 16:14) and the Gentiles of Pisidian Antioch (Acts

In summary, the evangelical traditions of particularism and universalism are united in their rejection of the Pelagian view that man is naturally good enough to save himself. Grace is required. The issue of holistic depravity divides these traditions because conclusions reached in this area are one step removed from the plain statements of Scripture. Clearly, if we ask the question of the text, “Can a sinner believe?” it will never tell us that he cannot. The emphasis of the text is always that he must in view of the grace of God. It will tell us that he cannot “seek” (Rom. 3:11); it will tell us that he cannot “will” or “run” (Rom. 9:16); it will tell us that he cannot “accept” or “understand” (1 Cor. 2:14-15); and it will tell us that he cannot “work” (Rom. 3:12); but it will never tell us that he cannot do what it everywhere tells us he must do, “repent and believe.” In the context of the scriptural dichotomy of salvation “through faith, not of works,” the “seeking”, “willing”, “running”, “accepting”, and “understanding” of these other passages require that they be viewed on the side of “working,” not “believing,” for like “working” none of these save, and faith saves. Men are sinners, and in view of the grace

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13:48). Though one might argue that “strongest evidence” for a disputed soteriological position ought to come from the doctrinal sections of the epistles, these statements of Luke certainly qualify as authoritative. He tells us not only that Lydia was listening, but also “the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” And he tells us that of those Gentiles who heard the word of God, rejoiced, and glorified the word of God, they who “had been appointed to eternal life believed.” In regard to Lydia’s experience, Luke uses the same verb to describe the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:31, 45). The force of the word emphasizes an ability to understand God’s revelation or illumination. The ability to understand does not necessarily equal the ability to believe (Heb. 6:4-6).

In regard to the Acts 13 passage, the ὅσοι clause follows the verb “they believed” in Greek unlike the passage in English. The emphasis is on the faith of the respondents. While the clause clearly communicates antecedent time, “they were appointed to eternal life prior to the time they believed,” it is less clear that immediate causation is in view, “they believed because they were appointed to eternal life” (see for instance Joh. 10:8, where “coming before” does not immediately cause “being a thief and robber,” although it clearly indicates an antecedent reality). The question as to whether some might be appointed to eternal life and still not believe is left open by the verse, while the emphasis of the verse is rather that all who believed had been appointed (see FF Bruce who interprets the appointment as enrollment in the book of life). In spite of the antecedent nature of the ὅσοι clause, Luke stops well short of communicating that “appointment” causes “believing.” There is room in the verse for the interpretation that says, “believing” causes “appointment” (just like “being a thief and robber” caused “coming before”). The eternal life bestowed upon the believer has both a past and future reality making him completely secure, and this security is given to all who believe.

of God they are responsible to believe. This law of faith excludes boasting (Rom. 3:27); it needs no further help from a law of inability to exercise faith in order to do so.

## CHAPTER 4

### “OF CHRIST”: THE ATONING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

The work of Christ is central to the gospel. “Atonement”<sup>49</sup> is the theological term used to summarize that work. When Paul wrote his great treatise of soteriology, the book of Romans, he wrote about the gospel *of Christ* (1:16). When he summarized the gospel he proclaimed in Corinth, he said that it was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Co. 15:1-4). This was also the gospel that the Corinthian church savingly believed (vv. 2, 11). Reflecting again the essential unity of evangelical doctrine, Calvin, Arminius, and Amyraut all believed that the cross work of Jesus Christ secures salvation for the sinner. Together, they reject the moral influence theory of Peter Abelard (d. 1142) that asserts, “Christ died for us in order to show how great was his love to mankind and to prove that love is the essence of Christianity.”<sup>50</sup> Rather than merely influencing through example, the atoning work of Jesus Christ on Calvary executed a vicarious sacrifice (Is. 53).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The English word is very literally a compound of “at” and “one.” The basic idea is the reunification of two previously separated entities.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Abelard, *Sentences*, 23; quoted by Demarest, 153.

<sup>51</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup>-century debate between Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell exposed the difference between the orthodox doctrine of atonement and the teaching of modernism (see bibliographical reference for the analysis of David Wells). Notwithstanding, Bible scholarship united around the conclusion that the root meaning of כִּפָּר is “to cover” until the 1931 article on the LXX usage of ἵλασκεσθαι by C. H. Dodd. See chapter 5 of C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 82-95. Dodd argued that the Old Testament concept of atonement did not include the idea of propitiation, the satisfaction of divine wrath. Leon Morris was the first to respond, and then came the thorough word study of Roger Nicole, who concluded, “If the LXX and New Testament writers had shared Dodd’s dislike of the whole conception of propitiation it seems highly unlikely that they would have used such a term as ἵλασκεσθαι to mean ‘to expiate’, ‘to forgive’, when the usual connotation of this word was overwhelmingly ‘propitiation.’” “C. H. Dodd and Propitiation,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 17 (1954): 149. Dodd’s conclusions have been utilized to eliminate not only the truth of propitiation from the doctrine of

Yet in spite of this agreement regarding the real efficacy of the death of Christ, the doctrine of the atonement supplies the context for the sharpest disagreement between the particularistic, universalistic, and mediating positions of evangelical theology. In no other area of soteriology are the differences between the three approaches so greatly pronounced. For the particularistic position, any view that proposes to interpret the work of Christ on the cross as something less than the complete actuation of the eternal salvation of those for whom Christ died simply dishonors Calvary. John Owen's summary statement regarding the atonement is representative and powerfully expressed:

The sum of all is,—The death and blood-shedding of Jesus Christ hath wrought, and doth effectually procure, for all those that are concerned in it, eternal redemption, consisting in grace here and glory hereafter.<sup>52</sup>

B.B. Warfield agrees with Owen's logical conclusions to the point of letting his own definition of "evangelical" breakdown under the weight of the syllogism employed:

As supernaturalism is the mark of Christianity at large, and evangelicalism the mark of Protestantism, so particularism is the mark of Calvinism. . . . Particularism in the saving processes . . . is already given in the supernaturalism of salvation and in the immediacy of the operations of the divine grace; and the denial of particularism is constructively the denial of the immediacy of saving grace, that is, of evangelicalism, and of the supernaturalism of salvation, that is, of Christianity itself. It is *logically* the total rejection of Christianity [emphasis mine].<sup>53</sup>

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atonement, but also the truth of substitution. Note the comments of Brian A. Gerrish: "C. H. Dodd has shown, I think conclusively, that in the Septuagint the word *ἱλασκεσθαι* and its cognates suggest not "placation" but "expiation"—in other words, that the Christian understanding of sacrifice has been too much influenced by "pagan" analogies . . . . If sacrifice in the Old Testament is not placatory, neither is it substitutionary." "Atonement and 'Saving Faith,'" *Theology Today* 17 (1960): 188.

<sup>52</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1642; reprint, Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1983), 47.

<sup>53</sup> *The Plan of Salvation*, 87. Later in this work Warfield must admit that logical consistency is not the best mark of good doctrine as he argues for infralapsarianism over supralapsarianism (93). At times Calvinists like C. H. Spurgeon have invoked correctly the limitations of logic in defense of their positions: "We have been accused of having no logic, and we are not particularly sorry about that, for we would rather have what men call dogmatism than logic. It is Christ's to prove; it is ours to preach. We leave argument to Christ; for us, we have only to affirm what we see in God's Word." "A Willing People and an Immutable Leader" (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0074.htm> [6 April 2009]).

