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RECLAIMING MONERGISM:  
THE CASE FOR SOVEREIGN GRACE IN EFFECTUAL  
CALLING AND REGENERATION

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A Dissertation  
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the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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by  
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To my wife,  
Elizabeth Barrett

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Aug</i>	<i>Augustinian Studies</i>
AOTC	Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InverVarsity)
<i>ARH</i>	<i>Archive for Reformation History</i>
BCOT	Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker)
BDAG	W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, <i>Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed.
BDF	F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker)
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CCC	The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway)
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DBSJ</i>	<i>Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal</i>
DR	<i>Downside Review</i>
EBC	The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary (Edinburg: T&T Clark)
<i>FP</i>	<i>Faith and Philosophy</i>
<i>FUQ</i>	<i>Free University Quarterly</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>

<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JRE</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
<i>LQ</i>	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
NAC	The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H)
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson)
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker)
NICOT	The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)
NTC	New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker)
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R)
<i>RR</i>	<i>Reformed Review</i>
<i>R&amp;R</i>	<i>Reformation and Revival</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>

TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL InterVarsity)
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity)
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	World Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word)
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ABS	Anchor Bible Series (Garden City, NY: Doubleday)
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan)

## PREFACE

This project could not have been completed without the help and encouragement of others. First, I would like to thank my dissertation committee. My supervisor, Bruce Ware, was the first to hear my ideas for this project and from beginning to end his expertise has been invaluable to my writing. For years Bruce Ware has given to me an outstanding example of Christian scholarship in his writings defending Calvinism against Open Theism and Arminianism. I only hope to emulate his excellent ability to clearly and acutely defend and expound the Scriptures. His passion for the glory of God is unwavering and he has given me a deep love and appreciation for the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God.

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Last, the most important person in my life is my wife, Elizabeth. We met at Biola University and together we both developed a love for theology. Her zeal for knowing God never ceases to amaze me. Elizabeth has read and commented on every page (and footnote!) of this project and many times it was in the midst of mothering our daughters, Cassandra and Georgia, a privilege she treasures above all. I embark on few theological adventures without Elizabeth's input and remarkable scrutiny. Therefore, it is to Elizabeth that I dedicate this project.

Matthew Barrett

Louisville, Kentucky

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

How important is the doctrine of sovereign grace, as displayed in effectual calling and regeneration, to the system of Calvinism? According to B. B. Warfield, “Monergistic regeneration - or as it was phrased by the older theologians, of ‘irresistible grace’ or ‘effectual calling’ – is the hinge of the Calvinistic soteriology, and lies much more deeply embedded in the system than the doctrine of predestination itself which is popularly looked upon as its hall-mark.”<sup>1</sup> Such a statement by Warfield is astonishing given the enormous focus on other issues such as the problem of evil or God’s election in eternity by Calvinists and Arminians. However, Warfield is not alone. Today Calvinist theologians still agree, believing that monergistic regeneration is the *sine qua non* of salvation.<sup>2</sup> For example, when asked what *the* difference is between an Arminian and a Calvinist, both R. C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson responded that it is the doctrine of monergistic regeneration. As Sproul stated, while Calvinists and Arminians can argue about many other issues, the litmus test is whether regeneration precedes faith in the *ordo salutis* or, stated otherwise, whether one has or does not have the ability to cooperate with the grace of regeneration.<sup>3</sup> According to Sproul, the shibboleth for deciding whether or

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<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 359. Also see Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 433-40. Warfield’s point is exemplified in Bruce Ware, who argues that Scripture’s support of an effectual call provides the very basis for unconditional election, as demonstrated by Jesus in John 6. See Bruce A. Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 203-28.

<sup>2</sup>R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 188.

<sup>3</sup>R. C. Sproul and Sinclair Ferguson, “Questions and Answers #3” (session held at the annual meeting of the Ligonier Ministries National Conference, Orlando, FL, 21 March 2009). Also see R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 72-73. The *ordo salutis* can be defined as “the process by which the work of salvation, wrought in Christ, is subjectively realized in the hearts and lives of sinners. It aims at describing in their logical order, and also in their interrelations, the various movements of the Holy Spirit in the application of the work of redemption.” Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 415-16.

not one is a Calvinist or an Arminian is the doctrine of monergistic regeneration, the belief that God alone acts to irresistibly and effectually call and regenerate the dead and passive sinner from death to new life, thereby causing the sinner to respond in faith and repentance.<sup>4</sup> Whether or not regeneration precedes faith and is accomplished by God's sovereign will alone (monergism) or is conditioned upon man's faith, requiring man's free will cooperation for its efficacy (synergism) continues to be one of the most important (or in Warfield's opinion *the* most important) divisions between the Calvinist and the Arminian today. As Scott Warren observes, "Perhaps the doctrine that most evidently distinguishes an Arminian theological framework from a Calvinist framework can be found in the *ordo salutis* – specifically in the question of whether faith precedes or follows regeneration."<sup>5</sup> Warren is lucid: the doctrine of regeneration is the very hinge on which the debate turns. Yet, if Warfield, Sproul and Ferguson are right that monergistic grace is the very hinge of Calvinistic soteriology, then it is no small issue that such a doctrine is under reconsideration by contemporary evangelicals. The traditional Calvinistic view is once again being challenged not only by Arminians but by those who wish to propose a modified scheme.

### **The Contemporary Debate**

While monergism is an old doctrine its relevance today is apparent as the twentieth-century has been characterized by a resurgence of Calvinism and with it a resurgence of a predestinarian theology which exalts God's sovereignty rather than the will of man.<sup>6</sup> As J. Ligon Duncan III explains, "A fever for the glory of God has gotten

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<sup>4</sup>"Monergistic regeneration has to do, not with the whole process of redemption, but strictly with the initial condition or first step of our coming to faith." Sproul, *What Is Reformed Theology?* 185.

<sup>5</sup>Scott C. Warren, "Ability and Desire: Reframing Debates Surrounding Freedom and Responsibility," *JETS* 52 (2009): 551.

<sup>6</sup>Duncan dates the resurgence as far back as the 1950s. For exactly why this "New Calvinism" has taken root, see Ligon Duncan, "The Resurgence of Calvinism in America," in *Calvin Today* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 227-40. On the resurgence of Calvinism, see Collin Hansen, *Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey with the New Calvinists* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2008), 13-152; David Van Biema, "10 Ideas Shaping the World Right Now," *Time*, 12 March 2009, 50. From an Arminian perspective, see Roger E. Olson, "Freedom/Free Will," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 186-87.

into the bloodstream of a new generation.”<sup>7</sup> Duncan goes on to show that the resurgence of Calvinism has occurred in part because Christians are famished with the small view of God they have been fed and are hungry for the “big view of God” portrayed in the Scriptures and systematically articulated in the doctrines of grace. The doctrines of effectual calling and monergistic regeneration are but a slice of this biblical view of God and yet, as seen above, they may be the very hinge of the Calvinist position. In short, the Calvinist argues that God and man do not cooperate but God alone acts to regenerate the sinner, causing man to repent and believe in Christ. The grace that the Spirit applies to the elect is not resistible but effectual and monergistic. It is not man’s will, but God’s will, that is the cause of new life. Therefore, for the Calvinist effectual calling and regeneration causally and logically precede conversion in the *ordo salutis*. Moreover, the Calvinist is convinced that monergism preserves the sovereignty and glory of God in salvation while synergism robs God of his sovereignty and glory. Sovereignty is preserved because God’s will in salvation is not conditioned upon man’s will nor can it be successfully resisted by man’s will if God should so choose to save. God’s glory is preserved because God alone is the cause of the new birth. If God’s grace is dependent upon the will of man for its success, then God does not receive all of the credit.

However, with the resurgence of Calvinism has come a counter-response from those within the Arminian tradition.<sup>8</sup> While Calvinism places an emphasis on God’s sovereign grace, not only as displayed in predestination but in the application of monergistic grace in effectual calling and regeneration, Arminianism rejects monergism

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<sup>7</sup>Duncan, “Resurgence of Calvinism in America,” 227.

<sup>8</sup>David Basinger and Randall Basinger, eds., *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986); Clark Pinnock, ed., *The Grace of God and the Will of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989; reprint, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995); idem, ed., *Grace Unlimited* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999); Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will - Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism* (Nashville: Random House, 2002); Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Jack W. Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 70-134; Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, eds., *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

and instead affirms synergism, the view that God and man co-operate, making God's grace conditional upon man's free will (see chapter 5). However, two types of Arminian synergism exist. First, there are those Arminians who affirm a *God-initiated synergism*. Man is totally depraved but God provides a universal prevenient grace whereby man's depravity is mitigated and man's will is enabled to either cooperate with or resist God's grace. While God initiates and enables, ultimately man has the final say as to whether or not God's grace will be effective.<sup>9</sup> Such a view, often labeled "classical Arminianism" or "evangelical Arminianism," was advocated by Jacob Arminius, John Wesley, and contemporary advocates include Roger Olson and Wesleyan Thomas Oden (see chapter 5).<sup>10</sup> Historically, such a view shares many affinities with Semi-Augustinianism during the Middle Ages (see chapter 2). Second, there are other Arminians who reject the doctrine of total depravity and argue that there is no such thing as prevenient grace in Scripture. Instead, while sin does have a negative effect on man, man is still able to exercise his free will and initiate grace in order to either accept or reject the grace of God. This Arminian view, which we can call a *man-initiated synergism*, was affirmed by Arminian Remonstrant Philip Limborch in the seventeenth-century and is today advocated by Jack Cottrell, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark Pinnock (see chapter 5).<sup>11</sup> Historically, such a view of synergism is consistent with the Semi-Pelagianism that Augustine wrote against (see chapter 2).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, despite these differences, both

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<sup>9</sup>As Arminius himself states, "All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the Gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of the Elect and of the Reprobate." James Arminius, "Certain Articles to Be Diligently Examined and Weighed," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 2:497. Also see Cottrell, "Classical Arminian View of Election," 120-21.

<sup>10</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 137-78; Oden, *Transforming Power of Grace*, 31-208.

<sup>11</sup>Cottrell, "Classical Arminian View of Election," 116-22; Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 21-24; Bruce R. Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 286. On Philip Limborch, see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 147-51, 167-69. Dave Hunt could be added to this list of Semi-Pelagians. Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 286-87.

<sup>12</sup>For a helpful summary of the Semi-Pelagian view, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:712-14.

groups of Arminians agree that at the moment of decision the final determinative say is in the hands of the sinner to either accept or reject grace.

Today there has been an increasing effort by classical Arminians such as Thomas Oden and Roger Olson not only to refute contemporary Calvinists, but to clear the “Arminian” name from Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian accusations. Consequently, Olson has put forth immense effort into re-presenting “classical Arminianism,” as opposed to the Semi-Pelagian Arminianism represented by Cottrell, Reichenbach, and Pinnock, in order to make Arminianism more appealing to evangelicals today.

Synergism is any theological belief in free human participation in salvation. Its heretical forms in Christian theology are Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism. The former denies original sin and elevates natural and moral human ability to live spiritually fulfilled lives. The latter embraces a modified version of original sin but believes that humans have the ability, even in their natural or fallen state, to initiate salvation by exercising a good will toward God. When conservative theologians declare that synergism is a heresy, they are usually referring to these two Pelagian forms of synergism. Classical Arminians agree. . . . Contrary to confused critics, classical Arminianism is neither Pelagian nor semi-Pelagian! But it *is* synergistic. Arminianism is *evangelical synergism* as opposed to heretical, humanistic synergism. . . . I am referring to evangelical synergism, which affirms the prevenience of grace to every human exercise of a good will toward God, including simply nonresistance to the saving work of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

It is clear from what Olson says that Calvinism’s monergism has a counter-opponent in Arminianism’s synergism. While there have existed and do exist today those Arminians of a Semi-Pelagian stripe, Olson is making an effort to counter contemporary monergists with a synergism that is tasteful to evangelicals. Olson is not alone, but his Arminian synergism is reiterated by others including Robert Picirilli, Kenneth Keathley, Steve Lemke, Jeremy Evans, Jerry Walls, Joseph Dongell, among others (see chapter 5).

Moreover, not only have contemporary Arminians reacted strongly to the monergism of Calvinism, but those who affirm a modified position also have responded with a model of their own. The modified position which has gained perhaps the most popularity and momentum among contemporary evangelicals is that of Millard Erickson,

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<sup>13</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 17-18.

Gordon Lewis, and Bruce Demarest.<sup>14</sup> Such a view, while it borrows from both Arminianism and Calvinism, never fully agrees with either. The modified view's differences are easily demonstrated through the logical ordering of salvation. In the classical Arminian view prevenient grace is primary, followed by man's free will decision in conversion, and consequently God's response in regeneration. Therefore, regeneration is causally conditioned upon man's free will choice to accept or reject God's grace. For Calvinism, the *ordo salutis* differs drastically. God does not respond to the sinner but the sinner responds to God. God's choice does not depend on the sinner's, but the sinner's choice depends on God's mercy and grace. Therefore, God's special calling is particular and effectual (as opposed to a calling which is universal, prevenient and resistible) and regeneration monergistic. Consequently effectual calling and regeneration causally precede conversion. However, the modified view borrows and diverges from both of these views. While the modified view affirms a special calling that is effectual and prior to conversion, it denies that regeneration causally precedes conversion. Instead the modified view argues that regeneration is causally conditioned upon conversion.<sup>15</sup> While advocates of this view readily acknowledge that they are borrowing not only from Calvinism but also from Arminianism,<sup>16</sup> nevertheless, they insist that they remain monergists.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Demarest even includes his view ("Regeneration a Work of God in Response to Faith") as part of the "*Reformed Evangelical*" position.<sup>18</sup> As shall be shown in chapter 7, Erickson, Lewis, and Demarest are defining monergism differently and

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<sup>14</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 901-78; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 49-96, 203-312; Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Gordon, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 3:17-172.

<sup>15</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:57, 3:104.

<sup>16</sup>"This moderately Reformed scheme agrees with Arminianism in holding that human conversion precedes divine regeneration (Miley, Wiley) and disagrees with high Calvinism in its claim that the Spirit's regeneration takes logical precedence over conscious, human conversion (Strong, Berkhof, Murray)." Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:57.

<sup>17</sup>For example, see Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 289.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 289-91. Emphasis original. Lewis and Demarest title their view "moderately Reformed" and a "modified Calvinistic hypothesis." Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:57.

more broadly than the Reformed tradition has defined it in the past and the modified scheme, which places conversion between effectual calling and regeneration, is nothing short of novelty as it is without precedent among Reformed theologians.

However, Erickson, Lewis, and Demarest are not the only ones who try to lay claim to the label of “monergism.” More recently Kenneth Keathley also claims he is justified in adopting the term “monergism,” a surprising move in light of the fact that Keathley’s view is almost identical to the Arminian position. Keathley rejects the modified view of Erickson, Lewis, and Demarest, as it concedes too much to the Calvinist affirmation of effectual calling.<sup>19</sup> Instead, Keathley puts forward a very traditional Arminian view of synergism when he rejects the distinction between the gospel call and the effectual call and in its place affirms that God’s call is universal, God’s grace is resistible, man’s freedom is libertarian, and conversion is logically prior to regeneration. Monergism for Keathley means that God alone can be called the author of salvation, and he is not thwarted in his intention to save *as long as* man “refrains from resisting,” a definition radically different from how Calvinists use the term.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, for the Arminian, Calvinism’s doctrine of monergistic grace must be rejected and for the modified advocate the doctrine must be qualified and altered at the very least. Such recent opposition demonstrates that while the monergism-synergism debate is an old one, it has taken on new significance in contemporary theology. Nevertheless, the question remains as to who is right. Does synergism or monergism best adhere to what Scripture says about the application of God’s grace to the sinner?

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<sup>19</sup>Since Keathley’s view so closely aligns with the Arminian view, I will interact with his objections as I also interact with objections from those who are classical Arminians. Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 101-35. Also see idem, “The Work of God: Salvation,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David P. Nelson, and Peter R. Schemm (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 686-785; idem, “A Molinist View of Election, or How to Be a Consistent Infralapsarian,” in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 195-215.

<sup>20</sup>As will become evident, Keathley’s arguments are no different from those of Arminian Roger Olson, who likewise says God’s grace is always successful as long as man is nonresistant. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 154-55.

## Thesis

The monergism-synergism debate is not first and foremost a *philosophical* debate, nor is it primarily a *historical* debate, as important as philosophy and history are to the discussion. Rather, the debate is primarily a *biblical-theological* debate. While Calvinists and Arminians disagree over a range of issues, both agree that the Bible must have the ultimate authority. Nevertheless, each view contests to be the biblical position. The thesis of this project will argue that the biblical view is that God's saving grace is monergistic - meaning that God acts alone to *effectually* call and *monergistically* regenerate the depraved sinner from death to new life - and therefore effectual calling and regeneration causally precede conversion in the *ordo salutis*, thereby ensuring that all of the glory in salvation belongs to God not man. Stated negatively, God's grace is not synergistic – meaning that God cooperates with man, giving man the final, determining power to either accept or resist God's grace – which would result in an *ordo salutis* where regeneration is causally conditioned upon man's free will in conversion and, in the Calvinist's opinion, would rob God of all of the glory in salvation. As J. I. Packer states, "All Arminianisms involve a measure of synergism, if not strong (God helps me to save myself) then weak (I help God to save me)."<sup>21</sup> And as John R. de Witt concludes, synergism essentially is "an attack upon the majesty of God, and puts in place of it the exaltation of man."<sup>22</sup>

This thesis evaluates both the Arminian and modified views as unbiblical in nature and consequently as failing to do justice to the scriptural portrayal of God's sovereignty and glory in salvation. Moreover, since it is the glory of God at stake such a debate is no small matter. Perhaps nobody understood this as much as John Calvin did. Commenting on Calvin's monergism, I. John Hesselink remarks, "If that grace is undercut by some form of cooperation (synergism) between a semiautonomous 'free'

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<sup>21</sup>J. I. Packer, "Arminianisms," in *Puritan Papers: Volume Five, 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 39.

<sup>22</sup>John R. de Witt, "The Arminian Conflict and the Synod of Dort," in *Puritan Papers: Volume Five*, 23.

human being and the sovereign Lord, the glory of God is compromised, as far as Calvin is concerned.”<sup>23</sup> The thesis of this project is in agreement with Calvin precisely because Scripture itself denies that God’s decision to regenerate his elect is conditioned upon man’s cooperation. Only monergistic grace can fully preserve the sovereignty, glory, and majesty of God.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, while the present day Arminian and modified views seek to gain contemporary adherents, this project finds relevance in that it is a call to evangelicals to reject the temptation of synergism in its various forms and return to the traditional Calvinist position as that which is most faithful to Scripture.

### **The Presuppositions and Parameters of this Project**

#### **Vocabulary in the Debate**

Too often in projects of this sort, whether it is from an Arminian or a Calvinist perspective, labels are thrown around carelessly. Consequently, caricatures result which only hinder dialogue in the debate. Therefore, it is crucial to categorize the terms that will be used throughout this project in relation to their respective parties. There are historical roots to both the monergism and synergism views. Specifically, as many historians and theologians have recognized, there are at least four distinct positions throughout church history concerning the monergism-synergism debate: (1) Humanistic monergism, (2) Human-initiated synergism, (3) God-initiated synergism, and (4) Divine monergism.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>“This, for him, was one of the fundamental differences between the sixteenth-century Reformation and late medieval Roman Catholicism. Hence he calls Roman compromises here ‘evasions with which Satan has attempted to obscure God’s grace.’ Calvin grants that ‘they hold with us that human beings, as corrupt, cannot move even a finger to perform some duty for God,’ but then they err in two respects. They hold that both the mind and the will have some wholeness even in regard to God, and they teach that ‘the grace of the Holy Spirit is not effective without the agreement or cooperation of our free choice.’ The result: ‘they leave people suspended in midair when they deal with the grace of the Holy Spirit.’” John I. Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 72.

<sup>24</sup>John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 186.

<sup>25</sup>Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 20-41. These four categories are recognized also by Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity A.D. 311-590*, vol. 3 of *History of the Christian Church* (n.p., 1867; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 783-865; William Gene Witt, “Creation, Redemption and Grace in the Theology of Jacob Arminius” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 2:608ff.; Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 91; Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 205-07.

Each of these positions can be identified with certain groups within church history: (1) Humanistic monergism is the view of Pelagius and Pelagianism, (2) Human-initiated synergism is the view of Semi-Pelagianism, (3) God-initiated synergism is the view of the Semi-Augustinians, and (4) Divine monergism is the view of Augustine and the Augustinians. As will be seen in chapters 2 and 5, Calvinism and Arminianism drew from these historical positions of the early and late Middle Ages. Calvinism appeals to Augustine for its view of efficacious grace. On the other hand, Arminianism is diverse. Some, such as Philip Limborch and today Jack Cottrell and Clark Pinnock, advocate a view which aligns itself with Semi-Pelagianism. However, many Arminians have rejected Semi-Pelagianism and instead have affirmed what is the equivalent of the Semi-Augustinian view as they seek to be faithful to Arminius himself.<sup>26</sup>

While these categories may not exhaustively encompass every theologian or movement, they are descriptive of the majority and serve to categorize each view according to the historical context. The parameters of this project are not broad enough to include an exhaustive history of all the views mentioned above. Such a history can be found elsewhere by other very capable historians.<sup>27</sup> Instead, this project will primarily limit itself to the theological arguments of the Calvinist position, the Arminian views, and recent modified views, and secondarily draw from history where necessary to show the origins, developments, and arguments of each view.

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<sup>26</sup>As William Witt observes, it is fair to “discern in Arminius the Semi-Augustinianism affirmed by Orange II.” Witt, “Arminius,” 2:612.

<sup>27</sup>Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, 2 vols., trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952); Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 278-331; idem, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition* (1984), 183-244; Rebecca H. Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, Patristic Monograph Series 15 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996); Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 35-36, 79-85, 120, 167; Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (n.p., 1937; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 127-61.

## The Legitimacy of an *Ordo Salutis*

Sinclair Ferguson has observed that the *ordo salutis* is an effort to discover the proper relationship of the various aspects of salvation to one another in the Spirit's application of Christ's redeeming work.<sup>28</sup> While the precision of the *ordo salutis* that is found in later Reformed dogmatics did not exist among early reformers like Luther or even second generation reformers like Calvin,<sup>29</sup> two early examples of a detailed *ordo salutis* can be found in Theodore Beza's *Tabula praedestinationis* or *Summa totius christianismi* (1555), which constructs an *ordo* in which each link is cause and effect (i.e., "causal model"),<sup>30</sup> and in William Perkins (1558-1602) who, in his work *A Golden Chaine* (1591), sought to properly place each aspect of salvation in its proper place on the basis of Romans 8:28-30.<sup>31</sup> Beza's *Tabula* is particularly important since, as Richard

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<sup>28</sup>“*Ordo* means a series, a line, an order of succession. Cicero used *ordo* for a row of seats in the theatre, or a bank of oars in a vessel. When applied to the application of redemption, *ordo salutis* denotes the orderly arrangement of the various aspects of salvation in its bestowal on men and women. In particular it seeks to answer this question: ‘In what ways are the various aspects of the application of redemption (such as justification, regeneration, conversion, and sanctification) related to each other?’ Discussions of *ordo salutis* thus attempt to unpack the inner coherence and logic of the Spirit's application of the work of Christ.” Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996), 96. For a history of the *ordo salutis*, see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 3:485-595; Archibald Alexander Hodge, “The Ordo Salutis: Or, Relation in the Order of Nature of Holy Character and Divine Favor,” *The Princeton Review* 54 (1878): 304-21; Herman Kuiper, *By Grace Alone: A Study in Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 17-37; Cornelis P. Venema, “Union with Christ, the ‘Twofold Grace of God,’ and the ‘Order of Salvation’ in Calvin's Theology,” in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 91-113.

<sup>29</sup>Kuiper, *By Grace Alone*, 35-37. However, Hodge rightly observes that on the issue of regeneration (in the narrow sense) preceding faith the Reformers were very clear. See Hodge, “The Ordo Salutis,” 305.

<sup>30</sup>Richard A. Muller, “Theodore Beza (1519-1605),” in *The Reformation Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 213-24. Also idem, “The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula Praedestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), 34, 52. On Beza's Calvinism see Shawn Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2007); John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1975); Richard A. Muller, “Predestination and Christology in Sixteenth Century Reformed Theology” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1976), 131-43, 203-16; David Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 162-71; Jill Raitt, “Theodore Beza, 1519-1605,” in *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560-1600*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 89-104.

<sup>31</sup>William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine; or, the description of theologie, containing the order of the causes of salvation and damnation, according to God's Word*, in *The Workes of William Perkins* (Cambridge: n.p., 1612), 1:11-117. For a comparison of Perkins with Beza, as well as a well-argued case for continuity between Calvin, Perkins and Beza (contra Basil Hall, Alexander Schweizer, Wilhelm Gass, Hans Weber, and Ernst Bizer), see Richard A. Muller, “Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*: Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (1978): 68-81.

Muller and Carl Trueman argue, it was published during Calvin's lifetime and "appears to have met with his approval," demonstrating obvious continuity between the two men (contra Basil Hall).<sup>32</sup> Post-Reformation Calvinists would continue within such a tradition as is apparent in Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* and Herman Witsius' *Economy of the Covenants*.<sup>33</sup> Adherence to the *ordo salutis* among Reformed theologians only continued to develop as is evident in nineteenth and twentieth-century systematic theologies including those of Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, Herman Bavinck, and Louis Berkhof.<sup>34</sup>

Yet, even among the Reformed there is minor disagreement. For example, Louis Berkhof argues that "while it [the Bible] does not explicitly furnish us with a complete order of salvation, it offers us a sufficient basis for such an *ordo*."<sup>35</sup> John Murray, however, believes that the order of salvation is *explicit* in Scripture. He argues that we have good and conclusive reasons for thinking that the various actions of the *ordo salutis* "take place in a certain order, and that order has been established by divine appointment, wisdom, and grace."<sup>36</sup> Despite these minor disagreements over exactly how specific Scripture is, nevertheless, Reformed theologians believe there is enough explicit biblical revelation for putting certain doctrines before others. For example, for the Reformed one of the most important links is the ordering of regeneration to faith. For the

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<sup>32</sup>I am quoting Carl R. Trueman, "Calvin and Reformed Orthodoxy," in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 473. Also see Muller, "Theodore Beza," 214-15; idem, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 79-96; idem, "The Use and Abuse of a Document," 33-61. Contra: Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. Gervase Duffield (Appleford: Sutton Courtney, 1966), 19-37.

<sup>33</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:169-270, 501-724; Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (London: n.p., 1822; reprint, Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1990), 1:324-468; 2:1-107.

<sup>34</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:485-596; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 3:3-258; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., ed. Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg, NJ: 2003), 761-808; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 415-554.

<sup>35</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 416.

<sup>36</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 98.

Calvinist the new birth logically and causally precedes faith whereas for the Arminian faith precedes the new birth.<sup>37</sup>

However, other scholars, such as Karl Barth, Otto Weber, and G. C. Berkouwer, have criticized the structuring of an *ordo salutis*, rejecting it altogether.<sup>38</sup> Berkouwer has argued that Paul, in Romans 8:28-30, does not intend to structure a precise sequence.<sup>39</sup> A similar argument was made by John Wesley in the eighteenth-century.<sup>40</sup> While it is true, as Herman Ridderbos warns, that we do not want to overly analyze the *ordo salutis* where Scripture gives no instruction or where no inference can be drawn, forcing the apostle Paul to fit the systematic methods of our own day,<sup>41</sup> nevertheless, we should not go to the opposite extreme by dismissing the *ordo salutis* altogether. Even Paul in Romans 8:28-30, while not giving us every specific detail of the *ordo salutis* (e.g., sanctification), is not leaving salvation unordered. One would not dare say that each aspect Paul lists is relative so that being glorified can precede being justified or being justified can precede being predestined.<sup>42</sup> To the contrary, Paul places predestination before calling and calling before justification and justification before glorification. These categories are not interchangeable, but each follows as a result of the

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<sup>37</sup>See Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 98.

<sup>38</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952), pt. 2:499-511; Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 336-38; G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 25-36.

<sup>39</sup>Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification*, 25-36. Berkouwer would rather speak of a “way of salvation” than an “order of salvation.”

<sup>40</sup>John Wesley, “On Predestination,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 6:226. Also see Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 40-41; Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 157-58.

<sup>41</sup>Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of his Theology*, trans. J. R. de Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 206. Also see Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 13-14.

<sup>42</sup>Ferguson keenly reminds us, “We cannot avoid *orderly* thought when it comes to theology. After all, the Spirit is a Spirit of order (1 Cor. 14:33)! As Hendrikus Berkhof wryly comments on Barth’s stringent criticisms of the *ordo salutis*, when Barth writes about soteriology in his *Church Dogmatics*, ‘he too needs a kind of logical order!’ No-one, surely, holds that regeneration and conversion, justification and sanctification are randomly related. The question, therefore, is: On what principle or model is the order of the Spirit’s work to be construed?” Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 100. See Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Christian Faith*, trans. S. Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 479.

previous. As we will later see, the same is true in other passages such as 1 John 5:1 where the grammatical structure demonstrates that regeneration produces faith. As Reymond states, “A cause and effect relationship exists between God’s regenerating activity and saving faith.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, not only is it impossible for a theologian to think theologically without assuming an *ordo salutis* but an *ordo salutis* is biblically justified and, as this project will show, the relationship between regeneration and faith in the *ordo salutis* is an issue Scripture is not silent on. As we shall see, while *in time* regeneration, faith, and repentance all occur simultaneously, *logically* speaking regeneration has causal priority over faith and repentance (see chapters 3 and 4). In other words, the *ordo* is not strictly temporal but is an order of nature. Hoekema uses the helpful example of turning on a light switch. While turning on the light switch is simultaneous with light flooding a room, nevertheless, it is turning on the switch which *causes* the light to appear. So it is with regeneration and conversion, for the very definition of faith and repentance assumes the pre-existence of spiritual life. John Piper uses the example of fire causing heat and light: “The instant there is fire, there is heat. The instant there is fire, there is light. But we would not say that the heat caused the fire, or the light caused the fire. We say that the fire caused the heat and the light.”<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, as John Frame explains, the *ordo salutis* is a biblically helpful pedagogical device.

Some items precede other items because the first comes earlier in time, the other later. That is the case with effectual calling and glorification. Other items on the list precede others because one is a cause, the other an effect, as with regeneration and faith. Still others come before others not because of temporal priority or causal priority but because of what theologians call *instrumental priority*, as in the relation of faith to justification. And still other pairs of events are simply concurrent or simultaneous blessings, like justification and adoption. So, the “order” means different things: sometimes cause and effect, sometimes earlier and later, sometimes instrumental and object, sometimes mere concurrence. Nevertheless, the order does

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<sup>43</sup>Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., rev. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 709.

<sup>44</sup>John Piper, *Finally Alive* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 102.

bring out important relationships between these events, relationships that the Bible does set forth.<sup>45</sup>

If, as some suggest, we are to do away with an *ordo salutis*, then tragically we lose the ability to distinguish between loci. The consequence of abandoning the *ordo salutis* is a subtle discarding of theological precision and construction altogether. But, as Frame states, there is an important place for ordering loci, whether it be temporal, causal, instrumental, or one of concurrence. Nevertheless, as Ferguson warns, one must guard against forming an *ordo salutis* that is so mechanical that one displaces Christ from his central role in soteriology.<sup>46</sup> This leads us to our next point, namely, the importance of conceiving of an *ordo salutis* within the category of union with Christ.

### ***Unio cum Christo***

Ferguson is right when he states, “The central role of the Spirit is to reveal Christ and to unite us to him and to all those who participate in his body.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore, union with Christ is the “dominant motif and architectonic principle of the order of salvation.”<sup>48</sup> Rather than placing union with Christ (*unio cum Christo*) at a particular point in the *ordo salutis*, union with Christ serves as an umbrella category within which the entire *ordo salutis* finds its beginning, fulfillment and *telos* (John 6:56; 15:4-7; Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:17; 12:2; 13:5; Gal 2:20; 3:28; Eph 1:4, 2:10; 3:17; Phil 3:9; Col 1:27; 1 Thess 4:16; 1 John 4:13).<sup>49</sup> As Murray wrote, union with Christ is “the central

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<sup>45</sup>Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 183.

<sup>46</sup>Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 99.

<sup>47</sup>“Every facet of the application of Christ’s work ought to be related to the way in which the Spirit unites us to Christ himself, and viewed as directly issuing from personal fellowship with him.” *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.1.1, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 537-38. For a full treatment of union with Christ see Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 54-67; Lewis Smedes, *Union with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

<sup>49</sup>Paul says of believers that they are those who are “in Christ” or “in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1-2; 2 Thess 1:1). Paul also says Christ is “in” the believer (Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Col 1:27). For an excellent treatment of the nature of union with Christ as (1) federal, (2) carnal or flesh union, (3) faith union, (4) spiritual union, (5), extensive union, and (6) union of life, see Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), 104-14.

truth of the whole doctrine of salvation” and it “underlies every aspect of redemption.”<sup>50</sup> While it is not my purpose here either to defend such a doctrine extensively or delve into the debates over how precisely to define union with Christ,<sup>51</sup> nonetheless, it is necessary to affirm that the Spirit’s goal at each stage of the *ordo salutis* is for the elect to be found *in Christ* (1 Cor 12:12-13).<sup>52</sup> The goal of the *ordo salutis* is not simply for Christ to be the “ultimate causal source” but for the sinner to directly participate in Christ’s benefits through the power of the Spirit (Eph 1:3).<sup>53</sup>

Likewise, the same holds true in the doctrines of effectual calling and regeneration.<sup>54</sup> The Father effectually draws his elect *to his Son* (John 6:65) and God, by the power of the Spirit, makes sinners dead in their trespasses alive together *with Christ* (Eph 2:5, 10). And while God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), it is in regeneration that God re-creates us in Christ (Eph 2:5, 10). As Hoekema explains, “It is therefore at the moment of regeneration that union between Christ and his people is actually established. This union is not only the beginning of our salvation; it sustains, fills, and perfects the entire process of salvation.”<sup>55</sup> Or as Piper states, “In the

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<sup>50</sup>Murray, *Redemption*, 201. Also see Smedes, *Union with Christ*, xii; A. A. Hodge, “The Ordo Salutis,” *The Princeton Review* 54 (1878): 312.

<sup>51</sup>On such an issue, see William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology, Studies in Christian History and Thought* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2008); Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., “Union with Christ: Some Biblical and Theological Reflections,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology*, ed. A. T. B. McGowan (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 271-88; idem, *By Faith, Not By Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2006), 35-40; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

<sup>52</sup>Therefore, the Holy Spirit is appropriately titled the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor 3:17), the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11), the Spirit of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:19), and the Spirit of God’s Son (Gal 4:6). See Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 29, for more on this topic.

<sup>53</sup>“This approach has several advantages over a ‘series’, or ‘causal chain’ model which has tended to dominate expositions of the *ordo salutis*. It means that we cannot think of, or enjoy, the blessings of the gospel either isolated from each other or separated from the Benefactor himself. This promotes a healthy Christ-centeredness in Christian living, and also safeguards evangelical teaching from the flaw of isolating the effects of the gospel from faith in Christ himself as both Saviour and Lord. In this sense, Melancthon’s famous anti-scholastic dictum ‘To know Christ is to know his benefits’ is well taken.” Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 101-02. For an extensive treatment of union with Christ, see pages 103-13.

<sup>54</sup>As Frame explains, “As effectual calling calls us into union with Christ, so regeneration is our union with him in his resurrection life. New birth, new creation, life from the dead are alternative ways of speaking of the ways God gives us new life.” Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 186.

new birth, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ in a living union. . . . What happens in the new birth is the creation of life in union with Christ.”<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the doctrine of union with Christ subtly yet powerfully undergirds the passages that will be discussed in this project. Consequently, as this project discusses and defends the Reformed view of effectual calling, regeneration, and conversion, it is assumed that all of these doctrines have union with Christ as their goal. The Spirit’s purpose in calling, regenerating, and producing faith and repentance in the elect is to unite the elect sinner to Christ and all his benefits.

### *Spiritus Recreator*

The work of redemption is by nature Trinitarian. All three persons of the Trinity work together (*opus commune*) to accomplish salvation and, as Robert Letham states, “not one of the persons works by himself in isolation from the others.”<sup>57</sup> As Augustine asserted, since the three persons are inseparable in their divine unity and essence, so also “do they work inseparably.”<sup>58</sup> Therefore, as Letham explains, there is a triadic pattern to our redemption whereby the plan of salvation “is brought about from the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>59</sup> Consequently, every act of redemption involves not just one but all three persons of the Trinity so that the *opera ad extra*

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<sup>55</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 60. Hoekema views regeneration in particular as the initial point where union with Christ begins. “By regeneration, also called the new birth, is meant that act of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings a person into living union with Christ, so that he or she who was spiritually dead now becomes spiritually alive.” *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>56</sup>Piper, *Finally Alive*, 32-33, 37.

<sup>57</sup>Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 157. Here Letham is summarizing Gregory of Nyssa. Letham continues, “Every work of God originates from the Father, proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit. However, these are not three different things, but one and the same work of God.” For a very recent work that makes a similar point see Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>58</sup>Augustine, *The Trinity: De Trinitate*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1991), 70. Elsewhere Augustine states, “Therefore, as there is an equality and inseparability of the persons, not only of the Father and the Son, but also of the Holy Spirit, so also the works are inseparable.” *Tractates on the Gospel of John 11-27*, *The Fathers of the Church*, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 166. Also see Augustine, *Sermons: III (51-94) on the New Testament*, *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. Jon E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1991), 50-52.

<sup>59</sup>Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 81, 95.

*trinitatis indivisa sunt*. Or in the words of John Owen, “by whatsoever act we hold communion with any one person, there is an *influence* from every person to the putting forth of that act.”<sup>60</sup> Such is the case in calling, to take but one example. The Father calls (John 6:44, 65; 1 Cor 1:9; 1 Thess 2:12; 1 Peter 5:10), to and through his Son (Matt 11:28; Luke 5:32; John 6:44, 65; 7:37; Rom 1:6), by the power of the Spirit (Matt 10:20; John 15:26; Acts 5:31-32).<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, while each act of redemption involves each person of the Trinity, one of the three persons may take on the central role as the focal agent in any one particular saving act. For example, while the Father *plans* salvation (Eph 1:4-5), the Son is sent by the Father to *accomplish* salvation (Eph 1:7), and the Father and the Son send the Spirit to *apply* salvation (Eph 1:13-14).<sup>62</sup> Or, in the words of Johannes van der Kemp, “the Father ordained grace for the elect, the Son purchased it, and the Holy Ghost applies and dispenses it to the favorites of God.”<sup>63</sup> All three persons play a role in election, the atonement, and the application of grace and yet each work places a primary emphasis on one out of the three persons of the Trinity. As Augustine asserts, all three persons of the Trinity have a part in the work of each person and yet each work is attributed to one person in particular.<sup>64</sup> Such is the case in the application of salvation. It is the Holy Spirit

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<sup>60</sup>John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 105-06. Also see J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 159.

<sup>61</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 457.

<sup>62</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:570.

<sup>63</sup>Johannes van der Kemp, *The Christian Entirely the Property of Christ, in Life and Death, Exhibited in Fifty-three Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. John M. Harlingen (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1997), 5, quoted in Richard A. Muller, *The Triunity of God*, vol. 4 of *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 274.

<sup>64</sup>Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John 11-27*, Tractate 20. Letham, summarizing Augustine, captures such a Trinitarian complexity when he writes, “The three do nothing in which all do not have a part. Nevertheless, each work is appropriately applied to one of the persons.” And again, “Thus, the grand sweep of salvation follows a Trinitarian structure. However, in each aspect all three persons are integrally involved, while one in particular is directly evident.” Letham, *Holy Trinity*, 187, 404-05. This Augustinian dictum was reiterated by seventeenth-century Calvinist John Forbes of Corse in his 1645 work entitled *Instructiones historico-theologiae de doctrina Christiana*. As Muller explains, Forbes affirmed that “wherever one of the persons is named in relation to a particular work, the operation of the entire Trinity is understood. The multiplicity of works terminating on particular persons does not disrupt or compromise the

in particular who takes on the focal role in Scripture as the one who makes the new birth effectual (John 3:3-5; Titus 3:5).<sup>65</sup> As the Nicene-Constantinople Creed states, the Holy Spirit is “the Lord and Giver of Life.” Likewise, John Calvin concludes, “To sum up, the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself.”<sup>66</sup> Therefore, while the person of the Holy Spirit is not the primary focus of this study, the role of the Spirit is everywhere assumed and implied in the discussion, since he is the efficient cause of the new birth.<sup>67</sup>

### Conclusion

In conclusion, with these presuppositions in mind we are now ready to enter into the monergism-synergism debate. We shall begin in chapter 2 by first examining how monergism has been defined and defended in the Calvinist tradition. In chapters 3 and 4 we will turn to Scripture in order to see that the doctrines of effectual calling and monergistic regeneration are biblical. Chapter 5 will transition to the Arminian view, seeking to represent the synergistic position, while chapter 6 will provide a critique, demonstrating that such a view is unbiblical. Finally, chapter 7 will conclude this project

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unity of knowledge and will in the Godhead.” Forbes finds this truth in Augustine’s *Enchiridion* as well as Athanasius’ *Ad Serapionem*. Muller, *The Trinity of God*, 111-12. In contemporary theology, such an Augustinian dictum has been reiterated not only by Letham but also by Feinberg when he writes, “While each member of the Trinity is active in each divine action, Scripture (the NT in particular) frequently associates a given activity with one member of the Godhead more than with the others.” John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 488 (cf. 470). Also see Genderen and Velema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 159-60.

<sup>65</sup>“While the term ‘regeneration’ is not strictly associated with the work of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, the idea of inauguration into the kingdom of God as a Spirit-wrought new birth is widespread and is in fact foundational in Johannine theology.” Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 118.

<sup>66</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.1. Calvin states in his commentary on John 14:16, the role of the Spirit “is to make us partakers not only of Christ Himself, but of all his blessings.” Idem, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 18 of *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 92-93. Also see Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “Calvin on the Holy Spirit,” in *Calvin for Today*, 60. Or as Westminster states, “The Holy Spirit, whom the Father is ever willing to give to all who ask him, is the only efficient agent in the application of redemption. He regenerates men by his grace, convicts them of sin, moves them to repentance, and persuades and enables them to embrace Jesus Christ by faith. He unites all believers to Christ, dwells in them as their Comforter and Sanctifier, gives to them the spirit of adoption and prayer, and performs all these gracious offices by which they are sanctified and sealed unto the day of redemption.” “The Westminster Confession,” in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, vol. 2 of *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 24.3.

<sup>67</sup>On the Spirit as the principal efficient cause, see Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:524.

by assessing contemporary attempts at a *via media*, arguing that such attempts are fundamentally flawed.

## CHAPTER 2

### MONERGISM IN THE CALVINIST TRADITION

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to enter into the historical context in which the doctrine of monergism has been defended, by seeking out several key representatives from the Reformed tradition, including Augustine, Calvin, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession. While the following representatives are only a small sample of the many voices in Reformed theology, they do serve to bring out the best formulations in the Calvinist tradition. First, I will demonstrate that the Reformed tradition has consistently affirmed the doctrine of monergism as that which is taught in Scripture and has rejected various forms of synergism as unbiblical. Second, by examining certain representatives I will seek to display *exactly how* Calvinists in the past have made their case for the doctrine of monergism. Third, it seems irresponsible to skip over the history of a debate that is almost two millennia old. In doing so one runs the danger of applying labels (Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, etc.) inaccurately. Therefore, by examining some of the major monergism-synergism controversies, we seek to evade such an error.

#### **Augustine: *Doctor Gratiae***

Sovereign grace is typically associated with Calvinism and for good reason since it is John Calvin and his followers who articulated the doctrine of effectual grace so clearly against the synergists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, in reading Calvin it is immediately apparent that he is not inventing the doctrine but is himself tremendously indebted to St. Augustine (354-430). As Albert Outler has noted, the “central theme in all Augustine’s writings is the sovereign God of grace and the

sovereign grace of God.”<sup>1</sup> It is Augustine whom Calvin quotes more than any other human author and it is upon Augustine’s doctrine of irresistible grace that Calvin builds his case against synergists like Albertus Pighius. Therefore, it is Augustine who is the *terminus a quo* for the debate over grace and free will.<sup>2</sup> However, in order to understand Augustine’s “gracious monergism” one must first understand the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian views of sin, free will, and grace.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Albert C. Outler, “Introduction,” in Augustine, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, LCC, vol. 7, ed. Albert C. Outler (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 14-15.

<sup>2</sup>Mark E. Vanderschaaf, “Predestination and Certainty of Salvation in Augustine and Calvin,” *RR* 30 (1976): 1. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Augustine are designated by book and are taken from *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4 vols., ed. John E. Rotelle, I/23-26 of *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. Roland J. Teske (New York: New City, 1997-1999). My reading of Augustine will differ from some Augustinian scholars today. I am in agreement with older historians/theologians such as Harnack, Schaff, and Warfield that Augustine strongly affirmed man’s total depravity and bondage of the will until the arrival of monergistic grace. Therefore, Augustine’s monergism stands in direct contrast not only to Pelagianism but also to the synergism of what would come to be known as Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism. However, as James Dennison has observed, many contemporary scholars today, such as Gerald Bonner, wrongly interpret Augustine as affirming a Semi-Pelagian view of grace and free will. See James Dennison, “Augustine and Grace,” *Kerux* 18, no. 3 (2003): 42-43, 50-51. Dennison observes this is the case with many (though not all) of those who have contributed to *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). Dennison is right to conclude that this is an erroneous reading of Augustine, which is partly due to the fact that Augustine’s soteriology is “offensive to modern (scholarly) man as it was (in essence) to Pelagius and his semi-Pelagian followers of old. And so it must be massaged to render it more palatable to modern natural man.” Dennison, “Augustine and Grace,” 51. Nowhere is this more evident than in Gerald Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (Norwick: Canterbury, 1986), 390-93. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with Dennison that despite such a flaw, contemporary works like *Augustine through the Ages* are still very valuable for historical context and the theology of movements like Pelagianism. Therefore, the following will work off of both older historians like Schaff but also incorporate many contemporary scholars like Bonner, though of course with a commitment to a traditional reading of Augustinian soteriology.

<sup>3</sup>This section will briefly outline the theology of the debate. For a fuller treatment of these debates in historical context, see the following works (to which this study is also indebted): B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1991), 1:1-143; 2:1-28; Francis X. Gumerlock, “Predestination in the Century Before Gottschalk (Part 1),” *Evangelical Quarterly* 81 (2009): 195-209; Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Traditions of Plato and Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); William J. Collinge, “Introduction,” in *Saint Augustine: Four Anti-Pelagian Writings*, trans. John A. Mourant and William J. Collinge (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 3-20, 93-108, 181-99; J. R. Lucas, “Pelagius and St. Augustine,” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 22 (1971): 73-85; Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin, 1993), 225-35; idem, *Augustine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 38-43, 107-19; G. F. Wiggers, *An Historical Presentation of Augustinianism and Pelagianism from the Original Sources*, trans. Ralph Emerson (New York: Gould, Newman & Saxton, 1849); Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 312-93; idem, “Pelagianism and Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 33-51; Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 340-79; Serge Lancel, *St. Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: SCM, 2002), 38-43, 107-19; F. Van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. B. Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961); Patout J. Burns, “Augustine’s Role in the Imperial Action against Pelagius,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979): 67-83; Sarah Byers, “Pelagianism and Augustine,” *Augustinian Studies* 23 (1992): 33-51; John M. Lawrence, “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” *Restoration Quarterly* 20, no. 2 (1977): 93-101; Joane McWilliam, “Augustine of Hippo (354-430),” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 43-46; E. TeSelle, “Pelagius, Pelagianism,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 633-40; Alan P. F. Sell, “Augustine Versus Pelagius: A Cautionary Tale of Perennial Importance,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 12 (1997): 117-43; Roy W. Battenhouse, ed., *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 203-34; Eugene TeSelle, *Augustine the Theologian* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 156-84, 278-93,

## Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Semi-Augustinianism

Pelagius (c. 350), educated in Eastern theology (i.e., Antiochian) with a thorough knowledge of the Greek fathers,<sup>4</sup> had a zeal which manifested itself in the ascetic legalism of monastery life and moral reform.<sup>5</sup> However, it was the theology behind the moral reform that aroused the attention of Augustine. First, Pelagius denied the doctrines of *tradux peccati* (transmitted sin) and *peccatum originis* (original sin), consisting of both inherited guilt and corruption.<sup>6</sup> To Pelagius, it is blasphemous to think

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313-38; John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study in the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 183-254; Rebecca H. Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996); Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 289-412; Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Christianity A.D. 311-590*, vol. 3 of *History of the Christian Church* (n.p., 1867; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 783-865; Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Charles E. Hay, *History of Doctrines in the Ancient Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 1:328-88; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1 of *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 278-331; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 344-75; Justo L. González, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 of *The Story of Christianity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 207-20; Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 134-43; Hans von Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 252-76; Hubertus R. Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church: A Comprehensive Introduction*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 386-424; Everett Ferguson, *Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1:276-85; J. H. Koopmans, "Augustine's First Contact with Pelagius and the Dating of the Condemnation of Caelestius at Carthage," *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (1954): 149-53; Elaine Hiesey Pagels, "Augustine on Nature and Human Nature," in *Saint Augustine the Bishop*, ed. Fannie LeMoine and Christopher Kleinhenz (New York: Garland, 1994), 77-108; Harry A. Wolfson, "Philosophical Implications of the Pelagian Controversy," in *Doctrines of Human Nature, Sin, and Salvation in the Early Church*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1993), 170-78; Eugène Portalié, *A Guide to the Thought of Saint Augustine*, trans. Ralph J. Bastian (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1960), 177-229.

<sup>4</sup>Many of the early church fathers in the East prior to Augustine emphasized free will and held to a synergistic view of grace which paved the way for Pelagianism. Schaff, *History*, 3:785-86; Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (n.p., 1937; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 127-39; Mathijs Lamberigts, "Pelagius and Pelagians," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan A. Harvey and David G. Hunter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 265; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 344-57; J. Patout Burns, "The Economy of Salvation: Two Patristic Traditions," *TS* 37 (1976): 598-619. However, Steve Lawson argues that nevertheless there are a number of early fathers who affirmed what would become known as an Augustinian view of grace. Steven J. Lawson, *Pillars of Grace* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2011).

<sup>5</sup>The legalism of Pelagius is revealed in his letter to Demetrias, where he states, "As often as I have to speak concerning moral improvement and the leading of a holy life, I am accustomed first to set forth the power and quality of human nature, and to show what it can accomplish." Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:xiv. Also see Schaff, *History*, 3:791. By 409 Pelagius had written a commentary on Paul's epistles and it is particularly his commentary on Romans that displays his concern for moral reform within the Roman church. See Pelagius, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Theodore De Bruyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). For other writings by Pelagius, see Robert F. Evans, *Four Letters of Pelagius* (New York: Seabury, 1968); Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:xii.

<sup>6</sup>Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:91; Collinge, "Introduction," 8-9.

that God would either transmit or impute Adam's guilt and corruption to his progeny. Instead, Adam was an isolated person not a representative of all mankind and his act of sin injured himself alone, merely setting a bad example for all who followed to imitate.<sup>7</sup> The corruption of the human race seen throughout history then is not due to hereditary guilt and corruption but rather to an evil habit acquired through the imitation of the wicked example of those who have come before.<sup>8</sup> Second, since no guilt or corruption is inherited by Adam's posterity the will is free, unhindered by a depraved nature.<sup>9</sup> The will is not enslaved to sin or in bondage to sin, but it is just as able after the fall as before to

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<sup>7</sup>Commenting on Rom 5:12, Pelagius explains, "They are not condemned, because the statement that all have sinned in Adam was not uttered on account of a sin contracted by reason of their origin through being born, but on account of the imitation of Adam's sin." Quoted by Augustine, *Nature and Grace*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 10. Augustine responds, "But in order to pass to sin, the free choice by which they harmed themselves is sufficient. To return to righteousness, however, they need a physician because they are not well; they need someone to bring them to life, because they are dead. This fellow says nothing at all about grace, as if they could heal themselves by their own wills alone, because they were able to harm themselves by the will alone." Ibid. To see how Pelagius interprets Rom 5:12 in its context, see *Pelagius's Commentary on Romans*, 92. Also see Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 365-66; Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:35-36; Collinge, "Introduction," 8-9; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 358-59; González, *Christianity*, 215.

<sup>8</sup>Evans, *Four Letters of Pelagius*, 97; J. Patout Burns, "Introduction," in *Theological Anthropology*, ed. and trans. J. Patout Burns, Sources of Early Christian Thought (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 5-6, 10-22; Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 227-28.

<sup>9</sup>Of first importance to Pelagius is the type of freedom man possesses. If Adam is to be a moral agent, then God must create man with innate reason and free will. Free will can never be lost lest man cease to be a moral agent. Pelagius distinguishes between three types of freedom, "We distinguish these three elements and arrange them in a definite order. In first place, we put the *ability*; in the second, *willing*; in the third, *being*. Ability is found in nature; willing in choice; being in action. The first element, namely, ability, is properly due to God who conferred it upon his creature. The two other elements, namely, willing and being, should be attributed to the human person, because they proceed from choice as their source." Augustine is quoting from Pelagius' *In Defense of Free Choice (Pro libero arbitrio)*. Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 1.5. Schaff refers to these three as: "power, will, and act (*posse, velle, and esse*)." Schaff, *History*, 3:810-11. Also see Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 356-57; Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:35-36; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 358. It is the last two, willing (choice) and being (action), that are of critical importance to Pelagius in the event of salvation. As Augustine states, willing and action for Pelagius are entirely ours, meaning that we are perfectly capable of equally turning away from evil or good without the help of God. Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, 1.5. Consequently, man possesses the power of contrary choice, or, to use modern language, a libertarian freedom. In other words, man is only free if he has the ability to choose or not choose good and evil equally. No factor, external (God) or internal (man's own motives), can determine the will so that it must choose one thing over another. The will itself retains the power to determine itself so that it is the will that is the "final cause of all its own choices and actions." Needham states, "For Pelagius, the freedom of the will meant that our wills are, so to speak, hanging in the air, suspended between good and evil, and capable of choosing between them by the will's own in-built power. In other words, Pelagius interpreted freedom to mean that the human will is always the final cause of all its own choices and actions. He acknowledged (sometimes very eloquently) the power of environment and habit to tempt and pervert the will; but in the last analysis, the will always retained an ultimate power of self-caused choice in both good and evil." N. R. Needham, *The Triumph of Grace* (London: Grace, 2000), 64. Also see Alister E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 377-78; Schaff, *History*, 3:802-04.

choose that which is good.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, as Bonner notes, since for Pelagius libertarian freedom is a “natural endowment which every creature has from God,” man “cannot lose his capacity for doing good.”<sup>11</sup> Pelagius believed free will to be proved from Scripture, for God gives commands to all people and these commands would not be given if man was morally incapable of obeying them.<sup>12</sup> Pelagius took offense at Augustine’s prayer, *Da quod iubes, et iube quod vis*,<sup>13</sup> because these words “undermine moral responsibility.”<sup>14</sup> God, in giving the law, assumes man has the ability to keep the law and merit salvation. Third, since man is not infected by the guilt or corruption of Adam’s sin and consequently man’s will retains its ability to equally choose good or evil, an assisting grace lacks necessity.<sup>15</sup> For Pelagius the will is not free if it is in need of God’s help.<sup>16</sup> As Evans states, for Pelagius “the grace of creation and the grace of redemption operate in such a way that human will is never moved irresistibly by any necessity emanating from

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<sup>10</sup>Schaff, *History*, 3:806, 808; McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 380; N. P. Williams, *The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin* (New York: Longmans, 1927), 341-42; M. Cleary, “Augustine, Affectivity and Transforming Grace,” *Theology* 93 (1990): 206; Ferguson, *Church History*, 1:280.

<sup>11</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 356. Also see Collinge, “Introduction,” 8.

<sup>12</sup>Pelagius explains in his *Letter to Demetrias*, “Instead of seeing the commands of our glorious King as a privilege, we cry out against God. In the scoffing laziness of our hearts, we say, ‘This is too hard, too difficult. We can’t do it. We are only human. We are hampered by the weakness of the flesh.’ What blind folly! What presumptuous blasphemy! We make out that the all-knowing God is guilty of a double ignorance – ignorant of His own creation, ignorant of His own commands. As if He had forgotten the human weakness of His own creatures, and laid upon us commands we cannot bear! And at the same time (God forgive us!), we ascribe unrighteousness to the Righteous One, cruelty to the Holy One: unrighteousness, by complaining that He has commanded the impossible; cruelty, by imagining that a person will be condemned for what he could not help. The result (O the blasphemy of it!) is that we think of God as seeking our punishment, not our salvation. No-one knows the extent of our strength better than the God Who gave it. He has not willed to command anything impossible, for He is righteous. He will not condemn people for what they could not help, for He is holy.” Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias*, in Rees, *Pelagius*, 16.2.

<sup>13</sup>“Give what you command; command what you will.” Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle, 1/1 of *Works*, 10.40. This phrase is also in idem, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, trans. Bruce Harbert, in *On Christian Belief* 1/8 of *Works*, 32. Also see Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:1; Evans, *Pelagius*, 82.

<sup>14</sup>Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 227. Also see Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 358-59.

<sup>15</sup>Gerald Bonner, “Pelagianism,” in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 422-24.

<sup>16</sup>Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1903), 5:199; McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 380.

the will of God, except the necessity that will be will and therefore free.”<sup>17</sup> The rejection of irresistible grace and necessity is evident in Pelagius’ interpretation of Romans 8:29-30, “Those he foreknew would believe he called. Now a call gathers together those who are willing, not those who are unwilling.”<sup>18</sup> Grace does not consist in a sovereign or efficacious work of the Spirit upon a depraved sinner, as it would for Augustine, but in a mere external *illuminatio* (illumination) or revelation (enlightenment) of (1) the law of God,<sup>19</sup> (2) creation, and (3) the example of Christ.<sup>20</sup> As Bonner observes, such “a definition of Grace is clearly not what the New Testament understands by the word, as Augustine was not slow to point out.”<sup>21</sup> Rees also notes,

Even when he attempted to safeguard his position by adding that God helps man by ‘the manifold and ineffable gift of heavenly grace,’ he seemed to his opponents to be thinking in terms of intellectual enlightenment rather than spiritual assistance. His whole teaching of grace was constructed around the central premise of the absolute freedom of man’s will when faced with a choice between good and evil, a freedom given to man by God but, once given, not subject to God’s interference.<sup>22</sup>

The contrast between Pelagius and Augustine on the issue of grace could not be greater. As McGrath observes, “For Pelagius, grace is *external and passive*, something outside us, whereas Augustine understands grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in

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<sup>17</sup>Evans, *Pelagius*, 121. Also see Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1:315. When grace is described by Pelagius it is used in three ways. First, grace may refer to the grace of creation which allows man, heathens included, to live perfectly or in sinlessness (*impeccantia*). Second, grace can refer to the law (*lex*). The grace of the law is that which instructs man, facilitating and guiding man to do that which is righteous. Third, grace may refer to Christ who gives us an example to follow. It is essential to recognize that the second use of grace as law means that “grace was given *secundum merita* (according to the merits of the rational spirit).” Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 5:202. In other words, the Pelagians believed that God gives grace to those who merit it. In short, grace is something that must be earned. Consequently, as Harnack observes, “the gospel is not different from that of the law, the former is in point of fact completely reduced to the level of the latter.” *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup>Pelagius, *Pelagius’s Commentary on Romans*, 112.

<sup>19</sup>“Caelestius was accused at Carthage in 411 of teaching that the Law had the same effect as the Gospel in introducing men into the kingdom of heaven.” Pelagius ran into the same problem at the Synod of Diospolis. Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 363.

<sup>20</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 362-65; Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:32-36; Evans, *Pelagius*, 111-14; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 359.

<sup>21</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 362.

<sup>22</sup>Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:34. Also see Collinge, “Introduction,” 8-9.

Christ within us, transforming us – something *internal and active*.”<sup>23</sup> In summary, salvation is monergistic for Pelagius but it is a *humanistic* monergism because God’s aid (*adjutorium*) is not fundamentally necessary or prevenient since man is able in and of himself to exercise works of righteousness that merit eternal life.<sup>24</sup> As Rees states, for Pelagius “man had the power to save himself,” which was essentially a way of “replacing grace by free will as the means of salvation.”<sup>25</sup>

The theology of Pelagius was adopted by Caelestius, who became one of Pelagius’ foremost advocates, as well as by Julian of Eclanum.<sup>26</sup> Both affirmed a “*human monergism*” which “assumes that the power of the human will is decisive in the experience of salvation.”<sup>27</sup> As Bonner observes, “Julian of Eclanum did not hesitate to speak of man as ‘emancipated from God’ by the possession of free will, while Caelestius

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<sup>23</sup>McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 383. Contra Lamberigts, who minimizes this difference by stating that Pelagius had a theology of grace, a statement that fails to recognize the vacuous definition of grace Pelagius provided. See Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagians,” 265.

<sup>24</sup>Robert Peterson and Michael Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 20-41.

<sup>25</sup>Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:15, 32. Pelagius states in his Letter to Demetrias, “It is by doing his will that we may merit his divine grace.” Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:92. See especially 1:129. Also see Cary, *Inner Grace*, 80.

<sup>26</sup>Augustine summarizes the views of Caelestius in *The Deeds of Pelagius*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 29-34. Also see Schaff, *History*, 3:793. On Caelestius and Julian and their relation to Pelagius, see Bonner, *St. Augustine of Hippo*, 312-93; idem, “Augustine and Pelagianism,” *Aug* 24 (1993): 27-47; idem, “Pelagianism and Augustine,” *Aug* 23 (1993): 33-51; idem, “Caelestius,” *Augustiana (L)* 1, 5/6 (1992): 693-98; idem, “Rufinus of Syria and African Pelagianism,” *Aug* 1 (1970): 31-47; idem, “How Pelagian was Pelagius?” *Studia Patristica* 9 (1966): 350-58; idem, “Pelagianism Reconsidered,” *SP* 27 (1993): 237-41; Peter Brown, “Pelagius and his Supporters: Aims and Environment,” *JTS* 19 (1968): 93-114; idem, “The Patrons of Pelagius,” *JTS* 21 (1970): 56-72; Drobner, *The Fathers of the Church*, 407-11; Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” 258-79; P. L. Barclift, “In Controversy with Saint Augustine: Julian of Eclanum on the Nature of Sin,” *RTAM* 58 (1991): 5-20; A. Bruckner, *Julian von Eclanum, sein Leben und seine Lehre: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Pelagianismus* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897); G. De Plinval, “Julien d’Eclane devant la Bible,” *RSR* 47 (1959): 345-66; G. Honnay, “Caelestius, discipulus Pelagii,” *Augustiana (L)* (1994): 271-302; Mathijs Lamberigts, “Julian of Aeclanum: A Plea for a Good Creator,” *Augustiana* 38 (1988): 5-24; idem, “Julien d’Eclane et Augustin d’Hippone: deux conceptions d’Adam,” *Augustiana* 40 (1996): 393-435; idem, “Augustine and Julian of Aeclanum on Zosimus,” *Augustiana* 40 (1990): 311-30; idem, “Julian of Aeclanum on Grace,” *SP* 27 (1996): 342-49; idem, “Recent Research into Pelagianism with Particular Emphasis on the Role of Julian of Aeclanum,” *Augustiana* 52 (2002): 175-98; Carol Scheppard, “The Transmission of Sin in the Seed: A Debate between Augustine of Hippo and Julian of Eclanum,” *Aug* 27 (1996): 97-106; J. Lössl, *Julian von Aeclanum* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001); Alister E. McGrath, “Divine Justice and Divine Equity in the Controversy between Augustine and Julian of Eclanum,” *DR* 101 (1983): 312-19; Michael R. Rackett, “What’s Wrong with Pelagianism: Augustine and Jerome on the Dangers of Pelagius and his Followers,” *Aug* 33 (2002): 223-37.

<sup>27</sup>Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 6n2. Also see Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” 272.

asserted that the will could not be free if it need the help of God, since each of us has it in his power either to refrain from acting.”<sup>28</sup> However, Pelagianism would be condemned by the Councils of Carthage (418), Mileve (418), and Ephesus (431),<sup>29</sup> though, as seen at Carthage, Augustine’s doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace were not affirmed either.<sup>30</sup>

Pelagianism, however, was not the only view Augustine battled. Semi-Pelagianism – represented by John Cassian,<sup>31</sup> Faustus of Riez,<sup>32</sup> Vincent of Lérins, Gennadius of Massilia, Arnobius, as well as the monks at Hadrumetum (Adrumetum) in Northern Africa and Southern Gaul<sup>33</sup> – would also pose a threat to Augustine’s view of grace, as it sought a *via media* between Augustine and Pelagius, arguing that while Pelagius was wrong in denying original sin Augustine also went too far in denying any freedom whatsoever to man’s will.<sup>34</sup> While man does need God’s universal grace due to

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<sup>28</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 361. Also see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 360-61.

<sup>29</sup>“The Canons of the Council of Carthage, A.D. 418,” in *Theological Anthropology*, 57-60. See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 117. Some want to question the condemnation of Pelagius and labeling him a heretic. For example, see Lamberigts, “Pelagius and Pelagianism,” 273; Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:22-23, 51. Such a move fails to understand how heretical Pelagius was.

<sup>30</sup>Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1:318.

<sup>31</sup>Dennison, “Augustine and Grace,” 47, observes how Cassian states in his *Conferences* 13.9 that “when God sees us inclined to will what is good, He meets, guides, and strengthens us” whereas Augustine states, “It is not then to be doubted that men’s wills cannot, so as to prevent His doing what he wills, withstand the will of God.” Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 45. See John Cassian, *The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers, 57 (New York: Newman, 1997), 13.9. Also see Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian: A Study in Primitive Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 110-36; A. M. C. Casiday, *Tradition and Theology in St. John Cassian*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72-118; Boniface Ramsey, “Cassian, John,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 133-35; Peter Munz, “John Cassian,” *JEH* 11 (1960): 14-20. Contra Donald Fairbairn, who tries to soften the synergism of Cassian in “Cassian, John (c. 360 – c. 435),” in *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, 115-16. For an extensive overview of Cassian, Faustus of Riez, and Vincent of Lérins, see Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1:319-27.

<sup>32</sup>T. A. Smith, “*De Gratia*”: *Faustus of Riez’s Treatise on Grace and Its Place in the History of Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); C. Tibiletti, “Libero arbitrio e grazia in Fausto di Riez,” *Augustinianum* 19 (1979): 259-85.

<sup>33</sup>Augustine wrote to the monks at Hadrumetum in his works *Grace and Free Choice* and *Rebuke and Grace*. Augustine wrote to the monks in Southern France (Gaul) in his works *The Predestination of the Saints* and *The Gift of Perseverance*. For details on these debates see Dennison, “Augustine and Grace,” 43-47; Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 403.

<sup>34</sup>Conrad Leyser, “Semi-Pelagianism,” in *Augustine through the Ages*, 761-65. C. Tibiletti, “Rassegni di studi e testi sui ‘semi-pelagianiani,’” *Augustinianum* 25 (1985): 507-22.

the crippling effect of sin (contra Pelagianism), man is not so corrupted by the fall that he cannot initiate salvation in the first place (contra Augustine). As Cassian states, “When he notices good will making an appearance in us, at once he enlightens and encourages it and spurs it on to salvation, giving increase to what he himself planted and saw arise from our own efforts.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while Pelagius taught a *humanistic* monergism and Augustine a *divine* monergism, the Semi-Pelagians taught a *human-initiated synergism*.<sup>36</sup> Man is able to take the first move towards God, cooperating with or resisting his grace.<sup>37</sup>

Though Semi-Pelagianism won victories in Gaul at the Synods of Arles (472) and Lyons (475), it was condemned by the Synod of Orange (529)<sup>38</sup> and yet Orange did not return completely to Augustinianism, refusing to accept irresistible grace, but rather, under the influence of Prosper of Aquitaine, endorsed what is today labeled Semi-Augustinianism, as did the Synod of Valence (529).<sup>39</sup> Semi-Augustinianism advocates a *God-initiated synergism*. While man is incapable of initiating salvation due to the bondage of his will, God provides a universal, prevenient grace, mitigating total depravity, enabling man to cooperate.<sup>40</sup> While God is credited with the initiation of

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<sup>35</sup>Cassian *The Conferences* 13.8. For a fuller description of the synergism of Cassian and Semi-Pelagianism, see Schaff, *History*, 3:861; Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 2:247; Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 1:370-72; R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 73-75.

<sup>36</sup>Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 21-40; Schaff, *History*, 3:858; Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 306. TeSelle, “Pelagius, Pelagianism,” 639; Dennison, “Augustine and Grace,” 46-47; Leyser, “Semi-Pelagianism,” 761-66; Roger E. Olson, *Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 283; Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 138.

<sup>37</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 350, 361-62; Collinge, “Introduction,” 190; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 370-71.

<sup>38</sup>“The Synod of Orange, A.D. 529,” in *Theological Anthropology*, 109-28. See David F. Wright, “Semi-Pelagianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 636; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 371-72.

<sup>39</sup>González, *Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>40</sup>Peterson and Williams helpfully summarize, “Any goodness or righteousness that humankind displays is the result of God’s grace working in them. But this should not be taken as evidence that the Synod of Orange affirmed Augustine’s gracious monergism. The synod softened the Augustinian teaching into a gracious synergism. First, as stated above, the synod did not endorse predestination. The canons explicitly reject predestination to damnation, but they are completely silent concerning predestination to redemption. Second, while the synod insisted that the initiation of faith begins with the work of grace, it suggested that human agency cooperates with the divine in order to produce redemption. This synergism is subtly but crucially different from that of the Semi-Pelagians. While both see redemption as the product of both divine grace and human effort, the Semi-Pelagians depict redemption as beginning with human agency. The Semi-Augustinian synergism of Orange reversed the sequence. Hence, a person’s contribution

salvation, ultimately man's will has the final say and determination. As will be seen in chapter 5, the synergism of Arminius would closely parallel Semi-Augustinianism.

### **Augustine and the *Causa Gratiae***

Augustine did not always hold to the doctrines of God's efficacious grace and man's pervasive depravity that he later became so famous for. In his treatises *On Free Will* and *The Happy Life* Augustine actually exalts the free will of man as that which is determinative in salvation. However, in his *Retractions*, Augustine would come to reject his early views.<sup>41</sup> Yet, when Augustine came to affirm sovereign grace, Pelagianism was not what first motivated him. Ten years prior to the controversy (c. 400) Augustine, reflecting on what Paul means in Romans 9, wrote *Confessions*, in which he exposes the depravity and utter inability of man's free will and exalts the sovereign grace of God, as evident in his prayer: *Da quod iubes, et iube quod vis.*<sup>42</sup> Augustine's affirmation of sovereign grace was truly a reflection upon the events of his own conversion in the garden for, as Schaff rightly concludes, "He teaches nothing which he has not felt."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Augustine was officially provoked when Pelagius' wrote *On Nature (De Natura)* and *On Free Will* "since in them he had too little to say about divine grace and too much about the human will."<sup>44</sup>

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to salvation is faithful response to the grace of God. Grace is prevenient here in that it precedes human response. . . . While the synod held that divine grace is necessary unto faith, its refusal to affirm the particularism of Augustine's doctrine of predestination seems to be an implicit affirmation of universal preceding grace. That is, universal repairing and enabling grace is given to all, but each person must obediently respond to the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in order to be saved." Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 38-39.

<sup>41</sup>Augustine, *The Happy Life*, trans. Ludwig Schopp (London: B. Herder, 1939); Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, ed. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1964). "Many of his earlier views-e.g., respecting the freedom of choice, and respecting faith as a work of man-he himself abandoned in his *Retractions*." Schaff, *History*, 3:817. Also see Joseph T. Lienhard, "Augustine on Grace: The Early Years," in *Saint Augustine the Bishop*, 189-91; Collinge, "Introduction," 10.

<sup>42</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.32. Also see Collinge, "Introduction," 11-12. Lane argues that Augustine held his view of grace as early as 397. Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 50-51. Also see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 357.

<sup>43</sup>Schaff, *History*, 3:816. Also see Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 357-58.

<sup>44</sup>Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:9. It should be noted that Caelestius was the first target in Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings and Augustine would respond to Pelagius for the first time in 415 with *On Nature and Grace*.

First, contrary to Pelagius, Augustine, on the basis of passages like Psalm 51, Ephesians 2:1-3, John 3:3-5, and especially Romans 5:12,<sup>45</sup> affirmed the doctrine of original sin as a universal reality making all of mankind a *massa peccati* (mass of sin) deserving damnation.<sup>46</sup> When Adam sinned, via pride (*superbia*), he brought all of his progeny from a *status integritatis* (state of integrity) to a *status corruptionis* (state of sin). Besides inheriting *originalis reatus* (original guilt), Adam's progeny inherited a corrupt and depraved nature, leading Augustine to say with Paul "There is none who seeks after God" (Rom 3:11).<sup>47</sup> Augustine, reading Paul, argues that the corruption inherited from Adam is pervasive in nature, meaning that every aspect of man (will, mind, affections, etc.) is infected by sin so that no part of him escapes sin's pollution.<sup>48</sup>

Second, one of the consequences of the fall and the transmission of corruption is the captivity of the will. The will, while previously able to choose good (meaning sin was only a *possibility* not a necessity), after the fall finds itself enslaved to sin, transgressing out of *necessity*. While before the fall the will of man possessed the *posse peccare* (the ability to sin) and the *posse non peccare* (the ability not to sin), after the fall the will of man is *non posse non peccare* (not able not to sin).<sup>49</sup> Consequently, though

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<sup>45</sup>"How did we sin in Adam? *Omnes enim fuimus in illo uno, quando omnes fuimus ille unus* – 'In that one man were we all, when we were all that one man.'" Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 371. Bonner goes on to observe that though Augustine (following Jerome's Vulgate) mistranslated Paul in Rom 5:12 as saying *in quo omnes peccaverunt* (in whom all sinned) rather than as the Greek read "because all sinned" (*quia* or *propter quod* in Latin), nevertheless, Augustine's theory of original sin "does not depend upon the meaning of a single verse from Romans, however important it might appear." *Ibid.*, 374. Contra Hill who says Augustine's doctrine of original sin is not based on Scripture but due to his Platonism and Manichaeism. Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 2003), 89-90.

<sup>46</sup>For a more extensive look at Augustine's reliance on Romans, see Paula F. Landes, "Introduction," in *Augustine on Romans*, ed. Paula F. Landes (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982), i-xvi; William S. Babcock, "Augustine's Interpretation of Romans, A.D. 394-396," *Aug 10* (1979): 55-74.

<sup>47</sup>Augustine, *Marriage and Desire*, in *Answer to the Pelagians II*, 2.47; *idem*, *Nature and Grace*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 21; *idem*, *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 1.10.

<sup>48</sup>Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 368-73; González, *Christianity*, 1:214; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 361-66. For an extensive study of Augustine's doctrine of original sin, see Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987); James Wetzel, "Sin," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 801.

<sup>49</sup>The following distinctions can be seen in Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 31-33. Three other categories are noteworthy: After the fall man has the *non posse non mori* (the inability not to die) whereas before the fall man had both the *posse mori* (ability to die) and the *posse*

before the fall man possessed an inclination for good, after the fall man's will is inclined towards evil, making sin its master.<sup>50</sup> Augustine, however, does not mean that as a result of the fall man no longer has moral agency for that would mitigate culpability. On the contrary, the issue is not whether or not man has moral agency but whether moral agency after the fall is good or evil. Augustine explains,

We, however, always have free will, but it is not always good. For it is either free from righteousness, when it is enslaved to sin, and then it is evil, or it is free from sin when it is enslaved to righteousness, and then it is good. But the grace of God is always good, and this grace makes a human being who first had an evil will to have a good will.<sup>51</sup>

It could be objected, however, that if man is a slave to sin, there can be no freedom of the will for he does not sin voluntarily. However, Augustine rightly argues that this bondage is a *willful* bondage to sin (*servum arbitrium*). Yes, without the *adiutorium Dei* the sinner is unable to will righteousness and therefore he sins necessarily. However, it is not the case that the sinner wants to will righteousness and God will not let him. Rather, the sinner does not desire or want to will righteousness at all. Therefore, the sinner is both free and a slave simultaneously. He is free in the sense that he sins willfully according to the desires of his flesh. However, his sinful desires stem from a corrupt nature and therefore he sins out of necessity. Augustine writes, "For he is freely in bondage who does with pleasure the will of his master. Accordingly, he who is the servant of sin is free to sin. And hence he will not be free to do right, until, being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness."<sup>52</sup> Augustine goes on to explain, from John 8:36 and Ephesians 2:8, that it is only by God's saving grace that man can be set free from his

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*non mori* (ability not to die). Burns, "Introduction," 14-15; Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1:298-99; González, *Christianity*, 214; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 365-66.

<sup>50</sup>On the bondage of the will, see Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 1/8 of *Works*, 104-06; idem, *On Human Perfection*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 9. Also see Campenhausen, *The Fathers of the Church*, 261.

<sup>51</sup>Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 31. Also see Bonner, *St. Augustine*, 383-85; Lane, *Christian Thought*, 51.

<sup>52</sup>Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, in *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York: Random, 1948), 1:675.

slavery to sin and instead become, as Paul says, a slave to righteousness. For Augustine the sinner possesses a *liberum arbitrium captivatum* (captive free will) and is in need of a grace that liberates, resulting in a *liberum arbitrium liberatum* (liberated free will).<sup>53</sup>

Grace does not abolish the will but establishes it (John 8:24-26; 2 Cor 3:17; Gal 5:1).<sup>54</sup>

Third, Augustine not only taught that grace is necessary but that it is both particular and efficacious. God does not bestow his special, saving grace upon all of mankind and wait to see if man will cooperate with it (i.e., synergism), but God works upon his elect in an irresistible manner, giving the sinner a new heart and a renewed will so that he *will* respond in faith and repentance (i.e., monergism). Therefore, it is God's grace which causes and effects man's will to respond in faith, rather than man's will which causes and effects God's grace.<sup>55</sup> Irresistible grace is the natural consequence of an

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<sup>53</sup>Augustine, *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, in *Answer to the Pelagians II*, 1.9. Augustine's understanding of the will is not limited to his anti-Pelagian writings but can be found in a variety of other writings, which include Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), 5.10; 14.6; idem, *Enchiridion*, 30, 104-106.

<sup>54</sup>McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 379, 380. In my interpretation of Augustine, it appears that the early Augustine affirmed what we today title libertarian freedom while the later Augustine affirmed compatibilist freedom. On Augustine's articulation of free will (as well as the disagreement among scholars as to whether Augustine was a compatibilist or libertarian), see Rees, *Pelagius*, 1:42-44; Cary, *Inner Grace*, 33-128; Brian E. Daley, "Making a Human Will Divine: Augustine and Maximus on Christ and Human Salvation," in *Orthodox Readings of Augustine*, ed. George E. Demacopoulos and Aristotle Papanikolaou (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 101-26; Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007); Johannes Brachtendorf, "Augustine's Notion of Freedom: Deterministic, Libertarian, or Compatibilistic?" *Aug* 38 (2007): 219-31; Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De Libero Arbitrio* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Sarah Byers, "The Meaning of *Voluntas* in Augustine," *Aug* 37 (2006): 171-89; Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 198-237; Katherin A. Rogers, "Augustine's Compatibilism," *RS* 40 (2004): 415-35; Lynne Rudder Baker, "Why Christians Should Not Be Libertarians: An Augustinian Challenge," *FP* 20 (2003):460-78; Sharon M. Kaye and Paul Thomson, *On Augustine* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001), 9-26; Eleonore Stump, "Augustine on Free Will," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kreetzmann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 124-47; Ilham Dilman, *Free Will: An Historical and Philogophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 71-88; Christopher Kirwan, *Augustine* (London: Routledge, 2001), 82-128; William S. Babcock, "Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency," *JRE*, 16 (1988): 28-55; James Wetzel, "The Recovery of Free Agency in the Theology of St. Augustine," *HTR* 80 (1987): 101-25; Chadwick, *Augustine*, 38-43; William L. Craig, "Augustine on Foreknowledge and Free Will," *Aug* 15 (1984): 41-63; John M. Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," *JTS* 20 (1969): 420-47; Frederick Sontag, "Augustine's Metaphysics and Free Will," *HTR* 60 (1967): 297-306.

<sup>55</sup>See Augustine, *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 2.18, 21-22, 23; 4:14; idem, *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 1.27, 34; idem, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 13, 15, 39, 41; idem, *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 2.5, 30; idem, *Enchiridion*, 31-32; idem, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 52; idem, *On Grace and Free Choice*, 17, 29, 32-33, 40. Also see Chadwick, *The Early Church*, 232.

omnipotent Savior. An omnipotent God cannot have his will defeated.

One should, therefore, have no doubt that human wills cannot resist the will of God who in heaven and on earth has done everything he willed and who has brought about even those things which are in the future. Human wills cannot resist his will so that he does not do what he wills, since he does what he wills and when he wills even with the very wills of human beings.<sup>56</sup>

God has “omnipotent power over human hearts to turn them where he pleased.”<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, *gratia irresistibilis* does not mean that man does not resist God, but rather it means that when God so chooses to act upon his elect he overcomes all of man’s resistance.<sup>58</sup> Irresistible grace, says Augustine in *The Predestination of the Saints*, is grounded in the biblical distinction between a gospel call and an effectual call.

God, after all, calls his many predestined children in order to make them members of his predestined only Son, not by that calling by which they too were called who refused to come to the wedding. By that calling, of course, the Jews were also called for whom Christ crucified is a scandal as well as the nations for whom Christ crucified is folly. But he calls the predestined by that calling which the apostle specified when he said that he preached to these who were called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24). For he said, But to those who have been called (1 Cor 1:24), in order to show that those others were not called. He knew, after all, that there is a special calling which is certain for those who have been called according to God’s plan whom he foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:28-29). Referring to that calling, he said, Not on the basis of works, but because of the one who calls, it was said to him, “The older will serve the younger” (Rom 9:12.13). Did he say, “Not on the basis of works, but because of the one who believes”? He, of course, took this too away from human beings in order that he might ascribe everything to God. He, therefore, said, But because of the one who calls, not by just any calling, but by that calling by which one becomes a believer.<sup>59</sup>

Augustine demonstrates from texts like 1 Corinthians 1:24 and Romans 8:28-29 that there are two distinct callings, one universal and the other particular. The former is the gospel

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<sup>56</sup>Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 45. Also see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrine*, 367-68.

<sup>57</sup>Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 45.

<sup>58</sup>Irresistible grace for Augustine “does not mean to intimate that divine grace forces the will, contrary to the nature of man as a free agent, but rather that it so changes the will that man voluntarily chooses that which is good. The will of man is renewed and thus restored to its true freedom.” Berkhof, *History*, 135. Also see González, *Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>59</sup>Augustine goes on to prove these two different callings from Romans 11:25-29 in *The Predestination of the Saints*, 32-33.

call which many people reject while the latter is efficacious, so that those whom the Father draws always come to Jesus. Citing John 6:45, Augustine explains, “But everyone who has learned from the Father not only has the possibility of coming, but actually comes!”<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere Augustine again explains how God’s special calling is unfailing,

What does, *Everyone who has heard my Father and has learned comes to me*, mean but that there is no one who has heard my Father and has learned who does not come to me? If everyone who has heard my Father and has learned comes, then everyone who does not come has not heard my Father or has not learned. For, if one had heard and had learned, he would come. No one, after all, has heard and learned and has not come, but *everyone*, as the Truth said, *who has heard my Father and has learned comes*.<sup>61</sup>

As a consequence of God’s special call, the sinner’s heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh by the power of the Spirit (Ezek 11:19-20; 36:22-27).<sup>62</sup> Only then can the sinner begin to love God. In *The Spirit and the Letter* Augustine writes,

For free choice is capable only of sinning, if the way of truth remains hidden. And when what we should do and the goal we should strive for begins to be clear, unless we find delight in it and love it, we do not act, do not begin, do not live good lives. But so that we may love it, the love of God is poured out in our hearts, not by free choice which comes from ourselves, but by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rom 5:5).<sup>63</sup>

It is the sovereign act of the Spirit that causes the sinner to experience new affections for Christ, not man’s free choice. As Augustine explains in *Rebuke and Grace*,

For we must understand the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. It alone sets human beings free from evil, and without it they do nothing good whether in thinking, in willing and loving, or in acting. Grace not merely teaches them so that they know what they should do, but also grants that they do with love what they

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<sup>60</sup> Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, 1.27. Also see *On the Predestination of the Saints*, 13. Early on in 397 Augustine wrote *Ad Simplicianum*, where he argues for a *vocatio congrua* (congruous call) “which held that what distinguished the elect is that God issued a call and manipulated external circumstances in a way that was so adopted to their prior dispositions that they would respond to their call by their own free will.” However, later he changed his mind arguing that “he sees conversion, the beginning of faith, as the result of the Holy Spirit working upon the human will from within.” Collinge, “Introduction,” 182 (cf. 11). Also see J. P. Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980), 158.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, 13. Also idem, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, 1.14-15, 1.19-22.

<sup>62</sup> “For a heart of stone itself signifies nothing but a will which is most hard and utterly inflexible in opposition to God. For, where a good will is already present, there is, of course, no longer a heart of stone.” Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice*, 29. Also see *The Predestination of the Saints*, 40-43.

<sup>63</sup> Augustine, *The Spirit and Letter*, 5.

know.<sup>64</sup>

Those who have been awakened to new life by efficacious grace have a will that has been liberated, renewed, and reoriented to desire God rather than sin.<sup>65</sup> Augustine appeals to passages such as 1 Corinthians 4:7, Proverbs 8:35, Psalm 37:23, Philippians 2:13, and especially Romans 9:16 to demonstrate that though our wills are evil God grants us a good will, not on the basis of anything in us but because of his own good pleasure.<sup>66</sup> Augustine writes, “God does not grant His mercy to some people because they know Him, but in order that they may know Him.”<sup>67</sup>

Fourth, if it is God who must liberate the will from its bondage to sin, so also it is God who must grant man faith to believe.<sup>68</sup> According to Augustine, Scripture teaches that faith is *gratia dei gratuita* (a gift from God) rather than a product of man’s autonomous will. “Faith, then, both in its beginning and in its completeness, is a gift of God, and let absolutely no one who does not want to be opposed to the perfectly clear sacred writings deny that this gift is given to some and not given to others.”<sup>69</sup> Augustine appeals to passages like Ephesians 1:13-16, 2:8, Philippians 1:28-29, and 1 Thessalonians 2:13 to show that the *initium fidei* (beginning of faith) is all of God. Moreover, Augustine is clear that faith is not merely offered as a gift but God actually works faith within. In other words, as Carey observes, for Augustine when God calls us to faith, he does not merely “make faith possible” but actually makes sure we will come to faith without fail.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 3. Also see Augustine, *The Gift of Perseverance*, in *Answer to the Pelagians IV*, 53; idem, *Grace and Free Choice*, 31, 32, 41; idem, *Rebuke and Grace*, 35. Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 404.

<sup>65</sup>Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 405.

<sup>66</sup>Augustine, *The Punishment and Forgiveness of Sins*, in *Answer to the Pelagians I*, 2.27-30; idem, *Enchiridion*, 32.

<sup>67</sup>Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 11. Elsewhere Augustine states, “human beings do nothing good that God does not make them do.” *Answer to the Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 2.21. Likewise, idem, *Grace and Free Choice*, 32.

<sup>68</sup>On faith as a gift see Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter*, 54, 57-60. Also see Cary, *Inner Grace*, 33.

<sup>69</sup>Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice*, 30. Also see Augustine, *The Predestination of the Saints*, 16.

<sup>70</sup>Cary, *Inner Grace*, 54.

As Augustine states, “the will itself is something God works [*operatur*] in us.”<sup>71</sup>

Therefore, Carey is right to conclude that grace is not merely a “*necessary precondition* of faith but a *sufficient cause* of it . . . not only prevenient but *efficacious* in itself.”<sup>72</sup>

God *is* in control of our wills, because God can always choose to call us in such a way that we actually do choose to turn to him in faith. That is more than just saying faith is a gift of God. It means that when God chooses to give this gift to you, he can also make sure that you freely and willingly receive it. This is the sort of calling to which the Calvinist tradition later gives the name, “the effectual call.”<sup>73</sup>

Interpreting John 6:45, Augustine argues that “God’s grace gives us actualities, not mere possibilities.” Grace “does not simply make faith possible; it causes us to believe.”<sup>74</sup> And yet, coercion is no where in view, but an “ineffable sweetness” (1 Cor 3:7).<sup>75</sup>

Fifth, in *Grace and Free Choice* Augustine distinguishes between *operative* and *co-operative* grace.<sup>76</sup> Operative grace is that grace which *effectually* acts upon the will in the beginning in order to change the sinner’s will from evil to good. As Burns states, for Augustine operative grace “produces human willing and consent.”<sup>77</sup> Co-operative grace, by contrast, is that grace which acts *after* man has been made alive by operative grace.<sup>78</sup> To use contemporary theological terms, while operative grace works in *regeneration*, co-operative grace works in *sanctification*. In regeneration God operates monergistically to bring the sinner to new life, but once the sinner is a believer God co-

<sup>71</sup>Augustine, *Revisions*, in *Works*, 1:3.3. Also see Cary, *Inner Grace*, 54.

<sup>72</sup>Emphasis added. Cary, *Inner Grace*, 55.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 56. Also see 87-88, 95.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>75</sup>Augustine, *The Grace of Christ and Original Sin*, 1.14. Also see Cary, *Inner Grace*, 96. Turretin would later pick up this same mystery calling effectual grace a display of divine sweetness and omnipotence. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:521, 524-25.

<sup>76</sup>Appealing to texts like Phil 1:6 Augustine states, “He works, therefore, without us so that we will, but when we will and will so that we do the action, he works along with us.” Augustine, *Grace and Free Choice*, 33. Also see Berkhof, *History*, 135-36; Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 73.

<sup>77</sup>J. Patout Burns, *The Development of Augustine’s Doctrine of Operative Grace* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1980), 158. Also see Lane, *Christian Thought*, 51.

<sup>78</sup>Lane, *Christian Thought*, 51.

operates with man's will in good works, though God's grace remains primary. Such a distinction is significant in Augustine's polemic against the Semi-Pelagians because while they affirmed the necessity of grace, such grace was always co-operative (synergistic) and never operative (monergistic). For the Semi-Pelagian, the grace that awakens is dependent upon man's will so that it is always synergistic.

To conclude, the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian controversies turn upon one question, namely, is redemption the work of God or the work of man? Stated otherwise, does grace depend upon the will of man or does the will of man depend upon grace?<sup>79</sup> Schaff's answer is incisive:

The soul of the Pelagian system is human freedom; the soul of the Augustinian is divine grace. Pelagius starts from the natural man, and works up, by his own exertions, to righteousness and holiness. Augustine despairs of the moral sufficiency of man, and derives the new life and all the power for good from the creative grace of God. The one system proceeds from the liberty of choice to legalistic piety; the other from the bondage of sin to the evangelical liberty of the children of God. . . . The former makes regeneration and conversion a gradual process of the strengthening and perfecting of human virtue; the latter makes it a complete transformation, in which the old disappears and all becomes new. The one loves to admire the dignity and strength of man; the other loses itself in adoration of the glory and omnipotence of God. The one flatters natural pride, the other is a gospel for penitent publicans and sinners. Pelagianism begins with self-exaltation and ends with the sense of self-deception and impotency. Augustinianism casts man first into the dust of humiliation and despair, in order to lift him on the wings of grace to supernatural strength, and leads him through the hell of self-knowledge up to the heaven of the knowledge of God.<sup>80</sup>

For Augustine, if grace is not necessary, sufficient, and efficacious, God is robbed of his glory and man given the credit in salvation. Therefore, God's grace must always precede the will of man to believe in Christ.<sup>81</sup> Berkhof then is correct to conclude, "Augustine's doctrine of regeneration is entirely monergistic."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Schaff, *History*, 3:787-88. Also see Warfield, *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*, 291.

<sup>80</sup>Schaff, *History*, 3:787-88.

<sup>81</sup>As Burns states, "The Augustinian system gives God exclusive credit for beginning and completing the process of salvation." Burns, "Introduction," 16.

<sup>82</sup>Berkhof, *History*, 135. Also see Larry D. Sharp, "The Doctrines of Grace in Calvin and Augustine," *EQ* 52 (1980): 84. Contra Burns who says Augustine "allowed that humans must respond by cooperating with God's gift." John Bussanich, "*Gratia et libero arbitrio, De*," in *Augustine through the Ages*, 394.

## The Reformation

Augustine's understanding of sin and grace would be influential, infiltrating the theology of Prosper of Aquitaine,<sup>83</sup> Fulgentius of Ruspe, Avitus of Vienne, and Caesarius of Arles, even being restated in works like the *Indiculus* (c. 435-442).<sup>84</sup> However, by others "Augustine was reinterpreted, so that theologians came to call themselves 'Augustinian' while rejecting his views on irresistible grace and predestination."<sup>85</sup> To make matters worse, Semi-Pelagianism, despite being condemned by the Council of Orange, continued to spread during the medieval period.<sup>86</sup>

## The Late Medieval Background

Despite Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings, the medieval era was anything but uniform. At least two scholastic schools of thought emerged in the late medieval period, one being the *via moderna* and the other the *schola Augustiniana moderna*. The *via moderna*, represented by William of Ockham, Pierre d'Ailly, Robert Holcot, and Gabriel Biel, held an optimistic view of human ability, arguing that man is able to do everything

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<sup>83</sup>Prosper, however, would soften Augustine's views considerably. See Prosper, *Grace and Free Will*, vol. 7 of *The Fathers of the Church*, ed. Joseph Deferrari, trans. J. Reginald O'Donnell (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1947) 1.5; Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1:318-31.

<sup>84</sup>Needham notes that the *Indiculus* (catalogue) was probably edited by Prosper of Aquitaine and it summarized Augustine's view of sin and grace. Needham, *The Triumph of Grace*, 22-23.

<sup>85</sup>González, *Christianity*, 1:215.

<sup>86</sup>Since the focus of this chapter is on the Reformed tradition, I have chosen to bypass the early Medieval era. This does not mean that the monergism-synergism debate did not continue after Augustine (see Gregory the Great, Gottschalk, Councils of Quiercy and Valence, Anselm, Aquinas, Ockham, etc.), but only that I have chosen to focus very briefly on the late medieval ages due to the immediate context it provides to Reformers like Calvin. On the monergism-synergism debate during the Middle Ages one should consult Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham* (London: Merlin, 1959); Dennis E. Nineham, "Gottschalk of Orbais: Reactionary or Precursor of the Reformation?" *JEH* 40 (1989): 1-18; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967); Karlfried Froehlich, "Justification Language and Grace: The Charge of Pelagianism in the Middle Ages," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Elsie Anne McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 21-47; Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven: Yale, 1980), 1-222; Willemien Otten, "Carolingian Theology," in *The Medieval Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Medieval Period*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 76-80; Marcia L. Colish, "Peter Lombard," in *Medieval Theologians*, 172-79; Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 140-46; Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)*, vol. 3 of *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 80-157; Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 2:114-23; 158-61, 197, 207-08.

needed to be right with God.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, represented by Thomas Bradwardine, Gregory of Rimini, and Hugolino of Orvieto, held a pessimistic view of man's ability, arguing, similar to Augustine, that man can do nothing apart from grace. As Ozment and McGrath explain, the debate between these schools was a replay of the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine.<sup>88</sup> The position of the *via moderna* can be summarized by the slogan *facere quod in se est*, meaning "doing what lies within you" or "doing your best." In other words, the demands of God's covenant were that man is to do his best and when he does God is obligated to accept his work as sufficient for eternal life. Stated otherwise, *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam* ("God will not deny grace to anyone who does what lies within them."). Though debated, McGrath argues that the *via moderna* was a return to Pelagianism, for both "assert that men and women are accepted on the basis of their own efforts and achievements."<sup>89</sup> The only difference, however, is that the *via moderna* was using a more sophisticated covenantal scheme to promote its Pelagianism.<sup>90</sup> In contrast, the *schola Augustiniana moderna* reacted strongly to the *via moderna*, especially as it took root at the University of Oxford, Merton College. Bradwardine ignited the backlash with his book *De causa Dei contra Pelagium (The case of God against Pelagius)*, in which he attacked the *via moderna* as

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<sup>87</sup>David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 61-62; Alister McGrath, *Intellectual Origins of the European Reformation* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 73-74, 90-92, 178. Take Ockham for example, "Ockham argued that one could perform works acceptable to God simply by doing the best one could with one's natural moral ability (*ex puris naturalibus*)."<sup>89</sup> Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 40 (cf. 41, 234-37). Also see Gordon Leff, *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 293-95; 207; Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 207.

<sup>88</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 72; idem, *Intellectual Origins*, 104-105; Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 40-42.

<sup>89</sup>McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 75. Also idem, *Intellectual Origins*, 26-27, 104-05; Stephen Lahey, "Wyclif and Lollardy," in *The Medieval Theologians*, 334-35. Others have argued that a pure Pelagianism during the Middle Ages did not exist but only a Neo-Pelagianism or Semi-Pelagianism. See Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 123-41; Arthur Landgraaf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, vol. 1.1 of *Die Gnadenlehre* (Regensburg: n.p., 1952), 238-302.

<sup>90</sup>Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 62.

modern day Pelagianism and argued for a return to Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings.<sup>91</sup> Bradwardine's arguments would be reiterated by John Wycliffe (1328-84) in England but it would be Gregory of Rimini, a member of the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine, at the University of Paris who would be responsible for an "Augustinian renaissance."<sup>92</sup> As McGrath explains, "Gregory developed a soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, which reflected the influence of Augustine. We find an emphasis on the need for grace, on the fallenness and sinfulness of humanity, on the divine initiative in justification and on divine predestination. Salvation is understood to be *totally* a work of God, from its beginning to its end."<sup>93</sup>

In spite of the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, the *via moderna* would have an enormous influence as the church became characterized by a Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism which relied heavily on a sacramental theology of merit. As Ferguson observes, "The work of the Spirit was thus enclosed with the administration of the seven

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<sup>91</sup>Thomas Bradwardine, *De Causa Dei*, ed. Henry Savile (Frankfurt: Gruyter, 1964), 1.42. Also see Gordon Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians: A Study of His "De Causa Dei" and Its Opponents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 69; Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 2:189; Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 151-64; McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 57-60; Jaroslav Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)*, vol. 4 of *The Christian Tradition* (1984), 32.

<sup>92</sup>Heiko A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe*, trans. D. Martin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 70-71; idem, *Forerunners of the Reformation*, 151-64. Trapp calls Gregory of Rimini (d. 1358) "the first Augustinian of Augustine." Damasus Trapp, "Augustinian Theology of the Fourteenth Century," *Augustiniana* 6 (1956), 181. Rimini, says Frank James III, would take Augustine's predestinarianism to its logical extreme (i.e., double predestination) and would have an enormous influence on Peter Martyr Vermigli. Frank A. James III, "Peter Martyr Vermigli," in *The Reformation Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 205. On Rimini's Augustinian anthropology see John P. Donnelley, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Frank A. James III, *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Predestination: The Augustinian Inheritance of an Italian Reformer* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); idem, "Peter Martyr Vermigli: At the Crossroads of Late Medieval Scholasticism, Christian Humanism and Resurgent Augustinianism," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 62-78. Whether Rimini was influential upon Luther and Calvin is debated. See Heiko A. Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 40-88; Alister E. McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought: A Study in Late Medieval Influence upon Calvin's Theological Development," *ARH* 77 (1986): 58-78.

<sup>93</sup>McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 77. Also see Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 197; Robert Spieler, "Luther and Gregory of Rimini," *LQ* 5 (1953): 160; Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 2:187; Frank A. James, "A Late Medieval Parallel in Reformation Thought: Gemina Praedestinatio in Gregory of Rimini and Peter Martyr Vermigli," in *Via Augustini: Augustine in the Later Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Heiko A. Oberman and Frank A. James (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 157-88; Gordon Leff, *Gregory of Rimini: Tradition and Innovation in Fourteenth Century Thought* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1961).

sacraments. Such sacramentalism produced a mechanism which, certainly from the Reformation's perspective, denied the sovereign work of the Spirit which was not dependent on the administration of the rites of the church."<sup>94</sup> Likewise, Berkhof explains that this sacramentalism supplanted "the irresistible grace of predestination" and led the Catholic Church "in the direction of Semi-Pelagianism, which had long before secured a rather sure footing in the East."<sup>95</sup> By the late Middle Ages, as McGrath argues, it "was widely held that salvation was something that could be earned by good works, which included fulfilling the moral law and observing a vast range of ecclesiastical rules."<sup>96</sup> Consequently, though there were exceptions, "popular Pelagianism was rampant" and pure soteriological Augustinianism was lost.<sup>97</sup> However, with the Reformation would come a return to an Augustinian soteriology, with an emphasis on the efficacy of grace and the sovereignty of God in salvation.<sup>98</sup>

### The Reformers

The Reformers by no means agreed with everything Augustine wrote, as is evident in aspects of Augustine's doctrine of justification. However, as Paul Helm notes, Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings were "a rich resource for the Reformers in

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<sup>94</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1996), 94.

<sup>95</sup>Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 138-39. However, even on the eve of the Reformation there were monergists like William Tyndale though the minority voice. See James Edward McGoldrick, "Was William Tyndale a Synergist?" *WTJ* 44 (1982): 58-70.

<sup>96</sup>McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 386.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 387. For exceptions to popular Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, see Lawson, *Pillars of Grace*, 255-392.

<sup>98</sup>By "Augustinian soteriology" I am referring to Augustine's understanding of God's sovereignty in predestination and effectual calling. I am not referring to Augustine's understanding of justification which would be elaborated upon in the medieval period, with which the Reformers would take issue. See Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 95; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); *idem*, *Studies in Doctrine*, 388-96; *idem*, *Intellectual Origins*, 32-122; *idem*, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 67-94; Pelikan, *Reformation of Church and Dogma*, 127-82; Wilhelm Dantine, *The Justification of the Ungodly* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968); Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith – A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982). For the Reformers's (Calvin in particular) disagreement with Augustine on justification, see Paul Helm, *Calvin at the Centre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196-226.

establishing their views of the ‘servitude’ of the human will and the freeness and power of divine grace.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, Childs Robinson writes, “On account of its rediscovery of the doctrines of grace, the Reformation has been hailed as a revival of Augustinianism. . . . Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Knox – all echo Augustine’s conviction that grace does not find us willing; it makes us willing.”<sup>100</sup> For example, Martin Luther, who was immersed into the theology of the *via moderna* at the University of Erfurt (1501-1505) and again at the Augustinian monastery (1505), not only countered the Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism of the *via moderna*<sup>101</sup> with his biblical understanding (cf. Rom 1:17) of the *iustitia Dei* (initially aroused by his burning question *Wie kriege ich einen gnädigen Gott?*), but his 1525 *De servo arbitrio* (*Bondage of the Will*)<sup>102</sup> against Erasmus’ 1524 *De libero arbitrio* (*Diatribes on Free Will*; cf. *Hyperaspistes I, II*) defended an Augustinian<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 202.

<sup>100</sup>Robinson goes on to note that for the Reformers, contra the Semi-Pelagians, the return to Augustinianism meant that in the *ordo salutis* regeneration precedes faith and repentance. Childs Robinson, *The Reformation: A Rediscovery of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 8. Also see Carl R. Trueman, “Calvin and Reformed Orthodoxy,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 476. Oberman, however, challenges the thesis hinted at by Robinson that Augustine’s doctrine of grace was lost until the Reformation. Oberman, *Forerunners*, 131.

<sup>101</sup>On Luther’s reaction to the *via moderna*, see Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 233-37; Heiko A. Oberman, *The Two Reformations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 21-43; idem, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications*, trans. Andrew Colin Gow (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 91-115; idem, “*Facientibus Quod in se est Deus non Denegat Gratiam*: Robert Holcot O. P. and the Beginnings of Luther’s Theology,” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Steven E. Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1971), 119-41; Paul Vignaux, “On Luther and Ockham,” trans. Janet Coleman, in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, 107-18; Steven E. Ozment, “*Homo Viator*. Luther and Late Medieval Theology,” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, 142-54; Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 114.

<sup>102</sup>Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, vol. 33 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957). Also see Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 141-60; E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson, eds., *Luther and Erasmus on Free Will and Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 1-34. For Erasmus, see *A Discussion of Free Will*, trans. Peter MacCardle, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 76: 1-89; idem, *Hyperaspistes 1*, trans. Clarence H. Miller, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 76:91-297; idem, *Hyperaspistes 2*, trans. Clarence H. Miller, ed. Charles Trinkaus, in *Collected Works of Erasmus*, 77:1-751.

<sup>103</sup>Luther also found an ally in Gregory of Rimini, whom he called *meinen lieben Meister* (my beloved Master). Luther said all, except for Gregory, were “worse than Pelagians.” Martin Luther, *Resolutiones Lutherianae, Luthers Werke: Weimar Ausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1884), 2:394. Also see Reinhold Seeberg, “Gregori von Rimini,” in *Realenzyklopaedie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 17, ed. A. Hauck (Leipzig: Hinrich’sche Buchhandlung, 1904), s.v. Also see the influence Johannes von Staupitz had on Luther in Richard Muller, “Predestination,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3:332. However, later Lutherans did not always side with Luther, but instead affirmed synergism against the Calvinists. See Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 274-77; Robert Kolb, *Bound Choice, Election, and Wittenberg Theological Method: From Martin Luther to the Formula of Concord* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Gerald O.

understanding of man's depravity and God's efficacious grace over and against Erasmus' Ockhamist Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>104</sup> One must not miss the close connection between justification by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) on the basis of Christ's work alone (*solus Christus*) and the doctrine of efficacious grace. If justification is by faith alone then it is by grace not works and if by grace then it is the gift of God. Moreover, if it is the gift of God then even faith itself must be the gift of God and if faith itself is a gift of God then it follows that God and God alone brings new life into the dead sinner, creating repentance and faith in Christ. As Calvin says, faith as a work itself ("I am justified *because I believe*") is ruled out completely, so that in no way can it be said that it is my decision that brings about justification.<sup>105</sup> McGrath explains,

A popular misunderstanding of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith is that we are justified *because we believe*, that it is our decision to believe that brings about our justification. Here faith is understood as a human work, something which we do – and so we are justified on the basis of our works! This is actually the later doctrine, especially associated with seventeenth-century Arminianism, of 'justification *propter fidem per Christum*,' justification on account of faith through Christ (rather than 'justification *per fidem propter Christum*,' justification by faith on account of Christ). The Reformation doctrine affirms the activity of God and the passivity of humanity in justification. Faith is not something human we do, but something divine that is wrought within us. 'Faith is the principal work of the Holy Spirit' (Calvin), and it is through faith that Christ and all his benefits are received.<sup>106</sup>

J. I. Packer also makes a similar observation that is telling:

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Forde, *The Captivation of the Will: Luther vs. Erasmus on Freedom and Bondage*, ed. Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); *Documents from the History of Lutheranism 1517-1750*, ed. Eric Lund (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 237-44.

<sup>104</sup>J. Laurel Carrington, "Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536)," in *The Reformation Theologians*, 44. Also see Scott Hendrix, "Luther," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, ed. David Bagschi and David C. Steinmetz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 39-56; Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, 42, 235, 295-301.

<sup>105</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.11.7. Paul Helm states, "Justification then cannot be *on account of* faith in the sense that justification has faith as its ground, for the merit of Christ is the ground of justification. So how is faith a cause? It is, Calvin says, neither the material cause nor the efficient cause. It is the *instrumental* cause of justification." Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 214. Helm says elsewhere, "Faith does not contribute causally to justification, any more than does obedience. It is in no sense the ground of justification. Faith is essentially receptive, an acknowledgement, a recognition of what God in Christ has done, and in that sense (as we have already noted in Calvin) faith is the instrumental cause of justification." Helm, *Calvin at the Centre*, 220.

<sup>106</sup>McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 391.

“Justification by faith only” is a truth that needs interpretation. The principle of *sola fide* is not rightly understood till it is seen as anchored in the broader principle of *sola gratia*. What is the source and status of faith? Is it the God-given means whereby the God-given justification is received, or is it a condition of justification which it is left to man to fulfill? Is it a part of God’s gift of salvation, or is it man’s own contribution to salvation? Is our salvation wholly of God, or does it ultimately depend on something we do for ourselves? Those who say the latter (as the Arminians later did) thereby deny man’s utter helplessness in sin, and affirm that a form of semi-Pelagianism is true after all. It is no wonder, then, that later Reformed theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work) and a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in saving sinners, which was the deepest religious and theological principle of the Reformers’ thought). Arminianism was, indeed, in Reformed eyes a renunciation of New Testament Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism; for to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle from relying on oneself for works, and the one is as un-Christian and anti-Christian as the other. In the light of what Luther says to Erasmus, there is no doubt that he would have endorsed this judgment.<sup>107</sup>

Therefore, though the doctrines of forensic justification and moral regeneration must remain distinct (the latter a change in status and the former a change in nature), they are intimately connected in attributing to God alone the efficacy in creating within us saving faith, a reality Arminianism would later struggle to explain in demanding that grace be conditioned upon man’s free will.<sup>108</sup>

While not all Reformers would adhere to Augustine’s monergism (e.g., the synergism of Philip Melancthon),<sup>109</sup> most would owe a debt to Augustine as they drew

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<sup>107</sup>J. I. Packer, “Historical and Theological Introduction,” in Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 59.

<sup>108</sup>McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine*, 391

<sup>109</sup>See Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), Locus 3, 4, 5, 8, 14. “Melancthon viewed the concurrently cooperative causes of conversion as the Word, the Spirit, and the cooperating human will.” Thomas Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 99. For extensive studies of Melancthon on free will, see Gregory B. Graybill, *Evangelical Free Will: Philipp Melancthon’s Doctrinal Journey on the Origins of Faith*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Barbara Pitkin, “The Protestant Zeno: Calvin and the Development of Melancthon’s Anthropology,” *The Journal of Religion* 84, no. 3 (2004): 345-78. Contrary to Brandt, Muller rightly argues that Melancthon, as well as Erasmus and Veluanus, “are quite synergistic” and it is their synergism that stands in contrast to Bullinger, who “offers not a hint of synergism.” Strangely Brandt and Baker blame Bullinger for a synergism that eventually was adopted by Arminius. See Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Reformed Tradition,” *WTJ* 70 (2008): 28. Contra: Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:309; J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), 211-14; idem, “Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1988): 359-76. To the contrary, see Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Heinrich Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2004), 3:185-94; Cornelius Venema, “Heinrich Bullinger’s Correspondence on Calvin’s Doctrine of Predestination, 1551-1553,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986): 445-46; Cornelius Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of “the Other Reformed Tradition?”* Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). Melancthon’s synergism created minor tension not only between him and Luther, but also with Calvin. For Calvin’s response, see John Calvin, *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, ed. Jules Bonnet, trans.

from his works in order to defend the irresistibility of grace in the elect against the papist synergism of their day, as is apparent in sixteenth<sup>110</sup> and seventeenth-century Reformers.<sup>111</sup> First among these is the second generation reformer John Calvin.<sup>112</sup> No other Reformer articulated the monergism of Augustine as well as Calvin.<sup>113</sup> Like Luther, Calvin was trained in the *via moderna* though at the University of Paris, the Collège de Montaigu. But Calvin would reject the *via moderna* as Luther did and his thought would parallel the *schola Augustiniana moderna* instead.<sup>114</sup> On sin and grace Luther and Calvin

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David Constable (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2009), 5:379-80; Robert W. Godfrey, *John Calvin: Pilgrim and Pastor* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 118; Machiel A. van den Berg, *Friends of Calvin*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 119; Randall C. Zachman, "The Conciliating Theology of John Calvin," in *Conciliation and Confession*, ed. Howard P. Louthan and Randall C. Zachman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 101.

<sup>110</sup>Consider Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), Amandus Polanus (1561-1610), Wolfgang Capito (1478-1541), Peter Martyr Vermigli (1491-1562), Girolamo Zanchi (1516-1590), John à Lasco (1499-1560), Martin Bucer (1491-1551), John Knox (1510-1572), Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), Caspar Olevianus (1536-1587), Lambert Daneau (1530-1595), Francis Junius (1545-1602), William Perkins (1558-1602), and Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). Concerning Vermigli, Donnelly states, "Martyr insists that God gives grace to some individuals and calls them to himself; others are simply not called to the true way. Those who maintain that grace is offered to all men reduce grace to nature. The unregenerate are too perverted to accept grace; therefore God must make them good. If man were free to accept grace or reject it, he would have something to boast about. . . . Martyr feels that his opponents allow man to choose God by accepting or rejecting grace, whereas scripture teaches that God chooses man." And again, "Martyr also attacks the scholastics who say that grace comes first, but man has the power to accept or reject it. If that were so, man's salvation would depend on himself, whereas Paul and Augustine teach that salvation depends on God and not on man." Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace*, 138-39, 159. Also see Frank A. James III, "A Late Medieval Parallel in Reformation Thought: *Gemina Praedestinatio* in Gregory of Rimini and Peter Martyr Vermigli," in *Via Augustini*, 157-88; idem, "Peter Martyr Vermigli," 62-78. On Zanchi see Girolamo Zanchi, *Die Gotteslehre Girolami Zanchis und ihre Bedeutung für seine Lehre von der Prädestination* (Neukirchen: Neukirchner Verlag Des Erziehungsvereins GmbH, 1965), 108-22; Otto Gründler, "Girolamo Zanchi," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4:306. On Bullinger see Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination*, 17-118; J. Wayne Baker, "Heinrich Bullinger," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 1:229.

<sup>111</sup>Especially see Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641). Others in the seventeenth-century would include: Riissen, Maresius, Maastricht, Witsius, Heidegger, Polan, Wolleb, Burmann, Crocius, Voetius, Keckermann, Bucan, and Turretin. See Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1950), 510-42. Likewise, see the confessional statements of the 1560s including the Scots Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Second Helvetic Confession.

<sup>112</sup>Wim Balke observes that Calvin not only wrote against papist synergism but Anabaptist synergism as well. See Wim Balke, "Calvin and the Anabaptists," in *The Calvin Handbook*, 150. The synergism of the Anabaptists, says Berkhof, was a motivating factor for Luther as well in emphasizing the efficacy of God's call. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 459-60. Also see David C. Steinmetz's chapter "Luther and Hubmaier on the Freedom of the Will," in *Luther in Context*, 59-71; idem, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 138-45.

<sup>113</sup>Barbara Pitkin, "Nothing But Concupiscence: Calvin's Understanding of Sin and the *Via Augustini*," *CTJ* 34 (1999): 347.

<sup>114</sup>McGrath, *Reformation Thought*, 82.

stood hand in hand, both following Augustine. As McGoldrick observes, “They affirmed categorically the depravity of human nature because of the fall, and both rejected all synergistic and semi-Pelagian views of salvation.”<sup>115</sup> Calvin drew consistently from Augustine’s doctrine of grace as articulated in the anti-Pelagian corpus, which experienced a revival of interest in the 1530s and 1540s. As McGrath observes, “Thus Calvin clearly understood the Reformation to be a restoration or recapitulation of the theology of Augustine, occasionally suggesting that everything he himself had written might be regarded as a paraphrase of Augustine’s writings.”<sup>116</sup>

### **John Calvin: Theologian of Sovereign Grace**

Calvin’s understanding of grace is explicit both in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-1559) and in *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* (1543), which is his reply to the Dutch Roman Catholic and Louvain scholar Albertus Pighius, who represented the Vatican at Worms and Regensburg (1540/41).<sup>117</sup> In *Bondage* Calvin is responding to the first six books of Pighius’s 1542 work *Ten Books on Human Free Choice and Divine Grace*. Although Pighius died before Calvin finished his entire response, Calvin’s controversy over predestination with Jerome Bolsec would instigate Calvin, almost ten years later (1552), to finish his response to Pighius’s last four books in

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<sup>115</sup>James Edward McGoldrick, “Calvin and Luther: Comrades in Christ,” in *Tributes to John Calvin*, ed. David Hall (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 178-79. For Luther’s view, idem, “Luther’s Doctrine of Predestination,” *R&R* 8 (1999): 81-103. For Calvin’s reliance on Luther see Doede Nauta, “Calvin and Luther,” *FUQ* 2 (1952-53): 1-17; B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (London: T & T Clark, 1982), 150.

<sup>116</sup>McGrath, *Intellectual Origins*, 188. McGrath says the same of Luther on page 119.

<sup>117</sup>Originally titled *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*. For the background to this work, see Wulfert de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 144. For a synopsis of the content of Pighius’s treatise, see Lane’s summary in John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A. N. S. Lane, trans. G. I. Davies, *Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), xviii. Helm notes, *Bondage* “can be regarded as an expansion and re-presentation of what Calvin says in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*.” Helm agrees with A. N. S. Lane that Calvin never deviates from the *Institutes* in his reply to Pighius. Paul Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158. Also idem, *Intellectual Origins*, 188.

*De aeterna Dei praedestinatione (Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God)*.<sup>118</sup> By 1559 Calvin finished his final edition of the *Institutes* and his understanding of grace and free will is again evident, but this time with all the experience of his debates with Pighius.

### **Pervasive Depravity and the Bondage of the Will**

Calvin begins with the first sin of Adam and, like Paul in Romans 5, draws the connection from Adam to all of humanity. When Adam sinned he “entangled and immersed his offspring in the same miseries.”<sup>119</sup> Calvin defines original sin as “a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul, which first makes us liable to God’s wrath, then also brings forth in us those works which Scripture calls ‘works of the flesh.’”<sup>120</sup> According to Calvin, the result of descending from Adam’s “impure seed” and being “born infected with the contagion of sin” is the pervasive corruption of man’s nature.<sup>121</sup> “Here I only want to suggest briefly that the whole man is overwhelmed-as by a deluge-from head to foot, so that no part is immune from sin and all that proceeds from him is to be imputed to sin. As Paul says, all turnings of the thoughts to the flesh are enmities against God [Rom. 8:7], and are therefore death [Rom. 8:6].”<sup>122</sup> Calvin concludes, “Therefore if it is right to declare that man, because of

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<sup>118</sup>Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin*, 145; Richard C. Gamble, “Calvin’s Controversies,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 198; Calvin, *Bondage*, xv; idem, *Calvin’s Calvinism: Treatises on ‘The Eternal Predestination of God’ and ‘The Secret Providence of God’*, ed. and trans. Henry Cole (London: Sovereign Grace Union, 1927).

<sup>119</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.1. In 2.1.6 Calvin further explains his understanding of Rom 5 as well as his rejection of Pelagianism, which Calvin accused Pighius of adopting, calling Pighius a spiritual child of Pelagius. On the Pelagian tendencies of Pighius, see L. F. Schulze, “Calvin’s Reply to Pighius – A Micro and a Macro View,” in *Calvin’s Opponents*, vol. 5 of *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, ed. Richard C. Gamble (New York & London: Garland, 1992), 179.

<sup>120</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.8. “Thus Calvin holds to original sin in the sense of both original guilt (newborn babies are not innocent before God) and original depravity.” Anthony N. S. Lane, “Anthropology,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, 278.

<sup>121</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.6. Cf. Eberhard Busch, “God and Humanity,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, 231.

<sup>122</sup>Calvin earlier states, “For our nature is not only destitute and empty of good, but so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle. Those who have said that original sin is ‘concupiscence’ [Augustine] have used an appropriate word, if only it be added-something that most will by no means concede-that whatever is in man, from the understanding to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence. Or, to put it more briefly, the whole man is of himself

his vitiated nature, is naturally abominable to God, it is also proper to say that man is naturally depraved and faulty. Hence Augustine, in view of man's corrupted nature, is not afraid to call "natural" those sins which necessarily reign in our flesh wherever God's grace is absent."<sup>123</sup> Calvin states elsewhere, "So depraved is [man's] nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil."<sup>124</sup> If man has been corrupted as by a deluge and if sin permeates every recess so that "no part is immune from sin" then it follows that man's will is in bondage to sin. Calvin, against Pighius, writes, "For the will is so overwhelmed by wickedness and so pervaded by vice and corruption that it cannot in any way escape to honourable exertion or devote itself to righteousness."<sup>125</sup>

Calvin rejects the medieval philosophers in what is today termed libertarian freedom or the power of contrary choice. "They say: If to do this or that depends upon our choice, so also does not to do it. Again, if not to do it, so also to do it. Now we seem to do what we do, and to shun what we shun, by free choice. Therefore, if we do any good thing when we please, we can also not do it; if we do any evil, we can also shun it."<sup>126</sup> However, the philosophers are not alone, for some of the early church fathers were even unclear in their understanding of free will.<sup>127</sup> For example, take Chrysostom who says, "Since God has placed good and evil in our power, he has granted free decision of

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nothing but concupiscence." Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.1.9 (Cf. 2.3). Lane states, "The whole of human nature is corrupted – not just the sensual part but also the mind and will." Lane, "Anthropology," 278. Also see Suzanne Selinger, *Calvin against Himself: An Inquiry in Intellectual History* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1984), 42; Luther Burns, "From Ordered Soul to Corrupted Nature: Calvin's View of Sin," in *John Calvin and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 90-91, 97-101.

<sup>123</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12. Also see T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin: An Introduction to His Thought* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 51-52.

<sup>124</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5 [1539]. Lane comments, "Our nature is depraved, and it is futile to seek any good in it." Lane, "Anthropology," 278-79. Also see Williston Walker, *John Calvin* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 412.

<sup>125</sup>Calvin, *Bondage*, 77. Also see Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 82; A. Dakin, *Calvinism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946), 33-40.

<sup>126</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.3.

<sup>127</sup> "Further, even though the Greeks above the rest and Chrysostom especially among them extol the ability of the human will, yet all the ancients, save Augustine, so differ, waver, or speak confusedly on this subject, that almost nothing certain can be derived from their writings." *Ibid.*, 2.2.4.

choice, and does not restrain the unwilling, but embraces the willing. Again: He who is evil, if he should wish, is often changed into a good man; and he who is good falls through sloth and becomes evil. For the Lord has made our nature free to choose.”<sup>128</sup> Jerome seems to agree, “Ours is to begin, God’s to fulfill; ours to offer what we can, his to supply what we cannot.”<sup>129</sup> Nevertheless, Calvin is opposed, siding instead with Augustine who does not hesitate to title the will “unfree.”<sup>130</sup> As Augustine argued, without the Spirit the will is not free but shackled and conquered by its desires.<sup>131</sup> Calvin elaborates,

Likewise, when the will was conquered by the vice into which it had fallen, human nature began to lose its freedom. Again, man, using free will badly, has lost both himself and his will. Again, the free will has been so enslaved that it can have no power for righteousness. Again, what God’s grace has not freed will not be free. Again, the justice of God is not fulfilled when the law so commands, and man acts as if by his own strength; but when the Spirit helps, and man’s will, not free, but freed by God, obeys. And he gives a brief account of all these matters when he writes elsewhere: man, when he was created, received great powers of free will, but lost them by sinning.<sup>132</sup>

This does not mean, however, that man is coerced. Rather, man sins willingly, out of

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<sup>128</sup>As quoted by Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.4.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup>Calvin does observe how Augustine at one point does react against those who say the will is “unfree” but only because they seek to deny the decision of the will “as to wish to excuse sin.” *Ibid.*, 2.2.7.

<sup>131</sup>Pighius will of course reject such a claim by arguing that “ought” implies “can” or “ability.” In other words, God commands that his law be obeyed (“ought”); therefore, man must be able (“can”) to obey it otherwise such a command is disingenuous. How does Calvin respond? For Calvin, “ought” does not necessitate “ability” and at the same time God remains just to require the law. Calvin explains why this is the case, “For we ought not to measure by our own ability the duty to which we are bound nor to investigate man’s capabilities with this unaided power of reasoning. Rather we should maintain the following doctrine. First, even if we cannot fulfill or even begin to fulfill the righteousness of the law, yet it is rightly required of us, and we are not excused by our weakness or the failure of our strength. For as the fault for this is ours, so the blame must be imputed to us. Secondly, the function of the law is different from what people commonly suppose it to be. For it cannot make [sinners] good but can only convict them of guilt, first by removing the excuse of ignorance and then by disproving their mistaken opinion that they are righteous and their empty claims about their own strength. Thus it comes about that no excuse is left for the ungodly to prevent them from being convicted by their own conscience and, whether they like it or not, becoming aware of their guilt. . . . Therefore in issuing commands and exhortations God does not take account of our strength, since he gives that very thing which he demands and gives it for the reason that by ourselves we are helpless.” Calvin, *Bondage*, 41-42 (cf. 141-42).

<sup>132</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7. With Augustine, Calvin appeals to 2 Cor 3:17, where Paul says, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” Such a passage implies that where the Spirit of the Lord is not to be found (i.e., depraved man) there is no freedom. Likewise, Jesus states in John 15:5 that “without me you can do nothing.”

*necessity*, but not out of *compulsion*.<sup>133</sup> Such a distinction is one of Calvin's chief points in his treatise against Pighius who argues that *necessitas* (necessity) implies *coactio* (coercion). However, as Paul Helm explains, for Calvin "it does not follow from the denial of free will that what a person chooses is the result of coercion."<sup>134</sup> For Calvin, coercion negates responsibility but *necessity* is "consistent with being held responsible for the action, and being praised or blamed for it."<sup>135</sup> Therefore, Calvin can state that man "acts wickedly by will, not by compulsion" (*Male voluntate agit, non coactione*).<sup>136</sup>

What then is one to think of the term "free will" (*liberum arbitrium*)? Calvin, like Luther before him, would rather do away with the term.<sup>137</sup> What is the purpose served by labeling such a "slight thing" with such a "proud name"? Calvin quips, "A noble freedom, indeed—for man not to be forced to serve sin, yet to be such a willing slave [*ethelodoulos*] that his will is bound by the fetters of sin!"<sup>138</sup> Moreover, the term is given to misunderstanding for sinful men are prone to hear the term "free will" and think they are their own master, having the power to turn themselves to good or evil.<sup>139</sup> Therefore, we are better to avoid the term. However, this does not mean that Calvin does not believe in "free will."<sup>140</sup> If by freedom one means, as Lombard, the Papists, and Pighius argue,

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid. Calvin's understanding of necessity is not the same as the Stoic understanding of necessity. See Charles Partee, "Calvin and Determinism," in *An Elaboration of the Theology of Calvin*, vol. 8 of *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism*, 351-68.

<sup>134</sup>Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 162. Also see Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 87.

<sup>135</sup>Calvin, *Bondage*, 150. Also see John H. Gerstner, "Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Edwards on the Bondage of the Will," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2:287.

<sup>136</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7; cf. 3.5. "We cannot free ourselves from our will's wrong direction. We are freed from it only through God's goodness. But this goodness liberates." Eberhard Busch, "God and Humanity," in *The Calvin Handbook*, 232.

<sup>137</sup>Hugh Thomson Kerr, Jr., ed., *A Compend of Luther's Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1943), 88, 91.

<sup>138</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid. Calvin reaffirms his view in *Bondage*, 68.

<sup>140</sup>"As my *Institutes* bear witness, I have always said that I have no objection to human choice being called free, provided that a sound definition of the word is agreed between us." Calvin, *Bondage*, 311. See also Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.7-8.

that man's will in no way is determined but man has the self-power to will good or evil towards God, so that by his own strength he can equally will either, then free will is rejected by Calvin. But if by free will one means, as Augustine maintained, that man wills out of *voluntary necessity* (not coercion) then willful choice can be affirmed.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, even if man wills out of necessity such necessity is only a necessity to sin prior to effectual grace. "For we do not say that man is dragged unwillingly into sinning, but that because his will is corrupt he is held captive under the yoke of sin and therefore of necessity wills in an evil way. For where there is bondage, there is necessity."<sup>142</sup> Therefore, the bondage of the will to sin remains and yet such slavery is voluntary and willful captivity (*voluntariae suae electioni*). As Calvin makes evident in his 1538 *Catechism*, man does not sin out of a "violent" necessity (*violenta necessitate*), but transgresses "out of a will utterly prone to sin" (the "necessity of sinning").<sup>143</sup>

The chief point of this distinction, then, must be that man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust, not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil. But if this is true, then it is clearly expressed that man is surely subject to the necessity of sinning.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, II.3.5. Also see Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 87; John H. Leith, *John Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 141-42. For a defense of Calvin as a compatibilist, see Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas*, 157-83.

<sup>142</sup>Calvin, *Bondage*, 69. And again, "The will bereft of freedom is of necessity either drawn or led into evil." *Institutes*, 2.3.5 [1539]. Lane, summarizing Calvin, writes, "The will is not free in the sense that Pighius understands it to be free, namely having the power to choose good or evil. Neither is it coerced in the sense of being forcibly driven by an external impulse. Instead it is self-determined in that we will voluntarily, of our own accord. Yet because of the corruption of the will it is in bondage and subject to a necessity of sinning." Calvin, *Bondage*, xix-xx.

<sup>143</sup>Calvin's statement on free will in his 1538 *Catechism* is one of his clearest and most precise definitions, "That man is enslaved to sin the Scripture repeatedly testify. This means that his nature is so estranged from God's righteousness that he conceives, desires, and strives after nothing that is not impious, distorted, evil, or impure. For a heart deeply steeped in sin's poison can bring forth nothing but the fruits of sin. Yet we are not to suppose for that reason that man has been driven by violent necessity to sin. He transgresses out of a will utterly prone to sin. But because on account of the corruption of his feelings he utterly loathes all God's righteousness and is inflamed to every sort of wickedness, it is denied that he is endowed with the free capacity to choose good and evil which men call 'free will.'" John I. Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 9-10 (cf. 69).

<sup>144</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5. Lane helpfully summarizes, "The necessity to sin means that sinners cannot other than sin, but this necessity is imposed by the corruption of the will and innate human wickedness. Sinners are not coerced or forced by any external impulse but sin voluntarily." Lane, "Anthropology," 279.

Calvin shows how an agent can be both free and under necessity when he uses the example of the devil. The devil can only do evil all of the time and yet he is fully culpable for his actions and commits them voluntarily though out of necessity. Therefore, sin is simultaneously necessary and voluntary.<sup>145</sup>

Although Calvin affirms the slavery of the will (or, as Calvin calls it, the “depravity of the will”) he does not reduce men to “brute beasts” but rather acknowledges that since the will is inseparable from human nature, it “did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after the right.”<sup>146</sup> Likewise with the mind; while man still possesses human understanding he remains enslaved by the perversity of his mind.<sup>147</sup> It should be noted that in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin’s language is very strong, saying that the will is abolished. However, when Pighius in 1542 sets Calvin over against Augustine by objecting and misunderstanding Calvin as saying that there is no substance to the will since it is abolished, Calvin responds in *Bondage* (1543) and *Institutes* (1559) by explaining what he means. What takes place in man’s conversion is not a destruction of the *substance* or *faculty* of our will and mind, as Pighius thought Calvin was saying, but the destruction and removal of the *habit* or *qualities* of the will, which of course is evil.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, Calvin makes the qualification that the nature is not so much destroyed as it is repaired and made new (*nova creari*) in the sense that the corrupt nature must be radically transformed.<sup>149</sup> The will is “changed from an evil to a

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<sup>145</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5; idem, *Bondage*, 149-50.

<sup>146</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12. Niesel, *Theology of Calvin*, 81.

<sup>147</sup>“Indeed, man’s mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12 (cf. II.2.19-21; II.3.1-2). Also see Anthony N. S. Lane, *A Reader’s Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 67-68.

<sup>148</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.5. “The faculty of will is permanent in humanity, but the evil will comes from the fall and the good will from regeneration. The will remains as created, the change taking place in its habit, not its substance (DSO 290f.)” Lane, “Anthropology,” 284. Likewise see Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 113.

<sup>149</sup>See *Institutes* 2.3.6. Cf. Lane, “Anthropology,” 283. Lane goes on to note that in the “1539 *Institutio* Calvin came dangerously close to teaching the destruction of the will.” However, “Pighius’s challenge on this point, so vehemently rejected by Calvin, did cause him to qualify his teaching, first in DSO [*The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*] and later in the 1559 *Institutio*. The reason why he allows

good will.”<sup>150</sup>

How total is man’s depravity according to Calvin? As stated by Calvin above, since man still “possesses human understanding” and since man’s nature did not perish, it must be concluded that for Calvin depravity was not total in *intensiveness* but total in *extensiveness*.<sup>151</sup> Michael Horton explains,

In other words, there is no foothold of goodness anywhere in us – in our mind, will, emotions, or body – where we could rise up to God. Sin has corrupted the whole person, like a poison that works its way in greater or lesser intensity throughout the entire stream. Yet, despite ourselves, this does not eliminate the possibility of reflecting God’s glory. Humanity is therefore not as bad as it could possibly be, but as badly off as it could possibly be. There is no residue of obedient piety in us, but only a *sensus divinitatis* that we exploit for idolatry, self-justification, and superstition. Thus the same remnants of original righteousness that allow even pagans to create a reasonably equitable civic order in things earthly provoke them in their corruption to false religion in things heavenly.<sup>152</sup>

It is evident at this point in Calvin’s thought that man, apart from the Spirit, can do nothing good towards God (i.e., spiritual inability).<sup>153</sup> Due to man’s depravity he is willfully a slave to sin. Consequently, no willful act towards God precedes the “grace of the Spirit.”<sup>154</sup> Therefore, man’s only hope is sovereign grace.

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himself to be moved in this direction is that the debate concerned the teaching of Augustine, for whom he had such a high regard.” Also see Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, 141.

<sup>150</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.6.

<sup>151</sup>T. F. Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 83-84. However, it is precisely on this point that several scholars seem to misinterpret Calvin and set him over against later Calvinists, as if Calvin never would have affirmed total depravity and the need for irresistible grace. For example, see Charles Partee, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 133.

<sup>152</sup>Michael Horton, “A Shattered Vase: The Tragedy of Sin in Calvin’s Thought,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 160-61. Also see Torrance, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Man*, 106; McGoldrick, “Calvin and Luther,” 179.

<sup>153</sup>“The will, because it is inseparable from man’s nature, did not perish, but was so bound to wicked desires that it cannot strive after right.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.12. Leith, *Calvin’s Doctrine*, 141.

<sup>154</sup>“Yet if we hold the view that men have, apart from grace, some impulses (however puny) toward good, what shall we reply to the apostle who even denies that we are capable of conceiving anything [II Cor. 3:5]? What shall we reply to the Lord, who through Moses declares that every imagination of man’s heart is only evil [Gen. 8:21]? . . . Rather let us value Christ’s saying: ‘Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin’ [John 8:34]. We are all sinners by nature; therefore we are held under the yoke of sin. But if the whole man lies under the power of sin, surely it is necessary that the will, which is its chief seat, be restrained by the stoutest bonds. Paul’s saying would not make sense, that ‘it is God who is at work to will in us’ [Phil. 2:13], if any will preceded the grace of the Spirit.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.27.

### Special Calling and Effectual Grace

It is evident in Calvin's thought so far that grace is needed for the liberation of man's will.<sup>155</sup> Such grace comes before man's will (i.e., it is prevenient) in order to effectually liberate him from bondage rather than merely coming beside man's will to assist him (which is Semi-Pelagianism).<sup>156</sup> As Lane explains, "The corollary is that grace is prevenient – that God's grace precedes any human good will. But Calvin wishes to say more than this. *Prevenient grace does not simply make it possible for people to respond. Grace is efficacious and effects conversion.*"<sup>157</sup> In other words, unlike Semi-Augustinianism and the Arminianism that would come after Calvin in the seventeenth-century, grace is not prevenient in the sense that it simply makes salvation a possibility if man decides to cooperate with it. Rather, the prevenient grace Calvin speaks of is effectual, so that the conversion of the elect necessarily follows. Lane, quoting Calvin, explains,

Prevenient grace [for Calvin] is not merely sufficient, bringing to the human will "freedom of contrary choice." Calvin is aware of and rejects what would later be known as *the Arminian view*, that God "offers light to human minds, and it is in their power to choose to accept or to refuse it, and he moves their wills in such a way that it is in their power to follow his movement or not to follow it" (DSO 204). God does not merely offer us grace and leave it up to us whether to accept or resist it. Instead conversion is "entirely the work of grace," and *God does not merely give us the ability to will the good but also brings it about that we will it* (DSO 252f).<sup>158</sup>

Or, as Calvin would argue in his treatise against Pighius, since the human will is only evil and needs transformation and renewal to will the good, God's grace is "not merely a tool which can help someone if he is pleased to stretch out his hand to [take] it." Calvin elaborates, "That is, [God] does not merely offer it, leaving [to man] the choice between

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<sup>155</sup>"Because of the bondage of sin by which the will is held bound, it cannot move toward good, much less apply itself thereto; for a movement of this sort is the beginning of conversion God, which in Scripture is ascribed entirely to God's grace." *Ibid.*, 2.3.5.

<sup>156</sup>Lane, "Introduction," in Calvin, *Bondage*, xx.

<sup>157</sup>Emphasis added. Lane, "Introduction," in Calvin, *Bondage*, xx.

<sup>158</sup>Lane, "Anthropology," 283. DSO stands for Calvin's *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii adversus calumnias Alberti Pighii Campensis*.

receiving it and rejecting it, but he steers the mind to choose what is right, he moves the will also effectively to obedience, he arouses and advances the endeavour until the actual completion of the work is attained.”<sup>159</sup> Quoting Augustine, he concludes, “The human will does not obtain grace through its freedom, but rather freedom through grace.”<sup>160</sup>

The efficacious nature of grace also reveals the particularity of God’s choice. Calvin argues that free will is “not sufficient to enable man to do good works, unless he be helped by grace, indeed by special grace, which only the elect receive through regeneration.”<sup>161</sup> Calvin explains, “For I do not tarry over those fanatics who babble that grace is equally and indiscriminately distributed.”<sup>162</sup> Against Pighius, Calvin argues,

In addition this grace is not given to all without distinction or generally, but only to those whom God wills; the rest, to whom it is not given, remain evil and have absolutely no ability to attain to the good because they belong to the mass that is lost and condemned and they are left to their condemnation. In addition, this grace is not of such a kind as to bestow on [its recipients] the power to act well on condition that they will to, so that they thereafter have the option of willing or not willing. But it effectively moves them to will it; indeed it makes their evil will good, so that they of necessity will well.<sup>163</sup>

Therefore, Calvin would have certainly rejected what later Arminians would have meant in affirming a universal, prevenient grace. Rather, God’s special grace is discriminate, particular and efficacious.

Calvin’s detestation for synergism becomes especially apparent not only in his arguments against Pighius, but also in his opposition to Peter Lombard (“The Master of

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<sup>159</sup>Calvin, *Bondage*, 114. Calvin will argue elsewhere that “it is not in man’s power to prepare himself to receive the grace of God, but his whole conversion is the gift of God.” Ibid., 173.

<sup>160</sup>Quoting Augustine, Calvin remarks, “Again: ‘Therefore just as he chose us, so he calls us, according to the decision of his will, lest, where so great a benefit is concerned, we should boast in the decision of our own will.’ . . . But the question is asked whether freedom to choose good or evil does not naturally reside in man. He replies: ‘It must be acknowledged that we have free choice to do both evil and good. But in doing evil each one is free of righteousness and the slave of sin, while in doing good no one can be free, unless he has first been set free by the Son of God. So people are freed from evil by the grace of God alone.’” Calvin, *Bondage*, 130.

<sup>161</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.6.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid. Elsewhere he states, “Hence it is clear that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to reserved solely and individually for the sons of the church, is falsely debased when presented as effectually profitable to all.” Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.22.10.

<sup>163</sup>Calvin, *Bondage*, 136.

the Sentences”) who utilizes the Medieval distinction between “operating” and “co-operating” grace. According to Lombard, operating grace ensures that we effectively will the good while co-operating grace follows “the good will as a help.”<sup>164</sup> Calvin is not amused. What displeases him is that while Lombard “attributes the effective desire for good to the grace of God, yet he hints that man by his very own nature somehow seeks after the good-though ineffectively.”<sup>165</sup> In short, this is Semi-Pelagianism at its best.

Parker has worded Calvin’s dissatisfaction as follows:

This distinction Calvin dislikes. Although it ascribes the efficacy of any appetite for good to grace, it implies that man has a desire for good of his own nature, even if this desire is ineffectual. Nor does he like the second part any better, with its suggestion that it lies within man’s own power to render the first grace vain by rejecting it or to confirm it by obedience.<sup>166</sup>

Calvin’s frustration only escalates when Lombard “pretends” to be following Augustine in such a distinction, demonstrating, says Calvin, that whenever Augustine says something clearly Lombard obscures it. While it is true that Augustine made the distinction, the medieval spin of it differs considerably, enabling Lombard to interpret Augustine through a Semi-Pelagian lens, a common move among medieval theologians. Calvin is adamant that Augustine never would have affirmed such co-operation or synergism.<sup>167</sup> Calvin protests, “The ambiguity in the second part offends me, for it has given rise to a perverted interpretation. They thought we co-operate with the assisting grace of God, because it is our right either to render it ineffectual by spurning the first grace, or to confirm it by obediently following it.”<sup>168</sup> Therefore, Calvin rejects Lombard’s view because (1) cooperating grace suggests that grace is not efficacious, (2) cooperation

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<sup>164</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.6. “Initially (operating) grace converts the will from evil to good. The converted will then desires the good and so works together with (cooperating) grace.” Lane, “Anthropology,” 286.

<sup>165</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.6.

<sup>166</sup>Parker, *Calvin*, 53.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 56. On Calvin’s interpretation of Augustine and other Church Fathers see Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1999).

<sup>168</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.6.

with grace results in human merit, and (3) cooperation with grace means that perseverance is a gift only given on the basis of how we choose to cooperate with it, all of which Pighius affirmed. As Lane explains, for Calvin the consequence is that this would “make us masters of our own destiny rather than God alone.”<sup>169</sup> Calvin seeks to interpret Augustine properly, arguing that cooperating grace does not refer to our ability to determine whether God’s initial grace will be accepted or resisted but instead refers to man’s will *subsequent to* and *after* he has been effectually called and awakened to new life, whereby he works with God in sanctification and final perseverance.<sup>170</sup>

Contrary to Lombard’s synergism, Calvin argues for the particularity and effectual nature of grace in his exegesis of Ezekiel 36 where God removes the heart of stone and implants a heart of flesh causing the dead sinner to walk in new life.

If in a stone there is such plasticity that, made softer by some means, it becomes somewhat bent, I will not deny that man’s heart can be molded to obey the right, provided what is imperfect in him be supplied by God’s grace. But if by this comparison the Lord wished to show that nothing good can ever be wrung from our heart, unless it become wholly other, *let us not divide between him and us what he claims for himself alone*. If, therefore, a stone is transformed into flesh when God converts us to zeal for the right, whatever is of *our will is effaced*. *What takes its place is wholly from God. I say that the will is effaced; not in so far as it is will, for in man’s conversion what belongs to his primal nature remains entire. I also say that it is created anew; not meaning that the will now begins to exist, but that it is changed from an evil to a good will. I affirm that this is wholly God’s doing, for according to the testimony of the same apostle, “we are not even capable of thinking” [II Cor. 3:5].*<sup>171</sup>

Referencing Paul’s words in Ephesians 2, Calvin goes on to say that in this “second creation” which we attain in Christ, God works alone. Salvation is a free gift; therefore, “if even the least ability came from ourselves, we would also have some share of the merit.”<sup>172</sup> Quoting Psalm 100:3 (“And we ourselves have not done it”) Calvin remarks,

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<sup>169</sup>Concerning number one Lane states, “This was just how Pighius took it, maintaining that we already cooperate at the point of conversion and that God gives initial grace only to those who cooperate with it (DSO 275f.). Against this Calvin emphasizes prevenient efficacious grace which, in Augustine’s words, “works without us to cause us to will” (DSO 195).” Lane, “Anthropology,” 286.

<sup>170</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 2.3.11.

<sup>171</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 2.3.6.

<sup>172</sup>*Ibid.*

“Moreover, we see how, not simply content to have given God due praise for our salvation, he expressly excludes us from all participation in it. It is as if he were saying that not a whit remains to man to glory in, for the whole of salvation comes from God.”<sup>173</sup> If all of salvation comes from God, including the first moment of new life, then human cooperation with God’s grace is unacceptable and unbiblical.

However, Calvin anticipates an objection, “But perhaps some will concede that the will is turned away from the good by its own nature and is converted by the Lord’s power alone, yet in such a way that, having been prepared, it then has its own part in the action.”<sup>174</sup> Such an objection comes from the Semi-Augustinian view, arguing that while God initiates grace and prepares the will for subsequent acts of grace, ultimately man must do his own part for such grace to be finally successful. Contrary to such a view Calvin answers that the very activity of the will to exercise faith is a free gift from God,<sup>175</sup> eliminating any possible participation of man’s will.<sup>176</sup> As formulated in his 1538 *Catechism*, “If we duly ponder both how much our minds are blinded to God’s heavenly mysteries and with how much unfaith our hearts labor in all things, we will have no doubt that faith far surpasses all our natural powers and is an excellent gift of God.”<sup>177</sup>

Therefore, it follows that “when we, who are by nature inclined to evil with our whole

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<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 2.3.7.

<sup>175</sup>Victor A. Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 80-81; Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: B&H, 1988), 223-28. On the relation of faith to intellect for Calvin, see Richard Muller, “*Fides and Cognitio* in Relation to the Problem of Intellect and Will in the Theology of John Calvin,” *CTJ* 25 (1990): 207-24.

<sup>176</sup>Calvin will have much to say about exactly how the Spirit utilizes the Word to create faith in the heart of the elect. It is the Holy Spirit who takes the Word and makes it efficacious, producing faith as a free gift. Due to man’s dullness and blindness it is absolutely necessary for the Spirit to illuminate the mind and awaken the heart to new life. Calvin quotes numerous passages in his defense including 1 Cor 2:10-16; Rom 11:34; John 6:44-45; Luke 24:27, 45; John 16:13; etc. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.33-34. According to Calvin, not only faith, but also repentance is a gift from God. “Further, that repentance is a singular gift of God I believe to be so clear from the above teaching there is no need of a long discourse to explain it.” Calvin supports such a claim with passages like Acts 11:18; 2 Cor 7:10; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Eph 2:10; Isa 63:17; Heb 6:4-6; etc. By Calvin arguing that both faith and repentance are gifts from God, monergism is again reaffirmed and the sovereign will of God instead of man’s willful choice is exalted. Ibid., 2.3.21

<sup>177</sup>Hesselink, *Calvin’s First Catechism*, 18.

heart, begin to will good, we do so out of mere grace.”<sup>178</sup> After expositing Ezekiel 36:26 and Jeremiah 32:39-40 Calvin concludes, “For it always follows that nothing good can arise out of our will until it has been reformed; and after its reformation, in so far as it is good, it is so from God, not from ourselves.”<sup>179</sup>

He [God] does not move the will in such a manner as has been taught and believed for many ages – that it is afterward in our choice *either to obey or resist the motion – but by disposing it efficaciously*. Therefore one must deny that oft-repeated statement of Chrysostom: “Whom he draws he draws willing.” By this he signifies that the Lord is only extending his hand to await whether we will be pleased to receive his aid.<sup>180</sup>

Contrary to the synergism of Chrysostom, Calvin argues that it is not the case that God’s grace is only effective if we accept it (“Whom he draws he draws willing”). Rather, God wills to work in his elect in such a way that his special grace is always effective. “This means nothing else than that the Lord by his Spirit directs, bends, and governs, our heart and reigns in it as in his own possession.”<sup>181</sup> Quoting Augustine, Calvin explains that while we will, it is God who causes us to will the good. Unless God first creates within us a new heart, causing us to will the good, we will remain dead in sin. Calvin appeals not only to Ezekiel 11:19-20 and 36:27 but also to the gospel of John,

Now can Christ’s saying (“Every one who has heard . . . from the father comes to me” [John 6:45] be understood in any other way than that *the grace of God is efficacious of itself*. This Augustine also maintains. The Lord does not indiscriminately deem everyone worthy of this grace, as that common saying of Ockham (unless I am mistaken) boasts: grace is denied to no one who does what is in him. Men indeed ought to be taught that God’s loving-kindness is set forth to all who seek it, without exception. But since it is those on whom heavenly grace has

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<sup>178</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.8. The obvious implication for Calvin is that the Spirit must change our will so that sinful man can have faith. As Muller explains, “We cannot will the good, nor can we will to have faith. Both result only from the gracious activity of the Spirit that changes the will from evil to good.” Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 166-67.

<sup>179</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.8-9.

<sup>180</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 2.3.10. Calvin will repeat this statement in *Bondage* and will further elaborate when he writes, “I say that it is not given merely to aid our weakness by its support as though anything depended on us apart from it. But I demonstrate that it is entirely the work of grace and a benefit conferred by it that our heart is changed from a stony one to one of flesh, that our will is made new, and that we, created anew in heart and mind, at length will what we ought to will.” Calvin, *Bondage*, 174.

<sup>181</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.10. Cf. Lane, “Anthropology,” 284. Also see Christian Link, “Election and Predestination,” in *John Calvin’s Impact on Church and Society, 1509-2009*, ed. Martin Ernst Hirzel and Martin Sallmann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 116.

breathed who at length begin to seek after it, they should not claim for themselves the slightest part of his praise. It is obviously the privilege of the elect that, regenerated through the Spirit of God, they are moved and governed by his leading. For this reason, Augustine justly derides those who claim for themselves any part of the act of willing, just as he reprehends others who think that what is the special testimony of free election is indiscriminately given to all. “Nature,” he says, “is common to all, not grace.” The view that what God bestows upon whomever he wills is generally extended to all, Augustine calls a brittle glasslike subtlety of wit, which glitters with mere vanity. Elsewhere he says: “How have you come? By believing. Fear lest while you are claiming for yourself that you have found the just way, you perish from the just way. I have come, you say, of my own free choice; I have come of my own will. Why are you puffed up? Do you wish to know that this also has been given you? Hear Him calling, ‘No one comes to me unless my Father draws him’ [John 6:44].<sup>182</sup>

Calvin is emphatic: unless man is drawn efficaciously by the Spirit’s special call, he is hopeless since his will is of no avail. Calvin will again use similar biblical language in the middle of his exposition on predestination. Calvin views the Spirit’s special call as the outflow of God’s unconditional election.

Therefore, God designates as his children those whom he has chosen, and appoints himself their Father. Further, *by calling*, he receives them into his family and unites them to him so that they may together be one. But when the call is coupled with election, in this way Scripture sufficiently suggests that in it nothing but God’s free mercy is to be sought. For if we ask whom he calls, and the reason why, he answers: whom he had chosen.<sup>183</sup>

Calvin elaborates on this “calling” in his exegesis of Matthew 22:14.

The statement of Christ “Many are called but few are chosen” [Matt.22:14] is, in this manner, very badly understood. Nothing will be ambiguous if we hold fast to what ought to be clear from the foregoing: that there are *two kinds of call*. There is the *general call*, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word—even those to whom he holds it out as a savor of death [cf. II Cor. 2:16], and as the occasion for severer condemnation. *The other kind of call is special*, which he deigns for the most part to give to the believers alone, while by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts.<sup>184</sup>

As Muller notes, not only the *Institutes* but Calvin’s commentaries on Amos and Isaiah bear this same distinction between the general and special call.<sup>185</sup> For example,

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<sup>182</sup>Emphasis added. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.3.10.

<sup>183</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 3.24.1. Calvin also draws the connection from election to calling in *Institutes*, 3.24.2.

<sup>184</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 3.24.8.

<sup>185</sup>Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 151.

commenting on Isaiah 54:13 Calvin observes how the apostle John quotes Isaiah to demonstrate the efficacy of God's call on the elect. "The Gospel is preached indiscriminately to the elect and the reprobate; but the elect alone come to Christ, because they have been 'taught by God,' and therefore to them the Prophet undoubtedly refers."<sup>186</sup> Commenting on the "efficacy of the Spirit" Calvin concludes, "Besides, we are taught by this passage that the calling of God is efficacious in the elect."<sup>187</sup> In his commentary on the gospel of John, Calvin will return once again to the Spirit's efficacious call. Concerning John 6:44 Calvin first explains that though the gospel is preached to all, all do not embrace it for a "new understanding and a new perception are requisite."<sup>188</sup> Calvin then explains what it means for the Father to draw sinners to himself.

To come to Christ being here used metaphorically for believing, the Evangelist, in order to carry out the metaphor in the apposite clause, says that those persons are drawn whose understandings God enlightens, and whose hearts he bends and forms to the obedience of Christ. The statements amount to this, that we ought not to wonder if many refuse to embrace the Gospel; because no man will ever of himself be able to come to Christ, but God must first approach him by his Spirit; and hence it follows that all are not drawn, but that God bestows this grace on those whom he has elected. True, indeed, as to the kind of drawing, it is not violent, so as to compel men by external force; but still it is a powerful impulse of the Holy Spirit, which makes men willing who formerly were unwilling and reluctant. It is a false and profane assertion, therefore, that none are drawn but those who are willing to be drawn, as if man made himself obedient to God by his own efforts; for the willingness with which men follow God is what they already have from himself, who has formed their hearts to obey him.<sup>189</sup>

Calvin goes on to explain that such a drawing does not consist in a mere external voice

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<sup>186</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 8, trans. and ed. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 146.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 146-47. Cameron rightly comments that for Calvin since "faith was given and inspired, rather than attained to, God, for inscrutable reasons, chose to give faith to some people and not to others." Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 119. The same point is made by Vermigli. "We in no wise saie, that grace is common unto all men, but is given unto some; and unto others, according to the pleasure of God, it is not given." Peter Martyr Vermigli, *The common places of the most famous and renowned diuine Doctor Peter Martyr*, trans. Anthonie Marten (London: Henry Denham and Henry Middleton, 1583), 31.38. Cf. David Neelands, "Predestination and the *Thirty-Nine Articles*," in *A Companion to Peter Martyr Vermigli*, ed. Torrance Kirby, Emidio Campi, and Frank A. James III (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2009), 364.

<sup>188</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 17, trans. and ed. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 257.

<sup>189</sup>But what about the phrase "they shall be all taught by God"? Does this not refer to all people? Calvin disagrees. "As to the word all, it must be limited to the elect, who alone are the true children of the Church." Calvin, *John*, 258.

but is the secret operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby God inwardly teaches through the illumination of the heart.<sup>190</sup> Calvin reveals his monergism when he concludes by saying that man is not fit for believing until he has been drawn and such a drawing by the grace of Christ is “efficacious, so that they necessarily believe.”<sup>191</sup>

### *Sola Gratia and Soli Deo Gloria*

As seen above, God’s grace, according to Calvin, does not depend upon the human will but the human will depends upon God’s grace. Quoting Augustine, Calvin exposes the central question of the debate, “This is the chief point on which the issue turns, ‘whether this grace precedes or follows the human will, or (to speak more plainly) whether it is given to us because of the fact that we will or whether through it God also brings it about that we will.’”<sup>192</sup> According to Calvin, the depraved sinner does not

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<sup>190</sup>Calvin was not alone in such a distinction between a general call and an efficacious or special call. As David Steinmetz observes, some of Calvin’s contemporaries such as Martin Bucer also distinguished between the *vocatio congrua* and *vocatio incongrua*. The *vocatio congrua* “is the preaching of the gospel to the elect, who are moved by God to embrace it.” The *vocatio incongrua* is the preaching of the gospel to the nonelect, “who are not assisted by the mercy of God and so are left in their sins.” While the *vocatio incongrua* is ineffectual or resistible, the *vocatio congrua* is effectual or irresistible. Of course, such a distinction was not original with Bucer or Calvin (as the term Calvinism might convey) but actually originated with Augustine. As Steinmetz explains, later Calvinists would utilize such a distinction between effectual and ineffectual calling. The *vocatio* to the elect is always *efficax* (effective) but the calling to the nonelect is designed to be *inefficax* (ineffectual) because it is not accompanied by the Spirit. Therefore, as Muller notes, the Reformed would affirm a *vocatio specialis* (special calling), also titled *vocatio interna* (internal calling) because the Spirit works within, which makes the *vocatio externa* (external calling) *efficax*. Such distinctions among the Reformed were not novel but, as demonstrated above, are evident in the thought of Calvin in an effort to both remain faithful to the diverse *vocatio* language in Scripture and at the same time to refute those like Pighius who sought to minimize the *vocatio* to a single, universal, resistible, and ineffectual act of grace. David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 149; Richard Muller, “*vocatio*,” in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 329.

<sup>191</sup>Calvin, *John*, 256 (cf. 258-59). Also see Paul Helm, *John Calvin: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 84; Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 150, 175-76.

<sup>192</sup>Previously Calvin, quoting Augustine, makes a similar statement using biblical language. “Let Augustine speak: ‘It is obvious then that God by his grace takes away the stony heart from unbelievers and preempts the merits of human good wills. [He does this] in such a way that the will is prepared by antecedent grace, rather than grace being bestowed because of the antecedent merit of the will’ (*Letter [217] to Vitalis*).” Calvin, *Bondage*, 176. Notice how the monergism of Augustine and Calvin stands in contrast to the synergism of Pighius: “He [Pighius] thinks that God does stretch out his hand to fallen humanity to raise them up, but only to those who long to be raised up and do not neglect the grace which is available to help them, but rather lay hold of it, try with its help to return to God, desire to be saved by him, and hope for this – those who deliver themselves to him to be healed, enlightened, and saved. With these words, in regard to regeneration he attributes, to free choice the role of willing, laying hold, trying, and obeying. To this he adds, as is inevitable, that all are equally able to receive grace because it is offered indiscriminately to all.” *Ibid.*, 188.

cooperate with God's grace but God works alone, calling the sinner to himself in an efficacious manner, producing new life within through his Spirit.

Why is such a debate so crucial for Calvin? For Calvin the glory of God is at stake in how one understands grace. Hesselink argues, "If that grace is undercut by some form of cooperation (synergism) between a semiautonomous 'free' human being and the sovereign Lord, the glory of God is compromised, as far as Calvin is concerned."<sup>193</sup> Such a compromise of God's glory was, for Calvin, not only unbiblical but an assault to God himself. Calvin, in his controversy with Jerome Bolsec in 1551, makes this apparent. When asked the question why some believe and others do not, Bolsec answered that it was because some exercise their free will while others do not. However, Calvin saw such an answer as contrary to Scripture, particularly Romans 3:10-11 which says, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks God." The unregenerate will has no ability to turn to God. Rather, it is God alone who must save depraved sinners and in doing so he alone receives the glory. Godfrey explains the contrast between Calvin and Bolsec well, "Bolsec's religion is man-centered. God has done all he can to save, but the ultimate decision on salvation rests with the human response. For Calvin such religion takes the glory of salvation away from God and trivializes the work of Christ."<sup>194</sup>

## Conclusion

Calvin is a supreme representative of the Reformers and the Reformed tradition as a whole. Despite Calvin's efforts, the Catholic Church of the sixteenth-century did maintain a synergistic view of grace, as is evident in Canons 4 and 5 of the Council of

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<sup>193</sup>Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 72. Also see Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin*, (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 145-73. Warfield can confidently say, "The central fact of Calvinism is the glory of God." Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield, *Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today* (Grand Rapids: Evangelical, 1969), 26. Or as Cameron says, "In Calvin's exposition one theme stood out: the unique unbounded sovereignty and majesty of God. God must be allowed to be God, in the fullest possible sense." Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 129.

<sup>194</sup>Godfrey, *John Calvin*, 116-17. Godfrey goes on to point out that this same issue sprouted again in 1552 with John Trollet. On Bolsec's synergism, see Richard A. Muller, "The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula Praedestinationis*, the Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 45, 49-50.

Trent (1545-1563).<sup>195</sup> Berkhof explains, “The Roman Catholic Church clearly harboured two tendencies, the one Semi-Augustinian and the other Semi-Pelagian, of which the latter gradually gained the upper hand.”<sup>196</sup> Consequently, “Roman Catholics reject the idea of man’s spiritual impotence and his utter dependence on the grace of God for renewal. They adopt the theory of synergism in regeneration, that is, that man co-operates with God in the spiritual renewal of the soul.”<sup>197</sup> Berkhof is right to conclude, “In the days of the Reformation the monergism of the Reformers was opposed by the Roman Catholic Church with greater vehemence than any other doctrine.”<sup>198</sup> No one has demonstrated the Reformation affirmation of monergism as well as J. I. Packer,

Historically, it is a simply matter of fact that Martin Luther and John Calvin, and,

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<sup>195</sup>“If anyone says that a person’s free will when moved and roused by God gives no co-operation by responding to God’s summons and invitation to dispose and prepare itself to obtain the grace of justification; and that it cannot, if it so wishes, dissent but, like something inanimate, can do nothing at all, and remains merely passive: let him be anathema.” “The Council of Trent,” in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, vol. 2 of *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), session 6, canon 4. On Calvin’s response to Canons 4 and 5, see John Calvin, *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, with the Antidote*, in *John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, 3:147-48. For a seventeenth-century critique of Trent and post-Trent Catholicism, see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:517-21.

<sup>196</sup>Berkhof, *History of Christian Doctrines*, 144. Also see McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 338-40; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:717-19. Chemnitz (1522-1586), building off of the work of Jacob Payva Andrada’s *Orthodox Explanations of the Controverted Points of Religion* (1564), makes the same point that Berkhof does. See Martin Chemnitz, *Examination of the Council of Trent*, trans. Fred Kramer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1971-86), 1:428-29.

<sup>197</sup>Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 145-46. The Roman Catholic debate over Semi-Pelagianism and Augustinianism did not end with Trent, but continued into the seventeenth-century with the Jansenist controversy. Professor in Louvain, Michael Baius, affirmed Augustine’s views of inability and effectual grace and his seventy-nine theses were condemned by a bull of Pope Pius V. Luis de Molina (1535-1600), a Jesuit, argued for a synthesis between Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Augustinianism, but, as Seeberg states, still was synergism “in its boldest form.” Though the Dominicans opposed synergism the Jesuits adopted Molina’s synergism and successfully made it their official doctrine. Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 2:450-52. The debate eventually erupted in 1640 when Cornelis Jansen (1585-1640), Bishop of Ypres, wrote *Augustinus* where he argued for irresistible grace. Nonetheless, in 1653 Innocent X, under the influence of the Jesuits, condemned Jansen’s views. See Harold J. Grimm, *The Reformation Era: 1500-1650* (New York: Macmillan, 1954), 533; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 350-54. In the eighteenth-century the debate would return as Pasquier Quensnel (1634-1719) argued for Augustinianism and Jansenism in his *Meditations upon the New Testament*. Again, the Jesuits condemned the work. Seeberg, *History of Doctrines*, 2:455. Yet, in his essays against the Jesuits, Jansenism was revived by Blaise Pascal (1623-62). Today, Semi-Pelagianism continues to be affirmed by the Roman Catholic Church, as seen in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Pauline, 1994), 103, 430. For further details on this debate, see Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 80-82; Edmund J. Fortman, *The Theology of Man and Grace* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966), 261-93; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:714-19; González, *The Story of Christianity*, 2:166-68.

<sup>198</sup>Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, 146. Also see Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:81-82.

for that matter, Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Bucer, and all the leading Protestant theologians of the first epoch of the Reformation, stood on precisely the same ground here. On other points, they had their differences; but in asserting the helplessness of man in sin, and the sovereignty of God in grace, they were entirely at one. To all of them, these doctrines were the very life-blood of the Christian faith. A modern editor of Luther's great work underscores this fact: 'Whoever puts this book down without having realized that evangelical theology stands or falls with the doctrine of the bondage of the will has read it in vain.' The doctrine of free justification by faith only, which became the storm-centre of so much controversy during the Reformation period, is often regarded as the heart of the Reformers' theology, but this is hardly accurate. The truth is that their thinking was really centered upon the contention of Paul, echoed with varying degrees of adequacy by Augustine, and Gottschalk, and Bradwardine, and Wycliffe, that the sinner's entire salvation is by free and sovereign grace only. The doctrine of justification by faith was important to them because it safeguarded the principle of sovereign grace; but it actually expressed for them only one aspect of this principle, and that not its deepest aspect. The sovereignty of grace found expression in their thinking at a profounder level still, in the doctrine of *monergistic regeneration* – the doctrine, that is, that the faith which receives Christ for justification is itself the free gift of a sovereign God, bestowed by spiritual regeneration in the act of effectual calling. To the Reformers, the crucial question was not simply, whether God justifies believers without works of law. It was the broader question, whether sinners are wholly helpless in their sin, and whether God is to be thought of as saving them by free, unconditional, invincible grace, not only justifying them for Christ's sake when they come to faith, but also raising them from the death of sin by His quickening Spirit in order to bring them to faith. Here was the crucial issue: whether God is the author, not merely of justification, but also of faith; whether, in the last analysis, Christianity is a religion of utter reliance on God for salvation and all things necessary to it, or of self-reliance and self-effort.<sup>199</sup>

Packer demonstrates that for Luther, Calvin, and many other Reformers, the doctrine of monergistic regeneration was the pillar supporting the doctrine of justification by faith alone.<sup>200</sup> Granted, Calvin did not always use the word "regeneration" in the narrow sense that later Calvinists would, but rather used it in the broad sense synonymous with sanctification.<sup>201</sup> However, though theological labels may differ the content of sovereign

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<sup>199</sup>Packer, "Historical and Theological Introduction," 58-59. Emphasis added. The Lutheran to whom Packer refers is H. J. Iwand.

<sup>200</sup>R. C. Sproul agrees in *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 181-83.

<sup>201</sup>Calvin, *Institutes* 3.3.9; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 233-34; Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 116-17; Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism*, 20; François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Developments of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 242; William Edgard, "Ethics: The Christian Life and Good Works according to Calvin," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes*, 322; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 94. However, as Pipa observes, "Even though Calvin often used the term *regeneration* to include sanctification, he also used the term in its later, more traditional meaning. For example, commenting on Psalm 100:3, he wrote, 'It is clear from the context that he is speaking of regeneration, which is the beginning of the spiritual life. . . .' [*Institutes* 2.3.6. and 2.7.11.] He referred to the Spirit as the Spirit of regeneration in light of His initial work of conversion." Therefore, it would be historically and theologically irresponsible to argue either for or against monergism on the basis of Calvin's use of the word "regeneration." Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., "Calvin on the Holy Spirit," in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 59-60.

grace is the same. For Calvin the faith that justifies rests completely and entirely on the sovereign work of the Spirit to bring about the new birth. Gaffin quotes Calvin, saying,

This mention of faith, and the key role accorded to it, prompts Calvin, still within this opening section, to touch on what would become a central question in subsequent discussions about the *ordo salutis*, namely the origin of faith, giving rise eventually in Reformed theology to the doctrine of regeneration in a narrower sense. We observe “that not all indiscriminately embrace that communion with Christ which is offered through the gospel.” Why? Not because of some differentiating factor on our side. The answer is not to be found by looking into ourselves or contemplating the mystery of human freedom and willing. Rather, consistent with his uniform teaching elsewhere about the total inability of the will because of sin, we must “climb higher” and consider “the secret energy of the Spirit” (*arcana Spiritus efficacia*). Faith is Spirit-worked, sovereignly and efficaciously.<sup>202</sup>

Without the sovereign and effectual act of God to call and regenerate, justification by faith alone is without a foundation. The reason some believe and others do not is not to be found in man’s free will, but in the Spirit’s sovereign choice.

### **The Synod of Dort**

Calvin would not be without a following as his view of grace would be defended by a host of Calvinists, including successors like Theodore Beza (1519-1605),<sup>203</sup> William Perkins (1558-1602), and eventually Francis Turretin (1623-1687). However, it is in the seventeenth-century with the uprising of Jacob Arminius and the Remonstrants that Calvinism would find its greatest challenge, eventually rousing a response from the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Before we begin to probe the intricacies of exactly how Dort argued for monergism, it is necessary to provide a brief historical background explaining the rise of the Arminian view (though a full presentation of Arminianism awaits chapter 5).

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<sup>202</sup>Richard B. Gaffin, “Justification and Union with Christ (3.11-19),” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, 259.

<sup>203</sup>For example, for Theodore Beza’s monergism, see *The Christian Faith*, trans. James Clark (East Sussex: Focus Christian Ministries Trust, 1992), 4.3-13; idem, *A Little Book of Christian Questions and Responses*, trans. Kirk M. Summers (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), Q81-Q107.

## Jacob Arminius

Arminianism bears the name of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609).<sup>204</sup> Arminius studied at the University of Leiden under Lambert Daneau,<sup>205</sup> a colleague of John Calvin in 1560 and close friend of Theodore Beza, until at age twenty-two he moved to Geneva to attend the Geneva academy in 1581, under the teaching of Beza, Calvin's epigone and successor.<sup>206</sup> However, it would become clear after Arminius left Geneva to pastor in Amsterdam from 1587 to 1603 that he would advocate a synergistic view of grace, especially apparent in his sermons on Romans 7-9, where he taught that chapter 7 represented Paul as an unbeliever.<sup>207</sup> As Muller explains,

He first directed his attention to Romans 7 and the problem of the will. He moved away from the traditional Augustinian pattern of the Reformers and argued that the inward struggle of Paul was a pre-conversion, not a post-conversion, struggle. Here

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<sup>204</sup>On the life and theology of Arminius see Gerard Brandt, *The History of the Reformation and Other Ecclesiastical Transactions in and about the Low Countries, down to the Famous Synod of Dort*, 4 vols. (London: n.p., 1720-23; reprint, New York: AMS, 1979); Caspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius, D.D.*, trans. John Guthrie (London: n.p., 1854); A. W. Harrison, *The Beginnings of Arminianism to the Synod of Dort* (London: University of London Press, 1926); idem, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937); Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); idem, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," in *The Heritage of John Calvin*, ed. John H. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 209-22; F. Stuart Clarke, "Theology of Arminius," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 185 (1960): 248-53; Gerald O. McCulloh, ed., *Man's Faith and Freedom: The Theological Influence of Jacobus Arminius* (New York: Abingdon, 1962); Harold Slaatte, *The Arminian Arm of Theology: The Theologies of John Fletcher, First Methodist Theologian, and His Precursor, James Arminius* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1978); Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); William Gene Witt, "Creation, Redemption and Grace in the Theology of Jacob Arminius," 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993); F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: Jacobus Arminius' Doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2006); Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609*, ed. Wim Janse, Brill's Series in Church History, 27 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007); Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin, and Marijke Tolsma, eds., *Arminianism, Arminianism, and Europe: Jacob Arminius (1559/60-1609)*, Brill's Series in Church History, 39 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010). It should be noted, however, that there were, to be anachronistic, Arminians before Arminius. As Praamsma observes, several precursors included: Dirk Volkertszoon Coornhert (1552-1509), Hubertus Duifhuis (1531-1581), Caspar Coolhaes (1536-1615), Herman Herberts (1540-1607), Cornelis Wiggerts (d. 1624), Adolphus Venator (d. 1619), Taco Sybrants (d. 1613), and Jelle Hotzes Sneecanus (1540-1600). Of these, Coornhert's theology would instigate a revolution in Arminius' thought. Louis Praamsma, "Background of Arminian Controversy," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 24-26. Also see Mark A. Ellis, "Simon Episcopius and the Doctrine of Original Sin" (Ph.D. diss, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2002); Bangs, *Arminius*, 25-55.

<sup>205</sup>Muller, *Jacob Arminius*, 17; Bangs, *Arminius*, 138-41.

<sup>206</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 66-71, 75-77, 148-49, 253; Muller, *Jacob Arminius*, 19.

<sup>207</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 71-80, 141; Jan Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort," in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulso and Jan Rohls, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 134 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 9.

already are hints of a synergism in which the human will takes the first step toward grace.<sup>208</sup>

In 1603 Arminius accepted a professorate at the University of Leiden and while he would receive opposition from many Calvinists like Lucas Trelcatius, the younger (1573-1607), perhaps his most aggressive opponent came in Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), a student of Beza, Whitaker, and Ursinus.<sup>209</sup> Gomarus, believing Arminius's theology to be in agreement with the Jesuits and Pelagians, was not alone when he declared that Arminius violated the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563).<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup>Richard A. Muller, "Arminius and Arminianism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 33. See Bangs, *Arminius*, 140-45, 186-92, for details on Arminius's preaching of Rom 7. Rom 9 would prove equally monumental, as he came to teach that Paul was not teaching the unconditional election of individuals, but the election of classes of persons (as represented by Jacob and Esau), a view which would bring Arminius into debate with Franciscus Junius. On Arminius' response to Junius, see Jacob Arminius, "Epistolary Discussion, concerning Predestination, between James Arminius, D. D. and Francis Junius, D. D." and "Appendix to the previous discussion, containing the Theses of Junius concerning Predestination, with annotations by Arminius," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. W. R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 3:7-278. Also see Muller, "Arminius and Arminianism," 33; Bangs, *Arminius*, 193-205; Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 25; Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism," 10. Peter Plancius also objected, charging Arminius with Pelagianism. To solidify his views further, in 1601 Arminius decided to write a response (published posthumously in 1612) to the Cambridge Calvinist William Perkins (1558-1602), once again making evident his departure from the Calvinists. James Arminius, "Examination of a Treatise Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination, and the Amplitude of Divine Grace, by William Perkins," in *Writings*, 3:279-526. Also see McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 28. Arminius's treatise against Perkins was serendipitous as controversy in England already ensued with anti-Calvinists such as Peter Baro (1534-1559) and eventually William Barrett, protesting the push to have the Calvinist Lambeth Articles of 1595 (which Perkins, William Whitaker, and Richard Vaughan stood behind) appended to the Thirty-Nine Articles (1563), giving the Church of England a more official Calvinistic position. Bangs, *Arminius*, 206-08; Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 101-23; O. T. Hargrave, "The Freewillers in the English Reformation," *CH* 37 (1968): 271-80; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York: Schocken, 1964), 292, 314; G. J. Hoenderdaal, "The Debate about Arminius outside the Netherlands," in *Leiden University in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Th. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 153; Mark R. Shaw, "William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Cambridge Predestination Controversy of the 1590's," *WTJ* 58 (1996): 267-301; Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1973); Keith D. Stanglin, "Arminius Avant la Lettre: Peter Baro, Jacob Arminius, and the Bond of Predestinarian Polemic," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 51-74; H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 376-90; Nicholas R. N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 29-106; Patrick Collinson, "England and International Calvinism, 1558-1640," in *International Calvinism, 1541-1715*, ed. Menna Prestwich (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 197-224. On the spread of Arminianism in England and Ireland, see David Steers, "Arminianism amongst Protestant Dissenters in England and Ireland in the Eighteenth Century," in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, 159-202.

<sup>209</sup>Stanglin explains the key difference between Gomarus and Arminius: "Gomarus went out of his way to stress that God makes unwilling people into willing people. . . . For Gomarus and Kuchlinus, there is no free choice in matters of salvation prior to regeneration. Although Arminius would equally stress the necessity of divine grace in initiating conversion, he was careful to avoid language implying that humanity is an unwilling participant in conversion." Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 79. Also see Th. Marius van Leeuwen, "Introduction: Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe," in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, xiii.

<sup>210</sup>See Brandt, *Life of James Arminius*, 343-44; Bangs, *Arminius*, 319; Muller, *Jacob Arminius*, 28. Muller shows that claims that Arminius was a crypto-Catholic or Jesuit are without substance, though it

As Van Leeuwen states, “To his enemies it became ever more obvious that, by diminishing the role of God and pleading for human freedom, Arminius distanced himself from the Reformed confession: the *Confessio Belgica*, the Catechism of Heidelberg.”<sup>211</sup> Moreover, as Gerrit Jan Hoenderdaal observes, Arminius along with his friend Johannes Uitenbogaert (1557-1644) “joined in wanting the [Belgic] Confession and the [Heidelberg] Catechism to be ‘revisable and reformable.’”<sup>212</sup> Despite the claims of some historians that Arminius was part of the Reformed tradition, Richard Muller has successfully demonstrated that the synergism of Arminius was, in the eyes of seventeenth-century Reformers, an obvious violation of the Reformed confessions for “the basic doctrinal position advanced both in the Confession and in the synods was anti-synergistic, namely, monergistic.”<sup>213</sup> One year before Arminius’s death, his departure from the Reformed confessions would become even more explicit in the publication of his *Declaration of Sentiments* in 1608 (presented before the Calvinistic Estates General of Holland), which included a clear affirmation of synergism as well as a refutation of Calvinism’s decretal theology.<sup>214</sup> For Arminius, Calvinism (both supra- and

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is true that he was influenced by Aquinas, Molina and Suárez. See pages 29, 88, 110-21, 163, 192-98. On Gomarus’s opposition to Arminius’s, see Simon Kistemaker, “Leading Figures at the Synod of Dort,” in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 42-44.

<sup>211</sup>Van Leeuwen, “Introduction: Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe,” in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, xiv.

<sup>212</sup>Gerrit Jan Hoenderdaal, “The Life and Struggle of Arminius in the Dutch Republic,” in *Man’s Faith and Freedom*, 15. On Arminius’s several attempts, all of which failed, to bring about a synod where the Reformed confessions were revised, see Van Leeuwen, “Introduction: Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe,” in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, xiv; White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, 37-38.

<sup>213</sup>Richard A. Muller, “Arminius and the Reformed Tradition,” *WTJ* 70 (2008): 31-47; idem, “Arminius and Arminianism,” 34; idem, *Jacob Arminius*, 42; Praamsma, “Background of Arminian Controversy,” 28, 29; Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 100. Contra Brandt, *The History of the Reformation*, 1:308-13, 336-37, 369-70, 441-51, 2:27-32; Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius*; Carl Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 221; idem, *Arminius*, 21-22, 103-04; 315-15, 336-37, 349, 354; idem, *Review of God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius*, *CH* 66 (1997): 118-20; F. Stuart Clarke, “Theology of Arminius,” 251.

<sup>214</sup>Arminius also revealed his deviation in “Examination of Gomarus’s Theses on Predestination” (published posthumously), where he also concludes that Gomarus’s views are “very well adapted for establishing and confirming it [the kingdom of Satan].” James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 3:658.

infralapsarian)<sup>215</sup> was in conflict with God's love and man's free will, ultimately making God the author of sin. To the contrary, God's election is conditioned upon God's foreknowledge of man's faith.<sup>216</sup> Likewise, the Spirit's effort to apply the grace of God is also conditioned upon the sinner who is able to use his free will to resist and reject God's grace. It is only when the sinner cooperates with God that grace is made effective.<sup>217</sup> While it is necessary for God to provide a universal, prevenient grace (grounded in a universal atonement) which mitigates man's pervasive depravity and enables belief, God's saving act to finally convert the sinner is conditioned upon the free choice of the sinner to accept or reject grace (synergism).<sup>218</sup> Such a synergistic view by Arminius shared many similarities with the synergism of medieval theologian Gabriel Biel, which only fueled the charge, even if it be an inaccurate one, that Arminius was advocating Semi-Pelagianism.

### **The Arminian Remonstrants<sup>219</sup>**

While Arminius died in 1609 his synergism filled many churches in Amsterdam so that by 1610 there were many Arminian pastors. These included his

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<sup>215</sup> Muller, *Jacob Arminius*, 10, 19; idem, "Arminius and Arminianism," 34; Praamsma, "Background of Arminian Controversy," 29-30; Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 467.

<sup>216</sup> See James Arminius, "Declaration of Sentiments," in *Writings*, 1:230-31. As Olsen states, "In the final analysis, according to Arminius, any monergistic doctrine of salvation makes God the author of sin and thus a hypocrite 'because it imputes hypocrisy to God, as if, in His exhortation to faith addressed to such, He requires them to believe in Christ, whom, however, He has not set forth as a Savior to them.'" Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 467. Also see Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 103-08.

<sup>217</sup> On synergism, see James Arminius, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," in *Writings*, 2:492-501; idem, "Declaration of Sentiments," 1:252-53; idem, "Apology against Thirty-One Theological Articles," in *Writings*, 1:276-380 (especially 328, 364-73). See Bangs, *Arminius*, 342, 358; Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 470; Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 22.

<sup>218</sup> "Arminius saw a man's salvation or his damnation resting ultimately on that man's response to God's offer of grace. His response is not predetermined by a fixed decree." McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 32. Also see Hoenderdaal, "The Life and Struggle of Arminius in the Dutch Republic," in *Man's Faith and Freedom*, 24.

<sup>219</sup> My exposition of the Remonstrant doctrine and Dort's response is brief. For an excellent theological study of the Remonstrants and Dort, see Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008), 19-53.

colleagues Johannes Uitenbogaert and Peter Bertius, as well as other disciples such as Hugo Grotius, Jan van Oldenbarnevelt, Adrian Borrius, Johannes Corvinus, and Nicolas Grevinchovius. However, perhaps two of the most important successors were Conrad Vorstius (1569-1622), opposed by King James himself, and Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), both of whom succeeded Arminius at the University of Leiden.<sup>220</sup> As unrest continued, forty-six Arminians, led by Uitenbogaert and Episcopius, gathered in Gouda in 1610 to write a *Remonstrance* against the Calvinists, which included five canons articulating their beliefs. The confession is consistent with the writings of Arminius, teaching that God's election is conditioned upon foreseen faith, Christ's atonement is universal in scope, and grace is resistible. As Rohls explains, "The Remonstrants presupposed free will, which could either accept God's universal offer of salvation or reject it."<sup>221</sup> Like Arminius, for the Remonstrants grace is not effectual, irresistible, causal, or monergistic, but only persuasive so that man's free will is able to ultimately determine whether or not God's grace will be cooperated with.<sup>222</sup> Muller explains,

The third article argues the necessity of grace if fallen man is to choose the good and come to belief. In the fourth article, this insistence upon prevenient grace is drawn into relation with the synergism of the first two articles. Prevenient and subsequent assisting grace may be resisted and rejected: ultimately the work of salvation, in its efficacy and application, rests on human choice.<sup>223</sup>

While the specifics of the Remonstrants's synergism will be examined in chapter 5, it is important to observe here that for the Arminians, synergism was the key component in their protests against the Calvinism of their day.

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<sup>220</sup>On King James's opposition to Vortius and Arminianism, especially in regard to its adoption of Socinianism, see White, *Predestination, Polity, and Polemic*, 159-66, 175-202; Simon Kistemaker, "Leading Figures at the Synod of Dort," 49-50; Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands," in *John Calvin, His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Standford Reid and Paul Woolley (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 104-05.

<sup>221</sup>Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism," 19.

<sup>222</sup>Such synergism is evident in the Remonstrants's articulation of predestination as well. As Muller observes, predestination was defined "as the eternal purpose of God in Christ to save those who believe and to damn those who reject the gospel and the grace of God in Christ. Here already the implication is synergistic and the will of God is viewed as contingent upon human choice." Muller, "Arminius and Arminianism," 34.

<sup>223</sup>*Ibid.*, 34-35.

Prompted by the Calvinist Prince Maurice of Orange, six representatives of each side met in Hague (the *Collatio Hagiensis*) in 1611 to discuss their differences but the meeting was of no success.<sup>224</sup> By 1618 a Counter Remonstrance was formed by the Calvinists in Dordrecht, presided over by Johannes Bogerman (1576-1637), which sought not only to correct the Arminian caricatures of the Calvinist position as well as refute the Remonstrant position, but also to set forth the “biblical” view.<sup>225</sup> In so doing, Dort showed, as Muller notes, that the

Arminian doctrines were clearly beyond the bounds of Reformed confessional orthodoxy. . . . The Canons of Dort ought to be viewed as a magisterial interpretation of the extant Reformed confessional synthesis: they condemn predestination grounded on prior human choice; they deny a grace that is both resistible and acceptable by man; they affirm the depth of original sin, argue a limited efficiency of Christ’s work of satisfaction and stress the perseverance of the elect by grace. None of these views modifies the earlier Reformed position – indeed, virtually all of these points can be elicited from Ursinus’s exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>226</sup>

The focus of Dort is on the major difference between the two parties: conditionality

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<sup>224</sup>Ibid., 345.

<sup>225</sup>John R. De Witt, “The Arminian Conflict,” in *Puritan Papers*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 5:17-18. Before the delegates of Dort pronounced their verdict they requested that the Remonstrants, led by Episcopius, set forth their views with greater detail than they had in the *Five Articles* originally presented. The Remonstrants wrote a confession of their beliefs that more fully presented their views and it came to be called the *Sententiae Remonstrantium* (the *Opinions of the Remonstrants*). For the entirety of the *Sententiae Remonstrantium*, see Appendix H in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 229. When Dort pronounced its verdict, condemning the Remonstrant views as outside the bounds of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism and most importantly in conflict with Scripture itself, such a pronouncement was based upon the *Five Articles* and the *Sententiae Remonstrantium* of the Remonstrant party. For more a detailed history of Dort, see Cornelius Augustijn, “Synod of Dordrecht,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 2:2; Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of our Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1980), 1-102; White, *Predestination, Policy, and Polemic*, 175-202; Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 450-477; Rohls, “Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism,” 3-48; Samuel Miller, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Articles of the Synod of Dort* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 5-78; Thomas Scott, “The History,” in *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, 94-240; Philip Schaff, *The History of the Creeds*, vol. 1 of *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 509-16; William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth), 2:371-513; L. H. Wagenaar, *Van Strijd en Overwinning: De Grootte Synode van 1618 op ’19 en Wat aan Haar Voorafging* (Utrecht: G. J. A. Ruys, 1909), 1-256; W. Robert Godfrey, “Tensions Within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619” (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974), 10-69; Praamsma, “Arminian Controversy,” 22-38; Donald Sinnema, “The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618-19) in Light of the History of this Doctrine,” (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael’s College, 1985), 136-213; Keith D. Stanglin, “‘Arminius avant la lettre’: Peter Baro, Jacob Arminius, and the Bond of Predestinarian Polemic,” *WTJ* 67 (2005): 51-74; Godfrey, “Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands,” 95-122.

<sup>226</sup>Muller, “Arminius and Arminianism,” 35. See Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); Lyle D. Bierma, *Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); George W. Bethune, *Guilt, Grace, and Gratitude: Lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001).

versus unconditionality in salvation.<sup>227</sup> According to the Counter-Remonstrants, man is pervasively depraved and spiritually unable to choose God, election is unconditional, the atonement of Christ is limited to the elect, God's grace for the elect is effectual and irresistible in its application, and God always preserves his elect unto glory. Dort is clear: no aspect of God's eternal choice is conditioned upon man's free will for its efficacy or success. As John R. De Witt states,

Arminianism meant synergism: that is, in however evangelical a form in some of its early proponents, it introduced a cooperative element into the effecting of salvation. And each of the doctrines delineated at Dort was directed against the notion of any cooperation, any grounding of God's favor upon something acceptable in the creature, in the extending of grace to sinners.<sup>228</sup>

It is to this fight against synergism in the Canons of Dort that we now turn.

### **The Canons of Dort**

Dort begins by describing the pervasiveness of depravity. Man has inherited from Adam a corrupt nature so that after the fall every man is a slave to sin.

[Article 1] Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.<sup>229</sup>

[Article 2] Man brought forth children of the same nature as himself after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt he brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam to all his descendants – except for Christ alone – not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of his perverted nature.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>227</sup>De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 174; Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian*, 122. Also see Fred H. Klooster, "Doctrinal Deliverances of Dort," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 52-57.

<sup>228</sup>De Witt, "The Arminian Conflict," 20.

<sup>229</sup>"The Canons of the Synod of Dort," in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, 3-4.1.

<sup>230</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.2. Original sin is also addressed in the "Rejection of the Errors" of canons 3 and 4. "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 1. Who teach that,

[Article 3] Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.<sup>231</sup>

In these first three articles it is evident Dort affirms that (1) man's depravity pervades every aspect of his being (will, mind, affections), (2) man is dead, a slave to his sinful nature, and (3) man is in no way willing to return to God or reform his distorted nature.<sup>232</sup>

He is in total reliance upon the saving power of God.<sup>233</sup>

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properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin itself is enough to condemn the whole human race or to warrant temporal and eternal punishments. For they contradict the apostle when he says: 'Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death passed on to all men because all sinned' [Rom 5:12]; also 'The guilt followed one sin and brought condemnation [Rom 5:16]; likewise: 'The wages of sin is death.' [Rom 6:23]" 2. Who teach that the spiritual gifts or the good dispositions and virtues such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness could not have resided in man's will when he was first created, and therefore could not have been separated from the will at the fall. For this conflicts with the apostle's description of the image of God in Ephesians 4:24, where he portrays the image in terms of righteousness and holiness, which definitely reside in the will." Ibid., 3-4, rejections 1-2.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 3-4.3.

<sup>232</sup> As rejections 3 and 4 state, "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 3. Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts have not been separated from man's will, since the will in itself has never been corrupted but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions, and since the will is able to exercise its innate free capacity once these hindrances are removed, which is to say it is able of itself to will or choose whatever good is set before it – or else not to will or choose it. This is a novel idea and an error and has the effect of elevating the power of free choice, contrary to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: 'The heart itself is deceitful above all things and wicked' [Jer 17:9]; and of the words of the apostle: 'All of us also lived among them [the sons of disobedience] at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts.' [Eph 2:3] 4. Who teach that unregenerate man is not strictly or totally dead in his sins or deprived of all capacity for spiritual good but is able to hunger and thirst for righteousness or life and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which is pleasing to God. For these views are opposed to the plain testimonies of Scripture: 'You were dead in your transgressions and sins' [Eph 2:1, 5]; 'The imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil all the time.' [Gen 6:5, 8:21] Besides, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer God the sacrifice of a broken spirit is characteristic only of the regenerate and of those called blessed [Ps 51:17; Matt 5:6]." Ibid., 3-4, rejections 3-4.

<sup>233</sup> Dort goes on to argue in Article 4 that though there remains within man "a certain light of nature" in which he "retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is more and immoral," nevertheless, this light of nature "is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God" nor is it able to convert him. To the contrary, man distorts the light and "suppresses it in unrighteousness" and in so doing "he renders himself without excuse before God." Ibid., 3-4.4. Just as the light of nature is inadequate, so also is the Law. "For man cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of his sin and increasingly convict him of his guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable him to escape from his misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse." See Article 5 for a fuller statement. Ibid., 3-4.5. Article 6 provides the solution, "What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and New Testament." Ibid., 3-4.6.

Despite man's ruin, God has graciously provided a gospel call for all people. "For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in his word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe [Matt 11:28-29]."<sup>234</sup> Notice, the gospel call is a well-meant offer. Those who are called by the gospel are called "seriously." Here Dort is responding to the objection of the Remonstrants who argued in their *Sententiae Remonstrantium* that the Calvinist God was hypocritical to call all people by his gospel when he would effectually save only his elect.

8. Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely un hypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.<sup>235</sup>

Dort rejects such a charge. Scripture is clear; God does indeed call all externally though according to his decretive will he only chooses to internally convert his elect. God is in no way hypocritical for he only holds out to the sinner that which he could have (eternal life) if he would believe. However, the sinner not only cannot believe but he will not believe. Therefore, as Dort argues in article 9, the fact that the sinner does not believe is nobody's fault but his own.<sup>236</sup>

However, when a sinner does hear the gospel and believes, God and God alone receives all of the credit for he is the one who first gave the sinner new life to believe.

[Article 10] The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to man, as though one distinguishes himself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid., 3-4.8.

<sup>235</sup>As quoted in "Appendix H: The Opinions of the Remonstrants," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 226-27.

<sup>236</sup>Article 9 states, "The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the word with the thorns of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower [Matthew 13]." "The Canons of the Synod of Dort," 3-4.9.

or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity he chose his own in Christ, so within time he effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son [Col 1:13], in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light [1 Pet 2:9], and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture [1 Cor 1:31].<sup>237</sup>

For the sinner to believe God must irresistibly and effectually, by the power of the Spirit, call that elect sinner to himself and awaken him to new life.

[Article 11] Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities<sup>238</sup> into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.<sup>239</sup>

No mere moral persuasion will do, but unfailing resurrection to spiritual life is necessary.

[Article 12] And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup>Ibid., 3-4.10.

<sup>238</sup>Horton argues that this infusion of new qualities is “not a medieval notion of infused habits, but simply a manner of expressing the impartation of new life from a source external to the person who is ‘dead in sins.’ . . . [regeneration] is not represented here as accomplished apart from or prior to the external preaching of the gospel.” Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 203n.83.

<sup>239</sup>“The Canons of the Synod of Dort,” 3-4.11.

<sup>240</sup>Ibid., 3-4.12.

Perhaps no confession since Dort has spent so much space articulating the monergistic nature of grace. Notice, in article 12, Dort is unambiguous: God works regeneration before any act of faith on our part and apart from our help (contra Arminianism). Such a work of God, not upon all but only upon his elect, is irresistible, effectual, and always successful, bringing the sinner from death to new life.<sup>241</sup> As Ezekiel 36:26 demonstrates, God's work is not by mere moral persuasion nor is it conditioned upon "man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted."<sup>242</sup> Rather, it is a work equivalent to raising the dead. Indeed, God's act of rebirth is always certain, unfailing, and effective, so that those whom God chooses to specially call and regenerate "do actually believe." Appealing to Ephesians 1:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:11, and 2 Peter 1:3, Dort's rejection of synergism is also evident in Rejections 8 of Canons 3/4.

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 8. Who teach that God in regenerating man does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby he may powerfully and unfailingly bend man's will to faith and conversion, but that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for man's conversion, man nevertheless can, and in actual fact often does, so resist God and the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate him, that man completely thwarts his own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in his own power whether or not to be reborn. For this does away with all effective functioning of God's grace in our conversion and subjects the activity of Almighty God to the will of man; it is contrary to the apostles, who teach that we believe by virtue of the effective working of God's mighty strength, and that God fulfills the undeserved good will of his kindness and the work of faith in us with power, and likewise that his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>241</sup>Dort rejects a universal grace that is contingent upon the will of man in rejection 5. "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 5. Who teach that corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that he is able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace – evangelical or saving grace – as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God, for his part, shows himself ready to reveal Christ to all people, since he provides to all, to a sufficient extent and in an effective manner, the means necessary for the revealing of Christ of Christ, for faith, and for repentance." Dort cites Psalm 147:19-20, Acts 14:16, and Acts 16:6-7 in support. *Ibid.*, 3-4, rejection 5.

<sup>242</sup>Dort rejects a mere persuasion in rejection 7. "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 7. Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God's acting in man's conversion that is most noble and suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral suasion even by itself from making natural men spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the assent of the will except in this manner of moral suasion, and that the effectiveness of God's work by which it surpasses the work of Satan consists in the fact that God promises eternal benefits while Satan promises temporal ones." Dort goes on to say that such a teaching is Pelagian and contradicts Ezekiel 36:26." *Ibid.*, 3-4, rejection 7.

<sup>243</sup>Dort also states in rejection 9, "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 9. Who teach that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to

Notice the emphasis Dort places on making sure it is God, not man, who receives all of the credit and glory (1 Cor 1:31). To reverse the order is to rob God of his glory and give man a ground to boast upon.

If, as Dort argues, man's faith is the result of God's effectual call and regenerative work, then it also follows that faith itself is a gift. However, Dort is very careful to avoid an Arminian definition of faith. Having Jeremiah 31:18, 33, Isaiah 44:3, and Romans 5:5 in mind, article 14 states,

In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent – the act of believing – from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself.<sup>244</sup>

In other words, the Arminian defines faith in such a way that it is a gift but only in the sense that it is offered so that whether or not it becomes actual is man's choice, not God's. To the contrary, faith is a gift that God wills to implant within the dead, lifeless sinner so that upon granting the dead sinner new life he believes necessarily. As Dort states, God produces "in man both the will to believe and the belief itself."<sup>245</sup> Peter Toon correctly concludes that, on the basis of article 14, Dort taught "that regeneration precedes faith and is the cause of faith."<sup>246</sup>

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initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede – in the order of causality – the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help man's will to come to conversion before man's will itself motivates and determines itself." Dort goes on to argue that the church condemned the Pelagians for such an error. Dort cites Rom 9:16, 1 Cor 4:7, and Phil 2:13 in support. Ibid., 3-4, rejection 9.

<sup>244</sup>"The Canons of the Synod of Dort," 3-4.14. Likewise, rejection 6 states, "Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the synod rejects the errors of those . . . 6. Who teach that in the true conversion of man new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into his will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name 'believers' is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith." Dort cites Jeremiah 31:33, Isaiah 44:3, Romans 5:5, and Jeremiah 31:18 in support. Ibid., 3-4, rejection 6.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid., 3-4.14.

<sup>246</sup>Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 123.

Dort, however, is aware of two objections. First, the Arminian objects that if it is only God who can do this effectual and irresistible work so that without it no man can believe, then God is unjust and unfair to limit his saving work to only some rather than all. But Dort responds to this objection in the tradition of the apostle Paul in Romans 9. “God does not owe this grace to anyone. For what could God owe to one who has nothing to give that can be paid back? Indeed, what could God owe to one who has nothing of his own to give but sin and falsehood?”<sup>247</sup> Man has nothing to offer but sin and guilt. Therefore, it is pure mercy for God to call and regenerate anyone at all. To level the charge of injustice against God is to miss this point entirely.

Second, the Remonstrants also objected that if grace is irresistible, not just providing the opportunity to believe but actually providing the will to believe, then man is reduced to a block or stone, stripped of his personal agency. Dort responds,

However, just as by the fall man did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and – in a manner at once pleasing and powerful – bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. It is in this that the true spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, man would have no hope of getting up from his fall by his free choice, by which he plunged himself into ruin when still standing upright.<sup>248</sup>

The grace of regeneration works upon the will not to abolish it or coerce it, but rather in a way that revives, heals, and reforms it, bending it back to love God rather than sin. Notice exactly how God revives, heals, reforms, and bends the will; it is in a “manner at once pleasing and powerful.” It is pleasing because man is a sinner, deserving only wrath. It is powerful in that God does not leave salvation up to man’s will but brings him into union with Christ without fail, accomplishing the redemption he intended.

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<sup>247</sup>“The Canons of the Synod of Dort,” 3-4.15.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 3-4.16.

### The Westminster Confession

Though the Arminian Remonstrants were condemned by Dort, nevertheless, their synergism would continue as many in the Remonstrant Brotherhood (*Remonstrantse Broederschap*) were exiled to Antwerp and eventually returned secretly to Holland. Shortly after Dort, Episcopius took on a lead role in drafting a confession, which was published in 1621 as the *Confession or Declaration of the Remonstrant Pastors*.<sup>249</sup> Synergism would continue to characterize Arminianism as it spread throughout Europe.<sup>250</sup> Nevertheless, Dort's emphasis on sovereign grace would be reiterated at the Westminster Assembly (1643-49), whose confession is arguably the most important for the Reformed tradition today.<sup>251</sup> As Robert Norris observes, "the decisions of the Synod of Dort were of great import to the Assembly" and Dort "was the most significant of the recent Reformed synods." Indeed, the "Dutch theologian and leader of the strict Calvinist party at Dort, Franciscus Gomarus, is frequently cited in the 'Minutes' and his arguments are repeated with approval."<sup>252</sup> Dort was all the more relevant to Westminster because in England "the influence of Archbishop Laud and his clergy had cast a long shadow upon the memories of the Divines."<sup>253</sup> Therefore, as Arminianism spread throughout England and London (e.g., through John Goodwin), it was no surprise that the Assembly believed Arminianism to be a great threat. The Westminster Confession drew from the creeds of

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<sup>249</sup>In Latin: *Confessio sive declaratio sententiae pastorum, qui in foederato Belgico Remonstrantes vocantur, super praecipuis articulis Religionis Christianae*. On Episcopius, see Mark A. Ellis, "Introduction," in *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, ed. Mark A. Ellis, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), viii-ix. For the confession itself, see pages 1-137.

<sup>250</sup>Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 87-244. On Arminianism in England both before and after Dort, see McGonigle's chapter "Arminianism in England: 1590-1700," in *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 41-72.

<sup>251</sup>Others would include the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 1; Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism*, 52-61.

<sup>252</sup>Robert M. Norris, "The Thirty-Nine Articles at the Westminster Assembly," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009), 3:161. Also see Valdeci S. Santos, "A Missiological Analysis of the Westminster Confessions of Faith – Chapter 14," in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 3:337; Toon, *Born Again*, 124.

<sup>253</sup>Norris, "The Thirty-Nine Articles at the Westminster Assembly," 3:162.

the Reformation<sup>254</sup> – Heinrich Bullinger’s “Second Helvetic Confession” (1561), Guido de Bres’s “The Belgic Confession” (1561), Zacharius Ursinus’s “Heidelberg Catechism” (1563), William Whitaker’s “Lambeth Articles” (1595), James Ussher’s “Irish Articles” (1615), “The Scots Confession” (1560), and the “Thirty-Nine Articles” – and the Calvinism within these confessions became evident at Westminster.<sup>255</sup>

### **Westminster on Depravity and Free Will**

Like Dort, Westminster affirmed original sin and the pervasive depravity of man. In chapter 6, “Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment Thereof,” Westminster states that guilt and corruption from Adam has been imputed to all mankind.<sup>256</sup> By Adam’s sin man has fallen from his original righteousness and communion with God and has therefore become dead in sin, “wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.”<sup>257</sup> It is from the original corruption man has inherited that all of his actual sins proceed, which only compound man’s guilt and condemnation before a holy God.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>254</sup>For our purposes we will examine Westminster’s understanding of man’s depravity, free will, and God’s effectual grace. The Reformed understanding of these doctrines can also be found in the following confessions which preceded Westminster: The 1536 First Helvetic Confession 8-10; The 1536 Geneva Confession 4-5, 8-11; The 1559/1571 French Confession 10-12, 21; The 1560 Scots Confession 3, 8, 12; The 1561 Belgic Confession 14-17; The 1563 Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day) 3-5; The 1566 Second Helvetic Confession 8-9, 10, 14, 16; The 1571 Thirty-Nine Article 9-10, 17; The 1595 Lambeth Articles 1-9; The 1615 Irish Articles 11-16, 22-28, 31-33. Of these, the Three Forms of Unity – The Belgic Confession, The Canons of Dort, and The Heidelberg Catechism – would especially define the Reformed churches. For an excellent introduction and overview of the Reformed Confessions, see the ongoing project of *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation*, 2 vols. to date, ed. James Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008-2010); also see Jan Rohls, *The Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998); Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

<sup>255</sup>Latham, *The Westminster Assembly*, 37, 53-56, 62-69; A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards: Being the Baird Lectures for 1882* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath-School Works, 1897), 146, 150, 336; A. Pettegree, “The Reception of Calvinism in Britain,” in *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex* [Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion], ed. W. H. Neuser (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 267-89.

<sup>256</sup>“They being the root of mankind, the guilt of this sin was imputed, and the same death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity, descending from them by original generation.” “The Westminster Confession,” in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, 6.3.

<sup>257</sup>“By this sin they fell from their original righteousness and communion with God, and so became dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body.” *Ibid.*, 6.2.

<sup>258</sup>“From this original corruption, whereby we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil, do proceed all actual transgressions.” “The Westminster Confession,” 6.4. Likewise, 6.6 states, “Every sin, both original and actual, being a

The implications of man's depravity are massive for free will. Chapter 9, "Of Free Will," states that God created Adam with a "natural liberty" so that his choices were not forced nor was he under "any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil."<sup>259</sup> "Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God; but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it."<sup>260</sup> However, after the fall man's will is in bondage to sin. "Man, by his Fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto."<sup>261</sup> Therefore,

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, he freeth him from his natural bondage under sin, and, by his grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.<sup>262</sup>

Man's only hope is for God to free him from this bondage to sin by a supernatural grace.

### **Westminster on Effectual Calling**

Westminster appropriately moves from man's willful bondage to sin and need for God's grace to the doctrine of effectual calling and regeneration in chapter 10.<sup>263</sup>

1. All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time effectually to call [Rom 8:30; 11:7; Eph

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transgression of the righteous law of God, and contrary thereunto, doth, in its own nature, bring guilt upon the sinner, whereby he is bound over to the wrath of God, and curse of the law, and so made subject to death, with all miseries spiritual, temporal, and eternal." Ibid., 6.6.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 9.1.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid., 9.2.

<sup>261</sup>Ibid., 9.3.

<sup>262</sup>See *ibid.*, 9.4. "Of Free Will" in 9.5 concludes, "The will of man is made perfectly and immutable free to good alone, in the state of glory only." Ibid., 9.5.

<sup>263</sup>Effectual Calling is also defined and affirmed in the Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.31, "Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel." "Westminster Shorter Catechism," in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, Q.31.

1:10, 11], by his Word and Spirit [2 Thes 2:13-14; 2 Cor 3:3, 6], out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ [Rom 8:2; Eph 2:1-5; 2 Tim 1:9-10]: enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God [Acts 26:18; 1 Cor 2:10, 12; Eph 1:17-18], taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh [Ezek 36:26]; renewing their wills, and, by his almighty power determining them to that which is good [Ezek 11:19; Phil 2:13; Deut 20:6; Ezek 36:27], and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ [Eph 1:19; John 6:44-45]; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace [Song of Songs 1:4; Ps 110:3; John 6:37; Rom 6:16-18].

2. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man [2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:4-5; Eph 2:4-5, 8-9; Rom 9:11], who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit [1 Cor 2:14; Rom 8:7; Eph 2:5], he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it [John 6:37; Ezek 36:27; John 5:25].<sup>264</sup>

Several observations must be noted. First, chapter 10 begins by stating that only those whom God has predestined for life are effectually called and regenerated, contrary to the Arminian view which only sees God's calling as universal. Second, God effectually calls and regenerates dead sinners by his Word and Spirit to new life by the grace of his Son Jesus Christ.<sup>265</sup> Here Westminster draws from the biblical metaphors by stating that the Spirit enlightens the mind to understand (Eph 1:17-18), takes away the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26), renews the will, and effectually draws them to Jesus Christ (John 6:44-45).<sup>266</sup> Yet, though the Spirit's drawing is effectual, nevertheless, man comes most freely, "being made willing by his grace." The will, therefore, is renewed and made willing to believe. Moreover, notice the order in which Westminster places God's grace in reference to man's faith. In 10.2 Westminster states that the effectual call is purely of God's grace so that man is absolutely passive. It is only when the sinner has been "quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby

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<sup>264</sup>“The Westminster Confession,” 10.1-2. In 10.4 WCF addresses those who are not effectually called, “Others, not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the Word, and may have some common operations of the Spirit, yet they never truly come to Christ, and therefore cannot be saved: much less can men, not professing the Christian religion, be saved in any other way whatsoever, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, and the law of that religion they do profess; and to assert and maintain that they may be saved without warrant of the Word of God.” Ibid, 10.4.

<sup>265</sup>Also see “Westminster Shorter Catechism,” Q.30; William G. T. Shedd, *Calvinism: Pure and Mixed: A Defense of the Westminster Standards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986) 92-101.

<sup>266</sup>Robertson, “The Holy Spirit in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” 1:68.

enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it.” In other words, man’s answer to the call only comes after the Spirit has “quickened and renewed” and not before.<sup>267</sup> As O. Palmer Robertson comments,

The priority of the Holy Spirit in effectively calling and regenerating a person still dead in his trespasses and sins underscores the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners. If the new birth occurred as a consequence of faith, or if the only call to sinners came through the general invitation of gospel preaching and the common stirrings in the lives of all sinners by the Holy Spirit, then men rather than God would be making the final determination concerning their salvation. But the Scriptures plainly teach, as the Confession affirms, that the Spirit works uniquely in the souls of some people to draw them to God, persuade them to believe, and recreate a new life within. In a number of ways corresponding to the varied testimony of Scripture on this subject, the [Westminster] Confession upholds the sovereignty of God’s Spirit as he effectively brings chosen sinners to eternal salvation, while not working with the same power in the lives of others. . . . But the simple words of Jesus in the gospel of John make the point plain enough. Never does Jesus even hint that a person must “born himself again.” His teaching indicates that the sinner is just as passive in being born of the Spirit of God as he was when he was born the first time. There is no exception. No one. Not even the most religious can ever see the kingdom of God unless he first has been born again by the sovereign Spirit of God, who works as freely as the wind blows (John 3:3-8). As Jesus said, “no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44). But this “drawing” of sinners by the Father is not merely a general summoning that effects all people who hear the gospel preached. For as Jesus indicates, those who come to him for salvation are those and only those that the Father has sovereignly “given” to Him (John 6:37).<sup>268</sup>

In conclusion, Westminster’s understanding of grace - which was restated by John Owen’s and Thomas Goodwin’s Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Second London Confession (1677, 1689) of the Particular Baptists - once again demonstrates, as was the case with Augustine, Calvin, and Dort, that it is God’s grace which must precede any activity (faith included) on the part of the dead sinner. Until God effectually calls and regenerates the sinner, no faith will be present.<sup>269</sup> To reverse this order would be to exalt

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<sup>267</sup>The priority of the effectual call to faith is evident in 14.1, which states, “The grace of faith, whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls, is the work of the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and is ordinarily wrought by the ministry of the word, by which also, and by the administration of the sacraments, and prayer, it is increased and strengthened.” “The Westminster Confession,” 14.1.

<sup>268</sup>O. Palmer Robertson, “The Holy Spirit in the Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1:84-85. Also see Morton H. Smith, “Theology of the Larger Catechism,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1:108.

<sup>269</sup>For other Puritan affirmations of sovereign grace, see William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Stephen Charnock, *The New Birth*, vol. 3 of *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996); idem, *The Doctrine of Regeneration* (Choteau, MT: Gospel Mission, 2000); Elisha Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God’s Sovereignty* (Choteau, MT: Gospel Mission, 1999); Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Alberta: Still Waters Revival, 1991); John Flavel,

man's will over God's grace. Therefore, A. H. Pask is right when he observes that one of the main reasons the Puritans in England detested Arminianism so much was because it "inclines men to pride" by allowing "man's participation in the work of his salvation."<sup>270</sup>

### Conclusion

E. Brooks Holifield is unquestionably correct when he states, "The defining mark of Reformed theology was its regard for the glory of God, which entailed a pronounced insistence on divine sovereignty."<sup>271</sup> This chapter has shown how Calvinists have defined and defended monergism as a necessary ingredient to the sovereignty of divine grace which alone can preserve God's glory. What then is the implication for evangelicals today? Michael Horton answers that Arminian and Wesleyan synergism can no longer be an option for Protestants committed to the Reformation.

[T]hose who are convinced that the Reformation was essentially on the mark are not given the luxury of not taking a stand on . . . the monergistic work of the Holy Spirit granting new life. Therefore, if we are really convinced of the justice in the Reformation's critique of medieval Rome, we can no longer fail to regard Arminianism within Protestant circles as any more acceptable. It is not only Rome,

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*The Method of Grace* (Choteau, MT: Gospel Mission, 1977); Thomas Goodwin, *A Discourse of Election*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 9:1-498; idem, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 6:1-522; Christopher Love, *A Treatise of Effectual Calling and Election* (Orland, FL: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998); Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism* (Alberta: Still Waters Revival, 1988); John Preston, *Irresistibility of Converting Grace* (Burnie, Australia: Presbyterian's Armoury, 2005); George Winnock, "The Door of Salvation Opened by the Key of Regeneration," in vol. 5 of *The Works of George Swinnock* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996); Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998); idem, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1964); idem, *A View of the Covenant of Grace* (East Sussex, England: Focus Christian Ministries, 1994); Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1990), 1:344-72; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1993), 2:191-305; Peter Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002); Ezekiel Hopkins, "The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration; or, the New-Birth," in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, ed. Charles W. Quick (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:221-98; Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:501-58; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 294-99. John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 10:43-137; idem, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:297-366; also see the 1662 unpublished work, Johannes Hoornbeek, *Van de oorsprongh der Arminiaensche nieuwigheden*. For a treatment of Calvinism in Puritanism as a whole, see Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), 290-352.

<sup>270</sup>A. H. S. Pask, "The Influence of Arminius Upon the Theology of John Wesley," (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1940), 105.

<sup>271</sup>E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought From the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 11

but the Wesleyan system, . . . which must be equally rejected to the extent that each fails to sufficiently honor God's grace.<sup>272</sup>

Reformation monergism is much more (though not less) than simply affirming that God is the sole author of salvation. God's sole authorship also means that grace for the elect is efficient and irresistible as seen in the doctrines of effectual calling and regeneration to which we now turn.

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<sup>272</sup>Michael S. Horton, "The *Sola*'s of the Reformation," in *Here We Stand! A Call from Confessing Evangelicals for a Modern Reformation*, ed. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 120.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE SCRIPTURAL AFFIRMATION OF EFFECTUAL CALLING

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how some of the major Calvinists in past centuries have defined and defended the doctrine of sovereign, monergistic grace, in light of the threat of synergism. Here we shall turn our attention from the historical to the biblical by examining the doctrines of total depravity and effectual calling as defined in Scripture. This chapter will argue that in Scripture man is portrayed as pervasively depraved and this depravity has resulted in the bondage of his will.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the sinner is utterly reliant upon the supernatural act of God for liberation. Such an act is not in the form of a universal, prevenient grace (as the Arminian supposes), but is specific to the elect and absolutely efficacious in nature. While God has a gospel call to all, he also has a special, effectual call for his elect by which the Father draws sinners to his Son. Perhaps no one expresses the thesis of this chapter better than John Murray who wrote,

The fact that calling is an act of God, and of God alone, should impress upon us the divine monergism in the initiation of salvation in actual procession. We become partakers of redemption by an act of God that instates us in the realm of salvation, and all the corresponding changes in us and in our attitudes and reactions are the result of the saving forces at work within the realm into which, by God's sovereign and efficacious act, we have been ushered. The call, as that by which the predestinating purpose begins to take effect, is in this respect of divine monergism after the pattern of predestination itself. It is of God and of God alone.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>“Man, according to the Bible, is not merely sick in trespasses and sins; he is not merely in a weakened condition so that he needs divine help: but he is dead in trespasses and sins. He can do absolutely nothing to save himself, and God saves him by the gracious, sovereign act of the new birth.” J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 244.

<sup>2</sup>John Murray, “The Call,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:166; Idem, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 93-94.

### Total Depravity and the Bondage of the Will

In order to understand properly effectual calling we must first comprehend the doctrine of total depravity and identify how depravity relates to the doctrine of original sin. Original sin consists of two aspects: guilt and corruption (pollution/depravity).<sup>3</sup> Guilt is a judicial and legal term, concept, or category describing man's relationship to the law of God. Guilt means that man has broken and violated God's holy law and is therefore liable to be punished, as was the case with Adam in Genesis 3. In regards to original sin, Calvinists have affirmed the hereditary nature of both guilt (*reatus*) and corruption (*vitium*). Original sin means that guilt and corruption have spread to all men. Exactly how original sin is transmitted is debated, but Calvinists have traditionally argued that the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all of mankind,<sup>4</sup> since Adam was acting as our federal head or representative when he sinned (Rom 5:12-21).<sup>5</sup> The doctrine of original guilt is supported by passages such as Psalm 51:1-2, Romans 5:14-18, and 1 Corinthians 15:22-45. As Paul says, "through one transgression resulted condemnation for all people" (Rom 5:18) and "by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (Rom 5:19).<sup>6</sup>

While original guilt is a legal concept involving one's status, original corruption or pollution is a moral concept, meaning that man's moral nature has been

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<sup>3</sup>It is also necessary to distinguish between *peccator originaliter* (original sin) and *peccator actualiter* (actual sin). "Original sin" as Hoekema explains, "is the sinful state and condition in which every human being is born; actual sin, however, is the sins of act, word, or thought that human beings commit." Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 143. The term "original sin" not only means that sin's origin follows the origin of man, but it also means that the sin that is original with Adam is the source of our "actual" sins.

<sup>4</sup>"Imputation" means to reckon to another person's account. In Scripture, the guilt of Adam's sin is imputed to all of his progeny and posterity. See Charles Hodge, "Imputation," *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:812; R. K. Johnston, "Imputation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 554-55. For the various theories on how original sin is transmitted see Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 156-67. I will be assuming a federal view (immediate imputation). See Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1918), 3:93; John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 42-64; G. C. Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. P. Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 454-58; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 156-67.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 149; Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 148.

<sup>6</sup>For an extensive treatment of Romans 5, see Schreiner, *Paul*, 146-50.

corrupted after the fall as a result of imputed guilt.<sup>7</sup> As Theodore Beza states, Adam “transmitted to his posterity a nature *in the first* place guilty, and *next* corrupted.”<sup>8</sup> Or as Johannes Wollebius states, Adam’s guilt is “imputed to the entire human race, and so it is corrupted by that sinfulness.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Horton writes, “the *condition* of sin is the source of specific *acts* of sin, rather than vice versa.”<sup>10</sup> It is the purpose here to limit our focus to original corruption, since this is where the doctrine of total depravity is located.

Inherited corruption (pollution) is twofold. First, original corruption is the absence of original righteousness and second it is the presence of positive evil. In other words, original corruption is not merely a *privatio* but it is also *depravatio*. Corruption is no mere deficiency (though not less) but results in the plunging of oneself into sin.<sup>11</sup> Berkhof outlines several implications that follow from affirming both *privatio* and *depravatio*: (1) Original pollution cannot be a mere disease, as insisted by many Greek

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<sup>7</sup>Hoekema defines original corruption as “the corruption of our nature that is the result of sin and produces sin.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 149-50.

<sup>8</sup>As quoted in Archibald Alexander Hodge, “The Ordo Salutis: Or, Relation in the Order of Nature of Holy Character and Divine Favor,” *The Princeton Review* 54 (1878), 315.

<sup>9</sup>Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, trans. Alexander Ross (London: n.p., 1650), 10.1.5; quoted in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 69. Hoekema also states, “As a necessary implication of our involvement in Adam’s guilt, all human beings are born in a state of corruption.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 149-150. I am in agreement with those Calvinists who argue that not only corruption but guilt is imputed or inherited by all of Adam’s posterity.

<sup>10</sup>Michael S. Horton, “Sola Gratia,” in *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 120.

<sup>11</sup>As Bernard Ramm states, “Roman Catholic theology usually interprets Original Sin as *privatio* (a lack, a loss, a deficiency), not as *depravatio* (an actual turn towards sin and evil). Original Sin defined as privation is, however, too academic. It cannot account for the aggressive, demonic, sadistic, and devilishly inventive dimension of human sinning. The heart is desperately wicked, not merely deprived.” Bernard Ramm, *Offense to Reason: A Theology of Sin* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1985), 87-88. However, Ramm’s observation concerning Catholicism’s rejection of *depravatio* seems also to have spread into the thought of Arminius. Stuart Clarke explains, “If Arminius treats Adam’s sin so seriously, does he deny equal seriousness to the actual sins of his posterity? Bangs suggests that Arminius sees the result of Adam’s sin in his posterity more in privation than in deprivation, and tends to avoid use of the term ‘original sin’ as begging too many questions; the Private Disputations show that Arminius prefers to keep the term for the absence of original righteousness after the fall, as quite sufficient to produce all actual sins.” F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: Jacobus Arminius’ Doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 74. See Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985); 338ff. Also see James Arminius, “Seventy-Nine Private Disputation,” in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 2:77-78.

Fathers and also some Arminians.<sup>12</sup> While sin does infect man, sin also incorporates guilt, condemning man before God. As Schreiner says, “Human beings do not enter the world in a neutral state or slightly inclined to evil, according to Paul [Rom 5:18-19]. They are *polluted* by the sin of Adam and enter the world as sinners, condemned and destined for death.”<sup>13</sup> (2) Pollution or corruption should not be thought of as a substance infused into man’s soul as if a metaphysical change occurs. Such a view was taught by the Manicheans in Augustine’s day and also by Flacius Illyricus during the Reformation. “If the substance of the soul were sinful, it would have to be replaced by a new substance in regeneration; but this does not take place.”<sup>14</sup> (3) Original pollution is no mere privation (*privatio boni*). As Luther explains, it is not a mere lack of a quality in the will or intellect, but is pervasive deprivation of moral rectitude and ability. It is an inclination to evil and love for darkness.<sup>15</sup> These three points help qualify the negative aspects of original pollution. However, original pollution also must be stated positively and can be spoken of in two ways: total depravity and spiritual inability.

### **Total Depravity**

Before explaining what total depravity consists of, due to common caricatures and misunderstandings it is imperative to clarify what total depravity is not.<sup>16</sup> First, total depravity does not mean that man is as depraved as he possibly can be. Total depravity

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<sup>12</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 246.

<sup>13</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 149. Emphasis added.

<sup>14</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 246. Also see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 3:6, 32.

<sup>15</sup>“According to the apostle [Paul] and the simple sense of him who is in Christ Jesus, it is not merely the lack of a quality in the will or indeed merely the lack of light in the intellect, of strength in the memory. Rather it is a complete deprivation of all rectitude and of the ability of all the powers of the body as well as the soul and of the entire inner and outer man. In addition to this, it is an inclination to evil, a disgust at the good, a disinclination toward light and wisdom; it is love of error and darkness, a fleeing from good works and a loathing of them, a running to what is evil.” Martin Luther, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 3:1300-01.

<sup>16</sup>I am following Berkhof both in my presentation of total depravity and spiritual inability. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 246-247. For a very similar treatment of total depravity and spiritual inability, see Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 150-55. Also see Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Brockville, Ontario: 1979), 91-130.

does not mean that the sinner will commit or indulge himself in every form of sin or in the worst sins conceivable. Due to common grace God restrains evil so that man does not always commit the worst possible sin.<sup>17</sup> Second, total depravity does not mean that man has no innate knowledge of God's will or that man no longer possesses a conscience that can discern between good and evil. Third, total depravity does not mean that man is incapable of appreciating the good deeds or character of others. Though societies are corrupt there are still remnants of altruism and civil good (or *civil virtue* as the Reformers titled it). God's common grace ensures that men can still perform civil responsibilities that benefit others (such as a doctor helping a patient in need of surgery). Berkhof explains, "It is admitted that even the unrenewed possess some virtue, revealing itself in the relations of social life, in many acts and sentiments that deserve the sincere approval and gratitude of their fellow-men, and that even meet with the approval of God to a certain extent."<sup>18</sup>

Total depravity does mean that the corruption inherited from Adam extends to every aspect of the sinner's nature (i.e., total in extensiveness). As Berkhof says, inherited corruption extends to "all the faculties and powers of both soul and body."<sup>19</sup> No part of man (intellect, will, affections, etc.) is untouched by sin.<sup>20</sup> Total depravity is the

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<sup>17</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 152. For a Reformed understanding of common grace in light of total depravity see John Murray, "Common Grace," in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 2:93-96; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:667; Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Hendrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 279.

<sup>18</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 246-47. Similarly, Hoekema states, "The unregenerate person can still do certain kinds of good and can exercise certain kinds of virtue. Yet even such good deeds are neither prompted by love to God, nor done in voluntary obedience to the will of God." Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, 152.

<sup>19</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

<sup>20</sup>"Like a deadly poison, sin has penetrated to and infected the very center of man's being: hence his need for the total experience of rebirth by which, through the grace of God in Christ Jesus, the restoration of his true manhood is effected." Philip Hughes, "Another Dogma Falls," *Christianity Today* 23 May 1969, 13. Roger Nicole states, "May I suggest that what the Calvinist wishes to say when he speaks of total depravity is that evil is at the very heart and root of man. It is at the very foundation, at the deepest level of human life. This evil does not corrupt merely one or two or certain particular avenues of the life of man but is pervasive in that it spreads into all aspects of the life of man. It darkens his mind, corrupts his feelings, warps his will, moves his affections in wrong directions, blinds his conscience, burdens his subconscious, afflicts his body. There is hardly any way in which man is called upon to express himself in which, in some way, the damaging character of evil does not manifest itself. Evil is like a root cancer that extends in all directions within the organism to cause it dastardly effects." Roger Nicole, *Standing Forth* (Fearn, UK: Mentor, Christian Focus, 2002), 430. Also see Thomas M. Gregory, "The Presbyterian

*interior corruption totius hominis* (the internal corruption of the whole human being). Therefore, as Hoekema prefers, it may be better to speak of “pervasive” depravity.<sup>21</sup> Others have used the phrase “radical” depravity instead.<sup>22</sup>

Second, total depravity means that man cannot do anything spiritually good towards God but rather he is a slave to sin. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, men “are wholly incapable of doing any good, and inclined to all evil.”<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Berkhof states, “there is no spiritual good, that is, good in relation to God, in the sinner at all, but only perversion.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, while a man may perform a civil good towards his neighbor, such an act is never out of love and reverence for the one true God. His actions are not God-oriented, as if he performs them out of faith in Christ. Therefore, even civil or natural deeds are nothing but filthy rags and ultimately defective of salvific good. As the Westminster Confession states in 16.7, “works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, yet because they do not proceed from faith are sinful and cannot please God.” In relation to God who is perfectly holy, even these “good” deeds are somehow and in some way tainted by sin. “Their fatal defect is that they are not prompted by love to God, or by any regard for the will of God as requiring them.”<sup>25</sup>

Scripture everywhere affirms the doctrine of total depravity. Beginning in the Old Testament, the pervasiveness of man’s depravity is evident after the fall of Adam.<sup>26</sup>

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Doctrine of Total Depravity,” in *Soli Deo Gloria, A Festschrift for John H. Gerstner*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Philadelphia: P & R, 1976), 36-54.

<sup>21</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* 150.

<sup>22</sup>Roger Nicole, *Standing Forth*, 430; R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 118.

<sup>23</sup>Question 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism in Philip Schaff, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, ed. David S. Schaff, vol. 3 of *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 3:310.

<sup>24</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

<sup>25</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247.

<sup>26</sup>For an overview of the doctrine of original sin in the Old Testament, see Richard C. Gamble, *God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 of *The Whole Counsel of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2009), 187-232, 250-76.

Adam's descendents (Gen 5) are multiplied on the earth and in Genesis 6:5 we read, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5; cf. 8:21). What the Lord saw in man was both the *extensiveness* and the *intensiveness* of sin. Hamilton rightly comments, "The situation is further aggravated because such depravity controls not only man's actions but also his thoughts . . . The mind, too, has been perverted, an emphasis made again in 8:21."<sup>27</sup> To add to Hamilton's comment, it is not merely the "thoughts" but the thoughts of "his heart" that are continually evil. As Mathews explains, in Hebrew anthropology the "heart is the center of a human's cognitive processes (e.g., Gen 31:20; Ps 33:11; 1 Sam 10:26)."<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, the word "only" is telling for, as Calvin says, it is "as if he [God] would deny that there was a drop of good mixed with it."<sup>29</sup> In other words, God could have said man's heart was corrupt, but instead he says every imagination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually, accentuating the intensiveness of depravity. Man's depravity is so perverse that he decided to "blot out man" (Gen 6:7a) by a massive flood, sparing none, except Noah, who "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8).<sup>30</sup> However, even after the flood man's depravity continues, as is readily apparent at the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19). Even within Israel, God's chosen people, depravity characterized not only the people but also the leaders, so that Judges concludes, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25; cf. 17:6). Rather than doing

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<sup>27</sup>Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (1990), 273.

<sup>28</sup>Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC, vol. 1a (1996), 341.

<sup>29</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1:248. Calvin goes on to correctly comment that the interpreter is not wrong to extend the doctrine of man's total and universal depravity in Genesis 6 to "the whole human race" in every age. Calvin quotes Psalm 5:10, 14:3, and Romans 3:12 in support.