Because the work of Christ must be viewed as victory and because not all are saved, the particularistic view must interpret the atonement as intended only for the elect. On this foundation, scriptural passages that appear to describe a universal intent in the death of Christ undergo interpretations that assume them to be less than completely perspicuous.<sup>54</sup>

On the other side of the interpretative spectrum stands the Arminian position with its universal atonement interpretations. This tradition welcomes the many passages of Scripture that teach that Jesus Christ died for the sins of all mankind (Jn. 3:16-17, 1Co. 15:3, 1Ti. 2:4, 2Pe. 2:1, 1Jn. 2:2). For them, the accomplishments of Christ on the cross are as far-reaching as the problem of sin itself (Is. 53:6, Ro. 5:15, 11:32). Yet because they too understand that not all will be saved, this tradition is forced to reinterpret the efficacy of the work God intended for Christ to do on the cross. This approach has by no means yielded a uniform consensus within the tradition. One polarity finds little or no use for the penal nature of the sacrifice of Christ, following the governmental theory of the atonement developed by Hugo Grotius (d. 1645). Under this approach, Christ died to level the playing field between good and evil rather than actually to pay the penalty for the sins of mankind. The 19<sup>th</sup> century American Methodist, John Miley, goes so far as to teach that God's nature does not require a penal satisfaction for sin.<sup>55</sup> Instead, Christ's death was a piacular act, one that creates the conditions under which one's sins may be

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<sup>54</sup> Calvinist John Murray admits, "from beginning to end the Bible uses expressions that are universal in form," yet he labors to explain why a universal view of the atonement still cannot be reached. *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 59. The passage which seems to give the author the most trouble is 1 John 2:2. He admits candidly, "Perhaps no text in Scripture presents more plausible support to the doctrine of universal atonement than 1 John 2:2" (72). He advocates a interpretation of the distinction in the phrase, "not for ours only, but also," as a distinction between those close to John and those unassociated with him. But John's distinction is more accurately understood as between believer and unbeliever in that context, those who enjoy the advocacy of Christ (v. 1) and those who do not. Warfield relies on his postmillennial eschatology to interpret passages like these (*Plan of Salvation*, 101-104).

<sup>55</sup> For a concise presentation of various Wesleyan views, see R. Larry Shelton, "A Covenant Concept of Atonement," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19 (1984): 102.

expiated through repentance and faith. In this system, repentance and faith do the expiation, not the death of Christ strictly speaking. On the other hand, Methodists like Richard Watson saw the necessity of maintaining the penal sense of the sacrifice of Christ before the demands of God's holy nature, and he was willing to suffer some inconsistencies to maintain the view. He described man's options as "the upholding of such a [righteous] government by the personal and extreme punishment of every offender; or else the acceptance of the vicarious death of an infinitely dignified and glorious being."<sup>56</sup>

Moise Amyraut rose to distinction with his theory of hypothetical universalism. Unfortunately, the distinction he achieved was also a distinction from the orthodoxy of that day. Schooled in the tradition of John Cameron, Amyraut was too much of a biblical theologian to fully embrace a supralapsarian particularistic approach to plainly universalistic soteriological passages. Viewing the atonement as the gospel covenant, he taught that all such arrangements have two necessary components, a condition and a promised reward for the fulfillment of that condition.<sup>57</sup> He further emphasized that one of the differences between the covenant of law and the covenant of gospel was that the former was particular and the latter was universal.<sup>58</sup> The particularism of orthodox Calvinism was accordingly a return to the old covenant and a reversal of progressive revelation.

In terms of answering the question in regard to what exactly Christ accomplished on Calvary's cross, Amyraut sought to maintain a view that allowed for the complete ful-

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Armstrong, 143-144. He calls Amyraut's progressive method of comparison between the three covenants he saw, the natural (Adam), the legal (Moses), and the gospel (Christ), "a most important consideration if one is to understand his theology." Amyraut was one of the first to emphasize the distinctions between Moses and Christ in a covenantal context; in so doing, he represents something of a pre-dispensationalist.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 152.

fillment of God's intentions while it gave sufficient recognition to both the universalistic nature of those intentions and the particularistic result of them. To do this, Amyraut proposed two intentions: 1) God's desire to provide salvation for all as an expression of his love for mankind in the covenant, and 2) God's desire to apply the benefits of the death of Christ only to the elect. Amyraut easily documented with the pages of Calvin his two-will solution that so irritated the orthodox Calvinism of his day. He was especially fond of Calvin's comment regarding 2 Peter 3:9.<sup>59</sup>

How can God's provision in the atonement be both the successful accomplishment of His will to save and the expression of His desire to save all mankind, when the Bible clearly teaches that most of the race will one day be lost (Mt. 7:13-14)?<sup>60</sup> The particular denial of universalism in texts of Scripture is unsatisfactory, as is the slippery slope faced by those who entertain the governmental theory of the atonement. Christ's death was both substitutionary and penal, and He died for all. The two-will theory seems only to rephrase the problem rather than offer a solution. In this context "hypothetical universalism" is a misnomer, for hypotheses tested and known to be false become untruths; they are no longer valid for the purpose of supposition or argument. To say that God desires to give His Son to all while he desires to withhold the benefits of that gift from some misses the point that the gift of God's Son is the premium gift that secures for the believer all the blessings of salvation with Him (Ro. 8:32).

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<sup>59</sup> "*Not willing that any should perish.* So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But the order is to be noticed, that God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish; for in these words the way and manner of obtaining salvation is pointed out. Every one of us, therefore, who is desirous of salvation, must learn to enter in by this way. But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made know to us in the gospel." *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22:419.

<sup>60</sup> Note that Barthian universalism, which teaches that all men shall be saved, simply does not qualify as evangelical.



One aspect of the efficacy of the cross is sometimes missed. James Arminius spoke of the cross work of Christ as efficacious in regard to Himself because it rendered Him a perfect priest.<sup>61</sup> According to the writer of Hebrews, the perfection Arminius speaks of relates especially to the completion of the obedience of Christ as the Great High Priest, which obedience “became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Hb. 5:8-9). Christ’s atonement involved the perfect response of the sinner’s substitute to two important aspects of the law. In His active obedience, Christ fulfilled the mandates of the law; and in his passive obedience, Christ endured the penalty of the law in behalf of sinful man.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the context of the reunification enacted in the atonement is that it happens exclusively “in Him.”

In Ephesians 1 Paul emphasizes the relation of the atonement to the doctrine of union with Christ. There we learn that believers are chosen before the foundation of the world in Him (vv. 1, 4), blessed with every spiritual blessing in Him (v. 3), redeemed through His blood in Him (v. 7), the objects of God’s good pleasure in Him (v. 9), part of the consummation of all things in Him (v. 10), heirs through predestination in Him (v. 11), objects of God’s glory in Him (v. 13), and sealed by the Holy Spirit in Him (v.13). After completing this list, Paul goes on to speak of their “faith in the Lord Jesus” (v. 15). Apart from Him, there is no spiritual blessing, and to be in Him is to have faith in Him.

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<sup>61</sup> The passage reads: “Of the Messiah's Oblation two acts are described to us: the first of which is performed on earth; the delivering of his own body unto death, and the shedding of his blood. By this act He was consecrated or perfected, and opened heaven to himself: . . . For it was a part of his office to enter into heaven by his own blood, and "through the veil, which is his flesh," . . . flesh indeed, destitute of blood, that is, destitute of life, and delivered up to death "for the life of the world," . . . although it was afterwards raised up again from death to life. The second act is, the presenting of himself, thus sprinkled with his own blood, before the face of his Father in heaven; and the offering of the same blood.” “Public Disputation on the Offices of the Lord Jesus Christ,” <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius32.htm> (25 April 2005).