<sup>30</sup>Therefore, while God in Genesis 1 saw that what he had made was good, here God saw that what man had made was wicked. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, EBC, vol. 1 (2008), 117; Mathews, *Genesis*, 340-41.

what is right in God's eyes (Exod 15:26; Deut 6:18; 12:25, 28; 13:19; 21:9; Jer 34:15), Israel's corrupt heart led them to do what was right in their own eyes (Deut 12:8).<sup>31</sup> Therefore, David is correct when he states, "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one" (Ps 14:1-3; cf. Rom 3:10). Notice, the universality of depravity is emphasized by the words "all," "together," "none," and "not even one." Moreover, as VanGemeran observes, the phrase "become corrupt," which in Arabic means "to make sour," shows the pollution of man (cf. Ps 53:3).<sup>32</sup> As Calvin states concerning Psalm 14, depraved man is filled with "disgusting corruption or putrescence" and nothing can proceed from "apostates but what smells rank of rottenness and infection."<sup>33</sup> And again, "David declares that all men are so carried away by their capricious lusts, that nothing is to be found either of purity or integrity in their whole life."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, man is one who is vile and corrupt, abominable in God's sight, drinking injustice like water (Job 15:16).<sup>35</sup> Job can accurately say, "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. . . . Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? There is not one" (Job 14:1, 3). Job's words are similar to David's, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (Ps 143:2).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (1999), 483-84. For examples of doing what is right in the Lord's eyes, see 1 Kings 11:33, 38; 14:8; 15:5, 11; 22:43; 2 Kings 10:30; 12:2; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2; Jer 24:15.

<sup>32</sup>Willem A. VanGemeran, *Psalms*, EBC, vol. 5 (2008), 176-77. On the Arabic also see John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, BCOT, vol. 1 (2006), 214.

<sup>33</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, 1-35* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 4:193.

<sup>34</sup>"This, therefore, is defection so complete, that it extinguishes all godliness." Calvin, *Psalms*, 4:193-94.

<sup>35</sup>Despite the fact that Eliphaz in Job 15 believes Job's suffering is the result of God's punishment for sin (and wrongly so since Job is vindicated in the end), nevertheless, these statements concerning man's depravity by Eliphaz are true of all of mankind.

<sup>36</sup>John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (1988), 231.

David will also confess, after admitting to Nathan his adultery with Bathsheba, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps 51:5).<sup>37</sup> Surely David’s assertion is not just true of him alone but of all mankind.<sup>38</sup> As David says in Psalm 58:3-5, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies. They have venom like the venom of a serpent . . .” David’s son Solomon would agree, “Who can say, ‘I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin?’” (Prov 20:9). The implied answer of course is “no one!”<sup>39</sup> As stated in Ecclesiastes, “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” (Eccl 7:20; cf. Ps 143:2).<sup>40</sup> And again, “the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead” (Eccl 9:3). The prophet Isaiah is just as clear: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way” (Isa 53:6). And again, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isa 64:6a). The prophet Jeremiah rightly concludes, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9; cf. Ezek 36:26).

Total depravity envelops the New Testament as well. Jesus himself affirmed the pervasive depravity of man in his dispute with the Pharisees over the necessity of washing one’s hands prior to eating a meal. Jesus explains that it is not what goes into a man but what comes out of him that defiles him (Mark 7:18-20). Jesus then states, “For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft,

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<sup>37</sup>“David, then, is here brought, by reflecting one particular transgression, to cast a retrospective glance upon his whole past life, to discover nothing but sin in it.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 5:290. And VanGemenen is right to conclude that because of being brought forth in iniquity and corruption “people in their sinfulness cannot respond unless the Lord sends ‘wisdom’ from on high.” VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 436.

<sup>38</sup>John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 10:70. Contra John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89 BCOT*, vol. 2 (2007), 129-30.

<sup>39</sup>All men lack moral purity: Gen 6:5; 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; Job 15:14-16; Pss 14; 19:12-13; 32; 51:5-8; 143:2; Eccl 7:20-29; Jer 17:9; Ezek 18:31; Rom 3:9-19. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15-31*, NICOT (2005), 135.

<sup>40</sup>Tremper Longman observes that in the context of Ecclesiastes this verse (7:20) teaches that not even the “wise” are righteous. Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (1998), 198-99.

murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person” (Mark 7:21-23; cf. Exod 20:13-15). In other words, it is the heart, “the very innermost nature of one’s being, that is the problem.”<sup>41</sup> However, as R. T. France notes, while in English “heart” usually conveys emotion, in Hebrew and Greek “heart” or “inner being” strongly conveys “spiritual and intellectual processes, including the will.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, depravity penetrates man’s very essence, including not only his affections and mind but his will. While R. T. France recognizes that the defilement Jesus speaks of penetrates to the very essence, even the will, he wrongly concludes that one reads Jesus out of context to interpret Jesus as setting forth a “very radical view of the ‘total depravity’ of humanity.”<sup>43</sup> Such a statement by France should be rejected since Jesus not only is teaching that sin has defiled man’s innermost being but, in piling one evil characteristic on top of another (evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, etc.), he is emphasizing just how bad man’s heart really is. Indeed, man’s depravity *is* radical.

In another debate with the Jews over healing a man on the Sabbath (John 5:42-44) Jesus takes his understanding of man’s depravity (as seen in Mark 7:21-23) and applies it directly to the Jews who were questioning his authority, refusing to believe in his identity as the Son of God, saying to them, “But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?” (John 5:42-44). At the root of man’s depravity is a rejection and hatred for Jesus Christ

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<sup>41</sup>Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (2008), 346. Also see William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (1974), 255.

<sup>42</sup>R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, NIGTC (2002), 291.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 293. France goes on to state that Jesus does not deny that good things may come out of the heart also. While this is true, France fails to understand that while good things may come out of the heart, they only do so *because* God through Christ has given the sinner a new heart.

which reveals the root issue in man's corruption, namely, a failure to give glory to God.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, Schreiner is correct when he defines sin as "first and foremost a rejection of the supremacy of God and his lordship over our lives."<sup>45</sup> Perhaps no one makes this as apparent as the apostle Paul when he says in Romans 1,

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them (Rom 1:21-32).

As Paul explains, the wrath of God is unleashed because though they knew God they refused to give him thanks and honor.<sup>46</sup> Instead, their thinking became futile and their hearts dark. They exchanged the glory of God for created images (idolatry) and indulged themselves in dishonorable passions. Here, therefore, we see a very grave picture of man's depravity,<sup>47</sup> as emphasized in how Paul builds one evil characteristic on top of

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<sup>44</sup>“Having turned blind spiritually, they had lost the ability to perceive God's work in their midst.” Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (2004), 194.

<sup>45</sup>As Rom 1:18-3:20 shows, “sin is fundamentally a refusal to honor and praise God,” Schreiner, *Paul*, 103-04.

<sup>46</sup>“The heart of sin is the refusal to worship God and give him the supreme place in our lives.” Ibid., 105. Also see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (1998), 87-88, 100; E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 47.

<sup>47</sup>“As in 1:21, Paul stresses [in 1:28] that people who have turned from God are fundamentally unable to think and decide correctly about God and his will. This tragic incapacity is the explanation for the apparently inexplicable failure of people to comprehend, let alone practice, biblical ethical principles. Only the work of the Spirit in ‘renewing the mind [nous]’ (Rom. 12:2) can overcome this deep-seated blindness and perversity.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (1996), 118. Also see John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (1979), 1:41ff.

another, until it becomes obvious that man is hopelessly lost.<sup>48</sup> Paul says they were “filled with all manner of unrighteousness” showing the extent of depravity. As Murray observes, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness “accentuates the totality of the depravity involved and the intensity with which it had been cultivated.”<sup>49</sup> A similar picture is painted by Paul in Romans 3.

“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.” “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.” “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” (Rom 3:10-18; cf. Pss 5:14:1-3; 53:1-3; 5:9; Jer 5:16; Pss 140:3; 10:7; Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7-8; Ps 36:1).

Paul demonstrates (1) that sin is *universal* (“None is righteous, no, not one”),<sup>50</sup> and (2) that this universal sin is *pervasive*, so that men’s throats, tongues and lips speak evil, their feet are swift to do evil, and their eyes lack any fear of God. Paul’s point is obvious: corruption and depravity are universal and utterly enslaving, so that no one can be justified by obedience to the law. Schreiner helpfully comments,

Paul had a darker view of human ability than some Jews in that the latter believed that human beings had the capability to observe the law (cf. Laato 1991; Westerholm 1988:141-73). Judaism acknowledges that all people without exception were sinners (B. Longnecker 1991: 23-27). But Paul thought that sin had wrapped its tentacles so tightly around human beings that they could not keep the law. This state of affairs obtained not only for the Gentiles but also for the Jews, who were God’s covenant people.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>48</sup>For other examples where Paul gives a vice list, see 1 Cor 5:10-11; 6:9-10; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 4:31; 5:3-5; Col 3:5, 8; 1 Tim 1:9-10; 6:4-5; 2 Tim 3:2-4; Titus 3:3.

<sup>49</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 1:50.

<sup>50</sup>“The fact that many of these quotations denounce only the wicked or unrighteous within Israel – and hence do not seem to fit Paul’s universalistic intention – has been taken as indication that Paul’s intention is not to condemn *all* people. But Paul’s actual intention is probably more subtle; by citing texts that denounce the unrighteous and applying them, implicitly, to all people, including all Jews, he underscores the argument of 2:1-3:8 that, in fact, not even faithful Jews can claim to be ‘righteous.’” Moo, *Romans*, 202-03. Moo has in mind Philip R. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study of Romans 1-4*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement (London: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 82-96. Moo explains that while it is true that Paul would have recognized that there were “righteous” people before Christ (Abraham, David, etc.), nonetheless, Paul is looking at man as he is before God apart from grace. In this sense says Moo even Abraham and David are “unrighteous.” See Moo, *Romans*, 202n26.

<sup>51</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 164-65. Schreiner correctly goes on to observe that not only is sin enslaving but it is universal and pervasive. Contrary to Davies who argued that Paul cannot be saying that all people are sinners, Schreiner argues that Paul is referring to both Jews and Gentiles. Thus demonstrating that the whole world, even God’s chosen people (!), have fallen under the fatal grip of sin. Paul is speaking

Schreiner is right when he states that some (not all) Jews believed that man was capable to observe the law. As Laato and Schreiner observe, some Jews had a very optimistic view of human ability.<sup>52</sup> “The law could be obeyed if one overcame the evil impulse.”<sup>53</sup> However, “Paul had a more somber estimate of human capability. Justification by law is ruled out because no one could keep what the law said.”<sup>54</sup> Consequently, as Schreiner states, “Paul repudiates a synergism that was present in Jewish theology” and rightly so.<sup>55</sup> If Paul repudiated the synergism of some Jews, who denied total depravity in order to maintain man’s ability, then so also would Paul have repudiated some Arminians today who likewise deny total depravity and affirm synergism (see chapter 5).

Paul again touches on the issue of man’s slavery to sin in Romans 8.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom 8:5-8; cf. 7:18).

Paul argues that the sinner without the regenerating work of the Spirit has a mind set on the flesh and consequently is hostile to God and his law.<sup>56</sup> It is not only the case that they won’t submit to God’s law but, as Paul states, they “cannot” for it is impossible for them to please God. Therefore, Moo rightly states that Paul’s description of the unbeliever as

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universally (all without exception) when he says “all” are under sin and “no one is righteous.” All are sinners, guilty before God. See Davies, *Faith and Obedience*, 80-104.

<sup>52</sup>T. Laato, *Paulus und das Judentum: Anthropologische Erwägungen* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi Press, 1991), 185-209.

<sup>53</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 173.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid. As Schreiner notes, Thielman qualifies this by observing that not all Jews were guilty of legalism. See Frank Thielman, *Paul and the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 179; idem, “Unexpected Mercy: Echoes of a Biblical Motif in Romans 9-11,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994): 169-81. On the proneness of some Jews to legalism see Moses Silva, “The Law and Christianity: Dunn’s New Synthesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1990): 339-53; John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 28-29; M. Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), 44; Donald Macleod, “The New Perspective: Paul, Luther, and Judaism,” in *The Westminster Confession into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010), 3:291-326; Schreiner, *Paul*, 110-25.

<sup>56</sup>For Paul’s understanding of “flesh” or *sarx* see Schreiner, *Paul*, 140-46.

“hostile to God (8:7) “may justly be summed up in the theological categories of ‘total depravity’ and ‘total inability.’”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, as Schreiner observes, there is an emphasis placed on the inability of the human will rather than on a human decision to cooperate (contra Cranfield and Dunn).<sup>58</sup> It is common for the Arminian to object that if man is unable then he cannot be held responsible. But this is not what Paul says. Paul affirms a moral inability to keep God’s law and yet Paul still holds the sinner responsible. Schreiner rightly comments, “He [Paul] does not conclude that those of the flesh are not responsible for their sin because of their inability. Rather, he holds them responsible for their sins even though they cannot keep God’s law. Paul apparently did not believe that people were only culpable for sin if they had the ‘moral’ ability to keep commandments.”<sup>59</sup> Contrary to Pelagius who tries to minimize Paul’s words, Calvin appropriately states, “Let the Christian heart therefore drive far from itself the non-Christian philosophy of the freedom of the will, and let every one of us acknowledge himself to be, as in reality he is, the servant of sin, that he may be free by the grace of Christ and set at liberty.”<sup>60</sup>

In Galatians 4:3 Paul reiterates the bondage of man, “In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.”<sup>61</sup> Or as Paul tells the Ephesians,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that

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<sup>57</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 488.

<sup>58</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 411-12. Contra James Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC (1988), 425; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans: Introduction and Commentary on Romans I-VIII*, ICC (1975), 385-87.

<sup>59</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 412-13.

<sup>60</sup>John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, trans. R. MacKenzie, Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 163. On Pelagius see *Pelagius’s Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Theodore De Bruyn, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 107-08, as observed in Schreiner, *Romans*, 413.

<sup>61</sup>On the debate over the meaning of “elementary principles” in relation to the effort of many to earn salvation by works-righteousness, see Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, NICNT (1953), 154; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (2010), 267-69.

is now at work in the sons of disobedience-among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph 2:1-3).<sup>62</sup>

Paul says that “by nature” man is under God’s wrath, conveying the inherited status and condition every person receives at birth.<sup>63</sup> The guilty status all are born into (“dead in . . . transgressions and sins”) results in a corrupt nature, an inescapable bondage to sin. *All of “mankind” is by nature corrupt and the consequence is a futility, darkness, hardness of heart, and alienation from God.*<sup>64</sup> Thielman rightly notes that unbelievers “choose this path inevitably, in agreement with the state into which they were born (cf. Rom. 5:12; 2 Esd. [4 Ezra] 7:62-69, 116-18).”<sup>65</sup> Unbelievers are dead in trespasses and sins, following the course of this world and Satan himself (the prince of the power of the air), living in the passions of the flesh, and are *by nature* children of wrath (cf. Rom 5:12). Man’s impotence could not be more evident, for, as Hoehner observes, “Dead people cannot communicate and have no power to bring life to themselves.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Schreiner

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<sup>62</sup>The Geneva Bible comments on 2:1, “He declareth again the greatness of God’s good will, by comparing that miserable state wherein we are born, with that dignity whereunto we are advanced by God the Father in Christ. So he describeth that condition in such sort, that he saith, that touching spiritual motions we are not only born half dead, but wholly and altogether dead.” And on 2:2, “He proveth by the effects that all were spiritually dead. He proveth this evil to be universal, insomuch as all are slaves of Satan. . . . Men are therefore slaves to Satan, because they are willingly rebellious against God. They are called the children of disobedience, which are given to disobedience.” *1599 Geneva Bible* (White Hall, West Virginia: Tolle Lege, 2008), 1217.

<sup>63</sup>Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (2010), 134.

<sup>64</sup>“In other words, Paul is saying, even believers are by nature, apart from God’s renewing grace, so evil and depraved that they are rightly the objects of the wrath of God.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 152. Some have difficulty understanding how being “dead” in sin can relate to sinners who actively will and choose. John Gerstner helpfully explains through the example of a zombie. Boice, who took Gerstner as a student explains Gerstner, “A zombie is a person who has died but who is still up on his feet walking around. It is a gruesome concept, which is why it appears in horror stories. But it gets worse. This upright, walking human corpse is putrefying. It is rotting away, which is probably the most disgusting thing most people can imagine. But this is a fair description of what Paul is saying about human nature in its lost condition. Apart from Jesus Christ, these sinning human corpses are ‘the living dead.’” James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 74. The imagery of the “living dead” would not be uncommon for Paul who uses the same technique in Romans 12:1 where he describes the Christian as a “living sacrifice.”

<sup>65</sup>Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (2010), 127.

<sup>66</sup>“It is the power of God that is directed toward us that gives us life.” Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 308. Likewise “It [spiritual death] is consistent with the idea of ‘new birth’; if at some stage believers come to life they must have been previously dead.” E. Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (1998), 201. John Owen also writes that we have no more power than “a man in his grave hath in himself to live anew and come out at the next call.” Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:130.

writes, “Paul does not depict unbelievers as merely disinclined to the gospel. He says that they have no capacity at all to respond to the gospel, for they are engulfed in trespasses and sins and find their delight in the realm of sin and death rather than in doing the will of God.”<sup>67</sup> Simpson is equally emphatic, “*All alike, Jew and Gentile, are by natal proclivity inchoate children of wrath. We swerve from the very outset. ‘An evil ground exists in my will previous to any given act’ (S. T. Coleridge).*”<sup>68</sup> Consequently, says Simpson, Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism are antithetical to Paul.<sup>69</sup>

Notice how the sinner is in bondage to three powers: the world, Satan, and his own flesh (cf. James 3:15; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:7-10).<sup>70</sup> On the devil O’Brien states,

The devil is further characterized as the spirit who exercises effective and compelling power over the lives of men and women. . . . Indeed, so effective is his *present* evil working that Paul can refer to his victims as ‘sons of disobedience’, that is, men and women whose lives are characterized by disobedience. They are rebels against the authority of God who prefer to answer the promptings of the archenemy.<sup>71</sup>

Paul returns to the lack of moral ability in Ephesians 4:17-19,

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Paul could not be more lucid. Man’s spiritually depravity infiltrates not only in his *heart* (“hardness of heart”; cf. Rom 1:21) but his *mind* (“the futility of their minds . . . darkened

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<sup>67</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 138. Likewise see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 316, 320; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 130. Bryan Chapell states, “This picture of our pre-Christian state is devastating to any suggestion that we possess the ability to act or believe in such a way as to save ourselves. Our practice is simply to live in accord with the nature we inherit . . . By nature and practice we are spiritually lifeless. Our status before God is that of dead people.” Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, REC (2009), 80.

<sup>68</sup>E. K. Simpson, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, NICNT (1977), 46.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>70</sup>“Paul’s teaching suggests that the explanation for our behavior is not to be found exclusively in human nature or in terms of the world’s influence. Similarly, an exclusively demonic explanation for deviant behavior is unduly myopic. Rather, we should explain behavior on the basis of human nature, environment and the demonic – all three simultaneously. One part may play a leading role, but all three parts need to be considered.” Clinton E. Arnold, *Powers of Darkness* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1992), 125-26.

<sup>71</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (1999), 160-61. Also see Arnold, *Powers of Darkness*, 125; *idem*, *Ephesians*, 131-32.

in their understanding”).<sup>72</sup> Hoehner summarizes Paul saying, “The hardness of their hearts toward God caused their ignorance. Their ignorance concerning God and his will caused them to be alienated from the life of God. Their alienation caused their minds to be darkened, and their darkened minds caused them to walk in the futility of mind.”<sup>73</sup>

Paul emphasizes the depravity of the heart again when he writes to the Colossians, before you knew Christ you “were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your heart, . . .” (Col 2:13; cf. 1:13). Likewise, Paul warns Titus, “To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:15-16). Knight notes, “By saying that the defilement is in ‘their mind and conscience,’ Paul signifies that it is internal and thus intrinsically moral and religious. . . . Paul consistently regards ‘the mind’ of the non-Christian as controlled by sin and therefore erroneous in its outlook (e.g., Rom. 1:28; Eph. 4:17; especially 1 Tim. 6:5 and 2 Tim. 3:8) and needing to be transformed by renewal (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23).”<sup>74</sup>

The depravity of the heart and mind that results in spiritual slavery is again emphasized in Titus 3:3, “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” The unbeliever is in bondage to sin, a bondage he cannot escape.<sup>75</sup> This bondage is evident in that not only does the sinner give in to various passions but he actively hates others.

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<sup>72</sup>“The Gentiles’ mind-set has been drastically affected (v. 17b), their thinking has become darkened so that they are blind to the truth, and their alienation from God is *because of the ignorance within them*.” O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 320. Also see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 583-87. Also see Thielman, *Ephesians*, 297.

<sup>73</sup>Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 588-89. Also see Arnold, *Ephesians*, 282.

<sup>74</sup>George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (1992), 303. Also see Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (2006), 709.

<sup>75</sup>“Their slavery does not consist in being forced to do certain things against their will. On the contrary, they live as captives to sin in doing precisely what they wish to do.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 139.

Before moving on it is important to recognize the emphasis many of these passages above place on the depravity not only of the heart but of the mind. Theologians have called this the “noetic” effect of the fall. Noetic is derivatory of the Greek, νοῦς, which means mind. Prior to sin’s entrance into the world, Adam’s intellectual capabilities were pure, without defilement. However, after the fall man’s mind became distorted and perverse. This does not mean that he can no longer reason or use logic in order to think critically, for as Sproul has pointed out while the “faculty” remains” it is the “facility” that is lost.” The facility of the mind is tainted by a “sinful bias and prejudice, especially with respect to our understanding of the good and of God.”<sup>76</sup> Calvin describes the situation well when he says, “All parts of the soul were possessed by sin after Adam deserted the fountain of righteousness. For not only did a lower appetite seduce him, but unspeakable impiety occupied the very citadel of his mind and pride penetrated to the depths of his heart.” The consequence is devastating: “none of the soul remains pure or untouched by that moral disease.” And “the mind is given over to blindness and the heart to depravity.”<sup>77</sup>

### **Spiritual Inability and the Bondage of the Will**

Man’s inherited corruption places significant attention not only upon the depravity of man’s heart and mind, but also upon the bondage of man’s will.<sup>78</sup> The will of man is so impacted by pollution that he is unable to turn towards God in faith and repentance (Titus 1:16). Spiritual inability can be defined in several ways. First, spiritual inability means that the sinner can in no way do anything which meets the perfect

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<sup>76</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 57. Also see Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 452-53; A. W. Pink, *The Doctrine of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975), 23-34.

<sup>77</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2.1.9.

<sup>78</sup>As Hoekema asserts, the doctrine of spiritual inability “is really only another way of describing the doctrine of ‘pervasive depravity,’ this time with an emphasis on the spiritual impotence of the will.” Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 152.

demands of the holy law of God. The unregenerate man cannot please God nor can he meet the consent or approval of God. Second, the sinner is unable to change his inclinations, preferences, and desires for sin that he may turn to love God instead. In short, the sinner is not able to do anything spiritually good due to the fact that he is born with an evil prejudice, inevitably predisposed to sin.<sup>79</sup> Therefore, while man's rational faculties do remain intact (ability to acquire knowledge, reason, conscience, etc.), man did lose his "material freedom," as Berkhof calls it. Man "has by nature an irresistible bias for evil. He is not able to apprehend and love spiritual excellence, to seek and do spiritual things, the things of God that pertain to salvation."<sup>80</sup> In this sense then it is best to say, as Johannes Wollebius does, that the "will has been made so evil [*factum est ad malum*] that it is better described as enslaved than as free."<sup>81</sup> However, as we will later see, such bondage is a *willful* bondage. Man is not forced or constrained against his will to commit sin. Rather, he loves sin, willfully and perpetually choosing to make sin his master. As Wollebius explains, "original sin consists not only of inability to do good, but also of a tendency [*proclivitas*] toward evil."<sup>82</sup>

Scripture is abundant with texts that prove the doctrine of spiritual inability. The prophet Jeremiah, after explaining the greatness of Israel's iniquity" (Jer 13:22), asks rhetorically, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil" (13:23). In other words, it is impossible for the wicked to do what is right in God's sight. As Reymond states, "because man is totally or pervasively corrupt, he is *incapable of changing his character or of acting in a way that is distinct from his corruption*. He is unable to discern, to love, or to choose the things that are pleasing to God."<sup>83</sup> The root issue in man's inability is his corrupt

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<sup>79</sup>Ramm, *Offense to Reason*, 88.

<sup>80</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 248.

<sup>81</sup>Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 10.1.18.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.1.8.

<sup>83</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 453.

character. As Jesus explains, a diseased tree cannot bear good fruit (Matt 7:18). In the opening of his gospel John states, “But to all who did receive him [Christ], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood *nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man*, but of God” (John 1:12-13). If man is going to be born again, it will not be due to his own will. As Jesus states in John 3:5, a man cannot see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. In John 6:44 Jesus again makes man’s impotence abundantly clear, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” Man is not spiritually capable of coming to Jesus. What is it that hinders, binds, and enslaves man’s will, keeping him from following Christ? Jesus explains, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34; cf. Rom 6:6, 17, 19-20; 2 Pet 2:19).<sup>84</sup>

Slave or δοῦλός in John 8:34 is from δουλεύειν, meaning “to be enslaved.” The KJV translates the noun “servant” and the ASV “bondservant.” However, the NASB and ESV use “slave” which properly communicates the imprisonment of man’s will. Moreover, since the participle in John 8:34 is in the present tense, communicating continuation, Jesus is saying that this enslavement to sin is habitual.<sup>85</sup> Köstenberger rightly states, “At issue here is not so much the commission of distinct acts of sin, but *remaining in a state of sin.*”<sup>86</sup> Jesus exposes the bondage of those who do not believe in him once again when he says,

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. .

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<sup>84</sup>“Not only does the practice of sin (the Greek is literally ‘the one who does sin’; cf. 1 Jn. 3:4, 8, 9) prove that one is a slave to sin, but the practice of sin actively enslaves.” D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 350. For a discussion of how slavery to sin related to the false confidence the Jews had in their descent from Abraham, see Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 310; Köstenberger, *John*, 262-63.

<sup>85</sup>Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 232-33. For an extensive treatment of the biblical language of “slave” see John MacArthur, *Slave: The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011).

<sup>86</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 263. Also see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (1971), 406. Contra C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 345.

. . . But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God (John 8:43-47).

Jesus is very clear; the reason they do not understand him in a saving way is because they cannot bear to hear his word. Carson comments,

This is shocking: Jesus does not say they fail to grasp his message because they cannot follow his spoken word, his idiom, but that they fail to understand his idiom precisely because they *cannot* ‘hear’ his message. The Jews remain responsible for their own ‘cannot’, which, far from resulting from divine fiat, is determined by their own desire (*thelousin*) to perform the lusts (*tas epithymias*) of the devil (8:44). This ‘cannot’, this slavery to sin (8:34), itself stems from personal sin. Sin enslaves.<sup>87</sup>

Carson’s observation is piercing. The reason the sinner does not understand the word of Christ is because he is enslaved to the devil (8:44). However, as we will see later, while the proximate reason for unbelief is slavery to sin and the devil, the ultimate or remote reason is because they do not belong to God. As Jesus states, “The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God” (John 8:47; cf. 12:37-40; 14:17). What must be done to free man’s will from this bondage to sin? According to Jesus, man willfully remains in bondage to sin until the Son sets him free (John 8:36). As John 15:1-5 explains, apart from Christ the sinner can do nothing, but “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Like Jesus, the apostle Paul is very clear that man is a willful slave to sin and unable to do anything out of faith in God. Paul states, “Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” (Rom 6:16). Those who are slaves to sin are dominated by sin, unable to escape its power (Rom 6:18; cf. 6:20-23).<sup>88</sup> As Schreiner states, “unbelievers cannot liberate themselves from sin’s grip.” In other words, “Sin exercises control over them so that they are in

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<sup>87</sup>D.A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 166

<sup>88</sup>“Those who are born in Adam do not merely sin; they are also slaves to sin. Sin, as an alien power, dominates them. They are under its rule and authority.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 127.

bondage to it.”<sup>89</sup> In Romans 8:7-8 Paul again reminds us of man’s slavery and spiritual inability when he says, “For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” As observed already, Paul does not say that man, though maimed by sin, can still submit to God’s law. Nor is it the case that the sinner simply is refusing to cooperate. Rather, Paul is certain that man is absolutely unable to please God because he, as an unregenerate man, is of the flesh rather than the Spirit (Rom 8:9).<sup>90</sup> Therefore, Mounce correctly states, “Not only are persons apart from Christ ‘totally depraved’ (i.e., every part of their being has been affected by the fall) but also ‘totally disabled’ – in their rebellious state they cannot please God.”<sup>91</sup> Murray concludes, “Here we have nothing less than the doctrine of the total inability of the natural man, that is to say, total inability to be well-pleasing to God or to do what is well-pleasing in his sight.”<sup>92</sup>

Paul makes the same point when writing to the Corinthians, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The natural person is enslaved to the foolishness of this world and the spiritual things of God he cannot even begin to understand in a saving way.<sup>93</sup> As Calvin comically but insightfully states, “Faced with God’s revelation, the unbeliever is like an ass at a concert.”<sup>94</sup>

Similar to the Corinthians, Paul also says to the Galatians, “In the same way

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>91</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, vol. 27 (1995), 178.

<sup>92</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 1:287.

<sup>93</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (2003), 100; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (2000), 271. Schreiner compares 1 Cor 2:14 to 2 Thess 2:9-12 where those perishing refuse to love the truth and so be saved. “Paul could have easily said that unbelievers do not welcome the truth, but he refers to ‘the love of the truth’ to emphasize that unbelievers do not have any affection for or inclination to believe in the truth.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 136.

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Richard B. Gaffin, “Some Epistemological Reflections on 1 Cor 2:6-16,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 57 (1995): 114.

we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3). Being enslaved to the elementary principles of the world is comparable to being “under the law” (Gal 3:23; 4:5).<sup>95</sup> Schreiner comments that Paul draws an important parallel between Israel’s slavery under the law (Gal 3:10, 22; 4:3-5) and the slavery of the Gentiles to idols (Gal 4:8, 10). Notice, with the Jews and the Gentiles “sin reigned as a tyrannical power.”

Paul does not represent pre-Christian existence as one characterized by libertarian freedom, that is, the power to choose the contrary. People instead are under the thrall to sin, subjugated and mastered by alien power. The earthly Jerusalem that resists the Pauline gospel is not only misguided, ‘she is in *slavery* with her children’ (Gal 4:25) and her inhabitants are in bondage (Gal 4:31).<sup>96</sup>

It is only when Christ liberates the sinner that one becomes a son of God (Gal 4:4-5). Moreover, if, as Schreiner argues, being enslaved to the elementary principles of the world is parallel to being “under the law” (Gal 3:23; 4:5),<sup>97</sup> then it is also true, as Calvin observes, that the law does not reveal our capacity but incapacity to obey. Anthony Lane explains, “The purpose of the law is not to show us our capacity but rather to reveal our inability. The law cannot make sinners good but convicts them of guilt.”<sup>98</sup> However, our inability does not mitigate our responsibility to obey the law.<sup>99</sup> Berkhof explains that

though man tore away from God in sin and is now incapable of rendering spiritual obedience to his rightful Sovereign, his willful transgression did not abrogate the claim of God on the service of His rational creates. The right of God to demand absolute obedience remains, and He asserts this right in both the law and the gospel.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore, when man fails to heed the law due to his corrupt nature and enslavement to

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<sup>95</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 130. Also see Ridderbos, *Galatia*, 154; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC, vol. 41 (1990), 165-66.

<sup>96</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 131-32.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>98</sup>Anthony N. S. Lane, “Anthropology,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 280.

<sup>99</sup>As Berkhof states, “it is no more unreasonable to require repentance and faith in Christ of men than it is to demand of them that they keep the law. Very inconsistently some of those who oppose the general offer of salvation on the basis of man’s spiritual inability, do not hesitate to place the sinner before the demands of the law and even insist on doing this.” Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 463.

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

sin, he is not excused due to his inability but his continual inability actually aggravates and increases his culpability.<sup>101</sup> Consequently, the Arminian cannot object at this point that man's inability removes his responsibility. Such an assumption is unbiblical as seen with Israel's history. Schreiner clarifies, "The law's commands were given to people who had no inclination or capability to keep the Torah. Those in the flesh are enslaved to sin [Rom 8:8]. Once again, the history of Israel testifies to what Paul says. Israel was thoroughly instructed by the Torah, but they had no inclination to keep it."<sup>102</sup>

Paul emphasizes the inability and slavery of man again in 2 Timothy 2:24-26, "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." In verse 26 Paul is lucid: the unregenerate man is under the snare of the devil and captured by him to do his will.<sup>103</sup> Paul makes a similar statement in 2 Corinthians 4:4, "In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Murray Harris observes that while in 3:14a (see Rom 11:8 also) the minds of the Jews "are hardened by God (by implication)," in 4:4 it is Satan who "blinds" the minds of all unbelievers.<sup>104</sup> However, God, not Satan, is sovereign in this text. Hafemann explains,

Paul is not teaching a dualism in which competing gods battle one another for the lives of men and women. Paul describes Satan as limited, that is, he is only "the god

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<sup>101</sup>John Cheeseman, *Saving Grace* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 26.

<sup>102</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 136. Also see Cheeseman, *Saving Grace*, 26-30.

<sup>103</sup>Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 549-50; Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 425-27; William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC, vol. 46 (2000), 537-38.

<sup>104</sup>Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (2005), 328. "Since Paul elsewhere speaks of God as blinding human eyes (Rom. 11:8, 'God gave them . . . eyes that would not see'; cf. Rom 11:10), he must have understood this blinding of the understanding either as a divine judgment administered by Satan or, as seems preferable, as an accommodation within the divine will [In illustration of this general point, compare Exod. 7:3 with Exod. 7:13 (nine times in Exodus the hardening of the pharaoh's heart is attributed to God, nine times to the pharaoh himself), and 2 Sam. 24:1 with 1 Chron. 21:1 (the census of Israel and Judah). Even Satan's acts lie within God's sovereign control." Ibid., 329.

of this age.” When taken together with the use of the “divine passive” of 3:14 and Paul’s emphasis on the active work of the Spirit in removing the “veil” in 3:17, Satan’s work is clearly seen to be *subordinate to the sovereignty of the “one God”* (cf. 1 Cor. 8:6; also Rom. 11:36). “Those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 4:3) do so because God leaves them in their blinded state, cut off from his glory and without the power of the Spirit needed to escape Satan’s reign over their lives.<sup>105</sup>

Man is not only a slave to his own passions and the sins of the world, but he is also a slave to Satan himself, doing his bidding.<sup>106</sup> Only a sovereign act of God granting repentance can liberate the will’s bondage to the devil.

### **Willfully Inclined to Sin: Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of Inclination**

It is concerning the doctrine of spiritual inability that the categories of Jonathan Edwards on the freedom of the will are of great assistance.<sup>107</sup> Edwards is debatably the most important Calvinist philosopher-theologian in American history. His 1754 volume, *Freedom of the Will*, showed itself to be the central work in defense of a Calvinist view of free will.<sup>108</sup> Four years later Edwards also wrote *The Great Christian Doctrine of*

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<sup>105</sup>Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (2000), 178. Likewise, Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (2005), 329.

<sup>106</sup>“People are not blinded because they choose to renounce the gospel; rather, they choose to renounce the gospel because they are blind. And they are not blind because they choose to be so, but because Satan has made them so.” Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 177.

<sup>107</sup>The following section on Edwards is indebted to John Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards: A Mini-Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1987), 35-68; Idem, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, (Powhatan, VA: Berea, 1992), 2:303-22; 3:137-40; Allen C. Guelzo, “The Return of the Will: Jonathan Edwards and the Possibilities of Free Will,” in *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion*, eds. Sang Hyun Lee and Allen C. Guelzo (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 87-109; idem, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); idem, “Freedom of the Will,” in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 115-129; Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2-90; Leon Chai, *Jonathan Edwards and the Limits of Enlightenment Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 94-112; Sam Storms, “The Will: Fettered Yet Free (Freedom of the Will),” in *A God Entranced Vision of All Things*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 201-20; idem, “Jonathan Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,” *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982): 131-69; Mark Noll, “Jonathan Edwards’s *Freedom of the Will* Abroad,” in *Jonathan Edwards at 300*, ed. Harry S. Stout, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Caleb J. D. Maskell (London: University Press of America, 2005), 98-109; Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 49-68, 147-168. For a critical assessment of Edwards, which I disagree with, see Hugh J. McCann, “Edwards on Free Will,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, eds. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 27-44.

<sup>108</sup> Ramsey states, “This book alone is sufficient to establish its author as the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene.” Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsay, vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1970), 1-2. Edwards’s original title was *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of Will, Which is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame*.

*Original Sin Defended* (1758), which would be the essential companion to *Freedom of the Will*. Edwards argues that the universal imputation of Adam's sin to humanity resulted in man being necessarily inclined towards sin. In other words, man "is depraved and ruined by propensities to sin," indeed, an "unfailing propensity" to moral evil.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, only the work of the Spirit in regeneration can change man's propensity towards sin.<sup>110</sup> Such an understanding of sin will come into play as Edwards defines the freedom of the will.

Edwards defines the will as the mind that chooses. "The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice."<sup>111</sup> In the mind's choosing a man chooses that which he most desires. "A man never, in any instance, wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will."<sup>112</sup> Therefore, one will always choose whatever the strongest desire (motive) may be at the moment of choice. Such desires or motives provide reasons for why a person chooses *A* instead of *B*.

If, as Edwards says, man's choice is necessitated by his strongest desire or motive then freedom is compatible with divine determinism. Edwards explains,

By 'determining the will,' if the phrase be used with any meaning, must be intended, causing that the act of the will or choice should be thus, and not otherwise: and the will is said to be determined, when, in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object.<sup>113</sup>

Determinism means that when a person acts he must necessarily choose one option rather than another and the chosen action is exactly what God had ordained beforehand. Such a

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<sup>109</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh, PA: Banner of Truth, 1979), 1:145, 152. For an in depth treatment of *Original Sin*, see Samuel C. Storms, *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (London: University Press of America, 1985).

<sup>110</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh, PA: Banner of Truth, 1979), 1:210-14. Calvin also uses the language of the "faculty of the will" in *Institutes*, III.2.5.

<sup>111</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 137.

<sup>112</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 141.

view is contrary to Arminianism's indeterminism which argues, as chapter 5 will show, that no one thing, external (God) or internal (depravity) to man, determines, necessitates, or causes his choice. For the indeterminist, man can always choose otherwise, or other than he did. While there may be influences on his choice, no one influence is so influential that man *must* choose *A* instead of *B*. Edwards sees such a view as nonsense because it is a freedom of indifference which makes the agent's choices arbitrary, lacking decisive motive for any given action. In short, such a view is irrational, says Edwards. To the contrary, the will is never "indifferent" but there is always a cause which results in a certain effect. "To talk of the determination of the will, supposes an effect, which must have a cause."<sup>114</sup> To disagree would be to argue that the will is not caused and therefore is an "uncaused effect." However, such a view cannot explain why there are effects that issue forth from man's will.<sup>115</sup>

According to Edwards, the will is both a determiner and is determined. "If the will be determined, there is a determiner. This must be supposed to be intended even by them that say, the will determines itself. If it be so, the will is both determiner and determined; it is a cause that acts and produces effects upon itself, and is the object of its own influence and action."<sup>116</sup> For Edwards, the will is a determiner in that the will produces certain effects. However, the will is also determined in that the choices it makes are choices that are caused by certain desires or motives. The will always chooses the strongest desire and so is determined. Edwards calls this the will's "strongest motive" for "the will is always determined by the strongest motive."<sup>117</sup> There can never be an act of

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid. As Sproul explains, "An effect, by definition, is that which has an antecedent cause. If it has no cause then it is not an effect. Likewise, a cause by definition is that which produces an effect. If no effect is produced then it is not a cause." Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 159.

<sup>116</sup>Sproul comments, "At this point Edwards argues from the vantage point of the law of cause and effect. Causality is presupposed throughout his argument. The law of cause and effect declares that for every effect there is an antecedent cause. Every effect must have a cause and every cause, in order to be cause, must produce an effect. The law of causality is a formal principle that one cannot deny without embracing irrationality. David Hume's famous critique of causality did not annihilate the law but our ability to perceive particular causal relationships." Ibid., 158-59.

<sup>117</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 142.

the will which is uncaused, but rather the act is always caused by the will's greatest motive. If then by free will one means a will which chooses that which it most desires, then yes the will is free. However, if by free will one means (as the Arminians do) that the will is uncaused and man can always choose otherwise (power of contrary choice or contra-causal choice) then such a definition of free will must be rejected for the will is never free in this manner.<sup>118</sup> Here Edwards is simply reiterating the Reformers before him, especially Calvin, who argued that "the will is never indifferent" as if man possessed a *libertas contrarietatis* (freedom of contrariety).<sup>119</sup> Such a view is also affirmed by many Reformed theologians today in the position titled "compatibilism."<sup>120</sup>

How does this philosophical discussion on the will by Edwards relate to sin and grace? If, as Edwards says, the will is always caused by its "strongest motive" then it is proper to call free will the freedom of inclination, for the will always does that which it is most inclined to do, or that which it most desires. However, in light of Adam's inherited corruption to all of mankind, man's nature is polluted. Consequently, man's inclinations are evil. What this means for the will is that its "strongest motive" after the fall is towards sin. Man's will is necessitated by his sinful nature so that he chooses that which is evil and yet since this is the will's strongest motive it is exactly what he most wants to choose.<sup>121</sup> Man is not forced or coerced to sin but sins willingly because his will

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<sup>118</sup>For Edwards's treatment of the Arminian view see *Freedom of the Will*, 164-65.

<sup>119</sup>Richard A. Muller, "Liberum Arbitrium," in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985).

<sup>120</sup>It is not the primary focus of this chapter to explain and defend compatibilism. However, compatibilism simply means that divine determinism is compatible with human freedom, freedom being understood as a freedom of inclination rather than indifference. Robert Kane helpfully defines compatibilism: "Compatibilists argue that to be free, as we ordinarily understand it, is (1) to have the *power* or *ability* to do what we want or desire to do, which in turn entails (2) an *absence of constraints* or *impediments* (such as physical restraints, coercion, and compulsion) preventing us from doing what we want." Kane also outlines several qualifications so that compatibilism is not misunderstood: (1) Don't confuse determinism with constraint, coercion, or compulsion. (2) Don't confuse *causation* with *constraint*. (3) Don't confuse *determinism* with *control* by other agents. (4) Don't confuse *determinism* with *fatalism*. (5) Don't confuse *determinism* with *mechanism*. Robert Kane, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 13, 18-21.

<sup>121</sup>At this point some object that necessity is inconsistent with liberty. However, Edwards denies such an inconsistency and explains what he means by necessity. "Philosophical necessity is really nothing else than the full and fixed connection between the things signified by the subject and predicate of

finds its strongest desire not in God but in sinful pleasures.

It is at this point that Arminians will object that man's will is not free nor can man be held responsible. How can such an understanding of freedom be reconciled with man's duty to repent and believe? Surely if man is unable to repent and believe he cannot be held responsible for not doing so. Edwards is able to answer such an objection by distinguishing, as Francis Turretin did before him, between natural and moral ability and natural and moral necessity.<sup>122</sup>

What has been said of natural and moral necessity, may serve to explain what is intended by natural and moral *inability*. We are said to be *naturally* unable to do a thing, when we can't do it if we will, because what is most commonly called nature don't allow of it, or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects. *Moral* inability consists not in any of these things; but either in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the will, or the strength of apparent motives to the contrary. Or both these may be resolved into one; and it may be said in one word, that moral inability consists in the opposition or want of inclination.<sup>123</sup>

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a proposition, which affirms something to be true. When there is such a connection, then the thing affirmed in the proposition is necessary, in a philosophical sense; whether any opposition, or contrary effort be supposed, or supposable in the case, or no. When the subject and predicate of the proposition, which affirms the existence of anything, either substance, quality, act or circumstance, have a full and certain connection, then the existence or being of that thing is said to be necessary in a metaphysical sense. And in this sense I use the word necessity, in the following discourse, when I endeavor to prove that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty." Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 152.

<sup>122</sup>Besides Turretin, Holifield also lists Cotton Mather in New England as employing this distinction. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 121.

<sup>123</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 159. Not all Calvinists have agreed with Edwards on this distinction. For example, see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 247-48. This is unfortunate for it seems as though Berkhof is reacting not so much against Edwards as against those who came after Edwards and used his distinctions to support synergism. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between Edwards's Calvinism and the neo-Arminianism of those who followed. On the New Divinity's use of Edwards, see Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 262-329; Holifield, *Theology in America*, 25-55, 102-94; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:8-15; idem, "Regeneration," in *Princeton v The New Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1-51; idem, "The New Divinity Tried," in *Princeton v The New Divinity*, 141-70; Archibald Alexander, "The Early History of Pelagianism," in *Princeton v The New Divinity*, 52-90; idem, "The Inability of Sinners," in *Princeton v The New Divinity*, 115-40; Benjamin B. Warfield, "Edwards and the New England Theology," in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 5, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 227; Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Christian University Press, 1981); Douglas A. Sweeney, *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, Religion in America Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark A. Noll, "Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology," in *The Best in Theology*, ed. J. I. Packer (Carol Stream, IL: Christian Today, 1990), 115-40; S. Donald Fortson III, *The Presbyterian Creed: A Confessional Tradition in America, 1729-1870* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 42-60; Douglas A. Sweeney and Allen C. Guelzo, eds., *The New England Theology: From Jonathan Edwards to Edwards Amasa Park* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); D. G. Hart, "Jonathan Edwards and the Origins of Experimental Calvinism," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, ed. D. G. Hart and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 161-80; Douglas A. Sweeney, "Taylorites, Tylerites, and the Dissolution of the New England Theology," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 181-99.

If man's will was constrained by nature then yes, man's will would not be free. However, the bondage of the will to sin is not a *natural* or physical inability of the will, but a *moral* inability. Edwards states that moral ability consists in the "want of inclination." The problem after the fall, however, is that man does not want and is not inclined towards righteousness. The will, in other words, is morally necessitated to choose evil rather than good, but since the will always chooses according to the "strongest motive" such a choice is freely chosen, respecting man's liberty. When the sinner chooses to sin he does so out of moral necessity and yet he is free because he is choosing according to his strongest inclination, namely, sin.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, as Edwards would argue in *Effectual Grace*, left to himself man will not and morally cannot choose God until his inclinations are changed by a sovereign act of effectual grace.<sup>125</sup> It is in the sovereign work of regeneration that man's disposition is changed and his inclinations reoriented. God alone can liberate man from his willful bondage to sin.<sup>126</sup>

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On other Calvinists besides Berkhof who disagree with Edwards see Sean Michael Lucas, "He Cuts Up Edwardsism by the Roots' Robert Lewis Dabney and the Edwardsian Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century South," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, 200-14.

Also, others like Paul Helm, though a compatibilist, have argued that "the Bible does not teach a doctrine of human agency that clearly falls either into the libertarian or into the determinist family in the way that it clearly teaches the doctrine of predestination. So Christians are free to adopt, as their opinion, either compatibilism or libertarianism about human agency in a way that they are not free to deny Paul's teaching on predestination." Paul Helm, "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 27. Helm also lists the following as Calvinists who have favored indeterminism: J. L. Girardeau, *The Will in Its Theological Relations* (Columbia, SC: n.p., 1891); William Cunningham, "Calvinism, and the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity," in *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 471-524; Hugh McCann, "Divine Sovereignty and the Freedom of the Will," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995): 582-98; idem, "The Author of Sin?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22.2 (2005): 144-59. While Helm is right that Scripture does not teach a certain view of free will as clearly as it does a doctrine like predestination, are we really willing to go as far as Helm and say that the Bible says nothing whatsoever in one direction or another as to whether or not free will is libertarian or compatibilistic? I disagree with such a statement. Ware has aptly demonstrated that Scripture actually has much to say in support of the doctrine of compatibilist freedom, even if it be indirectly. See Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2004), 61-96. The literature on the issue of free will is massive. For an encompassing bibliography see *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 576-617.

<sup>124</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 164.

<sup>125</sup>Jonathan Edwards, "Efficacious Grace," in *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee, vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 149-468.

<sup>126</sup>Summarizing Edwards, Sproul states the matter well, "Man is morally incapable of choosing the things of God unless or until God changes the disposition of his soul. Man's moral inability is due to a critical lack and deficiency, namely the motive or desire for the things of God. Left to himself, man will never choose Christ. He has no inclination to do so in his fallen state. Since he cannot act against his

However, before moving into the doctrine of effectual calling it is necessary to show that the philosophical categories Edwards appropriates have biblical warrant. Consider two texts: 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. Thomas Schreiner explains the dilemma, “Paul says there [in 1 Cor 2:14] that unbelievers *cannot* accept the things of the Spirit, whereas in 2 Thessalonians 2 he says merely that they *do not* accept the truth. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 their inability (cf. also 2 Cor 4:4 below) seems to exist *before* they hear the truth, whereas in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 delusion is a *consequence* of their forsaking the gospel.”<sup>127</sup> In other words, in 1 Corinthians 2:14 the sinner is incapable of obeying whereas in 2 Thessalonians 2 the sinner, it seems, chooses not to obey. Schreiner is right to respond that no logical contradiction exists for “Paul consistently maintains both that people *cannot* respond to the gospel and that they *do not* respond to it.”<sup>128</sup> If we appropriate a freedom of inclination the texts are further reconciled. Remember, freedom of inclination shows that while man’s choices are determined and necessitated by his strongest motive, nevertheless, he chooses that which he most wants and therefore his choice remains free. In light of depravity, man’s strongest motive is towards sin and so his choice is determined and necessitated by his corrupt nature and yet since sinning is exactly what he most wants to do his choice remains free. So is this the case in these texts. In 1 Corinthians 2:14 we see that man cannot obey because he is not spiritual. He is enslaved to his sin, determined by his corrupt nature. Yet, 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 shows us that he willfully chooses sin,

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strongest inclination, he will never choose Christ unless God first changes the inclination of his soul by the immediate and supernatural work of regeneration. Only God can liberate the sinner from his bondage to his own evil inclinations. Like Augustine, Luther, and Calvin, Edwards argues that man is free in that he can and does choose what he desires or is inclined to choose. But man lacks the desire for Christ and the things of God until God creates in his soul a positive inclination for these things.” Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 165. Also see Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1993), 2: 209-210.

<sup>127</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 137.

<sup>128</sup>“We must also see that 1 Corinthians 2:14 and 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 contemplate two different situations. The former text emphasizes one’s initial inability to welcome the truth, while in 2 Thessalonians Paul emphasizes the consequences of one’s rejecting the truth. The two different perspectives are not contradictory but complementary.” *Ibid.*

showing that this is what he most want to do. On the one hand he cannot obey because he is not spiritual while on the other hand he does not obey because he refuses to love the truth and be saved (2 Thess 2:10-12; cf. Exodus 4:21, 23). Stated otherwise, on the one hand he does not believe because he is necessitated by his corrupt nature (natural man), while on the other hand he does not believe because he refuses to, loving sin more than truth. The former highlights how man's freedom is determined by his sinful nature and the latter highlights how man sins willfully and freely, for this is his strongest inclination. To conclude,

We should not conceive of bondage to sin as if unbelievers are forced or compelled to sin against their will. People manifest their captivity to sin when they do precisely what they wish to do. The dominion of sin is so complete that unbelievers are unaware of their servitude to sin. They believe that they are 'free' because they do what they wish and follow the inclination of their mind. Such desires, however, stem from people who are dead in trespasses in sins, who are actually under the tyranny and dominion of sin.<sup>129</sup>

### **Common Objections**

However, it should be recognized that the doctrines of "total depravity and spiritual inability" (TDSI) are objected to. First, some object that TDSI leads sinners to despair and ruins any motivation that one should turn to God. In response, unless man is driven to see his utter corruption he will never throw himself before Christ in despair and in need of a Savior. As Reymond explains, "It is only when a man knows that he is sinful and incapable of helping himself that he will seek help outside of himself and cast himself upon the mercies of God."<sup>130</sup> Ironically, it is one's rejection of TDSI that discourages repentance. Again, Reymond elaborates,

Nothing is more soul-destroying than the sinner's belief that he is righteous and/or is capable of remedying his situation himself. And precisely this attitude is fostered by the teaching that man is natively able to do whenever he desires to do so what is good in God's sight. To encourage such a conviction is truly to plunge men into self-deception, and that is indeed a counsel of despair.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>130</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 454.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

Second, it is also objected that TDSI is in direct tension with God's command to repent and believe. God would not give this command if man was unable to fulfill it. In short, "ought implies can." A lengthy response here is unnecessary since this objection has already been addressed above. However, it should be noted that Reymond is right when he observes that "God deals with man according to his *obligation*, not according to the measure of his ability."<sup>132</sup> While Adam had both the obligation and the ability, after the fall man lost the ability yet the obligation remains as God's perfect standard cannot be compromised or lowered. Reymond concludes for us,

Man's inability to obey, arising from the moral corruption of his nature, does not remove from us his obligation to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself. His obligation to obey God remains intact. If God dealt with man today according to his ability to obey, he would have to reduce his moral demands to the vanishing point. Conversely, if we determined the measure of man's ability from the sweeping obligations implicit in the divine commands, then we would need to predicate *total ability* for man, that is to say, we would all have to adopt the Pelagian position, for the commands of God cover the entire horizon of moral obligation.<sup>133</sup>

### Effectual Calling in Scripture

Nineteenth-century Arminian William Pope wrote in his *Christian Theology*, "Of a *Vocatio Interna*, as distinguished from the *Vocatio Externa*, there is no trace in Scripture: internal calling and effectual calling are phrases never used. The distinction implies such a difference as would have been clearly stated if it existed."<sup>134</sup> As we will see, Pope is grievously mistaken for there is every trace in Scripture of a distinction between a gospel call to all people and an effectual call only to the elect.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.

<sup>134</sup>William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, n.d.), 2:345.

<sup>135</sup>Other terms used to compare these two include: material and formal, revealed call and call of God's good pleasure, common and personal, universal and special, external and internal. See Amandus Polanus, *Syntragma theologiae christianae*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Hanover: Aubry, 1624), 6, ch. 32; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: 2008) 4:42.

The general call, also referred to as the *vocatio externa*, refers to the call to all people to pay heed to the revelation of God.<sup>136</sup> The *vocatio externa* consists of two parts: *vocatio realis* and *vocatio verbalis*.<sup>137</sup> The *vocatio realis* refers to a call to all people to acknowledge and honor their Creator (Ps 19:1-4; Acts 17:24; Rom 1:19-21; 2:14-15). The *vocatio realis*, call from things, occurs through general revelation (creation and conscience). The *vocatio verbalis* (call from words) refers to the call to all people through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The *vocatio verbalis* calls sinners to repentance and faith in Christ so that they may receive eternal life and be forgiven of their trespasses (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8; 26:16-23; Rom 10:8-15; 1 Cor 15:1-8). As we will see, the gospel call goes to all people but it is clearly not effectual for not all believe. In contrast, Scripture also teaches that there is an effectual call or *vocatio interna*. As the label suggests, the *vocatio interna*, unlike the *vocatio externa*, is invincible and irresistible. It is “God’s inward and ultimately persuasive summons to repent of sin and to turn to Christ for salvation.”<sup>138</sup> However, unlike the *vocatio externa* which is for all, the *vocatio interna* is designed by God to be only for those whom he has unconditionally elected (Rom 8:28-30; 1 Cor 1:22-24). The particularity of the *vocatio interna* is evidenced by the fact that not all are chosen to be saved.

### **The Gospel Call**

Despite man’s depravity God is outrageously gracious to sinners, sending forth his gospel message to the ends of the earth. Hoekema, building off of Berkhof, helpfully defines the gospel call as the “offering of salvation in Christ to people, together with an invitation to accept Christ in repentance and faith, in order that they may receive the

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<sup>136</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 210.

<sup>137</sup>These distinctions can be found in greater detail in Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:33-35; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 457-58; Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 210-11; Muller, “Vocatio,” in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*.

<sup>138</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 211.

forgiveness of sins and eternal life.”<sup>139</sup> Hoekema’s definition reveals two aspects of the gospel call: (1) it consists of the gospel of Jesus Christ and (2) it is meant to be universal in its extent. Concerning the former, Hoekema observes three essential components: (a) A presentation of the facts of the gospel and of the way of salvation. (b) An invitation to come to Christ in repentance and faith (Matt 11:28; Luke 14:23). (c) A promise of forgiveness and salvation for those who do come to Christ.<sup>140</sup> It is the second and third aspects which, for our purposes, deserve considerable attention, as does the universality of the gospel call which we shall first address.

**A Call to Sinners Everywhere to Repent and Believe.** The first truth to understand about the gospel call is that it is an invitation for everyone who hears the gospel. Hence, sometimes the gospel call is labeled the *general* or *universal* call, meaning that the gospel is preached indiscriminately to people of any age, race, or nation. Several passages demonstrate the universality of the gospel call. Consider Isaiah 45:22, “Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.” Here the Lord invites sinners to turn to Yahweh so that they might find salvation. Notice, Yahweh is the only God who can save for “there is no other.” Isaiah again teaches a call to all people in 55:1, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Here again we see an invitation to everyone to come to Yahweh empty handed to receive true spiritual salvation. Jesus will use this same language in the New Testament when he says to the woman at the well that he has living water which he gives as a gift from God (John 4:10). Jesus promises that the living water that he gives becomes a spring welling

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<sup>139</sup>Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 68. See Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 459-61.

<sup>140</sup>Hoekema adds an important point, “The gospel call must also include the promise that those who respond properly to this call will receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in fellowship with Christ. This promise is, however, conditional: you will receive forgiveness and salvation if you repent and believe. . . . When I call the promise included in the gospel call conditional, I do not mean that this is a condition which human beings can fulfill in their own strength. God alone can enable the hearer of the gospel call to repent and believe. The hearer must therefore pray that God will empower him or her to do so, and must give God the praise when he does so. But the condition must be fulfilled if the blessing is to be received – this the preacher must make clear.” *Ibid.*, 70.

up to eternal life (John 4:14), so that one never thirsts again (4:13). Likewise, Jesus uses the imagery of Isaiah when he says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35, 48, 51) and invites sinners to come and eat of his flesh that they may live (John 6:54-56). Such an invitation is consistent with the words of Joel 2:32a, “And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

In the New Testament, the general call to all people is specifically referenced to Jesus, the Christ, who is God with us (Matt 1:23; Isa 7:14). Like Yahweh in the Old Testament, Jesus is the source of salvation and redemption and it is through him and him alone that eternal life can be found (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom 10:10-12). Therefore, Jesus says in Matthew 11:28, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Jesus calls all people to come to him, to trust in him, and to believe in him (cf. Matt 10:32-33; Luke 12:8; 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24). Likewise, John 7:37 states, “On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink’” (cf. John 4:13). And again Jesus proclaims, “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). Such a promise is consistent with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (cf. John 6:40; 11:26; 12:46). Such invitations parallel Revelation 22:17, “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

The parables of Jesus also describe a gospel call. For example, Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:16-24, which are meant to illustrate the kingdom of heaven, both describe instances where somebody in the parable (Matthew: a king; Luke: a certain man) invites guests to his banquet and then sends out his servant(s), telling his guests to come.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, God sends out the message of his Son, inviting people everywhere to

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<sup>141</sup>Notice, in these parables there are three groups identified. Hoekema explains their identification: “It seems clear that these parables must be interpreted as referring to the gospel call. The first group of invited guests stands for the Jews, God’s ancient covenant people, who had been previously called through prophets, priests, and God-fearing kings, and who are now being called again by Christ and his disciples. In both parables those first invited refuse to come. The second group of invited guests, both in

come and enter into the kingdom. This is also the purpose of the great commission in Matthew 28:19-20 where Jesus commands his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The words of Jesus here demonstrate that the gospel is to be preached to all, without hesitation or reservation. We do not know who will believe and who will not. We do not know who the elect are. We are to preach the gospel to all, desiring to see all come to repentance and faith.

Furthermore, many times the invitation of the gospel call takes on the form of a command. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 4:17, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’” Likewise, Acts 17:30 says, “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he *commands* all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (emphasis added). Here again we see that God commands people everywhere to repent of their sins for a day of judgment is coming. What is important to note at this point is that these commands demonstrate that it is man’s duty to repent and believe. In other words, regardless of whether or not man has the spiritual ability to repent and trust in Christ (which, as we previously saw, the sinner does not), nevertheless, it is still man’s duty to do so. Therefore, the indiscriminate preaching of the gospel is necessary.

Besides the gospels, the epistles also present a gospel call to all people. Using the language of Joel 2:32, Peter proclaims in Acts 2:21, “And it shall come to pass that

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Matthew and in Luke (people who live within the town), seem to stand for Jews other than those previously called – tax collectors, sinners, and the like. The people in this second group are willing to come to the banquet. The third group of guests, mentioned only by Luke (people in the ‘roads and country lanes,’ and therefore outside of the town), may stand for the Gentiles to whom the gospel would come later as the church would fulfill Christ’s Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). In both Matthew 22 and Luke 14, therefore, Jesus teaches that many are called to accept the gospel invitation who refuse to do so – that, in other words, there is a general call which comes to all to whom the gospel is preached.” Ibid., 70-71.

everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (cf. Rom 10:13). Such a promise is not only for Jews but for Gentiles also as exemplified in Peter’s words to the household of Cornelius in Acts 10. The promise of life is held out to those who trust in Christ, “And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he [Jesus] is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that *everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*” (Acts 10:42-43; emphasis added). Similarly, the apostle Paul, explaining how salvation has come to the Gentiles, also holds out the promise of the gospel in Romans 9:33, as he quotes from Isaiah 28:16, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and *whoever believes in him will not be put to shame*” (emphasis added; cf. Rom 10:11-13; 1 Peter 2:6). Therefore, John rightly asserts in 1 John 4:15, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”

**God’s Desire for All to Believe.** As seen in the passages above, God offers the gospel freely to both Jew and Gentile, promising salvation if they believe. Such an offer is consistent with God’s desire to see sinners repent and be saved. As Peter states, the Lord is patient towards sinners, “not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Peter 2:9). Likewise, Paul tells Timothy that God our Savior “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). As will be seen in appendix 2, such passages as these reflect God’s will of disposition (not his decretive will) in which he not only offers salvation but desires that lost sinners repent and be saved. Consider the following texts:

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezek 18:23).

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezek 33:11).

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matthew 23:37; cf. Luke 13:34).

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20).

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:3-4).

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Pet 3:9).

Here we see several examples of God's desire that all people be saved, a desire which is manifested in his indiscriminate offer of the gospel to all people.

**The Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel.** The preaching of the gospel to all people comes out of a real, genuine desire to see all people repent and be saved (Num 23:19; Ps 81:13-16; Prov 1:24; Isa 1:18-20; Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11; Matt 21:37; 2 Tim 2:13). The gospel call is a *bona fide* calling that is seriously given. As Berkhof states, "When God calls the sinner to accept Christ by faith, He earnestly desires this; and when He promises those who repent and believe eternal life, His promise is dependable."<sup>142</sup> Or as Johannes Wollebius states, "He calls both [elect and non-elect] in earnest [*serior*] and without any deceit."<sup>143</sup> Arminians often object that this cannot be the case in light of the Calvinist belief that God chooses to only give his effectual grace to his elect. God's gospel offer would be "disingenuous" and "cynical."<sup>144</sup> However, there is no inconsistency for several reasons. (1) Such an offer is not superfluous because it is the gospel call which is the *very means* by which God converts sinners.<sup>145</sup> (2) God never

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<sup>142</sup>"This follows from the very nature, from the veracity, of God. It is blasphemous to think that God would be guilty of equivocation and deception, that He would say one thing and mean another, that He would earnestly plead with the sinner to repent and believe unto salvation, and at the same time not desire it in any sense of the word." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 462.

<sup>143</sup>Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 20.2.7.

<sup>144</sup>Steve W. Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 120.

<sup>145</sup>Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 134. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:48. Berkhof also explains, "It is the divinely appointed means of bringing sinners to conversion. In other words, it is the means by which God gathers the elect out of the nations of the earth. As such it must necessarily be general or universal, since no man can point out the elect." Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 462.

makes a promise in the gospel offer that he does not keep. God promises that eternal life will be granted on the condition of faith. However, God never promises that he will bestow faith on everyone. As Bavinck explains, in “that offer he does not say what he himself will do – whether or not he will bestow that faith. He has kept that to himself. He only tells us what he wants us to do: that we humble ourselves and seek our salvation in Christ alone.”<sup>146</sup> Or as Wollebius argues,

As to the reprobate, although they are not called “according to his purpose,” or to salvation, nevertheless they are called in earnest, and salvation is offered them *on condition of faith*. Nor are they mocked because they have been deprived of the grace of believing. Rather, because they destroyed the original grace of their own accord, and also, by their evil passion, despised the means of grace, God therefore has the right to demand faith from them and uses it no less justly than do other creditors, so that their mouths are closed, they are without excuse, and the justice of God is upheld. Therefore, he does not call them to mock them, but in order to declare and reveal his justice.<sup>147</sup>

Turretin says the same, “For a serious call does not require that there should be an intention and purpose of drawing him, but only that there should be a constant will of commanding duty and bestowing the blessing upon him who performs it (which God most seriously wills).”<sup>148</sup> (3) The gospel call is seriously meant regardless of the fact that man cannot fulfill it. It is objected that since sinners do not have the ability to believe (due to depravity), a gospel call cannot be genuinely offered. Some take this objection so far as to say God would be deceptive to make such an offer that he knows man cannot fulfill. However, as Wilhelmus à Brakel states, the “fact that man is not able to repent and believe is not God’s fault, but man is to be blamed.”<sup>149</sup> God will not lower the conditions of the gospel (faith and repentance) because man, by his own depravity, cannot fulfill them. Moreover, God is not obligated to bestow his grace on anyone. Man is a sinner,

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<sup>146</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:37.

<sup>147</sup>Emphasis added. Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 20.2.7.

<sup>148</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:504-510.

<sup>149</sup>à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 2:207 (cf. 2:208).

deserving only judgment, and for God to fulfill the gospel condition on anyone's behalf is sheer grace. (4) The well-meant offer is just as problematic (if not more problematic!) for the Arminian. As Bavinck notes,

If it be objected that God nevertheless offers salvation to those to whom he has decided not to grant faith and salvation, then this is an objection equally applicable to the position of our opponents. For in that case, *God also offers salvation to those whom he infallibly knows will not believe*. . . . the outcome of world history is eternally and unchangeably certain. The only difference is that the Reformed have had the courage to say that the outcome corresponds to God's will and purpose.<sup>150</sup>

Or as Turretin explains, "it is repugnant for God simply and absolutely to will and intend what he himself decreed should never happen."<sup>151</sup> As it turns out, it is the Arminian who has the real problem of a *well-meant* offer of the gospel.

Unfortunately, the Calvinist's affirmation of the well-meant offer of the gospel not only raises conflict with the Arminian but with the hyper-Calvinist as well, as evidenced in eighteenth-century hyper-Calvinism, represented by men such as Joseph Hussey (d. 1726) and John Brine (1703-1765), though scholars have now recognized that it is inaccurate to "lump together indiscriminately" all hyper-Calvinists due to their various theological nuances.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, hyper-Calvinism was refuted by Particular

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<sup>150</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:37. Emphasis added.

<sup>151</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:510.

<sup>152</sup>Timothy George, "John Gill," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 29. Also see E. P. Clipsham, "Andrew Fuller and Fullerism: A Study in Evangelical Calvinism," *Baptist Quarterly* 20 (1963): 99-114. Hussey's hyper-Calvinism can be found in his 1707 work *God's Operations of Grace but No Offers of His Grace*. W. T. Whitley, however, places the blame for hyper-Calvinism on John Gill (1697-1771). W. T. Whitley, *Calvinism and Evangelism in England, Especially in Baptist Circles* (London: Kingsgate, n.d.), 27. Likewise, Peter Morden argues that "attempts to defend him [Gill] from the charge of high [hyper] Calvinism are ultimately unconvincing." Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 15. Morden believes Gill's hyper-Calvinism is apparent in John Gill, *Sermons and Tracts, Three Volumes* (London: n.p., 1778), 3:269-70, as quoted in Morden, *Offering Christ*, 14. However, other Baptist historians strongly disagree. Nettles, for example, argues that Gill "has doubtless been judged more harshly and even maliciously than any man of comparable repute in Baptist history." Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 84. George has also defended Gill against the charge of hyper-Calvinism in "John Gill," 11-33. For example, Gill himself writes that young pastors are to "preach the gospel of salvation to all men, and declare, that whosoever believes shall be saved: for this they are commissioned to do." John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 164. For a historical treatment of Hyper-Calvinism see Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

Baptist Andrew Fuller in *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*.<sup>153</sup> Hyper-Calvinism was represented in the nineteenth-century once again by James Wells (1803-1872) but again was refuted in the Fullerism of Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892).<sup>154</sup> Unfortunately, in the twentieth-century hyper-Calvinism has shown its head once again with Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965), creating controversy both in the Netherlands and in England.<sup>155</sup> Hoeksema argued that the gospel call is not an “offer” since this would mean that everyone to whom the gospel went would be capable of accepting it, which is clearly not the case.<sup>156</sup> Since everyone cannot accept it, but only the elect, the gospel call is not an offer of salvation to sinners. Building off of his views on election and reprobation, Hoeksema argues that there can be no well-meant offer of the gospel, which would imply that God intends and desires the salvation of the non-elect, for Scripture is clear that God determines to harden the hearts of the non-elect, not save them. In fact, God does not

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<sup>153</sup> Fuller described the hyper-Calvinists of his day as arguing the following: “It is absurd and cruel to require of any man what is beyond his power to perform; and as the Scriptures declare that ‘No man can come to Christ, except the Father draw him,’ and that ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,’ it is concluded that these are things to which the sinner, while unregenerate, is under no obligation.” And again, “It is a kind of maxim with such persons that ‘none can be obliged to act spiritually, but spiritual men.’” Consequently, preaching in such a way that invites, pleads, urges, and exhorts sinners to repent and believe is out of the question. See Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of Reverend Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988), 1:360, 376. On Fuller, see Paul Brewster, *Andrew Fuller: Model Pastor-Theologian* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 65-108; T. E. Watson, “Andrew Fuller’s Conflict with Hypercalvinism,” in *Puritan Papers: 1956-1959*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 1:271-82.

<sup>154</sup> Iain Murray, *Spurgeon versus Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1995).

<sup>155</sup> Herman Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Church in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1947), 317-53; idem, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1966), 465-68; idem, *Whosoever Will* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945). Another advocate is Klaas Schilder, *Heidelbergische Catechismus*, vol. 2 (Goes: Oosterbaan and LeCointre, 1949). Hoeksema was the founder of the Protestant Reformed Church. It was the Christian Reformed Church who opposed Hoeksema. Anthony Hoekema rightly criticizes Herman Hoeksema, “Taking issue with Hoeksema on this point, the Christian Reformed Church of North America maintains, in agreement with the majority of Reformed theologians, that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation, not just on the part of the preacher, but on God’s part as well, to all who hear it, and that God seriously and earnestly desires the salvation of all to whom the gospel call comes.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 72ff. For other critiques of Hoeksema, see A. C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1954); R. Scott Clark, “Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel, and Westminster Theology,” in *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: Systematic Theology at the Westminster Seminaries, Essays in Honor of Robert B. Strimple*, ed. David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 149-79.

<sup>156</sup> The summary of Hoeksema I provide here can also be found in Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 72-74.

even desire the salvation of the non-elect nor does he act favorably towards the reprobate but only acts to further their sentence to eternal torment. Grace, even in the gospel call, is never for the reprobate but only the elect.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, when the gospel is preached it is not a free offer of grace to whomever will believe, but rather is simply a promise meant only for the elect. The only thing the non-elect receive in hearing this message is condemnation. However, as seen in the scriptures discussed already, Hoeksema's view is deeply unbiblical. Contrary to Hoeksema, Scripture everywhere affirms the well-meant offer of the gospel or, as Caspar Olevian (1536-87) termed it, an *evangelium oblatum* (gospel offered), whereby God freely offers the gospel of his Son Jesus Christ and genuinely desires the conversion of the lost (2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim 2:4).<sup>158</sup> Moreover, one will notice that in many of the passages discussed already the gospel call is given by Jesus himself. Jesus *did know* who the elect were and yet he offered the gospel freely (Matt 22:3-8, 14; Luke 14:16-21; John 5:38-40).

It is unfortunate that some Arminians accuse Calvinists of not affirming the well-meant offer of the gospel. Perhaps this is because Hyper-Calvinists like Hoeksema are wrongly used as representatives of Calvinism instead of the traditional Reformed theologians.<sup>159</sup> However, Calvinists throughout history have embraced and taught the well-meant offer. For example, consider the Canons of Dort:

It is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel (V.5).<sup>160</sup>

All who are called through the gospel are called seriously (*serio vocantur*). For seriously and most genuinely (*serio et verissime*) God makes known in his Word

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<sup>157</sup>Hoeksema, *Whosoever Will*, 148.

<sup>158</sup>On Olevian, see Clark, "Well-Meant Offer," 169.

<sup>159</sup>For example, see Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," 143-44; Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 49-50.

<sup>160</sup>As translated by Anthony Hoekema in *Saved by Grace*, 77.

what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously (*serio*) he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe (III-IV.8).<sup>161</sup>

In these statements Dort is responding to the accusation by the Arminian Remonstrants that they could not affirm the well-meant offer of the gospel. However, Calvinists have and continue to affirm the well-meant offer of the gospel right along side of the effectual call.<sup>162</sup> Scripture teaches both of these truths and we must let Scripture be our authority on this matter. Sounding much like Andrew Fuller in the eighteenth-century, Anthony Hoekema explains the rationalizing that occurs when one tries to compromise on one of the two biblical truths mentioned:

The Bible teaches, as we saw above, that God seriously desires that all who hear the gospel should believe in Christ and be saved. The same Bible also teaches that God has chosen or elected his own people in Christ from before the creation of the world. To our finite minds it seems impossible that both of these teachings could be true. A kind of rational solution of the problem could go into either of two directions: (1) To say that God wants all who hear the gospel to be saved; that therefore he gives to all who hear sufficient grace to be saved if they so desire; this grace, is, however, always resistible; many do resist and thus frustrate God's design. This is the Arminian solution, which leaves us with a God who is not sovereign, and which thus denies a truth clearly taught in Scripture. (2) The other type of rational solution is that of Hoeksema and the Hyper-Calvinists: Since the Bible teaches election and reprobation, it simply cannot be true that God desires the salvation of all to whom the gospel comes. Therefore we must say that God desires the salvation only of the elect among the hearers of the gospel. This kind of solution may seem to satisfy our minds, but it completely fails to do justice to Scripture passages like Ezekiel 33:11, Matthew 23:37, 2 Corinthians 5:20, and 2 Peter 3:9.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid. Hoekema helpfully expounds, "By way of background, we should note that the expression *serio vocantur* ("are called seriously") was chosen deliberately. For this expression had been used by the Remonstrants or Arminians at the Synod of Dort when they voiced their objections to the teachings of the Calvinists. In reply to a request from the officers of the synod asking the Arminians to state their views more fully than they had done before, the Arminians who were present at the synod handed in a document called "The Opinions of the Remonstrants" (*Sententiae Remonstrantium*). In this document they made the following statements about the well-meant gospel offer: 'Whomever God calls to salvation he calls seriously (*serio vocat*): that is, with a sincere and completely unhyprocritical intention and will to save.' (*Sententiae Remonstrantium*, III-IV, 8; see J. N. Bakhuizen Van Den Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenisgeschriften* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1940), 282-87.) The Arminians were here saying to the Calvinists: 'One of the problems we have with our [sic; your] position is that, granted your doctrines of election and limited atonement, you cannot possibly believe in a well-meant gospel call – you cannot maintain that God seriously calls (*serio vocat*) all to whom the gospel comes.'" Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>162</sup>John Murray and Ned Stonehouse, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Lewis J. Grotenhuis, 1948).

<sup>163</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 79. Fuller states, "They are agreed in making the grace of God necessary to the accountableness of sinners with regard to spiritual obedience. The one [hyper-Calvinism] pleads for graceless sinners being free from obligation, the other [Arminianism] admits of obligation but finds it on the notion of universal grace. Both are agreed that where there is no grace there is no duty. But if grace be the ground of obligation, it is no more grace, but debt." Fuller, *Works*, 2:379.

Anthony Hoekema's point could not be better stated. As we shall see in chapter 6, the Arminian way of rationalizing this biblical tension between God's sovereignty and the well-meant offer of the gospel fails. But notice, both the Arminian and the Hyper-Calvinist have the same objection, namely, if man is unable to repent and believe then a well-meant offer cannot be genuine.<sup>164</sup> The Arminian responds that man must therefore have ability (whether it be natural to him or enabled by prevenient grace), while the hyper-Calvinist responds by affirming inability but concludes that there can then be no well-meant offer of the gospel. Scripture does not permit us to go in either direction.

To summarize, Scripture simultaneously affirms four truths: (1) man's inability, (2) God's well-meant offer, (3) man's duty to repent, and (4) God's sovereign, effectual grace only for the elect (see below).<sup>165</sup> Arminians and hyper-Calvinists may not like the tension between these four truths but the reality is, this is a *biblical* tension and therefore not one of these four tenets can be excused.<sup>166</sup> Rather, we must say with Augustine, "Command what you wish, but give what you command."<sup>167</sup>

**The Resistibility of the Gospel Call.** Finally, it must be observed that unlike the effectual call which will be discussed below, the gospel call can be successfully resisted by sinners. All those whom God has not elected will and do resist the gospel call and consequently further their condemnation before a holy God. Consider the following OT passages where many in Israel reject Yahweh.

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all

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<sup>164</sup>Clark, "Well-Meant Offer," 175.

<sup>165</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 79. Hoekema goes on to observe that the implications of Hoekema's views, as well as the Arminian's, are disastrous for missions. The former ruins the missionaries genuine offer of the gospel while the latter ruins the missionaries trust in a sovereign God who can, does, and will save his elect.

<sup>166</sup>Fuller understood this: "To me it appears that the necessity of Divine influence, and even of a change of heart, prior to believing, is perfectly consistent with its being the immediate duty of the unregenerate." Fuller, *Works*, 2:381. Fuller used Jonathan Edwards to resolve the tension that exists, particularly his distinction between natural and moral inability.

<sup>167</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 40.

my counsel and would have none of my reproof (Prov 1:23-25).

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. (Hos 11:1-2).

They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law (Ps 78:10).

But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! (Ps 81:11-13)

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness (Ps 95:7-8).

What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? (Isa 5:4; cf. 65:12; 66:4).

Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction (Jer 17:23; cf. 7:13, 16; 35:17).

They have turned to me their back and not their face. And though I have taught them persistently, they have not listened to receive instruction (Jer 32:33).

In these passages it is clear that not all in Israel were truly Israel. Stated otherwise, not all who belonged to the exterior nation of Israel were inwardly, spiritually regenerated by the Spirit. Rather, many in Israel rejected Yahweh as Lord over them and instead followed the idolatry of the nations.<sup>168</sup> Though Yahweh called out to them to repent and turn to him, they refused.

Such resistance to God's gospel call comes to its climax in the New Testament as many of the Jews reject Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God. One passage that makes such resistance especially evident is Acts 7 where Stephen is martyred for his faith in Christ. Stephen gives a biblical theology of God's redemptive purpose through Israel and when he comes to the end he reminds the Jews putting him on trial that they have failed to understand what the Scriptures have said concerning the "coming of the Righteous One" (7:52). Stephen accuses them of being just like their fathers who persecuted the prophets. "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist

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<sup>168</sup>John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 317-334.

the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you” (Acts 7:51).<sup>169</sup> Stephen’s statement is telling because not only does he state that the Jews persecuting him are stiff-necked, uncircumcised, and resisting the Spirit, but so were their fathers, failing to heed the message of the prophets who proclaimed of the gospel to come through Christ (Deut 32:9; Jer 6:10; 9:26; Ezek 44:7-9; Mal 3:7). Indeed, the martyrdom of Stephen by men who resisted God’s Holy Spirit sits within the shadow of the crucifixion, where evil men, who had resisted the ministry of Jesus for years (Luke 7:30; Mark 6:5-6; John 6:63; Matt 22:3), rejecting his invitations to receive eternal life, finally put Jesus to death on a cross (Luke 23:1-49). Therefore, Jesus can rightly cry out, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!” (Matt 23:37; cf. Luke 13:34).

The resistibility of the gospel call is important to reiterate because often it is assumed that Calvinists deny the resistibility of grace. However, Calvinists affirm that God’s grace *in the gospel call* can be resisted. It is *when God so chooses to effectually call his elect* that such a calling cannot be finally resisted for God’s purposes in saving his elect must come to fruition.<sup>170</sup> The difference here is in God’s intention and design. As John Owen says, “Where any work of grace is not effectual, God never intended it should be so, nor did put forth that power of grace which was necessary to make it so.”<sup>171</sup> Welty also states the matter precisely,

In reply, to be sure, men *do* reject God’s grace again and again. Indeed, the Calvinistic doctrine of an outer, external call describes a call that can and often is successfully resisted by those to whom it comes . . . But the question is whether a man can successfully resist *when God’s individual purpose* toward that man is to

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<sup>169</sup>The author of Hebrews also warns his readers not to be like those in Israel who hardened their hearts in rebellion. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years” (Heb 3:8-9; cf. Ps 95:7-11). He warns them of having an “evil, unbelieving heart” which is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12, 13).

<sup>170</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:547.

<sup>171</sup>John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:318.

draw him to Himself? . . . The Calvinistic doctrine of effectual calling was never meant to preclude the phenomenon of all men resisting God (see Rom 1:18). Rather, it precludes the notion that, once God has set His purpose of saving grace upon a person (so that he is made willing by God's grace), that person can somehow *continue* successfully to resist. This the doctrine of effectual calling denies.<sup>172</sup>

It is to the effectual call that we now turn.

### The Effectual Call

When the gospel call is heard, why is it that some believe while others do not? For the Arminian, while God may enable and initiate grace, ultimately the decision is man's whether he will or will not believe. As we shall now see, such a reason for belief and unbelief is contrary to Scripture, which teaches that the only reason anyone believes is because God sovereignly chooses to effectually call his elect. As the Canons of Dort state, "The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decision."<sup>173</sup> Arminians reject such a statement because it implies that God, not man, is in control of salvation, irresistibly and effectually drawing those whom he has determined to save. For the Arminian, God cannot in any way determine who will and will not believe in the gospel. While God's (prevenient) grace is *necessary* to bring the sinner to Christ, it is not *sufficient* to bring about faith and repentance, for the will of man must act to do so.<sup>174</sup> However, as will become evident in

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<sup>172</sup>Greg Welty, "Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 240. Emphasis added. Turretin also states, "Nay, we maintain that efficacious grace so works in man that although he cannot help resisting from the beginning, still he can never resist it so far as to finally overcome it and hinder the work of conversion." Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:548.

<sup>173</sup>"In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us his act – unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just – of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decision of election and reprobation revealed in God's word. This decision the wicked and impure, and unstable distort to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words." "Canons of Dort," 1.6, in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, vol. 2 of *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 572.

<sup>174</sup>Welty explains, "Most evangelicals have little problem with saying that God's work of grace on the human heart is *necessary* if we are to repent and believe the gospel. For instance, (classic) Arminians typically hold to a doctrine of universal, prevenient grace, a work of God's Spirit which goes to all human beings and is required to enable otherwise depraved men and women to believe the gospel. On this view prevenient grace gives us back our free will that we lost in Adam. Then it is ultimately up to us how we use that free will (we can use it to either accept or reject the offer of salvation). The real controversy between Calvinists and non-Calvinists is whether God's work of grace upon the human heart is

chapter 5, this is a clear breach of God’s sovereignty in calling his elect to himself. Scripture teaches that when the gospel call goes out to all people, God secretly, irresistibly, and effectually calls his elect and only his elect through this gospel to new life, faith and repentance. Frame explains, “So, in effectual calling, God acts on us first, before we offer him any response. He acts sovereignly, calling us into fellowship with his Son. This calling is the ultimate source in time of all the blessings of salvation.”<sup>175</sup> The grace in effectual calling is not only *necessary* but also *sufficient* to bring about repentance and faith.<sup>176</sup> The reason for transformation is not to be found in man’s will but in God’s effectual grace. Piper writes,

The internal call is God’s sovereign, creative, unstoppable voice. It creates what it commands. God speaks not just to the ear and the mind, but he speaks to the heart. His internal heart-call opens the eyes of the blind heart, and opens the ears of the deaf heart, and causes Christ to appear as the supremely valuable person that he really is. So the heart freely and eagerly embraces Christ as the Treasure that he is.<sup>177</sup>

It is the burden of this section to show how the Reformed doctrines of effectual calling and irresistible grace are ingrained in Scripture.

**The Pauline, Petrine, and Johannine Epistles.** Scripture is replete with references to the effectual call (Rom 1:6-7; 8:30; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:2, 9, 24, 26; 7:18; 2 Thess 2:13-14; Heb 3:1-2; 2 Peter 1:10).<sup>178</sup> Summarizing the language of calling in Pauline literature, Schreiner states, “the word should not be defined as an ‘invitation’ that can be accepted or refused. Calling is performative, in which the call accomplishes what

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*sufficient*, in any individual case, to bring someone to repentance and faith.” Welty, “Election and Calling,” 235. The same point was made by Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:514. For the Arminian view see Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 20, 35, 76.

<sup>175</sup>John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 185. Frame also notes what these benefits are: the kingdom (1 Thess 2:12), holiness (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thess 4:7), peace (1 Cor 7:15), freedom (Gal 5:13), hope (Eph 1:18), patient endurance (1 Peter 2:20-21), eternal life (1 Tim 6:12).

<sup>176</sup>Welty, “Election and Calling,” 234-35; John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (South Carolina: Southern Baptist Publication Society, 1857; reprint, Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1990), 332.

<sup>177</sup>John Piper, *Finally Alive* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2009), 84.

<sup>178</sup>Contra Watson who calls it a “Calvinistic fiction.” Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 2:353.

is demanded.”<sup>179</sup> In other words, when Paul refers to calling he is not referring to a gospel call which is a mere invitation that can be resisted, but rather is referring to that calling which is effective, performing and fulfilling exactly that which it was sent to do.

Schreiner’s point is made evident in Paul’s words in Romans 8:28-30,

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose [τοις κατὰ πρόθεσιν κλητοις ούσιν]. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called [ους δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν], and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Paul states in verse 30 that those who have been predestined have also been called and those whom God called he also justified. Moo, contra John Wesley, correctly states,

The exact correspondence between those who are the objects of predestining and those who experience this calling is emphasized by the demonstrative pronoun “these” [*toutous*]: ‘it was precisely those who were predestined who also (*kai*) were called.’ This leaves little room for the suggestion that the links in this chain are not firmly attached to one another, as if some who were ‘foreknown’ and ‘predestined’ would not be ‘called,’ ‘justified,’ and ‘glorified.’<sup>180</sup>

In other words, Paul has the same exact group of people in mind throughout his entire chain of salvation, which also means that Paul does indeed affirm an unbreakable chain of salvation, one in which each link leads to the next. The link we want to pay special attention to is the verb “he called” which, as Moo titles it, “denotes God’s effectual summoning into relationship with him.”<sup>181</sup> Those predestined are the same ones who are called and likewise those called are the same ones as those justified, etc. Murray concludes from this, “Determinate efficacy characterizes the call because it is given in accordance with eternal purpose.” The calling proceeds necessarily from God’s eternal election.<sup>182</sup> Furthermore, Paul must be referring to a calling other than the gospel call

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<sup>179</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 241.

<sup>180</sup>Moo, *Romans*, 535.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 1:315.

because in the gospel call it is not true that all those called are justified.<sup>183</sup> Indeed, with the gospel call many disbelieve and are never justified. Paul does not say that out of all those whom he calls some are justified and then glorified. No, Paul is clear: those he calls are indeed justified and also glorified. Therefore, since many reject the gospel call and are not justified let alone glorified, Paul must be referring to a calling which unfailingly and immutably leads to and results in justification.<sup>184</sup> It is this effectual call which is grounded in predestination and results in justification and glorification (cf. 1 Cor 1:9; Heb 9:12, 15; Eph 4:4; 1 Thess 2:12).

Moreover, Paul cannot have in mind here the gospel call because those who are “called” are promised that not only will all things work according for good, but they will be glorified (8:30), demonstrating that calling produces perseverance. Paul in verse 28 shows that the called he has in mind are only those who love God. These are “called according to his purpose,” predestined, and promised that all things work together for good. Now it is true that the gospel call is also a call that is “according to his purpose” but it is not true that the gospel call only consists of those who love God and those for whom all things work for good.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, Paul is referring to a call that works.

Additionally, it should be pointed out the difficulty Arminians have with Romans 8:28-30. Take Richard Watson for example who insists that all references to calling in the New Testament must refer to a general, gospel call to all people, including Romans 8:28-30. But notice, Watson reads Paul as saying, “They are therefore CALLED,

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<sup>183</sup>“None is foreknown that is not predestined. None is predestined that is not called. And none is called that is not both justified and glorified. So then, if in Romans 8:30 all those called are justified and glorified, but if many who hear God’s general gospel call to believe instead resist and so are neither justified nor glorified, then it follows that the ‘call’ of 8:30 is the effectual call (which effects the justification of all those so called) and not the general call (which does not effect the justification of all those so called because it can be – and is – resisted).” Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 226.

<sup>184</sup>“One cannot say that all those who have received the gospel call, regardless of their response to it, are justified. But one can say that all those who have been effectually called are justified – and will eventually be glorified.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 84. Also see James White on such a point in Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 147-48.

<sup>185</sup>“To be sure, the gospel call is a call according to God’s purpose. But can it be said that all things work together for good for all those who have been called by the gospel, regardless of whether they believe or not? Can it be said that all those who receive the gospel call are people who love God? Obviously not.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 84.

invited by it [the gospel] to this state and benefit: the calling being obeyed, they are JUSTIFIED; and being justified, and continuing in that state of grace, they are GLORIFIED. . . . The apostle supposes those whom he speaks of in the text as ‘called,’ to have been obedient . . .”<sup>186</sup> Watson has added to Paul’s words the phrase “those whom he called, *and who obeyed the call*, he justified.” However, Paul never says this! Watson is reading into the text his Arminian view, which conditions the efficacy of the call on man’s will (“who obeyed the call, he justified”). As Hoekema concludes, “Watson can maintain his interpretation only by reading into the text words which are not there.”<sup>187</sup>

Furthermore, notice the implications Romans 8:28-30 has for the *ordo salutis*. All those who are called are then justified. Paul states in Romans 5:1 that justification is by faith. Two points must be made. First, since not all have faith once again we see that Paul does not have in mind all people but only the elect. As Schreiner states, “We can conclude from this that calling is restricted only to some and that it does not merely involve an invitation to believe.”<sup>188</sup> Second, since it is calling which comes before justification and since justification is by faith, it follows that for Paul it is calling which produces faith. As Schreiner explains, “Calling must create faith since all those who are called are also justified. Thus, God does not call *all* people but only some, and those whom he calls are given the power to believe.”<sup>189</sup> We are safe to conclude, therefore, that calling precedes faith in the *ordo salutis*. As Murray states, this is “divine monergism” and “God alone is active in those events which are here mentioned and no activity on the part of men supplies any ingredient of their definition or contributes to their efficacy.”<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup>Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 2:359-60.

<sup>187</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 84.

<sup>188</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 241.

<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

<sup>190</sup>Murray, *Romans*, 1:321.

Finally, it must also be observed that the reference to an effectual call by Paul rules out the Arminian reading of “foreknowledge” in verse 29, which they argue is proof for the doctrine of conditional election. While it is outside the parameters of this study to explore in depth the meaning of “foreknowledge,” it is necessary to recognize that not only does “foreknowledge” in verse 29 mean relationally foreloved rather than God’s cognitive foreknowledge of faith,<sup>191</sup> but Paul’s affirmation of effectual calling in verse 30 dismisses the Arminian reading of foreknowledge as the two doctrines are mutually exclusive. Bruce Ware explains the dilemma,

Many Arminians see foreknowledge in this text as God seeing in advance those who will believe in Christ when presented with the gospel (“foreseen faith,” as it is sometimes called). That is, from the vantage point of eternity past, God looks down the corridors of history and sees those who, in time, put faith in Christ when it was in their power to reject Christ. They could have believed or disbelieved, but God saw in advance who would believe. But if this is true, it makes no sense later for Paul to say that those whom God foreknew he then called—if this calling is effectual. For if God’s calling of them to salvation is effectual, they *must believe*; but if the foreknowledge of God is what Arminians claim, then those whom God foresees as believing *could instead have not believed*. In short, there is no way to reconcile the Arminian notion of foreknowledge in Romans 8:29 if the calling of Romans 8:30 is effectual. Since the calling of Romans 8:30 is indeed effectual (“those He called, He also justified” HCSB), foreknowledge cannot mean what these Arminians claim.<sup>192</sup>

Ware’s point is a significant one and one we shall return to. If God’s calling in verse 30 is effectual (which has already been shown to be true), then the sinner is necessitated to believe, ruling out the Arminian understanding of “foreknowledge,” which claims that the sinner could have resisted and ultimately disbelieved. Consequently, the Arminian doctrine of conditional election, which is based on their reading of “foreknow” in

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<sup>191</sup>For a refutation of the Arminian view that “foreknowledge” in Romans 8:29 means factual foreseeing of faith, see Schreiner, *Romans*, 448-55; idem, “Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election to Salvation?” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 89-106; Moo, *Romans*, 532-34; Mounce, *Romans*, 188-89; Charles Hodge, *Romans*, CCC (1993), 257-58; Murray, *Romans*, 1:315-20; Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 1-58; Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Robert Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 42-66; R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 11-58, 103-34; C. Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>192</sup>Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 18n23. Thomas Goodwin makes the connection as well in *A Discourse of Election*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 9:279.

Romans 8:29, is not a biblical option, based on what Paul says about the effectual call in 8:30. Here we see the Calvinist soteriology further supported as a whole.

Moreover, Paul's unbreakable chain between election and calling as well as perseverance is also seen in passages such as Romans 9:11-12, 24-26, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14. Schreiner explains,

God's election is not based on seeing what human beings would do or what in fact they actually perform (Rom 9:11). God's saving promise "is not based on works but on the one who calls" (Rom 9:12). We might expect Paul to say, "It is not of works but of faith," since the contrast between faith and works is common in his writings. He certainly is not denying such an idea here. And yet he reaches back to something that precedes human faith, to God's call, which creates such faith. Similarly, in 2 Timothy 1:9 God's call is opposed to works ("who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace") and is linked with God's eternal purpose and grace, which were given to believers before time began. In 2 Thessalonians 2:14 God's call, which is exercised in history through the gospel, is closely conjoined with his choosing people for salvation (2 Thess 2:13; cf. Rom 9:24-26; 1 Cor 1:9). Nor should we fail to see that the call guarantees the outcome. Those who are called through the gospel will possess eschatological glory (2 Thess 2:13). The one who called believers will see to it that they obtain the sanctification needed to stand before the Lord (1 Thess 5:23-24). Since God is faithful, he will confirm to the end those who are called as blameless (1 Cor 1:8-9).<sup>193</sup>

In other words, Paul shows that the reason salvation is not by works is not just because it is of faith, but first and foremost it is because those whom God has chosen he effectually calls and unfailingly preserves to the end.

Paul's reference to the effectual call in Romans 8:30 is also referenced elsewhere in Romans as well. When Paul opens Romans he addresses his readers as those "who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (1:6) and to those in Rome who are loved by God and "called to be saints" (1:7). The call here is again the effectual call as it belongs only to those who are saints and those who belong to Jesus Christ. Paul mentions the effectual call in Romans 9 when he labels those whom God has predestined "vessels of mercy" (as opposed to the reprobate who are "vessels of wrath prepared for destruction" in verse 22), "even us whom he has called," including both Jews and Gentiles (9:23-24).

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<sup>193</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 241-42.

The called ones in Romans 9 are not a reference to all those who hear the gospel but only to those whom God “has prepared beforehand for glory” (9:23).

Paul’s use of the effectual call is also apparent in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul begins his letter by identifying himself as one who has been “called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1:1). Paul then identifies believers as those “called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:2). Paul gives thanks to God for the Corinthian believers “because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus” (1:4), a grace which enriched them in all speech and knowledge. This same God who gave them grace, Paul says in 1:8, also “will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God’s preservation of his elect, Paul says, shows that God is faithful. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1:9). Paul cannot be referring in 1:9 to a general, gospel call which can be rejected but must instead be referring to an effectual call where all those whom God calls experience fellowship with Christ, something that cannot be said of those who reject the general gospel call. The call Paul addresses here is one that brings the elect into union with Christ, a fellowship reserved only for those whom the Father has chosen. Paul’s use of “call” to refer to the effectual call in 1:9 is similar to his use of “call” in Romans 1:7; 9:23-24; 1 Corinthians 1:26; Galatians 1:15; and Ephesians 4:1, 4.

Paul continues to speak of an effectual call in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, *but to those who are called*, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. *For consider your calling*, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no

human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

The gospel Paul preached (the word of the cross) is both the power and wisdom of God to those who are saved (1:18, 21, 24; cf. Rom 1:16) and at the same time is a gospel which is foolishness to those who disbelieve and perish (1:18, 23, 25). Notice, there is no change in the gospel. The gospel remains the same. However, some hear this gospel and see it as folly while others hear this gospel and see it as the power of life. Paul’s words here are similar to 2 Corinthians 2:15-16 where the gospel is a fragrance of Christ. To those being saved it is an aroma of eternal life, but to those perishing it is an aroma of eternal death (2:15-16). Ware helpfully observes, “The gospel, or aroma, is the same! The difference is in those smelling the fragrance and not in the fragrance itself.”<sup>194</sup> So if it is not the gospel then what is it that accounts for the fact that some reject the gospel and see it as folly while others, who hear the same message of Christ crucified, accept the gospel as life? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, “but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”<sup>195</sup> This specific group (“the called ones”) is in contrast to the larger group of Jews and Greeks whom Paul says received the message of Christ crucified and saw it as a stumbling block (Jews) and as folly (Gentiles).<sup>196</sup> On the other hand, to the “called ones” Christ is the power and

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<sup>194</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 220n32.

<sup>195</sup>Ware paraphrases: “When Christ crucified is preached among Jews and Greeks generally, Jews stumble over it for its apparent weakness and ignobility while Gentiles ridicule it as the height of human folly. But amazingly, some among these very same Jews and Greeks, who otherwise flatly reject the gospel, are savingly called by God out of their resistant frame of mind regarding the gospel, to understand and embrace it now as God’s marvelous good news! Here, they now see, in the cross, is found real power and wisdom. In Christ and Christ alone, they now understand, there resides the power of God and the wisdom of God that leads to salvation.” Ibid., 222.

<sup>196</sup>“To prove that effectual calling is described here, ask yourself whether those for whom the crucified Christ is a stumbling block or foolishness have been called. If Paul had been thinking only of the gospel call, he would have had to say Yes to this question. But here Paul particularly excludes these unbelieving hearers from the number of those who have been called; only those for whom the gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God are here designated as the *klētoi*, those who have been called. And in this sense, the sense of having been effectually called, the former class of people were not called.” Hoekema goes on to compare 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 with Luke 14:24 where Jesus says that not one of those men who were invited (called) will get to taste my banquet. “In the Luke passage none of the called are saved; but in the passage from 1 Corinthians only the called are saved.” The comparison shows the

wisdom of God. Such a contrast precludes any idea that Paul is only referring to a general gospel call.<sup>197</sup> Ware explains, “It makes no sense to contrast Jews and Greeks generally with those Jews and Greeks who are called (as 1:23-24 does) if the difference between believing Jews and Greeks and disbelieving Jews and Greeks is in their respective choices only.”<sup>198</sup> To the contrary, the contrast “is made between those called from disbelieving Jews and Greeks and, by implication, those not called, making up the general class of Jews and Greeks who regard the gospel as weakness and folly.”<sup>199</sup> Therefore, any Arminian attempt to read into these verses prevenient grace is in vain. If Paul has in mind merely a general call, one is unable to then explain why some believe and others do not. But if we understand that Paul is comparing those who reject Christ with those whom God calls to Christ effectually then the contrast makes perfect sense and the reason for belief as opposed to unbelief can be identified in the call of God, not in any wisdom of man.

Moreover, Paul must have in mind a calling that is irresistible because those identified as “the called” believe as a result of being called. In contrast to those who are not “the called” and therefore can only see the cross as folly, those who are identified as “the called” (both Jews and Greeks) consequently see Christ as the power and wisdom of God. Being called inevitably results in submitting to the lordship of Christ. Morris explains, “The important thing is the divine initiative, the call of God. Here, as usually in Paul’s writings, *called* implies that the call has been heeded; it is an effectual call. Those

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difference between a general call or invitation (Luke 14:24) and the special, effectual call (1 Cor 1:22-24). Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 83.

<sup>197</sup>“Calling is specifically distinguished from the proclamation of the gospel, in the sense that only some of those who hear the gospel are called. The message is broadcast to all, but only some are chosen and called among those who hear the gospel. The call, then, is effective in that it produces the conviction that the gospel is the power and wisdom of God.” Schreiner, *Paul*, 241.

<sup>198</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 222.

<sup>199</sup>“The point is that Jews and Greeks generally reject the gospel. But God intervenes, and toward some of these otherwise disbelieving Jews and Gentiles, he extends his saving call. This cannot be a call to all; it must be a call to some.” *Ibid.*

*called* know that the crucified Christ means power. Before the call they were defeated by sin; now there is a new power at work in them, *the power of God*.<sup>200</sup>

Furthermore, verses 26-31 rule out an Arminian interpretation which would view the success of God's call as that which is based on the free will of the sinner. Paul explains that those called are not chosen because of anything in them, their own wisdom or power for example. How could this be when God purposefully chose those who were weak, lowly, and despised, so that "no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1:29)? If it were the case, as the Arminian believes, that certain Jews and Gentiles were regenerated because they themselves believed and if it were the case that certain Jews and Gentiles were elected and chosen because of what they themselves did to believe, then Paul could not exclude all boasting. Man would then have something to boast about "in the presence of God" (1:29). Rather, it is "because of him you are in Christ Jesus" and therefore if anyone is to boast he is to "boast in the Lord" (1:31). Ware summarizes such a point well when he says, "the basis for boasting in the Lord is not that he made our salvation possible but that he saved us by his calling (1:24, 26) and his choosing (1:27-28, 30). Therefore any and all human basis for boasting is eliminated (1:29), and all honor and glory is owing solely to him (1:31)!"<sup>201</sup>

Paul's other letters also exemplify the effectual call. In Galatians 1:15 Paul says that God not only set me apart before birth but also "called me by his grace" and "was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15-16; cf. 5:13; Jer 1:5). Here Paul shows the Galatians that God elected him before he was born by his good pleasure and then at the proper time called him by his grace. The divine but gracious determinism in this passage is unavoidable. Ridderbos appropriately comments, "The *good pleasure* gives expression to the sovereign freedom as well as the infinite riches of the divine disposition . . . The emphasis falls on the

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<sup>200</sup>Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC (2008), 52.

<sup>201</sup>Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," 224.

sovereignty of the divine grace manifested to Paul. What the apostle is talking about here is the counsel of God which governs all things, most especially his work of redemption.”<sup>202</sup> Likewise, Schreiner asserts, “The word ‘calling’ here clearly means a call that is effective, a call that convinces the one who is summoned.”<sup>203</sup> The calling Paul has in mind refers to the Damascus road, where God called Paul to himself by revealing his Son to him by “immediate intervention.” “The film was, so to speak, removed from his eyes.”<sup>204</sup> Similarly, Paul exhorts the Ephesians,

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:1-6).

Call or calling, which “arises out of the gracious, saving purpose of God,” is used four times in this passage, reminding the Ephesians that because they have been called by God, their life should be one of faith, hope, unity, and peace.<sup>205</sup> Thielman detects that here “God has called Paul’s readers to be part of his people not because of anything they have done but as a free gift.”<sup>206</sup> Likewise, Paul writes to the Colossians, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful” (Col 3:15). Again, believers have been effectually called into one body characterized by the peace of Christ. Moo highlights the sovereignty of God in such a calling, “*You were called* picks up the language of election that Paul used in v. 12 – ‘God’s chosen people.’ Paul frequently uses the verb ‘call’ (*kaleō*) to denote God’s gracious and powerful summons to human beings, by which they are transferred from the

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<sup>202</sup>“The grace of God, through which this calling took place, was not only its motive but also its means. This grace it was that operated in Paul’s calling and made him willing and fit to carry it out.” Ridderbos, *Galatia*, 63.

<sup>203</sup>Schreiner, *Galatians*, 101.

<sup>204</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>205</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 274. Also see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 504-05; Thielman, *Ephesians*, 252; Arnold, *Ephesians*, 233.

<sup>206</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 252.

realm of sin and death into the realm of righteousness and life.”<sup>207</sup> Moo is correct for Paul says elsewhere “God has called us in peace” (1 Cor 7:15), “you were called to freedom” (Gal 5:13), “you were called in one hope” (Eph 4:4), “God did not call us to uncleanness but for holiness” (1 Thess 4:7),<sup>208</sup> and “God has saved us and called us to a holy life” (2 Tim 1:9).

Likewise to Timothy Paul writes, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:12). Calling here is a summons to salvation (in the passive voice; cf. Gal 5:13; Eph 4:1, 4).<sup>209</sup> In his second letter to Timothy Paul charges Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel nor of the Lord Jesus Christ “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Tim 1:9). Again, calling here is not deemed successful due to anything in us (“not because of our works), but purely because of God’s “own purpose and grace,” which Paul says is rooted in the eternal act (“before the ages began”) of election (“he gave us in Christ Jesus”).<sup>210</sup> Mounce states, “It [calling] expresses the belief in God’s prior election based solely on his desire and grace, totally apart from human works, a call that drives believers toward a holy life.”<sup>211</sup> Like election, calling is not based on anything

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<sup>207</sup>See Rom 8:30; 9:24; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:15-24; Gal 1:6; 5:8, 13; Eph 4:1, 4; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (2008), 284.

<sup>208</sup>Paul says in 1 Thess 2:12, “We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” Wanamaker observes that while Paul often refers to the “call” of conversion using the aorist (1 Thess 4:7; 2 Thess 2:14; Gal 1:6; 1 Cor 1:9), in 1 Thess 2:12 the present is used probably because Paul is referring to a calling that is continuous throughout the believer’s life (cf. 1 Thess 5:24; Gal 5:8). Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC (1990), 107.

<sup>209</sup>Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 411.

<sup>210</sup>Concerning Paul’s words about calling according to God’s “own purpose and grace” Towner states, “This line emphasizes that God is the initiator of the salvation plan; it does not arise from any human decision or source (the force of the specification ‘his own’ is to strengthen the contrast).” Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 469.

<sup>211</sup>Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 482.

in us (not even faith), but purely on God's good purpose and grace. Paul in 2 Timothy 1:9 sounds much like he does in Romans 8:28 where calling is said to be "according to his purpose" and Romans 9:11-12 where God's choice of Jacob over Esau is prior to them doing anything good or bad so that election would not be on the basis of works but "because of him who calls." Here we see in Paul both an unconditional election and an unconditional call, both of which are inseparable and accomplished apart from man's will to believe.

Not only Paul, but Peter also writes of an effectual call for the elect. According to Peter, Christians are those whom God has caused to be born again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3). Therefore, Christians are not to be "conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Pet 1:14-15). Schreiner rightly identifies this calling as effectual, "'Calling' refers to God's effectual call in which he infallibly brings people to himself (1 Pet 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10). . . . Calling does not merely 'invite' but conveys the idea of God's power in bringing people from darkness to light. Just as God's call creates light when there was darkness, so he creates life when there was death."<sup>212</sup> Schreiner explains the importance of this call,

The reference to "calling" is important, for again grace precedes demand. Otherwise the Petrine paraenesis could be confused with the idea that human beings attain their own righteousness or that they live morally noble lives in their own strength. All holiness stems from the God who called them into the sphere of the holy.<sup>213</sup>

Peter mentions the effectual call in 1 Peter 2:9-10 as well, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." Christ is credited with calling his elect ("chosen race," cf. Isa 43:3, 20-21; "a people for his own possession," cf. Exod 19:5; Hos 2:23-25)

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<sup>212</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (2003), 80.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid.

out of darkness (depravity and bondage to sin) and into the marvelous light of salvation. This “chosen and precious” people of God (2:4) were once dead in their trespasses and sins but Christ, through his calling, rescued them from the domain of darkness to experience new life. There is no possibility of a general, gospel call here since the called are referred to as God’s “chosen people.” The monergistic nature of this calling is apparent in how Peter’s language parallels Genesis 1:3-5 where God simply speaks and light appears in the midst of darkness. Paul does the same in 2 Corinthians 4:6 where God shines directly into the heart of his elect, giving them a saving knowledge of Christ. Schreiner rightly concludes that in 1 Peter 2:9 “the calling described here is effectual.” Just as “God’s word creates light, so God’s call creates faith. Calling is not a mere invitation but is performative, so that the words God speaks become a reality.”<sup>214</sup>

The effectual call is again emphasized by Peter in 2:21, “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” Peter is affirming an effectual call that results in faith. Those called follow in the steps of Christ. In other words, just as calling is given and appointed by God so also is suffering.<sup>215</sup> Those called to Christ will suffer as Christ suffered and in this way they will receive eternal life. Indeed, Peter takes the example of Christ’s suffering so seriously that he can say that believers have been called not to repay evil for evil but instead have been called to bless those who have insulted and injured them, that they may obtain a blessing (1 Pet 3:9).

The effectual call is so important to Peter that he closes his first letter saying, “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet 5:10). Earlier we saw how election and effectual calling were inseparable and now we see how effectual calling and perseverance are indivisible. As Schreiner writes, “Here it

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 116.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., 141.

should simply be said (see esp. 2:9) that ‘calling’ refers to God’s effective work by which he inducts believers into a saving relationship with himself. That the calling is to salvation is clear since believers are called to God’s ‘eternal glory.’”<sup>216</sup> The fact that Peter is referring to a calling that is salvific is not only manifested by its reference to “eternal glory” but also by the phrase “in Christ.” Schreiner again comments,

The words ‘in Christ’ be understood as modifying the entire clause, ‘eternal glory’ or ‘called.’ . . . Peter thereby emphasized that God’s saving calling is effectual in and through Christ. The theme of calling to glory reminds the readers that endtime salvation is sure, for God himself is the one who initiated and secured their salvation. As the rest of the verse will demonstrate, God will certainly complete what he has inaugurated. Their calling to glory is not questionable but sure.<sup>217</sup>

For Peter, effectual calling is a doctrine that not only stems from our unconditional election but also unites us to Christ and guarantees our perseverance unto glory.

Peter again uses language to refer to the effectual call in his second letter. Peter opens by saying, “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:3-5). Is this calling a mere gospel call and invitation for all people? Schreiner responds to contemporary misconceptions,

English readers are apt to understand calling in terms of an invitation that can be accepted or rejected. Peter had something deeper in mind. God’s call is effective, awakening and creating faith. Paul referred to calling in this way regularly (e.g., Rom 4:17; 8:30; 9:12, 24-26; 1 Cor 1:9; 7:15; Gal 1:6, 15; 5:8, 13; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9). More significantly, the word “called” also has this meaning in 1 Peter (1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10). First Peter 2:9 indicates that conversion is in view, for God called believers out of darkness into his marvelous light. The terminology reminds us that God is the one who called light out of darkness (Gen 1:3).<sup>218</sup>

Schreiner is indubitably right. Calling, for Peter, refers to a particular and effectual call.

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<sup>216</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., 244-45.

<sup>218</sup>Ibid., 292.

In 2 Peter 1:10 Peter also says, “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.” Notice, calling is identified alongside of election so much so that we could translate them as one – “elective call.”<sup>219</sup> Election and calling here are inseparably linked together, precluding the possibility of a general, gospel call. The combination of election and calling by Peter “highlights God’s grace,” namely, that “he is the one who saves.”<sup>220</sup> Moreover, grammatically, as Hoekema observes, “There is only one definite article (*tēn*) before the two nouns, *klēsīn* (calling) and *eklogēn* (election). This means that these two are treated as one unit and are to be thought of as such: not your calling as somehow separate from our election, but your calling and election together.”<sup>221</sup> Hoekema is building off of A. T. Robertson who says, “Sometimes groups more or less distinct are treated as one for the purpose in hand, and hence use only one article. Cf . . . 2 Pet. 1:10.” Hoekema and Robertson are grammatically right which leads to only one conclusion: the unity of calling and election in 2 Peter 1:10 demands that an effectual call is in view.

Obviously, therefore, ‘calling’ (*klēsīn*) here cannot refer to the gospel call alone, for two reasons: (1) It is linked with ‘election’ (*eklogēn*) by a single definite article, and ‘election’ can only refer to God’s choosing of his own from eternity. A calling which is of one piece with election can only be effectual calling. (2) There is no particular point in telling someone to make sure or to confirm his or her gospel call; once having heard the gospel or once having read the gospel message, she has been called in that sense. ‘Making your calling sure’ must therefore mean: make sure that you have been effectually called – that is, that you have been elected to eternal life in Christ. You can make sure of this, Peter explains, by ‘making every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control,’ and so on (vv.5-7). By observing the fruits of effectual calling in your lives, Peter is saying, you can make sure that you have been effectually called.<sup>222</sup>

Since Peter links calling with election it follows that an effectual call is present.

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<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 304.

<sup>220</sup>Ibid.

<sup>221</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 85. Also see A. T. Robertson, *Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 787, who says “Sometimes groups more or less distinct are treated as one for the purpose in hand, and hence use only one article. Cf . . . 2 Pet. 1:10.” Also see F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament*, trans. R. W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), sec. 276.

<sup>222</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 85-86.

**Effectual Calling in Jude and Revelation.** Not only do Paul and Peter emphasize the effectual call, but Jude in the opening verse of his letter says, “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you” (1:1-2). Calling here cannot be the general gospel call to all because Jude identifies the called as those who are beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ, characteristics not true of all those who receive the gospel call. It is not the case that everyone who receives the gospel call is kept by Christ and loved by the Father in a saving way.

John also uses the effectual call when he writes in Revelation 17:14, “They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful.” Like Jude 1, John identifies those called as those who are with the Lamb who is Christ. Those “called and chosen and faithful” represent the “vindication of the persecuted saints” (cf. Dan 7:21; Rev 6:9-11; 12:11; 13:10-17).<sup>223</sup> Also, similar to 2 Peter 1:10, here once again we see calling and election spoken of together. Those with the Lamb “are called and chosen.” It is not true of everyone who hears the general, gospel call that they are both called and chosen, found to be faithful to the Lamb.<sup>224</sup>

**Effectual Calling Taught by Jesus.** Perhaps one of the most important passages on effectual calling is John 6:35-64.<sup>225</sup> In the context of the passage (John 6:22-34), Jesus is interacting with the Jews who did not believe in him. After Jesus instructs them not to labor for food that perishes but for food that endures to eternal life, food which only the Son of Man can give (6:27), they respond “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” (John 6:28). Jesus responds, “This is the work of God, that you

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<sup>223</sup>G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (1999), 880.

<sup>224</sup>Another passage to consider is Hebrews 9:15, “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.”

<sup>225</sup>For a more extensive defense of effectual calling than what can be provided here see James White, *Drawn by the Father: A Study of John 6:35-45* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne, 1991).

believe in him whom he [the Father] has sent” (6:29). However, rather than believing, they demand a sign if they are to believe that Jesus is from God. “So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (6:30-31). Jesus responds, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (6:32-33). When the Jews ask for this bread, Jesus replies, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (6:35; cf. Isa 49:10; 55:1; Rev 7:16). Ware explains the words of Jesus here, “In other words, God has indeed performed the sign that the multitudes were seeking. Jesus, the bread out of heaven, is here in their midst! All that is required of them is that they believe in him, and yet they remain in their unbelief.”<sup>226</sup>

However, Jesus is not unaware of their unbelief, “But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe” (6:36). He continues,

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:37-40).

How can it be the case that some see the signs of Jesus and believe while others, seeing the very same signs, disbelieve? Both have the same knowledge before them and yet some trust in Christ while others hate him. What is the cause of this difference? What is to account for belief and unbelief? Notice, Jesus does not explain why some believe and others do not by turning to the fact that some choose him while others do not. While he holds out the promise of life to all (6:35-37, 40, 47, 51), he never says that everyone is able to believe, as the Arminian assumes. He tells them what will happen if they do

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<sup>226</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 212.

believe, namely, they will never go hungry or be thirsty (6:35), they will receive eternal life (6:40, 47), and they will live forever (6:51). However, while Jesus explains the rewards to be received, he never says the reason as to why some accept and others reject is due to free will. Arminians will interject at this point by arguing that the promises themselves must imply that they can turn and believe otherwise why would Jesus hold out such promises to them (see chapter 5). Why would Jesus hold out eternal life unless they were able to take it by faith? Ware expresses how the Arminian argument goes, “The ‘ought’ of believing in Christ to be saved implies the ‘can’ of common human ability to believe. Therefore, the answer as to why some believe and others disbelieve is that some choose to believe while others choose to disbelieve. . . . ought implies can.”<sup>227</sup> Yet, as Ware goes on to explain, “Our text devastates the logic of this position. . . . What is deniable is that this ought of belief implies the can of common human ability to believe. Our text never explicitly makes this logical inference upon which so much of Arminian soteriology rests, nor is it implied by anything said by Jesus here. What our text does tell us precludes the possibility of this ought-implies-can view.”<sup>228</sup> Jesus makes no reference to the logic of ought implies can in John 6. There is much “ought” in John 6, but there is no “can” to be found. To the contrary, Jesus only affirms a “cannot.” As Ridderbos states, Jesus “demonstrates the powerlessness of the natural person (‘no one’) to come to the salvation disclosed in Christ unless the Father who sent him ‘draws’ that person.”<sup>229</sup>

Notice what Jesus says in verse 37, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” Köstenberger rightly recognizes,

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<sup>227</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid. “It does not follow, however, that merely because God commands man is able to obey. Oftentimes parents play with their children in telling them to do this or that when their very purpose is to show them their inability and to induce them to ask for the parents’ help. When men of the world hear such language they assume that they have sufficient power in themselves, and, like the self-conceited lawyer to whom Jesus said, ‘This do, and thou shalt live,’ they go away believing that they are able to earn salvation by good works. But when the truly spiritual man hears such language he is led to see that he cannot fulfill the commandment, and so cries out to the Father to do the work for him. In these passages man is taught not what he can do, but what he ought to do.” Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1963), 178.

<sup>229</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 232.

contra Ben Witherington, that divine predestination is in view.<sup>230</sup> Likewise, Carson makes two observations worthy of consideration. First, the verb “cast out” (ἐκβάλλω; cf. John 2:15; 9:34; 10:4; 12:31) “implies the ‘casting out’ of something or someone already ‘in’”. The strong litotes in 6:37f., therefore, does not mean ‘I will certainly receive the one who comes’, but ‘I will certainly preserve, keep in, the one who comes’; while the identity of the ‘one who comes’ is established by the preceding clause.”<sup>231</sup> Carson is right, Jesus’ promise that he will never “cast out” implies that there is a set number already chosen, already “in” and it is clear that these are only those whom the Father has given to Jesus. Second, Carson observes that the causal *hoti* and telic *hina* in 6:38 “give the reason for this keeping action by Jesus, in terms of the will of the Father, viz. that Jesus should not lose one of those given to him (6.38f).” In other words, “6.37 argues not only that the ones given to Jesus will inevitably come to him, but that Jesus will keep them individually (*ton erchomenon* as opposed to *pan ho*) once there.”<sup>232</sup> To summarize, Jesus is teaching (1) that if one has been given to him by the Father then coming to him is inevitable (effectual) and (2) those given to Jesus he will unfailingly keep. Carson rightly states, “Jesus is repudiating any idea that the Father has sent the Son forth on a mission which could fail because of the unbelief of the people.”<sup>233</sup>

The implication for those Jews who disbelieve is startling: the Father has not given you to Christ, which is what is needed for you to come to Christ.<sup>234</sup> Or as Carson states, “You have not been given to the Son by the Father for life and therefore you will

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<sup>230</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (2004), 211. Contra Ben Witherington, *John’s Wisdom* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 158.

<sup>231</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 184.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid.

<sup>234</sup>Ridderbos points out that Bultmann says that “any man is free to be among those drawn by the Father.” Ridderbos responds, “‘Draw’ is said to mean only ‘let oneself be drawn.’ But this exegesis has correctly been rejected by others as not in keeping with ‘hearing’ and ‘learning’ totally determined by the divine will to saved. ‘No one can come to me’ is intended to take away the illusion that ‘coming to Jesus’ is a matter about which one can freely decide on the basis of one’s own ‘knowledge’ and possibilities. This observation keeps coming back in the Gospel (cf. 1:12, 13; 3:3ff.; 5:44); one might call it one of its fundamental thoughts.” Ridderbos, *John*, 233.

not have life but will continue in your unbelief.”<sup>235</sup> Jesus makes this same point in John 10:26, “But you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.” Notice, Jesus does not say, “You are not part of my flock because you do not believe” as the Arminian argues (see chapter 5). The Arminian must condition being part of the flock upon man’s free will to believe. But Jesus says the exact opposite, thereby dismantling the Arminian’s logic. They do not believe because they are not of his flock. And why exactly are they not of his flock? As Jesus states in John 6:37, they are not of his flock because they have not been given to Jesus by the Father. Jesus makes this same point in John 8:47, “Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.” Again, the Arminian must have it the other way around: the reason why you are not of God is that you do not hear the words of God. But Jesus says the exact opposite: you do not hear because you are not of God. Free will is nowhere the cause of becoming part of God’s flock. Rather, it is God’s sovereign choice to give certain sheep to his Son that results in belief.<sup>236</sup> As Ware so clearly states the matter,

Implicit is the idea that only those given by the Father can come (an idea made explicit by Jesus), while explicit is the idea that all those given by the Father do come. The multitudes’ disbelief is evidence that they are not among those given to Christ by the Father. . . . The point is not that they are not his sheep because of their disbelief, but their disbelief is owing to the fact they are not his sheep. Coming to Christ is causally linked by Jesus to having been given by the Father; all those who come do so precisely because the Father has given them to the Son.<sup>237</sup>

Likewise, Leon Morris states,

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<sup>235</sup>As Carson observes, Charlesworth tries to avoid the logic of Jesus here by saying that Jesus does not say that some are not given to Jesus. Carson responds, “However, if *all* are given to Jesus, then *all* will surely come to him, according to this text; and the logically entailed absolute universalism contradicts both the tenor of the fourth Gospel and those explicit passages which make it clear that only some of the world is given to Jesus (cf. 17:9).” Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 184. See James H. Charlesworth, “A Critical Comparison of the Dualism in 1QS 3.13-4.26 and the ‘Dualism’ Contained in the Gospel of John,” *John and Qumran* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1972), 95.

<sup>236</sup>As Boice and Ryken state, “If they fail to believe, it is because God has withheld that special, efficacious grace that he was under no obligation to bestow.” Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 159. Also see Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 166.

<sup>237</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 214. Also see Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 290; Hunt and White, *Debating Calvinism*, 118-25; Thomas R. Schreiner, and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 128-29.

Before men can come to Christ it is necessary that the Father give them to Him. This is the explanation of the disconcerting fact that those who followed Jesus to hear Him, and who at the beginning wanted to make Him a king, were nevertheless not His followers in the true sense. They did not belong to the people of God. They were not among those whom God gives Him.<sup>238</sup>

So also John Calvin, “That their unbelief may not detract anything from his doctrine, he says, that the cause of so great obstinacy is, that they are reprobate, and do not belong to the flock of God.”<sup>239</sup>

It must also be noted, lest the Arminian object at this point that coming to Christ is not the same as believing in Christ, that Jesus in 6:35-37 equates the two. As Carson states, “Coming to Jesus is equivalent to believing in Jesus (6:35).”<sup>240</sup> All those who come to him will not hunger and all those who believe in him will not thirst. The parallel is obvious: hungering is to thirsting as coming is to believing. But continuing on in the passage we see Jesus reiterate his point again as the Jews are enraged by his words.

So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’” Jesus answered them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. *No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.’* Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:41-51).

Here again we see Jesus explain that it is impossible for anyone to come to him unless the Father has already given them over to him (6:44; cf. 6:65). Stated otherwise, it is absolutely necessary for the Father to give a sinner to Christ if that sinner is to believe. If they are not given to Christ by the Father then they will not believe. Or as Boice and

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<sup>238</sup>Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 367.

<sup>239</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:251.

<sup>240</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 184.

Ryken state, “If they fail to believe, it is because God has withheld that special, efficacious grace that he was under no obligation to bestow.”<sup>241</sup> The only reason some come to Christ is because they were already given to the Son by the Father. Such a teaching by Jesus in no way precludes the fact that all “ought” to come to Christ and believe (cf. 6:51). Yet, “ought” does not imply “can” for Jesus is clear that no one “can” come to him unless they are drawn to him by the Father. As Morris states, “Men like to feel independent. They think that they come or that they *can* come to Jesus entirely of their own volition. Jesus assures us that this is an utter impossibility. No man, no man at all can come unless the Father draw him.”<sup>242</sup>

This brings us to the precise nature of such a drawing of the Father to Christ in John 6:37, 44 and 65. These three passages read:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:37).

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:44).

And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (John 6:65).

Is such a drawing effectual and irresistible? Or, as the Arminian believes, can this drawing be resisted successfully? For the Arminian (see chapter 5), while God initiates the drawing, unless the drawing is resistible, man’s free will is compromised. As Ware explains, “Whether they believe or not is their doing, not God’s. God must draw, to be sure; his drawing, however, only makes possible but not actual (or effectual) a believing response. This is the essence of the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace.”<sup>243</sup> And again,

In the Arminian view, what separates belief and unbelief is not the drawing of the Father; the Father draws all. Belief and unbelief, rather, is owing to what particular individuals (all of whom are drawn by the Father and so enabled to believe) freely

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<sup>241</sup>Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 159. Also see Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 166.

<sup>242</sup>Morris, John, 372.

<sup>243</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 215.

choose to do. They may come, or they may refuse to come. God has drawn all, so it is up to them.<sup>244</sup>

The major problem with the Arminian interpretation of John 6, however, is that Jesus is not talking about a universal drawing of all men to himself. Prevenient grace is nowhere to be found here. Moreover, not only is a universal grace absent but so also is a grace that is resistible and defeatable. To the contrary, Jesus teaches that the grace he is speaking of here is one that is particular to the elect and effectual. Several observations bear this out. In John 6, especially 6:44, the drawing of the Father necessarily results in a coming to Christ. In other words, contrary to Arminianism, this is not a drawing that merely makes possible a coming to Christ but rather is a drawing that inevitably and irresistibly leads to Christ. Or as Hendriksen says, “The Father does not merely beckon or advise, he *draws!*”<sup>245</sup> All those drawn do in fact believe.<sup>246</sup> As Jesus explains in 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him [ἐλκύση αὐτόν]. And I will raise him up on the last day.” Arminians view 6:44 as saying that while it is true that no one can come to Christ unless the Father draws him, such a drawing can be resisted (see chapter 5). However, such an interpretation fails in two ways: (1) It ignores the fact that “no one can come to me” (i.e., inability) and (2) it fails to finish the verse, viz. “I will raise him up on the last day.”

Each of these points deserves consideration. First, in John 6 the grammatical language is in support of an irresistible, effectual drawing. The word draw in Greek is *elkō*, which, as Albrecht Oepke explains, means “to compel by irresistible superiority.”<sup>247</sup> Though the Arminian rejects such a notion, the word linguistically and lexicographically

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<sup>244</sup>Ibid., 218.

<sup>245</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, NTC (2002), 1:238.

<sup>246</sup>“The drawing of the Father results in the full and final salvation of those drawn. That is, the drawing of the Father does not result in the mere possibility of being saved, which possibility becomes an actuality only when the one drawn chooses to assent to that drawing; rather, it results in the actual salvation of all those drawn.” Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 216.

<sup>247</sup>Albrecht Oepke, “*Elkō*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:503. J. Ramsey Michaels agrees in *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (2010), 386.

means “to compel.”<sup>248</sup> Therefore, Jesus cannot be saying that the drawing of the Father is a mere wooing or persuasion that can be resisted. Rather, this drawing is an indefectible, invincible, unconquerable, indomitable, insuperable, and unassailable summons.<sup>249</sup> As John Frame explains, the word “summons” captures the efficacy of this call well. “That word summons brings out God’s sovereignty. You might be able to refuse an invitation, but you can’t refuse a summons. A summons is an offer you cannot refuse.”<sup>250</sup> In short, this summons does not fail to accomplish what God intended. *Elkō* is also used in James 2:6 which says, “But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag [*elkō*] you into court?” And again in Acts 16:19, “But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged [*elkō*] them into the marketplace before the rulers.” As R. C. Sproul observes, to substitute “woo” in the place of drag in these passages would sound ludicrous. “Once forcibly seized, they could not be enticed or wooed. The text clearly indicates they were *compelled* to come before the authorities.”<sup>251</sup> Sproul is right; this is not a mere external effort by God to persuade, but is an internal compelling that cannot be thwarted.

Second, the Father’s drawing will indeed result in final salvation, the resurrection on the last day, as is evident in John 6:44. Jesus comes down from heaven to do the will of the Father and what is this will but to lose none of all those whom the Father has given to him but to raise them up on the last day (John 6:39-40). Surely Jesus cannot be referring to a universal call that is resistible for this would mean that Jesus is promising to raise all up on the last day, a promise he has failed to accomplish since so many disbelieve. Moreover, as Carson observes, “The combination of v. 37a and v. 44

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<sup>248</sup>R. C. Sproul makes this point in *What is Reformed Theology?* 153-54.

<sup>249</sup>See à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 2:225, 230-32.

<sup>250</sup>Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 184.

<sup>251</sup>Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* 154.

prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note in v. 44 is meaningless.”<sup>252</sup> In other words, Jesus is referring only to those whom the Father has given him and these only will Jesus give eternal life and the resurrection to glory. Here we see once again that the Father’s giving of the elect to the Son invincibly leads to final salvation. Therefore, the drawing Jesus speaks of must be effectual.

Nevertheless, Arminian Grant R. Osborne objects.<sup>253</sup> He argues that if the drawing in John 6:44 is effectual and irresistible then universalism is true for Jesus says in John 12:32 that when he is lifted up he will draw all men to himself. However, as will be further demonstrated in chapter 5, the drawing in 12:32 does not refer to all people without exception, but to all people without distinction. The context makes this clear as Jews and Greeks both come to Jesus. As Carson and Schreiner argue, Jesus has in mind all *types* and *kinds* of people (cf. Joel 2:28ff), not all people without exception.<sup>254</sup>

To summarize our findings we can conclude the following: (1) The Father’s drawing precedes any belief on the sinner’s part. (2) The reason a sinner believes is because he has been drawn by the Father to Christ, not vice versa. (3) The reason a sinner does *not* believe is because he has not been drawn by the Father to Christ, not vice versa. (4) The Father’s drawing is effectual because (a) *elkō* means “to compel by irresistible superiority”<sup>255</sup> and (b) Jesus ensures us that those drawn will be raised up on the last day,

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<sup>252</sup>Carson, *John*, 293.

<sup>253</sup>Grant R. Osborne, “Soteriology in the Gospel of John,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Pinnock, 248-49; idem, “Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 171, 184-85.

<sup>254</sup>Carson, *John*, 293, 444; idem, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 185-86; Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 241-42. Moreover, as Ware observes, we need to pay attention to what drawing means in its own context here in chapter six. Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 216n24. Michaels seems to take “all” here as referring to the elect and makes his argument off of chapter six. See Michaels, *John*, 698-70.

<sup>255</sup>Oepke, “*Elkō*,” 503.

something not true of all people who receive the gospel call. Therefore, the drawing does not make belief a possibility but an inevitable reality. (5) The efficacy of the drawing precludes that it is universal. Rather the drawing is particular, limited to the elect.<sup>256</sup>

It is crucial to observe how the narrative ends, namely, with everyone leaving Jesus because such a teaching is so offensive and difficult to understand (John 6:60-65; note the exception of Peter in John 6:66-69). How Jesus responds is telling. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe. . . . This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father” (John 6:63-65).<sup>257</sup> Two observations are relevant. First, Jesus once again emphasizes the inability of the sinner when he says it is “the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.” Ridderbos writes,

Only the Spirit, as the author of God’s renewing and redeeming work, makes alive, creates and imparts life. But the Spirit does so in the way and manner of the Spirit (cf. 3:8). The flesh cannot touch it! The words Jesus has spoken “are Spirit and life”; they are from God, hence life-giving for whoever believes. But the flesh – in its reflections and powerlessness – is of no avail here; it cannot hear that word, it takes offense at it, and it lapses into unbelief (vss. 64, 65).<sup>258</sup>

Such inability is affirmed again in John 14:17 when Jesus says, “the world *cannot accept him* [the Holy Spirit], because it neither sees him nor knows him.” Second, if, as the Arminian believes, all are drawn, why does Jesus stress his point concerning their persistence in unbelief? Jesus shows in John 6:65 that once again their unbelief serves as evidence that they have not been drawn by the Father. But none of this makes sense if Jesus is talking about a universal call that only makes salvation possible. As Ware comments, “Clearly there would be no point to it, and it certainly would not prompt those listening to Jesus to depart permanently from him.”<sup>259</sup> A calling common to all people is

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<sup>256</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.24.1.

<sup>257</sup>John 6:65 reads, καὶ ἔλεγεν, Διὰ τοῦτο εἶρηκα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὐδεὶς δύναται ἐλθεῖν πρὸς με ἐὰν μὴ ἦ δεδομένον αὐτῷ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς.

<sup>258</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 246.

<sup>259</sup>Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 219.

*not* offensive and surely would not lead his hearers to be angered, eventually abandoning Jesus. To the contrary, the reason his teaching is so offensive is because he explains their unbelief by appealing to the Father's sovereign choice, not man's free will.<sup>260</sup> Those not drawn by the Father and selected remain in their unbelief.

Before concluding our discussion, it is necessary to briefly look at three other passages, namely, John 12:37-40, 17:24, and 10:14ff. In John 12:37-40 we see perhaps the most outstanding instance in all of John's gospel where emphasis is placed on divine sovereignty. Though Jesus had accomplished many miraculous signs, still the people did not believe in him (12:37; cf. Deut 29:2-4). Why exactly did they not believe? John answers,

Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Lord, who has believed what he heard from us, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Therefore they could not believe. For again Isaiah said, "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them."

Why is it that those following Jesus, though seeing his signs, did not believe? John, quoting Isaiah 58:1 and then 6:10, says it is because God himself "has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart" so that they won't believe. Köstenberger comments, "This kind of reasoning places human unbelief ultimately within the sphere of God's sovereignty, and more specifically his (positive or negative) elective purposes. While not rendering people free from responsibility, their unbelief is ultimately shown to be grounded not in human choice but in divine hardening."<sup>261</sup> Or as Michaels states, "Not only has God not 'drawn' these people or 'given' them faith, but he has 'blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts' to make sure they would *not* repent and be healed!"<sup>262</sup> Stated otherwise, while man's own sinfulness may be the *proximate* cause of his unbelief, God is the

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<sup>260</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 186.

<sup>261</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 459-60.

<sup>262</sup>Michaels, *John*, 710.

*ultimate* cause of unbelief for it is he who hardens the heart (cf. Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20; 27; 11:10; 14:4, 17; Deut 2:30; Josh 11:20; 2 Chron 36:13; Isa 63:17; Rom 9:18; 11:7, 25).<sup>263</sup> As Paul says in Romans 9:18, “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” While the Arminian may detest such a claim, John saw such a hardening of the heart by God a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, again demonstrating that divine determinism is in view. Therefore, Köstenberger rightly concludes that while humans may question how God can remain just and man remain culpable if he is the one who hardens the heart, “John clearly does not condone this kind of reasoning and has no problem affirming both divine sovereignty and human responsibility in proper proportion to one another, with divine sovereignty serving as the comprehensive framework within which human agents are called to make responsible choices.”<sup>264</sup>

Finally, in John 17 Jesus gives his “high priestly prayer” in which he asks his Father to “give eternal life to all whom you have given him [the Son]” (17:2). Jesus goes on to say that he has manifested the Father’s name to “the people whom you gave me out of the world” (17:6). The predestinarian tone of Jesus’ words comes to light even further when he then says, “Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word” (17:6). Most commentators agree that Jesus is referring to his disciples, as is evident in 17:9 where Jesus states, “I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.” Here we see that not all are chosen but only some are chosen to be given to the Son. Notice, the “giving” of these disciples to the Son is not merely for service but for salvation. Jesus is not merely praying for their earthly ministry but is praying for the safe keeping of their very souls. This is evident in the fact that the language used here (“you have given me”) parallels the language used in John 6:36-65. The salvific nature is also obvious in Jesus asking the Father to sanctify them in the truth

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<sup>263</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:41-42. On God’s hardening, see Carson, *John*, 448-49. Also see Köstenberger, *John*, 391; Ridderbos, *John*, 444-45.

<sup>264</sup>Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 460.

(17:17, 19). Moreover, Jesus is acting as their mediator and high priest, praying on their behalf, holding them up before the throne of the Father as those whom he successfully kept (see 17:12, “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me”). Christ is the faithful Son who keeps all those entrusted to him by the Father. Jesus, however, does not stop with his disciples, but continues to pray for the elect who will believe after he has been glorified. “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word” (17:20). Carson states,

Christ’s prayer is not for the believers alone, but also for those who will become such through their witness (17:20f.). These too will believe in Jesus. There is an inescapable note of certainty: Jesus is praying for the elect who are not yet demonstrably such (cf. Acts 18:10). All believers, those presently such and those who will become such, constitute those given by the Father to Jesus (17.24), and will see Jesus’ glory.<sup>265</sup>

Those who have not yet heard the message of the disciples, but will soon enough, are already given to Jesus by the Father. Both the particularity and the determinism in this passage are inescapable. The particularity is present in that Jesus is not praying for all the world but only those whom will believe. The efficacy or determinism is present in that Jesus prays for those who *will* believe. Jesus is praying for the elect who have not yet heard the gospel and believed but nonetheless *will certainly do so* since Jesus himself intercedes on their behalf. Though the faith of these future believers is not yet a reality, the Father has guaranteed it in giving them to the Son and the Son has verified it by praying on their behalf to the Father. Here again we see that belonging to Christ or being given to Christ by the Father is what determines whether or not one will believe.

John 17 shares many similarities with John 10. In John 10:14-18 Jesus says that he is the good shepherd who knows his own sheep and lays down his life for his sheep. Here Jesus is speaking of those Jews who believe in Jesus because they have been given to him by the Father. However, Jesus also says that he has “other sheep that are not of this fold” and he “must bring them also” and they will listen to his voice (10:16). Jesus

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<sup>265</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 187.

is now referring to the Gentiles who would one day believe.<sup>266</sup> For them also Jesus lays down his life because they are his sheep as well (10:17). But notice, as we saw was the case in John 17, Jesus is guaranteeing that certain Gentiles will in fact believe. How can he make such a guarantee? Jesus can make such a promise *because* the Father has given these sheep to his Son, as becomes plain in John 10:24-29.

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

Once again we see that the Father has sheep that he gives to the Son. The reason some do not believe is that the Father has not given them to the Son.<sup>267</sup> The reason others believe and the reason others *will believe in the future* (Gentiles included; cf. 10:16) is that the Father has given them to the Son.

### **Effectual Calling and Unconditional Election**

So far a defense has been given for the doctrine of effectual calling from specific passages of scripture. However, it must be recognized that if effectual calling is a biblical doctrine, which it is, then the doctrine of unconditional election of individuals is entailed as well (cf. John 17:2, 6, 9, 24; Acts 13:48; Rom 9:10-16 [Exod 33:19]; 11:5-7; Eph 1:3-6, 11; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Eph 1:4; Titus 1:1-2). As Ware states,

Rightly understood, these two doctrines are mutually entailing. That is, if effectual calling is true, it entails the truthfulness of unconditional election, and if

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid., 190.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., 190; Carson, *John*, 393. “Here the main principle which distinguishes Augustinianism from all other schemes of doctrine is conceded. Why does one man repent and believe the Gospel, while another remains impenitent? The Augustinian says it is because God makes them to differ. He gives to one what He does not give to another. All Anti-Augustinians say that the reason is, that the one cooperates with the grace of God and the other does not; or, the one yields, and the other does not; or, that the one resists, and the other does not.” Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:678.

unconditional election is true, it entails the truthfulness of effectual calling. Put differently, you cannot have one without the other.”<sup>268</sup>

Ware explains why exactly this is the case,

If God effectually calls only some to be saved, and if this calling, by its nature, is granted only to some such that all of those called actually and certainly are saved, then it follows that God must select those to whom this calling is extended. That is, God’s effectual calling cannot be based on how people respond to the general call since the general call includes no certainty of the salvation of those called. But since the effectual call does include the certainty of salvation of all those called, then it follows that God must grant the effectual call to specifically selected individuals only, such that when they are called (effectually), they are surely and certainly saved. So, what name shall we give to this “selection” by God of those specific individuals to whom he extends the effectual call? Surely we could speak of these persons as those “chosen” or “elected” by God to be the recipients of the effectual call. Therefore, if the doctrine of the effectual call is true, it follows that God has previously elected just those specific persons to whom he extends this call. Effectual calling, then, entails unconditional election.<sup>269</sup>

While it is not the purpose of this project to provide a robust, detailed defense of unconditional election,<sup>270</sup> it should be noted that since effectual calling entails unconditional election, simultaneously precluding Arminian prevenient grace, support is only added to Calvinist soteriology as a whole.<sup>271</sup> Such a point has already been illustrated in the previous exposition of Romans 8:28-30 where the Arminian reading of “foreknowledge” as proof for a conditional election is absolutely at odds with the effectual call described in that very same passage.

### **Irresistible Grace**

Effectual calling has also been expressed by the term “irresistible grace,” most famously identified as the “I” in the acronym TULIP,<sup>272</sup> giving the impression that Calvinists invented the label. Herman Bavinck explains otherwise,

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<sup>268</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 17.

<sup>269</sup>Ibid.

<sup>270</sup>See footnote 192.

<sup>271</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 203. [bibl 203-228]

<sup>272</sup>Edwin W. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004). Also see Custance, *Sovereignty of Grace*, 175-90. On the origins of TULIP as an acronym, see Kenneth J. Stewart, *Ten Myths About Calvinism: Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 291.

The term “irresistible grace” is not really of Reformed origin but was used by Jesuits and Remonstrants to characterize the doctrine of the efficacy of grace as it was advocated by Augustine and those who believed as he did. The Reformed in fact had some objections to the term because it was absolutely not their intent to deny that grace is often and indeed always resisted by the unregenerate person and therefore could be resisted. They therefore preferred to speak of the efficacy or of the insuperability of grace, or interpreted the term “irresistible” in the sense that grace is ultimately irresistible. The point of the disagreement, accordingly, was not whether humans continually resisted and could resist God’s grace, but whether they could ultimately – at the specific moment in which God wanted to regenerate them and work with his efficacious grace in their heart – still reject that grace. The answer to this question, as is clearly evident from the five articles of the Remonstrants, is most intimately tied in with the doctrine of the corruption of human nature; with election (based or not based on foreseen faith); the universality and particularity of Christ’s atonement; the identification of, or the distinction between, the sufficient call (external) and the efficacious call (internal); and the correctness of the distinction between the will of God’s good pleasure and the revealed will in the divine being. Whereas the Remonstrants appealed to Isa. 5:1-8; 65:2-3; Ezek. 12:2; Matt. 11:21-23; 23:37; Luke 7:30; John 5:34; and Acts 7:51, and to all the exhortations to faith and repentance occurring in Scripture, the Reformed theologians took their cue from the picture Scripture offers of fallen humanity as blind, powerless, natural, dead in sins and trespasses (Jer. 13:23; Matt. 6:23; 7:18; John 8:34; Rom. 6:17; 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph 2:1; etc.), and from the forceful words and images with which the work of grace in the human soul is described (Deut. 30:6; Jer. 31:31; Ezek. 36:26; John 3:3, 5; 6:44; Eph. 2:1, 6; Phil. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:3; etc.). So they spoke of the efficacy and invincibility of God’s grace in regeneration and articulated this truth in confession at the Synod of Dort.<sup>273</sup>

As with the doctrine of effectual calling, so with the doctrine of irresistible grace, there must be qualification as to what exactly is meant by “irresistible.” As already discussed, it is not the case that Calvinists believe that there is no sense in which grace is resistible. Calvinists readily affirm that there are places in Scripture where grace is resistible (Acts 7:51). Nevertheless, in none of the cases where grace is successfully resisted, are Calvinists claiming that God has called his elect or sought to draw them to himself irresistibly. All of these cases are examples of instances where sinners have resisted God’s *general* gospel call to *all* people. As van Mastricht states, Scripture “plainly speaks of resistance made not to regeneration, but to the external call.”<sup>274</sup> It is only when the

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<sup>273</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:83. Also see John Murray, “Irresistible Grace,” in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1976), 55-62; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 105.

<sup>274</sup>Peter Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 45.

Spirit chooses to act effectually, a divine act that he only executes on God's elect, that the manner of grace is then called irresistible and effectual. Ware explains,

When Calvinists refer to irresistible grace, they mean to say that the Holy Spirit is able, when he so chooses, to overcome all human resistance and so cause his gracious work to be utterly effective and ultimately irresistible. In soteriology, the doctrine of irresistible grace refers to the Spirit's work to overcome all sin-induced resistance and rebellion, opening blind eyes and enlivening hardened hearts so that sinners understand and embrace the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ (Acts 16:14; 2 Cor 4:4-6; 2 Tim 2:24-25). Such is the grace by which we are saved.<sup>275</sup>

Understood rightly, the phrase "irresistible grace" indicates that when God so chooses to call an elect sinner to himself, God will indeed be successful in doing so.<sup>276</sup> As John Owen states, the Spirit's regenerating work is "infallible, victorious, irresistible, or always efficacious" and it "removeth all obstacles, overcomes all oppositions, and infallibly produces the effect intended."<sup>277</sup> As we saw in John 6, when the Father calls an elect sinner to Christ, that elect sinner inevitably comes. When God decides to bring or draw his elect to his Son, such a drawing cannot be successfully resisted. As Cornelius Plantinga says, "Nobody can finally hold out against God's grace. Nobody can outlast Him. Every elect person comes . . . to 'give in and admit that God is god.'"<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," 211. "It will of course be admitted that, if efficacious grace is the exercise of almighty power it is irresistible. That common grace, or that influence of the Spirit which is granted more or less to all men is often effectually resisted, is of course admitted. That the true believer often grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit, is also no doubt true. And in short that all those influences which are in their nature moral, exerted through the truth, are capable of being opposed, is also beyond dispute. But if the special work of regeneration, in the narrow sense of that word, be the effect of almighty power, then it cannot be resisted, any more than the act of creation. The effect follows immediately on the will of God, as when He said let there be light, and light was." Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:687-88. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:134-35.

<sup>276</sup>"Irresistible grace means that the sinner's resistance to the grace of regeneration cannot thwart the Spirit's purpose. The grace of regeneration is irresistible in the sense that it is invincible." Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* 189. Or consider Turretin, "However, whatever is that motion of efficacious grace, still it is such and so great that it is entirely invincible and insuperable; nor can any will of man resist God willing to convert him. This is the principal mark and properly the characteristic of efficacious grace by which it is distinguished from all the other gifts sometimes bestowed by God even upon the reprobate. For since the others can in different ways affect man and influence by illumination, coercing and even in some degree changing (at least as to external morality), this alone converts and recreates man; indeed with so great efficacy as infallibly to obtain its result and overcome any resistance of the will." Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:526.

<sup>277</sup>Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:317.

<sup>278</sup>Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *A Place to Stand* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1979), 151.

But the label “irresistible grace” can be misunderstood in a second way as well, namely, that God coerces the sinner. As Carson explains, “The expression is misleading, because it suggests what the theologians themselves usually seek to avoid, viz. the idea that the inevitability of the coming-to-Jesus by those given to Jesus means they do so *against* their will, squealing and kicking as it were.”<sup>279</sup> However, J. Gresham Machen helps to correct such a misunderstanding,

The Biblical doctrine of the grace of God does not mean, as caricatures of it sometimes represent it as meaning, that a man is saved against his will. No, it means that a man’s will itself is renewed. His act of faith by which he is united to the Lord Jesus Christ is his own act. He performs that gladly, and is sure that he never was so free as when he performs it. Yet he is enabled to perform it simply by the gracious, sovereign act of the Spirit of God.<sup>280</sup>

Therefore, while God’s grace for the elect does work effectually, since God renews the will, the sinner not only comes inevitably but willingly. Packer, quoting Westminster (10.1), states the matter astutely, “Grace is irresistible, not because it drags sinners to Christ against their will, but because it changes men’s hearts so that they ‘come most freely, being made willing by his grace.’”<sup>281</sup>

Therefore, irresistible grace can be used synonymously with effectual calling. One could just as easily say God *irresistibly* calls as one could say God utilizes his *effectual* grace. Since these two phrases are synonymous it is unnecessary here to rehash the previous defense of effectual calling.

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<sup>279</sup>Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 185.

<sup>280</sup>Machen, *The Christian View of Man*, 244. Welty, however, makes a fascinating point regarding “coercion” that deserves mention. “To be sure, if coercion were the *central and pervasive* element in human-human and divine-human relationships, that would tend to undermine the integrity of those personal bonds. No relationship would be attractive or desirable if it proceeded *primarily* by way of coercion. Nevertheless, in some contexts coercion is not only acceptable but praiseworthy. If a neighbor’s house were on fire and yet there he sat, enamored with some trifling pastime as the burning walls began to collapse on all sides, surely I would be regarded as a hero if I snatched him up and removed him from danger, all without the consent of his will. He might even come to his senses later and thank me for engaging in such decisive effort on his behalf. Why can’t this be an acceptable analogy for what God does on our behalf in effectual calling and regeneration? Would the redeemed in heaven really say, ‘Nice place you’ve got here, God, but why didn’t you respect my will and let me slide into hell? Not sure I can have a real relationship with you.’” Welty, “Election and Calling,” 241.

<sup>281</sup>J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 295.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the doctrine of effectual calling can be found throughout the New Testament. It is not only a Pauline doctrine but a doctrine taught by Jesus himself. It is important to recognize that at this point in the presentation of sovereign grace, the doctrine of monergistic regeneration has not yet been discussed (see chapter 4). Nor has a refutation of the Arminian view be given (see chapter 6). Nevertheless, already the Calvinist view is seen to be successful and the Arminian system is seen to be erroneous. In other words, if the doctrine of effectual calling is biblical, which we have seen that it is, then prevenient grace and synergism (two doctrines the Arminian is dependent upon) cannot be true for each of these doctrines is in direct conflict with the scriptural affirmation of efficacious grace.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE SCRIPTURAL AFFIRMATION OF MONERGISTIC REGENERATION

#### Introduction

“How can a person who is dead in trespasses and sins, whose mind is enmity against God, and who cannot do that which is well-pleasing to God answer a call to the fellowship of Christ? . . . The answer to this question is that the believing and loving response which the calling requires is a moral and spiritual impossibility on the part of one who is dead in trespasses and sins.”<sup>1</sup> Such a statement by John Murray is biblically on target for, as we saw in the previous chapter, man is dead in his sins and spiritually unable to make any move towards God in a salvific way (John 6:44; Rom 8:8).<sup>2</sup> Therefore, as Murray observes, the sinner cannot answer the call of God, but God must apply his calling effectually, regenerating the sinner so that he is born again.

God’s call, since it is effectual, carries with it the operative grace whereby the person called is enabled to answer the call and to embrace Jesus Christ as he is freely offered in the gospel. God’s grace reaches down to the lowest depths of our need and meets all the exigencies of the moral and spiritual impossibility which inheres in our depravity and inability. And that grace is the grace of regeneration.<sup>3</sup>

Like the last chapter, this chapter is dedicated to the grace of regeneration, which reaches down to that dead sinner and raises him to new life in Christ. Such grace in regeneration, however, is not contingent upon man’s will for its efficacy nor is it one man must

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<sup>1</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 95.

<sup>2</sup>As Reymond explains, “Man in his raw, natural state as he comes from the womb is *morally and spiritually corrupt in disposition and character*. Every part of his being – his mind, his will, his emotions, his affections, his conscience, his body – has been affected by sin (this is what is meant by the doctrine of *total* depravity). His understanding is darkened, his mind is at enmity with God, his will to act is slave to his darkened understanding and rebellious mind, his heart is corrupt, his emotions are perverted, his affections naturally gravitate to that which is evil and ungodly, his conscience is untrustworthy, and his body is subject to mortality.” Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 450.

<sup>3</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 96.

cooperate with. To the contrary, Scripture tells us that man is absolutely and totally passive in effectual calling and regeneration. God alone is the actor and man is acted upon. Therefore, it is only appropriate to label regeneration monergistic.

### Defining Regeneration

A discussion of regeneration flows naturally from effectual calling.<sup>4</sup> Those whom God effectually calls to himself are made alive (Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13; Rom 8:7-8). The actual word “regeneration” (*palingenesia*) is only used in Matthew 19:28 and Titus 3:5 and only the latter uses the word in the narrow sense, namely, as referring to the first instance of new life. In church history the term “regeneration” has been used differently. The Reformers used the term in a very broad sense. For instance, Calvin used the term to refer to the believer’s renewal, covering everything from conversion to sanctification.<sup>5</sup> The Belgic Confession (1561) does the same, as do many Reformed theologians of the sixteenth-century.<sup>6</sup> However, Reformed theologians since then have also used the term in a narrow sense to refer to the initial implanting of new life rather than in the broad sense to refer to the entire process of sanctification.<sup>7</sup> Regeneration in this narrow sense is affirmed throughout Scripture, for even if the word itself is not used, the idea is prevalent

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<sup>4</sup>See appendix 2 on the exact relationship between effectual calling and regeneration.

<sup>5</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.3, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960). On such a point, see Anthony Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 93-94.

<sup>6</sup>“We believe that this true faith, produced in man by the hearing of God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a ‘new man.’” “The Belgic Confession” in *Creeds and Confessions of the Reformation Era*, vol. 2 of *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), article 24: Also see “The Canons of Dort” in *Creeds and Confessions*, 3-4.11-12.

<sup>7</sup>It is important to qualify regeneration as it is used in different ways throughout Scripture. Hoekema explains, “The Bible speaks of regeneration in three different but related senses: (1) as the beginning of new spiritual life, implanted in us by the Holy Spirit, enabling us to repent and believe (John 3:3, 5); (2) as the first manifestation of the implanted new life (Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23); and (3) as the restoration of the entire creation of its final perfection (Matt. 19:28, KJV, ASV, NASB). In the last-named passage the word *palingensia*, translated ‘regeneration’ in the versions mentioned, and found in only one other New Testament passage (Titus 3:5), is used to describe the renewal of the entire universe – the ‘new heaven and new earth’ of 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1-4.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 93.

(John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:5-6, 10; 4:22-24; Col 2:11-14; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3-5; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4).

That said, it is appropriate to precisely define regeneration in this narrow sense. But first it is necessary to recognize what regeneration is not. First, there is no addition to or subtraction from the “substance” of man’s nature in regeneration. Such was the view of the Manicheans whom Augustine dealt with as was the case with Flacius Illyricus whom the Reformers debated. But as Berkhof explains, no “new physical seed or germ is implanted in man; neither is there any addition to, or subtraction from, the faculties of the soul.”<sup>8</sup> Second, regeneration is not limited to only one faculty in the person, but impacts the entire human nature, piercing the very core. Third, while regeneration is a transformation of the entire human nature, it is not a perfect change as if the sinner after regeneration is now incapable of sinning.<sup>9</sup> It now stands to define what regeneration is. I provide the following definition:

Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit to unite the elect sinner to Christ by breathing new life into that dead and depraved sinner so as to raise him from spiritual death to spiritual life, removing his heart of stone and giving him a heart of flesh, so that he is washed, born from above and now able to repent and trust in Christ as a new creation.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, regeneration is the act of God alone and therefore it is monergistic in nature, accomplished by the sovereign act of the Spirit apart from and unconditioned upon man’s will to believe. In short, man’s faith does not cause regeneration but regeneration causes man’s faith.

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<sup>8</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 468. The points listed above can be found in Berkhof.

<sup>9</sup>As Berkhof states, regeneration “does not comprise conversion and sanctification.” Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>My definition is similar to Hoekema’s: “In this sense regeneration may be defined as that work of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings persons into living union with Christ, changing their hearts so that they who were spiritually dead become spiritually alive, now able and willing to repent of sin, believe the gospel, and serve the Lord.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 94. Also see Murray’s definition, “God effects a change which is radical and all-pervasive, a change which cannot be explained in terms of any combination, permutation, or accumulation of human resources, a change which is nothing less than a new creation by him who calls the things that be not as though they were, who spake and it was done, who commanded and it stood fast. This, in a word, is regeneration.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 96. Also see Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 469.

Such a definition assumes several characteristics about regeneration.<sup>11</sup> First, regeneration is an *instantaneous* change.<sup>12</sup> Regeneration is not like sanctification, progressing gradually in time. Such is the view of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather regeneration is a momentary or snapshot action (Acts 16:14; Eph 2:5).<sup>13</sup> In other words, regeneration is punctiliar. Second, regeneration is a change in the *very inner core* or root of man's nature.<sup>14</sup> Just as total depravity is pervasive, penetrating the very essence of man's heart, so also is regeneration a change within the sinner's deepest recess.<sup>15</sup> Like total depravity, not only does regeneration strike at the very essence of man but it extends to every aspect, affecting the entire person. Third, regeneration occurs *below consciousness*.<sup>16</sup>

John Stott helpfully explains,

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<sup>11</sup>Here I am following Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 102-04. Hoekema seems to be following Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 468-69. Berkhof's discussion seems to share similarities with Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 2:675ff.

<sup>12</sup>“It is at the moment of regeneration that the dead sinner becomes spiritually alive, that resistance to God is changed to non-resistance, and that hatred for God is changed to love. Regeneration means that the person who was outside of Christ is now in Christ. Hence this is a radical, not just a supernatural change.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 103.

<sup>13</sup>The instantaneous character of regeneration is demonstrated in Acts 16:14 when God opens Lydia's heart to believe the gospel. The same can be inferred from Eph 2:4-5, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ-by grace you have been saved.” See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:688; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 468; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 102.

<sup>14</sup>“Regeneration involves an essential change of character. It is a making the tree good in order that the fruit may be good. As a result of this change, the person passes from a state of unbelief to one of saving faith, not by any process of research or argument, but of inward experience.” Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1932), 165.

<sup>15</sup>“Most Reformed theologians opposed the view of John Cameron (1579-1625), a French theologian, that the Holy Spirit in regenerating a person merely illumines the mind or intellect in such a way that the will inevitably follows the guidance of the intellect in immoral and spiritual matters. Not only does this view represent an erroneous type of faculty psychology; it is also quite unrealistic. I may be thoroughly convinced in my mind that a certain course of action is proper, but if I am still ‘dead in transgressions and sins,’ I will never follow that right course of action. The Arminians at the Synod of Dort also had an inadequate view of the role of the will in regeneration when they insisted that man's will was not at all affected by sin, so that all that was necessary was the removal of certain hindrances to the proper functioning of the will: ‘the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions.’” Hoekema continues, “Over against these inadequate conceptions, Reformed theologians insisted that regeneration is a total change – a change which involves the whole person. In Scriptural terms, regeneration means the giving of a new heart. And the heart in Scripture stands for the inner core of the person, the center of all activities, the fountain out of which all the streams of mental and spiritual experiences flow: thinking, feeling, willing, believing, praying, praising, and so on. It is the fountain which is renewed in regeneration. It should be added, however, that this does not mean the removal of all sinful tendencies. Though regenerated persons are new, they are not yet perfect.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 103.

<sup>16</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:704. “If we are, as the Bible says, by nature dead in sin, corrupt, not subject to God's law, not able to accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, we cannot consciously decide to change ourselves into the opposite of our natural state. We must be changed at the very root of our being, in a supernatural way. Hence this must be a change in what psychologists would call

There is no biblical warrant for the view that regeneration is a conscious process, that is to say, that the person being born again is conscious of what is happening inside of him. Jesus himself indicated the opposite when in his conversation with Nicodemus he drew an analogy between the Spirit's work in the new birth and the blowing of the wind [John 3:8] . . . Although the effects of the wind are seen, heard and felt, there is something secret and mysterious about the operation of the wind itself. The effects of the new birth are evident too (in a changed life), but there is something secret and mysterious about the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Of course, "conversion" (the sinner's turning to Christ in repentance and faith), which is also a work of the Spirit is normally, conscious, as he grasps certain things with his mind and acts with his will. But regeneration is the implantation of new life into a soul dead in trespasses and sins. We are no more conscious of this infusion of spiritual life, called rebirth or spiritual birth, than we are of our physical birth. In both cases self-consciousness, consciousness of being alive, develops later.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, Loraine Boettner states,

The regeneration of the soul is something which is wrought in us, and not an act performed by us. It is an instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is not even a thing of which we are conscious at the moment it occurs, but rather something which lies lower than consciousness. At the moment of its occurrence the soul is as passive as was Lazarus when he was called back to life by Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

As we shall see later, Stott and Boettner are right; regeneration is not a conscious synergism between God and the sinner, but rather regeneration occurs beneath the sinner's consciousness which results in the sinner consciously turning to Christ in faith and repentance as a result of God's awakening work.

Fourth, Regeneration is not only a supernatural change but an *immediate* change.<sup>19</sup> It is immediate in two ways. (1) Regeneration is immediate in that it is not a mere moral persuasion by the Word, as many in the Semi-Pelagian and Arminian

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the subconscious – a change which, however, is bound to reveal itself in our conscious life." Biblically this subconscious change makes sense. "Further, that this change takes place below consciousness is also evident from the terms used in the Bible to describe regeneration: 'I will give you a new heart'; 'unless he is born from above'; 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'; 'made us alive with Christ.' Expressions of this sort denote a transformation so radical that it must be a change in the subconscious roots of our being. In regeneration in the narrower sense, therefore, we are not active but passive." Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 103-04. Hoekema is quoting Canons of Dort, 3-4, Rejection of Errors, Par. 3.

<sup>17</sup>John Stott, *Baptism and Fullness*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 84.

<sup>18</sup>Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 165.

<sup>19</sup>See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:530-32; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:684-85, 2:702-703; 3:31.

tradition have said. Against the Remonstrants, the Synod of Dort rejected those “who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion.”<sup>20</sup> Rather “it is an entirely *supernatural* work, one that is at the same time *most powerful* and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead . . .”<sup>21</sup>

Bavinck explains that Dort rejected the view that “between God’s activity and its effect in the human heart (which is regeneration) is thus the free human will,” and instead argued that regeneration is *immediate*, meaning that “God’s Spirit itself *directly* enters the human heart and with infallible certainty brings about regeneration without in any way being dependent on the human will.”<sup>22</sup> Bavinck elsewhere explains that the immediate nature of regeneration is not meant to “exclude the Word as a means of grace from the operation of the Holy Spirit” but simply is meant to “uphold against the Remonstrants that the Holy Spirit, though employing the Word, himself with his grace entered into the heart of humans and there effected regeneration without being dependent on their will and consent.”<sup>23</sup> Charles Hodge makes the same point, comparing the immediate nature of regeneration to the miracle of a blind man seeing. While light is key to the faculty of seeing, it does not produce sight but that is reserved to the almighty power of Christ himself. So it is with regeneration. Truth and the Word are essential, but in themselves

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<sup>20</sup>Canons of Dort, 3-4, Rejection of Errors, Par. 7, quoted in Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 102. Also see Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 118-20, 162-65, 171-73, 177-80.

<sup>21</sup>Canons of Dort, 3-4 article 12, quoted in Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 103. Emphasis added. The Puritans would use the word “physical” to convey this same truth. As Packer explains, “The Spirit’s work is thus both moral, by persuasion (which Arminians and Pelagians affirm), and also physical, by power (which they deny). (‘Physical’ here means ‘terminating on our personal being at a level below consciousness’, not ‘terminating on the body as a distinct from the personal self [i.e., soul].’)” J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 295. For example, see John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 3:316f.

<sup>22</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:81. Emphasis added. Also see idem, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:580.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 3:580. Also see Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit’s Work in Calling and Regeneration* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008), 34.

they do nothing. Rather, it is the inward power of the Spirit with the Word that enacts the miracle of new birth.<sup>24</sup> (2) The Reformed have also titled such a change immediate in response to those such as John Cameron (1580-1625), who influenced those in the school of Saumur (Amyraut, Placaesus, Cappellus, Pajon), reducing regeneration to an illumination of the mind by the Word, believing that if the mind is changed the will naturally follows. So while there is an immediate work of God on the intellect, there is not one on the will.<sup>25</sup> Over and against Cameron, Saumur, and Pajonism “the Reformed generally claimed that the Holy Spirit not only impacted the human will through the intellect, but also that it penetrated the will directly and there instilled new habits immediately.”<sup>26</sup> Again, as Bavinck points out, the Reformed do not exclude the instrumentality of the Word but simply “assert against the theology of Saumur that in regeneration the Holy Spirit does not merely by the Word illumine the intellect but also directly and immediately infuses new affections in the will.”<sup>27</sup> This is another reminder of our previous point, namely, that regeneration is a change that is *total*, like depravity, in the sense that it impacts *all* a person’s faculties, the will included.<sup>28</sup>

This leads us to the fifth point: as Johannes Wollebius and Sinclair Ferguson observe, while the *efficient* cause of regeneration is the Holy Spirit, the *instrumental*

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<sup>24</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:703; 3:31.

<sup>25</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:81; idem, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:580; idem, *Saved by Grace*, 49-51. For a more extensive study, see Stephen Strehle, “Universal Grace and Amyraldianism,” *WTJ* 51 (1989): 345-57.

<sup>26</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:81. Also see Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 221; Toon, *Born Again*, 129-30.

<sup>27</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:581. Also see idem, *Roeping en wedergeboorte* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1903), 47-72.

<sup>28</sup>“Sin began with an act but penetrated the very nature of humans and corrupted them totally. It may not be a substance, but it is not merely an act either. It is an inner moral corruption of the whole person, not only of one’s thoughts, words, and deeds but also of one’s intellect and will; and again not only of these faculties but also of the human heart, from which all iniquities flow, of the central inner core, the root of one’s existence, the human self. And for that reason, according to Scripture, regeneration consists and can exist in nothing less than the total renewal and re-creation of human beings. If humans are radically evil, then, for their redemption, a rebirth of their entire being is indispensable. A tree must first be made good if it is ever to bear good fruit, for ‘functioning follows being.’” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:91-92. Also see 4:124.

cause of regeneration is the “word of God” (1 Pet 1:23) or the “word of truth” (James 1:18; cf. John 15:3; 2 Thess 2:14).<sup>29</sup> While Cameron and Saumur overplayed the intellect and mind to the neglect of the will, we do not want to swing this pendulum to the other extreme and deny the change regeneration has on the mind through the Word. In Scripture it is the Word of God that is absolutely necessary for the salvation and redemption of fallen sinners, as the Belgic Confession (Article 24) and Heidelberg Catechism (Lord’s Day 25) make so clear.<sup>30</sup> And yet, this Word must be accompanied by the Spirit if it is to be effectually applied.<sup>31</sup>

Calvin understood this well. While he acknowledged the gift of the mind even to unbelievers due to common grace, which enables them to excel in the liberal arts, yet when it comes to God “the greatest geniuses [e.g., Plato, Aristotle] are blinder than moles.”<sup>32</sup> Without God’s Word *and* Spirit man is left in utter darkness, lacking the effectual application of the saving content of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Calvin states, “The mind of man is blind until it is illuminated by the Spirit of God [and] the will is enslaved to evil, and wholly carried and hurried to evil, until corrected by the same Spirit.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, no mere assistance or moral suasion will do, nor a mere enlightening of the mind. The preaching of God’s Word does nothing if the Spirit does not work effectually to open blind eyes to the gospel. On John 6:44 Calvin says,

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<sup>29</sup>Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 53, 125. Or as Wollebius states, “The principal efficient cause is God, the active cause is his free mercy, and the instrumental cause the ministry of the word.” Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, trans. Alexander Ross (London, 1650), 28.1.2; quoted in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John W. Beardslee III (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 158. Also see Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 112; Peter Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 16; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1993), 2:226-29.

<sup>30</sup>God’s word has a prominent place throughout the canon: Ps 119:43; Jer 23:28; Deut 22:20; Prov 22:21; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13, 18; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 1:25.

<sup>31</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:526, 529.

<sup>32</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.2.18. Cf. Anthony N. S. Lane, “Anthropology,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 282.

<sup>33</sup>John Calvin, *Ecclesiae Reformandae Ratio*, quoted in Lane, “Anthropology,” 283.

But nothing is accomplished by preaching him if the Spirit, as our inner teacher, does not show our minds the way. Only those men, therefore, who have heard and have been taught by the Father come to him. What kind of learning and hearing is this? Surely, where the Spirit by a wonderful and singular power forms our ears to hear and our minds to understand. . . . It therefore remains for us to understand that the way of the Kingdom of God is open only to him whose mind has been made new by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. . . . Because these mysteries are deeply hidden from human insight, they are disclosed solely by the revelation of the Spirit. Hence, where the Spirit of God does not illumine them, they are considered folly.<sup>34</sup>

Calvin again explains the vital connection between Word and Spirit, “If anyone wants a clearer answer, here it is: God works in his elect in two ways: within, through his Spirit; without, through his Word. By his Spirit, illuminating their minds and forming their hearts to the love and cultivation of righteousness, he makes them a new creation (*nova creatio*). By his Word, he arouses them to desire, to seek after, and to attain that same renewal.”<sup>35</sup> This is simply another way of saying that the gospel call is made effectual for the elect. As Paul states in 2 Thessalonians 2:14, “To this *he called you through our gospel*, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Therefore, it is appropriate to say that the effectual call works through the general, gospel call.<sup>36</sup> What differentiates the gospel call, however, from the effectual call is that in the effectual call the Spirit accompanies the Word making it effectual for the elect while in the gospel call there is the absence of the Spirit and his effectual work for those not chosen. But the Word of the gospel not only has an instrumental role in effectual calling but in regeneration as well. James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:22-23 make this especially clear.<sup>37</sup> James

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<sup>34</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 2.2.20. Calvin rightly titles the Spirit the Teacher of truth or *magister veritatis* since we have been inwardly taught by Him. See Calvin’s comments on John 14:17 in idem, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 2:93.

<sup>35</sup>Calvin *Institutes* 2.5.5. Cf. Joseph A. Pipa, “Calvin on the Holy Spirit,” in *Calvin for Today*, ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2009), 62.

<sup>36</sup>“In other words, it is through the preaching of God’s Word by evangelists and ministers, and through the telling of the good news of the gospel by Christians everywhere, that God calls sinners.” James Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 142.

<sup>37</sup>I am assuming here that the word is the gospel itself. As Peter says, “And this word is the good news that was preached to you” (1 Peter 1:25). Schreiner equates the word with the gospel when he states that the imperishable “seed” is not the Holy Spirit since the Spirit is not even mentioned in the context. Rather, “We can be almost certain, however, that Peter used the term ‘word’ (logos) to refer to the gospel. It often has this meaning in the New Testament (e.g., Eh 1:13; Phil 2:16; Col 1:5; 4:3; 1 Thess 1:8; 2:13; 2 Thess 3:1; 2 Tim 2:9; 4:2; Titus 1:3; 2:5; Heb 13:7; Jas 1:21) and bears this meaning elsewhere in 1 Peter (2:8; 3:1).” How does the word of the gospel relate to regeneration? As Schreiner explains, the word is the means God uses to beget life in his elect. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37

states, “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” Peter says, “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” The instrumentality of the Word is evident in the regeneration of Lydia. “The Lord opened her heart [regeneration] to pay attention to what was said by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Likewise, Saul is converted when he is met by the Word, Christ Jesus, himself with the truth and reality of his resurrection and Lordship (i.e., “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? . . . I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” in Acts 9:4b-5). Here we see not only the reality of the gospel (the Word) confronting Saul but Jesus himself who is the Word (John 1:1-3) confronting the infamous persecutor of the church. In both Saul’s and Lydia’s case, the former dramatic and the latter subtle and discrete, it is when they are confronted with the Word of truth that regeneration occurs.

Unfortunately, some have used the instrumentality of the Word to undermine the sovereignty of God. Such a move shifts the Word’s role from instrumentality to efficacy. The efficient cause is no longer the Spirit but the Word itself. The Spirit is then demoted to a mere instrumental role rather than the efficient cause. Berkhof, having Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) and Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) in mind, explains,

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(2003), 95. Also see Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, TNTC (1988), 90-91. Also see Davids on the Old Testament background (cf. Gen 1; Ps 33:6, 9; Isa 40; John 1:3; Rom 4:17) of the re-creative and re-generative power of God through his word by which he gives and creates new life (Isa 55:10-11; Matt 24:35; John 5:24; 6:63; Phil 2:16; Heb 4:12). Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (1990), 78. Moo views the “word” as referring to the gospel as well. Concerning James 1:18 Moo argues, “The syntax suggests that this ‘word’ is the instrument through which God brings people to life. All four of the other occurrences of the phrase in the NT refer to the gospel as the agent of salvation (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15). And this reference to ‘word’ must also be seen in relation to the other important uses of the same term (Gk. Logos) in this context (vv. 21, 22, 23). The ‘implanted word’ of v.21 is sometimes thought to be a consciousness of God resident by nature in every human being. Yet this word, James says, can ‘save your souls’: indication, again, that the gospel is in view.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC (2000), 79-80. Similarly, see Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, NICNT (1954), 36. Likewise McCartney helpfully states, “In the NT this word of truth is the gospel, which both conveys the knowledge of God and ultimate reality (2 Cor. 6:7; Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:15) and transforms its recipient (John 8:32; 17:19; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).” Dan McCartney, *James*, BECNT (2009), 110. McCartney goes on to draw a further connection, “The ‘word’ as a reference to the gospel of truth has its roots in Jesus’s ‘seed’ parables (see Matt. 13:18-43, where the ‘seed’ of the parable of the sower is interpreted as the logos [*logos*, word] of the kingdom, the gospel). In John 17:17 Jesus’s prayer makes it explicit: ‘Your word is truth.’” Similarly see Daniel M. Doriani, *James*, REC (2007), 40-41; Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (1982), 89. Also see Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:49.

“According to this view the truth as a system of motives, presented to the human will by the Holy Spirit, is the immediate cause of the change from unholiness to holiness. . . . It assumes that the work of the Holy Spirit differs from that of the preacher only in degree. Both work by persuasion only.”<sup>38</sup> Berkhof responds, “But this theory is quite unsatisfactory. The truth can be a motive to holiness only if it is loved, while the natural man does not love the truth, but hates it, Rom. 1:18, 25. Consequently the truth, presented externally, cannot be the efficient cause of regeneration.”<sup>39</sup> Calvin also states, “the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>40</sup> Consequently, one should not think that the instrumentality of the Word subtracts from the sovereignty of God in regeneration.<sup>41</sup> Ferguson insightfully comments,

But how can regeneration take place through the word without this diluting the notion of the Spirit’s monergistic, sovereign activity? . . . For the New Testament writers, however, there is no hint of a threat to divine sovereignty in the fact that the word is the instrumental cause of regeneration, while the Spirit is the efficient cause. This is signaled in the New Testament by the use of the preposition *ek* to indicate the divine originating cause (e.g. Jn. 3:5; 1 Jn. 3:9; 5:1) and *dia* to express the instrumental cause (e.g. Jn. 15:3; 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:23).<sup>42</sup>

While the role of the Word in effectual calling and regeneration is more extensively studied in appendix 3, we will see in this next section that what the Westminster Catechism calls “savingly enlightening their minds” by “his word and Spirit” (i.e., *spiritus cum verbo*, the Spirit working with the Word) is something which is God’s sovereign prerogative, independent of man’s will.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 473. Also see Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:8-11, 16-17.

<sup>39</sup>Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 473. The Reformed “took the position that the external call and moral suasion by the Word is insufficient for salvation and has to be followed by a special operation of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:81.

<sup>40</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

<sup>41</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 125. In an effort to preserve the Spirit’s sovereignty many in the Reformed tradition have made the following distinction: “Regeneration, taken in the strict, narrow sense as the quickening of the spiritual dead, takes place *cum verbo*, that is along with the Word, but not *per verbum*, through the Word.” Typically the former is the Reformed view while the latter the Lutheran view. Herman Kuiper, *By Grace Alone: A Study in Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 48.

<sup>42</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 125. Also see Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:431.

<sup>43</sup>The Westminster catechism, which assumes regeneration under effectual calling, also explains the inseparability of Word and Spirit best when it says, “Effectual calling is the work of God’s

## The Circumcision and Gift of a New Heart

### Deuteronomy 30:6

In Deuteronomy 30 Israel faces and anticipates the reality of coming exile and judgment for disobedience. However, inspired by God, Moses foretells of a time to come when Israel will experience restoration, redemption, genuine repentance, and new spiritual life rather than judgment and condemnation. Included in such a future restoration is liberation from the slavery of sin. However, liberation from bondage to sin only comes through the circumcision of the heart. In Deuteronomy 30:6 we read, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). Eugene Merrill is correct to state that circumcision of the heart here refers to the “radical work of regeneration.” Merrill further explains,

Just as circumcision of the flesh symbolized outward identification with the Lord and the covenant community (cf. Gen 17:10,23; Lev 12:3; Josh 5:2), so circumcision of the heart (a phrase found only here and in Deut 10:16 and Jer 4:4 in the OT) speaks of internal identification with him in what might be called regeneration in Christian theology.<sup>44</sup>

If the circumcision of the heart refers to regeneration (cf. Rom 2:25-27) then to what purpose does Yahweh promise to circumcise the heart? Yahweh circumcises the heart “so that” they will love the Lord.<sup>45</sup> The Lord does not circumcise their hearts “because” they acted in repentance and faith by loving the Lord. Rather, it is Yahweh’s sovereign act of circumcising the heart that causes the sinner to love him. As Hoekema states, “Since the

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almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, *by his word and Spirit*; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.” Emphasis added. “The Westminster Larger Catechism,” in *Creeds and Confessions*, question 67.

<sup>44</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC, vol. 4 (1994), 388. Also see Mark A. Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*,” *DBSJ* 7 (2002): 70.

<sup>45</sup>“God himself will carry out the inward renewal of Israel (circumcise your heart), so that Israel will love Yahweh with all her heart. . . . Repentance in itself will not suffice. Perhaps, indeed, the origin of repentance itself lies in the divine activity. Certainly, the origin of heart-love for Yahweh lies in Yahweh himself.” J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC, vol. 5 (2008), 311.

heart is the inner core of the person, the passage teaches that God must cleanse us within before we can truly love him.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Yahweh’s promise of renewal and restoration is characterized by a sovereign act upon the uncircumcised heart of his elect. Nowhere in Deuteronomy 30:6 do we see any indication that Yahweh’s sovereign act of circumcising the heart is conditioned upon the will of man to believe. Rather, it is quite the opposite. Yahweh must first circumcise the heart so that the sinner can exercise a will that believes. In Deuteronomy 29:2-4 Moses summons all of Israel and says, “You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” Why is it that those in Israel, who saw the many miracles God performed in saving them from Pharaoh, do not believe? Verse 4 gives the answer, “To this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” It is remarkable how much Deuteronomy 29 parallels John 10:26. As Israel saw the miracles and failed to hear and see spiritually so also did the Jews in the gospels see the miracles of Jesus and fail to hear and see spiritually. But again, notice the reason Jesus gives as to why they do not believe, “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock” (John 10:25-26). Like Deuteronomy 29:2-4, the reason they do not see or hear is because God did not give them “a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.” It is not man’s choice or will which determines whether he will spiritually have a heart to hear and see but it is God’s sovereign choice to give the sinner a heart to hear and see that is the cause and reason for belief.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 95; John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:105, 136.

<sup>47</sup>Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith,” 74.

### Jeremiah 31:33 and 32:39-40

The concept of a new heart is also illustrated by the prophet Jeremiah, “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33; cf. Heb 8:10; 10:16). Similarly the Lord says in Jeremiah 32:39-40, “I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.” Unlike Deuteronomy 30:6, in Jeremiah the phrase “circumcise your heart,” the heart being “the organ of understanding and will,” is not used.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the phrase is used in Jeremiah 4:4 and the concept is present in 30:6 and 32:39-40 for the text does speak of the Lord writing his law on their hearts (in contrast to writing his law on tablets of stone), giving his people one heart, and putting the fear of the Lord in their hearts. Like Deuteronomy, in Jeremiah regeneration is in view.<sup>49</sup> Notice, it is only when God writes his law within, on the heart, and places within a fear of himself that the sinner can follow after him. As Turretin explains, Jeremiah “denotes not a resistible, but an invincible action which most certainly obtains its effect.”<sup>50</sup> Only when Yahweh circumcises the heart can the sinner obey. Thompson states, “Yahweh himself proposes to bring about the necessary change in the people’s inner nature which will *make them capable of* obedience.”<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Hamilton states, “Circumcision of the heart does seem to result in the *ability* to love God and live (Deut 30:6). The spiritual circumcision (circumcised

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<sup>48</sup>J. Andrew Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, NIVAC (2002), 85.

<sup>49</sup>F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, vol. 16 (1993), 285; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:52.

<sup>50</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:551. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:105.

<sup>51</sup>J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (1980), 581. Emphasis added.

heart and ears) *enables* people to incline to Yahweh.”<sup>52</sup> Hamilton points to Jeremiah 6:10 where Yahweh asks, “Who shall I speak to or warn that they might listen? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they are *not able* to pay attention. Behold, the word of Yahweh has become a reproach to them; they do not delight in it.” He concludes, “An ‘uncircumcised ear’ indicates an *inability* to interest oneself in the word of Yahweh.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Paul can say in Romans 2:29 that what saves is not a mere external, physical circumcision, but an inward, spiritual circumcision that is “by the Spirit, not by the letter.” Consequently, “His praise is not from man but from God.” Only when God circumcises the heart does a new ability to believe result.

### **Ezekiel 11:19-21 and 36:26-27**

The concept of a circumcised heart in Deuteronomy 30:6 and a new heart in Jeremiah 31:33 is also taught by the prophet Ezekiel. Yahweh again promises a day to come when his people will experience restoration and renewal.

And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose heart goes after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their deeds upon their own heads, declares the Lord GOD” (Ezek 11:19-21).

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules (Ezek 36:26-27).

Yahweh explains that in order for a sinner to walk in his statutes, keep his rules, and obey his law, he must first remove the dead, cold, lifeless heart of stone<sup>54</sup> and replace it with a

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<sup>52</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 47.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>“Persons with a heart of stone are spiritually dead, following their own lusts and passions.” G. Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 750.

heart that is alive, namely, a heart of flesh.<sup>55</sup> Yahweh does not give the sinner a heart of flesh because the sinner obeys but rather the sinner obeys *because* Yahweh surgically implants a heart of flesh. Such an order is indicated at the beginning of 11:20. Yahweh removes the heart of stone and gives them a heart of flesh “that they may” obey (11:21; 36:27).<sup>56</sup> The same causal order is even more apparent in Ezekiel 36 where Yahweh states that he will “cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (36:27).<sup>57</sup> Once again, God does not put a new heart and spirit within in reaction to or because of the sinner’s faith, but it is God’s sovereign act of implanting a new heart, a new spirit,<sup>58</sup> that causes the sinner to turn in faith and obedience.<sup>59</sup>

### **Ezekiel 37:1-14**

In Ezekiel 11 and 36 the sovereignty of God in regeneration is conveyed through imagery of a heart of stone that is replaced by a heart of flesh. Such a picture of God’s sovereignty and man’s passivity only escalates when the reader approaches

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<sup>55</sup>“Ezekiel concretizes the metaphor by describing the heart as *stone*, which speaks of coldness, insensitivity, incorrigibility, and even lifelessness (cf. 1 Sam. 25:37). . . . The only answer is the removal of the petrified organ and its replacement with a warm, sensitive, and responsive heart of flesh (*bāšār*).” Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48*, NICOT (1998), 355. Also see Hans W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Mifflintown, PA: Sigler, 1996), 29, 40-41, 54; Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, NIVAC (1999), 415.

<sup>56</sup>The language used here is so blatantly “causal” in nature that Block says it highlights “divine coercion.” Block, *Ezekiel*, 356. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:105.

<sup>57</sup>Cooper notes that the Spirit of God moving them to follow him shows their spiritual inability. Lamar E. Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, NAC, vol. 17 (1994), 317.

<sup>58</sup>“The ‘new spirit’ referred to there is not necessarily Yahweh’s Spirit (‘My Spirit’) referred to in v.27a, but a new spirit in the sense of a new attitude (see Num 14:24). This point is commonly recognized by translations, which leave the ‘s’ on ‘spirit’ in v. 26 lowercase while capitalizing the ‘s’ in v.27 (ESV, HCSB, NAS, NIV). As many interpreters agree, the parallelism between ‘new heart’ and ‘new spirit’ in v. 26 is a decisive indicator that the two concepts are synonymous. . . . The ‘new spirit’ is not Yahweh’s Spirit being placed in each individual restored Israelite. Rather, God will grant a new heart and a new attitude to the people. As noted above, we are not far from the circumcision of the heart, which can be likened to regeneration. Weinfeld states, ‘Ezekiel . . . described the process of Israel’s regeneration in a distinctly ritualistic manner. God sprinkles clear water on Israel and purifies them before He gives them a new heart.’” Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 53. Hamilton is quoting Moshe Weinfeld, “Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 88, no. 1 (1976): 32.

<sup>59</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:551. The promise of the Spirit is also highlighted in Isaiah 44:3, “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.”

Ezekiel 37, the valley of dry bones. The hand of the Lord brings Ezekiel out in the Spirit and sets him down in the middle of a valley that is full of dry bones.

And he said to me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” And I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” Then he said to me, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ Therefore prophecy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD” (Ezek 37:1-14).<sup>60</sup>

As in Ezekiel 11:19-21 and 36:26-27 we again see imagery of God taking that which is dead and making it alive.<sup>61</sup> The Lord takes bones that are dead, dry, and sitting in a heap and breaths new life into them. As 37:5 says, “Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.” The Lord prophesies that he will “lay sinews” upon these dead, dry bones and “will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD” (37:6). When Ezekiel begins to prophecy to these dead bones as he was commanded, suddenly the bones rattle and come to life, enveloped with flesh. At the command of the Lord breath comes from the four winds and suddenly “they lived and

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<sup>60</sup>Some have interpreted Ezekiel 37 as referring to the future resurrection of the dead. While we would not want to eliminate any hint at a future resurrection, I think it is better to interpret Yahweh as primarily referring to a spiritual reality he will do in the sinner’s heart, as is apparent when Yahweh uses the same language he used in chapter 36 to say “I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.”

<sup>61</sup>As Duguid states, “The means by which that regeneration is brought about is through an infusion of the Spirit (*rūah*) in response to the prophetic word.” Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 427.

stood on their feet” (37:10).<sup>62</sup> The Lord interprets for Ezekiel exactly what has happened. The bones represent the whole house of Israel, without hope, spiritually dead, cut off (37:11). However, the breath of the Lord resurrecting these bones is the restoration to new life. When the Lord breaths new spiritual life into his people, the result is that they know that he is the Lord (37:13-14). God’s act to breath new life is not conditioned upon the will of the dead. Dead, dry bones are lifeless (cf. Jer 34:17-20) until God breaths new life into them (flesh, sinews).<sup>63</sup>

**Objections from Deuteronomy 10:16,  
Ezekiel 18:31, and Jeremiah 4:4**

Though the passages so far present a picture of God’s monergistic work in regeneration, Arminians will object that the exact opposite is taught in Deuteronomy 10:16, Ezekiel 18:31, and Jeremiah 4:4 where it is the unregenerate sinner who is supposed to circumcise his own heart.<sup>64</sup> As Deuteronomy 10:16 says, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn.”<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Ezekiel 18:31 says, “Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” And again Jeremiah 4:4 reads, “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds.” On the surface, these passages could be interpreted to say that the sinner has the ability in and of himself to change his heart. However, it is essential to notice that though Yahweh commands the

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<sup>62</sup>“Here Yahweh, the sovereign of the universe, is summoning the winds from around the world to direct their life-giving energy to these corpses lying in the valley.” Block, *Ezekiel*, 377.

<sup>63</sup>Ezekiel Hopkins, “The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration; or, the New-Birth,” in *The Works of Ezekiel Hopkins*, ed. Charles W. Quick (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997), 2:245.

<sup>64</sup>For example, see Thomas Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity* (Nashville: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888), 2:85.

<sup>65</sup>For a statement of the dilemma and comparison with Deuteronomy 30:6, see Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (1976), 364; Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel*, NIBC (2009), 119.

sinner to circumcise his heart, he never says the sinner is able to do so.<sup>66</sup> The Arminian objects that a command implies ability (“ought implies can”), but as demonstrated already this is a faulty assumption that not only reads into the text but contradicts a multitude of other texts which explicitly say man cannot in any way turn towards God. But we do not even have to turn to other books of the Bible to discover the inability of man. For example, take the apparent tension between Deuteronomy 30:6 and 10:16. In Deuteronomy 30:6 it is the Lord, Yahweh, who must circumcise the heart, a miracle performed by God so that his people would have the ability to love and obey him. Merrill makes a keen observation,

This is an obvious reference to the demand of the Shema (Deut 6:4-5), adherence to which was at the very core of the covenant commitment. *This impossible standard* was always understood as the ideal of covenant behavior, *one to be sought but never fully achieved* (c.f. Matt 22:40; Mark 12:33). Here, however, Moses did not command or even exhort his audience to obedience. He promised it as a natural by-product of the renewal of the heart. People can love God with all their heart *only after the heart itself has been radically changed to a Godward direction.*<sup>67</sup>

Notice how Merrill states that Deuteronomy 30:6 is a reference to the Shema and therefore it is an “impossible standard” not because the law is flawed but because man is depraved. Therefore, the command in Deuteronomy 10:16 is also one that is impossible to achieve. Yet, when Moses gives the command in Deuteronomy 10:16 and in 30:6 he reveals that it is not man who fulfills this command but Yahweh himself. What is impossible for man is made possible by God’s sovereign grace.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, Merrill is exactly right to then state that it is “only after the heart itself has been radically changed to a Godward direction” that sinners can love God with all their heart.

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<sup>66</sup>Contra A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1907), 830, “If he is ever regenerated, it must be in and through a movement of his own will.”

<sup>67</sup>Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 389. Emphasis added. Notice a similar observation by Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:336.

<sup>68</sup>That is exactly why McConville can say, “The most dramatic new thing in this promise is that Yahweh himself will ‘circumcise [the] hearts’ of the people he is restoring (6). This is both like and unlike 10:16, in which Moses exhorted the people to ‘circumcise their hearts’: unlike, because here it is an act of Yahweh himself, rather than an act of the people.” J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC (2002), 427.

The same can be said of the apparent tension between Jeremiah 4:4 and 31:33/32:39-40. Notice, in 31:33 Yahweh says he will write his law on their hearts. Longman observes that this expression “intends to contrast with the Ten Commandments that were written on tablets of stone.”<sup>69</sup> Longman’s reference to the Law makes sense when one considers the command of Jeremiah 4:4. The people are to be in conformity with God’s commands and therefore they are commanded to circumcise the foreskin of their hearts. And yet, as already seen, it is impossible for them to obey the command because of their slavery to sin. Jeremiah makes such a point in 17:9-10 where the heart is said to be “deceitful above all things” and desperately sick.” Therefore, the command given in Jeremiah 4:4 is fulfilled in 31:33 and 32:39-40. As Dearman observes, God promises in Jeremiah 24:7 to give sinners a “new heart” which assumes “the fatal fallibility of the ‘old’ one!”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it is presupposed “that Israel must make a radical commitment to God but also that God’s people will be unable to fulfill that commitment unless he acts decisively to renew and transform them.”<sup>71</sup> Dearman rightly concludes that the command in Jeremiah 4:3-4 “does not assume that a mere act of the will on their part will make everything restored.”<sup>72</sup> The law written on their heart is something they were commanded to do but could not do. Therefore, in fulfillment of his own command, Yahweh himself must write it on their heart. Augustine’s prayer then is most appropriate, “Give what you command, and command what you will.”<sup>73</sup>

In closing, it is far better to interpret these passages in a similar way that other passages are interpreted, which speak of a gospel call to all people.<sup>74</sup> As discussed, all

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<sup>69</sup>Tremper Longman III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NIBC (2008), 211.

<sup>70</sup>Dearman, *Jeremiah*, 85.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions*, in *The Works of Saint Augustine V/1*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Maria Boulding, (New York: New City, 1997), 10.29, 40.

<sup>74</sup>Shedd takes a different approach. He argues that these texts do not refer “to regeneration in the restricted signification of the term.” Shedd does not think God is commanding the sinner to quicken himself, creating life out of death, but rather God is addressing those who are already saved. God is not

throughout Scripture a gospel call is given to all people and with it comes the invitation as well as the *command* to turn from sin and trust in God. However, it does not follow that since the command to repent and trust in Christ is given that man has the ability to do so. In fact, he does not, as already seen. The same is true of Deuteronomy 10:16 and Jeremiah 4:4. The command in Deuteronomy 10:16, Ezekiel 18:31, and Jeremiah 4:4 is given but the text says nothing concerning man's ability or inability to obey such a command. Two conclusions result. First, by interpreting these passages in light of texts which support man's total depravity and spiritual inability we must conclude that though man is commanded to change, he is not able to do so. Yahweh makes man's inability especially evident in Jeremiah 13:33 when he asks, "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil." Second, in light of the texts above (Deut 30:6, Jer 31:33, Ezek 11:19-21 and 36:26-27) it is clear that God must be the one to execute the spiritual change within the dead sinner. So though the command is given, only God can fulfill such a command on the sinner's behalf. Therefore, James Hamilton is right when he explains, "Although in Deut 10:16 the people are commanded to circumcise their hearts, in Deut 29:4 they are told that Yahweh has not given them hearts to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear. Then in 30:6 they learn that Yahweh will circumcise their hearts. Like Paul's command to be filled with the Spirit in Eph 5:18, the command for spiritual circumcision is a call to cry out to God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves."<sup>75</sup>

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referring to regeneration in the narrow sense but in the broad sense, referring to regenerate man's need to sanctify himself and avoid backsliding. William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 762. Shedd's interpretation was proposed by Turretin in the seventeenth-century. Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:551.

<sup>75</sup>Hamilton also makes the interesting point that though the phrase "circumcise yourselves" (ESV, HCSB, NIV, NRSV) is usually translated as a reflexive, it could be translated as a passive, namely, "be circumcised." Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 46n82.

## The New Birth

### John 3:3-8

**The Context of John 3.** Perhaps one of the most well known and important texts on the new birth or regeneration is the encounter Jesus has with Nicodemus.

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:3-8).

In order to understand John 3 we must begin with the context of the passage. In John 2 Jesus cleanses the Temple, showing his righteous anger at the defilement of God’s house. Such an incident demonstrates the wickedness of the religious leaders, that though they appeared righteous externally, inwardly they were corrupt, leading the people astray. After the cleansing of the Temple, the narrative moves to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem (John 2:23-25). John states that “many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing” (2:23). However, what appeared to be belief was mere superficiality. They “believed” because they saw the miracles but John reveals that Jesus knew what was within them, namely, unbelief and wickedness. Jesus refused to entrust himself to the people because “he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man” (2:25).<sup>76</sup> As John 3 will show, it was not only what was in man (unbelief and wickedness) that troubled Jesus but what was *not* within man, namely, a new spirit. In John 3 Jesus will get right to the point with Nicodemus: there is a lack of regeneration by the Spirit.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (2004), 117. Also see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (1971), 183.

<sup>77</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 117.

In John 3:1-2 we first learn that Nicodemus is a man of the Pharisees and a ruler of the Jews, who comes to Jesus at night. “Night” is not an insignificant word for John but elsewhere is symbolic for the spiritual darkness in the world (cf. 9:4; 11:10; 13:30; 21:3). While Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night to find privacy with Jesus, probably trying to avoid the crowds and perhaps even the ridicule of his own fellow Pharisees, it is also possible that John may be conveying a spiritual reality by the term, namely, that Nicodemus comes to Jesus (the light of the world) as one who is in spiritual darkness. Such an interpretation fits with John’s use of “night” in 3:2, 9:4, 11:10, and 13:30, where the word “night” is used “metaphorically for moral and spiritual darkness, or, if it refers to the night-time hours, it bears the same moral and spiritual symbolism.”<sup>78</sup> Paul uses “light” and “darkness” as well to convey the miracle of new birth, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

**Born from Above.** Nicodemus begins the dialogue by stating, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (3:2). It may appear that Jesus avoids answering the assertion made by Nicodemus when he responds, “Truly truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (3:3). However, Jesus is simply getting to the heart of the matter, directing his attention to how it is one can know God in a saving way. Nicodemus seems to ask his question wanting an answer, namely, who are you Jesus? The answer Jesus gives shows that the only way one can truly know who God is (and therefore who Jesus is) is by being born again. In other words, Nicodemus will never believe Jesus is from God (let alone that Jesus is the Son of God) unless he first receives the new birth from the Spirit. Therefore, rather than Jesus telling Nicodemus “yes, I am from God” he responds by saying that unless one is born by the Spirit he will never

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<sup>78</sup>“Doubtless Nicodemus approached Jesus at night, but his own ‘night’ was blacker than he knew (cf. Hengstenberg, 1. 157-158; Lightfoot, p. 116).” D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (1991), 186.

understand who Jesus is in a saving way. As Morris and Carson note, it is not by human reasoning but by spiritual rebirth that one comes to understand Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

The phrase “born again” (γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν) can also be rendered “born from above.”<sup>80</sup> Either translation seems to be textually possible in Greek and conveys the message Jesus is communicating. To render the phrase “from above” indicates where this new birth comes from. The second birth is not one of the earth or of the flesh but rather is one that must come from heaven. Nicodemus took the phrase as “born again” or born a second time, as evidenced in how he is perplexed, wondering how a man can enter a second time into his mother’s womb (3:4). Therefore, translating the phrase “born again” is appropriate though “born from above” seems to demonstrate the point that Nicodemus misses, namely, this is not a second natural birth but rather a supernatural birth which must be accomplished by God and God alone.

**Born of the Spirit.** Jesus is insistent that if Nicodemus is not born again he will not enter the kingdom of God.<sup>81</sup> In theological language, Jesus is teaching the necessity of the new birth. The necessity of this new birth leads Jesus to also explain in 3:5-6 exactly what it means to be born again. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Jesus says that the birth he speaks of is not one of flesh but of the Spirit (v.6). If one is born of the Spirit he is spirit. John’s use of flesh (*sarx*) here is not the same as Paul’s use of flesh where flesh refers to the sinful, enslaved nature. Rather, John is referring to flesh as physical flesh. In other

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<sup>79</sup>Morris, *John*, 189; Carson, *John*, 187-88. The way Jesus answers Nicodemus has huge implications for how we understand the order of salvation. Unless one is first born again he cannot know Jesus in a saving way, he cannot believe in Jesus in a saving way.

<sup>80</sup>Literally top to bottom. See Köstenberger, *John*, 123.

<sup>81</sup>Notice, in 3:3 Jesus says unless a man is born again he cannot “see” the kingdom of God, while in 3:5 Jesus answers that a man cannot “enter” the kingdom of God. Seeing and entering are therefore synonymous.

words, the contrast is not between sinful flesh and spiritual new life but is between physical birth and spiritual birth or new life.<sup>82</sup> Hence, Nicodemus misunderstands the words of Jesus as referring to physical birth. Jesus must clarify for Nicodemus: I am not talking about an earthly birth of human flesh, but of a spiritual birth from above.

Furthermore, this second birth is of “water and the Spirit” (3:5). There has been considerable debate over what Jesus means by “water.” There are several interpretations: (1) Some have argued that water refers to physical birth and would therefore interpret Jesus as saying not only does one need to be born physically but one needs to be born spiritually. However, such an interpretation of water finds little support and natural birth is not usually designated by the phrase “from water.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, such an interpretation seems to contradict the point Jesus is trying to make, namely, that the birth he speaks of is not physical but spiritual. (2) Others have argued that Jesus is referring to water baptism.<sup>84</sup> Such a view argues that one is born by the Spirit through the waters of baptism. Such a view also looks to the sacramental language of John 6 to buttress a sacramental reading in John 3. However, such a view results in baptismal regeneration which contradicts 1 Peter 3:21. Moreover, if Jesus is referring to water baptism as that which the Spirit uses to effect regeneration, it is very surprising that no where else in John’s gospel is the phrase used again. Also, such a view contradicts what Jesus says about the Spirit as the wind, blowing wherever it wishes. A sacramental reading of water and Spirit, which ties regeneration to water, seems to restrict the Spirit to elements rather than affirm the sovereignty of the Spirit in the new birth. Last, many have doubted that

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<sup>82</sup>“When we come to verse 6 we must resist the temptation to interpret the word ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) in the usual Pauline sense, as meaning human nature totally enslaved by sin. For John the word ‘flesh’ often means ‘the physical weakness inseparable from human existence,’ and that is what it seems to mean here. So when Jesus affirms, ‘that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit’ (v.6, RSV), he is saying that what is merely born physically continues to be unregenerate human nature and nothing more, whereas what is born of the Holy Spirit is spiritual in its essence. One can pass from the lower level to the higher only through a supernatural new birth. Regeneration, in other words, brings about a radical change in our nature.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 98. Also see Morris, *John*, 219.

<sup>83</sup>Carson, *John*, 191.

<sup>84</sup>R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, ABS, 29a (1966), 1:141-44.

John even has the sacraments in mind in John 6 which, if true, undercuts the baptismal regeneration view altogether.<sup>85</sup> (3) The best interpretation of “water” is one that identifies “water” symbolically, as that which cleanses the believer.<sup>86</sup> Water is used to represent the spiritual washing that must take place for one to be regenerated.<sup>87</sup> Such an association of water with cleansing is supported in the Old Testament. As already seen, Yahweh promises in Ezekiel 36:25-27, “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (cf. Exod 30:20-21; 40:12; Lev 14:8-9; 15:5-27; Num 19; 2 Kings 5:10; Ps 51:2-3; Isa 1:16; 32:15-20; 44:3-5; Jer 33:8; Ezek 11:10-20; 39:29; Zech 13:1; 14:8; Joel 2:28). Ferguson explains,

The reference to water is, however, best interpreted in the light of the probable background to this section of Jesus’ teaching in the new covenant promise of Ezekiel 36:25-27 . . . In the rest of the passage, Jesus speaks of only one birth, the birth from above (3:3, 6-7). ‘Water and Spirit’ probably refers to the two-fold work of the Spirit in regeneration: he simultaneously gives new life and cleanses the heart.<sup>88</sup>

Water then is co-ordinate with Spirit demonstrating, as in Ezekiel 36, the cleansing, purifying nature of the Spirit in regeneration. Such a washing or cleansing is at the very essence of what it means to be born by the Spirit. Schreiner observes,

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<sup>85</sup>Carson, *John*, 192.

<sup>86</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 98.

<sup>87</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 94. Also see Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 121-22; Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:21.

<sup>88</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 122. Schreiner and Ferguson seem to agree on John’s use of water and Spirit in John 3. Schreiner states that “both ‘water and Spirit’ follow a single preposition (*ex*), indicating that water and Spirit refer not to two different notions but rather to the same spiritual reality.” Does the reference to the water refer to baptism as many commentators seem to think? Schreiner answers in the negative because “Nicodemus could not have grasped something that did not even exist yet, and Jesus insisted that Nicodemus, being a teacher, should grasp what Jesus is saying (John 3:10).” What about the baptism of John? Certainly not since “the role of the Baptist is subordinated to Jesus in John’s Gospel, and so it is quite unlikely that his baptism would be considered necessary to be part of the people of God.” To the contrary, water “signifies cleansing and purification of sins” and “God will give the Spirit so that human beings desire to obey him.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 462-63. Likewise, see Köstenberger, *John*, 123-24.

The word “rebirth” points to God’s creative work in which a person is radically changed, and the word “renewal” signifies the beginning of the new life and the end of the old. The washing is one that signifies new birth and new life. Both the new life and the new birth signified by the washing come from the Holy Spirit. He is the one who grants new life to believers and cleanses them from sin. Believers are born by the Spirit (Gal. 4:29), so their new life is a miraculous spiritual work.<sup>89</sup>

As Schreiner states, water is used to show the cleansing nature of the Spirit.<sup>90</sup>

Additionally, Jesus places emphasis (as will the rest of the New Testament writers) on the role of the Spirit in new birth. He who is “born of the Spirit is spirit” (3:6). In other words, those whom the Holy Spirit regenerates are made spiritual.<sup>91</sup> “Spirit” here must refer to the Holy Spirit (3:8; cf. John 1:13; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18), demonstrating that it is a birth of “divine and supernatural character.”<sup>92</sup> Such an emphasis on the Spirit does not begin in the New Testament but rather in the promises of the Old Testament. In the context of redemptive history, Yahweh had covenanted with his chosen people Israel. However, unlike Yahweh, Israel was unfaithful, disobeying the law he put in place (Exod 20), going after the gods of the surrounding nations (Judges 2:11-15). While all of Israel was God’s covenant people, not all within Israel believed. As Paul states, not all Israel is Israel (Rom 9:6). Therefore, God made a new covenant in which he promised to give his people a new heart and a new spirit so that all of his people will walk in his ways. Unlike the old covenant, in the new covenant Yahweh will regenerate *all* of those whom he covenants with so that all of them will keep his statutes and rules and obey him (Ezek 11:20). Yahweh declares that he will put his law within them and will write it on their hearts (Jer 31:33). He will circumcise their heart so that they will love the Lord with all of their heart and soul and live (Deut 30:6; cf. Col 2:11-14). He

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<sup>89</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 462-63.

<sup>90</sup>It is not uncommon for Jesus in John’s gospel to use water and Spirit interchangeably. Consider John 7:37-39 where Jesus, drawing from the Old Testament (cf. Isa 44:3; Ezek 36:25-27), says “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” John, interpreting Jesus, says that “this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive” (7:39a).

<sup>91</sup>“That is to say, the person born of the Holy Spirit is indwelt and directed by the Holy Spirit.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 104.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

will give them one heart and put “a new spirit” within them, removing their heart of stone and giving them a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19-20). Moreover, he will sprinkle clean water, cleansing his people from all their uncleanness, causing them to turn from idols and follow the true and living God (Ezek 36:25).<sup>93</sup>

**Birth is Monergistic.** Before moving into John 3:7-8, it is essential to observe that the language of “birth” in John 3:3-7 precludes the possibility of synergism. The miracle of human birth is a unilateral activity. There is nothing the infant does to be born. The infant does not birth itself. Nor is it the case that birth is conditioned upon the infants will to accept it or not. Likewise, the same is true with spiritual birth. Man is dead in his sins and spiritually in bondage to sin. His only hope is the new birth and yet such a birth is a unilateral, monergistic act of God. Man plays no role whatsoever in the spiritual birthing event. Rather, God acts alone to awaken new life, as demonstrated in the use of the *passive voice* which tells the reader that the recipient of this new birth is absolutely inactive. Carson writes, “Jesus’ reply is not framed in terms of what Nicodemus must do to see the kingdom, but in terms of what must happen to him. The point is made both by the nature of the demanded transformation (a man neither begets nor bears himself) and by the passive mood of the verb.”<sup>94</sup> Edwin Palmer explains the birth metaphor,

In birth a baby is completely helpless. He does not make himself. He is made. He is born. There is complete passivity on his part. Obviously a baby could not have said to his parents before he was born, “I determine that I shall now be born.” And so it is in the case of a spiritual birth. That which is not yet born cannot say, “I will to be born.” That which is dead spiritually cannot say, “I will to live.” And that which has not yet been created can never say, “I will to be created.” These are manifest impossibilities. Rather, as in the case of a baby, or creation yet to be, or a dead man, spiritual birth, creation, or life comes wholly at the discretion of the Holy Spirit. It is he who does the deciding, and not man. Man is entirely passive. The Holy Spirit

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<sup>93</sup>As Schreiner observes, though the Spirit is not mentioned in Jer 31 as it is in Ezek 36, there can be no doubt that the promise is in accord with what is said in Ezekiel. The two prophecies are complementary for the “law will be imprinted on the heart when the Spirit is given universally to the people of God.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 435. Another passage that should be taken into consideration is Joel 2:28-32. Like Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 11 and 36, Joel 2 also promises the accompaniment of the new age with the Spirit who brings salvation. “When the Spirit descends, the age of salvation will also arrive, so that those who call upon the Lord will be saved.” *Ibid.*, 434.

<sup>94</sup>D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 180. Also see Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 97.

is entirely sovereign, regenerating exactly whom he wills. Consequently, John could say that the children of God are “born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:13).<sup>95</sup>

John Murray is just as insightful,

We are as dependent upon the Holy Spirit as we are upon the action of our parents in connection with our natural birth. We were not begotten by our father because we decided to be. And we were not born of our mother because we decided to be. We were simply begotten and we were born. We did not decide to be born. This is the simple but too frequently overlooked truth which our Lord here teaches us. We do not have spiritual perception of the kingdom of God nor do we enter into it because we will to or decided to. If this privilege is ours it is because the Holy Spirit willed it and here all rests upon the Holy Spirit’s decision and action. He begets or bears when and where he pleases. Is this not the burden of verse 8? Jesus there compares the action of the Spirit to the action of the wind. The wind blows – this serves to illustrate the factuality, the certainty, the efficacy of the Spirit’s action. The wind blows where it wills – this enforces the sovereignty of the Spirit’s action. The wind is not at our beck and call; neither is the regenerate operation of the Spirit. “Thou canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth” – the Spirit’s work is mysterious. All points up the sovereignty, efficacy, and inscrutability of the Holy Spirit’s work in regeneration.<sup>96</sup>

In John 3:3-7 there is not a hint of indication that the new birth has anything to do with the human will. To the contrary, Jesus is emphasizing, through the image of birth, the passivity and inability of the sinner and the autonomy of God in creating new life. As Packer states, “Infants do not induce, or cooperate in, their own procreation and birth; no more can those who are ‘dead in trespasses and sins’ prompt the quickening operation of

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<sup>95</sup>Edwin H. Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: The Traditional Calvinistic Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 82-83. Likewise Boettner states, “And as we had nothing to do with our physical birth, but received it as a sovereign gift of God, we likewise have nothing to do with our spiritual birth but receive it also as a sovereign gift. Each occurred without any exercise of our own power, and even without our consent being asked. We no more resist the latter than we resist the former. And as we go ahead and live our own natural lives after being born, so we go ahead and work out our own salvation after being regenerated.” Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 165-66. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:136-37; Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:544; Van Mastricht, *Regeneration*, 37; John Murray, “Regeneration,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1976), 2:167-201; Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 123; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 463; Köstenberger, *John*, 124-25; J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 925; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. K. Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 1:367.

<sup>96</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 99. Likewise Frame, “All these expressions emphasize God’s sovereignty. New birth is obviously an act of God (note Ezek. 36:26-27; John 3:8). You didn’t give birth to yourself; you didn’t have anything to do with your own birth. Others gave birth to you. Your birth was a gift of grace. So your new birth was a gift of God, in this case God the Holy Spirit. (As effectual calling is an act of the Father, so regeneration is an act of the Holy Spirit, as Scripture usually represents it).” John M. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R, 2006), 186.

God's Spirit within them (see Eph 2:1-10).<sup>97</sup> This same principle of monergism is again taught by Jesus as he further explains the role of the Spirit in John 3:7-8.

**The Sovereignty of the Spirit.** In John 3:7-8 Jesus turns to the sovereignty of the Spirit in regeneration. Already Jesus has indicated that one must be born of water and Spirit (John 3:5), demonstrating that the new birth is effected by the power of the Spirit.<sup>98</sup> Two points demonstrate the sovereignty of the Spirit. First, in 3:1-8 the new birth is described in the passive voice and it is justified to conclude that here we see examples of the divine passive being used. Hamilton explains that “this new birth is not something that people do to or for themselves. Each time the verb *gennaō* appears in John 3:3-8 it is passive (3:3, 4 [2x], 5, 6 [2x], 7, 8). John 1:13 (‘born of God’) provides clear warrant for seeing these as divine passives. God causes people to experience the new birth from above by the Spirit.”<sup>99</sup> Hamilton continues, “The need for new birth is connected to another clear feature in this passage: the stress on human inability to experience God’s kingdom apart from this new birth. The word *dunamai* appears five times in 3:2-5 and again in v.9. The new birth is brought about by God, and without it people are unable to see/enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>100</sup> In summary, the sovereignty of the Spirit is demonstrated by both the presence of the divine passive and the emphasis Jesus places on human inability.

Second, the sovereignty of the Spirit is manifested in how Jesus compares the Spirit to the wind. Jesus states, “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You [*plural*] must be

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<sup>97</sup>J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” 925. Also see idem, “Call, Calling,” 184.

<sup>98</sup>“The expression ‘born of . . . the Spirit’ designates the divine agent of this new birth: the Holy Spirit. Though previously Jesus had only said that this was a birth ‘from above,’ here he specifically identifies the divine author. In this new birth we are therefore utterly dependent on the sovereign activity of the Spirit of God.” Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 97-98. On God causing the new birth from above by the Spirit, see S. S. Smalley, “‘The Paraclete’: Pneumatology in the Johannine Gospel and Apocalypse,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John*, ed. R. A. Culpepper and C. C. Black (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 290; E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. F. N. Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 213.

<sup>99</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 130.

<sup>100</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 130.

born again.’ The wind [spirit] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” In the Greek the word for Spirit (πνεῦμα) is also wind and likewise the word for wind is also spirit. Jesus is drawing a clear parallel here between wind and Spirit (as made obvious by 3:8), so that when he speaks of one he is speaking of the other.<sup>101</sup> He is comparing the effects of the wind to the effects of the Spirit. It is very important to note that the phrase the “wind blows where it wishes” conveys the sovereignty of the Spirit. The Spirit is not controlled by the human will but works as God pleases to bring about new life. As Hoekema states, “The action of the Spirit in regenerating people is as sovereign as the wind which blows wherever it pleases.”<sup>102</sup> Therefore, a regeneration dependent upon man’s will to believe or a regeneration where God and man cooperate is ruled out by this text. As Schreiner rightly says, the Spirit’s role in the new birth is sovereign because, like the wind, he works apart from human control (John 3:8). “The Spirit grants new life sovereignly and unexpectedly, producing new life where humans least expect it to occur. New life comes not from human effort or human accomplishment but from the miraculous work of God’s Spirit.”<sup>103</sup> Berkhof also puts the matter acutely,

The only adequate view is that of the Church of all ages, that the Holy Spirit is the efficient cause of regeneration. This means that the Holy Spirit works directly on the heart of man and changes its spiritual condition. There is no co-operation of the sinner in this work whatsoever. It is the work of the Holy Spirit directly and exclusively, Ezek. 11:19; John 1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:13.

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<sup>101</sup>Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel According to John*. Trans. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 129.

<sup>102</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 98.

<sup>103</sup>Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 463. Likewise, in John 7:37b-38 Jesus also makes reference to the sovereign Spirit when he says, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” As John 7:39 explains, the rivers of living water refer to the Holy Spirit. Schreiner notes that the “life-giving water that streams from believers should be traced back to the Spirit.” Moreover, the correlation with John 4 is impossible to ignore. Like John 7, in John 4 Jesus again uses water to refer to the Spirit. “The water that Jesus promises likely refers represents the Spirit, given the identification between the Spirit and living waters in John 7:39. The Spirit quenches human thirst forever and will spring up to life eternal, bringing to believers the life of the age to come. This is another way of saying that the Spirit grants life, since human beings depend on water for survival. The Spirit himself satisfies the thirst of the human soul, so that believers slake their thirst by drinking of him.” *Ibid.*, 464. On the sovereignty of the Spirit in regeneration also see Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 82-83.

Regeneration, then, is to be conceived monergistically. God alone works, and the sinner has no part in it whatsoever.<sup>104</sup>

Likewise, Ferguson states,

The New Testament's statements on regeneration emphasize the sovereign, monergistic, activity of the Spirit. The metaphor of birth itself implies not only a radical new beginning, but one which is never autonomous. The divine monergism behind it is spelled out elsewhere in antitheses: we are born, not of our own will, but of God's decision (Jn. 1:12); from above, not from below; of the Spirit, not of the flesh (Jn. 3:3, 5-6); of God, not of man (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18); by God's choice, not our own; through his word, not out of the energies of an autonomous will (Jas. 1:18). The priority here is accorded to God, not to man. The reason for this is that man is 'flesh'.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Hamilton also explains how the Spirit's will, not man's will, is decisive:

The new birth from above is a "second birth" (see 3:4-5). The stress on ability (five uses of *dunamai* in vv. 2-5) suggests that the new birth brings a new ability. Regeneration, then, involves the Spirit *enabling* people to believe. Being "born of God" (1:13) and being "born of the Spirit" (3:6) in John's Gospel are equivalent. As in John 1:11-13, the new birth in John 3 is for those who "receive" what Jesus says (3:11) and "believe" Him (3:12). No one is able to believe Jesus, however, unless God draws that person to Jesus (6:44, 65), and the Spirit is like the wind, which "blows where it wishes" (3:8). Those to whom the Spirit is pleased to give new birth (3:6) are those whom the Father draws to Jesus (6:44), and they believe Him not because of human will, but because they have been born of God (1:12-13).<sup>106</sup>

Berkhof, Schreiner, Ferguson, and Hamilton all agree: Jesus emphasizes the sovereignty of the Spirit in producing the new birth apart from the will of man. As is yet to be seen, the rest of the New Testament also testifies to the sovereignty of God in the new birth. Old and New Testament authors alike use many other biblical analogies to demonstrate the sovereignty of the Spirit including: circumcising the heart (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31-34); writing the law on the heart (Jer 31:31-34); removing the heart of stone and replacing it

<sup>104</sup>Emphasis added. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 473.

<sup>105</sup>Emphasis added. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 119. Other Reformed works of the nineteenth and twentieth-century which also emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in monergistic regeneration include: Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 43-55, 293-353; Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008); idem, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:499-508, 4:29-95; George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 162-203; Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*, 77-86; Arthur W. Pink, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 42-53, 79-84; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 29ff; Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 708-21; J. Van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Trans. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008) 586.

<sup>106</sup>Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 131. On being "born of God" (1:13) and being "born of the Spirit" (3:6) as being equivalent see J. H. Bernard, *The Gospel According to St. John*, ICC (1928), 1:105; Carson, *John*, 189.

with a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; cf. Jer 24:7); breathing new life into dead dry bones (Ezek 37); shining light out of darkness and the very act of creating itself (2 Cor 4:6 and 5:17); creating man anew (2 Cor 5:17); the resurrection of a spiritually dead corpse (Rom 6:4; Eph 2:1; 1 Pet 1:3); washing and renewing (Titus 3:4-7).<sup>107</sup> Turretin rightly observes that all of these “imply the invincible and supreme power of God.”<sup>108</sup> Therefore, to conclude that man in some way cooperates with God in regeneration (synergism) or that man’s will (*liberum arbitrium*) in the act of faith is the cause of regeneration, so that conversion causally precedes regeneration, is an assault on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and furthermore denies the proper meaning of the biblical imageries used of the Spirit’s work in regeneration.<sup>109</sup> Murray states, “It should be specially noted that even faith that Jesus is the Christ is the effect of regeneration. This is, of course, a clear implication of John 3: 3-8. . . . We are not born again by faith or repentance or conversion; we repent and believe because we have been regenerated.”<sup>110</sup> Reymond consents, “regeneration is essential to faith as the latter’s causal prius.”<sup>111</sup>

To conclude John 3, it needs to be said that to reject what Jesus is teaching in these verses about man’s passivity and God’s sovereignty is no light matter. John Murray appropriately warns of the seriousness of interpreting Jesus wrongly here:

It has often been said that we are passive in regeneration. This is a true and proper statement. For it is simply the precipitate of what our Lord has taught us here. We may not like it. We may recoil against it. It may not fit into our way of thinking and it may not accord with the time-worn expressions which are the coin of our evangelism. But if we recoil against it, we do well to remember that this recoil is recoil against Christ. And what shall we answer when we appear before him whose

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<sup>107</sup>For a similar listing, see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 75.

<sup>108</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:532.

<sup>109</sup>John Murray states, “We are wholly dependent upon the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sole agent or author. Man is the subject of an action of which the Holy Spirit is the sole author. Not by synergism or co-operation do we enter into the kingdom of God.” Murray, “Regeneration,” 183-84. For a detailed analysis on the sovereignty and lordship of the Holy Spirit see Douglas Kelly, *Systematic Theology* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), 1:340ff.

<sup>110</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 103.

<sup>111</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 709.

truth we rejected and with whose gospel we tampered? But blessed be God that the gospel of Christ is one of sovereign, efficacious, irresistible regeneration. If it were not the case that in regeneration we are passive, the subjects of an action of which God alone is the agent, there would be no gospel at all. For unless God by sovereign, operative grace had turned our enmity to love and our disbelief to faith we would never yield the response of faith and love.<sup>112</sup>

**John 1:12-13 and 1 John 2:29;  
3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18**

**1 John 5:1.** Just as the gospel of John teaches that the grace that regenerates is monergistic, preceding man's faith, so also in John's first epistle is the same truth evident. Consider the following, with special attention to the grammatical construction:

If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness *has been* born of him (1 John 2:29).

No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he *has been* born of God (1 John 3:9).

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves *has been* born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7).

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ *has been* born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him (1 John 5:1).

For everyone who *has been* born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4)?

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him and the evil one does not touch him (1 John 5:18).

The grammar in each of these passages is absolutely essential. Beginning with 1 John 5:1, which Piper calls “the clearest text in the New Testament on the relationship between faith and the new birth,”<sup>113</sup> the Greek reads, Πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν γεννήσαντα ἀγαπᾷ [καὶ] τὸν

<sup>112</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 99.

<sup>113</sup>Piper, *Finally Alive* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2009), 118; also see 138-39. It could be objected from the outset that the logical priority of regeneration to faith in 1 John is unfounded because John never had this debate over the *ordo salutis* in his mind. As Burdick writes, “this verse is not written to prove either the Calvinistic or the Arminian *ordo salutis*.” Donald W. Burdick, *Letters of John the Apostle* (Chicago: Moody, 1985), 358. However, as Snoeberger comments, “Admittedly, the present argument was probably not filling John's mind as he penned these words; however, it does not follow that he is indifferent toward the issue. Two factors, namely, the syntax and the purpose for writing, militate against such a conclusion.” Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith,” 82.

γεγεννημένον ἐξ αὐτοῦ. Notice, “believes” (πιστεύων) in the phrase “Everyone who believes” (or “Everyone believing”) is a present active participle in the nominative case, indicating ongoing faith.<sup>114</sup> In contrast, when John says all those believing “*have been* born of him,” “have been born” (θεοῦ γεγέννηται) is a perfect passive indicative, meaning that it is an action that has already taken place in the past (it is completed) and has ongoing effects in the present. As Daniel Wallace explains, the perfect speaks “of an event accomplished in the past (in the indicative mood, that is) with results existing afterwards—the perfect speaking of results existing in the present.”<sup>115</sup> In 1 John 5:1, the action in the perfect passive indicative (regeneration) precedes and causes the action in the present active participle (faith). The result is clear: God’s act of regeneration precedes belief.<sup>116</sup> As John Stott explains,

The combination of the present tense (believes) and perfect tense [has been born] is important. It shows clearly that believing is the consequence, not the cause, of the new birth. Our present, continuing activity of believing is the result, and therefore, the evidence, of our past experience of new birth by which we became and remain God’s children.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>On the use of the participle, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics, An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 613ff.

<sup>115</sup>“The force of the perfect tense is simply that it describes an event that, completed in the past (we are speaking of the perfect indicative here), has results existing in the present time (i.e., in relation to the time of the speaker.” Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 572-73. Or as Zerwick states, the perfect tense is used for “indicating not the past action as such but the present ‘state of affairs’ resulting from the past action.” M. Zerwick, *Biblical Greek Illustrated by Examples* (Rome: Pontificii Instituti Biblici, 1963), 96. Likewise Mounce states, “The Greek perfect describes an action that was brought to completion and whose effects are felt in the present. Because it describes a completed action, by implication the action described by the perfect verb normally occurred in the past.” William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 225. Moreover, it is not the case that John is using the perfect tense randomly or without intention. As Moulton observes, the perfect tense is “the most important, exegetically, of all the Greek Tenses” and as Wallace observes, “when it is used, there is usually a deliberate choice on the part of the writer.” J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), 1:140.

<sup>116</sup>“Here, as in the other verses just considered, ‘has been born’ is perfect, passive, indicative; and the same logic applies. One expression of being born of God, says John, is that the person born again believes that Jesus is the Messiah. Presumably the opposite, then, is true. If one is not born again, he cannot believe that Jesus is the Messiah, just as if he is not born again, he cannot do what is right and he cannot love. Being born again, then, gives rise to doing right, to loving others; and it gives rise to believing that Christ truly is the Messiah. Faith in Christ, then, flows out of the life of the one who has been regenerated.” Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 20.

<sup>117</sup>John Stott, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 175. Also see White on this issue in Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 198-201.

The implication, therefore, is that it is God’s act of regeneration that creates the faith man needs to believe. Peterson and Williams similarly conclude,

The perfect-tense verb in 1 John 5:1, “has been born,” indicates that the new birth is the cause of faith in Christ, even as the new birth is the cause of godliness and love in the passages cited above [1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:18]. As a result of God’s grace in regeneration, all those who have been born of God believe savingly in the Son of God.<sup>118</sup>

Likewise, Robert Yarbrough states, “In Johannine theology, spiritual rebirth seems to precede and ultimately create faith: those who believe do so not so much as the result of human volition as of prior divine intention (cf. John 1:12-13; Akin 2001: 189 misses this by citing 1:12 but not 1:13; more aptly, see Peterson and Williams 2004: 188-189).”<sup>119</sup>

It should be noted that in regards to 1 John 5:1, the New International Version (NIV) should not be followed. The English Standard Version (ESV) correctly translates the perfect verb as a perfect, but the NIV translates the perfect as if it were a present tense verb.<sup>120</sup> “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ *is born* of God,” could be taken to mean that one’s faith produces or results in regeneration. Strangely, the NIV translates the same perfect in 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; and 5:4 as a perfect tense verb (“*has been born*”).<sup>121</sup> Why the NIV is inconsistent when it comes to 1 John 5:1 is unclear, but it gives the impression that faith precedes regeneration when that is not the case.

**1 John 2:29.** As seen above, the use of the perfect in 1 John 5:1 can also be found in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, and 5:4. In 1 John 2:29 the Greek reads, ἐὰν εἰδῆτε ὅτι δίκαιός ἐστιν, γινώσκετε ὅτι καὶ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγέννηται. Those who are doing righteousness *have been born of God* (γεγέννηται). The grammar here is parallel to 1 John 5:1. The phrase “*have been born of him*” is a perfect passive

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<sup>118</sup>Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 189. Also see Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 100-01.

<sup>119</sup>Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, BECNT (2008), 270.

<sup>120</sup>Peterson and Williams also makes this observation. *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 188.