<sup>62</sup> See Murray, 20-21.

The efficacy of the cross, then, lies in the truth that Christ was perfected to become the perfect High Priest for all who are in Him by faith.

With His obedience there, He fulfilled the law and incurred its penalty. But does the Law so fulfilled by Christ include the responsibility we have to repent and believe on Christ? If exercising the responsibilities of conversion was never a part of the active obedience of Christ, could it also be that the death Christ died did not relate efficaciously to this single sin, i.e., final rejection of Christ as Savior?<sup>63</sup> Is it possible that the nature of the eternal sin for which one never has forgiveness (Mk. 3:29), the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit,<sup>64</sup> is hopeless precisely because it is the only sin for which Christ did not die?<sup>65</sup> If so, this may be the reason “they that live” is a smaller category than “all that were dead,” in spite of the truth that Christ “died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14-15).

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<sup>63</sup> In his comments on Peter’s confession of Christ in John 6:68-69, D. A. Carson notes: “The verbs ‘to believe’ and ‘to know’ are extremely common in John, and are frequently roughly synonymous (cf. the parallelism in 17:8). There is one absolute distinction: Jesus himself is said to know God (7:29; 8:55; 10:15; 17:25), but never to believe in him. To believe apparently has overtones of dependence appropriate to creatures, redeemed creatures, but not to the one who is both the agent of creation (1:3) and their redeemer.” *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 303.

<sup>64</sup> Though beyond the scope of this study, the hypothesis here is that the unforgivable sin called the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Mk. 3:29, Mt. 12:31, Lk. 12:10) equals the rejection of Christ as Savior. This interpretation sees the distinction between blasphemy against Christ and blasphemy against the Spirit to be a temporal distinction communicating to the Pharisees that when the Holy Spirit came, they would get another chance to receive Christ. If they failed this time, however, they would remain unforgiven. In addition, Matthew’s account especially indicates that blasphemy against the Spirit is not a single event, but rather a heart condition (12:33f.). In addition to these indications of a single unatoned for sin, note also that the reason for the conviction of the Holy Spirit concerning sin is specifically “because they do not believe in Me” according to John 16:9. Note the comments of Charles W. Carter regarding this verse: “But why does Christ designate this convicting ministry of the Spirit, in relation to sin, in the singular number, rather than sins in the plural? The answer is obvious in Christ’s own words, ‘concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me.’ Thus it seems that Christ’s meaning is that there is but one basic, tap-root sin from which all other sins spring. When that tap-root sin of unbelief in Christ is severed, the entire tree with all of its fruit, fed as they are by the tap-root will die. Some of the old theologians regarded pride as the basic sin. But careful examination seems to reveal that pride itself is born of unbelief.” *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: A Wesleyan Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), 139-140.

<sup>65</sup> The thought is not a new one. Compare the following from C. H. Spurgeon’s sermon, “The Sin of Unbelief”: “And now to close this point—for I have been already too long—let me remark that you will observe the heinous nature of unbelief in this—that it is the damning sin. There is one sin for which Christ never died; it is the sin against the Holy Ghost. There is one other sin for which Christ never made atonement. Mention every crime in the calendar of evil, and I will show you persons who have found

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit notwithstanding, the Bible never tells us explicitly that Christ did not die for the sin of final failure to believe, repent, and be converted. Here too we must be careful to affirm the completeness of the substitution of Christ in the sinner's behalf.<sup>66</sup> While we do not see in the active obedience of Christ "conversion" per se, we do read that He submitted Himself to circumcision (Lk. 2:21) and a baptism of repentance (Mt. 3:15; Ac. 19:4), and Christ explicitly calls His baptism "a fulfillment of all righteousness." Certainly, in regard to those in Him who are no longer rejecting Christ, Christ died for every rejection of Him they ever committed. But if it is true that He did not die for a final rejection of Himself, an understanding of the atonement may be possible that includes on the one hand a completely intended, efficacious, substitutionary, penal death of Christ on the cross for every sinner, without on the other requiring the outcome that all are saved. Said differently, Christ died for the sins of all, but not for this final sin of some—their final rejection of His atoning work. What is not in doubt is that union with Christ is the key to the benefits of the atonement.

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forgiveness for it. But ask me whether the man who died in unbelief can be saved, and I reply there is no atonement for that man. There is an atonement made for the unbelief of a Christian, because it is temporary; but the final unbelief—the unbelief with which men die—never was atoned for. You may turn over this whole Book, and you will find that there is no atonement for the man who died in unbelief; there is no mercy for him. Had he been guilty of every other sin, if he had but believed, he would have been pardoned; but this is the damning exception—he had no faith" (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0003.htm>, accessed 1/6/2009). John Bunyan also wrote in these terms: "For what will sting like this?—'I have, through my own foolish, narrow, unworthy, undervaluing thoughts, of the love and ability of Christ to save me, brought myself to everlasting ruin. It is true, I was a horrible sinner; not one in a hundred did live so vile a life as I. But this should not have kept me from closing with Jesus Christ. I see now that there are abundance in glory that once were as bad as I have been; but they were saved by faith, and I am damned by unbelief. Wretched man that I am! Why did I not humbly cast my soul at his blessed footstool for mercy? Why did I judge of his ability to save me by the voice of my shallow reason, and the voice of a guilty conscience? Why did I not betake myself to the holy Word of God? Why did I not read and pray that I might understand, since I now perceive that God said that He gives liberally to those who ask, and upbraids not (James 1:5).'" *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved* (1691; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, 2005), 60-61.

<sup>66</sup> See the thrilling treatment of Horatius Bonar, *The Everlasting Righteousness* (1874; reprint, Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1993), 44-45.

## CHAPTER 5

### “POWER OF GOD”: THE NATURE OF GRACE

Grace is needed where no merit exists. It cannot be earned. It is God’s favor that super-abounds where nothing but sin has abounded (Ro. 5:20). Salvation is “by grace” (Ep. 2:8), for no merit of the sinner contributes to the work of salvation. Salvation by grace is “not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast” (vv. 8-9). For the Pelagian, grace means not the supernatural gift of merit to an object helpless in sin, but rather the natural instillation of a production capacity for merit to an object now prepared to conquer his own sin. Bruce Demarest summarizes:

Pelagius defined grace in a twofold way. (1) *Internally*, grace is God’s act of endowing persons at creation with a rational mind and free will by which to keep his commands, resist the power of evil, and live sinlessly if they choose. . . . (2) *Externally*, grace consists of the inducements to virtuous living God gives Christians via the law and Christ’s example [emphasis his].<sup>67</sup>

Against this view, the traditions of evangelical theology consistently maintain that grace is a gift to the sinner who has no hope without it. For the particularistic tradition, a distinction between “common grace” and “special grace” sums up the teaching. The universalistic tradition takes a more unified approach with their “prevenient grace” doctrine.

The debate in essence is whether or not God has one kind of grace or two.