<sup>121</sup>Unfortunately, the New American Standard Bible (NASB) makes the same mistake as the NIV in 1 John 5:1. However, unlike the NIV the NASB continues to make this mistake not only with 5:1 but with 2:29; 3:9; 4:7 and 5:4 as well. Again, the ESV is far superior at this point.

indicative (from γεννάω, to beget or bring forth), while the phrase “everyone who practices righteousness” (πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην) is a present active participle. Again, the perfect here refers to the new birth, an act that has been completed in the past and has continuing results in the present. Practicing righteous (present tense) is what results from the new birth. Or as Stott says, “A person’s righteousness is thus the evidence of his new birth, not the cause or condition of it.”<sup>122</sup> Similarly Murray states, “In 2:29, we must infer, that the reason why the person in view does righteousness is that he is begotten of God.”<sup>123</sup> To interpret 2:29 as if regeneration came after faith would mean that one’s own righteousness would precede regeneration. This interpretation would evidently teach works-righteousness. Ware explains,

The perfect tense normally indicates past action that continues into the present. So John is saying that the person who has been and is born again is like this: he does what is right. That is, being born again accounts for doing right. This surely means that the new birth precedes a righteous life; otherwise John would be teaching works-righteousness (i.e., doing ‘what is right’ accounting for being born again)! No, rather, regeneration accounts for the “right” sort of actions and behavior of which John speaks.<sup>124</sup>

It must be observed that Arminians find themselves in a number of contradictions at this point. For example, concerning 1 John 2:29 I. Howard Marshall agrees that practicing righteousness is the result of the new birth not the other way around. “What John is trying to stress is that doing what is right is the consequence of spiritual birth; hence if a person does what is right, this is a sign of spiritual birth.” And again, “True righteousness (the kind shown by Jesus) is possible only on the basis of spiritual birth.”<sup>125</sup> When Marshall comes to 1 John 5:1 he begins as he did in 2:29 by saying, “Faith is thus a sign of the new birth, just as love (4:7) and doing what is right (2:29; 3:9) are also indications that a

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<sup>122</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Letters of John*, TNTC, 19 (1998), 122. Likewise Burge, “But it does not work the other way around. Doing righteousness is not a precondition for being born of him, nor is it the means to divine birth.” Gary M. Burge, *The Letters of John*, NIVAC (1996), 145.

<sup>123</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 102. Similarly Frame, “Everyone who practices righteousness must have been born again, because you cannot do righteousness without being born again.” Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 186.

<sup>124</sup>Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 19.

<sup>125</sup>I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 169.

person has been born of God.”<sup>126</sup> Marshall sounds like a Calvinist. It is obvious even to Marshall that in 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7 doing righteousness, avoiding sin, and loving are all the result of the new birth. One would then expect Marshall to say the same about 1 John 5:1. After all, 5:1 has the same grammatical structure as 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7. Moreover, Marshall begins his commentary on 5:1 in this direction when he says “Faith is thus a sign of the new birth,” just like love and doing righteousness. However, Marshall immediately qualifies such a statement by saying,

At the same time, however, faith is a condition of the new birth: “to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God” (Jn. 1:12). Here, however, John is not trying to show how a person experiences the new birth; his aim is rather to indicate the evidence which shows that a person stands in the continuing relationship of a child to God his Father: that evidence is that he holds to the true faith about Jesus.<sup>127</sup>

Marshall’s logic seems to contradict itself. He begins by saying that faith is a sign of the new birth but then he says faith is a condition of the new birth. It is clear that for Marshall, saying faith is a sign of the new birth is not the same as saying that faith is caused by the new birth and only the result of the new birth. For Marshall, regeneration cannot occur without man having faith first. Consequent to regeneration, faith continues and so Marshall can simultaneously say faith is the condition of the new birth and yet faith is the sign of the new birth as shown in 1 John 5:1.<sup>128</sup> Two responses are in order. First, Marshall would never apply his exegesis of 5:1 to 2:29 (“everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him”). Why not? Because it would imply works righteousness! If Marshall was to be consistent he would have to apply the same hermeneutic to 2:29 that he does in 5:1 and it would sound like this:

“Righteousness is thus a sign of the new birth, just as love (4:7) and doing what is right (3:9f) are also indications that a person has been born of God. At the same time, however, righteousness is a condition of the new birth . . .”

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid.

<sup>128</sup>Smalley makes the same move that Marshall does. See Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC, 51 (1984), 266-67.

Notice how closely this parallels his comment on 5:1,

Faith is thus a sign of the new birth, just as love (4:7) and doing what is right (2:29; 3:9f) are also indications that a person has been born of God. At the same time, however, faith is a condition of the new birth . . .”<sup>129</sup>

It is astonishing that it can be so obvious to Marshall that in 2:29 righteousness could never be the condition of regeneration, but in 5:1, a verse with the same grammatical structure, faith can be the condition of regeneration. In the end, Marshall refuses to apply his same method of exegesis in 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7 to 5:1. Why? Evidently, to do so would mean that faith precedes regeneration and is caused by regeneration, a conclusion unacceptable to an Arminian like Marshall. Therefore, instead, Marshall has allowed his Arminian presuppositions to alter the plain meaning of the text.

Second, Marshall not only is inconsistent in his exegesis but he completely ignores the grammar of the text in 5:1. Marshall’s statements in 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7 seem to demonstrate (though he never says it explicitly) that he has knowledge of the fact that a perfect passive is being used in the phrase “have been born of God.” However, when Marshall comes to 5:1 he ignores the grammar altogether and actually interprets 5:1 as faith being the condition of regeneration, which is the exact opposite of what the text says grammatically, namely, that regeneration (perfect passive indicative) results in faith (present active participle). This negligence of the grammatical structure is poor exegesis on Marshall’s part.

**John 1:12-13.** Marshall, however, not only misconstrues the meaning of 1 John 5:1, but he does so by jumping over the plain meaning of 5:1 in order to appeal to John 1:12. John 1:12-13 reads, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.” It must be observed that such a move gives the reader the impression that Marshall does not want to deal with what 5:1

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<sup>129</sup>Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 226.

actually says on its own terms but rather he wants to allow *his* interpretation of John 1:12 to be the key factor in providing an alternative interpretation to 5:1.<sup>130</sup>

Furthermore, Marshall's appeal to John 1:12 is unfounded precisely because John 1:12-13 actually proves the opposite of what Marshall wants it to say. Marshall believes that John 1:12 proves that faith is the condition of regeneration for the text says that all who received Jesus, who believed in him (faith), God gave the right to become children of God.<sup>131</sup> There are several problems with Marshall's interpretation here. First, Marshall assumes that the phrase "become children of God" is synonymous with "new birth."<sup>132</sup> However, Marshall never shows evidence that this is the case. Why should the reader assume that the phrase "become children of God" is synonymous with the new birth? Why not interpret becoming a child of God as the result of the new birth? Why not interpret such a phrase as referring to adoption, which is produced by the new birth? Indeed, for several reasons I would argue that the phrase "become children of God" is referring to adoption, not regeneration. (1) The phrase "children of God" in John 1:12 is also used by Paul in Romans 8:15-16 to refer to adoption, not regeneration. Paul writes, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom 8:15-16; cf. Eph 1:5). Paul's language of adoption is again reiterated when he says in Galatians 3:26, "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (cf. Gal 4:5). As a consequence to believing

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<sup>130</sup>To clarify, I am not saying that it is unjustified to appeal to other texts (especially by the same author in this case) in order to interpret properly. This would be to deny the analogy of Scripture, which I do not. However, in Marshall's case, it seems as if his appeal to John 1:12 is so that he does not have to interpret 5:1 as he already did interpret 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7. Moreover, as will be seen above, even in Marshall's appeals to John 1:12 his bias becomes evident when he only quotes verse 12 and ignores verse 13, which has much to say concerning his interpretation. On appealing to the gospel of John to interpret 1 John see Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (2000), 157.

<sup>131</sup>Also Barrett, "This birth is conditional upon receiving Christ and believing on his name." C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 137. Contra H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: n.p., 1911), 2:534; Morris, *John*, 101; Barnabas Lindars, "The Fourth Gospel an Act of Contemplation," in *Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. F. L. Cross (London: A. R. Mowbray, 1957), 27.

<sup>132</sup>Likewise Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 124.

(John 1:12) or having faith (Gal 3:26), one is adopted into God's family as a son.<sup>133</sup> (2)

Adoption, as Snoeberger observes, is emptied of meaning "if the regeneration has already placed the believer into the family of God and given him all the privileges of heirs."<sup>134</sup>

(3) Many scholars agree that the phrase "become children of God" in John 1:12 is a reference to adoption, not regeneration.<sup>135</sup>

Second, in order to argue that the phrase "become children of God" is referring to the new birth or regeneration,<sup>136</sup> one must take a leap that is not warranted by the text and assume the text reads that one becomes a child of God because he believes. However, the text does not make such a causal correlation in 1:12. As Ware explains,

Notice that John does not say, 'He gave them the right to be children of God because they believed in His name.' Rather, he merely notes that these two things both happen: they are given the right to be children of God, and they believe in his name. What he does not say in verse 12 is that becoming children of God results from their faith.<sup>137</sup>

Michaels makes a similar observation between "believing" in verse 12 and being born again in verse 13.

It is important to notice here what is *not* said. The text defines no temporal or causal relationship between "believing" and being "born of God," either to the effect that

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<sup>133</sup>It is also important to keep in mind that while those who believe are adopted by God here and now, adoption is also a future hope and reality, something which cannot also be said of regeneration, which is a one-time event at initiation. Paul states in Romans 8:23 that we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as "we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Schreiner and Caneday comment, "Here adoptions is said to become ours when our bodies are redeemed, that is, on the last day. We conclude, then, that there is an already-but-not-yet dimension to adoption as well. As Christians we are adopted into God's family, yet we will not experience the consummation of our adoption until the day of the resurrection." Surely the same cannot be said of regeneration. Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 68. On adoption in Pauline literature see Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

<sup>134</sup>Snoeberger, "Regeneration," 77-78.

<sup>135</sup>Snoeberger, "Regeneration," 78. Also see Carson, *John*, 126; Ridderbos, *John*, 45; John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 1:17; Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 81, 87, 132-34; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 96, 185-87; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 738; Reymond, *New Systematic Theology*, 759.

<sup>136</sup>"In John being a child is always rooted in a new birth 'of God,' 'of the Spirit,' or 'from above' (cf. vs. 13; 3:3f)." Ridderbos, *John*, 45-46.

<sup>137</sup>Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," 20. Also notice the insight of Michaels, "It clearly does *not* mean that 'those who received him' have a choice of either becoming 'children of God' or not!" J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (2010), 69.

individuals are born of God *because* they believe [contra Bultmann], or that they believe because they are *already* born of God.<sup>138</sup>

In fact, causal language does not come into view until verse 13 which actually prohibits the new birth being conditioned on man's free will, bringing us to the third problem.

Third, we cannot ignore verse 13, which reads, "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Why does Marshall not quote verse 13? Could it be that verse 13 actually would prohibit his interpretation of verse 12? Anthony Hoekema exposes such a textual bias,

Arminian theologians often quote verse 12 to prove that faith must precede regeneration: 'To those who believed in his name he gave the right to become children of God.' But we must not separate verse 12 from verse 13. The latter verse tells us that being children of God is not the result of natural descent or human decision, but of divine activity alone. It is, of course, true that those who believed in Christ did receive the right to become children of God – but behind their faith was the miraculous deed of God whereby they were spiritually reborn. They were born not of man but of God.<sup>139</sup>

Verse 13 actually clarifies and qualifies verse 12 stating, "who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." In other words, being born is in no way due to the "will of man."<sup>140</sup> Since the will of man is involved in faith, there is no way that faith could precede being born again.<sup>141</sup>

To conclude verse 13, John makes it clear that the new birth is *not* conditioned upon man's will, but is completely and only the act of God. Ware is right when he states, "What accounts for them having the right to be God's children, and what accounts for their believing in Christ's name, is that they had been born of God."<sup>142</sup> Robert Reymond also comments on John 1:13,

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<sup>138</sup>Michaels, *John*, 71.

<sup>139</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 96.

<sup>140</sup>"Will" here can also mean "desire." Michaels notes that will "refers simply to choice or initiative." Michaels, *John*, 72.

<sup>141</sup>Snoeberger, "Regeneration," 80, expresses this point in the following syllogism:  
 A: No act of the human will can inaugurate regeneration.  
 B: Faith is an act of human will.  
 C: Therefore, Faith cannot inaugurate regeneration.

<sup>142</sup>Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," 20. Also see Snoeberger, "Regeneration," 80.

By this particular reference to God's "begetting" activity John refers to regeneration, and clearly suggests by his statement that, while faith is the instrumental precondition to justification and adoption, regeneration is the necessary precondition and efficient cause of faith in Jesus Christ. In short, regeneration causally precedes faith.<sup>143</sup>

Herman Ridderbos is just as adamant,

However, against this [the interpretation of John 1:12-13 which views faith as preceding regeneration] it has to be asserted that the concluding statement in vs. 13 traces the entire gift of being a child of God, including the manner in which it is effected, to its deepest ground: "procreation" by God. The idea that faith as a human choice should precede that birth and therefore that in some sense a person should have this rebirth of God at his or her disposal not only seems absurd but is also at variance with statements like this in 1 Jn. 5:1: "Everyone who believes . . . is born of God." By saying this one does not in any way detract from the call and invitation to believe so emphatically issued in John's Gospel, a call addressed to all without distinction.<sup>144</sup>

Therefore, when Marshall concludes from verse 12 that regeneration is conditioned upon man's faith he does so in direct conflict with the rest of the sentence in verse 13 where John is clear that the new birth is in no way conditioned upon man.<sup>145</sup>

**1 John 3:9.** The same grammar and logic in 2:29 applies to 1 John 3:9, "No one born of God [Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ; perfect passive participle] makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning [οὐ δύναται ἀμαρτάνειν; present active infinitive] because he *has been* born of God [θεοῦ γεγέννηται; perfect passive indicative]."<sup>146</sup> 1 John 3:9 is very similar to 1 John 5:18, "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him." In 3:9 and 5:18 the sinner would be expected to not make a practice of sinning so that he may be born again,

<sup>143</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 708.

<sup>144</sup>Ridderbos, *John*, 47.

<sup>145</sup>Such an interpretation is also in tension with what we have already seen is true in 1 John 5:1. Carson, interpreting John 1:12, states, "The tenses and the context of 1 John 5:1 strongly argue that faith, like love (1 John 4:8) is the *evidence* of the new birth, not its cause." Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 182.

<sup>146</sup>Kruse rightly states that "we may say that to be born of God here means being brought to new spiritual life by the will of God and through the agency of his Spirit." Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 124. For the OT background to spiritual rebirth see Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 234-35. Also see page 172 where Smalley mentions the perfect tense.

if the Arminian view is affirmed. The text, however, never warrants this. Instead, the believer is not to make a practice of sinning because he has been born of God and consequently “God’s seed abides in him.” Once again, like 5:1 and 2:29 we see the same grammatical structure. The perfect verb (has been born of God) is what grounds and results in the present active infinitive (makes a practice of sinning). The point then is that it is *because* one has been born again that he does not make a practice of sinning. As John Murray concludes, “He does not sin because God’s seed abides in him. Now this abiding seed alludes clearly to the divine impartation which took place in the divine begetting. It is this divine begetting with its abiding consequence that is the *cause* of not doing sin. Hence regeneration is logically and causally prior to the not doing sin.”<sup>147</sup>

**1 John 4:7.** In 1 John 4:7 we also see the priority of the new birth, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves *has been* born of God and knows God” (Αγαπητοί, ἀγαπῶμεν ἀλλήλους, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἀγαπῶν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται καὶ γινώσκει τὸν θεόν.). Loving (ὁ ἀγαπῶν; present active participle) is the result of having been born of God (θεοῦ γεγέννηται; perfect passive indicative).<sup>148</sup> Love is from God and until God regenerates the dead heart, the sinner cannot love God or neighbor. Therefore, “Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God” (4:7). As John states in 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” John does not say, “He loves us because we first loved him.” Rather, it is God’s love that precedes the sinner’s and it is God’s love which enables and produces the sinner’s faith,

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<sup>147</sup>“And again, John tells us that ‘he cannot sin because he is begotten of God,’ an express statement to the effect that regeneration is the cause why this person cannot sin. So the reason why a person cannot sin is that that person is regenerated – the order cannot be reversed. In this verse, therefore, we are informed that regeneration is the source and explanation of the breach with sin which is characteristic of every regenerate person.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 101.

<sup>148</sup>“The first verb is a perfect tense, suggesting that divine rebirth is past, yet bearing fruit in the present. A person once converted now demonstrates the fruit of that conversion. The second verb is a present tense, implying that love is connected to an ongoing awareness of who God is.” Burge, *The Letters of John*, 186. Smalley also sees love as the effect of the new birth from God rather than the cause. See Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 238.

evidenced in love for God and neighbor.<sup>149</sup> This same truth is affirmed in 5:1 where John states that not only is belief in Jesus the result of being born of God but so also is love for the Father who has sent his only Son. Again, love for the Father and the Son is caused by the new birth. But notice, 1 John 4:7 not only says that regeneration precedes love but it also precedes saving knowledge of God. John states that “whoever loves has been born of God and *knows God*.” “Knows” is not referring to pure cognitive, factual data of God’s existence and acts in the world. Rather, “knows,” like love, is tied to saving faith. To have saving faith in God is to know God personally. To know God is to have saving faith in God. Again, it must be concluded that saving knowledge of God is the result of God regenerating the believer, not the other way around.

**1 John 5:4, 18.** Finally, 1 John 5:4 is another text that supports the Reformed view. John states, “For everyone who has been born of God [γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ; perfect passive participle] overcomes the world [νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον; present active indicative]. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” What is John referring to when he says that we overcome the world? John is clear in the very next sentence: “And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.” So it is faith that overcomes the world and John goes on to say that such faith that overcomes is faith that “believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” Again, saving faith is the result of being born of God. Just as righteousness, rejecting sin, and loving God are the result of being born of God so also is having faith which overcomes the world. To reverse this order, as Arminians so often do, is to teach works-righteousness. How unorthodox it would be to say that being righteous (2:29), resisting sin (3:9), loving God and neighbor (4:7), having saving knowledge of God (4:7 and 5:1), possessing a faith that overcomes the world (5:4), and abstaining from sin (5:18) all result in regeneration. Though Arminians would never say such a thing, their reading of the text (that faith precedes regeneration)

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<sup>149</sup>“Again, ‘has been born’ is perfect, passive, indicative, and so the idea is clear: being born of God and knowing God are the basis by which one is able to love.” Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 19.

inevitably ends up in such a direction. In contrast, it is the Calvinist who is exegeting the text according to its proper grammatical structure. All of these benefits, faith included, come from the fountain of regeneration, not the other way around.<sup>150</sup> The same principle is evident in 1 John 5:18, “We know that everyone who has been born of God [γεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ; perfect passive participle] does not keep on sinning [οὐχ ἁμαρτάνει; present active indicative], but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.” The reason one does not keep on sinning (which is surely a faith involved deed) is because one has already been born again. Reymond states, “Though he does not say so in so many words, it is surely appropriate, because of his earlier pattern of speech in 1 John 3:9, to understand him to mean that the cause behind one’s not sinning is God’s regenerating activity.” Therefore, John’s “established pattern of speech would suggest that he intended to say that God’s regenerating activity is the *cause* of one’s believing that Jesus is the Christ, and conversely that such faith is the effect of that regenerating work.”<sup>151</sup>

In conclusion, these passages teach that regeneration precedes and brings about the believer’s faith. Schreiner makes two observations which have been seen,

First, in every instance the verb “born” (*gennaō*) is in the perfect tense, denoting an action that precedes the human actions of practicing righteousness, avoiding sin, loving, or believing. Second, no evangelical would say that before we are born again we must practice righteousness, for such a view would teach works-righteousness. Nor would we say that first we avoid sinning, and then are born of God, for such a view would suggest that human works cause us to be born of God. Nor would we say that first we show great love for God, and then he causes us to be born again. No, it is clear that practicing righteousness, avoiding sin, and loving are all the consequences or results of the new birth. But if this is the case, then we must interpret 1 John 5:1 in the same way, for the structure of the verse is the same as we find in the texts about practicing righteousness (1 John 2:29), avoiding sin (1 John

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<sup>150</sup>“We have therefore a whole catalogue of virtues – belief that Jesus is the Christ, overcoming the world, abstinence from sin, self-control, incapacity to sin, freedom from the touch of the evil one, doing righteousness, love to God and one’s neighbour. And they are all the fruit of regeneration.” Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 102.

<sup>151</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 709.

3:9), and loving God (1 John 4:7). It follows, then, that 1 John 5:1 teaches that first God grants us new life and then we believe Jesus is the Christ.<sup>152</sup>

Concerning these passages in 1 John, John Murray also concludes,

It should be specially noted that even faith that Jesus is the Christ is the effect of regeneration. This is, of course, a clear implication of John 3: 3-8. But John the apostle here takes pains to make that plain. Regeneration is the beginning of all saving grace *in us*, and all saving grace in exercise on our part proceeds from the fountain of regeneration. We are not born again by faith or repentance or conversion; we repent and believe because we have been regenerated. No one can say in truth that Jesus is the Christ except by regeneration of the Spirit and that is one of the ways by which the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ. The embrace of Christ in faith is the first evidence of regeneration and only thus may we know that we have been regenerated.<sup>153</sup>

Schreiner and Murray are exactly right and consequently these texts not only support the Calvinists position regarding the *ordo salutis* but equally exclude the Arminian position.

### **Brought Forth by God's Will**

#### **James 1:18**

James also has much to say concerning regeneration. Speaking of what God has done in and to the believer, James states, "Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." It is important to note two things in this passage. First, "brought us forth" (ἀπεκύησεν) refers to regeneration, as it is a metaphor for spiritual rebirth. As seen with John 3, just as a baby is brought forth or birthed from the womb, so the sinner is brought forth or birthed by the power of God. Some, such as Elliott-Binns, have argued that the language of bringing forth is not soteriological or redemptive in nature but rather refers to creation itself.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Regeneration Necessarily Precede Conversion?" available from <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/does-regeneration-necessarily-precede-conversion>; accessed 6 July 2008; internet.

<sup>153</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 103.

<sup>154</sup>L. Elliott-Binns, "James 1.18: Creation or Redemption?" *New Testament Studies*, 3 (1955): 148-61. Elliott-Binns' interpretation is strange because, as Adamson notes, if James is merely referring to creation then James would be arguing not that Christians should behave like true Christians but that they should not behave like beasts. To the contrary, "James is preaching not just humanity, but Christianity." James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, NICNT (1976), 76-77. Likewise, Davids states that Elliott-Binns "fails to notice that humanity can be joined to creation in redemption contexts." He continues, "James, like Paul (Rom. 8:18-25), see Christians . . . as that part of creation first harvested by God as part of his new creation. They have been reborn by the word of truth, the gospel. It may well be that James also sees them as the special possession of God." Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 90.

The phrase “Father of lights” draws the reader back to Genesis where man is brought forth by God’s word as a firstfruits of the human race to come. However, as Moo and McCartney have observed, the language in James 1:18 is similar to Romans 8:18-25 where redemption is promised.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the context of James 1:18 has to do with suffering, sin, temptation, and faith (1:2-17), all of which demonstrate that it is salvation which is in view not strictly creation. Also, the “word of truth” is a clear reference to the gospel (cf. 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; 2 Tim 2:15), again demonstrating that redemption not creation is the focus.<sup>156</sup> The phrase “Father of lights” does indeed refer to God as creator and giver of all good gifts to men, but the point is that it is this same Father who brought forth the heavenly lights who also, by his will and the power of his Word, brings forth sinners from spiritual death to new life.<sup>157</sup> Similar to creation, James saw his hearers who were trusting in Christ as the firstfruits of the harvest to come.<sup>158</sup>

Second, God brought us forth of “his own will” (βουληθεῖς). The emphatic “his” highlights both the gracious benevolence of God in begetting new life to sinners and the omnipotence of God in doing so by “his own will.”<sup>159</sup> James’ language here is very similar to Peter’s when he says that according to God’s mercy “he has caused us to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3). James also shares similarities with John who states that those who believe are born not of the will of man but of God (John 1:12-13). It is not man’s will or man’s cooperation with God’s will that effects this new birth. Rather, it is

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<sup>155</sup>Moo, *The Letter of James*, 79; McCartney, *James*, 113.

<sup>156</sup>Moo considers the phrase “the word of truth” as the most important piece of evidence in favor of a soteriological rather than a cosmological reading. Also, Moo sees the “implanted word” of verse 21 as another indicator that it is the gospel in view. After all, this word is said to “save your souls.” Moo, *The Letter of James*, 79.

<sup>157</sup>Dan McCartney is illuminating, “Just as God deliberately brought forth the heavenly lights by a word (Gen. 1), so he brings forth believers by ‘the word of truth.’” McCartney, *James*, 110. On the meaning of “Father of lights” in James and the rest of the scripture (Job 38:4-15, 19-21, 28, 31-33, Ps 136:4-9; Isa 40:22, 26) see *ibid.*, 108; Moo, *The Letter of James*, 78.

<sup>158</sup>For Old Testament background to “firstfruits” see: Exod 22:29-30; Num 18:8-12; Deut 18:3; 26:2, 10; Lev 27:26; Neh 10:35; Jer 2:3; Ezek 20:40. The New Testament also uses firstfruits imagery: Rom 8:23; 16:5; 1 Cor 15:20, 30; 16:15; 2 Thess 2:13; Heb 12:23; Rev 14:3. Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, NAC, vol. 36 (1997), 88.

<sup>159</sup>Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, 75-76.

by God's own will that he brings us forth. As Peter Toon states, "James is teaching what John taught: God takes the initiative and causes new life to begin in the soul."<sup>160</sup> Again, no mention is made of man's cooperation with God's grace nor is there any hint by James that God's work of bringing us forth is conditioned upon man's will to believe. To the contrary, James places all of the emphasis on God. It is God's will, not man's, which brings the sinner into new life in order that he should be the firstfruits of God's creatures. Therefore, it is "by His doing you are in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:30).

### **Caused to be Born Again**

#### **1 Peter 1:3-5**

Peter also places emphasis on God's sovereignty in the new birth.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! *According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again* [ἀναγεννήσας] to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5; emphasis added).

Peter uses the language of causation to describe God's merciful yet powerful act of new birth. Several observations are necessary. First, the reason Peter gives as to why God is to be praised is that in his great mercy God caused us to be born again.<sup>161</sup> Peter will use the language of spiritual begetting again in 1 Peter 1:23 where he says that they "have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God." Here Peter shows that God the Father takes the initiative in producing spiritual children by his Word. Second, Peter says that this new birth is according to God's great mercy. By definition mercy precludes any possibility of human works or contribution. Believers prior to the new birth are dead in sin and only deserving of God's judgment and wrath. However, as will be seen in Ephesians 2:4-5, God granted mercy to

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<sup>160</sup>Toon, *Born Again*, 40.

<sup>161</sup>"The term *anagennēsas* actually emphasizes 'rebegetting or begetting anew rather than being born anew,' though the latter idea is also implied." Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 60. Schreiner is quoting P. J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 94.

those who have rebelled against him. Third, the image of birth is used and as with John 3:5-6, so also in 1 Peter 1:3-5 such an image precludes any human contribution. As Schreiner states, “The focus therefore is on God’s initiative in producing new life. No one takes any credit for being born. It is something that happens to us.”<sup>162</sup> Schreiner’s point is demonstrated when Peter states that out of this great mercy God *caused* us to be born again. God causes, creates, brings about, and produces the new birth not on the basis of anything we have done but purely on the basis of his great mercy.

### **Made Alive with Christ**

#### **Ephesians 2:1-7**

While Jesus and Peter explain regeneration through the imagery of birth, Paul explains regeneration through the imagery of resurrection from the dead. As Hoekema states, for Paul “regeneration is the fruit of the Spirit’s purifying and renewing activity, that it is equivalent to making dead persons alive, that it takes place in union with Christ, and that it means that we now become part of God’s wondrous new creation.”<sup>163</sup> Paul speaks of God making dead persons alive in Ephesians 2 where he writes,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive [συνεζωοποίησεν] together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:1-7).

In Ephesians 2 we see a powerful picture of what takes place in regeneration. The sinner is dead but God makes him alive. The sinner is in the grave but God resurrects him from the dead. Notice, contrary to Arminianism, there is no contingency here or intermediate stage (see chapter 5) where God begins to make a sinner alive but whether or not God can

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<sup>162</sup>Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 61. Also see L. A. Goppelt, *Commentary on 1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 81-83.

<sup>163</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 99.

finally do so is dependent upon the sinner's decision. Rather, the transition is immediate, instantaneous, and unilateral as the sinner is at one moment dead and the next moment alive (Eph 2:10).<sup>164</sup> The situation is comparable with the resurrection of Christ. Christ was dead but God in great power resurrected him bodily from the grave (Eph 1:19-20).<sup>165</sup> Or consider Lazarus who was dead, rotting in the tomb for days, and suddenly, at the command of Christ, he is resurrected and walks out of the tomb alive (John 11).<sup>166</sup> Reymond rightly observes, "The conclusion cannot be avoided that God's regenerating work must causally precede a man's faith response to God's summons to faith."<sup>167</sup>

Moreover, the sinner who is "made alive" has a situation not only comparable to Christ but the new life he receives is actually found in and with Christ. Paul states that God made us alive *together with Christ* and seated us up with Christ in the heavenly places (2:6), so that in the coming ages we would know the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us *in Christ Jesus* (2:7). Peter O'Brien explains,

Paul's readers have come to life with Christ, who was dead and rose again; their new life, then, is a sharing in the new life which he received when he rose from the dead. It is only in union with him that death is vanquished and new life, an integral part of God's new creation, received. Because the believer's previous condition has been spoken of as a state of death (vv. 1, 5), there is no direct reference to Christ's death

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<sup>164</sup>Hoekema observes that the same is true in verse 10 where Paul says that we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do. "The word 'created' pictures God's sovereignly calling into existence something that did not exist before. Here the term refers, not to the origin of the universe as in Genesis 1:1, but to the origin of new spiritual life in those who were spiritually dead before. We have been made a new spiritual creation, Paul is saying." Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>165</sup>"Just as God used 'the might of his strength' to raise Christ from the dead and seat him at his right hand 'in the heavenly places' (1:19-20), so he has already raised and seated Christians together with him 'in the heavenly places' (Allen 1986: 103-4)." Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (2010), 134. Also see T. G. Allen, "Exaltation and Solidarity with Christ: Ephesians 1.20 and 2.6," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 28 (1986): 103-20.

<sup>166</sup>"When Jesus said, 'Lazarus, come forth,' a mighty power went along with the command and gave effect to it. . . . God's power was primary, his was secondary, and would never have been exerted except in response to the divine. It is in this manner that every redeemed soul is brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. And just as the dead Lazarus was first called back into life and then breathed and ate, so the soul dead in sin is first transferred to spiritual life and then exercises faith and repentance and does good works." Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 166. Also see Piper, *Finally Alive*, 68, 79, 84; Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life: A Doctrinal Introduction* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), 34-35; Bryan Chapell, *Ephesians*, REC (2009), 80-81.

<sup>167</sup>Reymond, *Systematic Theology*, 709.

or to the believer's participation in it. Instead, the sharp contrast between our former condition outside of Christ and being made alive with him is presented.<sup>168</sup>

O'Brien is right in identifying being made alive with the resurrection of Christ. As Ferguson states, "Regeneration is causally rooted in the resurrection of Christ (1 Pet. 1:3). Like produces like; our regeneration is the fruit of Christ's resurrection."<sup>169</sup> It is Christ's resurrection which is the very basis of the sinner's coming to life with Christ, as is further demonstrated in 2:6 where the sinner is raised up and seated in Christ. Our spiritual resurrection to new life is made explicit by what Paul contrasts it to, namely, deadness in trespasses and sins and bondage to the world ("following the course of this world," 2:2), Satan ("following the prince of the power of the air," 2:2), and the flesh ("once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind," 2:3). Like the rest of mankind we were "by nature children of wrath" (2:3). Therefore, being made alive, as O'Brien states, implies not only forgiveness but "liberation from these tyrannical forces."<sup>170</sup> Paul's words here in Ephesians 2 closely parallel his words in Colossians, "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses" (2:13; cf. Rom 6:11).

Finally, Paul also states that being made alive together with Christ is by grace ("by grace you have been saved"). O'Brien comments, "He draws attention to a mighty rescue which arose out of God's gracious initiative, which had already been accomplished in Christ, and which has abiding consequences for them: *it is by grace you have been saved.*"<sup>171</sup> As seen throughout Paul's epistles, grace stands opposed to merit or any contribution on the part of man (Eph 2:8-10). Grace is God's favor towards sinners in spite of what they deserve (Rom 3:21-26; 4:4; 5:15). The word "save" ("by grace you have been saved") can and is many times used to refer to an eschatological reality (as will

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<sup>168</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (1999), 167.

<sup>169</sup>Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, 119.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid.*, 168.

be seen in chapters 6 and 7), the deliverance from God's wrath and final judgment.<sup>172</sup> As Thielman observes, in some passages Paul can "describe it [saved] as an ongoing event in the present (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2; 2 Cor. 2:15) and say, 'Now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor. 6:2; cf. Isa. 39:8; Best 1998:602)." But Paul "normally refers to it as something believers will experience in the future, presumably at the final day (1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 10:33; Rom. 5:9-10; 9:27; 10:9; 11:26)."<sup>173</sup> However, as O'Brien explains, the case differs in Ephesians 2 for "saved" refers specifically to what "has already been accomplished and experienced." It describes a "rescue from death, wrath, and bondage and a transfer into the new dominion with its manifold blessings. The periphrastic perfect construction draws attention to the resulting state of salvation."<sup>174</sup> Paul is referring to salvation as something that is "emphatically present for believers" even though the "use of the perfect tense in Eph. 2:5, 8 for salvation is unusual."<sup>175</sup> Paul does draw our attention to the future eschatological consequences of this salvation in verse 7 (being seated with Christ in the coming age). However, in verses 5-6 Paul shows that being saved by grace means that God making us alive together with Christ is also by grace. Therefore, being made alive or regenerated is neither an act that is accomplished by man's works-righteousness nor an act conditioned upon man's willful cooperation. Rather, being made alive is *by grace and by grace alone*, meaning that it is purely by God's initiative, prerogative, and power that the sinner is resurrected from spiritual death.

Grace is not merely unmerited favor in the sense that one may choose to receive or reject a gift. Grace is the impartation of new life. Grace is a power that raises someone from the dead, that lifts those in the grave into new life. Grace is not merely an undeserved gift, though it is such; it is also a transforming power. Grace

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<sup>172</sup>In Paul's letters the 'salvation' word-group is used only in connection with humankind's relations with God. The terms often have an eschatological orientation, so that negatively they refer to a deliverance from God's wrath at the final judgment (Rom. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9) and positively to the reinstatement in that glory of God which was lost through sin (Rom. 8:18-30; 2 Thess. 2:13-14)." Ibid., 169.

<sup>173</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 135.

<sup>174</sup>O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 169. Also see Thielman, *Ephesians*, 135.

<sup>175</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 135.

imparted life when we were dead, and grace also raises us and seats us with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6).<sup>176</sup>

Therefore, it will not do to say with the Arminian that God's grace is a gift to be accepted or resisted. Yes, God's grace is a gift, but more than that it is a powerful gift that actually and effectually accomplishes new life as God intends.

### **Colossians 2:11-14**

Another passage of Scripture which is a powerful example of monergistic regeneration is Colossians 2:11-14 where Paul writes to the Colossians,

In him [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without [human] hands, by putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive [συνεζωοποίησεν] together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

In verse 11 Paul presents the metaphor of circumcision, a clear reference to the Old Testament where Moses and the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel call for a "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4; Ezek 44:7; cf. Rom 2:17). As Moo states, "Paul takes up this concept, claiming that it is the circumcision of the heart, performed by the Spirit – not physical circumcision as such – that marks a person as belonging to the people of God (Rom. 2:28-29). It is this nonphysical circumcision that Paul has in mind here, as the qualification 'not performed by human hands' suggests."<sup>177</sup> The contrast is not a circumcision by human hands but a circumcision by the Spirit on the heart as that which is needed for a person to experience new life in Christ.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 246.

<sup>177</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (2008), 197. Also see T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, ICC (1979), 250; Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC, vol. 32 (1991), 257. N. T. Wright is correct when he describes the circumcision Paul refers to as a "spiritual surgery." N. T. Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*, TNTC (1986), 105.

<sup>178</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 198-200; Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, WBC, vol. 44 (1982), 123.

As already noted in our commentary on Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, the metaphor of circumcision itself communicates the monergistic work of God. Spiritual circumcision is an act performed upon the recipient by God, apart from the sinner's cooperation. God and God alone circumcises the heart and then and only then can the sinner trust in Christ. As a result of being circumcised spiritually, "No longer are we dominated by those 'powers' of the old era, sin, death, and the flesh; we are now ruled by righteousness, life, grace, and the Spirit (see esp. Rom. 5:12-8:17; 12:1-2; Gal. 1:4; 5:14-6:2)."<sup>179</sup> It is only when spiritual circumcision takes place that the sinner is set free from the flesh. As Paul states in verse 12, we have been "raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." Paul transitions from the metaphor of circumcision to the metaphor of resurrection. Notice the parallel Paul makes in verses 12-13 between God raising Christ from the dead and God spiritually raising the sinner from the dead. Paul calls this act the "powerful work of God" and rightly so for just as God takes a dead corpse and brings it to life so also does he take a dead soul and breath new spiritual life into it.<sup>180</sup> As O'Brien notes, the giving of this new life is an "act of pure grace" and is in no way conditioned on man.<sup>181</sup>

### **The Washing of Regeneration**

#### **Titus 3:3-7**

Paul's words in Colossians show many similarities to his words in Titus,

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but

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<sup>179</sup>Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 201. Likewise, see F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (1989), 108.

<sup>180</sup>Concerning Paul's use of the word "dead" O'Brien notes that the adjective "is employed figuratively to describe the state of being lost or under the dominion of death . . . It is sometimes called spiritual death and denotes a state of alienation or separation from God caused by sin . . ." O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 122.

<sup>181</sup>O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 123. Also see Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, 262.

according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration [λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας] and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:3-7).

Like Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2, Paul begins in Titus 3 with man's depravity and slavery to sin, once again emphasizing man's deadness to sin and spiritual inability.<sup>182</sup>

Prior to the washing of regeneration man was a slave to evil desires (cf. Titus 2:12; 1 Tim 6:9), spending his time in malice, envy, and hatred. However, out of his love and goodness "God our Savior" saved us.<sup>183</sup> How exactly did he save us? Not by our own works of righteousness but purely according to his "own mercy."<sup>184</sup> Therefore, according to Paul, salvation is unconditional. Such mercy is made effective by the power of the Holy Spirit who washes the sinner clean as Paul says "by the washing of regeneration [λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας] and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (3:5; cf. 2:14).<sup>185</sup> The very purpose of Christ's redeeming work is for the Spirit to purify<sup>186</sup> a people unto God.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup>For an analysis of the vices Paul chooses to list, see Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (2006), 775-77.

<sup>183</sup>Notice the Trinitarian references in Titus 3:3-7. As Knight states, "All three persons of the Trinity are mentioned: The Father 'saved us' (v.5) and 'poured out' the Holy Spirit on us (v.6) 'through Jesus Christ.'" George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (1992), 338. Also see William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (2000), 447.

<sup>184</sup>On the meaning of "righteousness" by Paul here, see Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448.

<sup>185</sup>Titus 3:4-5 is similar to 2:14 where Paul says Christ "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works."

<sup>186</sup>Some use the language of Titus 3:5 as a proof-text for baptismal regeneration. The text, however, never warrants such a conclusion. If baptism is implied at all in the text it is because baptism signifies the inner reality (the Spirit cleaning the sinner) that has taken place. See I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (1999), 321-22. Lea and Griffin, helpfully write, "An alternative interpretation is that the 'washing' refers to an internal, spiritual cleansing as denoted by the terms contained in the phrase 'rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.' If this phrase indicates that it is the Holy Spirit who does the 'washing,' then the 'rebirth and renewal' must be an internal, spiritual cleansing. Therefore, 'washing' cannot refer to the external ordinance of water baptism." Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC, vol. 34 (1992), 324. Also, Marshall observes, it is significant that only one preposition is used, implying that the two terms are synonymous. "It is most likely, then, that the two phrases describe one and the same event from different angles." Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 321. Also see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 782-83. Also Mounce, "Although grammatically the Holy Spirit is specifically the agent of renewal, by contextual implication he is also the agent of regeneration." Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448. On the concept of "renewal" in Paul see Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Colossians 3:10; Hebrews 6:6. Concerning Titus 3:5 Mounce states, "The context in Titus 3:5 requires that it be a once-for-all renewal because salvation is seen as an accomplished fact . . . the creed [in Titus 3] views salvation as an accomplished fact, so it must refer to positional sanctification . . ." Ibid., 449-50. Also see Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 321.

<sup>187</sup>As Mounce observes, Paul moves from the "why" of salvation to the "how." "The Holy Spirit both cleanses believers through regeneration and fills them by a renewing, forming them into a new creature. . . . Conversion consists negatively of a cleansing and positively of a renewal brought about by the Holy Spirit." Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 448.

Two observations can be made. First, Paul's two prepositional phrases provide the basis for God's redemption of sinners, the first of which dismisses any "contribution on our part" and the second of which is an "equally strong affirmation that salvation is solely based on God's mercy."<sup>188</sup> Therefore, works-righteousness or works plus faith is clearly eliminated by Paul (Rom 3:21-28; 4:2-6; 9:11; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; 2 Tim 1:9; cf. Exod 34:6-7; Pss 78:38; 86:15).<sup>189</sup> Second, one does not escape the unconditionality of this passage by arguing that while one is saved by faith alone, not works, one must cooperate with God's grace in order to receive the washing of regeneration. This is the Arminian argument and it still contradicts the point Paul is making, namely, that man can contribute absolutely nothing whatsoever to God's work, including the washing of regeneration. To the contrary, man is passive in the washing of regeneration. Such a point is further proven by the language Paul uses for regeneration. Paul refers to regeneration as a "washing" which is accomplished by the Spirit who renews. Paul's language here parallels 1 Corinthians 6:11, where Paul, much like Titus 3:3-7, begins with a long list of the types of depravity the believer once walked in, but then says such were some of you, "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Notice, not only does Paul use the same metaphor of being "washed" to refer to the change and inner renewal or cleansing that must take place, but he once again ties the washing of regeneration to the agency of the Spirit. Paul's union of regeneration and Spirit both in Titus 3:3-7 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 utilizes the Old Testament language of Ezekiel 36:25-27 (also used by Jesus in John 3:5), "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you" (36:25).<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 340.

<sup>189</sup>“We’ did not ‘do’ anything that could claim God’s kindness and love or that would provide a basis for his saving us.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 341. Likewise, Mounce, “God saved believers not because they were deserving but because he is a merciful God.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 447. Also see Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 779-80; Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 322.

<sup>190</sup>Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 343-44; Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 100.

God, through Ezekiel, goes on to say in 36:26-27 that he will give them a new heart, putting his Spirit within, and cause them to walk in his ways. As Towner recognizes, the Spirit-enabled doing of the law in Ezekiel cannot be far from Paul's mind in Titus 3.<sup>191</sup> Paul, like Ezekiel, is emphasizing the power of the Spirit to wash or regenerate the sinner, causing him to walk in obedience and new life.

As already demonstrated, Ezekiel 36 and John 3 both attribute to the Spirit the sovereign work of regeneration, which is always monergistic.<sup>192</sup> Paul is no different. As demonstrated already in Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:11-14 so also in Titus 3, Paul connects the washing of regeneration with the Spirit who blows wherever he wills, quickening sinners from death to new life. The difference in Titus 3 is that the metaphor has changed slightly from regeneration as birth (John 3:5) or the resurrection from death to new life (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13) or circumcision (Col 2:14-15), to the washing of the dirty and stained sinner.<sup>193</sup> Yet, though the metaphor shifts, the message remains the same.<sup>194</sup>

### **Let Light Shine out of Darkness**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

Another passage which serves to complement what has been seen so far is 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 where we read that God has shone in the hearts of sinners "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here we see an example of the revealing of the Son to those who are veiled and blinded. However, it is

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<sup>191</sup>Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 774.

<sup>192</sup>Hoekema observes the similarities Titus 3:5 has with John 3, "In John 3 regeneration was pictured as a new birth or a birth from above; here [Titus 3] we have a similar figure: *palingenesis*, from *palin*, meaning 'again,' and *genesis*, meaning 'genesis' or 'birth.' The word points to a new beginning." Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 99.

<sup>193</sup>Marshall seems to miss this point when he argues that since the metaphor of washing is totally different than the metaphor of new birth, therefore, "It is hard to see how washing can convey new birth." The problem, however, is that washing is connected to new birth because both metaphors share the substance and reality of "regeneration." In other words, the doctrine of regeneration is present in both John 3 and Titus 3 but with different metaphors. See Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 318.

<sup>194</sup>"These metaphors for salvation indicate the radical change in heart that can be accomplished by God alone." Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 322.

not a mere revelation that takes place but the knowledge Paul speaks of is actually a “light” that pierces into the heart and like creation brings into existence a heart that has been radically changed.<sup>195</sup> To understand this miracle we need to look at the entire passage,

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:3-6).

The unbeliever is veiled to the truth of the gospel, blinded by the god of the world so that he cannot see “the light” of the gospel of the glory of Christ. As one who is blind, the sinner is in darkness, unable to see, and without the spiritual light that comes from beholding Christ in faith.<sup>196</sup>

Notice, it is not the case here that man is blinded and veiled but not to the extent that he cannot see or come to the light of Christ (Semi-Pelagianism). Schreiner explains, “Unbelievers are not portrayed as neutral, having ability to pursue or reject God. Rather, they are held in captivity under the devil’s power, prevented by him from seeing the glory of Christ.”<sup>197</sup> Nor is it the case that man was blinded and veiled but God provided a prevenient grace so that every man can, if he wills to, cooperate and come to the light (classic Arminianism). Neither of these options is present in the text. To the contrary, God acts in a direct, unilateral, unconditional, monergistic manner, creating sight where there was *only* blindness. As Paul says in verse 6, “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Hafemann explains that “this shining in the

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<sup>195</sup>See Jonathan Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 2:12-17.

<sup>196</sup>David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, vol. 29 (1999), 211; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (1997), 218-20.

<sup>197</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 138.

heart most naturally refers to God's work of changing the moral disposition and spiritual condition of his people."<sup>198</sup> Paul is referring to Genesis 1:3 where God creates light when "darkness was over the face of the deep" (Gen 1:2). Though darkness hovered over the face of the deep so also did the Spirit, hovering over the face of the waters (Gen 1:2b), so that at the very word light would be created. As Genesis 1:3-4 states, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness." Paul, speaking from personal experience, uses this language and miraculous event to describe, in parallel fashion, what takes place when God transforms a sinner. Just as God calls light into being where there is only darkness, so also God calls spiritual light (the light of the glory of his own Son) into being where there is only spiritual darkness.<sup>199</sup> The language of calling light out of darkness resembles the biblical language of regeneration as an act that brings about a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Frame explains, "Similarly with new creation. Creation is 'out of nothing,' as we saw. Before creation, there was nothing. Nothing can't produce anything. Reality all comes by the creative act of God. The same is true of resurrection. Before resurrection there is death. Death can't produce life. Only God can. So, in the new birth we are passive."<sup>200</sup> Such a divine fiat is not the light of prevenient grace as the Arminian would have it because (1) the light shines directly into the heart and (2) immediately moves the sinner from darkness to light (salvation) without any conditionality or cooperation. The state described here is not an "intermediate state" where man has been enlightened by prevenient grace but now it is up to him to believe resulting in final regeneration. To the contrary, Paul says that man is in darkness and when God shines light into the heart it is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus

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<sup>198</sup>Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (2000), 180.

<sup>199</sup>Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (2005), 335.

<sup>200</sup>Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 186.

Christ. In other words, the light results in a saving knowledge of Christ in the very heart of man, something that is not true of all people everywhere who receive prevenient grace.

### **Struck Down by Grace and an Opened Heart**

#### **Struck Down by Grace: Acts 9:1-20**

Most passages on regeneration are didactic in nature. However, there are other passages on regeneration that occur within the biblical narrative. Two passages in particular can be found in the book of Acts.

As will be seen in the next chapter, Arminians often complain and object to the Calvinist doctrine of monergism because such a view of grace does not respect man's libertarian freedom to choose to believe but works in a way that irresistibly overpowers man. Essentially, the Arminian has compromised the power and efficacy of God's grace for the sake of man's free will. However, there is perhaps no text which demonstrates how erroneous the Arminian view is than Acts 9.<sup>201</sup> Luke tells us in Acts 8 of Saul, a Hebrew of Hebrews and as to the law, a Pharisee (Phil 3:5), who was ravaging the church of Jesus Christ, persecuting believers of the Way. Saul was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1) and after going to the high priest Saul received permission to arrest those in Damascus who belonged to the Way and bring them back to Jerusalem (9:2). Luke explains what happened next,

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul rose from the ground, and although his eyes were opened, he saw nothing. So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how

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<sup>201</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:707-08.

much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened (Acts 9:3-19).

Why is it that Saul changed from a murderer of God’s people and hater of Christ to a man who suddenly believed in the very Christ he was persecuting? If Arminianism is to be consistent, it would have to say that ultimately it was Saul’s will to believe that resulted in a changed heart.<sup>202</sup> However, Luke’s explanation of what took place on the Damascus road is the exact opposite. Paul was struck down by the Lord himself and the light of Christ pierced the very center of Saul’s being, asking him why he continued to persecute those who belonged to the living Savior.<sup>203</sup> Such an encounter with the resurrected Christ turned Saul’s heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

Moreover, Luke goes on to explain that the Lord appeared to Ananias in a dream telling him to go to Paul. Ananias, naturally afraid of Saul, reminds the Lord that this is the man that has done much evil to the saints in Jerusalem (Acts 9:13-14). Notice how the Lord responds, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:15-16). Saul, prior to the Damascus road, was already chosen by God. In other words, just as we saw was the case in Acts 13:48, so also in Acts 9 is it the case that it is God’s sovereign choice that resulted in Saul’s regeneration to new life. Saul was determined by God to believe and when it came time God violently struck Saul down and radically changed his understanding of Christ.

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<sup>202</sup>One could also object that the narrative is not descriptive of a conversion. However, Barrett comments that “if such radical changes do not amount to conversion it is hard to know what would do so.” C. K. Barrett, *Acts 1-14*, ICC (1994), 442. Also see David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (2009), 303-04.

<sup>203</sup>Tannehill notes that Saul is “forced by the Messiah’s light to recognize his own blindness and to receive his sight through him.” R. C. Tannehill, “Narrative Criticism,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, eds. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden (London: SCM, 1990), 121; Peterson, *Acts*, 303.

Finally, lest one conclude that effectual grace in Paul's conversion was unique, one should take heed of the fact that Paul saw his effectual calling and regeneration to be paradigmatic for all believers in Christ (Gal 1:15-16). Before Paul was born God determined to call him at the proper time (Gal 1:15). When that time came God effectively revealed his Son to him. As Schreiner comments,

Paul's call was completely and utterly the work of God. The three accounts of Paul's conversion and call in Acts (Acts 9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:1-18) match the account in Galatians. Paul was summoned into ministry by a powerful hand. And despite the exceptional nature of Paul's apostolic ministry, he viewed his call as paradigmatic of the conversion of all believers, maintaining that 'Christ Jesus showed all his patience to me, the foremost, as an example of those who were about to believe in him for eternal life' (1 Tim 1:16).<sup>204</sup>

In other words, the sovereign grace seen in Paul's calling and regeneration were only a foretaste of the work God was about to do in other elect sinners as well.

### **An Opened Heart: Acts 16:13-15**

A second passage which also reveals the monergistic nature of regeneration is Acts 16:13-15 where Paul, Silas, and Timothy are traveling, encouraging the churches. Suddenly, Paul receives a vision at night where a man of Macedonia was calling him to Macedonia (Acts 16:9). Paul concluded that God had called them to preach the gospel to those in Macedonia who needed help (16:10). Luke explains what took place next:

And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us (Acts 16:13-15).

Why is it that Lydia believed and was baptized? Answer: The Lord opened her heart.<sup>205</sup>

Again, the order in the text is telling. The Lord does not open Lydia's heart because she believed, as the Arminian view must have it. Rather, the text says the exact opposite:

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<sup>204</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 241-42.

<sup>205</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:534; Peterson, *Acts*, 461; John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 263.

Lydia believed the gospel message because the Lord opened her heart. Once again, Lydia is a clear example of the Lord's monergistic way of opening a sinner's heart to believe.

### **Conclusion**

It has been a common practice among evangelical traditions in the past to say "you must be born again" in such a way that it is equivalent to the command to repent and trust in Christ.<sup>206</sup> However, as Ferguson explains, these evangelicals wrongly assume that the new birth "is something we must do." "But in the New Testament new birth is something God gives. The point of the metaphor lies in the fact that the new birth is *not* something we can do."<sup>207</sup> As seen above, the new birth is not a work conditioned on our will, but rather any spiritual activity by our will is conditioned upon God's sovereign decision to grant us new life by the Spirit.

### **Regeneration and the Liberation of the Will**

In the previous chapter Edwards was utilized to better understand exactly how the will is involved in total depravity. There it was argued that though man's slavery to sin is necessitated by his corrupt nature, nevertheless, such a slavery is a willful slavery because sin is what he most wants to do (i.e., freedom of inclination). The same understanding of the will must be brought into the discussion of grace. Prior to effectual calling and regeneration the will of man is in bondage to sin. Therefore, the will is not active, but passive, that is, passive towards the things of God. If it were active then

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<sup>206</sup>Billy Graham, *How To Be Born Again* (Waco, TX: Word, 1977), 150, 152, 158, 168. Also see idem, *The World Aflame* (Minneapolis: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1967), 134. For a critique see John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), 132-41.

<sup>207</sup>Ferguson, *Christian Life*, 49. Others make the same point. See John Frame, *Salvation belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 186; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 703; Douglas J. Wilson, "Irresistible Grace," in *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 144. For example, Grudem writes, "The reason that evangelicals often think that regeneration comes after saving faith is that they see the results (love for God and his Word, and turning from sin) after people come to faith, and they think that regeneration must therefore have come after saving faith. Yet here we must decide on the basis of what Scripture tells us, because regeneration itself is not something we see or know about directly: "The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8)." Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 703.

synergism would follow. However, in monergism, the will is completely and totally passive, having no bearing on God's sovereign choice. The will only becomes active *as a result of* and *consequence of* regeneration. As Paul makes clear in Romans 6, we once were enslaved to sin, but God made us alive (Rom 6:11). Though we were enslaved, we died with Christ and have been "set free from sin" (Rom 6:7, 18, 22). Therefore, the liberation of the will is freedom *from* sin. However, liberation is not only freedom *from* sin but it is a freedom *to* trust in Christ.<sup>208</sup>

What this means is that in regeneration God reorients the will so that man is able to repent and believe, something the will in no way could do before. Therefore, God's regenerating miracle always precedes any activity by the will. God is the cause and the active will is the effect. Such a truth is argued by William Perkins when he says,

Everie cause is before his effect, if not in time, yet in prioritie of nature. The will converted, so soone as God hath begunne to renew it, wils to be renewed: and it could not will the conversion of it selfe, unlesse it had formerly tasted the goodnesse thereof. . . . Will in the act of working, effecting, producing of our conversion or regeneration, is not cause at all, but in it selfe considered, a meere patient or subject to receive the grace of covnersion wrought and given by God.<sup>209</sup>

Muller astutely observes, "As Perkins's comments indicate . . . grace does not wrench or force the will; it regenerates and reforms the will in order that it might freely choose to believe."<sup>210</sup> Therefore, language used by Arminians of Calvinists that God coerces the sinner is unjustified. Rather, God "reforms" the will so that it now *wants* to choose Christ.<sup>211</sup> As slavery to sin was free because what man wanted most was to sin, so also is

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<sup>208</sup>See Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.19.1-9. Also see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 237-43.

<sup>209</sup>William Perkins, *Treatise of God's Free Grace and Mans Free Will*, in *Workes*, 1:715.2D, 716.1B, as quoted in Richard Muller, "Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius's Gambit and the Reformed Response," in vol. 2 of *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 276. For the same point see Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 61-62.

<sup>210</sup>"The doctrine conforms to the requirements of the Reformed insistence on the freedom of the will, of the Reformed doctrine of the will's inability in matters of salvation, and of the Reformed conception of a divine concurrence that must be active for free willing to occur." Muller, "Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice," 277. Also see idem, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9, no. 1 (April 1978): 69-81.

<sup>211</sup>Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 28.1.propositions 11. To put it colloquially: the sinner is given a renewed "wanter." Therefore, coming to Christ may be effectual, determined by God, and irresistible, but such a coming is exactly what the regenerated sinner now wants to

choosing Christ free because now Christ is what the will wants most, thanks to God's prior work of effectual calling and regeneration. Man is not coerced to choose Christ, but necessitated to choose Christ. Yet, such a divinely ordained necessity is perfectly consistent with genuine freedom because though God acts effectually and irresistibly to save, after being regenerated it is now the case that choosing Christ is what man now wants more than anything else.<sup>212</sup> Here is yet another reason why it is imperative that regeneration precede faith in the *ordo salutis*. God must reorient, renew, and reform the will so that in conversion man will repent and trust in Christ.<sup>213</sup> If regeneration does not come first then man will continue to only want sin. However, if God first regenerates then man will want Christ above all things, repent of his sins, and trust in Christ. Once again, freedom of inclination (compatibilist freedom) helps make sense of man's faith and repentance. Whereas before man was willfully enslaved to sin, now, due to God's prior work in effectual calling and regeneration, man is enabled to willfully repent and trust in Jesus for eternal life. Nevertheless, unlike Arminianism, this enabling is not one that may or may not result in faith. Rather, as Sproul states, after a dead corpse is resurrected to new life, "Not only *can* it respond then, it most certainly *will* respond."<sup>214</sup>

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do. As Welty explains, "Since freedom from coercion means having the freedom to do what you want to do, then yes, if you do something even though you did not want to do it, that would be coercion. But at no stage in the Calvinistic pre-conversion/ conversion/ postconversion story is the sinner forced to *do* anything he does not *want* to do. Rather, God (mysteriously, no doubt) changes our wants. We go from wanting our idols and sins to wanting God and righteousness. But wants are not actions. So regeneration does not produce any actions that go against our wills. Instead, regeneration is a matter of God's *renewing* the will so that the whole person delights in God and is inclined to find Him wholly attractive, to prefer Him above all else. And with that renewed will, we choose in accordance with it, and we choose Christ. . . . It is never a matter of God's making someone act *contrary to his will*." Greg Welty, "Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 241.

<sup>212</sup>See Ludovicus Crocius, *Syntagma Sacrae Theologiae* (Bremen: n.p., 1636), 918; as quoted in Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1950), 520.

<sup>213</sup>Bartholomaeus Keckermann Dantiscanus, *Systema Sacrosanctae Theologiae, tribus libris adornatum* (Geneva: n.p., 1611), 263-64; Leonardus Riissenius, *Francisci Turretini Compendium Theologiae didactico-elencticae ex theologorum nostrorum Institutionibus auctum et illustratum* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1695), XIII, 18; as quoted in Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 520-21.

<sup>214</sup>R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 184. Sproul helpfully states, "Our regeneration does not preclude such a response, but is designed to make this response not only possible but certain. The point is, however, that unless we first receive the grace of regeneration, we will not and cannot respond to the gospel in a positive way. Regeneration must occur before there can be any positive response of faith." *Ibid.*, 186.

### The Effectual Gifts of Faith and Repentance

Are faith and repentance gifts from God or are they something the sinner does by his own free will? Arminian Roger Olson believes the answer is simple: “Evangelicals in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions tend to treat faith as gift, while those in the Arminian-Wesleyan traditions tend to treat it as human response to prevenient grace.” He continues,

Lutheran and Reformed evangelicals argue that if faith is salvation’s instrumental cause and a human response, it is a meritorious work, and in that case salvation is not sheer gift of grace; they see Protestantism itself as at stake in saying faith is a gift. Arminian-Wesleyan evangelicals regard faith not as a work but as reception of gift; it is not meritorious work but only an acknowledgement of sin and need of grace. They argue that if faith is a gift and not a free human response to the initiative of prevenient and resistible grace, the urgency of evangelism (especially as solicitation of faith) is undermined. Evangelical activism hangs on belief that repentance and faith are grace-enabled but free responses of hearers of the gospel.<sup>215</sup>

Olson makes a significant observation: for the Reformed faith is the work of God, while for the Arminian prevenient grace is the work of God and faith is man’s work in response. The gift, for the Arminian, is only effective *if* man chooses to act upon it.<sup>216</sup>

Such a point is made by Jan Rohls as he comments on what the Remonstrants believed,

Indeed, the Remonstrants stressed that human beings did not have faith through their own free will, but rather were dependent for it on prevenient, posterior and co-operative grace. However, this in no way meant that all effort to gain salvation was in vain. Rather, it was serviceable to hear the Word of God, repent of one’s sins and pray for God’s grace; God would then work on the will in such a way that He would grant it the capacity to have faith, even though human beings could then reject that faith.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>Roger E. Olson, “Faith,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 184.

<sup>216</sup>“Faith is a gratuitous gift of God, *but not a gift which is bestowed by an absolute will for saving particular human beings*. Rather, faith is a condition required in the person to be saved, and is thus a condition prior to being the means of obtaining salvation.” William Gene Witt, “Creation, Redemption and Grace in the Theology of Jacob Arminius” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 2:632.

<sup>217</sup>Jan Rohls, “Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort,” in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls, Brill Studies in Intellectual History, vol. 134 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 40. Also see idem, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 157.

Not so for the Dortian Calvinist,

In contrast, that view is rejected according to which God had willed to save all through Christ, as also is the view that some do not attain salvation because of their own actions. Rather, the fact that fallen individuals convert is not attributable to their free will but to their election by God, who calls them efficaciously and grants them faith and contrition. To this end God not only allows them to hear His Gospel externally, but illuminates them through the Holy Spirit and thus effects their regeneration and recreation. Regeneration, therefore, does not happen through a process of moral persuasion, so that it is up to human beings whether to convert or not, but rather through God's influence. As a result, that view is rejected according to which human beings have not totally lost their free will to seek the good through sin and faith is not merely a gift of grace infused into the individual by God.<sup>218</sup>

For the Arminian, God stands, hands stretched out, and offers the gifts of faith and repentance, but it is up to the sinner whether or not he will take it.<sup>219</sup> As Rolhs explains, there is an "effort to gain salvation" that must be present if faith is to be accepted. The Arminian view of faith is evident in Witt's description of Arminius, "The gift of faith is not an omnipotent force which overwhelms the human being and irresistibly causes him or her to believe." Instead, "the mode by which grace works is persuasion."<sup>220</sup>

Like faith, repentance, for the Arminian, works the same way. Summarizing Arminius, Clarke explains, "Repentance is man's act as distinct from regeneration, which is God's act."<sup>221</sup> While the efficient cause of repentance is God, the proximate but subsidiary cause is man who converts himself by God's grace.<sup>222</sup> Olson elaborates,

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<sup>218</sup>Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism," 42.

<sup>219</sup>Elsewhere Olson denies the following: "A popular evangelical illustration- rejected by evangelical theologians- is that God casts a vote for the sinner and Satan casts a vote against him or her and salvation depends on how the sinner votes. Evangelical theologians reject such semi-Pelagian analogies for salvation and insist that even the *initium fidei* – beginning of faith – is made possible by God, whose prevenient grace calls, convicts, enlightens, and enables sinners who hear the gospel message to repent and believe." Olson, "Salvation," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 261-62. However, even if it is granted that prevenient grace enables faith, still, such faith is conditioned on the sinner's choice. Olson himself admits that it is the human choice which is decisive. Therefore, the analogy is not far off since God stands there, dependent upon the sinner to cast the decisive vote in favor of grace.

<sup>220</sup>Witt, "Arminius," 2:633. Arminius states, "I say, therefore, it is most plainly declared in the scriptures, that faith and repentance cannot be had except by the gift of God. But the same scripture, indeed, the very nature of both of these gifts, teaches most clearly that that bestowal is made by means of persuasion." James Arminius, "Examination of a treatise concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination, and the Amplitude of Divine Grace, by William Perkins," in *Works*, 3:315.

<sup>221</sup>F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: Jacobus Arminius' Doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 93.

<sup>222</sup>*Ibid.* See James Arminius, "Seventy-Nine Private Disputation," in *Works*, 2:238-40

Evangelicals of the Arminian persuasion agree that true repentance, like true faith, is a gift of God, but they also believe it is resistible and that its reception necessarily involves a cooperation by the person who repents. By his prevenient (going before) grace God calls, convicts, enlightens, and enables the sinner to repent and believe; the sinner then must respond to the Spirit's work by allowing it to change his or her life, and that change takes the aspect of repentance and faith. These are not works that merit salvation (contrary to some Reformed anti-Arminian polemics), but simply what it means to accept the gift of salvation. Both Reformed and Arminian evangelicals equally regard repentance as a work of God that manifests itself in the sinner's contrition, confession, and life amendment; the difference lies in whether or not the sinner called by God could resist so that repentance and faith are aborted.<sup>223</sup>

Olson's recognition of man's determinative role in salvation is also emphasized by William Cannon who agrees with how Wesley explained the matter.

In conclusion, therefore, we cannot say that the 'Wesleyan doctrine of saving faith . . . is a complete renewal of the Luther-Calvin thesis that in the thought of salvation God is everything, man is nothing.' Quite the contrary seems actually to be the case-not, of course, in the sense that man is everything and God is nothing; not in the sense that Wesley believed man could in any degree save himself by moral and ecclesiastical works or by any inherent goodness; but simply in this sense, and in this sense alone, that man is the sole determinative factor in the decision of his own justification. Faith as the condition of justification is offered unto him as a free gift by a gracious God, but then he must actively respond to that offer and reach out with the arms of true repentance to receive the gift."<sup>224</sup>

Cannon's honesty is enlightening. For Wesley, "Man is the sole determinative factor in the decision of his own justification." Therefore, not only is regeneration conditioned upon man's free will choice, but faith and repentance are first and foremost the act of man's will, not God's. Here is exactly where the Arminian and the Calvinist differ. For the Calvinist God actually works faith within his elect in an efficacious manner so that those whom he has effectually called and monergistically regenerated *necessarily* repent and believe. No conditionality is involved. Not so for the Arminian. Since faith precedes regeneration in the *ordo salutis* it is not the case that faith is efficaciously worked within the sinner by God. Rather, God offers faith but it is up to the sinner (granted, a sinner enabled by prevenient grace) to decide by his own free will whether or not he will

<sup>223</sup>Olson, "Repentance," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 251.

<sup>224</sup>William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley: With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (New York: University Press of America, 1974), 117. See John Wesley, "Letter to Isaac Andrews," in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. T. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 7:202. See Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of his Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 246.

cooperate. If he cooperates repentance and faith result and regeneration follows.

However, man's will is the ultimate decider in the matter, making conversion primarily the work of man, not God. Boyd and Eddy explain their Arminian view,

God graciously makes it *possible* for people to believe, but he does not make it *necessary* for them to believe. It is one thing to claim that without the Holy Spirit we *cannot* believe and quite another to say that with the work of the Holy Spirit we *must* believe. Scripture affirms the former but not the latter. In any event, this demonstrates that Arminianism does not undermine the truth that God is to receive all the glory for salvation.<sup>225</sup>

But do Arminians like Olson, Boyd, and Eddy get it right? Does such a view fit with what Scripture says? Can such a view avoid robbing God of the credit and glory?

Contrary to the Arminian, Scripture reveals that faith and repentance are the work of God first and foremost, necessarily resulting from God's work in effectual calling and regeneration. While man does play a role – he must trust in Christ (faith) and be penitent for his sin (repent) – such activities are not only gifts from God's hand but gifts that God effectually works within his elect. As Turretin put it, "God is said to give not only the power of believing, but the belief (*to pistuein*) or the act itself (Phil. 1:29)."<sup>226</sup> Turretin draws the comparison to the healing of a blind man. God not only gives the blind man the power to open his eyes, but God himself actually opens his eyes and makes him see. Therefore, Sproul correctly states, "God himself creates the faith in the believer's heart."<sup>227</sup> As was seen in chapter 2 with the Canons of Dort, God produces not only the *velle credere* (the will to believe), but the *actum credenda* (the act of believing).<sup>228</sup> Or as John Owen writes, "The Scripture says not that God gives us ability

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<sup>225</sup>Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 159.

<sup>226</sup>Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:523 (cf. 552).

<sup>227</sup>Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* 156. John Stott states, "We must never think of salvation as a kind of transaction between God and us in which He contributes grace and we contribute faith. For we were dead and had to be quickened before we could believe. No, Christ's apostles clearly teach elsewhere that saving faith too is God's gracious gift." John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1982).

<sup>228</sup>Also see Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, 28.1.propositions 9; Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:104-106; idem, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:308-309.

or power to believe only,-namely, such a power as we may make use of if we will, or do otherwise; but faith, repentance, and conversion themselves are said to be the work and effect of God.”<sup>229</sup>

## **Faith**

The first passage to be examined is Acts 13:48 where the chapter begins with Paul and Barnabas being sent off by the Holy Spirit to eventually arrive at Antioch in Pisidia. On the Sabbath Paul is invited to speak. Paul, drawing from the storyline of the Old Testament, reminds his listeners of God’s faithfulness to his people Israel, as they wandered through the wilderness, fought wars with other nations in the land of Canaan, and finally were governed first by judges, then by the prophet Samuel who was followed by King Saul, and finally by David the son of Jesse who was a man after God’s own heart, accomplishing God’s will (Acts 13:18-22). It is from the offspring of David that God brought to Israel a Savior in Jesus just as was promised (Acts 13:23-27), who was unrecognized and finally condemned to death though no guilt was found in him. Yet, God raised him from the dead (13:30-33) and it is in Jesus that “forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (13:38) so that “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses” (13:39). Afterwards, Paul was invited back for the next Sabbath where almost the whole city gathered to hear him. However, many Jews were filled with jealousy, reviling him. Paul and Barnabas respond boldly saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). While the Jews heard Paul and reviled him, the Gentiles also heard Paul and began rejoicing. Luke explains the scenario,

And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up

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<sup>229</sup>Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:320 (cf. 3:323-24).

persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district (Acts 13:48-50).

What is to account for the Jews rejecting the gospel message Paul presented while many Gentiles, hearing the same message, believe? One could assume, as many Arminians do, that it is the will of man. God tried to save them through the gospel presentation of Paul but only those who exercised their will to believe were saved. However, such an assumption is foreign to the text. Rather, Luke explains that the reason the Gentiles believed while the Jews did not was because “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (13:48).<sup>230</sup> Notice, Luke does not say “as many as believed were appointed to eternal life” as the Arminian synergist would have it. To the contrary, Luke says that God’s appointment (ordination; cf. Acts 15:2; 22:10; 28:23; Matt 28:16-17; Luke 7:8; Rom 13:1; 1 Cor 16:15-16)<sup>231</sup> or election to eternal life is what determined who would and would not believe.<sup>232</sup> Ware appropriately comments,

So it is not ultimately a matter of human choice that determines who rejects and who accepts the gospel. Although human choice (i.e., belief in Christ) is necessary for any to be saved, what stands prior – both temporally prior and logically prior – to this human choice is the choice of God, which divine choosing is causally linked to and hence accounts for the human choice to believe. In short, these Gentiles believed the gospel, while Jews rejected the same saving message because God had chosen these very Gentiles to believe.<sup>233</sup>

Here we see that it is God’s choice, not man’s, which determines whether or not a sinner will receive new life and consequently believe in Christ. Until God pierces through the sinner’s heart he cannot respond in faith and repentance (cf. Acts 2:37). As Peterson

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<sup>230</sup>The Geneva Bible comments, “Therefore either all were not appointed to everlasting life, or else all should have believed: but because that is not so, it followeth, that some certain were ordained and therefore God did not only foreknow, but also foreordain, that neither faith nor the effects of faith should be the cause of his ordaining or appointment, but his ordaining the cause of faith.” *1599 Geneva Bible* (White Hall, West Virginia: Tolle Lege, 2008), 1113.

<sup>231</sup>“The passive voice indicates that God does the assigning. It is as strong a passage on God’s sovereignty as anywhere in Luke-Acts and has OT roots.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (2007), 465.

<sup>232</sup>“The present verse is as unqualified a statement of absolute predestination – ‘the eternal purpose of God’ (Calvin) – as is found anywhere in the NT.” Barrett, *Acts 1-14*, 658. Also see Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, EBC, vol. 9 (1981), 430.

<sup>233</sup>Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 9.

states, “God must open hearts, to enable people to listen and respond with faith (cf. [Acts] 16:14; 18:10).”<sup>234</sup> God’s choice, not man’s, is the determining factor in salvation.

A second passage where we see God’s sovereignty in granting faith is Ephesians 2:8-10 where Paul says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (ESV). Or as the NASB translates, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” The debate here is over the meaning of the phrases “*this* is not your own doing” and “*it* is the *gift* of God.” What do “this” and “it” refer to? Arminians will argue that the Greek does not warrant faith to be understood as the gift Paul is talking about. “Faith” is feminine while the pronoun “that” is neuter. Therefore, if Paul had wanted to say faith is a gift he could have used the feminine form of the pronoun instead. The same applies to the word “grace” since it also is feminine in gender.

However, many Calvinists grant such a grammatical point, which is the consensus view today.<sup>235</sup> Even Calvin himself says, “His [Paul’s] meaning is, not that faith is the gift of God, but that salvation is given to us by God, or, that we obtain it by the gift of God.”<sup>236</sup> Schreiner elaborates when he affirms that the demonstrative pronoun *this* (*touto*) is neuter and “thus cannot be the specific antecedent to *grace* or *faith* since the words *grace* (*charity*) and *faith* (*pisteōs*) are both feminine. Nor can it refer specifically back to *saved*, for the participle *saved* (*sesōmenoi*) is masculine.”<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>234</sup>Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 399.

<sup>235</sup>There have been exceptions such as Charles Hodge, *Ephesians*, ed. Alister McGrath and J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 118-19; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 744, 754, 796. Such a view was held by Chrysostom, Theodoret, and Jerome. See Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 129.

<sup>236</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 228-29.

<sup>237</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 246-47.

Nevertheless, the question remains, what in Paul's mind is the antecedent of "that" ("this" in the ESV) in 2:8? Answer: The gift is salvation in its totality.<sup>238</sup> As Schreiner says,

Paul wanted to communicate that everything said in Ephesians 2:8 is God's gift. That is, if he had used the masculine or feminine form of the pronoun, some might have concluded that some of the elements contained in this verse were not part of God's gift. By using the neuter he emphasizes that the whole is God's gift.<sup>239</sup>

All and every aspect of salvation, says Paul, is by grace alone. As Sam Storms explains, "From beginning to end, from its inception to its consummation, salvation is a gift of God to his elect."<sup>240</sup> What then does this mean for "faith" itself? Storms continues, "Consequently, that faith by which we come into experiential possession of what God in grace has provided is as much a gift as any and every other aspect of salvation. One can no more deny that faith is wrapped up in God's gift to us than he can deny it of God's grace."<sup>241</sup> Storms is exactly right. While the "gift" refers to salvation in its totality, salvation is all of grace and, as Paul says in 2:8, it is "by grace you have been saved through faith." Therefore, if salvation is "not your own doing" but is a "gift of God" so also must it be the case that faith is also by grace and a gift of God. O'Brien states,

The point being made, then, is that the response of faith does not come from any human source but is God's gift. . . . God's magnificent rescue from death, wrath, and bondage is all of grace. It neither originates in nor is effected by the readers. Instead, it is God's own gift, a point which Paul goes out of his way to emphasize by changing the normal word order and contrasting 'God's' with 'yours'.<sup>242</sup>

Contrary to Arminianism, faith is not effected by the sinner nor does it originate in the sinner. Thielman observes that faith cannot be a synergism which brings about divine grace. "In Paul's thinking, faith is not something that people offer to God and with which God's grace then cooperates to save them. Rather, faith is aligned with grace, and both

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<sup>238</sup>Samuel C. Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 71. Also see Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 139.

<sup>239</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 246.

<sup>240</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 71.

<sup>241</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup>O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 175-76.

faith and grace stand over against anything that human beings can offer God: it is neither a work deserving payment nor a ground for boasting (Rom. 4:2-5, 16).<sup>243</sup>

Before moving to a third passage, it is essential to recognize that all boasting is excluded by Paul. Grace precludes works which include any “human effort in general.” Salvation “is not based on human performance or on any effort to win God’s approval.”<sup>244</sup> How could human effort be included when Paul previously made it obvious that man is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-3)? Therefore, as O’Brien states, “It was impossible for the readers to turn to their previous behaviour as the basis for achieving salvation.”<sup>245</sup> Boasting is excluded since man is “in no position to claim even the slightest credit for their acceptance with God (note Paul’s argument in Rom. 4:1-8). . . . Men and women have nothing which they can bring as their own to the living God.”<sup>246</sup> Can the Arminian escape bringing something of his own to God? It seems unlikely since he insists that while faith is a gift it is one that man can reject and even when it is accepted it is seen as the work of man primarily. Though the Arminian denies it, it is difficult to see how boasting is excluded, especially when someone like Wesley rejected Calvin’s thesis that in salvation God is everything and man is nothing and instead argued that “man is the sole determinative factor in the decision of his own justification.”<sup>247</sup> Surely this is a serious threat to the glory of God and the gratuity of God’s sovereign grace.

A third passage to be examined is Philippians 1:29-30 where Paul says, “For it has been *granted* to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only *believe* in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have” (emphasis added). Paul explains that not only is suffering a gift from God’s

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<sup>243</sup>Thielman, *Ephesians*, 143.

<sup>244</sup>O’Brien, *Ephesians*, 177.

<sup>245</sup>Ibid.

<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 177-78.

<sup>247</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 117.

sovereign hand, but so also is belief (faith) in Christ.<sup>248</sup> But notice, Paul specifically says “it [belief] has been granted.” The word “granted” here (*echaristhē*) should not be understood, as it sometimes is in English, as a reluctance or mere permission on God’s part.<sup>249</sup> Rather in Greek “granted” means to give graciously and freely. It is the same word from which the word *grace* is derived.<sup>250</sup> Out of love God grants to his elect faith or belief in his Son. Belief in Christ is not something the sinner produces but rather it is something that God gives. If God does not grant it, then belief does not result. Like Ephesians 2:8-10, in Philippians 1:29-30 we again see that faith is something which God produces in us, not something we do by our own free will.

A fourth passage which also exemplifies God’s sovereign work of faith is 2 Peter 1:1 which reads, “Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.” Is Peter saying that it is by man’s will that faith is obtained? Not at all, for obtaining faith here refers to the reception of a gift that is given by God’s choice. Storms explains, “What is of paramount importance here is the word translated ‘have obtained’ or ‘have received.’ It is related to a verb that means ‘to obtain by lot’ (see Luke 1:9; John 19:24; Acts 1:17). Thus, faith is removed from the realm of human free will and placed in its proper perspective as having originated in the sovereign and altogether gracious will of God.”<sup>251</sup> Therefore, while faith is an act of believing (*fides qua creditor*), this act is not a human but a divine work.<sup>252</sup> As Calvin states, “Faith is something merely passive, bringing nothing of ours to the recovering of God’s favor but receiving from

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<sup>248</sup>Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., BECNT (2005), 84.

<sup>249</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 71.

<sup>250</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 247.

<sup>251</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 72.

<sup>252</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.1.4. Cf. Barbara Pitkin, “Faith and Justification,” in *The Calvin Handbook*, 290.

Christ that which we lack.”<sup>253</sup> It is no wonder then that Calvinists like Packer see Arminianism as such a threat since it makes “man’s salvation dependent ultimately on man himself, saving faith being viewed throughout as man’s own work and, because his own, not God’s in him.”<sup>254</sup>

## Repentance

Faith is surely a gift that is granted and effectually applied by God’s sovereign will, but so also is repentance. As Bavinck states, “True repentance according to Scripture, does not arise from the natural ‘man’ but from the new life that was planted in a person by regeneration.”<sup>255</sup> Therefore, “Faith and repentance both arise from regeneration.”<sup>256</sup> It is essential to keep in mind then that faith and repentance are “ultimately inseparable.”<sup>257</sup> Since we have already seen that faith is a gift (Matt 11:25-27; 16:17; John 1:12-13; 6:44; 1 Cor 12:3; Gal 1:16; Eph 1:11; 2:8; Phil 1:29; 2:13), it should not be surprising that we would find texts where repentance also is a gift. Notice how Paul writes to Timothy, “And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will” (2 Tim 2:24-26). The opponents Paul refers to are unbelievers as is evident by the fact that they are opposing the Lord’s servant (2:24), are in need of

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<sup>253</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.13.5. “He indeed grants us the capacity to believe and the power of faith but also the will to believe and faith itself, not mechanically or magically, but inwardly, spiritually, organically, in connection with the word that he brings to people in various ways.” Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:125. Turretin also states, “God is the sole cause of habitual conversion. He effects it by the heart-turning power of his Spirit without any cooperation from man. Here man (since it treats of his renewal) is only passive and subjective inasmuch as he is a mere subject receiving the action of God.” Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:523.

<sup>254</sup>Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 128.

<sup>255</sup>Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:163.

<sup>256</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:152.

<sup>257</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 247.

repentance and knowledge of the truth (2:25), and are in “the snare of the devil.” The sinner cannot repent nor does he want to. Rather, he loves sin and therefore shows himself to be a slave of the devil, doing his will. Paul explains that the only way the sinner can be liberated from such a slavery is by God granting repentance. If God does not grant repentance then the sinner is left to his sinful captivity. As Storms states,

If a person is to repent, he or she must be enabled by God to do so. He must be ‘granted’ repentance as a gift. Whether or not a person repents, says Paul, is ultimately up to God. It rests with him and his sovereign good pleasure to give or to withhold that which leads to ‘a knowledge of the truth.’ That God does not bestow this gift universally is self-evident.<sup>258</sup>

Likewise, Schreiner states,

Such repentance can only come from God, for human beings are anesthetized by the devil; and only God can provide the power to ‘sober them up’ (*ananēpsōsin*, 2 Tim 2:26). No hope for the transformation of human beings lies in the human will. God must grant repentance and the necessary sobriety. Human beings are snared in the devil’s trap and are held captive (*ezōgrēmenoi*) by him, so that they always do the devil’s will.<sup>259</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that a sinner cannot repent unless God decides he will grant it to him also reveals the truth that repentance is not given universally but only to the elect. As Storms explains, “Were repentance something God gives to all, Paul would hardly have said that ‘perhaps’ God may grant repentance. Clearly he envisions the real possibility that God may *not* so grant.”<sup>260</sup> Consequently, the Arminian view that God tries through prevenient grace to work repentance on all people but whether or not he does so is dependent upon the will of man is contrary to passages like 2 Timothy 2:24-26. God, not man, determines whether or not repentance will be given and made effective.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 72-73.

<sup>259</sup>Schreiner, *Paul*, 247-48.

<sup>260</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 72-73.

<sup>261</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 73. Moreover, contrary to what the Arminian says, God’s sovereignty in applying salvation efficaciously and selectively does not lead to a laxness in evangelism. Notice that Paul tells Timothy to go to great lengths to not be quarrelsome but kind, teaching and patiently enduring evil, even correcting opponents with gentleness because God may perhaps grant Timothy’s opponents repentance. Therefore, sovereign grace, here evident in the granting of repentance, is not a barrier to evangelism and the preaching of the gospel to all but is perfectly compatible and consistent with it. Storms makes an important observation, “It is important to note that in Paul’s mind God’s sovereignty in no way minimizes Timothy’s ethical obligation or the urgency with which he is exhorted to fulfill it. Paul does not say, ‘Relax, Timothy; don’t worry about how you act. After all, whether or not these people repent

Two other texts to be examined concerning repentance are Acts 5:31 and Acts 11:18. Acts 5:31 reads, “God exalted him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 11:18 explains how God not only grants repentance to Israel but to Gentiles as well, “When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’” Peter recognized that not only had God intended to grant repentance to Jews (Acts 5:31), but to Gentiles as well. Peter, seeing such a miracle take place, draws the conclusion not that these sinners exercised their free will, but rather that God, in his sovereignty, decided to grant repentance. Storms argues, “Peter would not need to have drawn such a conclusion if repentance were a universal gift that all receive. . . . If everyone, even those who persist in unbelief, are granted repentance, Peter could not and would not have reasoned as he did.”<sup>262</sup> A universal granting of repentance by God is not in view. Quite the contrary; God and God alone decides whom he will grant repentance to (cf. Acts 2:47) and nothing in man makes such an act by God conditional or contingent. Passages like Acts 5:31 and Acts 11:18 only serve to complement those passages already examined, like Acts 13:48 where the Gentiles believe and rejoice in Christ because they were appointed to eternal life and Acts 16:14 where the reason Lydia repented and believed was because God first opened her heart, making her a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Eph 2:10; James 1:18).

### **Conclusion: Monergism Preserves God’s Glory**

To conclude, the exegetical evidence for monergistic regeneration preceding faith is overwhelming. Yet, because Scripture places the emphasis on God’s sovereignty, some readers will undoubtedly find themselves uncomfortable. Piper explains,

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is in God’s hands, not yours. So ease up and do as you please.’ Paul knew that Timothy’s patient love may well be one means utilized by God in the gracious bestowal of repentance. Thus, once again we see that the antecedence of divine sovereignty does not undermine the moral significance or necessity of human volition.” Ibid. Paul views preaching the gospel and teaching the truth not as a hindrance but as a means that God may use to grant sinner’s repentance.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid.

[T]he new birth is unsettling because it refers to something that is done to us, not something we do. . . . God causes the new birth; we don't. . . . We do not cause the new birth. God causes the new birth. Any spiritually good thing we do is a result of the new birth, not a cause of the new birth. This means that the new birth is taken out of our hands. It is not in our control. And so it confronts us with our helplessness and our absolute dependence on Someone outside ourselves. This is unsettling. We are told that we won't see the kingdom of God if we're not born again. And we're told that we can't make ourselves to be born again. . . . Therefore, if we are going to be born again, it will rely decisively and ultimately on God. His decision to make us alive will not be a response to what we as spiritual corpses do, but what we do will be a response to his making us alive.<sup>263</sup>

Despite how unsettling monergism makes one feel, the fact is that the doctrine is found everywhere in Scripture. Moreover, if such a biblical doctrine is compromised we surrender that which is ultimately at stake in such a debate, namely, the glory of God. As Ware explains, the biblical view is of “one who reigns supreme over all, whose purposes are accomplished without fail, and who directs the course of human affairs, including the central drama of saving a people for the honor of his name, all with perfect holiness and matchless grace.”<sup>264</sup> Key in such a statement is that God accomplishes his purposes without fail. For the Calvinist, God's effectual grace is not dependent on the will of man as it is for the Arminian. Only the former can truly give God *all* of the glory in regeneration. Abraham Kuiper explains,

It is a distinguishing mark of Reformed theologians that they always champion the glory of God over against all tendencies to exalt man. And it is especially in its doctrine of the Ordo Salutis that Reformed Theology magnifies God as the Sole Author of our salvation. It traces back the application of salvation to the sovereign and gracious will of God. Whether or not a man is to become a partaker of salvation, does not in the last analysis rest with man. It rests on the eternal decree of election, which God Himself effectually realizes in the course of history.<sup>265</sup>

Like Kuiper, James M. Boice and Philip Ryken explain the dividing line,

Having a high view of God means something more than giving glory to God, however; it means giving glory to God *alone*. This is the difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. While the former declares that God alone saves sinners, the latter gives the impression that God enables sinners to have some part in saving themselves. “Calvinism presents salvation as the work of the triune God –

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<sup>263</sup>Piper, *Finally Alive*, 26-27.

<sup>264</sup>Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 9.

<sup>265</sup>Kuiper, *By Grace Alone*, 36.

election by the Father, redemption in the Son, calling by the Spirit. Furthermore, each of these saving acts is directed toward the elect, thereby infallibly securing their salvation. By contrast, Arminianism views salvation as something that God makes possible but that man makes actual. This is because the saving acts of God are directed toward *different* persons: the Son's redemption is for humanity in general; the Spirit's calling is only for those who hear the gospel; narrower still, the Father's election is only for those who believe the gospel. Yet in none of these cases (redemption, calling, or election) does God *actually* secure the salvation of even one single sinner! The inevitable result is that rather than depending exclusively on divine grace, salvation depends partly on a human response. So although Arminianism is willing to give God the glory, when it comes to salvation, it is unwilling to give him *all* the glory. It divides the glory between heaven and earth, for if what ultimately makes the difference between being saved and being lost is man's ability to choose God, then to just that extent God is robbed of his glory. Yet God himself has said, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isa. 48:11).<sup>266</sup>

God's glory is wrapped up in the doctrine of monergistic regeneration and is only compromised should it unravel at the expense of man's autonomy.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>266</sup>Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 34-35.

<sup>267</sup>Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:308.

## CHAPTER 5

### ARMINIAN SYNERGISM IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### Introduction

Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) once said in his *Sentiments*,

In his lapsed and sinful state, man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers, by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit, that he may be qualified rightly to understand, esteem, consider, will, and perform whatever is truly good.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps for many Calvinists, such an affirmation of spiritual inability by Arminius is surprising. However, though there are notable exceptions, many Arminians and Wesleyans who followed Arminius would likewise affirm total depravity and the necessity of God's grace to precede the will of man. Why then does such a chasm exist between Calvinism and Arminianism if both camps agree on a doctrine as vital as man's depravity and bondage to sin? The divide exists because, as William Cannon observes, though Calvinists and Arminians come so close together, in reality they are worlds apart due to the doctrine of prevenient grace.<sup>2</sup> One could ask, for example, how it is that the Arminian can, on the one hand, affirm total depravity and spiritual inability and yet at the

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<sup>1</sup>James Arminius, "A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 1:252. Also see F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: James Arminius' Doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 74; Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 338.

<sup>2</sup>William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley: With Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (New York: University Press of America, 1974), 102. Also see Robert V. Rakestraw, "John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace," *JETS* 27, no. 2 (1984): 202; Kenneth J. Collins, *Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 45; Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon, 1960), 44; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 234; J. Kenneth Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1994), 49; Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of his Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 244; Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 50.

same time affirm that man's free will is able to accept or resist God's grace (synergism), while avoiding Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian notions of cooperation.<sup>3</sup> For the Arminian the answer lies in the doctrine of prevenient grace because it is here that a free will ability to cooperate with or resist subsequent grace is restored to man.<sup>4</sup> God provides a *gratia praeveniens* which mitigates depravity and enables man to either resist or cooperate with the Spirit. Therefore, while the Calvinist views God's grace as effectual, the Arminian disagrees, arguing that while grace must be the initiator, nevertheless, the efficacy of grace is ultimately conditioned upon man's free will and is therefore synergistic. Consequently, prevenient grace is no small doctrine, but the very hinge of an Arminian and Wesleyan soteriology which diverges so drastically from Calvinism.<sup>5</sup> As Robert Chiles confesses, "Without it, the Calvinist logic is irrefutable."<sup>6</sup> And Thomas Schreiner suitably concludes that "if prevenient grace is not taught in Scripture, then the credibility of Wesleyan theology is seriously undermined."<sup>7</sup> The aim of this chapter then is to accurately represent Arminianism. Not until chapter 6 will a critique of synergism can be given.

### **Arminianisms and Total Depravity**

Before examining Arminian synergism, it is necessary and essential to recognize where Arminians stand on original sin. As previously discussed in chapter 2, original sin is comprised of two aspects: guilt (*reatus*) and corruption (*vitium*), the latter of which is sometimes referred to as pollution or depravity.<sup>8</sup> Regarding the former,

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<sup>3</sup>Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2001), 319.

<sup>4</sup>As Picirilli states, the "problem of depraved man's inability to respond positively to the gospel is solved by what Arminius called 'prevenient grace.'" Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will – Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism* (Nashville: Random House, 2002), 149.

<sup>5</sup>Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace?" 234.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 50.

<sup>7</sup>Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace?" 234. Likewise see Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 149.

<sup>8</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 143-50.

Calvinists and Arminians have disagreed on the imputation of guilt from original sin. While most in the Reformed tradition have argued that *both* guilt and corruption (pollution) are imputed to Adam's posterity, many in the Arminian tradition have affirmed the imputation of corruption but have denied the imputation of guilt. As Grudem states, "Not all evangelical theologians, however, agree that we are counted guilty because of Adam's sin. Some, especially Arminian theologians, think this to be unfair of God and do not believe that it is taught in Romans 5."<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Olson states, "These [Arminian] evangelicals believe that the guilt of sin that alienates people from God derives only from intentional sinning. Any guilt associated with original sin, they argue, was set aside and covered by the atoning death of Jesus Christ."<sup>10</sup> But even within the Arminian tradition there has been disagreement over exactly *why* it is that mankind does not inherit Adam's guilt.<sup>11</sup> For instance, John Miley argued that original sin does not include guilt or condemnation. Though there is "native depravity" there is not "native demerit."<sup>12</sup> The reason why guilt is not imputed is because no guilt actually exists to be imputed. It is impossible for mankind to be held guilty or culpable for a sin it did not commit. However, not all Arminians agree or explain the absence of original guilt as Miley does. John Wesley, John Fletcher, Richard Watson, William Pope, and Thomas Summers have argued that the guilt of original sin does exist but is set aside, abrogated,

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<sup>9</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 496.

<sup>10</sup>Roger E. Olson, "Sin/Original Sin," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 268-69.

<sup>11</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 153. It should, however, be qualified that some Arminians do affirm original guilt. For example, Arminian theologian Robert E. Picirilli has no hesitation in affirming original guilt and even argues that Arminius himself affirmed it. Picirilli quotes David Smith as one who agrees with his assessment of Arminius. Picirilli goes on to also claim Thomas Grantham, a seventeenth-century "Reformation Arminian." See Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 152-53; David L. Smith, *With Willful Intent: A Theology of Sin* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1994), 87; James Arminius, "Epistolary Discussion, concerning Predestination, between James Arminius, D. D. and Francis Junius, D. D.," in *Writings*, 3:178.

<sup>12</sup>John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody Clarke, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), 1:509. However, while guilt cannot be imputed, corruption can. Consequently, while man cannot be held guilty for Adam's sin, due to man's inherited corruption, man inevitably becomes guilty because of the sins he commits. *Ibid.*, 1:521. See Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 153.

and mitigated by the atoning work of Christ, which provides prevenient grace to all sinners.<sup>13</sup> This view seems to be the most faithful to Arminius himself,<sup>14</sup> who, contrary to the Reformed tradition, preferred to speak of the result of Adam's sin in terms of "privation" rather than "depravation."<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, Arminius still avoids the Pelagian error because, as Bangs observes, "Acts of sin are not mere free choices in imitation of bad example but the result of the predicament of man in the fall."<sup>16</sup> Despite this disagreement between Calvinists and Arminians over the imputation of guilt, most agree over the inheritance of corruption to which we now turn.

### Jacob Arminius

According to Arminius, man is dead in sin and the severity of sin has penetrated every aspect of man's being due to the corruption inherited from Adam.<sup>17</sup> As seen in the opening quote of this chapter, for Arminius man's will is in bondage to sin,

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<sup>13</sup>John Wesley, "The Doctrine of Original Sin," in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. T. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 9:192-464. Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 87; Barry E. Bryant, "Original Sin," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, eds. William J. Abraham and James E. Kirby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 522, 537; Marjorie Suchocki, "Wesleyan Grace," in *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, 547; McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 158-59; Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 148-53; Kenneth J. Collins, *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 20-22; idem, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 31-45; Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 198-200.

<sup>14</sup>Arminius, "Twenty-Five Public Disputations," in *Writings*, 1:479-86. See Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 145n26; Bangs, *Arminius*, 339. Episcopius advocates a similar view. See Shedd's quotations of and comments on Episcopius's *Apology for the Remonstrants* in W. G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (Vestavia Hills, AL: Solid Ground Christian, 2006), 2:181-83. Also see D. C. Shipley, "Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher," (Ph. D. diss., Yale University, 1942), 195-96, who argues that Episcopius and the Remonstrance repudiated any affirmation of guilt in original sin.

<sup>15</sup>Arminius, "Private Disputation," in *Writings*, 2:77-79. See Clarke, *The Ground of Election*, 74; Bangs, *Arminius*, 338. On his avoidance of the term original sin, see Bangs, *Arminius*, 339. Arminius's choice to speak of privation instead of deprivation differs from the Reformed view. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1950), 340.

<sup>16</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 340.

<sup>17</sup>For example, Arminius states concerning original sin, "The whole of this sin, however, is not peculiar to our first parents, but is common to the entire race and to all their posterity, who, at the time when this sin was committed, were in their loins, and who have since descended from them by the natural mode of propagation, according to the primitive benediction: For in Adam 'all have sinned.' (Rom. V, 12.) Wherefore, whatever punishment was brought down upon our first parents, has likewise pervaded and yet pursues all their posterity: So that all men 'are by nature the children of wrath,' (Ephes. ii, 3,) obnoxious to condemnation, and to temporal as well as to eternal death; they are also devoid of that original righteousness and holiness. (Rom. V, 12, 18, 19.) With these evils they would remain oppressed for ever, unless they were liberated by Christ Jesus; to whom be glory for ever." Arminius, "Twenty-Five Public Disputations," 1:485.

unable to accomplish anything spiritually good towards God.<sup>18</sup> Arminius also states,

In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and [*attenuatem*] weakened; but it is also [*captivatum*], imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace. For Christ has said, “Without me ye can do nothing.”<sup>19</sup>

Arminius is very clear that every aspect of man must be renewed since he is infected by sin.<sup>20</sup> Notice, Arminius is not content with saying, as the Semi-Pelagians do, that man’s will is merely or only wounded, maimed, infirmed, bent, and weakened.<sup>21</sup> Rather, he goes farther, describing man’s will as imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. Apart from grace the will is debilitated and useless. As Bangs states, “There is nothing here of grace as an *assistance* given to a man who is only weakened by sin.”<sup>22</sup> Arminius denied the charges of Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, accusing both groups of ignorance in spiritual matters,<sup>23</sup> and argued that “what they attributed to natural free will, his theology

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<sup>18</sup>Arminius, “A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius,” 1:252.

<sup>19</sup>Arminius, “Twenty-Five Public Disputations,” in *Writings*, 1:526. Bangs comments, “Sinful man, then, has ‘free will,’ but not a will that is capable of accomplishing spiritual good, i.e., of doing a meritorious work. His free will is in bondage to sin and needs salvation from outside.” Bangs, *Arminius*, 341.

<sup>20</sup>Concerning man’s mind Arminius states: “*The mind* of man, in this state, is dark, destitute of the saving knowledge of God, and, according to the Apostle, incapable of those things which belong to the Spirit of God.” Arminius goes on to appeal to 1 Corinthians 1:18, 24, 2:14, Romans 1:21-22, Ephesians 4:17-18, 5:8, Titus 3:3. Concerning the affections Arminius states: “To the darkness of the mind succeeds *the perverseness of the affections and of the heart*, according to which it hates and has an aversion to that which is truly good and pleasing to God; but it loves and pursues what is evil.” Arminius goes on to appeal to Romans 8:7, Jeremiah 13:10, 17:9, Ezekiel 36:26, Gen 6:5, 8:21, and Matthew 15:19. Concerning the will (or powers) Arminius states: “Exactly correspondent to this darkness of the mind, and perverseness of the heart, is [*impotentia*] *the utter weakness of all the powers* to perform that which is truly good, and to omit the perpetration of that which is evil, in a due mode and from a due end and cause. The subjoined sayings of Christ serve to describe this impotence.” Arminius appeals to Matthew 7:18, 12:34, John 6:44, Romans 8:7, 7:5, 6:20, 2 Timothy 2:26. Arminius concludes, “To these let the consideration *of the whole of the life of man* who is [*constitute*] placed under sin, be added, of which the Scriptures exhibit to us the most luminous descriptions; and it will be evident, that nothing can be spoken more truly concerning man in this state, than that he is altogether dead in sin (Rom. iii, 10-19).” Arminius, “Twenty-Five Public Disputations,” 1:526.

<sup>21</sup>William Gene Witt, “Creation, Redemption and Grace in the Theology of James Arminius,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1993), 2:608.

<sup>22</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 341.

<sup>23</sup>Arminius, “Examination of Dr. Perkins’s Pamphlet on Predestination,” in *Writings*, 3:289. For an elaboration on this denial by Arminius, see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 142. For the case that Arminius was neither Socinian or Pelagian (as well as a short explanation on the origins of the term “Semi-Pelagian”), see Mark A. Ellis, “Introduction,” in *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, ed. and trans. Mark A. Ellis (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2005), v-vii.

attributes to divine grace.”<sup>24</sup> As seen in chapter 2, medieval Semi-Pelagianism argued that “God will not deny his grace to any one who does what is in him.” Arminius called such a saying “absurdity,” unworthy of “sacred matters”<sup>25</sup> and instead modified the medieval saying: “To him who does what he can *by the primary grace already conferred upon him*, God will bestow further grace upon him who profitably uses that which is primary.”<sup>26</sup> Arminius taught that due to man’s radical corruption and bondage of the will, it is God, not man, who must initiate salvation (see Private Disputation 44). Until God provides prevenient (“preventing”) grace man can in no way cooperate with God.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, while Arminius does affirm synergism it is a God initiated and enabled synergism. As Arminius further explains in his letter to Hippolytus,

Free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without Grace. That I may not be said, like Pelagius, to practice delusion with regard to the word “Grace,” I mean by it that which is the Grace of Christ and which belongs to regeneration. . . . I confess that the mind of a natural and carnal man is obscure and dark, that his affections are corrupt and inordinate, that his will is stubborn and disobedient, and that the man himself is dead in sins.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, William Witt concludes, “Whatever may be true of successors to Arminius’s theology, he himself held to a doctrine of the bondage of the will which is every bit as trenchant as anything in Luther or Calvin.”<sup>29</sup>

### **The Arminian Remonstrants**

Arminius was not lacking followers who sought to be true to his doctrine, as is evident in the Arminian Articles of 1610. Article III states,

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<sup>24</sup>Witt, “Arminius,” 2:629.

<sup>25</sup>Arminius, “Apology Against Thirty-One Defamatory Articles,” in *Writings* 1:328-29.

<sup>26</sup>Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 1:329.

<sup>27</sup>Bangs, *Arminius*, 341; D. E. Eaton, “Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley,” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1988), 75.

<sup>28</sup>James Arminius, “A Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A Collibus,” in *Writings*, 2:472-73. Also see Arminius, “A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius,” 1:253-54.

<sup>29</sup>Witt, “Arminius,” 479. Likewise see R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 126; Eaton, “Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley,” 67-68.

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John xv.5: ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, when Dort called upon the Remonstrants to more fully articulate their beliefs at the Synod of Dort, the Remonstrants, led by Simon Episcopius, would again affirm man’s pervasive depravity, corruption, and inability in the *Sententiae Remonstrantium*.<sup>31</sup>

Though these *Sententiae* were condemned by Dort, Episcopius would again reiterate the Remonstrance articles in his 1621 confession.

For without it [divine grace] we could neither shake off the miserable yoke of sin, nor do anything truly good in all religion, nor finally ever escape eternal death or any true punishment of sin. Much less could we at any time obtain eternal salvation without it or through ourselves.<sup>32</sup>

Episcopius, sounding much like Arminius, continues,

Man therefore does not have saving faith from himself, nor is he regenerated or converted by the powers of his own free will, seeing that in the state of sin he cannot of himself or by himself either think or will or do anything that is good enough to be saved (of which first of all is conversion and saving faith), but it is necessary that he be regenerated and totally renewed by God, in Christ, through the word of the gospel joined with the power of the Holy Spirit, namely, in his understanding, affections, will and all his strengths, that he may be able to understand, mediate on, will and finish correctly these things that are savingly good.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Philip Schaff, *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, vol. 3 of *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 546-47.

<sup>31</sup>Consider the following articles: “1. Man does not have saving faith of himself, nor out of the powers of his free will, since in the state of sin he is able of himself and by himself neither to think, will, or do any good (which would indeed be saving good, the most prominent of which is saving faith). It is necessary therefore that by God in Christ through His Holy Spirit he be regenerated and renewed in intellect, affections, will, and in all his powers, so that he might be able to understand, reflect upon, will and carry out the good things which pertain to salvation.” And again, “2. We hold, however, that the grace of God is not only the beginning but also the progression and the completion of every good, so much so that even the regenerate himself is unable to think, will, or do the good, or to resist any temptations to evil, apart from that preceding or prevenient, awaking, following and cooperating grace. Hence all good works and actions which anyone by cogitation is able to comprehend are to be ascribed to the grace of God.” And again, “4. The will in the fallen state, before calling, does not have the power and the freedom to will any saving good. And therefore we deny that the freedom to will saving good as well as evil is present to the will in every state.” As quoted in “Appendix H: The Opinions of the Remonstrants,” in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 225-26.

<sup>32</sup>See Chapter 7, Article 10 of Simon Episcopius, *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, 68-69.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

These statements by Episcopius clearly affirm man's inability apart from grace.

However, not all Remonstrants would agree. Philip Limborch (1633-1712), whom Olson describes as one who “defected from Arminius’s theology,” upheld an “optimistic anthropology” as opposed to Arminius’s “pessimistic anthropology.”<sup>34</sup> While Arminius argued that man’s will is in bondage to sin apart from God’s grace, Limborch denied the total bondage of man’s will. Influenced by the Enlightenment and the development of seventeenth-century Socinianism, Limborch argued that Adam’s sin merely resulted in a “universal misery.” This universal misery or “inherited misfortune” does not put man in bondage to sin but merely inclines people toward sin. Therefore, Limborch denied not only inherited guilt but inherited depravity.<sup>35</sup> According to Limborch, “All men are not by nature unteachable and wicked; for indocility is not owing to our nature, nor is it born with us, but ‘tis acquired by a vicious education and a bad custom.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, when Limborch did affirm special grace he made prevenient grace (i.e., that which excites man’s free will) synonymous with common grace, thereby relinquishing prevenient grace of its supernatural nature. Limborch is an example of the tendency of some Arminians to adopt Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>37</sup> Despite Limborch, later Arminians would repudiate Limborch, siding instead with Arminius.

### **John Wesley and Wesleyan-Arminianism**

John Wesley (1703-1791) wrote over two hundred pages defending the doctrine of original sin against John Taylor who denied the doctrine.<sup>38</sup> As David Steers

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<sup>34</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 147.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. See Philip Limborch, *A Complete System, or, Body of Divinity*, trans. William Jones (London: John Darby, 1713), 192. However, as Olson observes, Limborch was inconsistent because at times it sounded as if he was affirming inherited original sin. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 147-48.

<sup>36</sup>Limborch, *Body of Divinity*, 409. See Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 148.

<sup>37</sup>John M. Hicks, “The Theology of Grace in the Thought of Jamesus Arminius and Philip van Limborch” (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 3. Also see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 148.

<sup>38</sup>Wesley, “The Doctrine of Original Sin,” 9:191-464. Contra: John Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin, Exposed to Free and Candid Examination* (London: n.p., 1740). See McGonigle,

states, “Although he [Taylor] shared an Arminian theology with John Wesley, Taylor’s more rational approach was the opposite of Wesley’s evangelicalism.”<sup>39</sup> Though Wesley did not affirm the imputation of the guilt of original sin (contrary to many in the Reformed tradition),<sup>40</sup> he did affirm the corruption of original sin.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, as Albert Outler observes, Wesley “came close to the Calvinist hard line on point T of TULIP: ‘total depravity and original sin’” though “he never seriously considered any of the other four points.”<sup>42</sup> According to Wesley, man is dead in sin until God supernaturally calls him to new life.<sup>43</sup> In his 1790 sermon *The Deceitfulness of Man’s Heart*, based on Jermeiah 17:9, Wesley states, “Hence there is, in the heart of every child of man, an inexhaustible fund of ungodliness and unrighteousness so deeply and strongly rooted in the soul, that nothing less than almighty grace can cure it.”<sup>44</sup> Wesley even equated human nature at his time with man’s sinful nature at the time of the flood. “In his natural state

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*Sufficient Saving Grace*, 2; Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 169. Others opposed Taylor, including: David Jennings, John Hervey, Isaac Watts, Samuel Hebden, and Thomas Boston.

<sup>39</sup>David Steers, “Arminianism amongst Protestant Dissenters in England and Ireland in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe: James Arminius (1559/60-1609)*, ed. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stranglin, and Marijke Tolsma, Brill’s Series in Church History, vol. 39 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), 195. For an extensive defense of Wesley as an evangelical Arminian, see McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 329-30; Albert C. Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,” in *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*, ed. Thomas C. Oden and Leicester R. Longden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 34; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, “The Influence of Arminianism in England,” in *Man’s Faith and Freedom*, ed. Gerald O. McCulloh (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 60-61; George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: H. Holt, 1935), 10-21.

<sup>40</sup>On how Wesley came to this position, see Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 74-83.

<sup>41</sup>Jason Vickers, “Wesley’s Theological Emphasis,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley*, ed. Randy L. Maddox and Jason E. Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 195. Olson observes that Wesley may have preferred “deprivation” instead of “depravity” because he misunderstood the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity to say that man is as bad as he possibly can be. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 149. Also see David Hempton, “John Wesley (1703-1791),” in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 258-59; Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 82.

<sup>42</sup>Outler, “The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley,” 88. For a history of synergism both in Wesley and later Methodism, see pages 55-96, 189-209. Also see B. E. Bryant, “John Wesley’s Doctrine of Sin,” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1992), 178, who says, “Where total depravity was concerned Wesley certainly stood with the Reformers.”

<sup>43</sup>See Wesley, “On Working Out Our Own Salvation,” in *Works*, 6:506-13; idem, “The New Birth,” in *Works*, 6:65-77. Also see Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 26-45.

<sup>44</sup>John Wesley, “On the Deceitfulness of the Human Heart,” in *Works*, 7:340. For other works by Wesley on man’s depravity see “Original Sin,” 6:54-64; “On the Fall of Man,” in *Works*, 6:215-224; “God’s Love to Fallen Man,” in *Works*, 6:231-40. For Wesley’s solution to depravity in the new birth, see “The Circumcision of the Heart,” in *Works*, 5:202-11; “The Marks of the New Birth,” in *Works*, 5:212-222; “The New Birth,” 6:65-76.

every man born into the world is a rank idolater.”<sup>45</sup> Man has inherited from Adam a corrupt nature so that “every one descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly dead in sin; entirely void of the life of God; void of the image of God, of all that righteousness and holiness wherein Adam was created.” Consequently, “Every man born into the world now bears the image of the devil in pride and self-will; the image of the beast, in sensual appetites and desires.”<sup>46</sup> Wesley states in his sermon *On Original Sin*,

But here is the *shibboleth*: Is man by nature filled with all manner of evil? Is he void of all good? Is he wholly fallen? Is his soul totally corrupted? Or, to come back to the text, is “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart evil continually?” Allow this, and you are so far Christian. Deny it, and you are but a heathen still.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, not only did Wesley affirm man’s inherited and pervasive corruption, but he also asserted the bondage of man’s will. “I believe that Adam, before his fall, had such freedom of will, that he might choose either good or evil; but that, since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good.”<sup>48</sup> And again, “Such is the freedom of the will; free only to evil; free to ‘drink iniquity like water;’ to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more ‘despite to the Spirit of grace!’”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>John Wesley, “On Original Sin,” 9:198. Also see Bryant, “Original Sin,” 533.

<sup>46</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” 6:68.

<sup>47</sup>John Wesley, “On Original Sin,” 6:63. Earlier Wesley states, “No man loves God by nature, any more than he does a stone, or the earth he treads upon. What we love we delight in: But no man has naturally any delight in God. In our natural state we cannot conceive how any one should delight in him. We take no pleasure in him at all; he is utterly tasteless to us. To love God! It is far above, out of our sight. We cannot, naturally, attain unto it.” *Ibid.*, 6:59. On Wesley’s affirmation of total depravity, see Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 34-38; Harald Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation* (London: Epworth, 1950), 45; Rakeshaw, “John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace,” 196; Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today*, 41; Leo G. Cox, “Prevenient Grace-A Wesleyan View,” *JETS* 12 (1969): 147. As observed by Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace,” 233.

<sup>48</sup>John Wesley, “Some Remarks on ‘A Defense of the Preface to the Edinburgh Edition of *Aspasio Vindicated*,’” in *Works*, 10:350.

<sup>49</sup>John Wesley, “The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption,” in *Works*, 5:104. *idem*, *Wesley’s Standard Sermons*, ed. Edward H. Sugden (London: Epworth, 1955-56), 1:181-182; Charles A. Rogers, “The Concept of Prevenient Grace in the Theology of John Wesley” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1967), 109, 111. It is important to recognize how the image of God is impacted by sin. For Wesley, there are three images: (1) the natural image – man as a spiritual being with understanding, free will, and affections, (2) political image – man right to govern the earth, and (3) moral image – man’s righteousness and holiness. While the first two are marred by the fall, the third is absolutely destroyed. See Collins, *Wesley on Salvation*, 23; *idem*, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 29-30; Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 13-25.

Wesleyans in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries have likewise affirmed Wesley's doctrine of man's pervasive corruption and inability apart from grace.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps no one is as clear as Richard Watson (1781-1833) who said, "The true Arminian, as fully as the Calvinist, admits the doctrine of the total depravity of human nature in consequence of the fall of our first parents." Watson concludes, "Man is so totally overwhelmed, as with a deluge, that no part is free from sin, and therefore whatever proceeds from him is accounted sin."<sup>51</sup> William Pope (1822-1903) agrees,

It holds, with the purest Arminianism, earlier or later, that no ability remains in man to return to God; and this avowal concedes and vindicates the pith of original sin as internal. The natural man . . . is without the power even to co-operate with Divine influence. The co-operation with grace is of grace. Thus it keeps itself for ever safe from Pelagianism and semi-Pelagianism.<sup>52</sup>

Like Pope, Methodist Thomas Summers (1812-1882) would also say, "Apart from grace the will is bad, because the man's nature is so bad that of himself he cannot choose that which is right."<sup>53</sup> And again, "It is impossible for a man in this state [i.e., the bondage of the will] to will and to do works pleasant and acceptable to God. . . . He simply cannot do it."<sup>54</sup> Methodist John Miley (1813-1895) would also agree, "As the offspring of Adam, we all inherit the depravity of nature into which he fell through transgression."<sup>55</sup>

In the twentieth-century Wesleyan-Arminians have also affirmed total depravity. For example, H. Orton Wiley (1877-1961) states, "Not only are all men born

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<sup>50</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 151-56. Wesley's co-worker John Fletcher also affirmed total depravity. Shipley states, "Fletcher declared that, as a result of the Fall, man's ability to the good was lost completely. The fallen free-will is free only to choose evil." Shipley, "Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher," 198. On Fletcher's view of original sin, see 152-202.

<sup>51</sup>Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (New York: Lane & Scott, 1851), 2:48. Also see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 151.

<sup>52</sup>William Burton Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, n.d.), 2:80.

<sup>53</sup>Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity* (Nashville: Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888), 1:34.

<sup>54</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:68-69. Summers goes on to reject the Semi-Pelagians.

<sup>55</sup>Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 1:509.

under the penalty of death, as a consequence of sin, but they are born with a depraved nature also, which in contradistinction to the legal aspect of penalty, is generally termed inbred sin or inherited depravity.”<sup>56</sup> Elsewhere, Wiley is particularly clear, “Depravity is total in that it affects the entire being of man.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Thomas Oden states, “Total depravity does not mean that there is nothing good in human creation, but that sin taints every corner and aspect of human choosing.”<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such affirmations of total depravity, today there still exist a number of prominent Arminian theologians who deny the doctrine in order to preserve the libertarian freedom of man. Arminians like Jack Cottrell, Bruce Reichenbach, and Clark Pinnock argue that though the fall has devastating effects, some degree of libertarian freedom remains after the fall. There is no need, they say, to turn to a doctrine like total depravity when such a doctrine cannot be found in Scripture and only serves to destroy libertarian freedom which is essential to Arminian synergism. Pinnock, beginning as a Calvinist who then converted to Arminianism, explains his pilgrimage:

The depth of human sinfulness was another matter that soon demanded my attention. Calvinists, like Augustine himself, if the reader will excuse the anachronism, wanting to leave no room at all to permit any recognition of human freedom in the salvation event, so defined human depravity as total that it would be impossible to imagine any sinner calling upon God to save him. Thus they prevented anyone from thinking about salvation in the Arminian way. . . . Again, I had a choice of paths to follow. I knew that Wesley had opted for a doctrine of universal prevenient grace by which God enabled the spiritually dead sinner to respond to him in faith. The Fourth Gospel speaks of a universal drawing action of God (John 12:32). This move allowed him to retain his belief in total depravity and still avoid the Calvinistic consequences in terms of particularist election and limited grace. But I also knew that the Bible has no developed doctrine of universal prevenient grace, however convenient it would be for us if it did. Hence, I was

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<sup>56</sup>H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1952), 2:98, 129.

<sup>57</sup>Many other Wesleyan-Arminians since Wiley have also affirmed total depravity and spiritual inability. See Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*, 230-96; H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness: A Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Kansas City, Mo: Beacon Hill, 1988), 275-301.

<sup>58</sup>Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 161. Also consider Arminian Methodists today who still affirm total depravity and the bondage of the will, as demonstrated in *The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church*, adopted by the United Methodist Church, which were written and adapted by John Wesley from the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles in 1784 and intended for Methodists in America. See Articles VII and VIII. “The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church,” available from <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?mid=1648>; accessed 1 November 2010; internet. These twenty-four articles were first published by the church's Book of Discipline in 1790.

drawn instead to question total depravity itself as a possible ambush designed to cut off non-Augustinians at the pass. Was there any evidence that Jesus, for example, regarded people as totally depraved? Does the Bible generally not leave us with the impression that one can progress in sin as in holiness, and that how total one's depravity is varies from person to person and is not a constant? Surely "total" depravity biblically would be the full point beyond which it is not possible to go in realizing the full possibilities of sinfulness and not the actual condition of all sinners at the present time. In any case, what became decisive for me was the simple fact that Scripture appeals to people as those who are able and responsible to answer to God (however as we explain it) and not as those incapable of doing so, as Calvinian logic would suggest. The gospel addresses them as free and responsible agents, and I must suppose it does so because that is what they are.<sup>59</sup>

Elsewhere Pinnock states, "The Fall has not deprived man of his ability to choose. It rather initiated a historical process in which man uses his freedom in morally perverted ways. It did not nullify the fact of man's freedom; it only altered the moral direction of it."<sup>60</sup> Cottrell and Reichenbach make similar statements as well.<sup>61</sup> Cottrell states, "The fact is, however, that the Bible does not picture man as totally depraved."<sup>62</sup> These examples demonstrate that Semi-Pelagianism continues to have an influential impact within Arminianism.

In conclusion, man's radical, inherited depravity is a matter of debate within Arminianism. While a majority of Arminians clearly affirm total depravity, others do not. For those who do, such an affirmation seems to provide common ground between Calvinists and Arminians. As Schreiner states, the "Wesleyan analysis of the human condition does not differ fundamentally from the Calvinistic one."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, in a letter to

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<sup>59</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 21-22.

<sup>60</sup>Clark Pinnock, "Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History," in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark Pinnock (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 104-05.

<sup>61</sup>Jack Cottrell, "Conditional Election," in *Grace Unlimited*, 68. Similarly, see Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 286.

<sup>62</sup>Cottrell, "Conditional Election," 68. Geisler might fall within the Semi-Pelagian category as well. See Norman Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 57-68; idem, "A Moderate Calvinist View," in *4 Views on Eternal Security*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 65.

<sup>63</sup>Schreiner even goes so far as to say, "Wesley's analysis of the human condition and his bold proclamation of divine grace should warm the heart of any evangelical Calvinist." Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace?" 233. Likewise, see Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan Perspective," in *Five views on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 21-23; M. Elton Hendricks, "John Wesley and Natural Theology," *Wesley Theological Journal* 18 (1983): 9; J. Weldon Smith III, "Some Notes on Wesley's Doctrine of Prevenient Grace," *Religion in Life* 34 (1964-1965): 70-74. As observed by Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace?" 233.

John Newton, 14 May 1765, Wesley states that there is not a hair's breadth separating him from John Calvin.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the hair's breadth is the doctrine of prevenient grace.<sup>65</sup> As Cannon writes, "The Wesleyan conception of the nature of the operation of God's grace is as far removed from the Calvinistic conception as the east is from the west. Saving grace is not restricted; it is not particular; it does not rest on the prior principle of election or predestination."<sup>66</sup> Such commonality on total depravity is quickly forgotten by the introduction of prevenient grace into the Arminian and Wesleyan traditions. It is to this doctrine that we now turn.

### **Arminian Views on Grace and Free Will**

#### **1. The Nature of Prevenient Grace.**

**The Source of Prevenient Grace.** The term "prevenient grace" can be easily misunderstood for the term gives the impression that something or someone must be prevented. To the contrary, the word is used by Arminians to describe a grace that comes before salvation. The word "prevent" is derived from the Latin *venio*, meaning "to come."<sup>67</sup> The word "pre" is a prefix for "before." "Pre-venient" grace is a grace that "comes before" salvation (*prevenire*).<sup>68</sup> Thomas Summers explains that prevenient grace is that influence which "precedes our action, and gives us the capacity to will and to do right, enlightening the intellect, and exciting the sensibility."<sup>69</sup> The question that

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<sup>64</sup>Wesley states, "No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted either original sin, or justification by faith, in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done. . . . In this respect, there is not a hair's breadth difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield." Wesley, "The Question, 'What is an Arminian?' Answered. By a Love of Free Grace," in *Works*, 10:359. Also see Bryant, "Original Sin," 534

<sup>65</sup>Bryant, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Sin," 241; Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 49; Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 102; Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 38-39.

<sup>66</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 93.

<sup>67</sup>Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 129.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:77. Bryant explains, "God restores a certain measure of free will to a fallen humanity to guarantee that a decision for good or evil, obedience or disobedience could be made." Bryant, "Original Sin," 534.

inevitably follows is what event in the history of redemption is the source for prevenient grace? For Arminians and Wesleyans the source is in the atonement of Christ.<sup>70</sup> As John 12:32 states, it is when Christ is lifted up (on the cross) that he draws all men to himself. Leo Cox explains, “Rather than holding that the good found in man apart from salvation is a goodness left over from the fall of man, Wesleyan-Arminianism has always taught that God has supernaturally restored to all men a measure of His Spirit through the grace that flows from Calvary.”<sup>71</sup>

**The Recipients of Prevenient Grace.** If the atonement of Christ is the source of prevenient grace, who is the recipient of prevenient grace? Do all people receive prevenient grace or only some? It is on the scope or extent of prevenient grace that there is disagreement between those in the Arminian and Wesleyan traditions. Though it has been debated, Arminius himself viewed prevenient grace as restricted to where the gospel is preached.<sup>72</sup> Prevenient grace for Episcopius is restricted to the evangelized as well. However, many Wesleyan-Arminians, such as John Wesley, John Fletcher, and later Wesleyans like John Miley, have argued that prevenient grace is universal in scope, common to all mankind.<sup>73</sup> The universality of prevenient grace is directly tied to the universality of Christ’s atonement. Because the extent of Christ’s atoning work is universal rather than particular, so also does it follow that prevenient grace is universal rather than particular. Rogers explains how Wesley made such an argument,

Wesley’s notion of the ubiquity of prevenient grace is based upon his view of the universal extent of the sacrificial work of Christ, and its benefits for man. Christ lived and died for all, and according to Scripture, God for the sake of Christ freely

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<sup>70</sup>Arminius, “Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed,” in *Writings*, 2:494-95; Richard P. Heitzenrater, “God with us: Grace and the Spiritual Senses in John Wesley’s Theology,” in *Grace Upon Grace*, ed. Robert K. Johnston, L. Gregory Jones, and Jonathan R. Wilson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 94.

<sup>71</sup>Cox, “Prevenient Grace,” 145.

<sup>72</sup>Arminius, “Examination of Dr. Perkins’s Pamphlet on Predestination,” 3:525. See Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 167; Eaton, “Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley,” 72.

<sup>73</sup>Shipley, “Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher,” 21-22; Roger Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 169; Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 102.

bestows grace upon all. The work of Christ is the cause and source for this initial and universal gift of grace.<sup>74</sup>

Why would Christ die for all people and his grace only be given to some? All must have the opportunity to be saved, to choose or reject God's grace through Christ. As Grant Osborne explains, "God is an 'equal opportunity' convictor who, in drawing all to himself, makes it possible to make a true decision to accept or reject Jesus."<sup>75</sup> Therefore, the extent of Christ's atonement and the extent of prevenient grace are universal in scope.

For those Arminians and Wesleyans who view prevenient grace as universal, textual support is found in a number of places. John 12:32 says, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." Commenting on this passage Thiessen states, "There issues a power from the cross of Christ goes out to all men, though many continue to resist that power."<sup>76</sup> When Jesus states that he will draw "all people" to himself, he means all men without exception. Osborne states, "All people are equally drawn to the Father."<sup>77</sup> He not only dies for all men but then applies the grace from his atoning work to all men. He draws them to himself, but such a drawing is not an irresistible drawing as the Calvinist affirms, but rather a drawing that can be resisted. Therefore, such a drawing of all men in no way secures or guarantees salvation, but rather provides the opportunity for man to be saved if he should so choose to cooperate.

Also consider John 1:9, "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Jesus is this true light and the light he gives to every person is the light of prevenient grace. John continues by stating that some rejected the light, not

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<sup>74</sup>Rogers, "Prevenient Grace," 159-61. Likewise McGonigle: "Because this prevenient grace originates in the merits of Christ's redemptive death, a redemption made for all men, Wesley always stressed the universal nature of this grace." McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 327. Also see A. Skevington Wood, "The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace," in *Grace Unlimited*, 216; Runyon, *The New Creation*, 33-41; Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 100-02; Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 39-40; idem, *A Faithful Witness: John Wesley's Homiletical Theology* (Wilmore, KY: Wesley Heritage, 1993), 63-66; Steve Harper, "Cross Purposes: Wesley's View of the Atonement," in *Basic United Methodist Beliefs: An Evangelical View*, ed. James V. Heidinger II (Wilmore, KY: Good News, 1986), 42-43.

<sup>75</sup>Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, 257.

<sup>76</sup>Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 261.

<sup>77</sup>Grant R. Osborne, "Soteriology in the Gospel of John," 256.

receiving the Christ (1:11) but others responded to Christ (the light) by receiving him (1:12).<sup>78</sup> To the surprise of many Calvinists who appeal to John 6 in support of effectual calling and grace, Arminians like Thomas Oden also appeal to such a passage in support for prevenient grace. Jesus states, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44; cf. 6:65). Oden concludes that such a “drawing and enabling is precisely what is meant by prevenient grace.”<sup>79</sup> Arminians also believe prevenient grace is supported by Titus 2:11 which states that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” Paul seems to be saying that God’s grace is universal, coming to all men so that they may be saved.<sup>80</sup> Oden concludes from Titus 2:11, “To no one, not even the recalcitrant unfaithful, does God deny grace sufficient for salvation. Prevenient grace precedes each discrete human act.”<sup>81</sup> Finally, Arminians also appeal to Philippians 2:12-13, a text which Oden, following Wesley, says is the “most important homily that touches upon prevenient grace.”<sup>82</sup> Paul states, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”<sup>83</sup> Oden interprets Paul as saying, “God working in us enables our working and co-working with God.”<sup>84</sup> Since God works in us by giving us prevenient grace, it is now on us to co-operate with all subsequent

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<sup>78</sup>Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:230; 7:188; Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 45.

<sup>79</sup>“These scriptural statements would be false if the natural human will were capable of performing salutary acts without grace, which is the specific tendency of semi-Pelagian arguments. *So prevenient grace is necessary for the very inception of faith.*” Emphasis original. Thomas Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 120.

<sup>80</sup>Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:247; Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:353; Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1835), 117; Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 34; Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 49; Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness*, 339. As observed by Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 238.

<sup>81</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 48.

<sup>82</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 244. Oden also points to Psalm 59:10 and 23:6 in *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 54.

<sup>83</sup>Wesley, “On Working out our own Salvation,” 6:509; idem, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” in *Works*, 10:230-32; Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 246.

<sup>84</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 244.

grace, for the “chief function of prevenient grace is to bring the person to a state of nonresistance to subsequent forms of grace.”<sup>85</sup> Stated otherwise, “Prevenient grace is that grace that goes before us to prepare us for more grace, the grace that makes it possible for persons to take the first steps toward saving grace.”<sup>86</sup> Taking these first steps, however, requires that we must do something to arouse the grace within us. “All are called to be ready to stir up whatever grace is in them that more grace will be given.”<sup>87</sup>

**The Content of Prevenient Grace.** If, at least for some, the extent of prevenient grace is universal (common even among those who have never heard of Christ, rather than restricted to the preaching of the gospel), the content of prevenient grace can be defined by several characteristics. First, Wesleyans argue on the basis of texts like Romans 1:19, a general, basic knowledge of God is given to all of mankind due to prevenient grace. As Collins states, “Humanity, in other words, has not been left in the natural state, devoid of all grace and therefore knowing nothing of God; but all people have at least some understanding of God, however clouded or scant this knowledge may be.”<sup>88</sup> Oden is also lucid, “One can be shaped by common grace and moved by prevenient grace and still know nothing yet of incarnation, cross, resurrection, repentance, faith, hope, and love. Prevenient grace offers knowledge about God, not personal knowledge of the revealed God.”<sup>89</sup> Second, not only is a basic knowledge of God distributed through prevenient grace but so also is the moral law, as it is written on the human heart. Even after the fall, Wesley says, God re-inscribed the law on the sinner’s heart via prevenient grace.<sup>90</sup> Third, not only the law but the human conscience

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 247. Also see idem, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 53.

<sup>86</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 247.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 244. Also see 245, 250, and 251.

<sup>88</sup>Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 41. For many, inclusivism follows. See Runyon, *The New Creation*, 34-35; Randy L. Maddox, “Wesley and the Question of Truth or Salvation Through Other Religions,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 27 (1992): 14-18.

<sup>89</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 251.

<sup>90</sup>Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered” 9:233. On this issue also see Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 41.

also is imprinted with God.<sup>91</sup> “It is undeniable, that [God] has fixed in man, in every man, his umpire, conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both on his passions and actions, either approving or condemning them.”<sup>92</sup> Fourth, prevenient grace’s universal scope also results in the restraining of sin worldwide. As Collins states, prevenient grace places a “check on human perversity.”<sup>93</sup> These four characteristics demonstrate that universal prevenient grace shares many similarities with the doctrine of common grace. However, many Wesleyans insist that these two loci remain distinct. Cox concludes,

[T]hrough the teachings of common grace and prevenient grace have much in common, the essential difference is seen at the point where common grace and special grace are understood by Calvinists as essentially different. The Wesleyan teaches that prevenient grace leads on to saving grace, prepares for it, enables a person to enter into it. The difference between the two for Wesleyans would be in degree and not in kind. . . . Though Wesleyans can allow that all that is claimed for common grace can also be claimed for prevenient grace, yet they hold that the primary purpose of prevenient grace is not to restrain sin and give good desires and blessings to man; this grace is given in order to lead men to repentance and salvation. God’s primary purpose in allowing the human race to exist is to bring men to salvation.<sup>94</sup>

## 2. The Purpose of Prevenient Grace

**The Mitigation of Original Sin and Restoration of the Will.** As already discussed, for the Arminian the guilt of original sin is either (1) not imputed to Adam’s posterity (John Miley) or (2) is mitigated by the atoning work of Christ so that no man actually inherits Adam’s guilt (Wesley, Fletcher).<sup>95</sup> While some contemporary

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<sup>91</sup>Wesley, “Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels,” in *Works*, 4:169; Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 251, 252.

<sup>92</sup>Wesley, “Thoughts upon Necessity,” in *Works*, 10:473; Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 41-42.

<sup>93</sup>Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 42-43. Also see Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 63-76.

<sup>94</sup>Cox, “Prevenient Grace” 144, 145. Likewise, Shipley agrees in “Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher,” 216. Again, Wesleyans may differ slightly on the relationship between common and prevenient grace. While Cox seems to sharply distinguish between the two, Oden seems to see more affinity and synonymy. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 249-51.

<sup>95</sup>Cox, “Prevenient Grace,” 146; idem, “John Wesley’s Concept of Sin,” *JETS* 7, no. 3 (1966): 19-20; Eldon R. Fuhrman, “The Wesleyan Doctrine of Grace,” in *The Word and Doctrine*, ed. Kenneth E. Geiger (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1965), 143-44.

Arminians (such as Bruce R. Reichenbach<sup>96</sup>) accept the first view, many Arminians accept the second view and go further to argue that not only is the *guilt* mitigated by Christ's atonement but so is the *corruption* of Adam's sin.<sup>97</sup> Olson explains that the

Arminian doctrine of universal prevenient grace means that because of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit *no human being is actually in a state of absolute darkness and depravity*. Because of original sin, helplessness to do good is the natural state of humanity, but because of the work of Christ and the operation of the Holy Spirit universally *no human being actually exists in that natural state*.<sup>98</sup>

Olson's statement is revealing. For the Arminian no person actually exists in a state of total depravity. Collins, tracing such a view of depravity back to Wesley himself, agrees,

At least initially, there does appear to be a great similarity between Wesley's doctrine of original sin and that of . . . Calvin, especially in the emphasis on total depravity. Upon closer examination, however, there are important differences to be noted largely due to different conceptions of grace. For instance, when Wesley uses the vocabulary of total depravity, he is referring to what he calls, "the natural man," that is, to a person who is utterly without the grace of God. But does such a person actually exist? Not according to Wesley, for in the sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation" (1785) he states: "For allowing that all souls of men are dead in sin by nature, this excuses none, seeing that *there is no man that is in a state of mere nature*; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called 'natural conscience.' But this is not natural; it is more properly termed 'preventing grace.'"<sup>99</sup>

Wesley is clear, "There is no man that is in a state of mere nature" and so total depravity is not actually experienced by any sinner. As Umphrey Lee bluntly states, the "natural man" is simply a "logical abstraction" that does not correspond to humankind. "In this world man exists as a natural man plus the prevenient grace of God."<sup>100</sup> Likewise, Collins says, "Simply put, the effects of original sin are still present, but they are no longer total."<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Thomas Oden, quoting Wilbur Tillet, argues that fallen man "has

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<sup>96</sup>Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," 277-79, 286-87.

<sup>97</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 87; Bryant, "Original Sin," 522, 537; Suchocki, "Wesleyan Grace," 547; McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 158-59; Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 145n26; Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 45.

<sup>98</sup>Emphasis added. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 154.

<sup>99</sup>Emphasis added. Collins, *Scripture Way of Salvation*, 38-39. Collins is quoting Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 6:512.

<sup>100</sup>Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1936), 124-25.

<sup>101</sup>Collins, *Scripture Way of Salvation*, 39.

never been without the benefits and influences of the atonement but rather such benefits (i.e., prevenient grace) were coextensive with the effects of Adam's sin."<sup>102</sup>

Consequently,

No human being has been condemned for Adam's sin alone, but insofar as anyone is subject to condemnation and judgment, it is due to one's own freely collusive cooperation with the conditions of sin resulting from the history of sin following Adam. The principle of free moral agency is preserved in and through the doctrine of sufficient grace. Sin is never unilaterally imputed, but chosen, rechosen, and transmitted historically and intergenerationally by repeated social choice.<sup>103</sup>

Such statements by Olson, Oden, Collins, and even Wesley are characteristic of the Arminian and Wesleyan traditions.

Furthermore, Wesley's belief that prevenient grace abrogates depravity, so that no man is in such a state, is crucial for human responsibility. Wesley's statement above is prefaced by his concern that men might say there is nothing they can do since it is God who regenerates and they are depraved and unable to regenerate themselves. "Yet this is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker, by saying, 'It is God only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.'" However, the fact that all men are dead by nature excuses no one, says Wesley, because "there is no man that is in a state of mere nature."<sup>104</sup> Wesley then brings in prevenient grace, showing man he has been lifted from a state of depravity in order to choose if he so desires. Since everyone "has some measure of that light" it is the case that "no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."<sup>105</sup> As Wesley states in his "Remarks on Mr. Hill's Review" (1772), "We [Wesley and Fletcher] both steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet we both believe that every

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<sup>102</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 45; Wilbur Tillet, *Personal Salvation* (Nashville: Barbee and Smith, 1902), 117, 120.

<sup>103</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 45.

<sup>104</sup>Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 6:512.

<sup>105</sup>Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," 6:512; Cox, "John Wesley's Concept of Sin," 17.

man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace.”<sup>106</sup> Wesley will not tolerate the Calvinist logic which ultimately attributes belief and unbelief to whether or not God decides to give sinners grace. If man is not saved it is because he did not exercise his free will to do so.<sup>107</sup> To summarize, prevenient grace (1) mitigates total depravity so that no man is in a state of mere nature and (2) restores to every man a measure of free will so that he can cooperate or resist God’s plea to be saved.<sup>108</sup>

**The “Intermediate State.”** Prevenient grace, by mitigating total depravity, also places sinners in an “Intermediate State,” where, according to Arminians like Olson, the process of regeneration has begun due to the application of prevenient grace, but is incomplete because regeneration is still contingent upon whether or not man will cooperate with God.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, the sinner in this stage is neither unregenerate nor regenerate. Olson, claiming that Arminius himself taught this intermediate state, explains,

The intermediate stage is when the human being is not so much free to respond to the gospel (as the semi-Pelagians claimed) but is freed to respond to the good news of redemption in Christ. Arminius thus believes not so much in free will but in a freed will, one which, though initially bound by sin, has been brought by the prevenient grace of the Spirit of Christ to a point where it can respond freely to the divine call. *The intermediate stage is neither unregenerate nor regenerate, but perhaps post-unregenerate and pre-regenerate.* The soul of the sinner is being regenerated but the sinner is able to resist and spurn the prevenient grace of God by denying the gospel. All that is required for full salvation is a relaxation of the resistant will under the influence of God’s grace so that the person lets go of sin and self-righteousness and allows Christ’s death to become the only foundation for spiritual life.<sup>110</sup>

The sinner is not unregenerate because regeneration has already been initiated by

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<sup>106</sup>Wesley, “Remarks on Mr. Hill’s Review,” in *Works*, 10:392. Also see idem, “Thoughts Upon God’s Sovereignty,” in *Works*, 10:362. See Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 42.

<sup>107</sup>Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 42.

<sup>108</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 47.

<sup>109</sup>Since regeneration has begun due to prevenient grace but is incomplete, many Wesleyan-Arminians, including Wesley himself, must argue that grace is gradual rather than instantaneous, progressive rather than immediate. See Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 87; Iain H. Murray, *John Wesley and the Men Who Followed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 77.

<sup>110</sup>Emphasis added. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 164-165. Likewise, see Olson, “The Classical Free Will Model of God,” 167-168. Olson’s claim that Arminius held to an “intermediate stage” seems to be verified by Witt, “Arminius,” 2:636-64, though Olson never appeals to Witt.

prevenient grace.<sup>111</sup> However, since the sinner is able to resist God (i.e. *gratia resistibilis*), regeneration's finality is pending. It is not until the sinner decides to cooperate that he moves from this intermediate status, where he is neither unregenerate or regenerate, to a regenerated status.<sup>112</sup>

### 3. Prevenient Grace Irresistible, Co-operating Grace Resistible

Is grace, for the Arminian, resistible or irresistible? Depending on what stage of grace is being referred to, the answer is both. Grace in its first coming or arrival as "prevenient" is irresistible. God bestows *prevenient* grace on sinners, independent of whether they want it or not. However, once prevenient grace has been given by God *subsequent* or *co-operating* grace can then be resisted.<sup>113</sup> As Kenneth Collins explains,

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<sup>111</sup>Olson, therefore, even says that because of this intermediate stage the Arminian can say regeneration precedes conversion. "That is, God begins the renewal of the soul that is often called being 'born again' before the human person exercises repentance and faith." However, this affirmation that regeneration precedes conversion by the Arminian is very different (if not radically different) from the Calvinist because for the Calvinist regeneration is actually complete, causing conversion. However, for Olson and Arminianism, this cannot be the case because of the "intermediate state." Regeneration is not complete but is contingent upon what man will do in this intermediate state. If man does decide to cooperate with grace then man will come out of this intermediate state to finally and completely be regenerated. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 164. Most Arminian theologies do not talk about an intermediate state but rather when they organize the *ordo salutis* they place faith, repentance, and justification before regeneration. Therefore, Olson's affirmation that regeneration precedes conversion is potentially misleading because he does not mean that regeneration in its entirety precedes conversion otherwise the intermediate state would be negated.

<sup>112</sup>Not all Arminians would agree with Olson that prevenient grace is applied in such a way that regeneration has begun but is incomplete. For example, Robert Picirilli argues that Arminius taught that prevenient grace is prior to regeneration. Picirilli calls prevenient grace "Pre-regenerating Grace" instead. "What Arminius meant by 'prevenient grace' was that grace that precedes actual regeneration and which, except when finally resisted, inevitably leads on to regeneration." Emphasis added. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 153. Elsewhere Picirilli elaborates, "It [Pre-regenerating grace] is so closely related to regeneration that it inevitably leads on to regeneration unless finally resisted. In this way the older divines spoke of 'the motions of regeneration' and in so doing referred to the movements that initiate (but are not quite) regeneration. Thus Arminius referred to persons who 'feel those motions of the Holy Spirit which belong either to preparation or to the very essence of regeneration, but who are not yet regenerate.'" Emphasis added. *Ibid.*, 156. Picirilli and Olson differ only slightly. For Picirilli prevenient grace has not taken place though the sinner is on the very edge of regeneration lest he resist grace. Therefore, Picirilli titles prevenient grace "pre-regenerating grace." For Olson, prevenient grace has initiated and begun regeneration but the sinner is not completely regenerated or finally regenerated until he cooperates with grace. Until that point the sinner is neither in the state of the unregenerate nor of the regenerate but in an intermediate state.

<sup>113</sup>Oden states, "Insofar as grace precedes and prepares free will it is called prevenient. Insofar as grace accompanies and enables human willing to work with divine willing, it is called cooperating grace." Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 47. Thomas Summers also uses the label "cooperating grace." He states, "The word *co-operate* was expressed, in the first English recension of the article, by 'working in us;' but in 1572 the closer and better rendering, 'working with us,' was substituted. Grace works in us, of course; but it cannot work *in* us, after the initial operation, without working *with* us." As quoted in Thomas C. Oden, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 2:78.

First, since Wesley's doctrine of original sin underscores the notion of total depravity, then it logically follows that "irresistible grace" has to operate at least at some point in the Wesleyan way of salvation. This may come as a surprise to those Methodists who have been schooled on the notion that irresistible grace is a topic more suited to Calvinists. Nevertheless, since men and women in the natural state, according to Wesley, do not even have the freedom to accept or reject any offered grace, then this faculty itself must graciously and *irresistibly* restored. In other words, to deny that prevenient grace is irresistible in terms of graciously restored faculties is also to deny that Wesley held a doctrine of *total* depravity. Granted, prevenient grace in terms of the call of God upon the soul may be resisted, and indeed often is, but the graciously restored faculties, the first aspect of prevenient grace, cannot be refused.<sup>114</sup>

Such a distinction is crucial to correctly understanding the Arminian view. The Arminian and Calvinist differ in exactly where grace is irresistible in the *via salutis*.<sup>115</sup> For the Arminian, God bestows a prevenient grace which, in its first stage, is irresistible, in order to enable his faculties to cooperate. However, in its second stage, now that man is enabled to cooperate, he can accept or resist this subsequent grace (synergism). Not so for the Calvinist. Special, saving grace is always irresistible and, in one instantaneous act, God works monergistically not only to call but to regenerate the sinner completely.

This two-stage process, the first irresistible and the second resistible, is also affirmed by Arminius. Arminius writes, "It is unavoidable that the free will should concur in preserving the grace bestowed, assisted, however, by *subsequent grace*, and it always remains within the power of the free will to reject the grace bestowed and to refuse subsequent grace, because grace is not an omnipotent action of God which cannot be resisted by man's free will."<sup>116</sup> Sproul, quoting Arminius, acutely elaborates:

Is Arminius's view of regeneration monergistic or synergistic? To answer this question we must first understand what is meant by *regeneration*. Is regeneration the

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<sup>114</sup>Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 43-44.

<sup>115</sup>"One of the chief differences, however, between Calvinism and Wesleyanism is at what point in the *via salutis* irresistible grace occurs. For Calvin, it is sanctifying grace that is irresistible; for Wesley, it is prevenient grace that 'waiteth not for the call of man.' The difference is important." Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 44.

<sup>116</sup>Arminius, "An Examination of the Treatise of William Perkins Concerning the Order and Mode of Predestination," in *Works*, 3:470. Bangs, *Arminius*, 216, comments, "The part man plays in salvation is believing. Evangelical belief is the free choice to receive offered grace, which offered grace makes the free choice possible. In all of this man does nothing apart from grace: he earns nothing; he contributes nothing; but he chooses freely, and it is a choice which he can refuse to make, for grace is not an irresistible force."

same as prevenient grace? If prevenient grace always enables the sinner to assent to grace, then Arminius's view is monergistic in this regard. For Arminius prevenient grace seems to be irresistible to the degree that it effectively liberates the sinner from his moral bondage or impotency. Prior to receiving prevenient grace, man is dead and utterly unable to choose the good. After receiving this grace, the sinner is able to do what he was previously unable to do. In this sense, prevenient grace is monergistic and irresistible. But what Arminius calls the inward vocation or call of God is neither monergistic nor irresistible. He says: "Those who are obedient to the vocation or call of God, freely yield their assent to grace; yet they are previously excited, impelled, drawn and assisted by grace. And in the very moment in which they actually assent, they possess the capability of not assenting." Prevenient grace, then, makes man *able* to assent to Christ but not necessarily *willing*. The sinner is now able to will, but he is not yet willing to do so. The ability to will is the result of a monergistic, irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, but the actual willing is the synergistic work of the sinner cooperating with God's prevenient grace. Giving grace is the work of God alone; assenting to it is the work of man, who now has the power to cooperate or not cooperate with it. Arminius's view differs sharply from the Augustinian and Reformed view, which insists that the monergistic work of regeneration makes the sinner not only able to will but also willing. To be sure, it is still the sinner who wills, but he wills because God has changed the disposition of his heart. Arminius says: "In the very commencement of his conversion, man conducts himself in a purely passive manner; that is, though, by a vital act, that is, by feeling [*sensu*], he has a perception of the grace which calls him, yet he can do no other than receive it and feel it. But, when he feels grace affecting or inclining his mind and heart, he freely assents to it, so that he is able at the time to with-hold his assent."<sup>117</sup>

Arminius's last sentence above demonstrates that Sproul's reading of Arminius is correct.

While prevenient grace is given to man irrespective of his desire for it or not, once it is given it is up to him to decide whether or not he will give or withhold his assent to it.<sup>118</sup>

As Sproul observes, Francis Turretin held this same reading of Arminius and other Arminians.<sup>119</sup> Turretin's assessment is well-grounded, for eighteenth and nineteenth-century Arminians would follow Arminius in this distinction, as is evident in Wesley and

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<sup>117</sup>Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 131-2. Sproul is quoting Arminius, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," 2:498.

<sup>118</sup>Sproul, *Willing to Believe*, 132. Witt reiterates, Arminius says "that those who respond to the vocation of God freely yield their assent to prevenient grace; yet in the moment in which they actually assent, they nonetheless have the capability of not assenting." Witt, "Arminius," 2:655.

<sup>119</sup>"The question is not whether grace is resistible in respect of the intellect or affections; for the Arminians confess that the intellect of man is irresistibly enlightened and his affections irresistibly excited and affected with the sense of grace. But it is treated of the will alone, which they maintain is always moved resistibly, so that its assent remains always free. There is granted indeed irresistibly the power to believe and convert itself, but the very act of believing and converting itself can be put forth or hindered by the human will because they hold that there is in it an essential indifference (*adiaphoria*) as to admitting or rejecting grace. . . . Thus we strenuously deny that efficacious grace is resistible in this sense. . . . Nay, we maintain that efficacious grace so works in man that although he cannot help resisting from the beginning, still he can never resist it so far as to finally overcome it and hinder the work of conversion." Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992-97), 2:547-48.

Fletcher.<sup>120</sup> Fletcher said that “since the Fall our penitential grace comes immediately and irresistibly from God as Redeemer; I say irresistibly, because God does not leave to our option whether we shall receive a talent of redeeming grace or not.”<sup>121</sup> Yet, once we receive it we “are put in a capacity of choosing life or death, that is of acquitting themselves well or ill, at their option, in their present state of trial.”<sup>122</sup> Richard Watson, in his *Theological Institutes*, would say the same.<sup>123</sup> Such a distinction is apparent in contemporary Arminians also.<sup>124</sup> Thomas Oden distinguishes between prevenient grace and saving grace, stating, “*Prevenient* grace is the grace that begins to enable one to choose further to cooperate with *saving* grace. By offering the will the restored capacity to respond to grace, the person then may freely and increasingly become an active, willing participant in receiving the conditions for justification.”<sup>125</sup> What Oden calls “saving” grace is also referred to as “cooperating” grace. “Prevenient grace elicits the inception of the good will, while cooperating grace works within the constricted settings

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<sup>120</sup>Wesley states, “Every man has a greater or less measure of this [prevenient grace], which waiteth not for the call of man.” Rogers explains, “the initial giving of prevenient grace by the Spirit is irresistible, occurring independently of man’s decision or approval. . . . For Wesley, as Robert E. Chiles has said, man cannot choose not to receive prevenient grace, and no man comes into the world without having received some measure of it.” Rogers, “Prevenient Grace,” 162. Likewise Kenneth Collins explains, “It is interesting to note, however, that if Wesley truly held a notion of total depravity – and the Standard Sermons offer no reason to doubt this – it logically follows that ‘irresistible grace’ had to find some place in the Wesleyan order of salvation since humans in the natural state do not even have the freedom or ability to accept or reject any offered grace. Therefore, it is prevenient grace which must be irresistibly given in order to restore humanity’s very ability to respond to the further grace of God. In other words, to deny that prevenient grace is irresistible is also to deny that Wesley held a doctrine of *total* depravity.” Collins, *Wesley on Salvation*, 24.

<sup>121</sup>John Fletcher, “Fourth Check,” in *The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher* (New York: John Wilson and Daniel Hitt, 1809), 3:442-43, as quoted in Shipley, “Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher,” 187.

<sup>122</sup>Fletcher, “Fourth Check,” 3:321, as quoted in Shipley, “Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher,” 187.

<sup>123</sup>Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 2:77; Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 171.

<sup>124</sup>“Here is a form of synergism understood in the midst of a monergism. Initially God works and after His work begins, then it is possible for man to cooperate with Him.” Cox, “Prevenient Grace,” 147-48.

<sup>125</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 243. Oden is following Wesley here. Some like George Croft Cell have tried to argue that because Wesley rejected Semi-Pelagianism and argued that man was completely dependent upon God for grace, Wesley was a monergist. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, 244-70. However, as McGonigle has shown, Wesley was a synergist in the evangelical Arminian tradition, contra Cell. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 5.

of broken human freedom to turn it around, redeem, and enable the will to be responsive to God's own good will."<sup>126</sup> Elsewhere Oden elaborates,

While prevenient grace enables the will to do good, concomitant grace cooperates with the will thus enabled. Prevenient grace awakens responsiveness; concomitant (cooperating and subsequent) grace works in, with, through, and following human responsiveness. Prevenient grace is, from the viewpoint of its bounty and plenitude, intrinsically linked with *sufficient* grace because it suffices to make possible all salutary actions. Concomitant or cooperating grace is, from the point of view of its effect, structurally correlated with efficacious grace because it works to make effective the free use of divine assistance even against willful resistances. Grace is effective as it elicits willing cooperation and sufficient insofar as it does what is necessary to lead the will to cooperate, even when the deficient will is resistant. . . . Prevenient grace first operates before the will can cooperate. Prevenient grace is therefore the grace that *works without us because it works before us (gratia operans)*, but cooperating grace is the grace that *works with us as it works through us (gratia cooperans)*.<sup>127</sup>

Therefore, God initiates prevenient grace and once it is given man must decide of his own free will whether he will cooperate "with ever-fresh new offerings of grace."<sup>128</sup>

#### 4. Prevenient Grace, Total Depravity, and Libertarian Freedom.

**Disagreement and Agreement.** Like the scope of prevenient grace, there continues to be disagreement among Arminians over the nature of free will in relation to prevenient grace and total depravity. As already discussed, while some Arminians deny total depravity, others believe man is totally depraved but due to the gift of prevenient grace a measure of man's free will is restored. Cottrell explains the disagreement,

Classical Arminianism has a different view of the nature of man as a sinner [than Calvinism]. While there are variations in the explanation of why this is so, all Arminians believe that at the time of the hearing of the general gospel call, every sinner has the free will either to accept or to reject it. This is in essence a denial of the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity. Some Arminians believe that no sinner is ever totally depraved; others believe that all people are initially afflicted with total depravity but that God through a universal preparatory grace mitigates the depravity and restores a measure of freedom. Either way the result is the same:

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<sup>126</sup>Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 243.

<sup>127</sup>Emphasis original. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 51. Also see Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 243. I find it interesting that Oden cites in support the Council of Trent. See footnote 15 where Oden cites *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. H. J. Schroeder (Rockford, IL: Tan, 1978), 797ff. Such a move shows the similarities Arminian synergism shares with Roman Catholic synergism, an affinity the Post-Reformation Reformers easily recognized. See footnote 295 on Oden's citation of Trent.

<sup>128</sup>Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 244.

when the moment of choice comes, sinners have a freedom of the will to meet or not to meet the conditions for salvation. This is a prerequisite for the Arminian concept of conditional election.<sup>129</sup>

Arminians like Cottrell, Reichenbach, and Pinnock fall into the camp that denies man's total depravity, affirming that some degree of free will remains after the fall. Cottrell states, "The fact is, however, that the Bible does not picture man as totally depraved."<sup>130</sup> However, other Arminians disagree, arguing instead that man is totally depraved and utterly powerless in his will, though, due to the gift of prevenient grace, no man actually exists in such a state, but is born with an ability to cooperate with or resist God. As Wesley states, "I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world.'"<sup>131</sup> Either way, Cottrell is right in concluding that at the moment of salvation, both views believe that man's will is able to resist or cooperate with God's grace. Indeed, "the final decision belongs to each individual."<sup>132</sup> Whether or not the sinner is partially depraved, retaining free will, or whether the sinner is depraved but due to prevenient grace such depravity is mitigated and his will is made capable of cooperating, at the moment of the gospel call, it is still in the power of man's will to choose or reject the grace of God. Arminius explains,

All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the Gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do, without any difference of the Elect and of the Reprobate."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Jack W. Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election" in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville, B&H: 2006), 120-121.

<sup>130</sup>Cottrell, "Conditional Election," 68. Also see Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," 286; Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius," 21-22; idem, "Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History," 104-05.

<sup>131</sup>Wesley, "Predestination Calmly Considered," 10:229-30. Also see Heitzenrater, "God with us," 93; McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 329; Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 44; J. E. Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesleys* (London: Epworth 1938), 184. Likewise Langford explains, "Human will, because of the Fall, is not free, but through Christ's atoning work there is a universal prevenient grace which restores human freedom." Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 33. Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 167-68.

<sup>132</sup>Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," 121.

<sup>133</sup>Arminius, "Certain Articles to Be Diligently Examined and Weighed," 2:497.

It is this issue of man's final, determinative say in salvation that separates and divides the Arminian from the Calvinist. Cottrell writes,

In the Arminian system it does not really matter whether this freewill ability to accept or reject the gospel is regarded as *natural* (as in Pelagianism), as *restored* for all at conception via original grace, or as restored for all at a later time through the Holy Spirit's intervention in an act of prevenient grace. What matters is that when the gospel message reaches the sinner, he is *not* in a state of unremedied total depravity and thus of total inability to believe in Jesus without an unconditional, selective, irresistible act of the Spirit. Rather, every sinner is able to make his own decision of whether to believe or not.<sup>134</sup>

Since, in the Arminian system, the final decision rests with the individual, the *type* of freedom man possesses is of critical importance.

**Defining Freedom as Libertarian.** According to the Arminian, man's free will must be a *libertarian* freedom or a freedom of *contrary choice*. Libertarian freedom is an independence from necessity or determination, either external or internal to the choosing agent. As Arminius explains, "It is also a freedom from necessity, whether this proceeds from an external cause compelling, or from a nature inwardly determining absolutely to one thing."<sup>135</sup> According to Arminius, freedom from necessity "always pertains to him because it exists naturally in the will, as its proper attribute, so that there cannot be any will if it be not free."<sup>136</sup> Similarly, Wesley defines liberty as "a power of

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<sup>134</sup>Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," 121.

<sup>135</sup>Arminius, "Twenty-Five Public Disputations," 1:524. Bangs, *Arminius*, 341.

<sup>136</sup>Arminius, "Twenty-Five Public Disputations," 1:524. The freedom from necessity in Arminius's definition of freedom is especially evident in his description of what caused the fall of Adam and Eve. Arminius lists several causes: the efficient cause was the transgression of man, the external (moving, or principal) cause was the devil, the instrumental cause was the serpent, the accidental cause was the fruit, the occasional cause was the law of God, the only moving or antecedent cause was the inclination [*affectus*] in man, and the immediate or proximate cause was the will of man. However, notice how Arminius concludes, "Not one of these, therefore, nor others, if such be granted in the genus of causes, imposed any necessity on man [to commit that sin]. It was not an external cause, whether you consider God, or something from God, the devil, or man." For Arminius, nothing internal or external can cause man's choices lest his freedom not be free of necessity. Arminius is particularly concerned that the cause not be God. "(1.) It was not God; for since he is the chief good, he does nothing but what is good; and, therefore, he can be called neither the efficient cause of sin, nor the deficient cause, since he has employed whatever things were sufficient and necessary to avoid this sin. (2.) Neither was it something in God; it was neither his understanding nor his will, which commands those things which are just performs those which are good, and permits those which are evil; and this permission is only a cessation from such an act as would in reality have hindered the act of man, by effecting nothing [*extra*] beyond itself, but by suspending some efficiency. This, therefore, cannot be the cause." If it is not God or the devil what about something within Adam himself? Arminius answers no, for this would imply some "necessity" within man. "It was not an internal cause – whether you consider the common or general nature of man, which [*ferrebat*] was inclined only to one good, or his particular nature, which exactly corresponded with that which is general;

choosing for himself, a self-determining principle.”<sup>137</sup> If I do not have a liberty of self-determination then I cannot trust all my “outward” and “inward” senses which tell me I can act to the contrary and that my choice “depends on me, and no other being.”<sup>138</sup>

Moreover, without such a liberty “man is under a moral necessity to accept grace because he is elect, or reject it because he is non-elect,” an idea “repugnant to the notion of human liberty.”<sup>139</sup> Consequently, as McGonigle explains, in Wesley’s pneumatology there was absolutely “no place for a doctrine of irresistible grace.”<sup>140</sup> Man must have a freedom of contrary choice where he can decide for himself whether he will or will not choose life. As John Fletcher states, “The error of rigid Calvinists centers in the denial of that evangelical liberty, whereby all men, under various dispensations of grace, may *without necessity* choose life.”<sup>141</sup>

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nor was it any thing in his particular nature, for this would have been the understanding; but it could act by persuasion and advice, not by necessity. Man, therefore, sinned by his free will, his own proper motion being allowed by God, and himself persuaded by the devil.” Arminius, “Seventy-Nine Private Disputations,” in *Writings*, 2:74, 75-76.

<sup>137</sup>Wesley, “Thoughts upon Necessity,” 10:468. Wesley’s definition of liberty as self-determination is purposively contrary to Edwards because Wesley believes if necessity is involved then man cannot be held responsible for his actions. “I cannot possibly allow the consequence, upon Mr. Edwards’s supposition. Still I say, if they are necessitated to commit robbery or murder, they are not punishable for committing it. But you answer, ‘Nay, their actions are voluntary, the fruit of their own will.’ If they are, yet that is not enough to make them either good or evil. For their will, on your supposition, is irresistibly impelled; so that they cannot help willing thus or thus. If so, they are no more blamable for that will, than for the actions which follow it. There is no blame if they are under a necessity of willing. There can be no moral good or evil, unless they have liberty as well as will, which is entirely a different thing. And the not adverting to this seems to be the direct occasion of Mr. Edwards’s whole mistake.” *Ibid.*, 10:467.

<sup>138</sup>Wesley, “Thoughts upon Necessity,” 10:471. Wesley believes that if an act, such as salvation, is determined by God then man must choose one way rather than another by necessity and consequently true freedom is lost. If this is the case, says Wesley, then the reprobate cannot be judged for they had no choice. “Then it is impossible for either one or the other to help acting as they do; or rather, to help being acted upon, in the manner wherein they are. For if we speak properly, neither the one nor the other can be said to act at all. Can a stone be said to act, when it is thrown out of a sling? Or a ball, when it is projected from a cannon? No more can a man be said to act, if he be only moved by a force he cannot resist. But if the case be thus, you leave no room either for reward or punishment. Shall the stone be rewarded for rising from the sling, or punished for falling down? . . . As incapable of either punishment or reward is the man who is supposed to be impelled by a force he cannot resist. . . . So that your supposition of God’s ordaining from eternity whatsoever should be done to the end of the world; as well as that of God’s acting irresistibly in the elect, and Satan’s acting irresistibly in the reprobates; utterly overthrows the Scripture doctrine of rewards and punishments, as well as of a judgment to come.” Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:224.

<sup>139</sup>Here McGonigle is summarizing Wesley. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 307.

<sup>140</sup>McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 308.

<sup>141</sup>John Fletcher, “On Reconciliation,” in *Checks to Antinomianism* (New York: J. Collard, 1837), 2:333-34, quoted in Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 53.

The description of libertarian freedom by Arminius, Wesley, and Fletcher is not only carried on by eighteenth and nineteenth-century Arminians like Clarke, Watson, Summers, Pope, Ralston, Raymond, Miley, and Wiley, but is developed today by contemporary advocates of libertarian freedom as well.<sup>142</sup> For example, Reichenbach, rejecting Jonathan Edwards's view of freedom (freedom of inclination), states, "An agent is free when he could have chosen to do otherwise than he did. What the Calvinist has failed to grapple with is the very nature of choice. To choose means to select from among alternatives what one is going to do. If that selection process is not genuine, there is not genuine choice."<sup>143</sup> Reichenbach continues,

if there are no alternatives available to the agent, there can be no choice, only the implementation in action. If the alternatives are apparent only, in that we (mistakenly) think there is more than one alternative available to us, we have only the illusion of choice, not genuine choice. Choice, then, implies that persons can select among genuine alternative courses of action, and agents are free when they are not necessitated, either by external or internal coercion, in their choice and action.<sup>144</sup>

J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig also define libertarian freedom as follows:

Real freedom requires a type of control over one's actions-and, more importantly, over one's will-such that, given a choice to do *A* (raise one's hand and vote) or *B* (refrain from voting, leave the room), nothing determines that either choice is made. Rather the agent himself must simply exercise his own causal powers and will to do one alternative, say *A*. When an agent wills *A*, he also could have chosen *B* without anything else being different inside or outside of his being. He is the absolute originator of his own actions. . . . When an agent acts freely, he is a first or unmoved mover; no event causes him to act. His desires, beliefs and so on may influence his choice, but free acts are not caused by prior states in the agent; rather, they are spontaneously done by the agent himself acting as a first mover.<sup>145</sup>

There are several significant factors in the above definition of libertarian freedom. First,

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<sup>142</sup>Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 248; Roger Olson, "Freedom/Free Will," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 187; idem, "Grace," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 194-95.

<sup>143</sup>Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," 285.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 270. The same definition appears in Garrett J. DeWeese and James P. Moreland, *Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 123-124. For an extensive study on free will and bibliography, see *The Oxford Handbook on Free Will*, ed. Robert Kane (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-618.

libertarian freedom means man can equally choose one alternative or another (*A* or *B*). If he did not choose *A* he could have chosen *B*. As Cottrell states,

It seems to me that some ability to choose between opposites must be maintained in the concept of free will. Sometimes this is called the power of contrary choice or the power of opposite choice. To be considered free with respect to any particular situation, a person must have alternative choices and the ability to actualize more than one choice.<sup>146</sup>

Second, for man to be able to choose *A* or *B* he cannot be determined in any way. In other words, man is under no casual necessity or determination to choose either *A* or *B*.

Nothing outside of man or inside of man can cause or necessitate him to choose one way rather than another.<sup>147</sup> Third, when man chooses, he could have chosen otherwise

“without anything else being different inside or outside of his being.” The factors that would influence one to choose *A* have not changed if one would have chosen *B*. For there to be something else different inside or outside of man’s being would mean that man is not the “absolute originator of his own actions.” Man must be, in order to act freely, the “first or unmoved mover” in any particular choice, for “no event causes him to act.” If man is not his own unmoved mover then some event has caused him to act and therefore he is not truly free in the libertarian sense. However, Moreland and Craig make a qualification, namely, man as an unmoved mover does not mean that he is not influenced by his own desires or beliefs or by the influences of external sources (other people, his environment, or God). Rather, what it does mean is that even though man’s choice is influenced, no choice can ever be caused by an influence or by “prior states in the agent.”

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<sup>146</sup>Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible says about God the Ruler*, vol. 2 of *The Doctrine of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 192.

<sup>147</sup>Not being determined by either internal or external factors is key and can be traced back to the early Arminian theologians. For example, Episcopius, commenting on why Adam and Even chose to sin, states in 17.2 of his confession, “Furthermore, God was not seeking from this an opportunity of exercising his true mercy or true justice. But the man committed this sin by the pure liberty of his will, immune to any internal or external necessity.” Here is the very root of libertarian freedom: man is immune to internal and external factors in the sense that such factors may influence man’s choice but can in no way necessitate man’s choice. *The Arminian Confession of 1621*, 64. Episcopius is simply reiterating Arminius who said that Adam “sinned freely and voluntarily, without any necessity, either internal or external.” Arminius, “Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed,” 2:491. As Eaton observes, “Here Arminius differs from Calvin, who had attributed Adam’s fall to the decree of God.” Eaton, “Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley,” 67.

As Moreland and Craig state, “An agent must be the absolute, originating source of his own actions to be in control.”<sup>148</sup> Or as Gregory Boyd states, man must be the “ultimate cause and explanation.”<sup>149</sup> Other Arminians likewise affirm such a definition of libertarian freedom. For example, Walls and Dongell state, “The essence of this view is that a free action is one that does not have a sufficient condition or cause prior to its occurrence.”<sup>150</sup> Or as Reichenbach says,

To say that a person is free means that, given a certain set of circumstances, the person (to put it in the past tense) could have done otherwise than he did. He was not compelled by causes either internal to himself (genetic structure or irresistible drives) or external (other persons, God) to act as he did. Though certain causal conditions are present and indeed are necessary for persons to choose or act, if they are free these causal conditions are not sufficient to cause them to choose or act. The individual is the sufficient condition for the course of action chosen.<sup>151</sup>

Likewise, Pinnock states,

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<sup>148</sup>“A free act is one in which the agent is the ultimate originating source of the act. Freedom requires that we have the categorical ability to will to act. . . . The libertarian notion of categorical ability includes a dual ability: if one has the ability to exert his power to do A, one also has the ability to refrain from exerting his power to do A. . . . For libertarians, it is only if agents are first causes, unmoved movers, that they have the control necessary for freedom. An agent must be the absolute, originating source of his own actions to be in control. If, as compatibilists picture it, an agent is just a theater through which a chain of instrumental causes passes, then there is no real control. Further, the control that an unmoved mover exercises in free actions is a dual control: it is the power to exercise his own ability to act or to refrain from exercising his own ability to act.” Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 271-72; DeWeese and Moreland, *Philosophy*, 124, 126.

<sup>149</sup>Gregory Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 375.

<sup>150</sup>Jerry L. Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I am Not a Calvinist* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 103. Also see William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God*, 136-137.

<sup>151</sup>And again, “I am not describing or advocating a radical freedom where our choices are made completely independent of causal conditions or where no restraints are placed on us. Freedom is not the absence of influences, either external or internal. . . . Rather, to be free means that the causal influences do not determine my choice or action. Freedom, as actually found in our experience, is a relative notion: there are degrees of freedom. But where we are free, we could have done other than we did, even though it might have been very difficult to do so.” He elaborates by giving two reasons for libertarian freedom, “There are two kinds of evidence supporting human freedom. On the one hand, there is universal, introspective evidence. We feel that we have choices- . . . But choices make sense only if we can meaningfully select between the options, if we could have chosen or acted differently. The other kind of evidence is more philosophical. Persons are essentially capable of performing actions which are right or wrong (what are called morally significant actions), actions for which they can be held morally accountable. But if persons are to be held morally accountable for their actions, they must have been able to have acted differently. If persons are to be held accountable for stealing, it must have been possible for them not to steal under those circumstances. Put generally, if being free means we could have acted differently, then to be able to act morally persons must be free. It cannot be the case that they were compelled to act in a certain fashion. Humans cannot be free if an action taken by another person-human or divine-would compel them to think, will, or act in a certain manner.” Bruce Reichenbach, “God Limits His Power,” in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Bassinger and Randall Bassinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 102-04.

What I call ‘real freedom’ is also called libertarian or contra-causal freedom. It views a free action as one which a person is free to perform an action or refrain from performing it and is not completely determined in the matter by prior forces – nature, nurture or even God. Libertarian freedom recognizes the power of contrary choice. One acts freely in a situation if, and only if, one could have done otherwise. Free choices are choices that are not causally determined by conditions preceding them. It is the freedom of self-determination, in which the various motives and influences informing the choice are not the sufficient cause of the choice itself. The person makes the choice in a self-determined way.<sup>152</sup>

As seen from these definitions, libertarian freedom is incompatible with divine determinism.<sup>153</sup> If God determines man’s actions, especially in salvation, then man does not possess the power of contrary choice but rather is necessitated to choose one thing over another. Therefore, those who affirm libertarianism also embrace indeterminism.

**Libertarian Freedom and Synergism.** It is specifically the doctrine of libertarian freedom which guarantees synergism for the Arminian. While there can be many *internal* influences in man no prior state in man can necessitate his choice at the present. What “internal influences in man” could the Arminian possibly be worried about? The answer must be man’s own corrupt nature. If man is pervasively corrupt then the will is indeed influenced in a causal way to choose one thing (sin) over another (God). Therefore, the Arminian has two options: (1) deny total depravity or (2) affirm total depravity but argue that no person ever exists in such a state due to prevenient grace. Reichenbach, for example, opts for the former in order to preserve libertarian freedom.

In short, a person is free only if, given a certain set of circumstances or causal conditions, the person . . . could have chosen and done otherwise than he did. . . . It should be clear that this *libertarian or incompatibilist notion of freedom is incompatible with either a total depravity that determines our moral character and actions* or with divine foreordination (not based on foreknowledge) and divine causation of all events. If we are necessitated to evil by either of these, our morally significant freedom is removed.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Clark Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 127. Similarly see John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 221; David Basinger, “Middle Knowledge and Classical Christian Thought,” *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 416; Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 60.

<sup>153</sup>Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 268; Gilbert W. Stafford, “Salvation in the General Epistles,” in *Soteriology from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, vol. 1 of *Wesleyan Theological Perspectives*, eds. John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton (Anderson, IN: Warner, 1981), 209, 221.

<sup>154</sup>He explains earlier, “Genuine freedom means that the causal conditions do not determine the person’s choice or action. . . . But where we are free (to some extent), given the extant causal conditions, we could have done other than we did, even though it might have been very difficult to do so.” Reichenbach, “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility,” 286.

However, either option removes the causal nature of depravity and corruption so that at the moment of decision man has no internal factor that would necessitate him choosing sin instead of God.<sup>155</sup> Rather, man has the ability of contrary choice and he is able to choose God or reject God, cooperate with grace or resist grace, and nothing internal to man causes him to do one rather than the other.

Moreover, not only can no prior state *in man* necessitate his present choice but neither can a prior state *outside of man* necessitate his present choice. As Reichenbach explains, in order for man to be free one must be able to say that “he was not compelled by causes either internal to himself (genetic structure or irresistible drives) or external (other persons, God) to act as he did.”<sup>156</sup> The key word used by Reichenbach is “God.” God himself is one of the “external” influences that cannot sway man to such a degree that he *must* choose *A* instead of *B*. “Though certain causal conditions are present and indeed are necessary for persons to choose or act, if they are free *these causal conditions are not sufficient to cause them to choose or act. The individual is the sufficient condition for the course of action chosen.*”<sup>157</sup> Therefore, God, being one of these external “causal

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<sup>155</sup>This does not mean, however, that without prevenient grace men do not possess libertarian freedom due to the bondage of depravity. For the Arminian who affirms total depravity, even in the hypothetically depraved state, the sinner would still possess libertarian freedom. However, such libertarian freedom is not an absolute or unrestricted freedom. In other words, the depraved sinner has a libertarian choice between various options of evil, so that he can choose one evil or another evil equally. However, due to depravity, the will does not have the option of choosing God. Therefore, even libertarian freedom is a limited freedom. Once, however, prevenient grace is in effect, the options are expanded so that choosing God now is a capable option for the will. See Reichenbach, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 102-04.

<sup>156</sup>Reichenbach, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 102-04. For a very similar statement see Reichenbach, “Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility,” 286.

<sup>157</sup>“I am not describing or advocating a radical freedom where our choices are made completely independent of causal conditions or where no restraints are placed on us. Freedom is not the absence of influences, either external or internal. . . . Rather, to be free means that the causal influences do not determine my choice or action. Freedom, as actually found in our experience, is a relative notion: there are degrees of freedom. But where we are free, we could have done other than we did, even though it might have been very difficult to do so.” He elaborates by giving two reasons for libertarian freedom, “There are two kinds of evidence supporting human freedom. On the one hand, there is universal, introspective evidence. We feel that we have choices- . . . But choices make sense only if we can meaningfully select between the options, if we could have chosen or acted differently. The other kind of evidence is more philosophical. Persons are essentially capable of performing actions which are right or wrong (what are called morally significant actions), actions for which they can be held morally accountable. But if persons are to be held morally accountable for their actions, they must have been able to have acted differently. If persons are to be held accountable for stealing, it must have been possible for them not to steal under those circumstances. Put generally, if being free means we could have acted differently, then to be able to act morally persons must be free. It cannot be the case that they were compelled to act in a certain fashion.

conditions,” can seek to influence man to choose *A* instead of *B*, but cannot act in such a way that man would necessarily have to choose *A* instead of *B*. It is man’s choice which must be the “sufficient condition for the course of action chosen,” not God’s. What this means then is that God’s grace must be resistible. If God’s saving grace is irresistible or necessarily effectual then man’s libertarian freedom is violated and it is not man who is the “sufficient condition for the course of action chosen” but God. Cottrell clearly understands such an implication and that is why he says, “All Arminians believe that at the time of the hearing of the general gospel call, every sinner has the free will either to accept or to reject it.” And again,

Some Arminians believe that no sinner is ever totally depraved; others believe that all people are initially afflicted with total depravity but that God through a universal preparatory grace mitigates the depravity and restores a measure of freedom. Either way the result is the same: *when the moment of choice comes, sinners have a freedom of the will to meet or not to meet the conditions for salvation.*<sup>158</sup>

In conclusion, synergism is grounded in the adoption of libertarian freedom. Regardless of how the Arminian gets there (whether through a denial of total depravity or an affirmation of prevenient grace) at the moment of salvation the sinner has a libertarian will that is capable to choose *A* (God’s grace) or to choose *B* (reject God’s grace), and such a choice, if it is to remain undetermined and therefore libertarian, cannot in any way be necessitated or caused by God. God can woo, pursue, and lure man to himself but never in such a way that his drawing of man is necessary and determined. As Stranglin explains, “Rather than destroying free will, God’s grace governs and steers the human will in the right direction. It is, to be sure, a direction that fallen humanity would never consider without God’s grace. Nevertheless, it is synergistic in the sense that the human will either cooperates by not resisting, or by resisting it refuses to cooperate.”<sup>159</sup>

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Humans cannot be free if an action taken by another person-human or divine-would compel them to think, will, or act in a certain manner.” Reichenbach, “God Limits His Knowledge,”102-04.

<sup>158</sup>Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” 120-21.

<sup>159</sup>“Nothing can hinder the possibility of mercy being extended to the sinner except the sinner’s own refusal to believe and repent. Arminius recognizes that there are differences among those who hear the gospel. Unlike the majority of his Reformed contemporaries, however, he is not willing to place the cause of those differences at the feet of God’s decree. Arminius can therefore declare that election is *ex gratia*.”

**Biblical Support for Libertarian Freedom.** Now that libertarian freedom has been defined and its role in relation to synergism recognized, it is important to examine the reasons the Arminian gives from Scripture which show why such libertarian freedom is biblical. First, for the Arminian and Wesleyan, the power of contrary choice must be granted by God because God has issued *commands, invitations, and promises* in Scripture that imply man possesses the ability to obey. As Reichenbach states, “But commands to act properly and the sanctions imposed on improper conduct only makes sense if humans have [libertarian] freedom. God places before us his obligations and at the same time has created us free to accept or reject them.”<sup>160</sup> Boyd and Eddy also explain,

It does not make sense for God to command people to make decisions unless they are free to make these decisions. It does not make sense for God to offer people choices if he has already predestined the choices they will make. And it does not make sense for God to offer salvation to everyone and tell us he genuinely wants everyone to be saved if he has already determined that some of them (or, many would argue, *most* of them) will not believe and will thus be damned. If God gives us decisions and tells us he wants us to choose life, it can only be because we are capable of choosing life and because he genuinely wants us to do so.<sup>161</sup>

Such commands, invitations, and promises are abundant in Scripture. God has issued many *invitations* to come to him and believe (Joel 2:32; Matt 7:24; 10:32-33; 11:6, 28; 12:50; 16:24-25; Mark 16:15-16; John 1:7, 9; 3:15-16; 4:13-14; 6:40, 51; 7:17, 37; 8:51; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 2:21, 37, 40; 8:36-37; 10:32, 43; 16:30-31; Rom 9:33; 10:9-13; 1 John 2:23; 4:15; Rev 3:20; 22:17). Arminians like Steve Lemke have called these the “All-Inclusive Invitations in Scripture”<sup>162</sup> and he believes they disprove irresistible grace because in them God not only invites but *commands* all people to repent and believe in

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Sufficient grace is offered to all, but the grace becomes efficacious for those who do not refuse it, the elect.” Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: the Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 79-80.

<sup>160</sup>Reichenbach, “God Limits His Knowledge,” 104. Also see Pope, *Christian Theology*, 2:344-45; Clarke, *Christian Theology*, 130-32; Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2:245-46; Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 106. As observed by Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 238-39.

<sup>161</sup>Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 155.

<sup>162</sup>Steve W. Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 122-27.

Christ, *promising* that if they do they will inherit eternal life (Josh 24:15; 1 Chron 16:11; 2 Chron 7:14; Psalm 9:10; 34:10; Matt 16:24; Acts 2:38; 13:26; 16:31; Eph 5:14; Rev 3:20).<sup>163</sup> God would not command, invite, warn, and even give promises of reward if he had not provided man, via prevenient grace, with the ability to do so. As Wesley states, “All reward, as well as all punishment, pre-supposes free-agency; and whatever creature is incapable of choice, is incapable of either one or the other.”<sup>164</sup> For example, Romans 2:4 states, “Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?” God, in his kindness is waiting for the sinner to repent. Why would God command the sinner to repent and then wait for the sinner to repent if he had not already granted to the sinner the ability to do so? If it were not the case that we are able to come then God’s sincerity in such invitations and promises is without credibility. Wesley believes he has shown the absurdity in God inviting sinners to come to him though he will not allow it.

Our blessed Lord does indisputably command and invite “all men every where to repent.” He calleth all. He sends his ambassadors, in his name, to “preach the gospel to every creature.” He himself “preached deliverance to the captives,” without any hint of restriction or limitation. But now, in what manner do you represent him, while he is employed in this work? You suppose him to be standing at the prison-door, having the keys thereof in his hands, and to be continually inviting the prisoners to come forth, commanding them to accept of that invitation, urging every motive which can possibly induce them to comply with that command; adding the most precious promises, if they obey, the most dreadful threatenings, if they obey not; and all this time you suppose him to be unalterably determined in himself never to open the doors for them! Even while he is crying, “Come ye, come ye, from that evil place: For why will ye die, O house of Israel!” “Why!” might one of them reply, “because we cannot help it. We cannot help ourselves; and thou wilt not help us. It is not in our power to break the gates of brass, and it is not thy pleasure to open them. Why will we die! We must die; because it is not thy will to save us.” Alas! My brethren, what kind of sincerity is this, which you ascribe to God our Saviour?<sup>165</sup>

Therefore, not only is libertarian freedom assumed in Scripture but human culpability and responsibility only makes sense if man is free in a libertarian way. Wesley argues,

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<sup>163</sup>Lemke, “Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 157-59. Also see Witt, “Arminius,” 2:619.

<sup>164</sup>Wesley, “Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty,” 10:362.

<sup>165</sup>Wesley, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:226-27.

“Indeed, if man were not free, he could not be accountable either for his thoughts, words, or actions. If he were not free he would not be capable either of reward or punishment; he would be incapable either of virtue or vice, of being either morally good or bad.”<sup>166</sup>

## 5. Synergism and the Arminian Appeal to Scripture

Prevenient grace does not *guarantee* that the sinner will choose to believe but merely provides the *opportunity* for the sinner to exercise his libertarian freedom to believe.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, due to man’s power of contrary choice, while prevenient grace is *necessary* it is not *sufficient*, since man can ultimately veto divine grace.<sup>168</sup> Arminians believe several biblical passages demonstrate the resistibility of grace.<sup>169</sup>

If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof (Prov 1:23-25).

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath (Hos 11:1-9).

They did not keep God's covenant, but refused to walk according to his law (Ps 78:10).

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<sup>166</sup>Wesley, “On Predestination,” in *Works*, 6:227.

<sup>167</sup>Collins, *Wesley on Salvation*, 23; Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 83.

<sup>168</sup>Greg Welty, “Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study” in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 234.

<sup>169</sup>Many of these texts can be found listed as support by Wesley in “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:254-55; Lemke, “Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 117-20; Oden, *The Power of Transforming Grace*, 49, 114.

But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels. Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! (Ps 81:11-13)

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness (Ps 95:7-8).

Yet they did not listen or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck, that they might not hear and receive instruction (Jer 17:23).

They have turned to me their back and not their face. And though I have taught them persistently, they have not listened to receive instruction (Jer 32:33).

What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? (Isa 5:4).

Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you” (Zech 1:3).

[He] sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come (Matt 22:3).

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! (Matt 23:37; cf. Luke 13:34).

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief (Mark 6:5-6).

When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him (Luke 7:29-30).

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But there are some of you who do not believe (John 6:63).

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you (Acts 7:51).

Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. . . . Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God (Heb 3:7, 8, 12).

Based on these texts, Arminians believe while it is God who initiates the free gift of prevenient grace, it is man who has the ultimate determinative choice whether he will or will not be saved.<sup>170</sup> He is able of his own free will to resist the Spirit and thwart God’s

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<sup>170</sup>As Rakeshaw states concerning Wesley’s understanding of prevenient grace and free will, man “is ultimately the determining factor in the decision of his or her justification. Faith is offered as God’s

saving purpose.<sup>171</sup>

However, Arminians not only believe there are texts where the sinner *resists* grace, but also texts where the sinner *cooperates with* grace. Thomas Summers (1812-1882), for example, provides a thorough presentation of synergism from Scripture by beginning with the Old Testament.<sup>172</sup> First, he appeals to Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (cf. Jer 21:8) where Yahweh says he has set before Israel life and death and it is up to them to choose for themselves which of the two they will have. Summers then turns to Ezekiel 18:31 where Yahweh commands Israel to repent and turn themselves from their transgressions. Yahweh states that the sinner is to make for himself a new heart. These passages are clear examples of man's ability to cooperate. Summers also sees Ezekiel 36:25-26, a text Calvinists often appeal to, as a passage where "we have divine and human agencies, preventing and co-operating grace."<sup>173</sup> He sees the same type of cooperation in Jeremiah 31:33, Hebrews 8:10 and 10:15-17. Jeremiah 31:18 is so explicit that God says, "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." Summers concludes, "What a striking case of co-operation is here!"<sup>174</sup> Similarly, he believes Psalm 25:8-9 teaches that "those who with docility yield to his gracious influence will be sure to be led into the way of life."<sup>175</sup> Yet, synergism is not limited to the OT but can be found in the NT as well. In John 6:44-46, a Calvinist proof-text, the "*giving* here is the same as the *drawing* in ver. 44, and implies willingness, docility, and concurrence on the part of those thus given or

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free gift, but the sinner must then actively respond to that offer and reach out with the arms of true repentance to receive the gift." Rakeshaw, "John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace," 199.

<sup>171</sup>Lemke, "Critique of Irresistible Grace," 129.

<sup>172</sup>Most Arminians only appeal to those texts above where man resists grace. Very few, if any, Arminians today interact with scripture to show that man cooperates with grace. Consequently, I have chosen to interact with Summers because he actually tries to argue for synergism from the text. I will be using the translations of Scripture that Summers quotes. Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 85-90.

<sup>173</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 85.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid. Pope also cites Jeremiah and concludes, "He who works in us to will is never represented as working so absolutely upon us that nothing is left to personal responsibility. . . . There is no saying in the Word of God which, fairly expounded, represents the Divine Spirit as overruling the energy of the human object of His grace." Pope, *Christian Theology*, 2:365.

<sup>175</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 85.

drawn.”

All who will consider their need of Jesus, . . . and yield to the influence of preventing grace, will believe in him. The notion of necessitating grace forcing a certain elect number to come to Jesus, so that not one of them can fail to come, and no one besides can possibly come, is foreign from our Lord’s argument, and absolutely contradictory of his repeated assertions; . . . The drawing of the Father comprehends all that God does by preventing grace, . . . to bring men to Christ, and also their concurrent action; the divine cannot act without the human, nor the human without the divine. None can come to Christ without first being moved thereto, and enabled by grace; and none will be so conducted unless they use the grace thus given, since none are irresistibly dragged or forced to Christ, but *drawn*, which implies a voluntary yielding, as the “giving” to Christ implies their voluntary “coming” to him.<sup>176</sup>

Therefore, John 6 does not support irresistible grace, says Summers, but synergism and the dependency of grace upon man’s will. Such dependency and conditionality of God upon man’s will is again proven from Matthew 11:28-30 where Christ tells sinners to come to him and take his yoke. If we come to him he will come to us. As John 7:17 says, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”

Summers interprets, “Here the verb ‘will’ is not a sign of the future tense, but it denotes volition – ‘will to do’ – not if any man should do it, but if any man is disposed to do it – resolves to comply with God’s will. This is a rule of universal application.”<sup>177</sup>

Perhaps one of the most quoted passages in support of synergism, though, is Revelation 3:20, “Behold I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” Summers elaborates, “The standing and knocking and calling . . . sets forth preventing and co-operating grace.”<sup>178</sup> God knocks on the door of our heart but waits upon us to open that door and let him in. Summers believes this is the case with Lydia (Acts 16:14) and Cornelius (Acts 10). Is God’s opening of Lydia’s heart a monergistic act? No, for “she opened it herself; for she availed herself of the opportunity to hear the gospel, listened attentively to it, yielded with ingenuousness and docility to the gracious influence thus

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

brought to bear upon her, and promptly espoused the cause of Christ.”<sup>179</sup> The same is true of Cornelius and Saul of Tarsus who respond to the divine call with “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Here, Summers insists, are further examples of “co-operation with divine grace.”<sup>180</sup> Synergism is again evident with the Bereans (Acts 17:11-12) and the Gentiles in Antioch (Acts 13:45-48) who turned to God for life.<sup>181</sup> The ability to turn and come to Christ is also demonstrated in Hebrews 11:6, “He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Promising a reward makes no sense if there is not something to reward, namely, man’s part in cooperating with grace. Summers also argues that “Peter sets forth the same synergistic doctrine” in 1 Peter 1:22-23. “They purified themselves, but it was through the Spirit; they were to love the brethren, but then they were to be born again in order that they might fulfill the injunction.”<sup>182</sup> Or consider “that wonderful synergistic passage,” Rom. 8:26, where Paul says that the Spirit helps sinners pray. Yet, we “cannot employ the Holy Spirit as our proxy to do our praying for us, and, on the other hand, we cannot pray for ourselves without his assistance.”<sup>183</sup> Summers shows that for the Arminian all of these passages give ample proof of synergism in conversion. William Pope (1822-1903) agrees, “We find it [synergism], literally, in all those passages which declare that believers themselves voluntarily receive the Word of God or of Christ or of grace.”<sup>184</sup> Now that we have seen what Scriptures are appealed to, it is necessary to see exactly how Arminians believe this synergism works itself out.

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>181</sup>“They received the grace of God, and not in vain, but yielded to it, and concurred with it, and thus were disposed to seek salvation – and saving faith followed, as a certain result.” Ibid., 88.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>184</sup>Pope lists 1 Thess 1:6; 2:13; Col 1:6; 2 Cor 6:1. Pope, *Christian Theology*, 2:366.

## 6. The Complexity of Synergism in the Arminian Tradition.

**Synergism according to Arminius.** For Arminius, if libertarian freedom is restored in greater measure by prevenient grace so that man can now choose whether or not he will cooperate with God's subsequent grace, then such a grace must be resistible. Such resistibility presupposes a synergistic relationship (*synergismus*) between the sinner and God.<sup>185</sup> Rather than God working alone, or monergistically, to effectually call and regenerate the sinner by a grace that is irresistible, God's grace is successful if, and only if, man so chooses to cooperate (*cooperatio*) with it.<sup>186</sup> Arminius explains,

For the whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, "Is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?" That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace, (for I acknowledge and inculcate as many of these actions or operations as any man ever did,) but it relates solely to the mode of operation, *whether it be irresistible or not*. With respect to which, I believe, according to the scriptures, that many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.<sup>187</sup>

Elsewhere Arminius is lucid as well,

All unregenerate persons have freedom of will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God, of despising the counsel of God against themselves, of refusing to accept the gospel of grace, and of not opening to Him who knocks at the door of the heart; and these things they can actually do,

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<sup>185</sup>Witt, "Arminius," 2:661.

<sup>186</sup>The synergism of Arminius is especially evident the year of his death, 1609, when at the conclusion of reading his theses a man by the name of Adrianus Smetius, possibly a Jesuit, asked Arminius several questions. Bangs narrates the dialogue, "After an opening analysis of the debate, Smetius came to the heart of the matter. If there is sufficient grace given to every man, what distinguishes the man who answers the divine call from one who does not? If it is something of grace, then the man who *does not* answer *cannot* answer. If it is something on the part of man, then man determines his own salvation. This challenge aroused Arminius to the vivacity of former days, and he engaged in a rather long exchange with his challenger. Man determines himself, said Arminius, but not without grace, for free will is in concurrence with grace. One does not act without the other. The exchanges continued, using an analogy introduced by Smetius from the medicine of the day. If one man moves six degrees more than another man, does he not add something to what the other does? Arminius answered that more grace is bestowed on him who acts the more, not preveniently but in accompaniment to it. Smetius responded that the man who acts the more (referring to the human response to the divine call) has something of which he may boast. Arminius countered by pointing out that faith by its nature excludes boasting. As the exchange ended, 'the Jesuit muttered between his teeth, 'This is a very trite reply.''" Gomarus and Everard Vorstius both attended the debate with great dissatisfaction. Vorstius exclaimed afterward, "'The reigns have been given up to the Papists in fine style today!'" Arminius responded, "'I am fully persuaded that the doctrine of irresistible grace is repugnant to the sacred Scriptures, to all the Fathers, and to our own confession and catechism.'" Bangs, *Arminius*, 324-25. Also see Witt, "Arminius," 2:657-59. On Arminius's interaction with Rome, see Eric H. Cossee, "Arminius and Rome," in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, 73-88.

<sup>187</sup>Emphasis added. Arminius, "Declaration of Sentiments," 1:253-54. Also see Witt, "Arminius," 2:639-45.

without any difference of *the elect* and of *the reprobate*.<sup>188</sup>

And yet again,

The efficacy of saving grace is not consistent with that omnipotent act of God, by which he so inwardly acts in the heart and mind of man, that he on whom that act is impressed cannot do otherwise than consent to God who calls him; or, which is the same thing, grace is not an irresistible force.<sup>189</sup>

God woos and persuades (Arminius' word) the sinner, but God does not overpower, overwhelm, or irresistibly change the sinner. The resistibility of grace parallels the resistibility of God's call.<sup>190</sup> As Muller explains, "As in his doctrine of election, so too in his concept of calling, Arminius places his emphasis on the rejectability of the call and on the choice of the individual."<sup>191</sup> Or as Arminius states, "Those who are obedient to the vocation or call of God, freely yield their assent to grace; yet they are previously excited, impelled, drawn and assisted by grace; and in the very moment in which they actually assent, *they possess the capability of not assenting*."<sup>192</sup> In other words, the call of God can excite, draw, and assist through grace, but man always has the ability to resist and refuse to assent.<sup>193</sup> Arminius even goes so far as to say that man may be passive, simply

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<sup>188</sup>Arminius, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," 2:497. Also see Witt, "Arminius," 2:641.

<sup>189</sup>Notice also how for Arminius God's grace is not always successful, despite God's intentions. "Sufficient grace must necessarily be laid down; yet this sufficient grace, through the fault of him to whom [*contingit*] it is granted, does not [always] obtain its effect. [*Secus*] Were the fact otherwise, the justice of God could not be defended in his condemning those who do not believe." Arminius, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," 2:498.

<sup>190</sup>"Vocation is for all people, and the main purpose of vocation is for the salvation of those called; whomever God calls, he calls them *serio*. However, it is one's future contingent belief that determines more proximately whether the calling is effectual. Because the unregenerate are able to resist the Holy Spirit and divine grace, they may not open the door to the Savior who knocks. Conversion is passive on the part of the one being converted, but it is nevertheless resistible." Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 94.

<sup>191</sup>Richard A. Muller, "Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius's Gambit and the Reformed Response," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 260.

<sup>192</sup>Emphasis added. Arminius, "Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed," 2:498.

<sup>193</sup>Witt explains Arminius's view when he says it is by "persuasion" not by "an omnipotent force which overwhelms the human being and irresistibly causes him or her to believe." Witt, "Arminius," 2:633. "Grace is not a force; it is a person, the Holy Spirit, and in personal relationships there cannot be sheer overpowering of one person by another." Bangs, *Arminius*, 343. Also see Richard Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of James Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 308; Clarke, *The Ground of Election*, 76-77.

receiving the grace bestowed, as long as he still reserves the freedom to either give or withhold his assent when he feels grace affecting and inclining his mind and heart.

In the very commencement of his conversion, man conducts himself in a purely passive manner; that is, though, by a vital act, that is, [*sensu*] by feeling, he has a perception of the grace which calls him, yet he can do not other than receive it and feel it. But, when he feels grace affecting or inclining his mind and heart, he freely assents to it, *so that he is able at the same time to withhold his assent.*<sup>194</sup>

Arminius did not accept the Calvinistic distinction between an effectual call and an ineffectual call, as articulated by Calvin himself in his *Institutes*.<sup>195</sup> Muller explains, “The ‘efficacy’ of calling, according to Arminius, results from the concurrence of the external calling of the preached Word with the internal calling of the Spirit, but this is an efficacy that may be rejected by the hearer of the Word who may resist the divine counsel and the work of the Spirit.”<sup>196</sup> Muller rightly concludes that Arminius’s doctrine carries a “synergistic emphasis” because man can reject God’s call.<sup>197</sup> Such an emphasis is a concession to the medieval maxim, made famous by William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel, *facienti quod in se est* (God will deny his grace to no one who does what is in

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<sup>194</sup>Emphasis added. Arminius, “Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed,” in *Writings*, 2:498-99.

<sup>195</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 3.24.8. Also see Bangs, *Arminius*, 213, 343.

<sup>196</sup>Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 261.

<sup>197</sup>Muller also sees this synergism evident in Arminius’s *Letter to Hippolytus a Collibus* as well as in the *Declarations of Sentiments*, where Arminius places intellect before will and affections. “Arminius’s language both here and in his letter to Hippolytus a Collibus is not overtly synergistic, although it is probably significant that he consistently places intellect prior to will and affections, rather than argue, as had Calvin, a distinct priority of the will in matters of sin and salvation. In addition, while Arminius did insist on the necessity of grace in ‘the commencement, the continuance, and the consummation’ of salvation, he also insisted that ‘many persons resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace offered.’” Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 260-61. For Muller’s extended treatment of this issue in Arminius, see “The Priority of the Intellect in the Soteriology of James Arminius,” *WTJ* 55 (1993): 55-72. Here Muller explains, “What we see, by way of contrast, in Arminius’ teaching is the smallest possible opening for human initiative in the work of salvation – so small that it is difficult to label it synergism in the sense of an equal cooperation between the divine and human wills in the movement of the individual toward grace. Arminius makes, in some places, a clear distinction between the illumination of the mind and the renovatio of the heart in his definition of regeneration, and he can also speak of the gracious ‘internal calling’ of the Spirit ‘illuminating and influencing’ the heart ‘so that it might attend to the things that are said’ when the Word is preached. He nonetheless nowhere indicates that the depravity of the will creates a problem for the intellect; he says, rather, that the fallen intellect and fallen will both ‘do what is in them’ in accepting the gracious gifts of illumination and regeneration. In other words, in its fallenness, the intellect does not know the truths of the gospel, but it is not the case that the will prevents their appropriation.” *Ibid.*, 70-71. Also see *idem*, “Arminius and the Scholastic Tradition,” *CTJ* 24 (1989): 269; *idem*, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 78ff. See Arminius, “A Letter to Hippolytus A Collibus,” 2:470-73.

himself). As Arminius states, “For if the expression be understood in this sense, to the one who does what he can (potest) by the first grace already conferred on him, then there is no absurdity in saying God will bestow further grace on him who profitably uses what is first.”<sup>198</sup>

The synergism of Arminius takes on further meaning when he states that when the sinner rejects God’s grace and call (that is, the universal call or *vocatio catholica*), such a rejection is in no way intended by God himself. “The accidental result of vocation, and that which is not of itself intended by God, is the rejection of the word of grace, the contemning of the divine counsel, the resistance offered to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>199</sup> Such a rejection and resistance is not willed by God but is in its entirety due to the “malice and

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<sup>198</sup> Arminius, “Apology Against Thirty-one Theological Articles,” 1:329. Muller argues that even though Arminius affirms prevenient grace, there may still be hints of Semi-Pelagianism because his modification of the maxim is slight. “On this issue of prevenient grace and its character, Arminius does make a fairly clear declaration in his Apology or Defense. It was alleged against him that he claimed, in semi-Pelagian fashion, that a man might do good apart from grace and that he accepted a late medieval, semi-Pelagian maxim, ‘To those who do what is in them, God will not deny grace.’ Arminius countered that no good could arise apart from grace and that even Adam needed the assistance of grace to do good. Furthermore, when he had used the late-medieval maxim, he meant that the person ‘who does what he can by the primary grace already conferred upon him’ will receive from God further grace. Although this understanding does not deny the need of grace, it is distinctly semi-Pelagian, inasmuch as it is precisely the interpretation placed on the maxim by Gabriel Biel, the late medieval semi-Pelagian whose theology Luther so vociferously rejected at the outset of the Reformation. In Arminius’s theology, as in Biel’s, the saying indicates that the prevenient grace of God is offered to all and is not irresistible. The point represents a clear and fundamental departure from Reformed teaching, and in the eyes of Arminius’s Reformed contemporaries was surely understood as a recrudescence of late medieval semi-Pelagianism. This resistibility of grace stands, moreover, in clear systematic relation with Arminius’s understanding of the fourth and final decree of election as consequent upon human choice.” Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 261. And again, Muller writes elsewhere, “Indeed, when the Arminian understanding of the relationship of grace and human choice has been spelled out – particularly in terms of Arminius’s own interpretation of the medieval maxim, ‘to those who do what is in them God will not deny grace’ – Arminianism, like the Molinist theology on which it drew, is little more than the recrudescence of the late medieval semi-Pelagianism against which the Reformers struggled. Its tenets are inimical to the Pauline and Augustinian foundation of Reformed Protestantism.” Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 277. I agree with Muller that Arminius’ modification of the medieval maxim is slight, but it is still a modification nonetheless and therefore it still seems to distinguish him from Semi-Pelagianism. On Arminius and this medieval maxim also see Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 82-83. On Biel’s use of the phrase see Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967, 2000), 133, 194; Harry J. McSorley, “Was Gabriel Biel a Semipelagian?” in *Wahrheit und Verkündigung*, ed. Leo Scheffczyk, Werner Dettloff, and Richard Heinzmann (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1967), 1109-20; David C. Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 52-56.

<sup>199</sup> Arminius, “Twenty-Five Public Disputations,” 1:574. Similarly, Arminius states in his *private* disputations, “The accidental [*per accidens*] issue of vocation is, the rejection of the doctrine of grace, contempt of the divine counsel, and resistance manifested against the Holy Spirit, of which the proper and *per se* cause is, the wickedness and hardness of the human heart.” Arminius, “Seventy-Nine Private Disputations,” 2:106.

hardness of the human heart.”<sup>200</sup> Here we see that for Arminius the resistance to the divine call is “accidental” and unintended by God.<sup>201</sup> Does such an accident render God frustrated and impotent since the sinner successfully thwarts God’s will? Arminius does not think so since “the ultimate end of God’s designs is not the life of this human being and the death of that, but the illustration of the divine goodness, justice, wisdom, and power – which he always obtains.”<sup>202</sup>

To conclude, the synergism of Arminius is a *major* tenet of his overall system of conditioning God’s saving efforts on the will of man.<sup>203</sup> As Aza Goudriaan states, “According to Arminius, it is up to the human being to decide whether to use free choice well and to accept grace in order to be saved. Those who deliberately refuse grace will not be saved.”<sup>204</sup> Therefore, the synergism of Arminius, as Muller observes, was considered “inimical to the Pauline and Augustinian foundation of Reformed Protestantism.”<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup>Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 262.

<sup>201</sup>As Clarke explains, “The accidental consequence of vocation, not intended by God, is rejection of the call.” Clarke, *The Ground of Election*, 93. Likewise Witt, “the accidental consequence of vocation, not intended by God, is that some human beings reject grace.” Witt, “Arminius,” 2:642.

<sup>202</sup>Arminius, “Examination of Dr. Perkins’s Pamphlet on Predestination,” 3:478. Witt comments, “If God had willed absolutely that all should be saved, and yet some were not saved because they had refused grace, then it would follow that the divine will had been overcome by the will of the creature. But this is not what happened.” Witt, “Arminius,” 2:642-43. Witt goes on to quote Arminius as explaining that though God antecedently wills all to be saved, he consequently wills to save those whom he foresees will believe. Such a distinction is to be picked up in appendix I.

<sup>203</sup>I disagree with Stranglin who tries to belittle the massive gulf that existed between Arminius and his Reformed opponents. “If we take Arminius at his word, grace still operates in the same way as his Reformed opponents taught; the only difference is that grace is resistible.” Stranglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 112. First, to say that the “only” difference is that grace is resistible is to underplay the major divide that existed, a divide so large that the Calvinists accused Arminius of Semi-Pelagianism. Second, Stranglin has ignored the major differences that exists between Arminians and Calvinists when he says that “grace still operates in the same way” except for its resistibility. This ignores the implications synergism has for God’s love, God’s sovereign will, God’s eternal decree, God’s calling, the priority of conversion before regeneration.

<sup>204</sup>Aza Goudriaan, “‘Augustine Asleep’ or ‘Augustine Awake’? Jamesus Arminius’s Reception of Augustine,” in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe*, 69.

<sup>205</sup>Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 277.

**Synergism according to the Remonstrants.** The synergism of Arminius is again highlighted by the Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort, who were led by Episcopius. As already discussed, though the Remonstrants presented their *Five Articles*, these articles were brief and so Dort called upon them to present a fuller description of their views which resulted in the *Sententiae Remonstrantium*. Synergism is readily apparent,

4. The will in the fallen state, before calling, does not have the power and the freedom to will any saving good. And therefore we deny that the freedom to will saving good as well as evil is present to the will in every state.
5. The efficacious grace by which anyone is converted is not irresistible; and though God so influences the will by the Word and the internal operation of His Spirit that He both confers the strength to believe or supernatural powers, and actually causes man to believe – yet man is able of himself to despise that grace and not to believe, and therefore to perish through his own fault.
6. Although according to the most free will of God the disparity of divine grace is very great, nevertheless the Holy Spirit confers, or is ready to confer, as much grace to all men and to each man to whom the Word of God is preached as is sufficient for promoting the conversion of men in its steps. Therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion falls to the lost not only of those whom God is said to will to save according to the decree of absolute election, but also of those who are not actually converted.<sup>206</sup>

The Arminians go on to make a qualification in article 8, where they seem to be reacting against what they believe is the unavoidable in the Calvinists view, namely, that if grace is irresistible then God's call is hypocritical. To the contrary, not only do they deny the irresistibility of grace but the Reformed distinction between an external and internal call.

8. Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely un hypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.<sup>207</sup>

The Arminians understand that such a distinction is birthed from the Reformed peculiarity between the secret and revealed will of God, which they reject.

9. There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will; and we do not here,

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<sup>206</sup>As quoted in "Appendix H: The Opinions of the Remonstrants," 226.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 226-27.

as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.<sup>208</sup>

The issue of God's secret will versus his revealed will is to be examined extensively in appendix 2. However, it is important to observe here that even the Arminians of the seventeenth-century recognized that how one views the will of God has major implications for the application of grace. If God has a secret will and a revealed will then so also does God have an effectual call and a general, gospel call. While the former is irresistible the latter is not. For the Arminians such a Reformed distinction is hideous for this posits a "double person" in God and implies that one will contradicts the other, rendering God's call to salvation disingenuous (see article 8).

The *Sententiae Remonstrantium* is again reiterated by Episcopius in the *Arminian Confession* of 1621. There is perhaps no statement which so clearly articulates both a rejection of monergism and an affirmation of synergism than the following:<sup>209</sup>

17.3 For there is one calling that is effective, so called because it attains its saving effect from the event rather than from the sole intention of God. Indeed, it not administered by some special and hidden wisdom of God from an absolute intention of saving, so as to fruitfully unite with the will of the one who is called, nor so that by it the will of the one who is called is so efficaciously determined to believe through an irresistible power or some omnipotent force (which is nothing less than creation, or raising from the dead) that he could not but believe and obey, but because it is not resisted by the one who is now called and sufficiently prepared by God, nor is a barrier placed against divine grace which otherwise was able to be placed by him. Indeed there is another which is sufficient, but nevertheless ineffective, namely, which on man's part is without saving effect and through the will and avoidable fault of man alone it is unfruitful, or does not attain its desired and due effect.<sup>210</sup>

17.6 We think therefore that the grace of God is the beginning, progress and

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<sup>208</sup>Article 11 goes on to elaborate, "11. It is not true that all things, not only good but also bad, necessarily occur, from the power and efficacy of the secret will or decree of God, and that indeed those who sin, out of consideration of the decree of God, are not able to sin; that God wills to determine and to bring about the sins of men, their insane, foolish, and cruel works, and the sacrilegious blasphemy of His name – in fact, to move the tongues of men to blasphemy, and so on." And again, "12. To us the following is false and horrible: that God impels men to sins which He openly prohibits; that those who sin do not act contrary to the will of God properly named; that what is unrighteous (that is, what is contrary to His precept) is in agreement with the will of God; indeed, that it is truly a capital crime to do the will of God." *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>209</sup>On the synergism of Episcopius, see Jan Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort," in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Marin Mulsow and Jan Rohls (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2005), 34.

<sup>210</sup>*The Arminian Confession of 1621*, 106-07.

completion of all good, so that not even a regenerate man himself can, without this preceding or preventing, exciting, following and cooperating grace, think, will, or finish any good thing to be saved, much less resist any attractions and temptations to evil. Thus faith, conversion, and all good works and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed solidly to the grace of God in Christ as their principal and primary cause.<sup>211</sup>

17.7 Yet a man may despise and reject the grace of God and resist its operation, so that when he is divinely called to faith and obedience, he is able to render himself unfit to believe and obey the divine will, and that by his own true and conquerable fault, either by secure carelessness, or blind prejudice, or thoughtless zeal, or an inordinate love of the world or of himself, or other inciting causes of that kind. For such an irresistible grace or force, which, as to its effectiveness, is no less than creation, nor generation properly called, nor raising from the dead (and causes the very act of faith and obedience in such a way that, being granted, a man cannot not believe or obey) certainly cannot be but ineptly and foolishly applied where free obedience is seriously commanded, and that under the promise of vast reward if performed and the threat of the gravest punishment if neglected. For in vain he commands this obedience and requires it of another, and without cause promises to reward the obedience, who himself alone both ought and wills to cause the very act of obedience by such a force as cannot be resisted. And it is silly and irrational to reward someone as truly obedient in whom this very obedience was caused through such an alien power. And finally, punishment, especially eternal, is unjustly and cruelly inflicted on him as disobedient by whom this obedience was not performed solely through the absence of that irresistible and truly necessary grace, who really is not disobedient. We cannot here state how everywhere in Scriptures it is affirmed of some, that they resisted the Holy Spirit, that they judged, or rather made, themselves unworthy of eternal life, that they made void the counsel of God concerning themselves; that they would not hear, come, obey, that they closed their ears and hardened their hearts, etc. And of others, that they promptly and freely believed, that they obeyed the truth and the faith, that they showed themselves attentive and teachable, that were attentive to the evangelical doctrine, that received the Word of God with cheerfulness, and that they were more generous in this than those who rejected the same, and finally, lastly, that obeyed the truth, or the Gospel, from the heart, etc. To attribute all this to those who in no way can either believe or obey, or cannot not believe and obey when they are called, is very certainly foolish, and plainly ridiculous.<sup>212</sup>

It is very evident from the statements above that for Arminians like Episcopius, God's intention to save can be resisted and thwarted and unless man cooperates with God's

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<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 108.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 108-109. He concludes in 17.8 by also affirming the universal nature of prevenient, synergistic grace. "And even if there truly is the greatest disparity of grace, clearly according to the most free dispensation of the divine will, still the holy Spirit confers such grace to all, both in general and in particular, to whom the Word of faith is ordinarily preached, as is sufficient for begetting faith in them, and for gradually carrying on their saving conversion. And therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion not only comes to those who actually believe and are converted, but also to those who do not believe and are not really converted. For whoever God calls to faith and salvation, he calls them seriously, that is, not only by an external show, or in words alone (that is, when his serious commandments and promises are declared to those that are called in general) but also with a sincere and unfeigned intention of saving them and the will of converting them. Thus he never willed any prior decree of absolute reprobation or undeserved blinding or hardening concerning them." Ibid., 109-110.

grace it is left ineffective.<sup>213</sup> Muller writes concerning such a synergism that it was not only inimical “to the Reformed, Augustinian, and Pauline doctrine of predestination but also to the fundamental teaching of the Reformation that salvation is by grace alone.”

Indeed, the Arminian distinctions between antecedent and consequent divine wills and the Arminian assumption that prevenient grace is both universal and resistible led toward the development of a theory of grace and human choice quite opposite to the Reformed doctrines of salvation, grace, and calling, and toward their acceptance of a view of the divine foreknowledge of future contingents inimical to the Reformed doctrine of the sovereignty of God.<sup>214</sup>

As the Reformed saw things, the Remonstrant synergism was an apparent threat to *sola gratia* because it added human contribution to salvation, even if that salvation was initiated by God. Eric Cossee brings out this point when he states that the Remonstrants were seeking to preserve free will. “Following Arminius, the Remonstrants made a powerful plea for acknowledgment of *a human contribution to the implementation of God’s intention towards man*. God’s greatness must not preclude the recognition of people as responsible beings.”<sup>215</sup> Likewise, David Eaton, commenting on Arminius, observes the same, “Synergistic methodologies . . . require the imposition of prevenient grace but postulate a sufficient human ability to accept and cooperate with prevenient grace. . . . This seems to be *a human work be it ever so slight. Yet not so slight since one has power to accept or reject* God’s acceptance, love, and mercy.”<sup>216</sup>

**Synergism according to Wesley and Wesleyanism.** Such synergism is evident in the writings of Wesley and Wesleyanism as well. Wesley was a staunch defender of Arminian synergism against the “horrible blasphemies” and “mischievous doctrine” of Calvinism,<sup>217</sup> as represented in particular by Calvinists George Whitefield

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<sup>213</sup>For a summary of the Remonstrant view of synergism see Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 153-54.

<sup>214</sup>Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice,” 262-63.

<sup>215</sup>Emphasis added. Eric Cossee, “Our Liberal Protestant Heritage, A European Perspective,” *The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian* 15 (1997), 1088 (cf. 99).

<sup>216</sup>Emphasis added. Eaton, “Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley,” 76.

<sup>217</sup>Wesley, “Free Grace,” in *Works*, 7:381. Also see McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 6, 316. For Wesley’s impact on future Wesleyan-Arminians see Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 9-258.

(1714-1770)<sup>218</sup> and Augustus Toplady (1740-1778), who argued that Wesley seriously erred in teaching that God granted to all men the free will ability to come to Christ or resist Christ.<sup>219</sup> As founder of the *Arminian Magazine* (which argued that Calvinism is “very shocking, and ought utterly to be abhorred”<sup>220</sup>), Wesley rejected irresistible grace, arguing that if God acts irresistibly then man is no longer a moral agent.<sup>221</sup> God could

act *irresistibly*; and the thing is done; yea, with just the same ease when ‘God said, Let there be light; and there was light.’ But then man would be man no longer; his inmost nature would be changed. He would no longer be a moral agent, any more than the sun or the wind, as he would no longer be endued with liberty, a power of choosing or self-determination. Consequently he would no longer be capable of virtue or vice, of reward or punishment.<sup>222</sup>

Wesley preached (cf. *Free Grace, Predestination Calmly Considered*) that though prevenient grace enables, making a willful response possible, it is not necessary or

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<sup>218</sup>See Whitefield’s response to Wesley’s “Free Grace” in his letter entitled “A Letter to the Rev Mr John Wesley.” The full text can be found in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980), 2:551-69. On Whitefield’s conflict with Wesley, see Robert Philip, *The Life and Times of George Whitefield* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 195-217; Ian H. Murray, “Whitefield and Wesley,” *Banner of Truth* 191-92 (1979): 29-44; David C. Shipley, “Wesley and Some Calvinistic Controversies,” *Drew Gateway* 25, no. 4 (1955): 195-210; Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 120-68.

<sup>219</sup>For Toplady’s response, see Augustus Montague Toplady, *Augustus Toplady, A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley: Relative to his Pretended Abridgment of Zanchius on Predestination* (London: n.p., 1770); idem, “The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination Stated and Asserted,” in *The Works of Augustus Toplady* (Harrisonburg, VA: Hess Pubns 1987); idem, *The Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Arminianism* (London: n.p., 1779). On Toplady’s Calvinism, see G. Lawton, *Within the Rock of Ages* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1987); V. H. H. Green, *John Wesley* (Nashville: Nelson, 1965), 113; Ian H. Murray, *Wesley and Men Who Followed* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 72-73. For a response to Toplady see Walter Sellon, *The Church of England Vindicated from the Charge of Absolute Predestination* (London: n.p., 1771). On the particularities of the exchange between Wesley and Toplady, see Peter J. Thuesen, *Predestination: The American Career of a Contentious Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 98; Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 67-69.

<sup>220</sup>The *Arminian Magazine* was founded in reaction to the *Gospel Magazine*, edited by Augustus Toplady. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 305. For Wesley’s Arminian response see Wesley, “Free Grace,” 7:383-84; idem, “On Predestination,” 6:225-230; idem, “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:204-258; idem, “A Dialogue between a Predestinarian and his Friend,” in *Works*, 10:259-265; idem, “The question, ‘What is an Arminian?’” 10:358-360; idem, “Thoughts upon God’s Sovereignty,” 10:361-363; idem, “Thoughts upon Necessity,” 10:457-479.

<sup>221</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 86. To qualify, Wesley is inconsistent in his rejection of irresistible grace, as he leaves room for possible exceptions. “I allow, God may possibly, at some times, work irresistibly in some souls. I believe he does. But can you infer from hence, that he always works thus in all that are saved?” Wesley in “Predestination Calmly Considered,” 10:254-55. McGonigle says Wesley is contradictory. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 154-55, 281.

<sup>222</sup>Wesley, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” in *Works*, 2:488-89.

determined.<sup>223</sup> As Suchocki, Maddox, and Runyan observe, Wesley, rejecting the Augustinianism of the West, gave primacy to the synergism of the East.<sup>224</sup> Runyan states,

Instead, like his mentors among the Eastern Fathers, Wesley understands grace as co-operant. It invites into partnership. This partnership cannot be imposed but instead opens up a greater degree of genuine freedom. . . . Freedom is necessary to ensure *synergy*, the cooperative working together of the human and the divine, at every step in the process of salvation.<sup>225</sup>

Therefore, synergism is characterized first by a divine initiative but ultimately by a human freedom which determines the success of divine grace.

Despite the uniformity in affirming synergism seen so far, differences evolved as to how strong or soft this synergism is. Langford summarizes three views,

For Wesley, prevenient grace was most fundamentally revealed in moral conscience: But what does this imply for moral action or faithful response? There has been diversity of interpretation. On one end of a spectrum, one can find an understanding of prevenient grace as a power given to human beings, an endowment of ability to take initiative and act righteously. There is no longer a “natural man,” but only a graciously capable person. The emphasis in this case is on the power of humans to initiate movement toward God. In the middle position, prevenient grace is interpreted as a conscience that can evoke repentance; people are, by grace, aware of their fallen condition and may or may not respond to God’s gracious overture. Response, rather than initiative, is emphasized. At the other end of the spectrum, prevenient grace has been interpreted in a more restrictive manner. Faith is altogether a gracious gift of God. The freedom of sinful humanity is only the liberty of rebellion; it is wholly negative. This freedom leads to despair; human inability is recognized, thanks to prevenient grace; and also, thanks to prevenient grace, humans cease to resist, and God’s causality is able to operate.<sup>226</sup>

Langford identifies three views, which I have labeled as follows: (1) *Strong synergism*, which credits man with initiative (affirmed by Rupert Davies and Umphrey Lee<sup>227</sup>), (2) *Semi-strong synergism*, where man does not initiate but merely responds (affirmed by

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<sup>223</sup>“First, he [Wesley] understood grace to be enabling, but not enforcing. That is, grace makes human response to God possible, but grace does not determine that response.” Suchocki, “Wesleyan Grace,” 541.

<sup>224</sup>Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 66-67; Suchocki, “Wesleyan Grace,” 541-42.

<sup>225</sup>Runyan, *The New Creation*, 30-31. Similarly, see Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 33-34; John C. English, “References to St. Augustine in the Works of John Wesley,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 60, no. 2 (2005): 5-24; Runyon, *The New Creation*, 30-31.

<sup>226</sup>Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 33.

<sup>227</sup>Rupert E. Davies, “The People Called Methodist: ‘Our Doctrines,’” in *History of Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, George A. Raymond, and Rupp Gordon (London: Epworth, 1965), 1:158; Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion*, 110.

William Cannon, Harald Lindstrom, and Colin Williams<sup>228</sup>), (3) *Soft synergism*, where grace works invincibly unless man pro-actively resists (promoted by Robert Cushman<sup>229</sup>).

William Cannon identifies which of these Arminius and Wesley held to.

Without doubt Wesley thought human responsiveness has this more active nature; and here he goes beyond Arminius, who says only that man can resist grace. Wesley, recognizing that preventing grace exists in man even prior to man's ability to resist it and that no one living is without it, is forced to ascribe to man, operating under its influence, some element of active responsiveness.<sup>230</sup>

Cannon also argues that Wesley's view of *active synergism* is more consistent than Arminius's view of *mere resistance*. Cannon explains,

Man is able, not just to resist the grace of God in the Arminian sense of the term, but actually to kill the grace of God which is already housed within him. In this sense, therefore, in making himself immune to the promptings of what some call natural conscience and what others call divine grace, he steels himself against the power of the gospel, stifles the first urges to repentance, and dulls himself forever to the raptures of faith. In this negative way man is the absolute master of his fate and the captain of his own salvation. . . . Granting, therefore, man's ability to stifle and to kill the grace of God within him, have we the right to ascribe to him the positive role of a co-operator with God? We have. For in the very act of not killing grace and of listening to the voice of natural conscience, even though at times very inattentively, man is actually co-operating with God in God's efforts in behalf of his salvation. This must be the case; it cannot be otherwise. Once you grant to man a power great enough to make itself felt as a deciding factor in the acceptance or rejection of the means necessary for the bestowal of saving faith, you lift him, whether you will or not, out of a state of mere passivity into one of activity and of co-operation or non-co-operation with the grace of God. In the same sense in which Jesus said, "He that is not against us is for us," so he who does not stifle and kill divine grace really nourishes and preserves it and thus co-operates with God to make it effective within him. Wesleyan thought, therefore, is decidedly synergistic. . . . There is a genuine co-operation of man with God.<sup>231</sup>

Cannon later concludes just as strongly,

By denying to man the inherent, natural ability to generate his own faith and by his

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<sup>228</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 113; Lindstrom, *Wesley and Sanctification*, 46; Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today*, 42-43.

<sup>229</sup>Robert E. Cushman, "Salvation for All," in *Methodism*, ed. William Anderson (Nashville/New York: Abingdon/Cokesbury, 1947), 105-11. Roger Olson may fall within this third category with his language of "lack of resistance." Olson states, "If they [sinners] do accept salvation by repentance and faith (conversion), they are reconciled with God (justification) and born again spiritually (regeneration). The only thing they contribute to their own salvation is lack of resistance to and free acceptance of God's grace; all else is sheer gift." Olson, "Salvation," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 263.

<sup>230</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 108.

<sup>231</sup>*Ibid.*, 114-15.

own act to claim and to lay hold of justifying grace, Wesley ascribes to God alone the power and the glory manifested in the wondrous act of man's justification. But by affirming the doctrine of free and universal grace in defiance of Calvinistic predestination, Wesley likewise ascribes to man alone the right of decision as to whether he will accept or reject God's offer. The usual conception of divine initiative and human response is of course descriptive of Wesley's teaching; but, if understood properly, the conception of *human* initiative and *divine* response is likewise descriptive of his teaching and is not alien to his theology. Why? Simply because divine initiative in bestowing common or "preventing" grace is taken for granted.<sup>232</sup>

Here we see from Cannon, and he claims Wesley too, not a mere resistance (Arminius) but a pro-active, aggressive synergism that either positively cooperates with grace or savagely kills the grace of the gospel. Cannon does not shy away from the fact that such a strong synergism does ascribe to man a *major role* in salvation, so much so that Cannon calls man the "absolute master of his fate and the captain of his own salvation."<sup>233</sup> This being the case, Cannon is comfortable affirming that there is not only a divine initiative with a human response but a human initiative that brings about the divine response.

Nevertheless, for other Arminians, synergism does not mean that God and man are *equal* in cooperating with one another. Rather, God is the initiator and man the enabled responder.<sup>234</sup> Describing the synergism of Arminius, Roger Olson comments,

Was Arminius's soteriology then synergistic? Yes, but not in the way that is often understood. Calvinists tend to regard synergism as equal cooperation between God and a human in salvation; thus the human is contributing something crucial and efficacious to salvation. But this is not Arminius's synergism. Rather, this is an evangelical synergism that reserves all the power, ability and efficacy in salvation to grace, but allows humans the God-granted ability to resist or not resist it. The only "contribution" humans make is non-resistance to grace.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 115.

<sup>233</sup>Cannon is playing off of the poem "Invictus" by William Ernest Henley which concludes with the words, "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul." Of course, Cannon is applying these words to salvation, showing that it is man who is his own master, deciding his own fate in salvation, not God.

<sup>234</sup>Shiplee brings such a point out when he says, "For the Wesleyans . . . The grace of God and the human will are cooperant, making for a valid synergism; but this cooperation is not an equal terms. Grace has the determinative pre-eminence because in the fallen condition of unregenerate man the universal influence of the Holy Spirit is the sole source or efficacious agency in redemptive religious experience. The cooperation of the human will is real, however, because it is the nature of prevenient grace to allow the personal agency of man to determine whether the Divine influence shall be yielded to or repelled." Shiplee, "Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher," 222-23. Pope has a very similar statement in *Christian Theology*, 2:364-65.

<sup>235</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 165. See Arminius, "Apology Against Thirty-One Defamatory Articles," 1:365-66; Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 98; Peter White, *Predestination*,

Olson is reacting to Philip Limborch who elevated man's will to such a height that the sinner's role in synergism is equal with God's. According to Limborch, prevenient grace is not so much restorative, renewing the enslaved will as it is assisting, simply strengthening the natural ability that is already there.<sup>236</sup> Olson complains that

whereas classical Arminianism before and after Limborch speaks of a personal work of the Holy Spirit beginning to regenerate the human soul, including the will, through the Word, Limborch spoke only of a boost or assist to the soul by prevenient grace. The assistance of grace is primarily information; the unregenerate person needs enlightenment but not regeneration in order to exercise a good will toward God.<sup>237</sup>

To the dissatisfaction of Arminians like Olson, Limborch's doctrine was resurrected by Nathaniel Taylor (1756-1858) and nineteenth-century revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) who argued that man has a natural ability to repent and obey God's law.<sup>238</sup> Semi-Pelagianism, however, came into conflict with the *Christian Theology* of Adam Clarke (1760-1832)<sup>239</sup> and the *Christian Institutes* (1823) of British Methodist Richard Watson (1781-1833). Watson, however, made sure to preserve man's free will, arguing that God's qualities of justice and goodness must be expressed "not through irresistible grace, but through a grace that both creates and relies upon human responsibility."<sup>240</sup> For

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*Policy, and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33-34.

<sup>236</sup>Hicks, "The Theology of Grace," 177, 286; Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 168.

<sup>237</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 167. Olson notes that Richard Watson would fervently disagree with Limborch's understanding of prevenient grace, calling Limborch a Semi-Pelagian and instead arguing that prevenient grace is regenerative.

<sup>238</sup>Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology*, ed. J. H. Fairchild (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), 199-278. Also see Roger Olson, "The Story of Evangelical Theology," in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 24; idem, *Arminian Theology*, 27; Douglas A. Sweeney, *The American Evangelical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 67-76. For a critique of Finney's Pelagianism (and his contemporary advocates), see Michael S. Horton, "Finney's Attacks on the Westminster Confession," in *The Westminster Confession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003), 1:367-412.

<sup>239</sup>Adam Clarke, *Christian Theology* (London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1835). Others to be mentioned include: Nathan Bangs, "Election," in *The Errors of Hopkinsianism* (New York: D. Hitt and T. Mare, 1815) 97-197; Daniel D. Wheldon, "Doctrines of Methodism," in *Essays, Reviews, and Discourses* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 109-46. Selections from the above can all be found in Thomas A. Langford, *Wesleyan Theology: A Sourcebook* (Durham, NC: The Labyrinth, 1984), 23-306.

<sup>240</sup>Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 64. Also see McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 4.

prevenient grace to be successful it must be cooperated with or “improved upon.”<sup>241</sup> The same can be said for Thomas Summers (1812-1882), William B. Pope (1822-1903), and Thomas N. Ralston (1806-1891).<sup>242</sup> Summers’ *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity*, for example, also sought to rescue Arminian synergism<sup>243</sup> from Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism.<sup>244</sup> Specifically, he rejected Limborch, Taylor, and Whitby, “who pass under the name of Arminians, by a misnomer.”<sup>245</sup> Summers also rejected New England’s eighteenth-century “New Divinity,” which is “essentially Pelagian, as it denies that sin is in the nature of man, but only in his voluntary actions, and affirms that man has the natural ability to do what God requires.”<sup>246</sup>

However, as seen with Summers, the emphasis on prevenient grace was never at the expense of highlighting man’s determinative say in salvation. For example, while Pope’s *A Compendium of Christian Theology* (1874) argues that prevenient grace “is free in all, to all, and for all,”<sup>247</sup> it also argues that the divine operation “acts in such a manner as not to interfere with the natural freedom of the will.” Though it is because of divine grace, ultimately “man determines himself.”<sup>248</sup> The same emphasis becomes evident in

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<sup>241</sup>Watson, *Theological Institutes*, 2:77. Also see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 171.