While Calvin is often credited with the delineation of the categories of “common grace” and “special grace,” this specific terminology was not common vocabulary for the Reformer. Where he used the term “common” juxtaposed with “special,” he was actually

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<sup>67</sup> Demarest, 51.

speaking of two expressions of grace, both of which today's Calvinists would call "common":<sup>68</sup>

For whence is it that one is more excellent than another, but that in a *common* nature the grace of God is *specially* displayed in passing by many and thus proclaiming that it is under obligation to none. We may add, that each individual is brought under *particular* influences according to his calling. Many examples of this occur in the Book of Judges, in which the Spirit of the Lord is said to have come upon those whom he called to govern his people, (Judges 6: 34.) In short, in every distinguished act there is a *special* inspiration. . . . Thus it is said of Saul, . . . "The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy [emphasis mine]."<sup>69</sup>

Notice that the passage says that the "common nature" of God's grace is "specially displayed." It does not say that God's common grace is something different from God's special grace, but rather that they are one in the same. Nor does it claim that God's common grace is "common" because it extends equally to all. It says, in fact, the opposite: God's common grace involves "particular influences." Finally, the passage clearly teaches that King Saul was a participant in what Calvin refers to as "special" in this context. Yet other passages make it abundantly clear that Calvin did not consider King Saul among the elect. For example:

For this reason, also, the spirit which tormented Saul is said to be an evil spirit from the Lord, because he was, as it were, the scourge by which the misdeeds of the *wicked king* were punished.<sup>70</sup>

Clearly Calvinism's dichotomization of the "grace" of God is difficult to find on the pages of the *Institutes*. The passages cited indicate that it is more accurate to say that Calvin conceived of God's grace as common in nature or quality, and special in application. It is not that God has a different kind of grace for the elect, only that He has exer-

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<sup>68</sup> Bruce Demarest cites this passage from Calvin when he asserts, "Calvin distinguished between the 'general grace of God' and the 'special grace of God.' The former accounts for all that is noble and good in humankind short of salvation. . . . Special grace, on the other hand, represents God's saving mercy, particularly the imputation of undeserved righteousness to the elect" (68).

<sup>69</sup> *Institutes*, II.ii.17.

<sup>70</sup> I.xiv.17; see also I.xviii.2; II.iii.4

cised the same kind of grace in a specialized way.<sup>71</sup> This specialization occurs not only in the lives of the elect, but also in the lives of those who reject Christ as King Saul did. The dichotomization of God's grace into two separate kinds of grace is an overemphasis not found explicitly in Calvin, although the doctrine becomes necessary in light of the tradition's emphasis upon the irresistibility of grace.

But is the dichotomy between resistible common grace and irresistible special grace scriptural? Bruce Demarest argues for this position.<sup>72</sup> After an insightful study of the semantic field of the doctrine of grace, he begins his exposition with a description of man's need for grace. Advocating the holistic depravity of man, he asserts, "'Flesh gives birth to flesh' (Jo. 3:6)—*sarx* indicating fundamental human aversion to God and his holiness."<sup>73</sup> After examining the volitional, emotional, and rational opposition of sinners to the will of God, he concludes:

Scripture thus testifies that the unsaved are holistically depraved, in that sin has corrupted every aspect of their being: mind, will, emotions, relationships, and actions. By virtue of their anti-God bias and predilection to sin, the unregenerate, apart from grace, are incapable of turning to God, pleasing God, and saving themselves.<sup>74</sup>

The question of holistic depravity has already been discussed. What is significant at this stage in the paragraph above is the natural unity with which the author speaks of grace. In the next two sections, Demarest begins his differentiation between common and special grace:

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<sup>71</sup> See III.xxi.6, where Calvin speaks of "the grace of God . . . displayed in a more special form" relating this phrase to the activity by which God was "keeping others within his Church."

<sup>72</sup> Demarest, 69. Although Dr. Demarest may be fairly classified as Amyraldian in his interpretation of the atonement, he is, as Amyraut was, in agreement with the particularistic view of grace.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Just as we differentiate between general revelation and special revelation and between a general call and a special call *to salvation* . . . , so we distinguish between two forms of grace *that differ in kind, not merely in degree* [emphasis mine].<sup>75</sup>

For Demarest, the difference between special grace and common grace is a difference in “kind” or nature. That difference finds a parallel in the two methods of God’s calling and so consists in the view that special grace is a call “to salvation” and common grace is not. But one must question whether this distinction between two kinds of grace can be maintained after a closer examination of the intensions of God in regard to general and special calling. To say that the general call is not intended to be a call “to salvation” fails to account for the truth of important passages (Ac. 17:27, Ro. 2:4; 10:17-18). Later in his description of common grace, the author admits, “God’s good gifts are given to sinners as incentives to repentance (Rom 2:4).”<sup>76</sup> If common grace is given to sinners as “incentives to repentance,” how can it be accurately described as not a grace “to salvation”?

The distinction between common grace and special grace breaks down at this point. While it is true that the grace of “God’s good gifts” is often resisted such that they do not lead to repentance,<sup>77</sup> we cannot say that we therefore have a different kind of grace than the grace that does lead to repentance. What we must say is that we have one kind of grace that is sometimes resisted and sometimes not. Later in his discussion, the author lists the “qualities of special grace” as “sovereign,” “free,” “abounding,” “all-encompassing,” “sufficient,” “meets people where they are,” and “endures forever.”<sup>78</sup> Which of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Dr. Demarest affirms the same, “Both Scripture and experience attest that common grace is resistible; hence the deprivation and godlessness that exists in the world” (77). Note that Dr. Demarest affirms with the rest of the tradition that common grace is a necessary preparation for special grace, but this distinction adds little to the case for two kinds of grace.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 80.

these qualities is not also true of common grace? When the Lord told the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for thee?” was He speaking of His common or special grace? If his special grace in view of its total sufficiency, does it follow then that this grace could not be resisted? Why then did Paul pray three times? If common, does it not follow that common grace is indeed sufficient as directly stated by the verse? The particularistic dichotomy of grace follows not from Scripture’s teaching on the nature of grace, but rather from the system’s need for an irresistible/resistible grace distinction.

The unity of God’s grace is maintained in the universalistic tradition of evangelical theology because this approach does not necessitate irresistibility as a mechanism for salvation. Article IV of the Dutch Remonstrance of 1610 states the view:

That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following, and co-operative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptation to evil; so that all good deeds or movements that can be conceived must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But as respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible, inasmuch as it is written concerning many that they have resisted the Holy Ghost—Acts vii, and elsewhere in many places.<sup>79</sup>

The obvious assumptions here that distinguish the universalistic tradition from the particularistic tradition are two. First, it is assumed that the Scriptures speak of the grace of God in a unified sense. God does not bestow two kinds of grace; he bestows grace. Second, it is assumed that the Scripture speaks of resistance to the grace of God.

The grace of God is the gift of merit, not the imposition of it. It leads man to partake; it does not drive Him to. My dad used to call some strange things “gifts” sometimes. There was the gift that involved the opportunity to weed the garden, and the gift of the opportunity to go clean up my room. These were not gifts; they were impositions. Declining the offer was simply not an option. Dad would not accept “no” for an answer.

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<sup>79</sup> Quoted by Curtiss, 66-67.



The gifts that came on my birthday or at Christmas were different. Dad would have gladly taken back any of the rejections of a spoiled son in this context for credit on his Visa bill. Sinful man adds this to his condemnation, that he has ruinously resisted the saving grace of God (2:4-5).