<sup>242</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:19-92; Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, 2:3-84, 319-451. On Ralston, the first American to write a Wesleyan systematic theology, see Thomas Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1847), 238-57. On Arminian Methodism see Langford, *Wesleyan Theology*, 23-306; Thuesen, *Predestination*, 100-35; James C. Logan, “After Wesley: The Middle Period (1791-1849),” in *Grace Upon Grace*, 111-23. On Summers’s synergism, see David Clark Shipley, “Development of Theology in American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century,” *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (1959): 259.

<sup>243</sup>Summers states, “It does not follow from the foregoing that *monergism* is true, that man is passive in regeneration, that God does all the work, and man none at all. It is true man cannot do God’s work in regeneration, but then God cannot do man’s work in the process. There is necessarily a *synergism*, the concurrent energy of God and man.” Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:81.

<sup>244</sup>“What ignorance or impudence have those men who charge Arminius with Pelagianism, or any leaning thereto!” Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:34. Also see 2:54-56, 62-63, 68-69. On Arminianism as a *via media* see 2:31. This same approach is taken by Pope, *Christian Theology*, 2:390.

<sup>245</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:34-35. Summers instead seeks to uphold the Arminianism of Wilbur Fisk, Miner Raymond, J. O. A. Clarke, William Pope, Watson, and others.

<sup>246</sup>Summers, *Systematic Theology*, 2:63.

<sup>247</sup>Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 69. Also see McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 4-5.

<sup>248</sup>Pope, *Christian Theology*, 2:367. Also see Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:355.

the systematic theologies of Miner Raymond (1877)<sup>249</sup> and John Miley (1892-94). Miley, for example, made “free personal agency the foundation principle of his work”<sup>250</sup> and his “Ethical Arminianism” brought him into conflict with Princetonian Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921), a Calvinists in the tradition of Charles Hodge (1797-1878).<sup>251</sup>

Despite these efforts to avoid Semi-Pelagianism, Nazarene scholar H. Orton Wiley (1877-1961) would show much sympathy with Limborch’s theology, arguing that man’s free will was not destroyed by Adam’s fall but retains the power of volition so he can cooperate with grace. As Olson observes,

A hint of Limborch’s semi-Pelagianism infects Wiley’s account in places. He argues, for example, that the will’s power of volition was not destroyed by the Fall, but the ‘bent to sinning’ determines the sinner’s conduct by influencing the will. We hear echoes of Limborch in Wiley’s statement that ‘grace is needed, not to restore to the will its power of volition, nor thought and feeling to the intellect and sensibility, for these were never lost; but to awaken the soul to the truth upon which religion rests, and to move upon the affections by enlisting the heart upon the side of truth.’<sup>252</sup>

Such inconsistency plagues pockets of Arminianism which seep with Semi-Pelagianism.

**Synergism according to Contemporary Arminians.** In the twentieth-century a number of Arminian and Wesleyan scholars have come to the defense of synergism.

For example, New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall argues that, “The effect of the call of God is to place man in a position where he can say ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ (which he could not do before God called him; till then he was in a continuous attitude of ‘No’).”<sup>253</sup>

Similarly, Cox makes salvation dependent upon man’s choice. “Thus the salvation of man is dependent upon man’s response by prevenient grace to the saving grace of God.”<sup>254</sup> And again Cox, quoting Wesley, defends synergism when he writes,

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<sup>249</sup>Miner Raymond, *Systematic Theology* (New York, Phillips & Hunt, 1877), 2:7-406.

<sup>250</sup>Langford, *Wesleyan Theology*, 127. Also see idem, *Practical Divinity*, 114; Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 261; Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism*, 60.

<sup>251</sup>For Warfield’s review of Miley see Benjamin B. Warfield, “Review of *Systematic Theology*,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1980), 2:308.

<sup>252</sup>Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 175. See Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 2:352, 354, 356-57.

<sup>253</sup>I. Howard Marshall, “Predestination in the New Testament,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 140.

<sup>254</sup>Cox, “Prevenient Grace,” 147.

But man is still capable of rejecting the salvation offered to him. The grace that is provided is not irresistible. Man may react to this grace favorably, follow it and be saved or he may reject it, turn aside from it, and find himself more and more choosing the evil of his own nature. Thus a man willfully sins in rejecting the grace given to him, or he may live by yielding to the grace being given. . . . With this [prevenient] grace given to him man can cooperate with God. . . . Wesley described man's reaction to this grace as follows: Hence we may . . . infer the absolute necessity of this re-action of the soul (whatever it be called) in order to the continuance of the divine life therein. For it plainly appears, God does not continue to act upon the soul unless the soul reacts upon God. He prevents us indeed with the blessings of his goodness. He first loves us and manifests himself unto us. While we are yet afar off, he calls us to himself, and shines upon our hearts. But if we do not then love him who first loved us; if we will not hearken to His voice; if we turn our eye away from him and will not attend unto the light which he pours in upon us; his Spirit will not always strive: He will gradually withdraw, and leave us to the darkness of our own hearts. He will not continue to breathe into our soul unless our soul breathes toward him again; unless our love, and prayer, and thanksgiving return to him, a sacrifice wherewith he is well pleased."<sup>255</sup>

Cox concludes that while prevenient grace does not actually save the sinner (for the sinner must cooperate), it "lifts all men to a salvable point." "He can by this grace choose more grace leading on to salvation, or he may reject the grace."<sup>256</sup> In other words, while God initiates, ultimately the choice is man's. We are once again reminded of Cannon's words: "man is the absolute master of his fate and the captain of his own salvation."<sup>257</sup> Such a sentiment is also expressed by Barry Callen who says "saving grace is not received irresistibly." Quoting John Sanders, Callen states, "The crux of the debate is 'whether God ever *responds* to us and does things *because* of us (not merely through us).'"<sup>258</sup> For Sanders and Callen, the answer is yes; God responds to our libertarian choice and if God regenerates us it is "because of us."

Synergism is also advocated by Thomas Oden who states, "God prepares the will and coworks with the prepared will."<sup>259</sup> Oden argues that even though it is God who

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 147-48.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>257</sup>Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley*, 114-15.

<sup>258</sup>Barry L. Callen, "A Mutuality Model of Conversion," in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Collins, Kenneth J. and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 147 (cf. 152). Also see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 244. For a case for conditionality in God also see Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 97-103.

provides “sufficient grace to every soul,” only those who “cooperate with sufficient grace” are then given the means to make it *efficax*.<sup>260</sup> By *efficax*, however, Oden does not mean as the Calvinists do that grace is irresistible. Rather, efficacious grace is a “further refinement of the idea of cooperating grace.” As Oden explains,

Cooperating grace is never intrinsically insufficient and never able to be made perpetually ineffective, although it may be willfully resisted. The distinction between cooperating grace and efficacious grace is this: Cooperating grace may be received or not received. Efficacious grace by definition is that grace which is received.<sup>261</sup>

Rejecting the monergism of Dort as well as the affirmation of irresistible grace by the Jansenists of 1653, Oden, citing the synergism of Melancthon and the Council of Trent in support, states, “Grace is not the simply, direct, omnicausal will of God that nothing can resist, but rather a gift in which God condescends to cooperate with human freedom, and where responsive freedom is enabled to cooperate freely with grace.”<sup>262</sup> Following Oden, Roger Olson also affirms synergism when he argues that “grace is resistible” and therefore “the human response is crucial and determinative.” In other words, “Grace is

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<sup>259</sup>“Insofar as grace precedes and prepares free will it is called prevenient. Insofar as grace accompanies and enables human willing to work with divine willing, it is called cooperating grace.” Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 49 (cf. 47). Also see Olson, *Arminian Theology*, 177.

<sup>260</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 47. For Oden’s synergistic twist to “efficacious grace” and “effectual calling,” see pages 113-115, 194-205. It is very strange how Oden, in support of his synergism, will cite confessions and even theologians of the Reformed tradition, including Augustine. Oden wrongly cites Augustine in support of his Arminianism, when in reality Augustine makes a serious apologetic for monergism and irresistible grace (see chapter 2). Oden does the same with the Second Helvetic Confession, which he cites in his support right after citing Melancthon who was an obvious synergist who departed from Luther and Calvin. Here Oden is simply in error. See pages 95-100. Oden also makes a similar move when he concludes *The Transforming Power of Grace* with an affirmation of synergism in the disguise of “effectual calling.” Oden quotes the Westminster Confession on effectual calling as if he is in agreement. However, Oden makes is clear throughout the rest of his book that he rejects the Reformed view of the efficacy of grace. Here Oden contradicts himself, at best confusing the reader and at worst is misleading the reader by how he will spin the Reformed Confessions to fit Arminianism. See page 204.

<sup>261</sup>Oden continues, “Even where the will is most recalcitrant, grace is still said to be ‘sufficient,’ for grace would have sufficed to guide the will had the will not resisted. It is not inconsistent to say that sufficiency from God’s side may be met with resistance from the human side.” Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 114.

<sup>262</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 112, “God anticipates us, calls, moves, aids; but we must see to it that we do not resist.” *Ibid.*, 114; Philip Melancthon, *Loci communes theologici*, ed. J. Baillie, J.T. McNeill and H. P. Van Dusen, LCC, vol. 19 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953-1961), 22-30. On Trent see Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 51. Such a move shows how many Arminians like Oden have much in common with Rome when it comes to synergism, a point the Reformers made continually.

not effectual but enabling; only with free human consent does it become effectual.”<sup>263</sup>  
 Thus, “regeneration does not precede repentance and faith; it follows from them.”<sup>264</sup>

### 7. Synergism and the *Ordo Salutis*.

The synergism of Arminianism becomes even more explicit in the arrangement of the *ordo salutis*. For the Arminian, synergism entails the belief that God’s power to regenerate is causally conditioned upon man’s will to believe. What this means for the *ordo salutis* is that conversion logically and causally precedes regeneration. Wesley makes such a point in his sermon *The New Birth* where he begins by comparing justification (God’s work “for us”) to regeneration (God’s work “in us”). In time, Wesley says, both occur simultaneously. However, in the order of thinking “justification precedes the new birth.” “We first conceive his wrath to be turned away, and then his Spirit to work in our hearts.”<sup>265</sup> Therefore, as Langford concludes, “justification results in regeneration.”<sup>266</sup> A glance at Wesleyan systematic theologies will reveal that Wesleyans have taken this same view, as their systematics first treat conversion (faith and repentance) and justification and then turn to regeneration. This *ordo salutis* gives faith logical priority over regeneration so that the new birth is always contingent upon man’s faith-response. Two quotations from Wiley explain this ordering,

It [Arminianism] objects to making regeneration the first step in the process of salvation, in that this is a virtual denial of any gracious influence upon the heart previous to regeneration. Nothing is clearer in the Scriptures than this, that before one can be made a child of God by regenerating grace, he must first make use of prevenient grace by repenting, believing and calling upon God.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>Roger Olson, “Conversion,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, 162.

<sup>264</sup>Ibid.

<sup>265</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” 6:65-66. See Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 105; Timothy L. Smith, *Whitefield and Wesley on the New Birth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 11-120; Runyon, *The New Creation*, 71-86; Henry H. Knight III, “The Transformation of the Human Heart: The Place of Conversion in Wesley’s Theology,” in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 52-55; Ben Witherington III, “New Creation or New Birth? Conversion in the Johannine and Pauline Literature,” in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 119-42.

<sup>266</sup>Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 35.

<sup>267</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 416-17 (cf. 378).

Objection is further made to the Calvinistic idea of passivity. That regeneration is solely the work of the Spirit is not denied, but that it is absolutely so, apart from all conditions, is not according to the Scriptures. We are commanded to seek, to ask, to repent, to open the heart, and to receive Christ. These are requisites which cannot be met apart from human agency. There can be no regeneration without them, and yet they are not possible to the unaided resources of fallen human nature. While this help is graciously bestowed upon man by the Spirit, yet with every communication of saving grace there must be the co-operation of the human will. The soul may resist and be lost or it may accept and be born of the Spirit. This is the uniform testimony of Scripture.<sup>268</sup>

Such conditionality is in direct contrast to monergism as Miner Raymond explains,

The work of regeneration is synergistic and not monergistic, as is affirmed by the Augustinian anthropology. From the standpoint in which the above discussion places us, the controversy between monergists and synergists is reduced to narrow limits, is confined to a single view. Monergism affirms that the work of regeneration is the sole work of the Spirit. Synergism affirms that the will of man co-operates in this work. Now, of course, to affirm that the Spirit does what He does is an identical proposition; there can be no controversy so far. Again, that creating anew is a divine work; that the only agency competent to effect the change we call regeneration is the omnipotent will of God is also evident; all evangelical Christians are agreed on this point. The point of controversy is found in the question, "is the work of regeneration conditioned?" The work is divine-wholly divine-but whether the doing, the fact of its being done, depends solely upon the sovereign will of God, entirely separate from, and independent of, the human will, or is made dependent upon the co-operating consent of both the human and the divine will, is the question. The human agency is not employed in the work of regenerating-this is God's work-but in the performance of antecedent conditions; in hearing the word and giving good heed thereto, in repenting of sin and doing works meet for repentance, and in believing and trusting in the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ.<sup>269</sup>

Notice, Raymond, as does Wiley, wants to affirm that regeneration is God's act alone.

However, God's regenerate act is conditioned and contingent upon man's will to repent and believe (i.e., the "antecedent conditions").<sup>270</sup> The *ordo* is organized as follows:

Arminianism/Wesleyanism

1. Prevenient Grace/Calling
2. Conversion
3. Justification
4. Regeneration
5. Sanctification

Calvinism

1. Effectual Calling/Regeneration
2. Conversion
3. Justification
4. Sanctification

Such an *ordo* shows us that faith must be defined different for the Arminian. If

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<sup>268</sup>Ibid., 418 (cf. 419).

<sup>269</sup>Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, 2:356-357. Also quoted in Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 417.

<sup>270</sup>Wiley, *Christian Theology*, 419-21.

conversion, which includes not only repentance but faith, precedes regeneration then prevenient grace cannot make faith *necessary* but only a *possibility*. As Picirilli explains, prevenient grace cannot by itself “guarantee the conversion of the sinner.”<sup>271</sup> While the Calvinist affirms a chain of salvation (unconditional election, effectual calling, regeneration, conversion, etc.) in which the first step necessarily and effectually leads to the next, the Arminian affirms a chain of salvation in which the first step in the application of salvation (prevenient grace) in no way guarantees the next (conversion) but is conditioned upon man’s free will.

### **Conclusion**

Much space has been spent on the Arminian view in order to accurately represent the position rather than constructing straw men and caricatures that are unfair and misleading. However, now that the Arminian view has been articulated in all of its complexity, we turn to critically examine such a view in light of the biblical witness.

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<sup>271</sup>Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, 156.

CHAPTER 6  
THE INADEQUACY OF ARMINIAN SYNERGISM

**Introduction**

Jonathan Edwards, in his treatise on *Original Sin*, claimed that if Arminianism is correct in its affirmation of libertarian freedom then “they have an impregnable castle, to which they may repair, and remain invincible, in all the controversies they have with the reformed divines, concerning original sin, the sovereignty of grace, election, redemption, conversion, the efficacious operation of the Holy Spirit, the nature of saving faith, the perseverance of the saints, and other principles of the like kind.”<sup>1</sup> Edwards went on to argue that Arminianism possesses no such invincibility nor any “impregnable castle” because their definition of free will is inherently faulty and at odds with Scripture itself. As seen in chapter 5, besides libertarian freedom, a second doctrine that is indispensable for the Arminian is the doctrine of prevenient grace. Arminian Robert Chiles has admitted that if the Arminian and Wesleyan doctrine of prevenient grace is wrong, the Calvinist logic is irrefutable.<sup>2</sup> These statements from Edwards and Chiles demonstrate that two irreplaceable and essential pillars of the Arminian system are the doctrines of libertarian freedom and prevenient grace.

This chapter will argue that these two doctrines are unbiblical in nature and consequently they also rob God of his glory in salvation by resorting to a synergistic view of grace which exalts the will of man over the will of God. Accordingly, since these two doctrines cannot be supported by Scripture, Arminianism possesses no such

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<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook, vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 376.

<sup>2</sup>Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 50.

“impregnable castle” and the Calvinist logic remains irrefutable.

### **A Critique of Prevenient Grace**

#### **Man is totally depraved**

As discussed in chapter 5, while there are Arminians like Pinnock, Reichenbach, and Cottrell who deny total depravity and spiritual inability, other Arminians such as Wesley affirm total depravity and spiritual inability but argue that because of prevenient grace corruption is mitigated, meaning that no person actually exists in a state of total depravity and spiritual inability.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, man is able to resist or cooperate with the Spirit’s moral persuasion.

However, both of these views are erroneous. The first group of Arminians who reject total depravity do so in the face of the entire scope of Scripture. As chapter 3 demonstrated, the doctrine of total depravity is affirmed in both the Old Testament (Gen 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:1-3; Pss 14:2-3; 51:5; 58:3-5; Prov 20:9; Eccl 7:20; Jer 17:9; Ezek 36:26; Hos 6:7) and the New Testament (Rom 1:21-32; 3:10-18; 8:5-8; Gal 4:3; Eph 2:1-3; Eph 4:17-19; Col 2:13; Titus 3:3) and this is exactly why other Arminians, including Arminius himself and the Remonstrants at Dort, affirm the doctrine as biblical. Man is not merely weakened by the fall, but he is spiritually dead and unable to do anything to receive eternal life. Man’s total deadness in sin is exactly why analogies like that of Arminian Steve Lemke utterly fail.<sup>4</sup> Lemke compares salvation to a man who is drowning in the middle of the ocean. God comes by in a rescue ship and throws a life buoy to us. It is then up to us to grab the buoy so we can be pulled out of the water. Lemke goes on to say that perhaps we are even too weak to grab the buoy. Instead, we need a helicopter to come down and pick us out of the water. Yet, even here, what is

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<sup>3</sup>As Demarest states, “Arminians maintain that ‘prevenient grace,’ a benefit that flows from Christ’s death on the cross, neutralizes human depravity and restores to pre-Christians everywhere the ability to heed God’s general call to salvation.” Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 208.

<sup>4</sup>Steve W. Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 160.

required is our assent and cooperation. We can refuse. We must simply not resist being rescued. The reason such an analogy fails is that according to passages like Ephesians 2:1-3, man is not drowning, struggling for breath at the surface of the water, but rather he has already drowned and is dead at the bottom of the ocean. Man does not need God to throw him a buoy but to do a miracle by raising him from the dead (Rom 6:4), as Jesus did to Lazarus (John 11:43).<sup>5</sup> Analogies like Lemke's reveal a Semi-Pelagianism that continues to pervade certain Arminian circles and fails to heed Anselm's warning, "You have not yet considered how great your sin is."<sup>6</sup>

Regarding the second group of Arminians (classical Arminians) - who argue that prevenient grace negates total depravity so that no person *actually exists* in such a state - they also are without biblical warrant since Scripture not only affirms total depravity in principle but states that men are indeed in such a state presently. To take but one example, Paul states that *before man was saved* he actually walked according to the flesh, setting his mind on the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5-8). Before salvation man was actually hostile towards God, unable and unwilling to submit to God's law (Rom 8:7). Man was in the flesh and the "flesh cannot please God" (Rom 8:8). Scripture does not speak of man's depravity as that which is negated by prevenient grace or as that which no

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<sup>5</sup>George Whitefield eloquently explains, "Come, ye dead, Christless, unconverted sinners, come and see the place where they laid the body of the deceased Lazarus; behold him laid out, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, locked up and stinking in a dark cave, with a great stone placed on the top of it. View him again and again; go nearer to him; be not afraid; smell him. Ah! How he stinketh. Stop there now, pause a while; and whilst thou art gazing upon the corpse of Lazarus, give me leave to tell thee with great plainness, but grater love, that this dead, bound, entombed, stinking carcase is but a faith representation of they poor soul in its natural state: for, whether thou believer or not, thy spirit which thou bearest about with thee, sepulchred in flesh and blood, is as literally dead to God, and as truly dead in trespasses and sins, as the body of Lazarus was in the cave. Was he bound hand and foot with grave-cloaths? So art thou bound hand and foot with they corruptions: and as a stone was laid on the sepulchre, so is there a stone of unbelief upon thy stupid heart. Perhaps thou hast lain in this state, not only four days, but many years, stinking in God's nostrils. And, what is still more effecting, thou art as unable to raise thyself out of this loathsome, dead state, to a life of righteousness and true holiness, as ever Lazarus was to raise himself from the cave in which he lay so long. Thou mayest try the power of thy own boasted free-will, and the force and energy of moral persuasion and rational arguments (which, without all doubt, have their proper place in religion); but all thy efforts, exerted with never so much vigour, will prove quite fruitless and abortive, till that same Jesus, who said 'Take away the stone'; and cried, 'Lazarus, come forth' also quicken you." As quoted in John H. Gerstner, *A Predestination Primer* (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha, 1979), 20.

<sup>6</sup>As quoted in Michael S. Horton, "The *Sola*'s of the Reformation," in *Here We Stand! A Call from Confessing Evangelicals for a Modern Reformation*, ed. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 119.

man actually ever exists in, but rather it speaks of depravity as that state of man which he currently exists in and dies in unless an effectual work of grace is accomplished (Gen 6:5; 8:21; 11:1-9; 18-19; Deut 12:8; Judges 21:25; 17:6; Job 14:1, 3; 15:16; Pss 5:14:1-3; 10:7; 14:1-3; 36:1; 51:5; 53:3; 58:3-5; 140:3; 143:2; Prov 1:16; 20:9; Eccl 7:20; 9:3; Isa 53:6; 59:7-8; Jer 5:16; 17:9; Ezek 36:26; Mark 7:18-23; John 5:42-44; Rom 1:21-32; 3:10-18; 5:12; 8:5-8; Gal 4:3; Eph 2:1-3; 4:17-19; Col 1:13; 2:13; Titus 1:15-16; 3:3).

Moreover, to affirm total depravity in name and then to deny its functionality is to rob the doctrine of its meaning and effect. In short, the doctrine is purely hypothetical. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest explain the issue precisely,

These Wesleyan hypotheses amount to a universal restoration of spiritual and moral ability in unrepentant sinners – proposals difficult to reconcile with scriptural teaching concerning pre-Christians’ blindness, enmity, and alienation. The spiritually enslaved conditions of fallen humans (vol. 2, chap. 4) appear in Scripture *as actual conditions of people encountered by prophets, Christ, and apostles, not merely as hypothetical conditions*. The human depravity the biblical writers taught in such strong language *has an actual referent in actual persons*. It does not apply only to a *hypothetical condition* from which all have been delivered. Such a prevenient grace hypothesis does not fit the facts of Scripture or the general experience of pastors and counselors.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise, Peterson and Williams make a similar point,

We must ask: Does Scripture present inability as “a logical abstraction that does not correspond to actual men and women,” words used by a Wesley scholar [Umphrey Lee] summarize Wesley’s view? Or does Scripture present inability as the actual state of affairs of unsaved persons, as Calvinism holds? In sum, is inability *hypothetical* (Arminianism) or *actual* (Calvinism)? . . . Here is the key difference between Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism holds to the actual inability of sinners to move toward God in salvation. Arminianism holds to a *hypothetical inability* by prevenient grace granting sinners an ability to believe and be saved.<sup>8</sup>

Peterson and Williams go on to argue that the Arminian affirmation of total depravity in light of prevenient grace is simply misleading. What good is it to affirm the doctrine of total depravity when no person exists in that state? What effect can total depravity have if

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<sup>7</sup>Emphasis added. Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 3:60.

<sup>8</sup>Emphasis added. Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 165, 175. Quotation from Umphrey Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1936), 124-25. Also see Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley’s Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 39.

it is of no consequence to man in the moment of salvation? However, Olson disagrees, arguing that the Arminian affirmation of total depravity is not purely hypothetical or vacuous. Simply because “no human being is actually in a state of absolute darkness and depravity” does not mean that affirming the doctrine is unjustified.<sup>9</sup> Olson believes Peterson and Williams are disingenuous because “they know very well that Arminians do affirm total depravity as the natural state of human beings.”<sup>10</sup> However, Olson misses the point Peterson and Williams are trying to make. Peterson and Williams do not deny that Arminians affirm total depravity – indeed, they actually correct other Calvinists who misrepresent Arminians on this point – but instead argue that such an affirmation is without warrant since no person actually exists in a state of total depravity but humanity instead enjoys the power of contrary choice due to the arrival of prevenient grace. Nevertheless, Olson does not find such an accusation persuasive. Olson tries to counter the accusation of Peterson and Williams when he says,

The inability to will the good is not merely hypothetical; it is the state of nature in which every person (except Jesus Christ) lives. But no person is left by God entirely in that state of nature without some measure of grace to rise above it if he or she cooperates with grace by not resisting it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 154.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Olson uses several analogies and parables, which he thinks prove his point. “What would they think of a person who said of a man who is legally blind but with special glasses can see a little bit that he is only ‘hypothetically blind’? Or what would they think of a person who said of a woman who is deaf but with special hearing aids can hear a little that she is only ‘hypothetically deaf’? What would they think of a Roman Catholic who accused all Protestants of believing in a mere hypothetical unrighteousness of regenerate and justified believers because of the Reformation doctrine of imputed righteousness? The doctrine of *simul justus et peccator* lies at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. It says that Christians are always at best simultaneously sinners and righteous because their righteousness is Christ’s imputed to their account. To Catholic eyes this appears a subterfuge, but to Protestant eyes it is the very heart of the gospel! Surely these two Reformed authors would reject any claim that they believe in a purely hypothetical unrighteousness of believers. In classical protestant theology neither sinfulness nor righteousness is a fiction.” Ibid., 154-55. Olson’s analogies suffer serious flaws. (1) The blind man: This analogy does not work because even if the blind man receives the special glasses, the reality remains that before he receives those glasses he really was blind. Not the case with prevenient grace. In reality, no person actually is depraved (like the blind man is blind) because no person ever exists in such a state. (2) The deaf woman: the same argument applies here as it did with the blind man. (3) Hypothetical unrighteousness: Olson’s error here is significant. Against Rome’s charge that the Reformer’s were affirming an imputed righteousness that is mere subterfuge, the Reformers argued that it is not because there actually is a change in status. Unlike a state of depravity that nobody ever exists in due to prevenient grace, justified sinners actually existed in a guilty status prior to being justified. In other words, once they actually were “guilty” but due to Christ’s imputed righteousness they have been declared “not guilty.” Not so with prevenient

Ultimately Olson’s affirmation of total depravity in light of prevenient grace is unsuccessful and unconvincing. Even an Arminian like Jack Cottrell exposes fellow Arminians (with whom he disagrees) for such a maneuver. Ironically, Cottrell levels the same accusation that Lewis, Demarest, Peterson and Williams do. Using Robert Picirilli as an example, Cottrell explains,

Another example is Picirilli, who says he (like Calvin and Arminius) accepts total depravity, including total inability. But when he adds that this total depravity is universally canceled to the point that all who hear the gospel have the ability to resist it, *he in effect negates the main consequence of total depravity; it is no longer “total.” . . . Such approaches as these, I believe, are confusing and misleading. Retaining the term while denying the traditional heart of the doctrine it represents blurs the distinction between Calvinism and Arminianism at a crucial point.*<sup>12</sup>

Oddly enough, many Calvinists can agree with Cottrell on such a point as this. On biblical evidence, the Calvinist must conclude, “We are *actually* (not merely hypothetically) unable to rescue ourselves and thus need sovereign grace if we are to be saved. And this is exactly what our heavenly Father provides – unconquerable, invincible, irresistible grace.”<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that Arminians who believe prevenient grace has negated total depravity so that no man actually exists in such a state provide no biblical evidence to support such a negation. As Schreiner correctly observes, “Wesleyans contend that prevenient grace counteracts the inability of humanity due to Adam’s sin, but firm biblical evidence seems to be lacking. One can be pardoned, then, for wondering whether this theory is based on scriptural exegesis.”<sup>14</sup> The lack of scriptural exegesis and

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grace. As chapter 5 showed, Arminians argue that no person is ever in a depraved state. Therefore, the analogy fails in comparison.

<sup>12</sup>Emphasis added. Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 121-22. Culver also analyzes how prevenient grace annuls total depravity. Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical & Historical* (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2005), 359.

<sup>13</sup>Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 191.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?” in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner & Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 246.

support noted by Schreiner is especially demonstrated when Olson has to create a third category, namely, an “intermediate state” for all of those who have prevenient grace but have not chosen yet to believe. As we will see, Olson offers no scriptural warrant for such a claim and nowhere does Scripture ever recognize a sinner as neither unregenerate nor regenerate but simply in an intermediate stage.

### **Prevenient Grace is exegetically fallacious<sup>15</sup>**

**John 1:9.** The argument from this text is that the phrase “enlightens every person” refers to universal prevenient grace. John Wesley appealed to John 1:9 more than any other verse to argue for universal prevenient grace.<sup>16</sup> However, John 1:9 can be understood in at least three other ways than this: (1) Enlightenment refers to universal general revelation not prevenient grace and this illumination is grounded in creation.<sup>17</sup> Such a view is improbable because the context of the passage concerns Christ, the Son of God, who has come into the world, not an enlightenment at creation.<sup>18</sup> (2) Enlightenment refers to the inner conviction and illumination that results in faith and repentance.<sup>19</sup> Such a view argues that John uses “all” in the sense that all without distinction rather than all without exception are enlightened.<sup>20</sup> In other words, not just Jews but Gentiles are enlightened by Christ’s advent into the world (see John 10:16; 11:51-52). However, the

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<sup>15</sup>Unfortunately, besides Schreiner’s critique, there have not been many in depth critiques of prevenient grace, with the exception of William W. Combs, “Does the Bible Teach Prevenient Grace?” *DBSJ* 10 (2005): 3-18, who himself is dependent on Schreiner. Therefore, this chapter is indebted to Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 229-47.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of his Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 250.

<sup>17</sup>This view is held by Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (1971), 94-95. If one takes the view of general revelation then the debate must be over whether or not general revelation is sufficient revelation to save somebody. Such a view seems to be denied by Paul in Romans 1:18-32.

<sup>18</sup>Carson argues that general revelation doesn’t work in John 1:9 because if John wanted to argue for general revelation it would have been done in 1:3-4. See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (1991), 123.

<sup>19</sup>Köstenberger seems to adopt this interpretation though he says the illumination is external rather than internal. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (2004), 35-36.

<sup>20</sup>Carson, *John*, 123; Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 240.

immediate context does not seem to imply such a distinction. (3) “The word *enlighten* (*photizo*) refers not to inward illumination but to the exposure that comes when light is shed upon something. Some are shown to be evil because they did not know or receive Jesus (John 1:10-11), while others are revealed to be righteous because they have received Jesus and have been born of God (John 1:12-13).”<sup>21</sup> This interpretation is the best interpretation of John 1:9-13 because it fits the context of John 3:19-21 which says,

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works are evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out by God.

When John speaks of the light which enlightens all men he is not speaking of a light which bestows universal prevenient grace, nor of a light which conveys general revelation through creation to all of humanity, nor of a light which inwardly illumines every man, but rather of a light which “exposes and reveals the moral and spiritual state of one’s heart.”<sup>22</sup> D. A. Carson explains,

The verb *photizei* may have its primary lexical meaning “to shed light upon,” i.e., “to make visible,” “to bring to light.” Inner illumination is then not in view (whether of general revelation or of the special light that attends salvation). What is at stake, rather is the objective revelation, the “light,” that comes into the world with the incarnation of the Word, the invasion of the “true light.” It shines on every man, and divides the race: those who hate the light respond as the world does (1:10): they flee lest their deeds should be exposed by this light (3:19-21). But some receive this revelation (1:12-13), and thereby testify that their deeds have been done through God (3:21). In John’s Gospel it is repeatedly the case that the light shines on all, and forces a distinction (e.g. 3:19-21; 8:12; 9:39-41).<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, the text does not teach that Christ gives prevenient grace to all of humanity enabling man to cooperate with God’s grace but rather that the light of Christ reveals the true condition of men, either desperately wicked or trusting in God.

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<sup>21</sup>Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 240-41. This third view is held by C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 161; Robert H. Mounce, *John*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 372; Carson, *John*, 124. The view is also affirmed by Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 177.

<sup>22</sup>Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 240-41.

<sup>23</sup>Carson, *John*, 124.

**John 12:32.** As seen in chapter 5, it is argued by Arminians that John 12:32, where Jesus says that when he is lifted up he will draw (ἐλκύσω) all men to himself, refers to the universal drawing of humanity whereby through prevenient grace all men can come, if they choose, to Christ. However, such a reading misunderstands the words of Jesus as well as the context in which he spoke. First, such a reading would contradict what Jesus said earlier in John 6:37, namely, “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.” And again in 6:44, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.” The word “draw” (ἐλκύση) here is the same exact word Jesus uses in John 12:32 (ἐλκω). If all that the Father gives to Jesus come to Jesus and there are some in the world who do not come to Jesus, then there are some who do not come to Jesus because they are not drawn. Therefore, not all are drawn by the Father to Jesus (see chapter 3). Why would Jesus say that only some will be drawn by the Father but later say that all men will be drawn to the Son? This would result in a contradiction on Jesus’ part. Rather, as Carson states, “The combination of v.37a and v.44 prove that this ‘drawing’ activity of the Father cannot be reduced to what theologians sometimes call ‘prevenient grace’ dispensed to every individual, for this ‘drawing’ is selective, or else the negative note of v.44 is meaningless.”<sup>24</sup> Schreiner concludes, “The Johannine conception of drawing is not that it makes salvation possible, but that it makes salvation effectual. Those who are drawn will come to Jesus and believe in him.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the Wesleyan reading fails on two accounts: (1) Drawing is particular, not universal and (2) drawing is effectual not resistible.

Furthermore, if the reader pays close attention to the context of John 12:32 the meaning is clear. Just before Jesus says all men will be drawn, Jesus also interacts with a dispute that occurs over the arrival of some Greeks who want to speak with Jesus (John

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<sup>24</sup>Carson, *John*, 293.

<sup>25</sup>Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 242. Schreiner goes on rightly to note that John 12:32 cannot mean universalism either for the context of John shows that Jesus is teaching that it is through his death that man believes and clearly not all believe and will be saved.

12:20-26). Jesus seems to ignore these Greeks and instead says that the Son of Man must fall to the ground like a grain of wheat so that much fruit will result (speaking of his death). However, Jesus is not ignoring the Greeks, but explaining in parabolic fashion how it is that the Greeks will be saved, namely, by his death. It is through the death of the Son of Man that not only Jews but Gentiles also can receive eternal life, as demonstrated in John 10:16 and 11:51-52.<sup>26</sup> Jesus is explaining to his disciples the basis for which Greeks also will be drawn to the Son by the Father. Therefore, as Morris, Schreiner, Mounce, and Carson observe, when Jesus says he will draw all people to himself, he is not referring to all *without exception* but to all *without distinction*, Jew and Greek alike.<sup>27</sup>

**Romans 2:4.** Paul says, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). Grider quotes Romans 2:4 as proof that it is prevenient grace which is God’s kindness leading man to repent.<sup>28</sup> However, Paul says nothing about a *universal* grace that is provided to all people *enabling* them to repent. Such a detailed description of grace is not included in this passage. Rather, the present tense verb “leads” (ἄγει) in verse 4 simply indicates that it is God’s *desire* that sinners repent.<sup>29</sup> How exactly God goes about executing such a desire is not specified in this text.<sup>30</sup> What is specified is

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<sup>26</sup>Köstenberger, *John*, 384-85.

<sup>27</sup>Morris, *John*, 598-99; Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace?” 242; Mounce, *John*, 538; Carson, *John*, 242.

<sup>28</sup>Kenneth J. Grider, *A Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1994), 353.

<sup>29</sup>Therefore, Nygren interprets verse 4 as reading, “Do you not know that God’s kindness is meant to lead *you* to repentance?” Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 117, as pointed out by Peterson and Williams, *Why I am not an Arminian*, 178. Other commentaries make the same point, including: Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (1998), 108; H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans*, EBC (1984), 8; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, WBC, vol. 38A (1988), 91; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (1959), 60; Leon Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (1988), 113n30; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (1996), 125-35. As observed in Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 240.

<sup>30</sup>Indeed, it is rather the assumption of the Arminian - that if God desires all to be saved he must provide salvation to all - that leads the Arminian to interpret Paul in this way. Such an assumption not only reads too much into the text but fails to do justice to the complexity of God’s desires. For example, God can simultaneously love Jacob and hate Esau (Rom 9:13).

that God, in his kindness, withheld his judgment temporarily, showing his patience with sinners who persisted in ungodliness. Such forbearance and patience is generous to say the least and sinners would be wise not to take it for granted but to repent lest tomorrow God should unleash his judgment. Again, there is nothing here that indicates a doctrine of universal prevenient grace. What is being described is not a *giving* of universal grace but rather the *withholding* of God's judgment for a period of time. This is indicated in the very next verse: "But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (2:5). Furthermore, the context of the passage demonstrates that Paul is arguing that the wrath of God is coming not only on Gentiles but also on Jews. As Peterson and Williams state, "But a closer examination of the verse reveals that Paul is making not a universal statement but a particular one showing that the Jews are condemned along with the Gentiles."<sup>31</sup> This is why Paul states that "in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things" (Rom 2:1). In other words, God's kindness should have alerted the Jews to repent, but instead they looked upon the Gentiles with condemnation and contempt. All the while they themselves practiced the same sins. Israel only heaped judgment on themselves by showing contempt for God's tolerance and patience. Therefore, the passage has nothing to do with a universal prevenient grace, but rather speaks of the judgment that awaits Israel for her rejection of God's kindness (Rom 2:5).

**Philippians 2:12-13.** Arminians also appeal to Philippians 2:12-13 where Paul exhorts, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Wesley believes Paul teaches here the doctrine of prevenient grace, as do contemporary Wesleyan-Arminians like Oden.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Peterson and Williams, *Why I am not an Arminian*, 178.

<sup>32</sup>Emphasis original. John Wesley, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," in *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. T. Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 6:509. Also see Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity*, 246.

Oden interprets Paul as saying, “God working in us enables our working and co-working with God.”<sup>33</sup> Since God works in us by giving us prevenient grace, it is now on us to cooperate with subsequent grace, for the “chief function of prevenient grace is to bring the person to a state of nonresistance to subsequent forms of grace.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, “Prevenient grace is that grace that goes before us to prepare us for more grace, the grace that makes it possible for persons to take the first steps toward saving grace.”<sup>35</sup> Roger Olson also cites Philippians 2:12-13 as a proof-text for prevenient grace, “The directive to ‘work out your own salvation’ refers to receiving the gift of saving grace through repentance and faith; ‘God who is working in you’ refers to prevenient and assisting grace that goes before and makes possible free human reception of the grace of God.”<sup>36</sup>

However, Philippians 2:12-13 has nothing to do with prevenient grace, calling, or regeneration since Paul is talking about *the Christian* (not the unbeliever) who is commanded to work out his salvation in *sanctification*. As Moisés Silva states, “Paul here points to our conscious activity in sanctification.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Peter O’Brien says Paul is referring to the “outworking of the gospel in their day-to-day living” as they await “the approaching day of Christ when their salvation will be complete (cf. Rom. 13:11).”<sup>38</sup> Two contextual and exegetical points bear this out. (1) Paul and Timothy open the letter addressing those who are “saints in Christ Jesus” at Philippi, not those who are unbelievers being instructed on how to be converted (1:1). Paul rejoices because they

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<sup>33</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 244.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 247. Also see *idem*, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 53.

<sup>35</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 247.

<sup>36</sup>Roger Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theists Model of God,” in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: Four Views*, ed. Bruce A. Ware (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 169. Notice, this is the *only* text Olson cites to defend prevenient grace, which is a reminder of Schreiner’s and Erickson’s observation that the exegetical evidence Arminians use is scant. Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 246; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 925.

<sup>37</sup>Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., BECNT (2005), 122.

<sup>38</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC (1991), 273-74. Also see Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (1995), 235.

partnered with him “in the gospel from the first day until now” (2:5). Moreover, Philippians 2:12-13 is parallel in language to 1:6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Here we see Paul addressing those who are already believers, giving them confidence that God, who began such a work, will finish it. So also in 2:12-13 Paul is again addressing believers (“my beloved,” 2:12), exhorting them to persevere in the faith, reminding them once again that God is at work in them and will finish what he started.<sup>39</sup> This is evident by the fact that Paul then addresses them as those who are “children of God” who are to be blameless, innocent, without blemish, and lights in the world (2:14-16). (2) The word “salvation” is not always used by Paul, as we use it today in evangelical circles, to refer only to the first instance of new life, but rather can refer broadly to the entire process of conversion, sanctification, and glorification (a point we will return to in chapter 8). Silva insightfully explains the matter,

It is conceded by all parties in the discussion that the term salvation (or its cognate verb) need not be restricted, as it normally is in contemporary evangelical language, to the initial act of conversion (“Have you been saved?”) or to the status of being in a right relationship with God (“Are you saved?”). . . . But the biblical concept of salvation is not thus restricted to justification; more commonly what is in view includes God’s redemptive work in its totality. Thus, while in a very important sense we have already been saved (Eph. 2:5, 8; Titus 3:5), in another sense we are yet to be saved (Rom. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:18). Calvin rightly claims “that salvation is taken to mean the entire course of our calling, and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection, to which He has determined us by His free election.”<sup>40</sup>

In other words, “salvation” for Paul can refer to the *total* process rather than the initial event. Therefore, to conclude that such a passage refers specifically to the initial act of prevenient grace or, worse yet, to synergism because God instructs the unbeliever to “work out” his salvation, does violence to the proper meaning of the text.

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<sup>39</sup>As Murray states, “All working out of salvation on our part is the effect of God’s working in us.” It is because God works that we work. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1961), 148-49.

<sup>40</sup>Silva, *Philippians*, 121.

**Titus 2:11.** A final text that Wesleyan-Arminians appeal to for prevenient grace is Titus 2:11 which says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” Should “all people” be interpreted as all without exception? Schreiner helpfully shows that even if the text were referring to a potential salvation of all people, Titus 2:11 “is a far cry from saying through the atonement God has counteracted the effects of Adam’s sin so that all people have the opportunity to accept or reject him.”

Titus 2:11 says that God’s grace has been manifested through Christ’s work on the cross, but it does not say that God has thereby supplied the ability to believe to all people. Wesleyans conclude from the atonement effected by Christ that enough grace has been imparted to all people so that they can now choose whether or not to believe. But it is precisely this point that is not taught explicitly in the verse. It does not necessarily follow that since grace was manifested in the death of Christ that all people as a result have the ability to believe in him. Specific exegetical support for this conclusion is lacking.<sup>41</sup>

To argue from Titus 2:11 that the grace spoken of is one that negates total depravity and enables man to cooperate or resist is simply reading into the text more than is there. The text does not say as much as the Wesleyan wants it to say. Furthermore, attention must be paid to the context of the passage. Wesleyans like to interpret this passage as teaching *universal* prevenient grace. However, in the previous ten verses Paul lists all different types of people that make up the kingdom of God: elderly men, elderly women, young women, young men, slaves, and masters. Paul then says that salvation has come for all people. In light of the previous ten verses all people refers to all *kinds* of people not to all people without exception. The universality of grace is one of kind and class.<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, it is very surprising how little textual basis Arminians and Wesleyan have for the doctrine of prevenient grace. As Schreiner and Erickson observe,

What was most striking to me in my research was how little scriptural exegesis has been done by Wesleyans in defense of prevenient grace. It is vital to their system of theology, for even Wesleyans admit that without it “Calvinist logic is irrefutable.”

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<sup>41</sup>Schreiner, “Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace?” 241.

<sup>42</sup>Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 210; George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (1992), 319. For a survey of the various views on this passage, see Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, NIVAC (1999), 336-39; Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC, vol. 34 (1992), 309-10.

Nonetheless, not much exegetical work has been done in support of the doctrine.<sup>43</sup>

The problem is that there is no clear and adequate basis in Scripture for this concept of universal enablement. The theory, appealing though it is in many ways, simply is not taught explicitly in the Bible.<sup>44</sup>

No wonder Roger Olson has to say that prevenient grace is not explicitly named or stated in Scripture but one must find it “between the lines.”<sup>45</sup> Even Asbury Theological Seminary professor Ben Witherington III shockingly confesses,

Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace is frankly weakly grounded if we are talking about proof texts from the Bible. Sometimes Wesley would refer to a text like Matthew 5:44-45, which urges the loving of enemies because God makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and makes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust. . . . While this may be said to tell us something about God’s character, and the fact that God even blesses those who are at odds with his will and ways, can one then conclude from such a text that God bestows his prevenient grace – not just a general blessing but something that enables the will of all persons so that they can respond positively to the gospel if they have an opportunity to do so? This, it must be admitted, is a stretch.<sup>46</sup>

Witherington concludes by admitting that though he thinks prevenient grace is consistent with God’s gracious character, “one should not hang one’s entire theology about what sinners can do by free choice on such an exegetically weakly supported notion.”<sup>47</sup> This is no small confession from one who is himself within the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition. Surely Arminians seek to ground their arguments on Scripture, but the scriptural support offered is not only mistaken but meager for they lack texts to support their claim.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, other doctrines must be utilized, such as libertarian freedom.

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<sup>43</sup>Schreiner, “Prevenient Grace?” 246. Schreiner quotes Chiles, *American Methodism*, 50.

<sup>44</sup>Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 925.

<sup>45</sup>Olson, “The Classical Free Will Theist Model of God,” 168.

<sup>46</sup>Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), 207-08.

<sup>47</sup>Earlier Witherington states that such a doctrine “is not revealed in the NT.” *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>48</sup>“All lesser grace, however rich and wonderful it may be, is insufficient. A grace that does not regenerate people yet restores their will to the point where they can opt *for* the gospel is nowhere taught in Scripture and is also a psychological absurdity.” Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:86.

### Problems with Libertarian Freedom

Besides the doctrines of prevenient grace and the universal love of God, there is no doctrine as important to the Arminian system as the doctrine of libertarian freedom.<sup>49</sup> Whether the Arminian affirms the use of libertarian freedom through *nature* (i.e., man is not totally depraved) or by *grace* (i.e., prevenient grace enables full use of free will), at the moment of decision it is the will of man which must choose to cooperate (synergism) or resist God's grace. However, such a choice is libertarian in nature, meaning that man can always do otherwise than he chose to do. As seen in chapter 5, no single factor, external or internal, can cause or necessitate man to choose one thing rather than another.<sup>50</sup> Man is his own uncaused mover or *causa sui* (cause of oneself), possessing self-determination of the will. Consequently, at the moment of salvation man can equally choose to accept or reject divine grace. As Scott Burson and Jerry Walls state,

While God is the primary agent in salvation, he is not the only agent. To ensure freedom, humans are agents too. . . . There is a dual agency at work in the mysterious process of salvation. God is the initiator, filling the world with prevenient and saving grace. He tenaciously seeks the lost, wooing them, convicting them and drawing them to himself. Yet sinners can be saved only if they freely cooperate with the grace that is offered.<sup>51</sup>

While prevenient grace is necessary (for most Arminians at least) it is not sufficient because the will of man is the final determiner, equally able to accept or reject the gospel. Though God can seek to persuade and influence man's choice, such persuasion and influence can never necessitate man to choose one way rather than another. As Cottrell

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<sup>49</sup>On the Arminian view of God's indiscriminate, egalitarian love, see appendix 1.

<sup>50</sup>Reichenbach, "Freedom, Justice, and Moral Responsibility," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 285; J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 270; Garrett J. DeWeese and James P. Moreland, *Philosophy Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 123-24; Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Ruler*, vol. 2 of *The Doctrine of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 192.

<sup>51</sup>Scott R. Burson and Jerry L. Walls, *C. S. Lewis & Francis Schaeffer: Lessons for a New Century from the Most Influential Apologists of Our Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 91.

states, “For Arminians the final decision belongs to each individual.”<sup>52</sup>

While my purpose here is not to provide an extensive critique of libertarianism (as others have adequately done<sup>53</sup>), nevertheless, there are several major problems with a libertarian view, particularly with reference to salvation. John Frame has listed eighteen devastating reasons why libertarianism is faulty, which can be summarized as follows:<sup>54</sup>

(1) Contrary to incompatibilism, God does exercise exhaustive and meticulous sovereign control even over the actions of his creatures and such sovereign control is incompatible with libertarian freedom (e.g., Isa 10; Exod 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 2 Pet 1:20-21). (2) Scripture does not explicitly teach the existence of libertarian freedom. (3) Scripture never grounds human responsibility (in the sense of accountability) in libertarian freedom. (4) God never places, as Arminians think, a high or positive value on libertarian freedom or its existence.<sup>55</sup> (5) Scripture does teach that in heaven we will not be free in the libertarian sense for we will not be able to sin. (6) Scripture never judges anyone’s conduct by reference to his libertarian freedom.<sup>56</sup> (7) Scripture even condemns people for acts that were not free in the libertarian sense such as Judas’s betrayal of Jesus (even Greg Boyd admits this).<sup>57</sup> (8) Libertarian freedom is never assumed in civil courts as a condition for moral responsibility and culpability. (9) Civil courts actually assume a freedom of inclination since they look for an adequate and decisive motive that was the cause in committing a crime. (10) Scripture contradicts the proposition that only uncaused decisions are morally responsible (e.g., Assyrians). (11) Scripture denies we are independent of God or of our own character and desires in the libertarian sense (e.g., Matt 7:15-20; Luke 6:43-45). (12) Libertarianism, therefore, violates the biblical teaching concerning the unity of

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<sup>52</sup>Cottrell, “The Classical Arminian View of Election,” 121. Also see Burson and Walls, C. S. Lewis & Francis Schaeffer, 67-68; Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 127.

<sup>53</sup>For example see John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 625-734; R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 43-78; Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 61-95.

<sup>54</sup>The following points either summarize Frame’s point or directly quote Frame. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 139-45.

<sup>55</sup>“That is a significant point, because the freewill defense against the problem of evil . . . argues that God places such a high value on human free choice that he gave it to creatures even at the risk that they might bring evil into the world. One would imagine, then, that Scripture would abound with statements to the effect that causeless free actions by creatures are terribly important to God, that they bring him glory. But Scripture never suggests that God honors causeless choice in any way or even recognizes its existence.” *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>56</sup>“Scripture never declares someone innocent because his conduct was not free in the libertarian sense; nor does it ever declare someone guilty by pointing to his libertarian freedom. We have seen that Scripture sometimes refers implicitly to freedom or ability in the compatibilist sense. But it never refers to freedom in a demonstrably incompatibilist sense.” *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.* For example, see Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 38.

human personality in the heart.<sup>58</sup> (13) If libertarian freedom were necessary for moral responsibility, then God would not be morally responsible for his actions, since he does not have the freedom to act against his holy character.<sup>59</sup> (14) Libertarianism is essentially a highly abstract generalization of the principle that inability limits responsibility.<sup>60</sup> (15) Libertarianism is inconsistent, not only with God's foreordination of all things, but also with his knowledge of future events. If God knows exactly what we will do in the future then we cannot be free to do otherwise.<sup>61</sup> (16) Libertarians like Pinnock and Rice tend to make their view of free will a nonnegotiable, central truth, with which all other theological statements must be made consistent. (17) Philosophical defenses of libertarianism often appeal to intuition as the basis for believing in free will. (18) If libertarianism is true, then God has somehow limited his sovereignty (which Arminians concede) so that he does not bring all things to pass, a belief which is contrary to Scripture (Ps 115:3; Eph 1:11).<sup>62</sup>

These eighteen points are overwhelming for a libertarian view, especially the first point since Scripture always displays God as the one who determines and controls all things, including man's will (Isa 10; Exod 3:21-22; 11:2-3; 12:35-36; Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; 2 Pet 1:20-21). God's exhaustive and meticulous control is simply incompatible with a libertarian view and Arminians have tremendous difficulty explaining such biblical texts

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<sup>58</sup>“Scripture teaches that human hearts, and therefore our decisions, are wicked because of the Fall, but that the work of Christ and the regenerating power of the Spirit cleanse the heart so that our actions can be good. We are fallen and renewed as whole persons. This integrity of human personality is not possible in a libertarian construction, for on that view the will must always be independent of the heart and all of our other faculties.” Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 142.

<sup>59</sup>Frame's point is very important and could be elaborated on. God must have a freedom of inclination because he always does that (he must do that) which is in line with his own character. In a libertarian view of God, God would be able to be holy or not be holy by definition. This point is also made by John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.1.1, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), II.3.5; idem, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, trans. G. I. Davies, ed. A. N. S. Lane, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 149-50.

<sup>60</sup>“Libertarians say that if our decisions are afflicted by any kind of inability, then they are not truly free and we are not truly responsible for them. We saw earlier that inability does limit responsibility to some extent, but that this principle is not always valid, that we are always afflicted by some kinds of inability, and therefore that the principle must be used with great caution. Libertarianism throws caution to the wind.” Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 143.

<sup>61</sup>This problem has led many Arminians (Clark Pinnock, Greg Boyd, John Sanders, etc.) to Open Theism because they cannot reconcile exhaustive foreknowledge with libertarian free will. Therefore, rather than rejecting libertarianism they reject God's exhaustive foreknowledge. In this area Open Theists are in good company with the sixteenth to seventeenth-century Socinians. See the following for critiques of Open Theism: Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000); John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001); John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul K. Helseth, eds., *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003).

<sup>62</sup>“Furthermore, God's very nature is to be sovereign. Sovereignty is his name, the very meaning of the name Yahweh, in terms of both control and authority. If God limited his sovereignty, he would become something less than Lord of all, something less than God. And if God became something less than God, he would destroy himself. He would no longer exist.” Frame, *Doctrine of God*, 144-45 (cf. chapter 8).

in light of libertarian freedom.

While there are still other problems with libertarian freedom that could be mentioned (e.g. libertarianism results in an infinite regress,<sup>63</sup> libertarianism's incompatibility with the inspiration of Scripture and prophecy<sup>64</sup>), there is one significant point Frame has left out, namely, the arbitrariness of choices in a libertarian model, sometimes made evident in the title "liberty of *indifference*." Ware explains the philosophical dilemma, originally observed by Jonathan Edwards himself,

The philosophical problem comes here: if at the moment that an agent chooses A, with all things being just what they are when the choice is made, he could have chosen B. or not-A, then it follows that any reason or set of reasons for why the agent chooses A would be the *identical reason or set of reasons* for why instead the agent might have chosen B, or not-A. That is, since at the moment of choice, all factors contributing to why a choice is made are present and true regardless of which choice is made (i.e., recall that the agent has the power of contrary choice), this means that the factors that lead to one choice being made must, by necessity, also be able to lead just as well to the opposite choice. But the effect of this is to say that there can be *no choice-specific reason or set of reasons* for why the agent chose A *instead* of B, or not-A. It rather is the case, according to libertarian freedom, that every reason or set of reasons must be *equally explanatory* for why the agent might choose A, *or* B, *or* not-A. As a result, our choosing reduces, strictly speaking, to arbitrariness. We can give no reason or set of reasons for why we make the choices we make that wouldn't be the identical reason or set of reasons we would invoke had we made the opposite choice! Hence, our choosing A over its opposite is arbitrary.<sup>65</sup>

What happens if Ware's (or Edwards's) critique is applied to the issue of man's will in salvation? If man has libertarian freedom and if man's choice for selecting A is the "identical reason or set of reasons" for choosing B, then in the moment of salvation, man's choice to choose A (assenting to God's grace) is the "identical reason or set of reasons" for choosing B (resisting God's grace). Consequently, man's choice in salvation is arbitrary if man possesses libertarian free will. Since there can be "no choice-specific

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<sup>63</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, ed. Paul Ramsey, vol. 1 of *Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 164, 191, 197, 270-73. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 121.

<sup>64</sup>Stephen J. Wellum, "The Importance of Nature of Divine Sovereignty for Our View of Scripture," *SBJT* 4, no. 2 (2000): 76-90.

<sup>65</sup>Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 86. For Edwards's statement of the same issue, see Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 207. Feinberg also makes the same point in John S. Feinberg, "God, Freedom, and Evil in Calvinist Thinking," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Historical and Theological Perspectives on Calvinism*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2:469.

reason or set of reasons” for choosing *A* instead of *B*, and since man’s reason(s) for choosing *A* must be “equally explanatory” for why he chose *B* instead, man’s choice of choosing God or rejecting God is an arbitrary choice. Man can ultimately give no reason as to why he chose God’s grace instead of rejecting God’s grace. Such a problem has two effects. One, if man chooses God his arbitrary choice of God is disrespectful and dishonoring for man cannot give any unique reason or set of reasons for why he chose God instead of choosing sin. Second, if man chooses sin instead of God man cannot be held responsible for his sinful action of rejecting God’s grace because his reason or set of reasons for choosing sin would be the same reason or set of reasons why he would have chosen God. As Ware explains, “There is no accounting, then, for human moral choice, and our actions become fully inexplicable.” In other words, there is no “choice-specific explanation” or sufficient reason for why man chooses to cooperate with God’s grace (synergism) rather than reject God’s grace. If there is not a *sufficient* reason then the choice is arbitrary and if the choice is arbitrary, particularly the choice to resist and reject God’s grace, then man cannot be held morally accountable for doing so.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, neither has there been a choice in any meaningful sense of the term.<sup>67</sup> It must, therefore, be concluded that the attempt by the Arminian to explain freedom in a libertarian manner is an utter failure.

However, Arminians remain unconvinced and pose a further objection, namely, the commands in Scripture for man to repent and believe demonstrate that man

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<sup>66</sup>Ware elaborates, “Philosophers might put it this way: while necessary conditions surely can be present in order for us to be able to choose what we do (e.g., the *necessary* conditions of our being alive, and being present where we are, and having these particular options set before us, may all be present), yet none of those conditions can either be individually or jointly *sufficient* for why we choose what we do. There simply cannot be any choice-specific explanation for why we choose one thing over another, and this renders libertarian freedom fully inadequate as an explanatory model for human freedom and human volition.” Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 86.

<sup>67</sup>Such is not the case with freedom of inclination which can give motives and reasons for *why* a person chooses *A* instead of *B* precisely because the will is necessarily inclined towards one instead of another and yet, because that inclination is what man most wants to do at that particular moment of choice, his will remains free and at the same time determined. For a logical and biblical defense of compatibilist freedom (or freedom of inclination), see Ware, *God’s Greater Glory*, 87ff. Also see Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 137-470.

must be able to do so. In other words, it would be wrong and unfair of God to require man to do something that he is unable to do. It is to such an objection that Edwards' distinction between natural and moral ability or inability is crucial.<sup>68</sup> Man possesses the natural ability to obey God's commands. It is not as if God is commanding man to do something he physically cannot do, such as fly or walk on water. Man can physically obey God's commands if he desires to. However, man is morally incapable of obeying God's commands. The sinner does not desire to obey God's commands (Gal 3:10; Rom 1:18-3:20). Therefore, while God commands men everywhere to obey him, no sinner is morally able to do so due to sin's corruption. However, even though men are slaves to sin, Jesus still commands sinners to keep the commandments (Mark 1:15), knowing full well that they will inevitably sin instead (John 8:34).<sup>69</sup> The commands are not physically impossible to keep, but due to the corruption of man's nature it is morally impossible for man to keep them (cf. Rom 8:6-8; 14:23; Heb 11:6). Schreiner explains,

That is, all people should come to Jesus in order to have life (John 5:40). Jesus upbraids those who do not believe despite all his works (Matt. 11:20-24), and he invites all to come to him (Matt. 11:28-30). Yet he also teaches that no one can come to him unless drawn by the Father (John 6:44), and only those to whom the Father and the Son reveal themselves will come to know him (Matt. 11:25-27). All people are summoned to believe in Jesus and are censured for not believing. Nonetheless, the Scriptures also teach that they have no moral ability to believe, and that the only way they will believe is if they are given by the Father to the Son. This revelation is not vouchsafed to all people but only to the elect. Jesus commands believers to be perfect (Matt. 5:48), but the need for forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15) demonstrates that perfection is impossible to attain.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, it is not unfair to man because man's spiritual refusal to keep God's commands is exactly what he most wants to do (i.e., freedom of inclination). Therefore, he is morally culpable. As Ware states,

So, while unbelievers do not have libertarian freedom (they cannot obey the

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<sup>68</sup>Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, 159.

<sup>69</sup>Schreiner, "Prevenient Grace?" 243.

<sup>70</sup>"The problem with Wesleyanism at this point is that it is guided by human logic and rationality rather than Scriptures. Their view that commands would not be given that people could not morally obey is certainly attractive. But our counterargument is that such a notion is not taught in the Scripture." *Ibid.*

command of God), they nonetheless do exactly what they, by nature, want to do upon hearing the gospel or being faced with the command of God. And since they act out of their natures in disbelief, doing exactly what they most want, they are free in this rejection of the gospel and they rightly are held accountable.<sup>71</sup>

Schreiner and Ware are exactly right and once again the Arminian view has no biblical or rational foundation on which to stand on.

### The Leaven of Synergism

With the establishment of both prevenient grace and libertarian freedom one of the most important pieces to the Arminian system is the nature of synergistic grace. If man possesses libertarian free will then he is able to reject God's grace no matter how hard God tries to persuade the sinner to do otherwise. Consequently, for the Arminian God can never work in an effectual, monergistic, or irresistible manner to save the sinner. As seen in chapter 5, there are two implications to such a view: (1) God only has one call by which he seeks to persuade and draw sinners and this call is universal and always resistible. (2) Since man is able to resist God's cooperating grace, regeneration is conditioned upon man's choice to believe. As MacDonald states, "God cannot and – to say the same thing – will not regenerate a heart that will not admit him."<sup>72</sup> Therefore, for

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<sup>71</sup>Ware, *God's Greater Glory*, 93.

<sup>72</sup>“God respects the sovereignty-within-limitations with which he endowed man at creation. . . . He will speak truly, ‘very truly,’ to the Pharisee Nicodemus, but he will wait for him indefinitely to make his decision about a ‘new birth.’ It must also be remembered that the dramatic conversion of the ‘chief of sinner’ on the road to Damascus was not the overpowering of a God-hater, but the enlightenment of a badly mistaken man who up to that time had thought he was serving God and was doing so ‘in all good conscience!’” And again, “But the Spirit, while using the Word of God to convict man of sin and to offer grace to remove it, deals with the soul as Subject to subject, not as irresistible Will to soulless object. It is an encounter, a meeting, a hearing of evidence against the man and his plea, an offer of divine pardon and life, but it is not yet a ‘new birth’ until man grasps the gift of grace in faith, permitting the Spirit to enter the core of his being.” And again, “One without God sleeps in the death of his sins, but when God's call awakens him, he can respond in faith, or he can resist the Spirit and go back to sleep in death.” William G. MacDonald, “The Spirit of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 85-87. Pinnock writes, “If God's sovereignty meant that his will is always done and performed down to the smallest detail, it would mean that his will is also accomplished in the lostness of the lost. But that is not the case. God holds out his hands to those who will not listen to him (Rom. 10:21). He gives his Holy Spirit to those who resist the gift (Acts 7:51). Jesus desired to gather the Jews to himself, but they refused him (Matt. 23:37). Scripture requires us to reject the notion that God's will is always done. There is nothing in Scripture that teaches that God wills that men remain impenitent and perish. People perish because they reject God's plan for them and refuse to do the Father's bidding and for no other reason.” Pinnock, “Responsible Freedom and the Flow of Biblical History,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 106. Also see Grant Osborne, “Exegetical Notes on Calvinist Texts,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 171, 184-85; A. Skevington Wood, “The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited*, 218.

the Arminian conversion causally precedes regeneration in the *ordo salutis*.<sup>73</sup>

### Resistible Grace

In chapter 5 we saw that there are several passages Arminians appeal to in order to say that man can resist God's saving efforts (Prov 1:23-25; Hos 11:1-9; Pss 78:10; 81:11-13; 95:7-8; Jer 17:23; 32:33; Isa 5:4; Matt 22:3; 23:37; Mark 6:5-6; Luke 7:29-30; John 6:63; Heb 3:7-12). The passage most commonly referenced is Acts 7:51 where Stephen rebukes the Jewish leaders because they "always resist (*ἀντιπίπτετε*) the Holy Spirit."<sup>74</sup> The Arminian Remonstrants comment, "But as respect the mode of the operation of this [prevenient] 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>75</sup> For the Arminian, besides those passages examined above as proof-texts for prevenient grace, the case for synergism rests on these passages.

However, the Arminian, in arguing that God's calling and grace are *always* able to be resisted fails to understand the complexity Scripture portrays when describing God's work of grace. As already proven in chapter 3, God works in a general way (*vocatio externa*) through a gospel call (*vocatio verbalis*; cf. Matt 11:28-30; 28:18-20; Acts 1:6-8; 26:16-23; Rom 10:8-15; 1 Cor 15:1-8), but God also works in a special way,

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<sup>73</sup>“It does violence to the clear tenor of Scripture to reverse the order in the interest of a theological system and demand that regeneration precede faith rather than follow. That order makes faith virtually meaningless. It also would mean that justification and sanctification are separable states from regeneration. But if they all be considered simultaneous, then “faith” seems at best redundant. Does God even believe for us?” MacDonald, “The Spirit of Grace,” 86.

<sup>74</sup>The entire verse reads: “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.” Stephen’s uses the OT language of “stiff-necked” (cf. Exod 33:3, 5; 34:9; Deut 9:6, 13, 27) and “uncircumcised heart” (cf. Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; Ps 95; Jer 4:4; 6:10; 9:26; Ezek 44:7, 9) to show these Jewish leaders that they are just like Israel of old who rebelled against Yahweh. Therefore, it is only by God circumcising man’s heart that man will obey (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 36:26-27). As Wallace and Bock note, in Acts 7:51 the iterative present is used, meaning that they opposed God continually (again and again). Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 520-521; Daniel L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (2007), 305. Also see G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1968), 42. On the OT language of an uncircumcised heart see Michael C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 103; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles*, ICC, vol. 1 (1994), 376; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (2009), 264-65; Graham A. Cole, *Engaging with the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 38-41.

<sup>75</sup>“The Five Arminian Articles, 1610,” in *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds*, ed. Philip Schaff 3:547.

effectually calling (*vocatio interna*) his elect to himself (John 6:44, 65; Rom 8:28-30; 1 Cor 1:9, 22-24; 2 Thess 2:14).<sup>76</sup> The Calvinist does *not* deny that there are passages in Scripture, such as Acts 7:51, where the Spirit is resisted (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19).<sup>77</sup> In fact, such a passage like Acts 7:51 actually supports the Calvinist position which argues that man's will is in bondage to sin. Certainly God is resisted all throughout Scripture by rebellious sinners. However, such resistance does not encapsulate the *totality* of how God works. Rather, while God may be resisted and is resisted, when *God so chooses* to work in a special, saving manner to call and regenerate a sinner, he does so irresistibly and effectually (cf. John 6:22-65; Acts 16:14; Rom 8:28-30; 1 Cor 1:18-31; 2 Cor 4:4-6; 2 Tim 2:25). As Ware explains, "When Calvinists refer to irresistible grace, they mean to say that the Holy Spirit is able, *when he so chooses*, to overcome all human resistance and so cause his gracious work to be utterly effective and ultimately irresistible."<sup>78</sup> The key words are "when he so chooses." A sinner can resist God his entire life, but when God so chooses to intervene in order to save this sinner, God will ineffably and successfully overcome this sinner's resistance.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, those who do resist God until the end, God never intended nor did he ever try to *effectually* call them to himself. If he did then he would have failed (as is the case in the Arminian view).

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<sup>76</sup>For the effectual call in Scripture see the following: John 6:37-39, 44, 65, Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:9-10; Rom 1:1, 6-7; 8:28-30; 9:11, 24; 11:29; 1 Cor 1:1-2, 9, 24, 26; 7:15, 17-18, 20-24; Gal 1:6, 15; Eph 1:18; 4:1, 4; Col 3:15; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:7; 5:24; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 1:9; Heb 3:1; 9:15; 1 Pet 1:15; 2:19, 21; 3:9, 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3, 10.

<sup>77</sup>For an extensive examination of Acts 7:51, see Cole, *Engaging with the Holy Spirit*, 35-49. Cole seems to conclude that the Reformed tradition is right in appealing to a gospel call (which is resistible) and a special, effectual call only for the elect (which is irresistible).

<sup>78</sup>Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," in *Still Sovereign*, 211. Also see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 86. Contra: Leslie D. Wilcox, "Effectual Calling," in *Beacon Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Richard S. Taylor (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1983), 181.

<sup>79</sup>As Dort (1618-1619) says in Rejection 8, they reject those who affirm the following: "That God in the regeneration of man does not use such powers of His omnipotence as potently and infallibly bend man's will to faith and conversion; but that all the works of grace having been accomplished, which God employs to convert man, man may yet so resist God and the Holy Spirit *when God intends man's regeneration and wills to regenerate him, and indeed that man often does so resist that he prevents entirely his regeneration, and that it therefore remains in man's power to be regenerated or not.* For this is nothing less than the denial of all the efficiency of God's grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of the Almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles, . . ." Emphasis added. "Canons of Dort," in *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 93.

Chapter 5 additionally showed that Arminians like Thomas Summers also appeal to passages where man cooperates with grace (Deut 30:15-20; Ps 25:8-9; Ezek 18:31; 36:25-26; Jer 31:18; John 6:44; 7:17; Acts 13:45-48; 17:11-12; Rom 8:26; Heb 8:10; 10:15-17; 11:6; 1 Peter 1:22-23; Rev 3:20). Since chapter 4 already addressed Deuteronomy 30:15-20, Jeremiah 31:18, and Ezekiel 18:31, showing that these passages do not affirm synergism but a gospel call to all people, they will not be readdressed here. Likewise, there is no need to discuss Ezekiel 36:25-26, John 6:44, Acts 16:14, Heb 8:10; or 10:15-17 as chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated that these are strong proof-texts for monergism (not synergism as Summers thinks). But what about other passages that Summers claims support synergism? A close look shows that none of these passages are what Summers makes them to be.

While in Acts 13:45-48 the Jews resist and revile Paul and Barnabas, thrusting aside God's word, Summers ignores verse 48 which says "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed." As we saw in chapter 4, this verse supports monergism, showing that it is God's choice which determines who will believe. Strangely Summers also appeals to Acts 17:11-12 where we read that the Bereans "received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." But Luke says nothing here about the Bereans cooperating with grace. In fact, the specifics of grace operating on the soul are not given. All that is told to us is that the Bereans received God's word with eagerness and many of them "believed" (17:12). Summers also tries to read synergism into Romans 8:26. However, commentators are in agreement that these texts are not referring to unbelievers or the initial moment of faith but rather are addressed to *believers* in regards to their perseverance in holiness throughout the Christian life.<sup>80</sup> Summers does the same with Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." However, as Gregory Beale states, "This is an invitation

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<sup>80</sup>Schreiner, *Romans*, 442-47; Moo, *Romans*, 522-26; Morris, *Romans*, 326-28.

not for the readers to be converted but to renew themselves in a relationship with Christ that has already begun, as is apparent from v 19.” Beale continues,

The allusion to Cant. 5:2 points to a focus on renewal of a relationship, since there the husband knocks on the door of the bedchamber to encourage his wife to continue to express her love to him and let him enter, but she at first hesitates to do so. By analogy, Christ, the husband, is doing the same thing with regard to *his bride, the church*.<sup>81</sup>

Even Arminian Grant Osborne admits such a point, “This verse has all too often been misunderstood as an evangelistic all (linked with Holman Hunt’s famous picture, ‘the Light of the World’) to the unsaved to become Christians. However, that does not fit the context. Rather, it is a call to a weak church to repent (as in 3:19).”<sup>82</sup> Therefore, Christ is calling his bride to renew her relationship with him in repentance (Rev 3:19). Synergism at conversion is nowhere in view.

Two other texts Summers appeals to are 1 Peter 1:22 and Hebrews 11:6. Peter says, “[v.22] Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, [v.23] since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Does purification in verse 22 refer to conversion or sanctification?

Perhaps no one makes the case for sanctification better than Wane Grudem who says,

Having purified (*hēgnikotes*, perfect participle) could refer to initial conversion as a completed event in the past with continuing effects, but since Peter elsewhere uses the perfect tense of events in the process of sanctification (4:1; 2 Pet. 1:12), we cannot be certain that this is in view. More persuasive are arguments in favour of the view that Peter has post-conversion growth in moral purity in mind: (1) obedience (*hypakoē*) occurs fifteen times in the New Testament, and never clearly means initial saving faith; (2) Peter uses obedience (*hypakoē*) in verses 2 and 14 of obedience in conduct; (3) purify (*hagnizō*) when employed figuratively elsewhere in the New Testament is used of moral cleansing subsequent to conversion (Jas. 4:8, 1 Jn. 3:3); (4) the context is the apostle’s call to holiness in 1:15, which suggests

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<sup>81</sup>Beale even shows how if it is referring to unbelievers it is simply a gospel call to confess Christ. “Of course, it is always possible that some in the readership professed to know Christ, but really never had; for them the call would be to make their profession genuine.” G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (1999), 308.

<sup>82</sup>Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (2002), 212. Likewise, see Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, NICNT (1977), 113. Also see Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:515; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1993), 2:222.

that the purifying obedience he has in view results from an active response to that call; (5) this ‘purification’ is something the readers have themselves done (‘having purified your souls’), but Christians are never in the New Testament said to be active agents in God’s initial cleansing of their souls at conversion. On the other hand, they are said to be active in the progressive work of sanctification (*cf.* 2 Cor. 7:1; Jas. 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:3).<sup>83</sup>

However, Schreiner gives compelling reasons as to why Grudem is in error,

Every one of these arguments fails to convince. The first two arguments are refuted by the evidence presented in v.2. Both in the New Testament and in Peter obedience is used to refer to conversion. The third argument is not decisive since the issue is not whether other writers use the language of purification in other contexts to refer to one’s ongoing life in holiness. In any case, two texts used elsewhere are insufficient to determine Peter’s usage here, and so they can be set aside. The Petrine context suggests that conversion is in view since Peter clearly referred to the conversion of believers in v.23, and in both this instance and in v.23 the call to love would be rooted in their conversion. Probably the most important argument is the last one. Actually believers are called upon to repent, believe, be baptized, and confess Christ to be saved (e.g., Acts 2:38; 3:19; 13:39; 16:31; Rom 10:9). It is not surprising, therefore, that the notion of obedience is used as well. Of course, the New Testament clarifies elsewhere that faith, obedience, and repentance are the gift of God (Eph 2:8; 2 Tim 2:25; *cf.* esp. the commentary on 1 Peter 1:2), *and so no idea of synergism is involved, nor was Peter suggesting that believers are the ultimate agent of their salvation.*<sup>84</sup>

Schreiner’s last point is particularly important. Just because Peter is referring to conversion, it is wrong to conclude that synergism is in view. Peter is referring in 1:22 to initial faith and repentance. As seen in chapter 4, faith and repentance involve man’s participation and yet they are a sovereign gift from God which he works effectually in his elect. Therefore, as Schreiner states, synergism is not involved.

Finally, Summers appeals to Hebrews 11:6, “And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” Summers assumes that being rewarded for one’s faith is a reference to synergism. There are several problems with such a reading. (1) Hebrews 11:6 may have the believer in mind, not the unbeliever, as is indicated in the reference to divine rewards yet to be received. The believer exercises faith in God, drawing near to

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<sup>83</sup>Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, TNTC (1988), 87-88. Contra Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (1990), 76.

<sup>84</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC, vol. 37 (2003), 93.

him, with the expectation that one day he will receive his reward. If this view is correct, then Hebrews is much like the Psalms where, as O'Brien notes, seeking the Lord is a common expression "to refer to those who rely firmly on God, trust that his promises will be fulfilled, and find in him the source of their deepest satisfaction."<sup>85</sup> The reward then would refer not to the unbeliever receiving regeneration but to the Christian who looks forward (like Moses did; 11:26) to his future, heavenly reward and the consummation of his salvation. As O'Brien states, "For believers who persevere, full life in God's presence has already been anticipated in our access to him here and now (4:16; 6:19-20; 10:22)."

(2) Even if Hebrews 11:6 does refer to the unbeliever, it is unwarranted to read synergism into this verse. The text would simply be explaining that if a sinner repents God will be faithful to his promise by rewarding the believer with eternal life. The text does not say the believer is to cooperate with grace nor does it say that belief is the condition of regeneration. All the text says is that if the sinner believes, God will reward him in the end, as was the case with Abel (11:4), Enoch (11:5), Noah (11:7), and Abraham (11:8).

Before moving on, it is essential to note that Arminians like Olson try to soften the man-centeredness of synergism by arguing that the success of synergism simply means "non-resistance" on man's part (chapter 5). All man does is "relax" while God applies grace. However, such language is not new, but is reincarnated from Philip Melancthon in his conflict with his teacher, Martin Luther. Melancthon argued that though a sinner does not contribute anything to his salvation, it is still necessary that he not resist God's grace.<sup>86</sup> Man must simply be "non-resistant" while grace acts. Therefore, God is the grand initiator and man's part is slight. Luther, however, saw such a slight role

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<sup>85</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (2010), 406. See Pss 14:2; 22:27; 34:4, 10; 33:5, 11; 69:32; 68:33. Also see Deut 4:29; Amos 9:12; Acts 15:17.

<sup>86</sup>Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes 1543*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992), Locus 3, 4, 5, 8, 14. Also see Thomas Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 99; Richard A. Muller, "Arminius and the Reformed Tradition," *WTJ* 70 (2008), 28; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:720-24.

as more dangerous than the large role the Pelagians gave to man.<sup>87</sup> As Boice explains,

What made it dangerous was its subtlety. After all, what was the harm in adding just a little bit of human effort to the work of God? But Luther recognized that this was tantamount to the error of Roman Catholicism, which insisted that the will of man is the decisive factor in salvation. He also recognized that the leaven of synergism eventually works its way through the entire loaf of soteriology.<sup>88</sup>

Arminians like Olson do not escape Melancthon's problem. Softening the blow of synergism by saying it is merely "non-resistance" or a relaxing on man's part merely makes the poison more discrete. Synergism is there nonetheless, and the Arminian still does not avoid the problem of contributing the final and ultimate say in salvation to man, rather than to God.<sup>89</sup> Calvin reveals the toxin in such a view when he says, "Any mixture of the power of free will that men strive to mingle with God's grace is nothing but a corruption of grace. It is just as if one were to dilute wine with muddy, bitter water."<sup>90</sup> Abraham Kuyper is just as acute, "Every effort to claim for the sinner the *minutest co-operation* in this first grace destroys the gospel, severs the artery of the Christian confession and is anti-scriptural in the highest degree."<sup>91</sup>

### **The Speculation of an Intermediate Stage**

Arminianism is insistent that free choice must precede regeneration. One would not know this given the way Wesley describes the new birth:

Before a child is born into the world he has eyes, but sees not; he has ears, but does not hear. He has a very imperfect use of any other sense. He has no knowledge of any of the things of the world, or any natural understanding. To that manner of existence which he then has, we do not even give the name of life. It is then only when a man is born, that we say he begins to live. For as soon as he is born, he begins to see the light, and the various objects with which he is encompassed. His

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<sup>87</sup>See James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 37; Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1979), 363-64.

<sup>88</sup>Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 37.

<sup>89</sup>"He will not have us boasting of even the smallest human contribution to salvation." Ibid., 88.

<sup>90</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics, ed. John T. McNeill, vol. 20, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1.25.15.

<sup>91</sup>Emphasis added. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (n.p., 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 2:338.

ears are then opened, and he hears the sounds which successively strike upon them. At the same time, all the other organs of sense begin to be exercised upon their proper objects. He likewise breathes, and lives in a manner wholly different from what he did before. How exactly doth the parallel hold in all these instances! While a man is in a mere natural state, before he is born of God, he has, in a spiritual sense, eyes and sees not; a thick impenetrable veil lies upon them; he has ears, but hears not; he is utterly deaf to what he is most of all concerned to hear. His other spiritual senses are all locked up: He is in the same condition as if he had them not. Hence he has no knowledge of God; no intercourse with him; he is not at all acquainted with him. He has no true knowledge of the things of God, either of spiritual or eternal things; therefore, though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian. But as soon as he is born of God, there is a total change in all these particulars. The “eyes of his understanding are opened;” (such is the language of the great Apostle;) and, He who of old “commanded light to shine out of darkness shining on his heart, he sees the light of the glory of God,” his glorious love, “in the face of Jesus Christ.”<sup>92</sup>

What is so remarkable about this quote is that Wesley sounds like a Calvinist. Here Wesley is clear that man goes from death to new life and before there is new life there is only death. So what place is there then for a willful cooperation which causes and brings about the new birth?<sup>93</sup> If the transition is direct - from no life to new life - where does an active, willful choice prior to regeneration fit in? It would seem that there is no place for the will prior to regeneration whatsoever based on Wesley’s words above. Indeed, “It is then only when a man is born, that we say he begins to live.” But Wesleyans do make room for the will prior to regeneration and this is where their inconsistency lies. They simultaneously want to affirm that prior to rebirth there is only death. However, they also want to affirm that the new birth is conditioned upon faith, man’s willful choice to believe. Does prevenient grace solve this contradiction? No, it cannot. While prevenient grace mitigates death and depravity, enabling man’s will to believe, man still is not born again until he accepts God’s grace and chooses to believe (see chapter 5). So even with prevenient grace there is still a point prior to regeneration where man’s will is active. The same question remains: Granting that prevenient grace lifts man out of his depravity, enabling him to choose, how can man still choose if he is not yet regenerate?

This contradiction and tension is what causes Arminians like Roger Olson to

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<sup>92</sup>Wesley, “The New Birth,” in *Works*, 6:69-70.

<sup>93</sup>Such a problem becomes even more evident when we look at how Wesley actually defines the new birth: “It is that great change which God works in the soul when he brings it into life; when he raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness. It is the change wrought in the whole soul by the almighty Spirit of God when it is ‘created anew in Christ Jesus.’” *Ibid.*, 6:71.

affirm an “intermediate state” where regeneration has already begun but its finality is conditioned upon man’s willful choice (see chapter 5). In other words, prevenient grace begins regeneration and will bring it to completion unless man resists. What this means is that the sinner can be partially regenerate but not completely regenerate because the sinner has not yet chosen to believe. As John Girardeau observes, the Arminian argues that “a degree of spiritual life is imparted to him to enable him to embrace salvation offered to him” and therefore “the sinner is neither wholly dead nor wholly alive: he is partly dead and partly alive.”<sup>94</sup> But where is this concept in Scripture? Where in John 3 do we see Jesus teaching Nicodemus about an “intermediate state” where regeneration has begun but, if man chooses to resist, regeneration can be aborted and revoked? There is no hint of this in John 3 or in the entire New Testament. Rather, what we see is exactly what Wesley writes of above, namely, an instantaneous and immediate transition from death to new life. There is no contingency or conditionality but pure resurrection from death to life by the Spirit who blows like the wind wherever he pleases. It is evident that Arminians like Olson are looking to extra-biblical concepts (intermediate state) to solve the irresolvable tension within the Arminian system. Clearly, prevenient grace does not solve this tension and since the intermediate state Olson affirms is nowhere found in Scripture (not even inferred), we must conclude once again that the doctrine of prevenient grace and the affirmation of synergism is deeply erroneous and unbiblical in nature. Abraham Kuyper understood the danger of adopting this “intermediate state” view in the Netherlands during the late nineteenth-century.

The fatal doctrine of three conditions – viz., that (1) of the spiritually *dead*, (2) of the spiritually *living*, and (3) of men hovering *between life and death* – must be abandoned. The spread of this doctrine in our churches will surely destroy their spiritual character, as it has done in the ancient Huguenot churches of France. Life and death are absolute opposites, and a third state between them is unthinkable.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>John L. Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1984), 321. Girardeau also gives a refutation of this “intermediate state.”

<sup>95</sup>Kuyper, *Holy Spirit*, 2:290.

### Prevenient Grace Irresistible?

The Arminian speculation of an “intermediate stage” raises yet another problem. As already seen, two pillars of Arminianism are prevenient grace and libertarian freedom. Prevenient grace is given to all regardless of whether or not one wants it. In a real sense it is irresistible. Prevenient grace has initiated the regeneration process but whether or not regeneration will be finalized depends on man’s libertarian freedom to cooperate with subsequent grace. So while prevenient grace is irresistible, subsequent grace is resistible due to libertarian freedom. However, Bavinck explains the serious problem the Arminian has put himself in,

If humans have to receive the power to accept or reject the gospel in advance by the prevenient grace conferred in baptism or calling, then here too a kind of *irresistible grace precedes believing, for preparatory grace is granted to all without their knowledge or consent*. Then regeneration actually does occur before the decision of the human will, for “functioning follows being” (*operari sequitur esse*). The act follows the ability to act. The will enabling persons to accept the gospel, according to the Gospel of John, is a renewed and regenerate will existing prior to the act of acceptance. In that case, however, *it is impossible to understand how, after all this, a “free” act of volition is still possible*. The will, after all, thanks to the good power conferred on it without its consent, has already been determined for good and is so determined precisely in the same measure as it received the power to make a good choice. The more one construes the will as being weakened by sin, the more power one accords to it in prevenient grace, the more, and to the same degree, its indifferent freedom ceases to exist. In addition, it is unfathomable why such an act of free will is still necessary. For if God has to renew human being beforehand and irresistibly to the extent that they can choose for the gospel, what purpose does the maintenance of the indifferent freedom of the will still serve other than again to frustrate God’s grace, to render his covenant of grace as shaky and unstable as the covenant of works was before the fall, and to picture Christ as being even more powerless and loveless than Adam? For he has accomplished and acquired everything, but when he wants to apply it, his power and his love bounce off the human will, a will, mind you, that has even been endowed with new energies! Merely to rescue a pseudofreedom attributed to humans, God is deprived of his sovereignty, the covenant of grace of its firmness, and Christ of his royal power.<sup>96</sup>

Bavinck’s insight is a significant one. What the Arminian denies the Calvinist (irresistible grace) he finds appropriate to use in his own system with prevenient grace. But how can the irresistible nature of prevenient grace fit with the Arminian’s insistence upon

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<sup>96</sup>Emphasis added. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4:84-85, 86. On the other hand, “The Reformed have the edge over the proponents of free will. The advantage is that God’s counsel will stand, that his covenant of grace will not waver, that Christ is the true and perfect Savior, that goodness will one day triumph infallibly over evil.”

libertarian freedom? As Bavinck pointed out, prevenient grace is thrown upon man without his consent. Therefore, not only do we see inconsistency with the Arminian denying to the Calvinist what he himself appropriates in prevenient grace, but also inconsistency in the fact that the very thing appropriated is against the very nature of libertarian freedom. Bluntly put, the Arminian is trying to have his cake and eat it too, and, as Bavinck observes, all at the expense of God being deprived of his sovereignty.

***Re Infecta: Synergism strips  
God of His Omnipotence***

Perhaps one of the most serious problems with synergism is how it minimizes the power of God to save. Loraine Boettner, quoting Augustus Toplady explains,

If, as Arminians say, God is earnestly trying to convert every person, He is making a great failure of His work; for among the adult population of the world up to the present a time, where He has succeeded in saving one He has let perhaps twenty-five fall into hell. Such a view sheds little glory on the Divine Majesty. Concerning the Arminian doctrine of resistible grace Toplady says that it is “a doctrine which represents Omnipotence itself as wishing and trying and striving to no purpose. According to this tenet, God, in endeavoring (for it seems that it is only an endeavor) to convert sinners, may, by sinners, be foiled, defeated, and disappointed; He may lay close and long siege to the soul, and that soul can, from the citadel of impregnable free will, hang out a flag of defiance to God Himself, and by a continued obstinacy of defense, and a few vigorous sallies of free will compel Him to raise the siege. In a word, the Holy Spirit, after having for years perhaps, danced attendance on the free will of man, may at length, like a discomfited general, or an unsuccessful politician, be either put to ignominious flight, or contemptuously dismissed, *re infecta*, without accomplishing the end for which He was sent.”<sup>97</sup>

Boettner and Toplady could not state the issue better. In synergism man’s will is the decider even over God himself. Therefore, God’s power is defeatable, his omnipotence made weak. As John Owen states, for the Arminian “God may fail in his purposes, come short of what he earnestly intendeth, or be frustrated of his aim and end.”<sup>98</sup> God does not decide for himself whom he will save, but man decides for him. Not so for the Calvinist who upholds the omnipotence of God by affirming that God alone saves in regeneration.

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<sup>97</sup>Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1932), 170.

<sup>98</sup>John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 10:49.

As Hodge explains, “Regeneration is not only an act of God, but also an act of his almighty power. . . . If an act of omnipotence, it is certainly efficacious, for nothing can resist almighty power.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Kuyper states, in Scripture the “omnipotence of divine grace is unlimited.”<sup>100</sup> And as à Brakel writes, “God cannot fail to achieve His objective.”<sup>101</sup> Scripture states that nothing is too hard for the Lord (Gen 18:14; Jer 32:17, 27). He does whatever his will pleases and no one can say to him, “What have you done?” or stay his hand; not even the will of man (Dan 4:35; cf. Rom 9:19). How contrary these scriptural statements are to Arminians who must say, “I will that all men should be saved; nevertheless, it must finally be, not as I will but as they will.”<sup>102</sup>

### **Salvation is *of us*, not of the Lord: Synergism Robs God of His Glory in Salvation**

It is necessary at this point to outline several unbiblical consequences of a synergistic view. First, synergism means God is dependent upon man’s free will for his success in salvation. As Muller states, “In the Arminian view, the will is the effective ground of salvation.”<sup>103</sup> Muller’s assertion is demonstrated when Arminians like Pinnock write, “God makes the initial move by saying yes to us. Then it is our turn to respond with a yes or a no.”<sup>104</sup> Or as Wood says, man “has in himself the casting voice.”<sup>105</sup> In

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<sup>99</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:31.

<sup>100</sup>Kuyper, *Holy Spirit*, 2:290. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:20-21; Peter Van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, ed. Brandon Withrow (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002), 43; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:506.

<sup>101</sup>à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 2:205 (cf. 2:206).

<sup>102</sup>As observed by Boettner. “He is then put into the same extremity with Darius who would gladly have saved Daniel, but could not (Dan. 6:14).” Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 171.

<sup>103</sup>Muller concludes, “This perspective is not only synergistic but also fully semi-Pelagian.” Richard Muller, “Synergismus,” in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 294.

<sup>104</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational,” in *Perspectives on Election*, 304. Boettner says, “If we assert that after God has done all His work it is still left for man to ‘accept’ or ‘not resist,’ we give man veto power over the work of Almighty God and salvation rests ultimately in the hand of man. In this system no matter how great a proportion of the work of salvation God may do, man is ultimately the deciding factor.” Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 175.

<sup>105</sup>Wood, “The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace,” 218. Also see Wesley, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” in *Works*, 6:281.

other words, it is our answer, not God's, which determines salvation. As Boettner observes, this means "man proudly seizes the helm and proclaims himself the master of his destiny" and allows man to boast over those who are lost. "He can point the finger of scorn and say, 'You had as good a chance as I had. I accepted and you rejected the offer.'"<sup>106</sup> Second, synergism means God can be defeated in his saving purposes. God tries to save, but ultimately he is dependent upon man's free will to believe. How sobering this is when one realizes that God is the majority of the time defeated and thwarted in his saving purpose. Third, if faith precedes regeneration, even if it be a faith enabled by prevenient grace, then regeneration is not so much a sovereign act of grace as it is a reward for man's cooperation. Sproul explains,

In a very real sense regeneration is not so much a gift in this [Arminian] schema as it is a reward for responding to the offer of grace. The Arminian argues that in this schema grace is primary, in that God first offers grace for regeneration. God takes the initiative. He makes the first move and takes the first step. But this step is not decisive. This step may be thwarted by the sinner. If the sinner refuses to cooperate with or assent to this proffered grace, then grace is to no avail.<sup>107</sup>

Fourth, and most importantly, synergism robs God of *all* of his glory in salvation, a natural consequent of points one, two, and three. Arminians like Olson argue that their view does give God all the glory because it is God not man who initiates salvation through prevenient grace.

Arminians point to a beggar who is on the verge of starvation and receives a gift of food or money that saves life. Can that person boast of accepting the life-saving gift? Hardly. So it is with salvation; even though the person being saved must freely accept and not reject grace, he or she has no ground for boasting because all of the ability came from God.<sup>108</sup>

Oden, following Wesley, makes a similar argument,

Some argue that if human free will is given any power at all, such power is taken away from God, and thus God would not have the whole glory of the work of salvation, but some would fall to the human will. Wesley answered, against all hints

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<sup>106</sup>Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 175. Also see Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:553.

<sup>107</sup>R.C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 187.

<sup>108</sup>Olson, "The Classical Free Will Model of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, 168. Likewise see H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1952), 2:356.

of semi-Pelagianism, that the power “to work together with him” by grace is wholly from God. The creation of the human who may “work together with God” is the ground for the greater glorification of God, for such power to work has come from God. God does not exclude human freedom from cooperating with his grace, but rather creates, redeems, and newly enables human freedom. One could not cooperate with God had not the power and possibility of cooperating come from God. So it is no offense to grace to say that grace enables human freedom to cooperate with grace. The right use of freedom, far from detracting from the glory of God, enhances God’s glory.<sup>109</sup>

However, what Olson and Oden fail to recognize is that even if synergism is enabled by God’s prevenient grace the fact still remains that man, not God, is the determinative factor as to whether or not grace will be effective. As long as man determines God’s success, there is grounding for man to boast. Stated otherwise, if Arminius and recent Arminians like Cottrell are right when they say it is man, not God, who has the *final* say and determination in salvation, then God cannot receive all of the glory when a sinner believes.<sup>110</sup> Rather, man’s will plays not a minor role but a *major* role in determining whether or not grace will be effective.<sup>111</sup> As Pinnock states, while God tries his hardest to “win our consent,” the final decision and “right of refusal, he has vested in us.”<sup>112</sup>

Therefore, while God may initiate salvation, man ultimately receives credit in his salvation because it is man’s will, not God’s, which makes the final choice. James M. Boice rightly concludes, “For Arminianism, human decision making holds a central place in salvation. This results in a theology that is not exclusively God-centered but is distorted in the direction of self.”<sup>113</sup> Such a view robs God of his glory in salvation, providing a ground for man boast. Sam Storms’ words are sharp but accurate,

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<sup>109</sup>Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity*, 269.

<sup>110</sup>James Arminius, “Certain Articles to Be Diligently Examined and Weighed,” in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 2:497.

<sup>111</sup>E. Earle Ellis goes so far as to state, “By making ‘salvation faith’ a divine-human synergism, it logically appears to end up with salvation by works. It apparently supposes that God makes salvation (or healing) ‘available’ to any one who can exercise enough faith to receive it. But according to Scripture God does not make salvation available, he saves! He does not make healing available, he heals!” E. Earle Ellis, *The Sovereignty of God in Salvation* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 8.

<sup>112</sup>Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 163. To see how such a view destroys our prayers in asking God to save the unconverted, see Samuel C. Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 206-11.

<sup>113</sup>Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 28.

Those who embrace the gospel would be deserving of some credit for finding within themselves what others do not find within themselves. Arminians object. They are quick to point out that if anyone does believe in the gospel it is only because of prevenient grace, something that they didn't deserve. Yes, but whereas it is *only* because of prevenient grace that they believe it is *ultimately* because of what they, as over against others, choose to do with the power God has thereby restored to them. Prevenient grace only makes saving faith possible. The individual himself makes saving faith actual. So we must still ask, "Who *ultimately* accounts for why one comes to faith and another does not?" In the Arminian system, the answer is the person himself, not God.<sup>114</sup>

Likewise, G. C. Berkouwer exposes the man-centeredness of synergism,

In no form of synergism is it possible to escape the conclusion that man owes his salvation not solely to God but also to himself. Still more accurately, he may thank himself - by virtue of his decision to believe - that salvation actually and effectively becomes his in time and eternity. To be sure, synergism is constantly seeking to avoid this conclusion, and it is seldom expressed in so many words that salvation really depends partly on man. Nevertheless, this conclusion cannot in the long run be avoided and it is clear that we actually are confronted here with the real problem of synergism as it results in a certain amount of human self-conceit.<sup>115</sup>

Berkouwer's point is that synergism inevitably makes salvation depend partly upon man and the part that does depend upon man is the *most important* part, namely, the *final* part where man's will has the last stop on route to salvation or damnation. Ware, showing the connection between conditional election and synergism, makes such a point readily apparent when he says,

For if God's election of those whom he will save is conditional - conditioned upon "foreseen faith" as is often asserted and believed in the classic Arminian tradition - then there is one ultimate action relating to our salvation that we do and God specifically does not do and cannot effect. For these Arminians, while it is true that God must provide grace (prevenient grace) for any to be enabled to believe in Christ, as both Arminius and Wesley believed, yet it remains entirely up to the individual whether he will believe. By necessity, in light of the supposed libertarian freedom of the individual, God cannot ensure that any person will believe. God does all that he can do, but the choice, in the end, *is up to us*. Therefore, conditional election asserts human choice and action as that which is ultimately decisive in personal salvation. Put differently, at its most crucial moment (the moment of belief or disbelief), salvation is *of us*, not of the Lord.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Storms, *Chosen for Life*, 31.

<sup>115</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 42.

<sup>116</sup>Emphasis added. Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election*, 5.

Ware's last sentence (salvation is *of us*, not of the Lord) is the dividing line and the breaking point in the debate. As Ware explains, "at its most crucial moment (the moment of belief or disbelief)," it is man, not God, who is the person to credit in salvation. Therefore, while the Arminian may claim that in his system it is God and not man who saves, the Arminian still admits that whether or not man is saved is determined not by God but by man's free will and this, for the Calvinists, inevitably robs God of his glory and gives man something to boast about. The Arminian view could not be in more direct conflict with Paul when he says, "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Rom 9:16).<sup>117</sup> Indeed, for the Arminian, it does depend on human will and exertion!

### Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has shown that the Arminian and Wesleyan doctrines of prevenient grace and libertarian freedom are not only logically inconsistent but most importantly contrary to what Scripture says. Therefore, the chasm between Calvinism and Arminianism remains. No one describes the divide between Calvinism and Arminians with such clarity as Cottrell does when he says,

Thus, for Calvinists, the universal presence of total depravity means that the only gospel call which anyone can answer must be selective and irresistible. For Arminians the universal absence of total depravity (whether by nature or by grace) means that the only gospel call God issues is universal and resistible. For Calvinists total depravity dictates that the final decision of who is saved and who is not must be made by God. For Arminians the final decision belongs to each individual.<sup>118</sup>

It is Cottrell's last sentence that is most troubling to the Calvinist because it is man not God who has the "final decision." A. Skevington Wood, quoting John Wesley, makes it absolutely clear that man is the authority in his own salvation and God's success is totally dependent upon man's will when he says,

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<sup>117</sup>Not so for the Calvinists who has no problem asserting Romans 9:16. As Boice states, Calvinism is focused around a passion for the glory of God. "Each doctrine draws attention away from what human beings can accomplish, in order to declare, 'Salvation is of the Lord' (Jonah 2:9, KJV)." Boice and Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 33.

<sup>118</sup>Cottrell, "The Classical Arminian View of Election," 121.

I am persuaded that there are no men living that have not many times ‘resisted the Holy Ghost,’ and made void ‘the counsel of God against themselves.’ Yes, I am persuaded, every child of God has, at some time, ‘life and death set before him,’ eternal life and eternal death; and has in himself the casting voice.”<sup>119</sup>

What a horrific attack upon the majesty of God and, as John Owen states, an exaltation of the idol of free will.<sup>120</sup> Or as Dort says, “This is nothing less than the denial of all the efficiency of God’s grace in our conversion, and the subjecting of the working of the Almighty God to the will of man, which is contrary to the apostles.”<sup>121</sup> Likewise, Turretin observes,

If grace always works resistibly in us so that it depends upon the free will of man to either use this or resist that, it will follow that in conversion more is to be ascribed to the will of man than to God and that he who uses grace rightly makes himself to differ from others (contrary to Paul, 1 Cor. 4:7) and has some cause for glorying. For if after all the operations of grace, the will of man is left in equilibrium, it necessarily follows that not God through grace, but man through free will is the principal cause of faith and conversion; he contributes what is the greater, God contributing the lesser. Again, if the will is left doubtful in order that it may determine itself, who does not see that man is properly the cause of his own distinction, since grace which is held to be common and resistible could not accomplish this? And since suasion acts only objectively, it cannot be considered the efficient cause, but man must be.<sup>122</sup>

Therefore, John R. de Witt is correct when he states, “Arminianism essentially represents an attack upon the majesty of God, and puts in place of it the exaltation of man.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Wood, “The Contribution of John Wesley to the Theology of Grace,” 218. Wood is quoting John Wesley, “The General Spread of the Gospel,” in *Works*, 6:281.

<sup>120</sup>Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:14.

<sup>121</sup>“Canons of Dort,” in *Reformed Confessions Harmonized*, 93.

<sup>122</sup>Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:553. John Owen says almost exactly the same thing in *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:334. Also see Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, 10:36-37, 114-37. Likewise Girardeau says, “The Arminian doctrine involves the following unscriptural positions in regard to the *application* of redemption: God’s purpose was not savingly to apply redemption, but to permit men to avail themselves of redemption provided; the sinner’s will and not God’s is the determining factor in the great concern of personal salvation; the principle upon which salvation is applied is not that of grace, but of human willing; man is, in this respect, made sovereign and God dependent; the glory of salvation, *as a whole*, is divided between God and man; and, finally, the logical result must be a semi-Pelagian subversion of the Gospel scheme.” Girardeau, *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 141.

<sup>123</sup>John R. de Witt, “The Arminian Conflict,” in *Puritan Papers: Volume 5, 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 23. Likewise see J. I. Packer, “Arminianisms,” in *Puritan Papers*, 5:39. Therefore, Michael Horton warns, “I am afraid that we come perilously close to blasphemy in our exaltation of the human will, setting it over and above (or at least on a par with) the will of God.” Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 126.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE *TERTIUM QUID*: THE FAILURE OF RECENT ATTEMPTS AT A *VIA MEDIA*

#### Introduction

This project has shown that the Reformed tradition has argued that effectual calling and regeneration causally precede conversion.<sup>1</sup> Though there is minor disagreement among the Reformed on the precise relationship between effectual calling and regeneration (see appendix 3), Reformed theologians agree that conversion cannot precede regeneration lest synergistic Arminianism be adopted. However, in the latter half of the twentieth-century a new proposal, a *tertium quid*, made popular by Millard Erickson, Gordon Lewis, and Bruce Demarest, has surfaced which argues that while effectual calling precedes conversion (i.e., Calvinism), regeneration does not (i.e., Arminianism). Therefore, the proposed *ordo salutis* is as follows: effectual calling, conversion, and *then* regeneration. Demarest is even so bold as to include his view within the “*Reformed Evangelical*” position, despite the fact that he freely confesses that his view borrows from Arminianism.<sup>2</sup> Such a claim deserves a fair evaluation. Therefore, the following will analyze the modified view of Erickson, Lewis, and Demarest in order to argue that such a view not only stands outside of Reformed soteriology, but contradicts Scripture, which always identifies regeneration as logically and causally prior to conversion.

Finally, this chapter will conclude by briefly looking at yet a second novel

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<sup>1</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, “Ordo Salutis,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 480-81.

<sup>2</sup>Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway, 1997), 289-91.

proposal, namely, that of Kenneth Keathley. The novelty in Keathley's proposal is that while he completely rejects not only the Calvinist view but also the modified view of Erickson, Lewis, and Demerest, arguing instead for a view consistently in line with Arminianism, nevertheless, Keathley is adamant that he can affirm "monergism." It will be argued that Keathley's view is not new but simply Arminianism *incognito* and therefore his claim to "monergism" is ill-founded and should be dismissed.

### **The Variants of Reformed Theology**

As already seen, historically Calvinism has emphasized the scriptural teaching of monergistic grace. God alone works efficaciously in the heart of the dead and depraved sinner creating new life. Such a work is not conditioned upon man's faith but precedes and causes faith (see chapters 3 and 4). More specifically, those in the Reformed tradition have identified two aspects of this monergistic work of God to call and awaken the sinner to new life: effectual calling and regeneration. However, Calvinists have differed on the relationship between the two.<sup>3</sup> For example, John Murray and more recently John Frame distinguish between effectual calling and regeneration, placing the effectual call prior to regeneration in the *ordo salutis*.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, Louis Berkhof differs, identifying regeneration as that which precedes effectual calling.<sup>5</sup> Others such as Anthony Hoekema and more recently Kevin Vanhoozer and Michael Horton have argued that such bifurcations are erroneous and there needs to be a return to the Westminster Confession which includes regeneration in effectual calling.<sup>6</sup> Hoekema also argues that

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<sup>3</sup>For an overview, see A. T. B. McGowan, "Justification and the *Ordo Salutis*," in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 147-63.

<sup>4</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 86-94; John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2006), 184-87.

<sup>5</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 468-76.

<sup>6</sup>Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106-10; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Effectual Call or Causal Effect? Summons, Sovereignty and Supervenient Grace," *Tyndale Bulletin* 49.2 (1998): 213-51; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 216-41; "The Westminster Confession," in *The Creeds of Christendom*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3 of *The Evangelical Protestant Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 624-25. William G. T. Shedd seems to agree with this interpretation of the WCF in *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R, 2003), 761. Horton's argument is similar to Ferguson's when the latter

this was the view of the Synod of Dort as well.<sup>7</sup> Instead of separating regeneration from effectual calling the two must be viewed as identical and synonymous. Effectual calling and regeneration are simply two ways of describing the same reality. Despite these minor differences all Calvinists have agreed that regardless of the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration, Scripture teaches that conversion is always subsequent to, caused by, and conditioned upon effectual calling and/or regeneration. God does not respond to the sinner's cooperation (i.e., synergism) but the sinner responds to God who works alone to regenerate the unbelieving heart (i.e., monergism). Nevertheless, the traditional Reformed *ordo salutis* has been challenged today by some contemporary theologians.

### A New View

#### Millard Erickson

In 1983 Millard Erickson wrote in his *Systematic Theology*,

Salvation consists of three steps: effectual calling, conversion, and regeneration. Through the Holy Spirit, God calls the unbeliever to salvation. The human response to that call involves turning from sin to faith in Christ. Faith also includes belief. God responds by regenerating the person to new life in Christ. We can only stand in awe of God's work of saving us and regenerating us as spiritual beings.<sup>8</sup>

Erickson's order of salvation does not consistently follow Calvinism or Arminianism but instead borrows from both. First, Erickson borrows from Calvinism. Man is depraved, lost in sin, spiritually blind and unable to believe. While God's gospel call goes out to all people, due to total depravity no one has the ability to believe. Therefore, God must intervene with a special call but, unlike the gospel call, the special call is efficacious and only for his elect. "Special calling means that God works in a particularly effective way

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laments the divide between effectual calling and regeneration. Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 117.

<sup>7</sup>"The Canons of the Synod of Dort," in *The Creeds of Christendom* 587-92. Also see McGowan, "Justification and the *Ordo Salutis*," 151.

<sup>8</sup>Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 941.

with the elect, enabling them to respond in repentance and faith, and rendering it certain that they will.”<sup>9</sup> What exactly occurs in special calling? According to Erickson, special calling is the Spirit’s work of “illumination, enabling the recipient to understand the true meaning of the gospel.”<sup>10</sup> This special call also includes the Spirit’s work of conviction (John 16:8-10), which is necessary due to human depravity. So far Erickson sounds like a Calvinist in placing the effectual call prior to conversion. However, Erickson then borrows from Arminianism by placing regeneration subsequent to conversion. Erickson raises a question that is at the heart of the matter, namely, “Is one converted because of God’s work of regeneration within or does God regenerate *in response to and because of the person’s repentance and belief*?”<sup>11</sup> Erickson admits that from a logical point of view the traditional Calvinist position (the sinner’s response is caused by regeneration) makes the most sense. Since the sinner is radically depraved and his will is a slave to sin, God must first grant the sinner a new heart, enabling him to respond in repentance and belief.

If we sinful humans are unable to believe and respond to God’s gospel without some special working of his within us, how can anyone, even the elect, believe unless first rendered capable of belief through regeneration? To say that conversion is prior to regeneration would seem to be a denial of total depravity.<sup>12</sup>

Erickson, however, is not content with this logical consistency. He objects that the biblical evidence is to the contrary since it is the sinner’s will to exercise faith and repentance that arouses in God the act of regeneration.

Nonetheless, the biblical evidence favors the position that conversion is prior to regeneration. Various appeals to respond to the gospel imply that conversion results in regeneration. Among them is Paul’s reply to the Philippian jailor (we are here assuming that regeneration is part of the process of being saved): “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household” (Acts 16:31). Peter makes a similar statement in his Pentecost sermon: “Repent and be baptized, every

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 942-43.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>“We are not talking here about temporal succession. Conversion and new birth occur simultaneously. Rather, the question is whether one is converted because of God’s work of regeneration within, or whether God regenerates the individual because of his or her repentance and belief.” Ibid., 944.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 944-45.

one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). This appears to be the pattern throughout the New Testament.<sup>13</sup>

According to Erickson, the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2:38 refers to the act of regeneration. Therefore, the sinner’s repentance is what brings about regeneration. Likewise, Erickson believes the phrase “you will be saved” in Acts 16:31 refers to regeneration. It then follows that it is the sinner’s belief that brings about regeneration.

However, Erickson realizes there is a major problem with his position. How can conversion precede regeneration if the sinner is totally depraved and spiritually unable to act in faith and repentance? Isn’t this inconsistent with total inability? Erickson believes he has a resolution to the problem,

There is a way out. That is to distinguish between God’s special and effectual calling on the one hand, and regeneration on the other. Although no one is capable of responding to the general call of the gospel, in the case of the elect God works intensively through a special calling so that they do respond in repentance and faith. As a result of this conversion, God regenerates them. The special calling is simply an intensive and effectual working by the Holy Spirit. *It is not the complete transformation that constitutes regeneration*, but it does render the conversion of the individual both possible and certain. Thus the logical order of the initial aspects of salvation is special calling-conversion-regeneration.<sup>14</sup>

Erickson believes he has fixed the dilemma by modifying the special or effectual call. Notice how Erickson says that the effectual call is only partial. It cannot be the complete transformation of the sinner. If it were then Erickson would have to identify effectual calling with regeneration. However, by making the effectual call only partial, Erickson then has the freedom to separate the effectual call from regeneration and even to place conversion between the two. Erickson’s understanding of the effectual call as partial becomes evident when he says that the effectual call is similar to the Arminian doctrine of prevenient grace. Like prevenient grace, the effectual call initiates grace but does not complete the total transformation of the sinner. The effectual call, however, differs from

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. Emphasis added.

prevenient grace in that it is limited to the elect and guarantees a positive response from the sinner. Erickson explains,

Special or effectual calling, then, involves an extraordinary presentation of the message of salvation. It is sufficiently powerful to counteract the effects of sin and enable the person to believe. It is also so appealing that the person will believe. Special calling is in many ways similar to the prevenient grace of which Arminians speak. It differs from that concept, however, in two respects. It is bestowed only upon the elect, not upon all humans, and it leads infallibly or efficaciously to a positive response by the recipient.<sup>15</sup>

Two recent and adamant proponents of Erickson's view are Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, to which we now turn.

### **Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest**

Lewis and Demarest (L&D) acknowledge the traditional Calvinists position, but instead follow Erickson in a "modified Calvinistic hypothesis."<sup>16</sup> L&D appeal to John 3:15 where Jesus says he must "be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." L&D take the receiving of eternal life as regeneration. Therefore, it is not until one believes in Jesus that he has eternal life (regeneration).

"Eternal life" in context can be shown to refer to the new birth more specifically than can the more general term "saved" in Acts 16:31. The teaching that regeneration must precede faith seems to contradict the teaching that we must believe in Christ to receive eternal life, justification, and adoption as children of God.<sup>17</sup>

L&D do admit that their view does agree with and borrow from Arminianism.

This moderately Reformed scheme agrees with Arminianism in holding that human conversion precedes divine regeneration (Miley, Wiley) and disagrees with high Calvinism in its claim that the Spirit's regeneration take logical precedence over conscious, human conversion (Strong, Berkhof, Murray).<sup>18</sup>

L&D are right when they say that they are borrowing from Arminianism. As was seen in

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 944.

<sup>16</sup>Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 3:57.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. Why L&D call this "high" Calvinism when they are describing the historical Calvinist position is unclear. Are they implying that such a view is "hyper" Calvinism? If so they are inaccurate.

chapter 5, Arminians like John Miley and H. Orton Wiley argue that conversion precedes regeneration. Today contemporary Arminians do the same by appealing to many of the same passages L&D do. Take for example two contemporary Arminians, Steve Lemke and Kenneth Keathley. Similar to Erickson and L&D, Lemke and Keathley appeal to three types of passages.<sup>19</sup> (1) There are a number of passages which state that if a sinner believes he will receive “eternal life.” For example Jesus says to Nicodemus that “everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And again in John 3:36 Jesus states, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” and also in verse 40, “you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.” Other passages say the same (John 6:51, 53-54, 57; 11:25; 20:31). Lemke and Keathley conclude from these that to receive “life” or “eternal life” is to be regenerated and since one must believe to receive eternal life (or regeneration), faith always precedes regeneration. Therefore, in each of these passages “faith and salvation clearly precede the new life in Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

(2) Lemke and Keathley also enlist a number of passages that make receiving the Holy Spirit contingent upon man’s initial faith. For example, in Acts 2:38 Peter states, “Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” And the apostle Paul states that “having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). Other passages also condition the reception of the Spirit on belief (John 7:38-39; Gal 3:13; 4:6). Like eternal life, Arminians equate the reception of the Spirit with regeneration so that belief must precede regeneration whereby one receives the Spirit.<sup>21</sup>

(3) Finally, Lemke and Keathley enlist a host of passages which say that if one

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<sup>19</sup>Steve W. Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 134-40; Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 119-23. Hunt also appeals to these passages. Dave Hunt and James White, *Debating Calvinism* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 283.