## CHAPTER 6

### “EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES”: CONVERSION

With the topic of conversion we come to the question of the Philippian jailer, “What must I do to be saved?” The issues related to that question were for him anything but academic, and the evangelical traditions of soteriology have always taken its answer very seriously. Paul said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Calvin said, “it is true that we obtain this [Christ and all He possesses] by faith;”<sup>80</sup> Amyraut agreed, “I say, brethren, that it is as a kind of miracle that a man . . . can taste the doctrine of justification by faith alone;”<sup>81</sup> and Arminius concurred, “he [Jesus Christ] is their own saviour if they have believed in him.”<sup>82</sup> Evangelicals believe that justification is by faith not works. Each tradition includes a well-developed understanding of the nature and need of repentance in saving faith.<sup>83</sup>

Today however, two debates within the evangelical faith have precluded complete unity in regard to conversion: 1) a question concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in

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<sup>80</sup>*Institutes*, III.i.1

<sup>81</sup> *Sermons sur divers texts*; quoted in Armstrong, 230.

<sup>82</sup> “On Faith in God and Christ,” <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius87.htm> (26 April 2005).

<sup>83</sup> Although Calvin equated repentance with what was later termed sanctification, his views in this case are not fairly representative of the particularistic tradition that followed him. Some significant passages in this regard include the following: “I allude to great numbers of Anabaptists, those of them especially who plume themselves on being spiritual, and their associates the Jesuits, and others of the same stamp. Such are the fruits which their giddy spirit produces, that repentance, which in every Christian man lasts as long as life, is with them completed in a few short days” (*Institutes*, III.iii.2). It is a bit ironic that nearly all who claim the name Calvin today share this “giddy spirit” of the Anabaptists.

conversion and 2) a question about the nature of saving faith and repentance.<sup>84</sup> The first of these involves distinction between the particularistic and universalistic traditions of evangelical theology, and the second does not. This study will focus on the former.

The disagreement between the particularistic and the universalistic views of conversion involves a struggle between monergism and synergism. These distinctions, however, took time to materialize. The question concerns the role of the Holy Spirit in the conversion experience, and the Scriptures say much about the importance of the Holy Spirit to the salvation of the sinner. Three distinguishable works are prominently related to conversion: 1) conviction (Jn. 16:8), 2) regeneration (Jn. 3:5), and 3) adoption (Ro. 8:15; Ga. 4:5-7). Conviction pertains especially to an objective outward convincing, regeneration to the impartation of a new, spiritual, and eternal life and nature, and adoption to the sonship rank and relationship the Holy Spirit imparts.

When Calvin wanted to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit as a priority to saving faith, he did not use the word “regeneration.” He spoke of “secret work”, “baptizing”, and “enlightening”, but never “regeneration.” The following passage from Calvin even implies that regeneration is subsequent to faith:

Therefore, as we have said that salvation is perfected in the person of Christ, so, in order to make us partakers of it, he baptizes us "with the Holy Spirit and with fire," (Luke 3: 16,) enlightening us into the faith of his Gospel, and so regenerating us to be new creatures. Thus cleansed from all pollution, he dedicates us as holy temples to the Lord.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> This is known as the Lordship salvation debate. What appears lost in the recent debate is the important evangelical distinction between salvation and Christian growth. In an effort to reverse the antinomian tendencies witnessed in the circles of new evangelicalism, John MacArthur published *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) calling for a closer link between justification and sanctification. See Appendix A for a fuller assessment of the issues raised by this book.

<sup>85</sup> *Institutes*, III.i.4

Defending the priority of regeneration to faith, Mark Snoeberger recognizes that Calvin viewed “regeneration” as subsequent to faith,<sup>86</sup> but he finds the error attributable to “imprecise exegesis . . . typical of the early Reformation, where other debates took center stage.”<sup>87</sup> While many adjectives correctly describe John Calvin, neither “typical” nor “imprecise” are used much. In John Calvin, we are dealing not with a distracted theological pioneer, but rather with a second-generation Reformer who may well be the greatest biblical theologian the Church has ever known. He wrote a commentary on nearly every book of the Bible. The proposal that he somehow failed to notice that “regeneration” belongs prior to faith, especially in light of the fact that this was in essence his view, is simply to miss the realities of Calvin’s methodology and overall work. Calvin’s doctrine of “regeneration” is clearly not accurate,<sup>88</sup> but it does illustrate the ease with which a thoroughly biblical theologian can view regeneration as subsequent to faith.

James Arminius shared the view of Calvin that regeneration referred to what we call sanctification today.<sup>89</sup> Wesley often used the term “unregenerate” to describe the justified believer who failed to be sanctified. He was now “unregenerate,” for he had lost his salvation. Notwithstanding, the new birth finds a much broader treatment in Wesley than this:

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<sup>86</sup> He says, “John Calvin placed regeneration, at least in part, after saving faith. However, Calvin did not view regeneration as the initial impartation of spiritual life, but as the lifelong renewal of the believer—his progressive sanctification culminating in glorification.” “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 7 (Fall, 2002): 52.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>88</sup> A sacerdotal view of infant baptism may provide an explanation for the confusion in Calvin’s doctrine. He spoke of the rite of baptism as the “first regeneration” (*Institutes*, IV.xv.4), and in his chapter entitled “Our Regeneration by Faith: Repentance,” he directed his comments against the Anabaptists (III.ii.2).

<sup>89</sup> “On Regeneration and the Regenerate,” <http://www.godrules.net/library/arminius/arminius162.htm> (26 April 2005). Article III of the Remonstrance of 1610, however, does confess that sinners must be born again before they can believe (Curtiss, 66).

It is true, a late very eminent author, in his strange treatise on regeneration proceeds entirely on the supposition that it is the whole gradual progress of sanctification. No; it is only the threshold of sanctification, the first entrance upon it. And as, in the natural birth, a man is born at once and then grows larger and stronger by degrees, so in the spiritual birth, a man is born at once and then gradually increases in spiritual stature and strength. The new birth, therefore, is the first point of sanctification, which may increase “more and more unto the perfect day” [Pr. 4:18]. . . .

Who then is a Christian, according to the light which God hath vouchsafed to this people? He that, being “justified by faith, hath peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” [Rom. 5:1]; and, at the same time, is ‘born again,’ ‘born from above,’ ‘born of the Spirit.’<sup>90</sup>

What Wesley offers in these words is a sound correction to the view of Calvin and Arminius, which confused regeneration with an ongoing growth process. For Wesley, regeneration is an instantaneous event depicting the inception of new life. Spiritual regeneration is to spiritual life what physical birth is to physical life.

Mark Snoeberger follows many other Reformed theologians who do a better job articulating the Calvinist position on regeneration than Calvin did. The definition he defends is:

. . . regeneration is not merely the impartation of life, but, more broadly, *the decisive impartation of the new nature to a spiritually dead man* [emphasis his].<sup>91</sup>

The special concern of Snoeberger’s article is to demonstrate the logical priority of regeneration to saving faith, and in so doing to show the invalidity of mediation positions within Calvinism as represented by Bruce Demarest and Millard Erickson. He correctly points out concerning these:

Ironically, two visible proponents of the priority of faith to regeneration have definitions that closely resemble the Reformed view. . . . We might legitimately reduce Demarest’s and Erickson’s definitions as follows: regeneration is the impartation of the new nature *to the believer*. The difference (and a significant

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<sup>90</sup> Outler, 108-109.

<sup>91</sup> Mark A. Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological Ordo Salutis,” *Detroit Baptist Theological Journal* 7 (Fall 2002): 55.

one) between their definitions and the Reformed definition is that Demarest and Erickson allow for the exercise of faith apart from the new nature [emphasis his].<sup>92</sup>

Clearly, Snoeberger is correct in his assessment of these mediating positions. The problem he begins to run into, however, is the fact that the exegetical evidence strongly favors just such a position.

After listing eight passages of Scripture that teach that faith results in life for the believer, and then admitting “nor, in fact, is the list exhaustive,” the author feels he can dismiss this evidence with the correct line of reasoning:

However, a detailed exegetical study for each is unnecessary for two reasons: (1) the ‘life’ described in these verses is not a strict synonym for regeneration, and (2) the point of the passages is not to announce logical priority within an *ordo salutis*.<sup>93</sup>

The author does not explain why regeneration has to be a strict synonym for life in regard to the conclusion from these verses that faith precedes regeneration. The syllogism seems pretty straightforward:

A: Faith precedes the inception of eternal life.

B: Regeneration is the inception of eternal life.

Therefore, C: Faith precedes regeneration.

The connection in John 3 between new birth and eternal life could not be clearer. Birth issues in new life. Regeneration relates to eternal life just as physical birth relates to physical life (Jn. 3:6). Snoeberger admits as much in the definition of regeneration he is defending when he says that it consists of “not merely the impartation of life.” That phrase means that regeneration is indeed an impartation of new life, and consequently it need not be a synonym for eternal life. It need only to be the inception of that life in order for the “priority of faith” conclusion to hold true from these verses.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 62-63.

The larger issue regarding the priority of regeneration vs. the priority of faith question concerns the importance of keeping Christ central to the gift of eternal life. John 3:15 not only teaches that those who believe have life, but also it says that those who believe have life “in Him.” 1 John 5:11-12 makes the point abundantly clear, that apart from the Son a sinner has no life: “And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.” To not have the Son is to not have the life, to be spiritually dead, to be unregenerate. The priority of regeneration viewpoint requires that life be granted apart from the Son. 1 John 5:11-12 makes this impossible as follows:

A: Without the reception of the Son by faith, there is only death.

B: Only death is not regeneration.

Therefore, C: Without the reception of the Son by faith, there is not regeneration.

Snoeberger seems to sense the force of this biblical theological truth in that he feels constrained to propose a “regeneration → faith → life” sequence with the support of two texts of Scripture that do not even mention faith.<sup>94</sup> Here again we have an admission of the priority of faith to life, but the attempt is made to logically separate regeneration from life such that faith has room to squeeze in between. The attempt is unsuccessful, in spite of the author’s strong arguments from 1 Corinthians 2:14. Once again, the regeneration priority position has to rely on a verse that does not mention faith. While it is true that the natural man does not accept or understand the things of the Spirit of God, neither do naturally accepting and understanding the things of the Spirit of God save a man. He is saved by faith alone after the Spirit of God has supernaturally helped him to understand. Where Scripture explicitly focuses on the question, faith precedes regeneration.

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<sup>94</sup> Snoeberger, 69-77. The author even has to admit in regard to Titus 3:5-7, “reference to faith is oblique or absent in this passage” (76).

## CHAPTER 7

### “THE JUST SHALL LIVE”: SECURITY OF THE BELIEVER

Ordinarily, the debate between the particularistic and universalistic traditions of evangelical theology begins where the apostle Paul ends in the book of Romans. Not until late in chapter eight of Paul’s presentation of the gospel does anything happen before the foundation of the world in regard to our salvation. Paul’s concern in the presentation of the doctrines of grace is twofold. The first is to show that come what may, believers are eternally secured in Christ (Ro. 8:28-39), and secondly that “God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all” (Ro. 11:32). These are the bookends of the key passage of Scripture regarding the doctrines of grace. Paul’s concern throughout the section is thoroughly pastoral (8:28) and evangelistic (9:1-5, 10:1-21). Romans 8:29-30 contains the only comprehensive *ordo salutis* available to us in the NT. It also includes an emphasis that is often missing in the evangelical traditions that have sought to interpret these verses—the truth that all this happens in Christ: “how will He not also *with Him* freely give us all things?” (Ro. 8:32). Without Him, none of this applies.

Calvin’s view of the doctrines of grace was unequivocal. Following Augustine and Luther, he professed God’s will to be the necessity of all things and maintained a strong emphasis on the free sovereignty of God. But mirroring the apostle Paul, Calvin’s treatment of predestination and reprobation comes late in Book III of the *Institutes*, only after a thorough examination of the responsibility of the believer in the reception of salvation’s grace. This pastoral emphasis was quickly lost in the supralapsarian particularistic tradition that immediately followed Calvin as discussed in chapter 2. As



far as Calvin himself was concerned, foreknowledge was God's prescience of all things, but he insisted that the theologian back up one step further to God's will. God foreknows what he does only because he has willed what He does, and this activity occurs such that the result is "all things":

Indeed, I will freely admit that foreknowledge alone imposes no necessity upon creatures, yet not all assent to this. . . . But since he foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place, they vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge, when it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding.<sup>95</sup>

From here Calvin admits to the need for a well-developed theory of reprobation.

Accordingly, God has predestined the fall into sin, and it is not satisfactory to pretend that God's permission is somehow less than his determinate will.<sup>96</sup> This is a will that simply cannot be resisted "since he does with the wills of men what he wills."<sup>97</sup> Calling is the execution of this will and so always effectual. In fact, the phrase, "Every man who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me," describes according to Calvin God's adoption of sinners into His family. Nothing but God's free mercy is to be sought as an explanation for these doctrines of grace. Reprobation, though not merciful, is indeed just, granted that the question, "Who then can resist His will?" is obediently and humbly disallowed (Ro. 9:20-21). Because salvation was secured in eternity past, no threat can possibly be contemplated in regard to eternity future. The elect are glorified. The *ordo salutis* is contemplated entirely prospectively from the standpoint of the freedom of God.

In the Arminian tradition, the will of God is contemplated not as antecedent to His prescience, but as subsequent to it. The phrase, "whom He foreknew, them He also did predestinate," means for this tradition that God elected those whom he could see

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<sup>95</sup> *Institutes*, III.xxiii.6

<sup>96</sup> III.xxiii.7-8

<sup>97</sup> III.xxiii.14

beforehand would believe. Wesley's opposition to predestination stood on largely practical grounds, but over years of ministry he came to appreciate many who disagreed with him.<sup>98</sup> In the early years, conflict ensued with George Whitfield over predestination that ignited with Wesley's publishing *Free Grace: A Sermon Preached at Bristol* (1739), wherein the Methodist denounced the doctrines of predestination as "blasphemy."<sup>99</sup> A more balance tone appears in two essays Wesley wrote later in life: "Predestination Calmly Considered" and "Thoughts Upon Necessity." In the second of these, Wesley humbly protested:

It is not easy for a man of common understanding, especially if unassisted by education, to unravel these finely woven schemes, or show distinctly where the fallacy lies. But he knows, he feels, he is certain, they cannot be true; that the holy God cannot be the author of sin.<sup>100</sup>

Furthermore, Wesley defined election as:

. . . a divine appointment of some men to eternal happiness. But I believe this election to be conditional, as well as the reprobation opposite thereto. . . . According to this, all true *believers* are in Scripture termed "elect," as all who continue in *unbelief* are so long properly "reprobates" [emphasis his].<sup>101</sup>

He goes on to say the believers are elect before the foundation of the world by virtue of God's eternal omniscience, "to whom all things are present at once."<sup>102</sup> They were not actually elected then any more than Christ was actually slain before the foundation of the world (Re. 13:8), but merely viewed this way by an eternal God. For Wesley, then,

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<sup>98</sup> Outler, 78-79. In this 1765 letter to John Newton, Wesley said: "But still another fact stares me in the face: Mr. Haweis and Mr. Newton hold this: and yet I believe these have real Christian experience. But if so, this [doctrine of predestination] is only an 'opinion.' It is not subversive."

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 349-350.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

God's election acts upon man's faith. It is conditional. Consequently, real perseverance is necessary lest one fall from the place of security he once enjoyed.

As divergent as these views of the doctrines of grace appear, they converge when the respective traditions focus on the implications of the doctrine of union in Christ for the doctrines of grace. Calvin includes a section in the *Institutes* entitled, "Election is to be understood and recognized in Christ alone."<sup>103</sup> There he teaches, "his sons are said to have been chosen not in themselves but in his Christ (Eph. 1:4)" and "we have a sufficiently clear and firm testimony that we have been inscribed in the book of life . . . if we are in communion with Christ."<sup>104</sup> Westminster theologian John Murray states the truth even more plainly, "We are not able to understand all that is involved, but the fact is plain enough that there was no election of the Father in eternity past apart from Christ."<sup>105</sup> All this sounds strangely similar to the wording of Article I of the Dutch Remonstrance of 1610:

That God, by an eternal, unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ's sake and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his Son Jesus . . .<sup>106</sup>

Splendently mysterious and breathtakingly generous, the work of Christ in our behalf encompasses doctrines of grace that reach from eternity past to an endless future. It is not surprising that when contemplated "in Him," these doctrines, which otherwise divide and define the major evangelical traditions into the particularistic, the universalistic, and

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<sup>103</sup> III.xxiv.5

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Murray, 162.

<sup>106</sup> Curtiss, 65.

the mediating, become a unifying force of convergence into the true essence of evangelical continuity once more. For He is that unity, and our salvation is only in Him.

## APPENDIX A: A REVIEW OF *THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JESUS*

The ministry of John MacArthur has involved exposure to a wide spectrum of broad evangelicalism. What he has seen there has often disappointed him. The author describes himself as “apprehensive . . . about the methods and content of contemporary evangelicalism. On a disturbing number of fronts, the message being proclaimed today is not the gospel according to Jesus” (xx).<sup>107</sup> Specifically, MacArthur charges modern soteriology with a “new gospel,” which he calls “insidious easy-believism” (xxi). According to the author, the dispensational emphases of the 20th century Dallas Seminary theologian, Lewis Chafer, created the problem facing today’s evangelical world (29-33). In response to this unfortunate legacy, the author calls for a return to an emphasis on the lordship of Christ in the gospel message. Quoting a challenger to his own position, MacArthur agrees that lordship salvation is “the view that for salvation a person must trust Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin and must also commit himself to Christ as Lord of his life, submitting to his sovereign authority” (34).<sup>108</sup>

The preface to this revised edition of MacArthur’s advocacy of lordship salvation recognizes that “a major controversy . . . erupted on the evangelical scene with the publication of this book five years ago” (xiv). He also writes in this 1994 edition that the “debate continues to this day.” Unfortunately, that sentence still holds true. That the

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<sup>107</sup> Page number references refer to John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

<sup>108</sup> See Livingston Baulvelt, Jr., “Does the Bible Teach Lordship Salvation?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (January-March 1986), 37.

debate spawned by this book in 1988 rages on in the year 2005 unsettles the reader as he confronts the author's introductory interpretation of Galatians 1:6-9: "That is a sober warning of eternal damnation to those who would tamper with the message of salvation and corrupt it to make 'a different gospel'" (xxii-xxiii). Clearly, the author takes very seriously the assertions he makes in the pages of this book, and the careful reader must do so as well. The book contains five parts. After the description of the issues at hand in part one, part two takes the reader through eight chapters of expository analysis of the methods of the Savior in regard to gospel preaching. Part three examines key soteriological parables, and then part four looks at the more explicative sections of Jesus' teaching about the gospel. This section includes a chapter on justification that the first edition did not. Part five is also new to the book. It is a brief chapter emphasizing the finished work of Christ on the cross.

The author's style has contributed to the success of the book. MacArthur writes with a pastor's passion endeavoring to correct serious error. Interesting illustration and illuminating insights make the book a valuable commentary on many difficult gospel passages. The topic at hand, however, calls for a theological precision that seems at times to be missing. The author's presentation of his opponents' position is one example of this shortcoming of the book's style. Whereas MacArthur felt comfortable quoting a challenger's presentation of his own position as accurate (34), a challenger would have trouble finding the same courtesy in the pages of *The Gospel According to Jesus*. On multiple occasions, the author tries to make his case by what appears to be a misrepresentation of the mainline position of his opponents: "Nevertheless, loud voices from the dispensationalist camp are putting forth the teaching that it is possible to reject Christ as Lord yet receive him as Savior" (33); "He came to save his people from their sin . . . , not to confer immortality on people in bondage to wickedness" (60); "The modern definition of faith

eliminates repentance, erases the moral significance of believing, obviates the work of God in the sinner's heart, and makes an ongoing trust in the Lord optional" (188); "It has become quite popular to teach professing Christians that they can enjoy assurance of salvation no matter what their lives are like" (215).

Overstatement is a second stylistic problem with *The Gospel According to Jesus*. On one occasion MacArthur asserts, "Scripture never once exhorts sinners to 'accept Christ'" (113). On the same page, however, he recognizes that a footnote on John 1:12 is necessary. There he claims that "receiving Christ" is to "embrace him and all his claims without reservation." John calls it "believing." Other important passages on this theme go untreated. The book of John alone contains many passages that speak of the need to "receive" and "accept" the message of Christ (3:11, 33, 5:43, 12:48, 13:20; 14:17; 17:8), as do many other important passages (Luk. 18:17, 2Co. 6:1, 11:4, 2Th. 2:10). Rather than emphasizing an embrace of "all his claims," these passages normally link "believing" with the concept of "receiving." Overstating the narrowness of the gate to life in Matthew 7:13-14, the author claims, "But Jesus does not seek multitudes; he seeks and saves only those who know they are lost" (208). This comment leaves very little room for the truth of Matthew 9:36-38, where Christ saw the crowds and felt compassion on them, many of whom undoubtedly did not know that they were "distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd."

At times, the author utilizes the overstatements of others. Quoting D. Martin Lloyd Jones in italics, he says, "we must never think of sanctification as a separate and subsequent experience" (212); but to the contrary, MacArthur fails to follow the advice he quotes when he correctly cautions, "First, do not confuse justification with sanctification. Roman Catholic theology makes this error" (197-198). Spurgeon also contributes the following in keeping with MacArthur's style: "The idea of 'saving faith' apart from

good works, is ridiculous [*sic*]” (268). In that passage Spurgeon argues correctly that saving faith saves from sin unto good works, but “the idea of ‘saving faith’ apart from good works” is clearly not ridiculous. On the contrary, both Spurgeon and MacArthur would agree that this idea is the crux of the soteriology of the New Testament. What makes Christianity different from any other religion in the world is the fact that “saving faith apart from good works” is absolutely not ridiculous. What we have here is stylistic overstatement, and the method tends to leave the reader in a fog where clear light is desperately needed.

The author’s penchant for overstatement leads to confusing contradictions at key points of his argumentation. One of these, “an important truth to grasp,” is the author’s definition of saving faith as “an exchange of all that we are for all that Christ is.” He then issues a corrective, “We do not buy salvation by surrendering our lives.” Two sentences later however, he directly contradicts this statement by saying, “Everyone who surrenders to Christ gets all Christ has to give in return” (150). Throughout the book the author feels rightly compelled to concede, “Because we retain the vestiges of sinful flesh, no one will obey perfectly” (190); but these balancing concessions are often followed by a contradictory overstatement, “true faith always produces righteous works” (191). At first glance the second of these statements does not appear to be an overstatement, because fruit is the produce of every believer. But the author needs the statement to say more than this to make his case for lordship salvation. What the author needs the reader to read when he writes, “true faith always produces righteous works,” is “true faith always produces enough righteous works to distinguish a believer from an unbeliever.” Only this latter assertion allows him to build his case effectively for lordship salvation, but this latter assertion is the one that is impossible to reconcile with the realities of the “vestiges of sinful flesh” in a biblical way. The Bible would not use the word, “always.” There are



exceptions to the rule. Some produce 30 fold, some 60, and some 100; and because it is an obvious reality that there are more than three categories of spiritual fruitfulness represented in the lives of believers, it stands to reason that some may produce 95 fold, some 47, some 32, and some perhaps only 5. So even though the author wants to say, “Faith obeys. Unbelief rebels. . . . There is no middle ground,” he must also always admit in a footnote that there actually is plenty of middle ground, “Again, this is not to deny the obvious truth that Christians can and do fall into sin” (194). The effect of this style – overstatement counterbalanced by a contradictory corrective – yields a net lack of precision where theological specifications are too tight to allow for it.

A lack of precision creeps into the author’s treatment of important passages. At times, a biased preference for some passages over others is apparent. The Samaritan woman episode and the publican story fail to explicitly support a lordship salvation approach to the gospel, so the author concludes that one passage is “not an appropriate foundation upon which to base an understanding of what constitutes the gospel” (56), and the other is simply a statement of the “fact of justification,” not an explanation of the “theology of it” (197). In his chapter on repentance, the author argues against the definition of repentance as a change of mind, but he does so with an artificial dichotomy between “mental activity” and “the intellect, emotions, and will” (179). Historically, when Protestants have viewed repentance as a change of mind, they meant that it was not a change of body, or Romish penance. They meant it was not good works. Any act of the intellect, the emotions, or the will is also an act of the mind. Confusion of this historic distinction leads to yet another overstatement in the author’s definition of repentance: “a complete surrender of their will and an inevitable change of behavior—a new way of life, not just a different opinion” (181). Repentance is not a new way of life, nor a change in behavior; it is a changing of the mind (Luk. 17:3-4). A new way of life and

new behavior are good works, and they do not save. Repentance saves. In his interpretation of the non-saving faith of James 2, the author under appreciates the inadequacy of the object of non-saving faith (2:19). Instead, he emphasizes that this faith did not save because it has no works (186). Lot's experience as described by 2 Peter 2:7-9 is given little treatment in the book (274). Certainly, the standards of precision demand an explanation for Lot.

*The Gospel According to Jesus* makes clear that the departure of lordship salvation from biblical soteriology centers upon how we are to understand the distinction between justification and sanctification. The author's discussion of the issue begins well by warning against the Roman Catholic failure to distinguish between the two (197-198). Rome interprets justification in terms of sanctification truth. She makes getting saved a lifelong process of obedience, one that robs the believer of any hope of security in the grace of God. MacArthur claims that antinomianism has taken this distinction too far, and that the corrective must bring justification and sanctification back together again. Yet the reunion MacArthur calls for cannot be accomplished consistently without winding up back in the error of the Vatican. Repentance becomes changed behavior, and saving faith an embrace of every claim.

On the contrary, the historic corrective to Romish error—faithful maintenance of the biblical distinction between justification and sanctification – also protects against antinomianism. Whereas Rome confuses justification in terms of sanctification truth, antinomianism confuses sanctification in terms of justification truth. For example, the antinomian sees the legalist as one who teaches error about sanctification, whereas the Bible teaches that the legalist is one who teaches error about justification. For decades, New Evangelicalism has accepted the definition of sanctification in terms of justification

– no works, no law, no rules, no separation, and no standards.<sup>109</sup> The result has been the theological and spiritual landscape so appalling to John MacArthur. Men are saved apart from works and without the law, but Christians grow neither apart from works nor apart from the law.

In spite of its real value as an interpreter of key passages of Scripture and as an important corrective against the real danger of the easy-believism of contemporary evangelism, *The Gospel According to Jesus* fails to maintain faithfully the distinction between justification and sanctification so critical to historic Protestant truth.<sup>110</sup> Its solution for antinomianism is misdirected, and its overemphatic style brings unnecessary blurriness to the historically clear distinction between Protestant soteriology and the bondage of Rome.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See the penetrating assessment by Kenneth L. Barker, “The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blasing and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 296-297. He remarks in part: “Perhaps one of the reasons for the lamentable behavior of many Christians today—including leaders—is that they do not take the abiding moral, ethical, and profoundly spiritual commands of the Old Testament seriously enough” (297).

<sup>110</sup> The error committed here is not a new phenomenon. The non-conformist friend of Richard Baxter, Walter Marshall, argued against the same tendency in his day: “And, that they may the better secure the practice of holiness by their conditional faith, they will not have trusting in God or Christ for salvation, to be accounted the principal saving act of it; because, as it seemeth to them, many loose wicked people trust on God and Christ for their salvation as much as others, and, are, by their confidence, hardened the more in their wickedness; but they had rather it should be obedience to all Christ’s laws, at least in resolution; or a consent that Christ should be their Lord, accepting of his terms of salvation, and a resignation of themselves to his government in all things. It is a sign that the scripture form of teaching is grown into disesteem with our great masters of reason, when trusting in the Lord, so much commended in scripture, is accounted a mean and ordinary thing.” *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (1692; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954).

<sup>111</sup> A final criticism of Lordship salvation might be that the idea can discourage a proper sense of security in Christ. The believer could be left wondering whether the decision that saved him was truly submissive enough, a question that may not have a good answer simply because it is the wrong question. Compare the following from C.H. Spurgeon’s sermon, “The People’s Christ”: “There is a poor soul over there, who is desirous of coming to Jesus, but he is in very great trouble, lest he should not come right; and I know many Christians who say, ‘Well, I hope I have come to Christ; but I am afraid I have not come right.’ There is a little foot-note to one of the hymns in dear Mr. Denham’s collection, in which he says, ‘Some people are afraid they do not come right. Now, no man can come except the Father draw him; so I apprehend, if they come at all, they cannot come wrong.’ So do I apprehend, if men come at all, they must come right. Here is a thought for thee, poor coming sinner. Why art thou afraid to come? ‘Oh!’ sayest thou,

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'I am so great a sinner, Christ will not have mercy upon me.' Oh! you do not know my blessed Master; he is more loving than you think him to be. I was once wicked enough to think the same; but I have found him ten thousand times more kind than I thought, I tell you, he is so loving, so gracious, so kind, there ne'er was one half so good as he. He is kinder than ever you can think; his love is greater than your fears, and his merits are more prevalent than your sins. But still you say, 'I am afraid I shall not come aright; I think I shall not use acceptable words.' I tell you why that is: because you do not remember that Christ was taken out of the people" [<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0011.htm>, accessed 1/13/09]. Spurgeon's answer for doubts about having come correctly directed the believer to assess the sufficiency of Christ, not the sufficiency of his commitment—good advice for today.

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