<sup>20</sup>Lemke, “Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 137; Keathley, *Salvation*, 119-23.

<sup>21</sup>Lemke, “Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 137-38; Keathley, *Salvation*, 119-23.

believes he will be “saved” (Mark 16:15-16; John 1:12; John 20:31; Acts 13:39; 16:31; 18:8; Rom 1:16; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 1:21; Heb 11:6). For example, Acts 16:31 states, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Romans 10:9 also states that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Saved is equivalent with regeneration and therefore one is only saved or regenerated if he exercises belief.<sup>22</sup>

Arminians like Lemke and Keathley conclude from these three different types of passages that faith always precedes regeneration in the *ordo salutis*. Hence, Thomas Oden believes he is justified in arguing that “God does not desire to bring us into this new birth without our cooperation.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, “God does not will to save us without our will. God wills to save us with our will cooperating.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite this fundamental agreement between L&D and Arminianism, L&D would not classify themselves as Arminians since their view (1) affirms a call that is effectual and (2) places this effectual call prior to conversion. As L&D state, “In contrast to Arminianism, however, the only sinners who convert to Christ are effectually called by the Spirit.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, L&D do not want to go as far as some Calvinists do in equating effectual calling with regeneration. Rather, effectual calling and regeneration are as distinct and separate as conception is to birth.

The Spirit’s effectual call provides fertile ground for the initial sowing of the seed of God’s revealed truth. Those who conceive-as indicated by belief in the Gospel, repentance, and faith in Christ-are then reborn or regenerated. The internal call of the Spirit renews the sinner’s abilities (mind, emotions, and will) and secures a positive response to the Gospel. The Spirit then brings about the new birth,

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<sup>22</sup>Lemke, “Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 138-39; Keathley, *Salvation*, 119-23.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley’s Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of his Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 249.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. Oden explains what this means for the *ordo salutis*, “We are not first justified and then reborn, but by being justified are reborn. . . . Chronologically you cannot say that justification precedes new birth. But in order of thinking, i.e., logically, there is a distinction between justification and new birth in that God’s justifying activity of imputing righteousness is the logical precondition or presupposition of the Holy Spirit’s impartation of the gift of new life to us.” Ibid., 297.

<sup>25</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:57.

permanently changing atrophied abilities and giving eternal life.<sup>26</sup>

Effectual calling and regeneration are different in that in the effectual call the Spirit renews the mind, emotions, and will whereas in regeneration the Spirit permanently changes “atrophied abilities” and grants eternal life.

If conversion precedes regeneration can L&D say that their view is consistently monergistic? L&D believe they can, “While conversion is primarily a human act; regeneration is exclusively an act of God the Holy Spirit.”<sup>27</sup> However, L&D recognize the difficulty when they ask, “Are we regenerated in order that we may convert? Or do we convert in order to be regenerated?”<sup>28</sup> While the traditional Calvinist argues the former, L&D argue the latter. L&D appeal to John’s gospel (1:12-13; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24) where “sinners convert in order to become children of God and receive eternal life.”<sup>29</sup> It is by believing that the sinner has life (John 20:31). “So in our moderately Reformed *ordo salutis*, sinners who convert are regenerated. Spiritual conception (calling and conversion) precedes the spiritual birth of a child of God (1 Cor. 3:6).”<sup>30</sup>

### Yet Another “New” View

#### Kenneth Keathley’s Anti-Calvinism

As seen above, Erickson and L&D, in appealing to certain passages which they believe prove regeneration comes subsequent to faith, freely admit that their view adopts Arminianism. Erickson and L&D specifically mention Arminians of a previous generation, John Miley and H. Orton Wiley. However, as shown already, this same Arminianism is again propagated today by Steve Lemke and Kenneth Keathley who also argue from those same passages that faith precedes regeneration. However, what sets

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 3:104.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

Keathley apart is his novel attempt to simultaneously affirm an Arminian view and yet claim that his view can affirm “monergism.” There are two issues here that make Keathley’s view full of complexities. First, while Keathley’s view (which he calls “Overcoming Grace”)<sup>31</sup> is perfectly consistent with Arminianism, Keathley demands that he is an anti-Calvinist, rejecting the label of Arminianism. Keathley’s anti-Calvinism is obvious when he says concerning irresistible grace that it is a doctrine “shockingly weak” and therefore the “I” in T.U.L.I.P. “must go.”<sup>32</sup> Keathley says the same when it comes to the Calvinist distinction between a gospel and effectual call.<sup>33</sup> Effectual calling, says Keathley, is nowhere found in Scripture. But is it true that Keathley is not an Arminian when it comes to synergism? Certainly it was shown above that Keathley is in agreement with Arminians that Scripture always teaches that faith precedes regeneration. Moreover, consider the following summary of points where Keathley lines up with Arminian synergism perfectly, even quoting Arminian authors.

*Grace is always resistible:* “God’s drawing grace should and would be efficacious for all. The only thing that could stop it is if, inexplicably, a person decides to refuse. As Robert Picirilli puts it, overcoming grace ‘is so closely related to regeneration that it inevitably leads one to regeneration unless finally resisted.’ . . . It is one thing to say that without the Holy Spirit’s enabling we cannot believe, but it is another to say the Holy Spirit necessitates we believe. Simply put, the doctrine of irresistible grace renders incomprehensible major portions of the Bible. Scripture gives too many examples of persons successfully resisting God’s grace.”<sup>34</sup>

*Conversion precedes regeneration:* “Salvation is by faith. Therefore, regeneration cannot precede conversion, for regeneration is the beginning of eternal life (i.e., salvation), and faith, along with repentance, is a component of conversion. When Calvinists such as Sproul Sr. argue that regeneration leads to conversion, they reverse what the Scriptures actually say.”<sup>35</sup>

*Grace is synergistic:* “By contrast [to Calvinism], the overcoming grace model understands God’s grace to operate in terms of persuasion.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>He also calls his view the “Ambulatory model.” See Keathley, *Salvation*, 104, 126.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 116-19.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 106, 124.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 107.

*Man is the ultimate determiner, not God:* “The overcoming grace model holds that the difference between those who believe and those who do not is found in *the unbelievers*.”<sup>37</sup>

It is no wonder that Arminian Roger Olson declares his frustration with those (Keathley included) who contributed to the anti-Calvinist book *Whosoever Will*.

In fact, as I will discuss more later, *all* of the authors are Arminians in the classical sense. I don't know why Vines and they run from the label. Perhaps because it has been so hijacked and misrepresented by Calvinists? But they don't seem to be afraid of Calvinists. So, why so much distance from Arminianism? I can only assume it is because Vines, and perhaps some of the other authors, have bought into the pejorative polemics against Arminianism by its Calvinist enemies.<sup>38</sup>

When Olson says “all” of the authors are classic Arminians, Keathley is not left out. The point to be made here is obvious: even Arminian Roger Olson knows an Arminian when he sees one and no exception is made in Keathley's case. This first point does not present much novelty as Keathley is characteristic of many who, while rejecting Calvinism, will not adopt the Arminian label, despite evidence to the contrary.

The second issue which presents itself is that while Keathley's view is synergistic Arminianism in every way, nevertheless, he insists that he can affirm “monergism,” which according to Keathley means “God is the only worker and accomplisher of our redemption.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast to the first issue, here we do see novelty: an Arminian wanting to claim the term “monergism.” Keathley is blunt, “*God's grace is both monergistic and resistible*.”<sup>40</sup> Consider how Keathley says he can affirm both,

*[T]he overcoming grace model is consistent with the gracious nature of salvation. Here I nod to my Calvinist brethren: salvation is indeed a monergistic work of God. . . . So before anyone can be converted (i.e., repent and believe), God must graciously invade the darkness of a person's heart. God takes the initiative. Salvation is entirely*

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>38</sup>Roger Olson, review of *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. by David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, <http://www.baptisttheology.org/WhosoeverWill.cfm>; accessed 1 November 2010; internet.

<sup>39</sup>Keathley, *Salvation*, 11. Also see 103.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 11. Also see 104, 125. Keathley is following Richard Cross, “Anti-Pelagianism and the Resistibility of Grace,” *Faith and Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2005): 199-210; Eleonore Stump, “Augustine on Free Will,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 124-47; Kevin Timpe, “Controlling What We Do Not Cause,” *Faith and Philosophy* 24, no. 3 (2007): 284-99.

a work of God.<sup>41</sup>

But then Keathley says,

*[T]he overcoming grace model is consistent with the conditionality of salvation. Here I nod to my Arminian brethren: unbelief is the rejection of a Savior who was genuinely available. The convicting work of the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the gospel and enables a response that a lost person does not intrinsically have the ability to give. This includes the ability to accept the gospel. At this point it is not a question of free will. In fact, the Bible uses a grander term than free will: it declares that the water of life is available to “whosoever will.”<sup>42</sup>*

In conclusion, Keathley believes that he can simultaneously affirm synergism and monergism.

Now that the modified view of Erickson and L&D as well as the crypto-Arminian view of Keathley has been represented, we turn to examine these views.

### **Biblical and Theological Problems with a *Tertium Quid***

#### **1. In Scripture Effectual Calling is Not Partial Like Preventive Grace**

First, we begin by looking at Erickson and L&D. Erickson claims that effectual calling is only partial (much like preventive grace for Arminians) and it is not until after the sinner is converted that regeneration completes what the effectual call begun. Demarest agrees with Erickson, “Special calling stops short of effecting the complete transformation of life commonly represented by the term regeneration.”<sup>43</sup> But if effectual calling is only partial, awaiting the conversion of the sinner and subsequently his regeneration, so also is regeneration incomplete and strictly speaking partial. Such a concept is foreign to the Scriptures. The sinner is called into fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9; John 6:44), called out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9), and called into his kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 2:14; 1 Pet 5:10). One does not get the impression from such passages as these that calling is merely initial and partial, like preventive grace, only to be completed by a regeneration that comes subsequent to man’s

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<sup>41</sup>Keathley, *Salvation*, 128-29.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>43</sup>Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 265.

will in conversion. Rather, as seen in chapters 3 and 4, the effectual call immediately consists of and is followed by the regeneration of the sinner. Only then can the sinner respond with faith and repentance.

Also, there is a second problem that arises from the definition L&D propose. In the effectual call the Spirit internally renews “lost capacities for knowing, loving, and serving God because depraved sinners are both persistently unable to respond to spiritual things.”<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the Spirit “persuades chosen sinners of the truth claims made in the verbal or external call.”<sup>45</sup> In this supernatural influence, the sinner’s capacities to know, love, and act upon the gospel are renewed. “The Spirit graciously enables the sinner’s *mind* to apprehend the good, her *desires* to love the good, and her *will* to do the good.”<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the “Spirit of grace helps sinners overcome their spiritual inabilities by an initial renewing of the depraved mind, desires, and will.”<sup>47</sup> However, if this is how L&D define effectual calling, then what is left to take place in regeneration? In other words, L&D have already affirmed that in the effectual call the sinner’s capacities are renewed, awakened, and made new in order to know, love, and choose Christ. No longer are they dead but now they have restored desires, an awakened mind, and a will that is able to choose the good. Those capacities that were lost due to deadness in sin are now regained due to the effectual call. What then remains to be accomplished in regeneration?<sup>48</sup> Has not the sinner already been renewed and restored in all areas (mind, will, desires)? Has not the Spirit already made the sinner conscious of sin, convicted of

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<sup>44</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:54.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 3:55.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>Strangely enough L&D go on to say that in regeneration the person’s “capacities to know, love, and serve God” are renewed. But previously L&D claimed this occurred in effectual calling. Which is it? And if it is both then why would such “renewal” need to be repeated in regeneration? Perhaps this is why L&D must restrict their definition of regeneration to “eternal life.” By making effectual calling the primary act by which the sinner’s capacities are renewed not much is left for regeneration. Therefore, regeneration is defined as receiving “the gift of eternal life.” Ibid., 3:104-05.

wrongdoing, and summoned to repentance and faith? To the contrary, the sinner already has new life since he can respond in faith and repentance. Consequently, L&D have minimized and depleted regeneration of its full power to awaken the sinner. As a result, regeneration no longer is the first and primary event that brings new life into the dead sinner as Scripture affirms (Ezek 36-37; John 3:5-8; Eph 2:5; Titus 2:3-7; 1 Pet 1:23).

## **2. Scripture Does Not Teach That Conversion Precedes Regeneration**

Erickson and L&D have conceded to the Arminian order of salvation by placing conversion prior to regeneration.<sup>49</sup> It must be noted that such a claim is in direct conflict with what was seen in chapter 4, namely, that in Scripture it is regeneration that causes and produces conversion. However, as mentioned already, their argumentation appeals to three types of passages which, in their view, are determinative for the priority of conversion to regeneration. These passages are summarized as follows:

(1) Scripture teaches that if a sinner believes then he will receive “eternal life” (John 3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:54, 57; 11:25; 20:31).

(2) Scripture teaches that if one believes then he will receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:13; 4:6; Eph 1:13).

(3) Scripture teaches that if one believes then he will be “saved” (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 1:21).

Each of these must be addressed and since the argument of Erickson and L&D is the same argument found in Arminians like Lemke and Keathley, the following is a refutation of both the modified view and the Arminian view.

**“Eternal Life.”** First, there are several passages where believing results in receiving “eternal life.” L&D appeal to John 3:14-15 where Jesus says that as the Son of Man he must be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have “eternal life.” L&D take “eternal life” to mean “regeneration.” Therefore, regeneration (eternal life) follows belief. Lemke and Keathley make the same argument with other passages as well (John

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 3:57.

3:16, 36; 5:24; 6:54, 57; 11:25; 20:31). However, equating “eternal life” with regeneration is a case of eisegesis. Jesus is not describing the order of conversion and regeneration, but rather he is comparing “perishing” with living eternally in the age to come as a consequence of faith in Christ here and now. Commenting on John 3:15, Leon Morris defines Jesus’ use of eternal life as follows:

The word rendered “eternal” (always used in this Gospel of life) basically means “pertaining to an age”. The Jews divided time into the present age and the age to come, but the adjective referred to life in the coming age, not the present one. “Eternal life” thus means “the life proper to the age to come”. It is an eschatological conception (cf. 6:40, 54).<sup>50</sup>

Morris is right, eternal life is an eschatological concept. Jesus demonstrates this when he says in Mark 10:30 that it is “in the age to come” that one receives “eternal life.” As Thomas Schreiner and Ardel Caneday demonstrate, the phrase “eternal life” is not only a present reality but an eschatological reality and “by definition is life of the age to come.”<sup>51</sup> In Scripture, eternal life is said not only to be received in the present (John 5:24; 6:47, 54; 1 John 5:11-13) but to be received in the future (Mark 10:17, 29-30; Rom 2:6-7; Gal 6:8; 1 Tim 6:19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10). In other words, unlike regeneration, which is a one time instantaneous act that occurs at initiation, eternal life is an eschatological hope that pervades into the present but ultimately is received in the life to come. Therefore, L&D are simply in error to interpret eternal life as specifically referring to the act of regeneration.

Moreover, as Snoeberger observes, in many of these passages cited, life is said not only to follow belief but justification (Titus 3:7), sanctification (Rom 6:22), perseverance (Rom 2:7; Jude 21), and even physical death (2 Cor 5:4). “With this in view, the ‘life’ described in these passages cannot mean regeneration.”<sup>52</sup> The point is

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<sup>50</sup>Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (1971), 227. Also see Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 172.

<sup>51</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 65, 66-67.

<sup>52</sup>Mark A. Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith in a Theological *Ordo Salutis*,” *DBSJ* 7 (2002): 64.

made clear when one examines other passages (which Erickson, L&D, Lemke, and Keathley never mention) that use the phrase eternal life to refer to a gift to be received in the age to come (Mark 10:17, 29-30; Rom 2:6-7, 23; Gal 6:8; 1 Tim 6:19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; Jas 1:12; Rev 2:10). Notice how peculiar it sounds if we equate eternal life in these passages with regeneration. For example, Jesus, responding to the rich young ruler would state, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers . . . for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time . . . and in the age to come *regeneration* (eternal life)” (Mark 10:29-30). Likewise, Paul would state, “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give *regeneration* (eternal life)” (Rom 2:6-7). Notice, if Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley are right in equating regeneration with eternal life then in Romans 2:6-7 one must do works to be regenerated. The same would apply in passages like James 1:12 and Revelation 2:10. Surely Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley do not want to affirm works-righteousness, but their logic, if applied consistently, inevitably leads to this.

Finally, the flaw in equating regeneration with eternal life is most evident in Titus 3:5-7, “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, [6 ] whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, [7 ] so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” How can regeneration be equated with eternal life when in Titus 3:5 it is regeneration that is said to lead to the hope of eternal life? As Snoeberger writes, “Paul states unequivocally that regeneration must occur in order that (ἰνᾶ) eternal life may result. It is obvious that this ‘life’ is not regeneration, but the eschatological experience of ‘life that truly is life’ (1 Tim 6:19).”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 76-77.

**“Holy Spirit.”** Second, Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley also enlist a number of passages that make receiving the Holy Spirit contingent upon man’s initial faith (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:13; 4:6; Eph 1:13). Like eternal life, the reception of the Spirit in these passages is equated with regeneration so that belief must precede regeneration. Erickson makes his case by arguing from Acts 2:38 where Peter says, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” According to Erickson, the gift of the Holy Spirit in this passage refers to regeneration, and repentance must come first before such a gift can be received. Lemke and Keathley make a similar argument. To take but one example, Jesus says in John 7:38, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” John interprets, “Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” (7:39). Lemke and Keathley conclude from passages like these that belief is the condition for the reception of the Spirit, which they believe is referring to regeneration.

However, like we saw with “eternal life,” such an argument is reductionistic for two reasons. (1) No reason or explanation is given as to why one should equate the reception of the Spirit with regeneration. Why not interpret the reception of the Spirit as *the result of* regeneration? Or why should it refer to regeneration at all? Why not to conversion, adoption, justification, indwelling, or union with Christ? Or why not interpret eternal life as distinct from all of them? (2) To the contrary, these passages are best interpreted as meaning that one receives the indwelling of the Spirit at conversion. As James Hamilton has demonstrated at great length, regeneration and indwelling by the Spirit are not to be equated nor are they identical but are distinct events.<sup>54</sup> If they are not distinct then it is very difficult to make sense out of John 7:38-39, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ Now this

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<sup>54</sup>James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 127-59.

he said about the Spirit, *whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified*” (emphasis added).

Working his way through John’s gospel Hamilton explains,

The Gospel of John has been clear to this point that no one is able to come to Jesus unless the Father draws him (6:44, 65), and that ‘everyone who does sin is a slave to sin’ (8:34). If the disciples can love Jesus and keep His commandments, it is because they have been drawn to Jesus by the Father and freed from sin by the Son (8:36). Many assume that enabling an individual to believe is equivalent to an individual’s reception of the indwelling Spirit [See the stress on ability and inability in John 3:1-12. A form of the word “can” or “able” [δύναμαι] occurs six times there.] But John 7:39 speaks of people who had been enabled to believe in Jesus but had not yet received the Spirit. Similarly in this passage the disciples are assumed to be able to love and obey Jesus before they receive the Spirit. The grammatical connection between John 14:15 and 16 demonstrates the need to recognize that regeneration and indwelling are separate ministries of the Spirit. The disciples are able to love Jesus because they have been regenerated, though they are yet to receive the Spirit. If regeneration and indwelling are not separated, this text becomes very difficult to interpret because of its grammar.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, Hamilton is right. A permanent reception or indwelling of the Spirit is a reality of the new covenant. In the old covenant God’s presence indwelt the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11) and tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38), while in the new covenant God indwells not only Jesus who tabernacles among his people (John 1:14, 51), but his Spirit comes and indwells every believer (John 14:17, 23).<sup>56</sup> Rightly, new covenant followers of Christ are called temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19), in whom God’s Spirit dwells (1 Cor 3:16), something not said of old covenant believers. Therefore, while a sinner is regenerated by the Spirit regardless of where he is on the redemptive-historical timeline, receiving the Spirit or being permanently indwelt by the Spirit is only a reality after the glorification of Jesus.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, while regeneration and indwelling are both works of the Spirit,

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<sup>55</sup>“Jesus tells the disciples in John 14:15-17 that the Spirit will be given to those who love him. Their ability to love Jesus comes from the enabling new birth by the Spirit (John 3:3-8). This regeneration then manifests itself in love for Jesus, which results in obedience. Thus John 14:15-17 fits with John 7:39, where those who have believed (i.e., those who have been born again) are described as those who are about to receive the Spirit.” Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 75.

<sup>56</sup>This also makes sense of Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman in John 4:21-24 where Jesus speaks of a time when worship in Jerusalem is no longer necessary.

<sup>57</sup>“When the Spirit of God enables a person to hear the word of God and believe it, regardless of where that person is on the salvation-historical time line, he can be described as regenerate. The heart of the person is circumcised, and the ability to believe is created. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, however, only accompanies the Spirit’s life-giving work after the glorification of Jesus. After the glorification of

they are not the same but distinct.

For Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley John 7:39 becomes not only difficult but impossible to interpret since they insist on making regeneration synonymous with reception of the Spirit or indwelling. However, if regeneration and indwelling (or the reception of the Spirit) are synonymous as Lemke and Keathley seem to think, then how could believers in the old covenant be regenerate since, as Jesus states in John 7:39, the Spirit had not yet been given? Given the view of Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley, it seems they would have to conclude, if we follow their logic that regeneration and receiving the Spirit are the same, that old covenant believers could not have been regenerate on the basis of John 7:39. Surely we would not want to say that the Spirit did not regenerate old covenant believers. To the contrary, if we distinguish between regeneration and indwelling (on the basis of passages like John 7:39), then there is no problem. While the Spirit regenerated elect sinners in the old covenant, a *permanent* indwelling of *all* believers with the Spirit awaits the new covenant just as Jesus says.<sup>58</sup> For example, in John 3:5, as Hamilton shows, Jesus “speaks not of the Spirit *inhabiting* the one who is born again, but *causing the new birth*.”<sup>59</sup> This interpretation is also consistent with John 7:39 where it does not say “the Spirit was not yet causing the new birth, but that He was about to be received by those who had *believed* in Jesus.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, in John 7:39 it is clear that the permanent reception of the Spirit will not be experienced until after the crucifixion, but in John 3:5 Jesus does expect Nicodemus to

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Jesus, regeneration and indwelling can be seen as concurrent, though they remain distinct ministries of the Spirit.” Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 143.

<sup>58</sup>Please note that I am *not* saying that the Spirit did not have a role in regards to believers in the old covenant. Indeed, the Spirit did come upon certain leaders for certain tasks, though this may have been only for a limited time. However, it is not until the new covenant that *all* believers are indwelt and all are indwelt *permanently*. For a survey of the Old Testament on this issue see *ibid.*, 25-56.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 132. Hamilton notes that neither does Donald Guthrie equate regeneration with indwelling in his *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981), 527, 585-87. The same is true of G. M. Burge, *The Anointed Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 158-68; M. M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 165-70.

<sup>60</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 132.

understand the experience of the new birth, implying it was a reality in the old covenant.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Hamilton rightly concludes,

If John 3:6 is speaking of regeneration and not indwelling, then the door is open to an inward enablement by the Spirit (which the Old Testament calls ‘circumcision of the heart’) prior to the cross. Since John 7:39 refers to believers who are yet to receive the Spirit, it would seem that prior to Jesus’ glorification people could be enabled, i.e., regenerated, though they were not indwelt.<sup>62</sup>

Hamilton is correct given the fact that throughout the old covenant we see many examples (Noah, Abraham, David, etc.) of sinners spiritually circumcised and regenerated (Pss 87; 119:25; Isa 55:3; Neh 9:20, 30). As VanGemerren states, “The saints were those who were circumcised of heart, or ‘regenerate.’”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, while “the New Testament explicitly states that the reception of the indwelling Spirit could not take place prior to the glorification of Jesus (John 7:39), it does not say that regeneration could not take place.”<sup>64</sup>

Regrettably, Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley fail to address John 7:39 at all as well as the larger issue of the textual evidence throughout both the Old and New Testaments which demonstrates that regeneration and indwelling are not the same. Moreover, since regeneration precedes conversion in the *ordo salutis* and since, after Jesus is glorified, it is *at conversion* that the sinner is indwelt by the Spirit (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:13; 4:6; Eph 1:13), the passages where belief is said to bring about reception of the Spirit present no problem for the Calvinist.<sup>65</sup> Notice, in all of the texts that Lemke and Keathley put forward (John 7:38-39; Acts 2:38; Gal 3:13; 4:6; Eph 1:13),

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>63</sup>Willem A. VanGemerren, *The Progress of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 167.

<sup>64</sup>Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, 141.

<sup>65</sup>One could make the objection that after Jesus is glorified believers receive the Spirit at conversion. Granted, this is true. As Hamilton states, “The heart of the person is circumcised, and the ability to believe is created. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit, however, only accompanies the Spirit’s life-giving work after the glorification of Jesus. After the glorification of Jesus, regeneration and indwelling can be seen as concurrent, though they remain distinct ministries of the Spirit.” Ibid., 143. However, almost all theologians recognize that there is a difference between regeneration and conversion (faith and repentance). Therefore, even if we say that after Jesus is glorified indwelling occurs at conversion, still it has not been shown that conversion or indwelling precedes regeneration.

the Spirit is said to be received upon *faith*. None of these texts say anything about regeneration or new birth, which precedes and causes faith. What they do mention is an indwelling by the Spirit at conversion, which is not the same as regeneration but something that is the *result* and *product* of regeneration. In essence, Erickson, L&D, Lemke and Keathley fail to pay attention to the redemptive-historical timeline of Scripture and consequently they fall short of distinguishing, as Scripture does, between regeneration by the Spirit and indwelling by the Spirit.

“**Saved.**” Third, the view of Erickson and L&D also agrees with Arminians like Lemke and Keathley by enlisting a host of passages which say that if one believes he will be “saved” (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 1:21). To take one example, Erickson, Lemke and Keathley appeal to Acts 16:31 where Paul and Silas say, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Apparently “saved” (σωθήση) in this passage refers to regeneration. Therefore, it is only after the sinner believes that he is saved (regenerated). However, such an interpretation of “you will be saved” is reductionistic since there is no contextual reason to read “saved” in such a narrow manner. Even L&D, who agree with Erickson’s modified view, observe that Paul and Silas use the word “saved” in a general sense, not specifically referring to the inward act of regeneration but to salvation holistically.<sup>66</sup>

Like the passages on “eternal life” and the “Holy Spirit” so also here we see “saved” erroneously equated with regeneration. Again, why should one interpret saved in such a narrow manner? Why not interpret saved as referring to adoption or justification? Or why not interpret saved in a much broader sense as referring to the sinner’s escape from hell and wrath in the age to come? Or, better yet, why not interpret saved as a distinct metaphor in and of itself?<sup>67</sup> To interpret saved as synonymous with regeneration is seen to be fallacious when one looks at how other passages would then have to be

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<sup>66</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:56.

<sup>67</sup>Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 46-86.

interpreted. Consider Matthew 27:42, where Jesus is on the cross and his accusers say, “He regenerated (saved) others; he cannot regenerate (save) himself.” Clearly, such an interpretation is unwarranted. And again, 1 Corinthians 3:15 would say, “If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be regenerated (saved), but only as through fire.” According to Lemke’s and Keathley’s understanding, Paul would be teaching that one is actually regenerated on the last day. The same point is made when we consider 1 Peter 1:4-5 where Peter says God has caused us to be born again to a living hope and “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a regeneration (salvation) ready to be revealed in the last time.” Again, if Erickson, L&D, Lemke, and Keathley are right that “salvation” refers to regeneration then Peter would be saying that we are regenerated twice (born again and again), first in 1:3 at initiation and again in 1:5 in the “last time.” To the contrary, “salvation” in 1 Peter 1:4-5 is used to refer to an inheritance we will one day receive in the “last time.” Or consider Philippians 2:12b-13, “Work out your own regeneration (salvation) with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” If “salvation” is to be equated with regeneration then Paul would be instructing the Philippians that they must work out their own regeneration.

The meaning of “salvation” in Scripture is very different. Silva explains,

It is conceded by all parties in the discussion that the term *salvation* (or its cognate verb) need *not be restricted, as it normally is in contemporary evangelical language, to the initial act of conversion* (“Have you been saved?”) or to the status of being in a right relationship with God (“Are you saved?”). . . . But the biblical concept of salvation is not thus restricted to justification; more commonly what is in view includes God’s redemptive work *in its totality*. Thus, while in a very important sense we have already been saved (Eph. 2:5, 8; Titus 3:5), in another sense we are yet to be saved (Rom. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 3:15; 5:5; 2 Tim. 4:18). Calvin rightly claims “that salvation is taken to mean the entire course of our calling, and that this term includes all things by which God accomplishes that perfection, to which He has determined us by His free election.”<sup>68</sup>

Silva is correct; while salvation can refer to the past (Eph 2:5, 8; Titus 3:5; two passages

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<sup>68</sup>Emphasis added. Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., BECNT (2005), 121.

we already saw support monergism), many passages, including Philippians 2:12, refer to salvation in its totality or as a reality yet to come (Rom 5:9-10; 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5; 2 Tim 4:18). Such a point is made by Schreiner as well who observes that the language of salvation or deliverance is “fundamentally eschatological.” Consider texts like Romans 2:3, 5:9, and 5:10 where one is said to be saved from God’s wrath and saved by his life. Each of these texts uses the future tense “constraining us as readers to think about future deliverance.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, these texts show us that salvation is not ours now but it is a “future gift, a hope that we will be spared from God’s wrath on the day of the Lord.”<sup>70</sup> Schreiner helpfully explains,

When Paul speaks of the gospel ‘which results in salvation’ (Rom 1:16), he has in mind eschatological salvation that will be our possession in the coming age. Similarly, the salvation that belongs to those who confess Jesus as Lord and believe on him in their hearts (Rom 10:9-10; cf. Rom 10:13) is fundamentally eschatological. The future tenses refer to the coming age. . . . The eschatological character of salvation is strikingly confirmed in Romans 13:11, where salvation is said “to be nearer than when we first believed.” Paul does not speak here of salvation as something obtained at the moment we first believed but as a gift to be given at the last day.<sup>71</sup>

While salvation is fundamentally eschatological, it does have reference to both the past and the present. It would be incorrect, in other words, to restrict salvation to the eschaton since some texts do indeed speak of salvation in the past tense. Take Ephesians 2:5, 8 where Paul says “by grace you have been saved” or Colossians 1:13 where God “rescued us from the authority of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his Son.” Likewise 2 Timothy 2:9 says he saved us and again in Titus 3:5 Paul writes that God saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewal from the Holy Spirit. Paul again says in Romans 8:24, “For in hope we have been saved.” All of these are in the past tense. However, as Schreiner argues, these “past-tense statements do not cancel out the

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<sup>69</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 225. For an extensive treatment of “salvation,” see Schreiner and Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us*, 46-86.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 225-26.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 226.

eschatological dimension of salvation.”<sup>72</sup> Rather,

Paul most commonly assigns salvation to the future, but he can speak of salvation as past since the age to come has invaded this present evil age. The past dimension of salvation, therefore, should be understood within the eschatological framework of Paul’s theology. And Romans 8:24 helps us understand that the reality of salvation in the past does not mean that salvation is now complete. Believers still hope for the future realization of their salvation for they have not yet received the full inheritance. Once we grasp the eschatological tension between the future and the present, it is understandable that Paul also describes salvation as an ongoing process in the present. Through the gospel “you are being saved” (1 Cor 15:2); and the eschatological tension of Paul’s view is preserved in that such salvation will only be realized through perseverance. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 the gospel’s power has seized “those who are being saved” (cf. 2 Cor 2:15). Indeed, the gospel is the reason for their salvation.<sup>73</sup>

Schreiner’s point is well taken. “Salvation” is fundamentally a future reality, but it has broken into the past and the present (already not yet). As Sproul states, “We have been saved, are being saved, and shall be saved. There is a past, present, and future dimension to salvation.”<sup>74</sup> Therefore, “salvation” is a soteriological category that is *broad*, covering not only the past and present but the future, and therefore it is erroneous for Erickson, L&D, and Arminians like Lemke and Keathley to define “salvation” so narrowly as referring to the one, instantaneous event of regeneration at initiation.<sup>75</sup> It is obvious that Arminians who appeal to such passages have succumbed to a reductionistic interpretation by equating “saved” with “regeneration.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>74</sup>“Our salvation began in eternity, is realized in time, looks forward to heaven.” R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 198.

<sup>75</sup>“If “being saved” . . . is sometimes viewed as an eschatological event, it cannot be reduced to mean “being regenerated.” Instead, the Scripture-writers seem to use the verb broadly, as a generic or ‘package’ term.” Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration o Saving Faith,” 60.

<sup>76</sup>One could possibly object that even though “saved,” reception of the “Holy Spirit,” and “eternal life” are broadly defined, nevertheless, regeneration is included within such a broad definition and therefore would still come subsequent to belief. However, Snoeberger demonstrates that just because “saved,” or reception of the “Spirit,” or “life” follow faith “it does not follow that every single aspect” of “saved,” “life,” or reception of the “Spirit,” must follow faith. In other words, while some aspects of “salvation” or “life” may follow faith it is also the case that other aspects precede faith. Snoeberger, “The Logical Priority of Regeneration to Saving Faith,” 61, 65.

### 3. Placing Conversion Before Regeneration is Synergistic

In evaluation of Erickson, L&D, and Keathley, it is crucial to recognize that placing conversion before regeneration is synergistic since God's act of regeneration is logically and causally dependent upon and conditioned upon man's act of belief and repentance.<sup>77</sup> If conversion precedes regeneration then it must be the case that the Spirit's regenerative act is in response to man's act to repent and believe. This is the essence of Arminianism. Erickson and L&D in particular try to avoid full-fledged Arminianism by placing effectual calling prior to conversion but such a move does not remove the fundamental principle of an Arminian soteriology, namely, that the Spirit's regenerative work is dependent upon, conditioned upon, and in response to man's willful choice.<sup>78</sup> L&D even concede this when they admit that their moderately Reformed scheme agrees with Arminians who place the sinner's free choice before regeneration.<sup>79</sup> Due to such an Arminian stream of synergism in Erickson and L&D, it must be concluded that while one stands firmly within the Reformed tradition in representing any of the three views previously discussed (Murray, Berkhof, or Hoekema), one is outside the limits of Reformed monergism and more importantly Scripture itself (see chapter 4) to argue that conversion is subsequent to effectual calling but prior to regeneration.

### 4. Monergism Wrongly Defined

Despite the fact that the modified view of Erickson and L&D diverges from the Reformed view by agreeing with Arminians that faith precedes regeneration, L&D have no hesitation including the modified view as a legitimate option within the "Reformed

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<sup>77</sup>Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 945.

<sup>78</sup>I am not saying that Erickson and L&D are Arminians. Clearly they are not since they affirm a calling that is effectual and limited to the elect. Therefore, they are not *total* synergists. However, what I am arguing is that in placing conversion prior to regeneration they have borrowed the essence of Arminianism (or synergism). While they may begin as monergist (i.e., calling is effectual, preceding conversion) they end as synergists (i.e., in the end regeneration is still conditioned upon man's will in conversion). Perhaps to be accurate it would be best to categorize Erickson and L&D as *partial* or *soft* synergists.

<sup>79</sup>Lewis and Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, 3:56-57.

Evangelical” position. In so doing, L&D give the impression that their view is monergistic like the Reformed view, only slightly modified. To make matters worse, Keathley, whom Roger Olson identifies as an Arminian, is insistent that he can affirm the label “monergism,” despite the fact that he completely rejects both the Calvinist position and the modified view in favor of a traditional Arminian view of resistible grace.<sup>80</sup> Monergism, according to Keathley, means “God is the only worker and accomplisher of our redemption.”<sup>81</sup> So in Keathley’s mind, monergism simply means God alone is the author of redemption. Furthermore, says Keathley, though he affirms resistible grace, his view is still “monergistic because all that is necessary in this scenario is that a person *refrains* from acting.”<sup>82</sup> To summarize, for Keathley grace is monergistic if (1) God alone is the author of redemption and (2) if man refrains from acting or resisting. But is this how monergism has been defined, either historically or theologically? R. C. Sproul explains exactly why such a definition is misguided,

The classic dispute over monergism and synergism is not over the question of who does the regenerating. Virtually everyone agrees that only God can do the work of regeneration proper. The issue focuses instead on what the unregenerate person can do to evoke the divine work of regeneration. Synergists hold that one can “choose Christ” or “believe in Christ” prior to regeneration. The choice or the act of faith is a condition for regeneration. It is at this point that they are synergistic. The grace of regeneration is offered, but the “efficacious” grace of regeneration is given only to those who first accept the offer or act in faith to receive it.<sup>83</sup>

In other words, the issue in debate is not merely whether God alone is the author of regeneration. Both Arminians and Calvinists agree on this. If, as Keathley thinks, this is the whole of how monergism is defined then every Arminian is a monergist! To the contrary, the debate is over whether the Arminian is right in arguing that regeneration is contingent upon man’s will to believe. It is clear that for Keathley regeneration *is*

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<sup>80</sup>Emphasis original. “*God’s grace is both monergistic and resistible.*” Keathley, *Salvation*, 11.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid. Also see 103.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>83</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 196.

conditioned upon man's will to believe (faith) and therefore his view succumbs to synergism entirely.

Moreover, it is surprising that Keathley defines monergism as meaning that the "person merely refrains from resisting."<sup>84</sup> No Arminian would disagree with such a definition because this is the essence of synergism: divine grace is successful as long as man cooperates by refraining from resisting. Once again, if this is what monergism means then every Arminian has the right to call himself a monergist. To the contrary, Keathley has not only defined monergism wrong theologically, but historically, for as we saw in chapter 5, Arminians throughout history have defined grace as Keathley does and at the same time have labeled it synergism. Therefore, for Keathley to say that he can affirm monergism is (1) a redefinition of monergism entirely so that even Arminians can affirm such a label and (2) is misleading since his view, as was already seen, is basic Arminianism synergism wrapped in a new label which he calls "overcoming grace." While such a maneuver by Keathley may appear novel, history repeats itself. For example, seventeenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Wilhelmus à Brakel (1635-1711) also noticed such a move by Arminians in his own day and saw through it.

Moreover, the Arminians understand *effectual grace* to refer to the *result*. It is not effectual by the almighty power of God who would thus in actuality convert man, but only in reference to the result. If man repents and believes in Christ, his calling is effectual because of what man has done. . . . All of this, however, culminates in one thing: Free will remains lord and master, having ultimate power to either accept or reject. God is merely a servant or a friend who advises and urges him to act, whereas man himself determines whether or not he will allow himself to be persuaded. All of this we reject.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, "monergism" has been defined much differently than Erickson, L&D, and especially Keathley want to admit. As Sproul stated above, monergism does not merely mean God alone is the author, but that regeneration precedes faith. Reformed theology has consistently understood monergism in this way throughout church history.

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<sup>84</sup>Keathley, *Salvation*, 105.

<sup>85</sup>Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 1993), 2:214-15.

In chapter 2 it was shown by looking at sixteenth and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians that God's act of new birth always precedes faith and repentance. However, a brief glance at nineteenth and twentieth-century Reformed theologians will also prove such a point.

First, if we begin with the nineteenth-century it is evident that monergism for the Reformed means regeneration causally precedes conversion.

[*Charles Hodge*] According to the Augustinian doctrine the efficacy of divine grace in regeneration depends neither upon its congruity nor upon the active coöperation, nor upon the passive non-resistance of its subject, but upon its nature and the purpose of God. It is the exercise of "the mighty power of God," who speaks and it is done. . . . if the special work of regeneration, in the narrow sense of that word, be the effect of almighty power, then it cannot be resisted, any more than the act of creation. The effect follows immediately on the will of God, as when He said let there be light, and light was. . . . It follows, also, that regeneration is an act of sovereign grace. If a tree must be made good before the fruit is good; the goodness of the fruit cannot be the reason which determines him who has the power to change the tree from bad to good. So if works spiritually good are the fruits of regeneration, then they cannot be the ground on which God exerts his life-giving power.<sup>86</sup>

[*A. A. Hodge*] Thus it follows that the satisfaction and merit of Christ are the antecedent cause of regeneration; and yet, nevertheless, the participation of the believer in the satisfaction and merit of Christ (*i.e.*, his justification) is conditioned upon his faith which in turn is conditioned upon his regeneration. He must have part in Christ so far forth as to be regenerated in order to have part in him so far forth as to be justified.<sup>87</sup>

[*Benjamin B. Warfield*] Indeed, the soteriological significance of predestination to the Calvinist consists in the safeguard it affords to monergistic regeneration – to purely supernatural salvation. What lies at the heart of his soteriology is the absolute exclusion of the creaturely element in the initiation of the saving process, that so the pure grace of God may be magnified. Only so could he express his sense of man's complete dependence as sinner on the free mercy of a saving God; or extrude the evil leaven of Synergism (*q.v.*) by which, as he clearly sees, God is robbed of His glory and man is encouraged to think that he owes to some power, some act of choice, some initiative of his own, his participation in that salvation which is in reality all of grace.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:680, 688.

<sup>87</sup>A. A. Hodge, "The Ordo Salutis," *The Princeton Review* 54 (1878): 313. Also consider A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (n.p., 1860; reprint: Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 445-64.

<sup>88</sup>Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism*, vol. 5 of *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 359-60. Also see B. B. Warfield, "Regeneration," in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*, ed. John E. Meeter (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1973), 2:321-23. For a detailed look at Warfield's monergism see Fred G. Zaspel, *The Theology of B. B. Warfield: A Systematic Summary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 413-512.

[*Herman Bavinck*] The grace of regeneration occurs in us prior to faith, which is the effect of it.<sup>89</sup>

[*William G. T. Shedd*] [T]he new life is not implanted because man perceives the truth, but he perceives the truth because the new life is implanted. A man is not regenerated because he has first believed in Christ, but he believes in Christ because he has been regenerated. He is not regenerated because he first repents, but he repents because he has been regenerated.<sup>90</sup>

Also consider Southern Baptists James P. Boyce and John Dagg:

[*James P. Boyce*] Yet, after all, the Scriptures also teach that regeneration is the work of God, changing the heart of man by his sovereign will, while conversion is the act of man turning towards God with the new inclination thus given to his heart. . . . This [conversion] is the result of regeneration.<sup>91</sup>

[*John Dagg*] Besides the call which is external, and often ineffectual, there is another, which is internal and effectual. This always produces repentance and faith, and therefore secures salvation. . . . The internal grace, which renders the outward call effectual, is the grace of regeneration. Hence regeneration, considered as the work of the Holy Spirit, is the same as effectual calling; . . . In effectual calling, the Holy Spirit displays his omnipotence. . . . His power in creating the world was unresisted; and equally unresisted is the power by which he new-creates the heart. The outward means which the Spirit sends may be resisted; but when the Spirit himself comes in the omnipotence of his grace, resistance vanishes.<sup>92</sup>

Such an *ordo* is standard in nineteenth-century Reformed theology<sup>93</sup> and the twentieth-century is no exception. As has already been seen in chapters 3 and 4, theologians like

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<sup>89</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:582. Here Bavinck is quoting (in agreement) Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma theologiae Christianae*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Hannover: Aubry, 1624), 467.

<sup>90</sup>Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 771-72. Not only do each of these theologians specify such an ordering theologically, but an examination of the *structuring* of their systematic theologies only verifies such a taxis.

<sup>91</sup>James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (n.p., 1887; reprint, Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 374, 379. The quote above indicates that regeneration precedes and causes faith. It is safe to assume that in the drafting of the Abstract of Principles the same truth was implied, though less explicitly stated. The Abstract states in Article 8, "Regeneration is a change of heart, wrought by the Holy Spirit, who quickeneth the dead in trespasses and sins enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the Word of God, and renewing their whole nature, so that they love and practice holiness. It is a work of God's free and special grace alone." *Ibid.*, 513.

<sup>92</sup>John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 2009), 332-33. Also consider Charles Spurgeon. For a collection of his affirmations of monergistic regeneration see Charles H. Spurgeon, "On Regeneration," *Founders Journal* 48 (2002): 29-32

<sup>93</sup>Many other Calvinists could be listed as examples including: Archibald Alexander, "The Early History of Pelagianism," in *Princeton Versus the New Divinity: Articles from the Princeton Review* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 52-89; *idem*, "Original Sin," in *Princeton Versus the New Divinity*, 90-114; *idem*, "The Inability of Sinners," in *Princeton Versus the New Divinity*, 115-40; Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (n.p., 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 2:293-352; Robert L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (n.p., 1871; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 553-99; *idem*, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1992), 1-37.

John Murray, Louis Berkhof, and Anthony Hoekema all argue that regeneration precedes faith.<sup>94</sup> Also, consider other twentieth-century examples from Reformed Presbyterians:

[*Edwin Palmer*] This, incidentally, shows the great error that is so prevalent today in some orthodox Protestant circles, namely, the error that regeneration depends upon faith, and not upon God; and that in order to be born again man must first accept Jesus as his Savior. . . . If regeneration does not precede faith, but rather follows and depends upon it, then salvation is of him that runs and of him that wills, but not of God, in direct contradiction to Romans 9:7, which says just the opposite. Then Luke was wrong in saying that God first opened Lydia's heart, and afterward she believed. Then Jesus was mistaken when he asserted that the Holy Spirit is like the wind that blows where it wills, and when he compared the Spirit's work to birth, in which a baby is entirely passive. Then man it not *dead* in his sins and trespasses, for if he is able to believe, he already has spiritual life. . . . According to Scripture, faith does not precede and cause regeneration but rather, regeneration precedes and causes faith. Regeneration is necessary before a man can do a single thing that is spiritually good. In regeneration man is 100 percent passive, and the Holy Spirit is 100 percent active.<sup>95</sup>

[*R. C. Sproul*] In regeneration, God changes our hearts. He gives us a new disposition, a new inclination. He plants a desire for Christ in our hearts. We can never trust Christ for our salvation unless we first desire him. This is why we said earlier that *regeneration precedes faith*. Without rebirth we have no desire for Christ. Without a desire for Christ we will never choose Christ. Therefore, we conclude that before anyone ever will believe, before anyone *can* believe, God must first change the disposition of his heart.<sup>96</sup>

[*James M. Boice and Philip Ryken*] The grace of God's calling is overwhelmingly efficacious. A good way of expressing this is to say that the Holy Spirit regenerates us, giving us a new nature, as a result of which we naturally do what the new nature does: that is, we believe the gospel, repent of our sin, and trust in Christ unto salvation. . . . In other words, new life comes before saving faith; it is never the other way around.<sup>97</sup>

[*Robert Reymond*] Why do some people repent and respond by faith in Christ to the divine summons to faith while others do not? Concerning those who believe in Christ's name John immediately says in John 1:13: "[These are they] who have been begotten, not by blood, nor by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of a husband, but by God." By this particular reference to God's "begetting" activity

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<sup>94</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 103; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 473; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 101, 144.

<sup>95</sup>Edwin H. Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: The Traditional Calvinistic Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 83-84. Also see idem, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 56-66;

<sup>96</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1986), 118-19. Also see idem, *What is Reformed Theology?* 179-86.

<sup>97</sup>James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 135, 149.

John refers to regeneration, and clearly suggests by his statement that, while faith is the instrumental precondition to justification and adoption, regeneration is the necessary precondition and efficient cause of faith in Jesus Christ. In short, regeneration causally precedes faith. . . . *Regeneration is the precondition of repentance unto life and faith in Jesus Christ; it is not dependent upon these for its appearance in Christian life.*<sup>98</sup>

[*John Frame*] So, the new birth comes before our faith, bringing it about. People sometimes say, “Believe in Jesus, and you will be born again.” This expression is biblically inaccurate. It is true that believing in Jesus is the path to blessing. But the new birth is the cause of faith rather than the other way around. Again, you cannot give birth to yourself, even by faith. Rather, God gives new birth to you and enables you to have faith.<sup>99</sup>

[*Michael Horton*] To say that salvation is by grace alone is not only to affirm the supernatural character of salvation, but is to exclude any form of synergism (i.e., salvation as the result of human-divine cooperation). While the new birth brings about a new obedience in which one begins to cooperate with God in his or her growth, human decision and effort are strictly excluded as playing any role in our new birth: “It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom 9:16).<sup>100</sup>

[*Peterson and Williams*] God’s regeneration invariably results in faith.<sup>101</sup>

Presbyterians are not the only ones who understand monergism as meaning that regeneration precedes faith. Consider the following Baptists as well:

[*Wayne Grudem*] On this definition, it is natural to understand that regeneration comes before saving faith. It is in fact this work of God that gives us the spiritual *ability* to respond to God in faith. . . . Sometimes people will even say something like, “If you believe in Christ as your Savior, then (after you believe) you will be born again.” But Scripture itself never says anything like that. This new birth is viewed by Scripture as something that God does within us in order to enable us to believe.<sup>102</sup>

[*John Piper*] Your act of believing and God’s act of begetting are simultaneous. He does the begetting and you do the believing are simultaneous. He does the begetting and you do the believing at the same instant. And – this is very important – his

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<sup>98</sup>Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 708, 720.

<sup>99</sup>John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 186.

<sup>100</sup>Michael S. Horton, “The *Sola*’s of the Reformation,” in *Here We Stand! A Call from Confessing Evangelicals for a Modern Reformation*, ed. James Montgomery Boice and Benjamin E. Sasse (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1996), 120.

<sup>101</sup>Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 188-89. Also see Joel R. Beeke, *Living for God’s Glory: An Introduction to Calvinism* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation, 2008), 101-14.

<sup>102</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 702-03.

doing is the decisive cause of your doing. His begetting is the decisive cause of your believing.<sup>103</sup>

[*Thomas Schreiner*] God regenerates us and then we believe, and hence regeneration precedes our conversion. Therefore, we give all the glory to God for our conversion, for our turning to him is entirely a work of his grace.<sup>104</sup>

[*Bruce Ware*] Does Scripture indicate that regeneration precedes and grounds saving faith? . . . only God could grant a person the new life by which he could believe. Regeneration, then, precedes and grounds saving faith.<sup>105</sup>

[*Steven J. Lawson*] The one who believes in Christ does so because he has been born of God. . . . regeneration precedes and produces faith.<sup>106</sup>

Many other examples could be given,<sup>107</sup> but the point to be made here is simple: The consensus among Calvinists, both past and present, is that regeneration precedes faith in the *ordo salutis* and this is essential to monergism. To deny this or to tinker with it is to deny Calvinism traditionally construed. Moreover, none of these contemporary Reformed theologians even mention the modified view of Erickson and L&D as a possible option for Reformed theology or the possibility of redefining monergism as Keathley does. The

<sup>103</sup>Piper, *Finally Alive*, 102. Also see 70, 105, 107.

<sup>104</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Regeneration Necessarily Precede Conversion?" available from <http://www.9marks.org/ejournal/does-regeneration-necessarily-precede-conversion>; accessed 6 July 2008; internet.

<sup>105</sup>Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 19, 21.

<sup>106</sup>Steven J. Lawson, *Foundations of Grace: 1400 BC – AD 100*, vol. 1 of *A Long Line of Godly Men* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 519-20 (cf. 252-56, 289-95, 313-15, 324-26, 367-70, 388-92, 398-99, 405, 423-25, 432-34, 456-60, 474-78, 497-500, 506-507, 525-26, 538-40). Though not a Baptist, consider Sam Storms as well, "Calvinists insist that the sole cause of regeneration or being born again is the will of God. God first sovereignly and efficaciously regenerates, and only in consequence of that do we act. Therefore, the individual is passive in regeneration, neither preparing himself nor making himself receptive to what God will do. Regeneration is a change wrought in us by God, not an autonomous act performed by us for ourselves." Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 150, also see 70-75, 145-57.

<sup>107</sup>Other Baptists include: Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological and Practical Study Of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2006), 323-34; idem, "Preaching Irresistible Grace," in *Reclaiming the Gospel and Reforming Churches: The Southern Baptist Founders Conference 1982-2002*, ed. Thomas K. Ascol (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2003), 383-404; James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler's Chosen But Free* (Amityville, NY: Calvary, 2000), 283-325; Greg Welty, "Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 240; Erroll Hulse, *Who Saves, God or Me? Calvinism for the Twenty-First Century* (Darlington, England: Publishing with a Mission, 2008), 69; David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, and Documented*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2004), 52-64; Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 484, 486; Steven B. Cowan, "Common Misconceptions of Evangelicals Regarding Calvinism," *JETS* 33, no. 2 (1990): 195.

reason for this is obvious: the modified position of Erickson and L&D deviates considerably in affirming certain aspects of Arminianism, or in Keathley's case, affirming synergism entirely. Therefore, it is fitting to conclude that since Reformed theologians have never defined monergism as Erickson and L&D do or as Keathley does, it is illegitimate to classify the modified view as falling within the parameters of Reformed theology or to accept Keathley's definition of monergism as accurate.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident that attempts at a *tertium quid* or *via media* between Calvinism and Arminianism are unsuccessful, a point both Arminians and Calvinists agree upon. As Reformed theologian W. Robert Godfrey explains,

Some try to split the difference between Arminianism and Calvinism. They say something like "I want to be 75% Calvinist and 25% Arminian." If they mean that literally, then they are 100% Arminian since giving any determinative place to human will is Arminian. Usually they mean that they want to stress the grace of God and human responsibility. If that is what they mean, then they can be 100% Calvinists for Calvinism does teach both that God's grace is entirely the cause of salvation and that man is responsible before God to hear and heed the call to repentance and faith.<sup>108</sup>

Arminian Roger Olson says the same, "Consistent classical Arminians agree with Godfrey that their system of belief is incompatible with Calvinism and would argue that most people who declare themselves Calvinists or 75 percent Calvinist and 25 percent Arminian are actually Arminian! Some are simply inconsistent and willing to embrace contradictory propositions."<sup>109</sup> The modified attempts of Erickson, Lewis and Demarest, and especially Keathley are contemporary examples of the very point Godfrey and Olson make. Modifying monergism by borrowing from Arminian synergism results not only in an unsuccessful attempt at Calvinism but, as Olson says, results in a theology that is ultimately Arminian. Consequently, the "plain fact of the matter is that *on certain points*

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<sup>108</sup>W. Robert Godfrey, "Who Was Arminius?" *Modern Reformation* 1 (1992): 24.

<sup>109</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 67.

classical Calvinism and classical Arminianism simply disagree, and no bridge uniting them can be found; no hybrid of the two can be created.”<sup>110</sup> Monergism and synergism are one of these points and the hybrid models evaluated in this chapter simply cannot bridge this gulf.

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 68.

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

At the end of this debate over the nature of divine grace, Herman Bavinck asks the most telling question of all, “One always has to face the question: at the end of all the interactions, who makes the final decision?” Bavinck’s answer to this central question is exactly what we have found to be true in this project,

If it is the human person, then Pelagius is fundamentally correct and the decision concerning what is most important in human history—namely, eternal salvation—rests in human hands. If, however, the last word rests with God and his omnipotent grace, one sides with Augustine and accepts a preceding rebirth (internal grace) in which the human person is passive. In other words, by placing regeneration after faith and repentance, one does not escape the problem but wraps oneself in an insoluble contradiction.<sup>1</sup>

Though Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Arminianism may differ, at the end of the day their answer to the question of who is the ultimate determiner is the same: it is man’s will which decides. Therefore, J. I. Packer’s observation is invaluable,

Arminianism is a slippery slope, and it is always arbitrary where one stops on the slide down. All Arminianisms start from a rationalistic hermeneutic which reads into the Bible at every point the philosophic axiom that to be responsible before God man’s acts must be contingent in relation to him. All Arminianisms involve a rationalistic restriction of the sovereignty of God and the efficacy of the cross, a restriction which Scripture seems directly to contradict. All Arminianisms involve a measure of synergism, if not strong (God helps me to save myself) then weak (I help God to save me). All Arminianisms imply the non-necessity of hearing the gospel, inasmuch as they affirm that every man can be saved by responding to what he knows of God here and now.<sup>2</sup>

Packer’s words are strong but true and sobering. When it comes to who has the final say, Calvinism answers that it is God and God alone while the Arminian answers that it must be man. As already seen, the former exalts and preserves the sovereignty of grace and the

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 4:66.

<sup>2</sup>J. I. Packer, “Arminianisms,” in *Puritan Papers, Volume Five: 1968-1969*, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 27-30.

glory of God while the latter restricts divine sovereignty and steals God's glory, giving it to man instead. The former only boasts in the Lord while the latter gives man room, even if it be slight, to boast in himself. Bruce Ware explains the difference precisely,

But because "salvation is from the Lord" in every respect, from start to finish, and because to God alone belongs all glory and boasting for the gracious saving work he accomplishes and applies to sinners' lives (1 Cor. 1:26-31; Eph 2.8-9), therefore the unconditional nature of God's election is highly valued by its advocates. Both the rightful glory of God and the proper humility of sinners are secured in salvation only when the work of salvation, from beginning to end, is grounded in God's unconditional elective purposes. With the psalmist, we proclaim, "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1 HCSB). Only if God's election of those whom he determines to save is grounded on the good pleasure of God and not at all on any quality, decision, or action that will one day be true of those persons whom God creates can we proclaim, without qualification, that salvation is altogether from the Lord, and to him alone belongs exclusive glory.<sup>3</sup>

Ware's words cannot be improved upon. Only when grace is unconditional, monergistic, and effectual not only in election but in special calling and regeneration, does God receive his rightful glory. Therefore, only the Calvinist can consistently say "Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory" (Ps 115:1) and "it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Rom 9:16). While the synergist comes to God with his own autonomy in hand, the monergist, as Augustus Montague Toplady once wrote, comes to God saying,

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy Cross I cling;  
Naked, come to thee for dress;  
Helpless, look to thee for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.

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<sup>3</sup>Bruce A. Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 5-6.

## APPENDIX 1

### MONERGISM, SYNERGISM, AND THE LOVE OF GOD

#### **The Arminian View of Divine Love**

Herman Bavinck has observed that throughout the history of the church many attempts have been made to identify the one controlling attribute in God that is more fundamental than any other.<sup>1</sup> For Aquinas it was God's *esse* (existence), for Duns Scotus it was God's infinity, for Cornelius Jansenius it was God's veracity, for Saint-Cyran it was God's omnipotence, and the list is endless. Contemporary theologians have also contributed to the debate. For instance, Gordon Clark has argued that the fundamental attribute is God's aseity.<sup>2</sup> However, Arminians disagree, arguing instead that the fundamental attribute that takes priority over all others is the love of God, more specifically God's universal, impartial, and equal love for all people.<sup>3</sup> After all, John says in 1 John 4:8 and 16 that "God is love." Moreover, God as a loving God is evidenced throughout Scripture (Exod 20:1-3; Deut 6:4-9; 7:8; Ps 103:8; Isa 54:8; 63:9; Jer 31:3; John 3:16; John 13:34-35; Rom 8:32; 5:8; 1 Cor 13; Phil 2:1-11; 1 John 3:16; 4:8-10, 15-16). Arminians are not simply arguing that love is important or that love is the essence of God, but that love is more important and more fundamental than any other attribute in God. For example, Fritz Guy, calling his view "potentialism," claims "that in the character of God love is more fundamental than control." He explains,

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<sup>1</sup>Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1951), 114-20. As observed by John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 49-50.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon H. Clark, "Attributes, the Divine," in *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960), 78-79.

<sup>3</sup>Open theists, who are usually Arminians soteriologically, also would fall into this camp. For example, see Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 153-159.

Thus the divine love is free, not only to will what is truly good for every created entity but also to create moral freedom with a potential for determining its own relationship to the love that is the character of God. Thus the divine love makes its experience of the world vulnerable to the possible misuse of the moral freedom it creates. This approach affirms the destiny that humanity is able to determine for itself. The reasoning here is that if God's governance of the world is a matter of absolute control, then either none of humanity will be lost (since that would frustrate the divine will) or God is not truly and completely love (since not all of humanity is ultimately saved).<sup>4</sup>

Guy continues to explain how Christian theology has been misled by a "classical and medieval heritage" which assumes that the primary fact concerning God is his omnipotent sovereignty and control over all events, including man himself.<sup>5</sup> To the contrary, the heart of the gospel is not God's omnipotence but his love.<sup>6</sup> Guy argues that love is not simply another attribute or quality in God, but is the very essence and nature of God. Loving "is what *all* of the activities of God accomplish."<sup>7</sup> Consequently, love is more fundamental than any other attribute or action.

In the reality of God, love is more fundamental than, and prior to, justice or power. It is more important for God to give himself to his creation than to rule the world or to be worshiped by the whole creation. Divine love is the ground of divine justice, the motivation of divine power, the character of divine sovereignty. So love does not need to be "balanced" or "kept in check" by any other attribute or value such as justice or holiness. It is the magnificence of the divine love that is the ground and content of the divine majesty and holiness. It is because of love that sin must come to an end; for sin is the contradiction and perversion of love.<sup>8</sup>

What implication does this have for the will of God in salvation? Guy explains,

In the first place, it becomes possible to think about "the will of God as attractive

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<sup>4</sup>Fritz Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 33.

<sup>5</sup>The same argument is made by Clark H. Pinnock, "Between Classical and Process Theism," in *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists*, ed. John B. Cobb Jr. and Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 321.

<sup>6</sup>Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," 34.

<sup>7</sup>"Thus there is no 'doctrine' of the God's love alongside the doctrines of creation, humanity, salvation, church, and ultimate destiny; God's love is the inner content of all the doctrines of Christianity. It is what they are all *about*." *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.* Richard Rice also makes a similar statement, "It is clear, then, that process and open theists hold views of God that are similar in a number of important ways. For both, love is the supreme divine attribute, the essential nature of God. For both, God's experience exhibits relationality, temporality, and contingency. And for both, the world has significance for the inner life of God." Richard Rice, "Process Theism and the Open View of God: The Crucial Difference," in *Searching for an Adequate God*, 184.

rather than coercive, as a delighting more than a deciding” and even as “the desire of the lover for the beloved.” It is widely recognized that in the biblical revelation God’s “will” does not necessarily mean “God’s specific intention in a given situation, what he decides shall actually occur,” but may in fact mean “God general intention, the values with which he is pleased.” Apart from a predestinarian presupposition, it becomes apparent that God’s “will” is always to be understood in terms of intention and desire. “The will of God now becomes, not the orders of a superior directing what a subordinate must do, but the longing of a lover for what the beloved is.” And it is evident that “the grandest – and the final – imagery the Bible uses for [God’s] love is precisely that of lover and beloved, bridegroom and bride. It is the marriage of Christ and the church which is the last act of the long love affair between God and creation.”<sup>9</sup>

Guy is very clear: it is wrong to conclude that God has a specific sovereignty by which he controls everything, including man’s decisions. Rather, out of love, God’s will makes room for genuine freedom. Therefore, God’s sovereignty is not that which “maintains a monopoly of power” or one that seeks to make all the decisions.<sup>10</sup> Rather, God’s sovereignty is one of serving love. Love, in other words, holds a *primacy* in God’s attributes. Love is the *starting point* through which all other doctrines (such as God’s sovereignty) must be interpreted and therefore is the *controlling attribute* in God. Clark Pinnock explains,

We have a God who brings into being significant others who can experience divine love and reciprocate it. Love is not just an attribute among many which may or not kick in. It is the nature of God and central to God’s project. It’s not just one of the *loci* but belongs to the structure, the point of integration and thematic unity. If you accept the biblical picture of divine love, you will find yourself needing to reconsider the abstract categories that have been used for God, and you will have nothing whatever to do with the horror of double predestination. Let us not start with the metaphysical being of God and then insert love somewhere down the line as an add-on.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, what was true of Wesley is true of Arminianism, “Where Calvinism

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<sup>9</sup>Guy, “The Universality of God’s Love,” 35. Guy, quoting C. S. Lewis, believes that this type of love also includes an “enriching” experience for God. “For the interests of deity and humanity are ultimately the same. To borrow Screwtape’s words, the good of the one is the good of the other. God is ‘glorified’ – that is to say, the divine experience of reality is expanded and enriched – as the humanity created in the divine image experiences more and more of its glorious potential for creativity, understanding, love, and the sheer enjoyment of reality.” Ibid., 36. Such a statement by Guy sounds dangerously close towards positing God as a needy being, dependent on his creatures for his full enrichment.

<sup>10</sup>Guy, “The Universality of God’s Love,” 36.

<sup>11</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, “Divine Election as Corporate, Open, and Vocational,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 312.

interpreted God's love in terms of his sovereignty, Wesley interpreted God's sovereignty in terms of his love."<sup>12</sup> It is no surprise then that for Wesley's successor John Fletcher "sovereignty was not so much an unquestioned power as an unfathomable love."<sup>13</sup> As Wesley himself states, love is God's "reigning attribute, the attribute that sheds an amiable glory on all His other perfections" and inevitably rules out Calvinism since it is incompatible with this love.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, Guy not only thinks love is the central, fundamental attribute in God, but he also argues that God's love by nature must be a *universal, impartial, and equal love for all people*. He states, "It is unthinkable that the divine love is restricted to a fortunate part of creation and that another (perhaps even larger) part is excluded." To the contrary, "the divine love includes absolutely all, intending the ultimate good – that is, the eternal salvation – of every person."<sup>15</sup> God's desire is for a "unanimous response from humanity."<sup>16</sup> Anything less would not qualify as divine love. As Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy state, "This love entails that God loves all human beings with a perfect love and wants them to be saved. If God loves only some humans enough to save them, as Calvinism teaches, his love falls far short of perfection. Fortunately, Scripture's depiction of God's attitude toward all people is consistent with its teaching that God is perfect love."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, God intends for all people to be saved. Interpreting Romans 8:28-30

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<sup>12</sup>Herbert Boyd McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace: John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 310.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 1:52.

<sup>14</sup>As quoted in McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 311. Likewise Maddox, "If there was any distinctive element in his broad affirmation of grace's provenience-in comparison with these Anglican precedents-it is that Wesley grounded the gratuity of grace (which provenience insures) more in God's love than God's sovereignty." Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1994), 84.

<sup>15</sup>Guy, "The Universality of God's Love," 36.

<sup>16</sup>Guy believes only a universal divine love which intends to save everybody can provide a motivation for Christians to serve others and pray for all people. *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>17</sup>Boyd and Eddy, *Across the Spectrum*, 154.

Guy states that Paul is not teaching that God has an eternal decree by which he foreordains unconditionally eternal life or damnation, for God is “not imposing the divine will but *working with* those who have made God’s love the functional center of their lives.”<sup>18</sup> By “call” Paul invites man to participate in the divine love, but God never seeks to force himself on anyone.<sup>19</sup> If anyone is not saved it is not because God intended to prevent him or because God withheld his grace from him, but it is due to the person’s own free will.

One should not assume that God always gets what he intends or desires. Divine love in salvation is vulnerable. “God does not have to – and does not in fact – get whatever the divine will includes.”<sup>20</sup> The implications for saving grace are obvious,

For grace is never, strictly speaking, “irresistible.” Indeed, the term “irresistible grace” looks suspiciously like an oxymoron, like “married bachelor” or “square circle” or “causally determined free action.” For grace is the offer of a gift, not the imposition of another’s will; and it is in the nature of a gift that it can be rejected. It is the nature of love that it can be ignored or spurned. That is why it made logical (although perhaps not diplomatic) sense for Stephen to say to the leaders of the religious establishment in Jerusalem, “You always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51).<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, Boyd and Eddy explain how love is connected to synergism, “God loves everyone, but love is a two-way street. While love is who God is, humans are contingent beings who thus must choose it. This is why throughout Scripture God calls people to make decisions.”<sup>22</sup> When sinners do not repent and God’s will is frustrated, God weeps, showing his dynamic relationality towards mankind. Divine love “respects human freedom, even to the extent of allowing humanity to be utterly irrational and perverse –

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<sup>18</sup>Guy, “The Universality of God’s Love,” 39.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 39, 40. Of course Guy seems to assume that the Calvinist view means that God, in irresistibly calling a sinner, forces himself on them, an assumption without justification.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 40.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid. Likewise, McGonigle, summarizing Wesley, states, “The salvation of any man did not depend on the secret, inscrutable, irresistible will of God, but on whether or not that man met the conditions of salvation, vis. faith in Christ.” McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, 309.

<sup>22</sup>Boyd and Eddy, *Across the Spectrum*, 155.

that is, to reject the love that has created, sustained, and redeemed it.” Nevertheless, “If it happens, that rejection is recognized and respected by the very love that is rejected.”<sup>23</sup>

Guy concludes as most Arminians do, arguing that God does not exercise absolute control but rather in divine love he wills that which is best for everybody, namely, “salvation for all of humanity.”<sup>24</sup>

Guy is not the only contemporary Arminian who affirms such a view of divine love. For example, Roger Olson also believes that love has to be the starting point in the debate over grace. Olson states that Arminians “begin with God’s universal love for humanity as their first principle and interpret election and predestination in light of that.”

They do not begin with the humanity and freedom, as some Calvinist evangelicals allege. For Arminians, God’s love is simply incompatible with unconditional election or irresistible grace within a nonuniversalist scheme. In other words, so long as hell is in the picture, as it is for the vast majority of evangelicals, for God to select some fallen persons to everlasting punishment, apart from any free choices they make, is inconsistent with any account of love, including God’s. To avoid impugning God’s character, then, Arminian evangelicals interpret election and predestination as conditional and grace as resistible. This is the interpretation held by a significant portion of evangelical thinkers, including Thomas Oden, Clark Pinnock, Dale Moody, Fisher Humphreys, Jonathan Wilson, and Roger Olson. They avoid semi-Pelagianism by affirming human depravity as helplessness apart from supernatural, assisting grace (prevenient grace) and the divine initiative in salvation. Grace always convicts, calls, enlightens, and enables sinners before they repent and believe. There is a sense, then, in which God regenerates the will of the fallen person before he or she converts, but conversion is his or her work enabled by God. This is, of course, what offends Reformed evangelicals who believe that any truly contingent role of the human person in salvation makes salvation a work and not a gift.<sup>25</sup>

With a universal love of equality being the hermeneutical key to the Arminian’s approach

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<sup>23</sup>Guy, “The Universality of God’s Love,” 45. According to Guy, God’s passionate, universal love which intends for all to be saved leaves open the possibility of universal salvation. “This possibility is not, however, the script for an infinitely intricate and complicated puppet show whose every movement is programmed in advance by the Ultimate and Omnipotent Puppeteer; and so it can never be proclaimed a reality, but only (at most) a hope. The gracious love that intends salvation for all humanity also at the same time confronts every person with a genuine choice regarding the meaning of one’s present existence and the nature of the ultimate future. For this love loves so extravagantly that it is willing to risk eternal anguish rather than turn its beloved humanity into an object to be controlled by the will of another, even a divine Other.” *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>25</sup>Roger E. Olson, “Election/Predestination,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 169.

to the Calvinism-Arminianism debate, doctrines like irresistible grace are out of the question. As Olson explains, the only fitting relationship between the sinner and a God of love is one where the sinner is given ample ability to decide for himself whether he will or will not cooperate with God's grace.

### **A Biblical View of Divine Love**

#### **Arminianism's Distortion of the Love of God**

For the Arminian, synergism is grounded in God's universal, impartial love for all people. Since God loves all people he wants, desires, and tries his hardest to save all people, without violating their libertarian freedom. While such a view of God's love – a love of universal equality – may seem attractive, it is fraught with problems. In Scripture, God's love is much more complex than the Arminian makes it out to be. While a full scale treatment of God's love from a Reformed viewpoint cannot be accomplished here,<sup>26</sup> it is necessary to at least identify three major problems with the Arminian view.

First, simply arguing that love is highlighted in Scripture does not prove that it is more important than any other attribute. As Frame states, "One must also show that other attributes are less important and less central than love."<sup>27</sup> In fact, in Scripture one never gets the impression that other attributes are less central than love. For example, 1 John 1:5 affirms that "God is light." Likewise, John 4:24 says "God is spirit." Are these affirmations any less important than love? Or what about other affirmations such as God is jealous (Exod 34:14); God is holy (Ps 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Isa 1:4; 6:3); God is almighty (Ps 91:1; Prov 21:1; Dan 4:35; Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6, 15; 21:22); God is mercy and compassion (Exod 33:19); etc.<sup>28</sup> One should pay particular attention

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<sup>26</sup>D. A. Carson's study of divine love will be utilized below, but one should also consult J. I. Packer, "The Love of God: Universal and Particular," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, & Grace*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 277-91; idem, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 125-48.

<sup>27</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 53-54.

<sup>28</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 50-51.

to the first attribute, God is holy. Surely the holiness of God could take precedence over the love of God for while God is not obligated to love sinners or save them, God always must be holy. In other words, Scripture can say of God, “Jacob I loved and Esau I hated” (Rom 9:13; cf. Mal 1:2-3), but Scripture could never say (and never does say) “With Jacob I have been holy and with Esau I have not been holy.”<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, if one is simply counting Scriptures, it is hard to argue that love is more fundamental than an attribute like God’s sovereignty or lordship. As John Frame has extensively demonstrated, the name Lord and the theme of sovereign Lordship permeates every book of the Bible.

God performs his mighty acts so that people “will know that I am the Lord” (Ex. 6:7; cf. 7:5, 17; 8:22, and many other verses throughout Scripture). So his lordship is the attribute most often mentioned in Scripture, by the constant use of the Hebrew *Yahweh* and *adon* and the Greek *kyrios*. For pedagogical purposes, and for purposes of edification, it makes good sense to start where Scripture starts and emphasize what Scripture emphasizes, especially since God’s lordship leads so easily to a consideration of other topics.<sup>30</sup>

And again,

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<sup>29</sup>Wesleyan-Arminian H. Orton Wiley seems to disagree. While he agrees with Strong that holiness logically precedes love (God is not holy because he loves, but he loves because he is holy), Wiley disagrees with Strong and Shedd that holiness is fundamental. “But he [Strong] goes farther, he makes holiness fundamental, in that it is a necessity of the divine nature while love is voluntary. For this reason, justice as transitive holiness must be exercised, while mercy as transitive love is optional. Hence God was under no obligation to provide a redemption for sinners. Thus there is laid the basis for the Calvinistic concept of divine grace which finds its logical issue in election and predestination. The same position is taken by Dr. Shedd who states that God can apply the salvation after He has wrought it out to whomsoever He will . . . Dr. Pope avoids this error and states the true Arminian view when, as we have previously indicated, he takes the position that holiness and love are the two perfections which together may be called the nature of God, and that these are the only two terms which unite in one the attributes and essence (Cf. Pope, *Compend. Chr. Th.*, I, p. 331). Both holiness and love belong to the divine essence as well as to the attributes and cannot be separated except in thought. Justice, therefore, can never be necessary and mercy optional, but are always conjoined; and in the redemptive economy, holiness and mercy are supreme.” H. Horton Wiley, *Christian Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill, 1953), 1:383. Unfortunately, Wiley seems to misunderstand the Calvinist. Strong and Shedd are not saying that the Godhead can dispense with divine love because it is optional. Rather, what they are saying is that *in relation to the fallen created order* God is not obligated to love in a saving way, but he is obligated to be holy in executing his just wrath against the sinner. Calvinist do not deny that divine love is necessary within the triune Godhead as each member of the Trinity relates to one another. Rather, it is in relation to fallen human that love is optional in that God does not have to save and therefore holiness is necessary and never optional.

<sup>30</sup>Frame adds a qualification however, “Yet I would not want to say that lordship is metaphysically central to God’s nature in a way that holiness, love, eternity, and righteousness are not. These other concepts can also be central in specific biblical contexts. They also can name God, and even define him, as in 1 John 1:5 and 4:8.” Frame, *No Other God*, 51.

It is especially difficult to make a scriptural case that God's love is more important than his lordship. The NIV uses the word lord 7,484 times, to give only a rough measure of the term's importance. "Lord" is the translation of the covenant name that God gave to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15. God regularly performs mighty deeds so that people (will know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 6:7; 7:5, 17; 8:22; 10:2; 14:4, 18, and often throughout the Old Testament). The fundamental Christian confession is "Jesus Christ is Lord" (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3; Phil. 2:11; cf. John 20:28; Acts 2:36). Of course, God's lordship in Scripture is not opposed to his love. It includes it, and includes all of God's other attributes as well.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, to argue that love must supersede all other attributes due to its quantitative presence in Scripture fails to do justice to the diversity of Scriptures which highlight other attributes, such as lordship.

Second, even if it could be proved that love is more fundamental than any other attribute, love itself still remains to be defined. Simply emphasizing the centrality of love says nothing about what type of love it is that the God of Scripture expresses. One gets the sneaky suspicion that the very reason Arminians so vociferously argue for love is that they want to elevate love above other attributes such as sovereignty and lordship.<sup>32</sup> What Frame says of open theists could just as easily be applied to Arminians as well, "I gather that open theists maintain the primacy of love in part because they want to deny the primacy of attributes like omnipotence and unchangeability, not to mention justice and wrath." Such a view neglects the fact that each attribute is inextricably tied to every other attribute. If divine simplicity teaches us anything it is that God's love is also a *righteous* love, a *holy* love, a *sovereign* love, an *immutable* love, an *omnipotent* love, etc.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 54.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>“Rather than making any single attribute central, classical theology teaches that all of God's defining attributes are ways of describing his simply essence. So God's attributes are not parts or divisions within his nature, but each attribute is necessary to his being. Each is essential to him, and therefore his essence includes all of them. God cannot be God without his goodness, his wisdom, his eternity, or his love. In other words, he is necessarily good, wise, eternal, and loving. None of his attributes can be removed from him, and no new attribute can be added to him. Not one attribute exists without the others. So each attribute has divine attributes; each is qualified by the others. God's wisdom is an eternal wisdom; his goodness is a wise goodness and a just goodness.” Frame goes on to explain how his affirmation of God's attributes as “perspectival” aids such an affirmation of simplicity. “That is, each of them [God's attributes] describes everything that God is, from a different perspective. In one sense, any attribute may be taken as central, and the others seen in relation to it. But in that sense, the doctrine of God has many centers, not just one. Theologians are wrong when they think that the centrality of their favorite attribute excludes the centrality of others. These writers are (as often among theologians) right in what they assert, but wrong in what they deny. Ritschl is right to say that love is God's essence, but wrong to deny that holiness is. And that kind of error is sometimes linked to other theological errors. Often when a theologian

Moreover, Arminianism not only wants to emphasize love's centrality above all other attributes but Arminianism wants to emphasize that the kind of love God has is a love of *equality* and *universality*. However, to define love in its entirety as equality fails to define love as a *sovereign* love. God retains the right to give and withhold his love as he pleases. He is not obligated to bestow his love on all sinners precisely because they are sinners, undeserving of his saving love to begin with. Thomas Schreiner makes such a point especially lucid when he writes,

God is wholly just in condemning sinners who have no ability to obey his law (Rom. 8:7-8). They fail to keep the law because they do not want to obey it. In sinning they carry out the desires of their hearts. God is merciful and loving in not destroying them immediately and offering them salvation. It is a mistake, however, to say that God's love and mercy will provide every person an equal chance to believe. God would be just in sending all to hell since all have sinned. The love and mercy extended to the elect is undeserved. God is obligated to save no one, but out of a heart of mercy he saves some (Eph. 2:4-7). Those who believe that God must extend mercy equally to all are subtly falling into the trap of believing that God would not be good without showing mercy equally to all. This comes perilously close to the conclusion that God should show mercy to all to the same extent, and that such mercy is obligatory. But if God should show equal mercy to all, then mercy is no longer viewed as undeserved. In this view mercy extended to all is demanded by justice. This kind of reasoning should be rejected because the Scriptures make it clear that no one deserves to be saved that all people could be justly sent to hell, and that God's mercy is so stunning because it is undeserved.<sup>34</sup>

Third, not only do Arminians want to affirm that God's love is universal and without prejudice (egalitarian love), but Arminians also want to affirm that God's love is a love of vulnerability due to the fact that God's loving efforts to bestow grace on those he intends to save can be thwarted and resisted leaving God without success. In other words, while classical Reformed theology has emphasized a God who does not suffer loss to his nature nor does his eternal plan suffer defeat, Arminianism believes in a God

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makes God's love central, in contrast to other attributes, he intends, contrary to Scripture, to cast doubt on the reality or intensity of God's wrath and judgment. That was the case with Ritschl, and it is the case with some modern evangelicals." Frame's critique of Ritschl can be applied to Arminians as well. Just as Ritschl's emphasis on love led him to downplay or even deny God's wrath and judgment, so also does the Arminian's emphasis on God's love lead him to embrace a diminished view of God's sovereignty. Frame, *No Other God*, 52.

<sup>34</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, "Does Scripture Teach Prevenient Grace in the Wesleyan Sense?" in *Still Sovereign*, 245.

whose plan can suffer defeat. For the Arminian, only a God who makes himself vulnerable in this way can be truly relational and loving, respecting our libertarian free choice to reject his saving efforts. Reformed theologians like Frame, however, have pointed out that this is a false antithesis.

Must someone be vulnerable in order to love you? Or for you to love him? Someone's vulnerability may lead you to sympathize with him or to pity him, and those emotions can get mixed up with love in various ways. But is it really impossible to recognize love in someone who is too strong to be defeated? On the contrary, do we not desire in a lover precisely the kind of strength that will not fail to support us—the kind of love that will hold us fast, from which nothing can separate us? Certainly that is the nature of God's love in Scripture. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:35). Nobody can pluck us out of his hand (John 10:28-29). God's love is a sovereign love—not, in the final analysis, a vulnerable love.<sup>35</sup>

Frame's point is significant. As sinners who are unable to save ourselves, we must have a divine love that is sovereign, not vulnerable. We need a lover who will actually accomplish his loving intentions, not one who is at our disposal and determination.

### **Divine Love According to Scripture**

So far it has been argued that the Arminian view of love is a distortion of the biblical view of love. Yet, it remains to be discussed how exactly Scripture portrays divine love. D. A. Carson has outlined five ways that the Bible speaks about the love of God. These include: (1) The peculiar love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father; (2) God's providential love over all that he has made; (3) God's salvific stance toward his fallen world; (4) God's particular, effective, selecting love toward his elect; (5) God's love for his own people which is expressed in a provisional or conditional way (conditioned on obedience).<sup>36</sup> Notice, while there is a universal love of God that is exercised in providence (number 2) and in God's salvific stance towards a fallen world

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<sup>35</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 56.

<sup>36</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Downers Grove, IL: Crossway, 2000), 16-21. Also see idem, "How Can We Reconcile the Love and the Transcendent Sovereignty of God?" in *God Under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 279-312.

(number 4), there is also a particular, effective, and selecting love only for his elect (number 4). Both types of love are evidenced side by side in Scripture.

First, God has a salvific stance towards his fallen world, which includes all people. As Jesus states, “For *God so loved the world*, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16a). God loves the world so much that he sends his Son to a wicked and perverse world. As Carson observes, “In John 3:16 God’s love in sending the Lord Jesus is to be admired not because it is extended to so big a thing as the world, but to so bad a thing; not to so many people, as to such wicked people.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, Carson goes on to show that other passages do speak of the “‘whole world’ (1 John 2:2), thus bringing bigness and badness together.”<sup>38</sup> God’s salvific stance is especially demonstrated in the gospel invitation to all people (see chapter 3), whereby the gospel is freely offered and preached to all, inviting them to repent and trust in Jesus Christ (Matt 11:28-30; Acts 2:38).

Second, God has a special, effective, and selecting love for his elect. God unconditionally predestines a people for himself before the foundation of the world, choosing to set his special love and affection upon them for all eternity. In the Old Testament God’s special love is demonstrated with Israel, whom Yahweh chooses to love in a way that he does not love the other nations. Listen to God’s words to Israel in Deuteronomy, “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:7-8; cf. 4:37; 10:14-15). Notice, it is God’s love, not anything in Israel, that prompts him to elect Israel out of the

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<sup>37</sup>Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 16-21.

<sup>38</sup>“More importantly, in Johannine theology the disciples themselves once belonged to the world but were drawn out of it (e.g., John 15:19). On this axis, God’s love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.” One should not conclude from this that Carson is an advocate of unlimited atonement. Carson simply means that one should not argue that passages like John 3:16 and 1 John 2:2 refer to the elect only. Elsewhere Carson clearly argues for limited atonement. *Ibid.*, 73-79.

nations to be his chosen people. When Yahweh selects Israel it is not due to anything foreseen within them but they are selected unconditionally. Furthermore, God chooses Israel instead of and at the expense of the other nations, like Egypt. As Carson explains, “God’s love is directed toward Israel in these passages in a way in which it is not directed toward other nations.”<sup>39</sup> Such particularity is again demonstrated in Isaiah 43.

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; . . . For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you. Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. . . . everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made” (Isa 43:1-4, 7).

In Isaiah 43 we see Yahweh’s particular, discriminative, and selective love for his elect nation. He loves Israel in a way that he does not love the other nations, as demonstrated in the fact that he gives Egypt as a ransom and Cush and Seba in exchange for his chosen people. Israel, and only Israel, was “precious in my eyes, and honored” and therefore Yahweh could say to Israel, in a way that he could never say of any other nation, “I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.” Such a love Israel knew all too well. Isaiah’s words surely would have reminded them of their liberation in Egypt on Passover (Exod 12), where the blood of a lamb was placed above the doorpost so that the angel of death would pass over. As Bruce Ware observes, “For, although God could have given the same warning and instruction in Egypt regarding the upcoming angel of death as he did among the Israelites prior to the exodus, he did not. Nor did he intend to do so.”<sup>40</sup> Rather, Yahweh only warned and instructed the Hebrew people (Exod 12:1-13). Consequently, the angel of death, sent from Yahweh, passed over the homes of those in Israel with the blood while killing the firstborn child of each Egyptian

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<sup>39</sup>Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 18.

<sup>40</sup>Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 30.

household, including Pharaoh's (Exod 12:29-30). Texts like Exodus 12 and Isaiah 43 are representative of many others in the OT where it is clear that God has a special love for his people that he does not have for those whom he has not chosen.

God's special, effective, and selective love is again demonstrated in the New Testament. Quoting Malachi 1:2-3, the apostle Paul states, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom 9:13). Paul explains that God made this choice before they were born and had done nothing either good or bad (9:11). Therefore, the choice was unconditional (before they had done anything) and particular (Jacob, not Esau). The particularity is again emphasized when Paul, answering the objection that there must be injustice with God for choosing to love one and hate the other, answers that there is by no means any injustice for God said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion" (Rom 9:15). Once again, Paul returns to Yahweh's choice of Israel at the expense of other nations like Egypt. In parallel fashion, God chooses some to eternal life while rejecting others. The unconditionality of such a discriminative election is again emphasized when Paul states, "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. . . . So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom 9:16, 18).<sup>41</sup> While an extensive case for unconditional, individual election is not the purpose here,<sup>42</sup> it should

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<sup>41</sup>Paul uses the example of Pharaoh, "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, 'For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth'" (Rom 9:17). It is important to recognize that God makes it clear in Exodus 4:21-23 that he will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he won't let the people go. In other words, God always intended to harden Pharaoh's heart, long before Moses ever approached Pharaoh. God intended to do in order to display his grace and mercy on Israel. In other words, God intended that it would be through judgment that he would save his chosen people. Moreover, notice how Paul responds to the objection of unfairness, "You will say to me then, 'Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will? But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" (Rom 9:19-24).

<sup>42</sup>For such a defense, see the following: John Piper, *Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?" 89-106; Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," 1-58; Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985); Robert Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not an Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 42-66; R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God*

be recognized that God's love in Romans 9 is both unconditional and particular, as opposed to conditional and universal.

Such a discriminating love for his chosen is again demonstrated in Ephesians 5:25-27 which reads, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." Here we see the sacrificial nature of Christ's love for his church. Christ loves his church so much that he died on her behalf ("gave himself up for her") in order that "he might sanctify her." Such a particular love of Christ for the church is used by Paul to instruct husbands to love their wives in that same way. Husbands are to emulate the sacrificial love of Christ when loving their wives. But notice, not only is this love sacrificial but it is discriminate. Just as Christ loves the church in a way that he does not love everyone else, so also the husband is to have a special, particular love for his wife that he does not have for every other woman. The husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the church. Just as Christ gave himself up *for his church*, so the husband is to give himself up *for his wife*.<sup>43</sup> The particular love described in this passage is unavoidable and once again we have an example of divine love that is selective rather than universal. Moreover, it is unfathomable to think, as the Arminian does, what the implications would be if love must always be universal and impartial. If the love of Christ is always universal, contrary to what Paul says in Ephesians 5, what would this mean for husbands and their wives?

Bruce Ware explains the unthinkable,

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(Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1994), 11-58, 103-34; C. Sam Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007).

<sup>43</sup>The logic of limited atonement is impossible to avoid here. Notice, Paul describes Christ's love for the church by saying that he "gave himself up for her." This is the language of the cross where Jesus goes to the cross for his bride, the church. The parallel Paul makes to husbands only strengthens the case. Just as Christ gave himself up for his church so also husbands are to love their wives in the same way. A husband is not called to love and give himself up for all women but only his wife. Likewise, Christ was not called to give himself up for every single person, but only for his bride, the church.

Just imagine the response a husband would receive from his wife were he to say to her, “Honey, I love you, but I want you to know that the love I have for you is the same love in every respect that I have for all the women I meet, indeed, for all the women of the world!” If the wife responded by saying, “Well then, you don’t really love *me!*” she would be right. If a husband’s love for his wife is not particular, selective, and discriminate, then it is not really husbandly love. And the parallel truth is made clear and explicit in this passage: Christ loved *the church* and gave himself *for her*.<sup>44</sup>

Ware’s point is well taken. Christ’s love for his church is the love that is for *his bride*, a love that cannot be general and universal. It is this special, particular love that is far richer than God’s general love for all people. Just as Christ’s love for his church is far deeper than his general love for all people, so is a husband’s love for his wife far richer than his love for all women.

### **Implications for the Divine Monergism**

In this brief appendix we have seen that God not only has a general, universal love for all people, but a particular, efficacious, special, redeeming love only meant for his elect. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is also true in Scripture that God not only has a general call that goes out to all people (see chapter 3), inviting all who hear to repent and trust in the gospel of Christ, but a particular, efficacious, special call that regenerates his elect (see chapters 3 and 4). J. I. Packer explains the correlation,

Calvinism holds that divine love does not stop short at graciously inviting, but that the triune God takes gracious action to ensure that the elect respond. On this view, both the Christ who saves and the faith that embraces him as Savior are God’s gifts, and the latter is as much a foreordained reality as is the former. Arminians praise God for his love in providing a Savior to whom all may come to find life; Calvinists do that too, and then go on to praise God for actually bringing them to the Savior’s feet.<sup>45</sup>

Packer makes an important point. For the Arminian, God’s love and grace are universal and whether or not they become effectual is dependent upon man’s will. In other words, out of love God offers his grace but it is up to man whether or not he will cooperate with

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<sup>44</sup>Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” 31.

<sup>45</sup>Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 285.

it in order to secure it. Consequently, says Packer, we are left with a God who loves but is limited in effecting that love in sinners. Not so for the Calvinist. God not only loves but actually accomplishes his loving intention by effecting grace in those whom he has set his divine affection upon. He not only provides a Savior but actually brings sinners to the “Savior’s feet.” It must be argued, that this latter sense of divine love is far better than the former. Packer explains why,

Calvinism magnifies the Augustinian principle that God himself graciously gives all that in the gospel he requires and commands, and the reactive rationalism of Arminianism in all its forms denies this to a degree. The Arminian idea is simpler, for it does not involve so full or radical an acknowledgment of the mystery of God’s ways, and it assimilates God more closely to the image of man, making him appear like a gentle giant who is also a great persuader and a resourceful maneuverer, although he is sometimes frustrated and disappointed. But if the measure of love is what it really gives to the really needy and undeserving, then the love of God as Calvinists know it is a much greater thing than the Arminians imagine, and is much diminished by the Arminian model of God and his ways with mankind.<sup>46</sup>

The measure of love is, as Packer says, “what it really gives to the really needy and underserving.” For the Arminian, God cannot actually guarantee that his love will grant the needy what they must have. Such a love, as Packer observes, makes God more into the image of man, like a gentle giant who wants to bestow his love but is ultimately frustrated and disappointed by man’s resistance. The Calvinist has a much grander view of divine love. It is not a weak love but a love that is so rich it is impossible to resist. It is a love that is not only sweet but potent, not only gentle but persuasive, not only tempting but intoxicating. This love not only yearns to have its bride, but ineffably draws its bride, making her his own (Eph 1:4-5).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Arminianism has emphasized one aspect of God’s love at the expense of the other. While Arminianism has affirmed God’s providential love and salvific stance towards fallen humanity (two types of love which the Calvinist also

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<sup>46</sup>Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 286.

affirms), Arminianism has failed to affirm God's special, effective, and selective love for his elect. Ware explains why this is such a problem, "It 'flattens' God's love and so reduces it to only one of the biblical senses of God's love. Theological reductionism is dangerous simply because it errs by telling only partial truths. Arminianism, then, tells a partial truth about the love of God, but because it presents it as the whole, it distorts what Scripture actually says."<sup>47</sup> The consequence of the Arminian's reductionism is costly to say the least. If God's love is always the same for everyone, elect and non-elect alike, then God's love has lost its rich, meaningful, and profound sense since God no longer has a special, particular love for his elect that he does not also have for the non-elect. Ware again explains,

Just as "husbandly" love is destroyed altogether if a man were only capable of loving all women (including his wife!) equally and exactly in the same way, so here God's love for his own people is lost when the distinctiveness of this greatest of God's love is denied. As Paul reminds us in Ephesians 1, we should bless and praise God the Father because "*in love* He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself" (Eph. 1:4b-5 HCSB; italics added). His electing love (Eph. 1:4-5), his saving love (Eph. 5:25-27) is, by necessity, a gracious, selective, and particular love for which God is worthy of the highest praise and honor.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, such a flattened view of God's love replaces a sovereign God who bestows his grace on his elect effectually, with, what Carson calls, a "lovesick" God who is at the mercy and will of the sinner. Carson explains the problem precisely,

If the love of God is exclusively portrayed as an inviting, yearning, sinner-seeking, rather lovesick passion, we may strengthen the hands of Arminians, semi-Pelagians, Pelagians, and those more interested in God's inner emotional life than in his justice and glory, but the cost will be massive. There is some truth in this picture of God, as we shall see, some glorious truth. Made absolute, however, it not only treats complementary texts as if they were not there, but it steals God's sovereignty from him and our security from us. It espouses a theology of grace rather different from Paul's theology of grace, and at its worst ends up with a God so insipid he can neither intervene to save us nor deploy his chastening rod against us. His love is too "unconditional" for that. This is a world far removed from the pages of Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Ware, "Divine Election to Salvation," 31.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 22. Of course, one must be careful of the opposite extreme as well, usually found in hyper-Calvinism. As Carson explains, "If the love of God refers exclusively to his love for the elect, it is easy to drift toward a simple and absolute bifurcation: God loves

Carson is right: the cost will be massive if we adopt the Arminian view of God's love. If God's love is always equal and universal, then God's love is no longer sovereign, but made vulnerable and contingent upon the will of man for its efficacy. It is a love, as Packer states, that turns the gracious invitations of Christ in the gospel from expressions of "tender patience of a mighty sovereign," into "the pathetic pleadings of impotent desire." The consequence, says Packer, is that "the enthroned Lord is suddenly metamorphosed into a weak, futile figure tapping forlornly at the door of the human heart, which he is powerless to open." In short, this "is a shameful dishonor to the Christ of the New Testament."<sup>50</sup> Such a conception of God is simply unacceptable and unbiblical. God is not only loving but omnipotent, not only compassionate but sovereign. He is a God who not only makes salvation possible, but is unhindered in his purpose, unthwarted in his intent, to call and regenerate his elect. While the Arminian view of divine love may be egalitarian, it is powerless to save apart from man's consent. Such a love as this, as the saying goes, is a mile wide but only an inch deep. To the contrary, what we need is the love we find in Scripture, namely, an efficacious love.

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the elect and hates the reprobate. Rightly positioned, there is truth in this assertion; stripped of complementary biblical truths, that same assertion has engendered hyper-Calvinism. I use the term advisedly, referring to groups within the Reformed tradition that have forbidden the free offer of the Gospel. Spurgeon fought them in his day. Their number is not great in America today, but their echoes are found in young Reformed ministers who know it is right to offer the Gospel freely, but who have no idea how to do it without contravening some element in their conception of Reformed theology." *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>50</sup>Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 143.

## APPENDIX 2

### MONERGISM, SYNERGISM, AND THE WILL OF GOD

#### **Introduction**

The Arminian not only protests that monergism is in conflict with God's universal, impartial love (see appendix 1) but is also in conflict with God's will to save everyone. Arminians appeal to passages like 1 Timothy 2:3-4 where Paul says that God our Savior desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Or a similar passage is 2 Peter 3:9 where Peter says that the Lord does not wish that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (cf. Ezekiel 18:23). From passages such as these the Arminian concludes that Calvinism is in error to believe that God only wills that some be saved. Stated otherwise, Calvinism's view that God unconditionally elects only some and effectually calls only some, is contrary to God's will to save all. For the Arminian, if a sinner is not saved it is not because God did not choose him but it is because he did not choose God. God always chooses the sinner, but it is up to the sinner to decide if he will choose God (see chapter 5).

Like appendix 1, once again we see the Arminian presenting a half-truth, falling into the error of reductionism. Scripture has much more to say about God's will than what the Arminian makes it out to be. Though an extensive study of the will of God cannot be given here (but can be found elsewhere),<sup>1</sup> it is necessary to understand what

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, trans. and ed. J. K. S. Reid (London: J. Clarke, 1961); Jonathan Edwards, "Concerning the Decrees in General, and Election in Particular," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:526-34; Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 97-101; John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 107-31.

Scripture says concerning the complexity of God's will in salvation.<sup>2</sup> However, first we must begin by understanding the Arminian view.

### The Arminian View of God's Will

Arminianism distinguishes between the *voluntas antecedens* (antecedent will of God) and the *voluntas consequens* (consequent will of God), which are sometimes called God's primordial benevolence and God's special benevolence.<sup>3</sup> The antecedent will is God's will for all of mankind to be saved. God genuinely wills the salvation of all men and does not will that any man be predestined for hell. However, due to libertarian freedom God must wait to see (foreknowledge) what his free creatures will do. Since he foresees that not all men believe in Christ but instead resist God's grace, he, therefore, in response to and consequent upon foreseeing these libertarian free choices, elects those whom he foresees will believe and condemns those whom he foresees will resist him.<sup>4</sup> Such a distinction, which is found in Arminius himself,<sup>5</sup> is explained by Thomas Oden,

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<sup>2</sup>While the issue of God's will was not the focus of the previous chapters, nevertheless, it has major implications for the monergism-synergism debate, as demonstrated in the fact that an Arminian like Thomas Oden would place his discussion of the antecedent-consequent wills in God right in the middle of his case for synergism. See Thomas C. Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 82-91.

<sup>3</sup>Others such as William L. Craig have called these God's absolute intention and God's conditional intention. "But here one must distinguish between God's absolute and conditional intentions concerning creatures. It is, for example, God's absolute intention that no creature should ever sin and that all should reach beatitude. But we have seen that it is not within God's power to determine what decisions creatures would freely take under various circumstances. In certain circumstances, creatures will freely sin, despite the fact that it is God's will that they not sin. If then God, for whatever reason, wants to bring them precisely those circumstances, he has no choice but to allow the creature to sin, though that is not his absolute intention. God's absolute intentions are thus often frustrated by sinful creatures, though his conditional intention, which takes into account the creature's free action, is always fulfilled." William L. Craig, "A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989), 152.

<sup>4</sup>The same can be said for evil in the world. God never wills the existence of or the practice of evil in the world (antecedent will). However, man has libertarian freedom and has chosen to commit horrific atrocities (e.g. the Holocaust). Therefore, God, foreseeing these evils would take place and respecting man's libertarian freedom, chooses to allow these evils to take place (consequent will).

<sup>5</sup>"Whence that may be called the antecedent will by which God wills something to the creature . . . before every act or before any certain act of that creature. So God wills all human beings and every human being to be saved. The consequent is that by which he wills somewhat to the rational creature after a certain act, or after many acts of the creature. So he wills those who believe and persevere in the faith to be saved; but those who are unbelieving and remain impenitent to be condemned." Jacob Arminius, "Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet on Predestination," in *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 3:429-30. Witt observes that Arminius borrows this distinction from John Chrysostom. William Gene Witt, "Creation, Redemption and Grace in the Theology

The antecedent will of God is that all shall be recipients of redemption, yet not by coercion. The consequent will of God, ensuing upon the free, self-determining responses of persons to believe or not believe, is to redeem those who have faith. A just judge may antecedently will all citizens to live, yet consequent to the fact that some decide to be murderers, he wills that criminals be justly punished. Similarly, God wills antecedently that all should be brought to eternal blessedness, yet consequent to the operation of human freedom to reject grace, God wills that those who so reject grace face the consequences of that rejection as separation from God. From the perspective of the consequences of human freedom, one may apply the following formula: “Whatever God simply wills takes place; although what He wills antecedently may not take place,” [Aquinas] if voluntarily refused.<sup>6</sup>

And again Oden explains how such a distinction excuses God from being responsible for man’s unbelief and resistance to grace,

What God gives is never ineptly given or wanting in sufficiency. The deficiency lies in recalcitrant responses to grace. God antecedently wills that all should be saved, but not without their own free acceptance of salvation. Consequent to that exercise of freedom, God promises unmerited saving mercies to the faithful and fairness to the unfaithful. God does not will woodenly without reference to the variability of human willing.<sup>7</sup>

Oden outlines God’s antecedent versus consequent will as such:

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of Jacob Arminius,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 1993), 2:643-44. Stanglin, quoting Arminius, explains how such a distinction differs so drastically from the Reformed, “A definite, logical order is revealed in God’s will and love that differs markedly from the Reformed order. Assuming the created order and the fall into sin permitted by God, there follows 1) God’s general antecedent love and will, 2) the giving of Christ as mediator, 3) human faith foreseen, 4) God’s consequent love and will in Christ (or, *beneplicium*), and 5) particular election and reprobation. From an examination of Arminius’s contemporaries, they are clearly more hesitant than Arminius to describe God’s affection toward all humanity as ‘love.’ Although they would not necessarily be opposed to speaking of God’s common love, the chief difference is that, for Arminius, even this general, antecedent love of God has the salvation of humanity as its goal: ‘For since by his providence [God] has given to all creatures necessary and sufficient means by which they can arrive at their end (finem); but the end of man created in God’s image is eternal life; thus it follows that *all persons have been loved (amatos esse) by God to eternal life by the antecedent will*; nor can God without change of his purpose deny eternal life to persons, without respect of sin; which denial, consequent (*consequens*) on the action of a person, will be of the consequent will [*Works* 3:434-35].’ Like God’s antecedent will, his preceding love for all people comes logically before any actions of particular individuals; like his consequent will, his consequent love logically follows an individual’s acceptance of God’s grace. For the opponents of Arminius, God’s common love for all humanity extends only to general benefits, but not to spiritual salvation. For Arminius, although not all are consequentially saved, all are equally loved antecedently and desired by God for the goal of eternal fellowship. Both God’s general love and his love in Christ are intended for salvation; the former is potential, whereas the latter is actual.” Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation: the Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 225. On Arminius’s view of God’s love in relation to his decrees, see William den Boer, “Jacobus Arminius: Theologian of God’s Twofold Love,” in *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe: Jacob Arminius (1559/60-1609)*, ed. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin, and Marijke Tolsma, Brill’s Series in Church History 39 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2010), 25-50.

<sup>6</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 83.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 207.

1. God's will antecedently is to save all.
2. God's will is to offer grace sufficient to make actual God's universal will to save.
3. Consequent upon the exercise of freedom, God's will is to destine those who freely accept grace to be near to God in eternal blessedness and to destine those who reject grace to be far from God in eternal separation.<sup>8</sup>

How do Arminians like Oden articulate the exact nature of God's antecedent and consequent will? Beginning with God's antecedent will, Oden explains that it is (1) universal, (2) impartial, (3) efficacious, and (4) ordinate. First, God's antecedent will is universal since God wills that all of humanity be saved (John 3:16; Acts 17:30-31; 1 Tim 2:4; Titus 2:11), demonstrated in the fact that God provides a prevenient grace to people as "the necessary means to make a fitting response."<sup>9</sup> God's antecedent will is also demonstrated in that Christ's atoning work is unlimited or universal in extent and God's consequent will is verified because not all those whom Christ died for believe (1 John 2:2). Therefore, God really does want "everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9), wishing none to perish and that is why he pours out his Spirit on all people (Acts 2:17).

Furthermore, Oden argues that just as sin is universal in its extensiveness so also must God's antecedent will be universal in its extensiveness. "If in time sin has become universal, grace is universal before time and toward all time."<sup>10</sup> Second, the antecedent will is impartial, meaning that it is fair, granting all the possibility to be saved.

The general benevolence of God is called antecedent because it precedes any consideration of human responsiveness to it, disposing itself equally and impartially toward all. Accordingly, no human being of any period of history is

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid. To support his view Oden cites Hugh of St. Victor. Oden constantly quotes the early church fathers (e.g. Prosper of Aquitaine, Passaglia, John Chrysostom, John of Damascus, etc.) because he believes that theology needs to look to the early church above all other periods as *the* era which most accurately depicts true Christian theology. Notice, since some of the patristics were synergists, such a method works in Oden's favor. However, why should we give priority to the patristics as the golden age of Christianity? Couldn't one argue exactly the opposite, namely, that the longer we have the more time we have to accurately tune and develop our theology? Moreover, Oden seems to paint an overly optimistic picture of the early church, forgetting the many doctrines the early church taught in error. One only has to consider early heresies like Arianism to see how large portions of the early church fell into heresy. Finally, what about those church fathers who held a monergistic view such as Augustine? Why is Augustine not the church father to imitate? For Oden's method see *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), xiii-xxvi.

<sup>9</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 84.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 85.

left wholly without sufficient prevening grace or neglected by this divine will to save. The Son is sent to redeem the whole world. All human beings are intended recipients of this Word, even those who have not heard it, or upon hearing, having not believed it.<sup>11</sup>

Jack Cottrell makes a very similar argument when he writes,

Moreover, argues the Arminian, for God to deny man the restoration of his free-will by the gift of prevenient grace would contradict the loving, gracious, and kind character of God. The very nature of God (God is love) demands that through prevenient grace man's free will should be restored so that every man has the opportunity and possibility to be saved. A God of love and mercy could never deny to mankind the opportunity to repent and believe because he desires all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4). Therefore, a merciful God will make sure every person has a chance to decide for himself whether or not he will take the gift of salvation that is being offered to him.<sup>12</sup>

Third, God's antecedent will is efficacious in that it is *sincere*. Oden explains that the antecedent will is "guileless, serious, and active; hence, neither feigned, superficial, nor merely passive." Taking a stab at Calvinists, Oden quips, "It is not as if God perfunctorily willed that all be saved but hiddenly determined in advance that some would not be saved, in a way that would appear to make God the author of evil."<sup>13</sup> Fourth, God's antecedent will is ordinate in that it "deliberately orders and provides those sufficient means through prayer, conscience, reason, and especially the ministry of Word and Sacrament to confer these proffered blessings upon sinners."<sup>14</sup> While not all receive these benevolent means, such means are designed to call all people to repentance that they might be justified and regenerated.

However, while God's general or antecedent will is to save all, God never saves apart from human responsiveness, lest God should coerce man.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, God

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>12</sup>Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Redeemer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 381-391.

<sup>13</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 85.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>15</sup>This is set over and against the Calvinists view. Witt explains, "Corresponding to this principle is the rejection of any idea of a double will in God concerning the salvation of the elect and the reprobate, as in Luther's distinction between the 'hidden and revealed God,' or Calvin's distinction between the 'general call' and the 'special call' to repentance. Arminius argues that it would be impossible for God simultaneously to will the repentance of a sinner in his revealed will, and to will the damnation of that same sinner in his hidden will, because there can be no contradictions in the will of God. God calls

also has a consequent will to save those who cooperate (synergism) and are positively responsive. Therefore, the success and accomplishment of God's antecedent will is dependent upon and conditioned upon the response of the sinner.<sup>16</sup> Oden explains,

The divine resolve consequent to human choice wills that *those should be saved who receive* the salvation offered by grace through faith active in love. This is respectively called the consequent redemptive will because it follows as a consequence of God's decision to honor, and not coerce, human freedom. The eternal foreknowledge of God knew that if God did not coerce human freedom, some would believe and others would not.<sup>17</sup>

Oden believes that through the consequent will, "God respects, and does not intrude upon, the human freedom to reject grace."<sup>18</sup> Though God may be willing to save, the sinner may not be willing (Matt 23:37). Like a parent who wants to give a free gift to his child but is dependent upon his child's freedom to accept or reject, God is dependent upon the sinner to say yes or no. If the sinner says no it is because "God's will can be frustrated by human intransigence."<sup>19</sup>

As seen in chapter 5, God's frustration by "human intransigence" was not intended by God and is in that sense "accidental." Arminius states that when the sinner rejects God's grace and call (that is, the universal call or *vocatio catholica*), such a rejection is in no way intended by God himself. "The accidental result of vocation, and that which is not of itself intended by God, is the rejection of the word of grace, the

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sinners in all sincerity with the intention of redeeming them, never with the intention of condemning them. Thus Arminius says: 'Whomsoever God calls, he calls them seriously, with a will desirous of their repentance and salvation: Niether is there any volition of God about or concerning those whom he calls . . . that is either affirmatively or negatively contrary to his will.' God's sincerity toward all fallen and sinful human beings is a correlative of his *philanthropia*, his love for humanity in general. God's general love for the welfare of human beings forbids that he would deal with some according to the mercy of grace unfolded in Christ, but with others according to the strictness of law. Rather, God "has determined to display every good – in which also mercy and long-suffering are comprehended – in the salvation of human beings . . . ." Witt, "Theology of Jacob Arminius," 2:620-22.

<sup>16</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 87.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Barry L. Callen, "A Mutuality Model of Conversion," in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Collins, Kenneth J. and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 157.

contemning of the divine counsel, the resistance offered to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> Such a rejection and resistance is not willed by God but is in its entirety due to the “malice and hardness of the human heart.”<sup>21</sup> Here we see that for Arminius the resistance to God’s call is “accidental” and unintended by God.<sup>22</sup>

In summary, Arminianism affirms that though God’s will is one there are two aspects that can be labeled antecedent and consequent. As Oden states, “The antecedent will focuses on God’s eternal intent to give, the consequent on God’s will in answer to historical human responsiveness. The former is universally and equally given, the latter particularly and variably received according to human choice.”<sup>23</sup> The implications for election and conversion are significant. While God wills that all be saved (antecedently), he foresees that not all will believe, thereby only electing some (consequently). Therefore, election is conditional. Similarly, while God provides a universal prevenient grace to all, wishing all to repent and believe (antecedently), God only regenerates those who cooperate (consequently). Oden concludes,

God does not will saving faith coercively, or without regard for the fulfillment of appropriate conditions leading to the reception of grace. God antecedently wills through reliable ordinate means to confer saving faith upon all. The consequent will of God to save offers the same divine grace as the antecedent. There is only one difference – God’s redemptive will is *consequent to, or follows upon,* human

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<sup>20</sup>Arminius, “Twenty-Five Public Disputations,” in *Writings*, 1:574. Similarly, Arminius states in his *private* disputations, “The accidental [*per accidens*] issue of vocation is, the rejection of the doctrine of grace, contempt of the divine counsel, and resistance manifested against the Holy Spirit, of which the proper and *per se* cause is, the wickedness and hardness of the human heart.” Arminius, “Seventy-Nine Private Disputations,” in *Writings*, 2:106.

<sup>21</sup>Richard Muller, “Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius’s Gambit and the Reformed Response,” in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2:262.

<sup>22</sup>As Clarke explains, “The accidental consequence of vocation, not intended by God, is rejection of the call.” F. Stuart Clarke, *The Ground of Election: Jacobus Arminius’ Doctrine of the Work and Person of Christ* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006), 93. Likewise Witt, “The accidental consequence of vocation, not intended by God, is that some human beings reject grace.” Witt, “Theology of Jacob Arminius,” 2:642.

<sup>23</sup>Oden, *The Transforming Power of Grace*, 88. Oden goes on to quote Hollaz who states, “By His antecedent will, God wills that all men be saved if they believe to the end. But those using aright the ordinary means of salvation are those who finally believe. Therefore the antecedent will of God is not overthrown abolished, or removed by the consequent, but rather passes into the same when the condition is fulfilled.” *Ibid.*, 88-89.

responsiveness.<sup>24</sup>

### **Biblical Problems with the Arminian View**

As attractive as the Arminian view may be, it is inherently unbiblical. The major problem with the Arminian view is that God's intentions and purposes can be thwarted, resisted, and defeated, as evident in the distinction between an antecedent and consequent will. However, such a notion is foreign to the biblical witness (see chapters 2, 3, and 4). The antecedent-consequent distinction makes God dependent upon the will of man for his success. While God may desire one thing, consequent to creating libertarian free creatures, his desires, plans, purposes, and intentions can be finally defied. However, Scripture affirms the exact opposite. In Scripture God's purposes are always effectual and successful. God never fails to bring about what he eternally wills to take place, but his purposes always prevail. As Jeremiah states, "Ah, Lord God! It is you who has made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jer 32:17). The Lord himself responds to Jeremiah, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh, Is anything too hard for me?" (Jer 32:27; cf. Gen 18:14; Luke 1:37; Matt 19:26).<sup>25</sup> The power of God in accomplishing his purposes is again exemplified in Isaiah 14:24-27,

The Lord of hosts has sworn: "As I have planned, so shall it be, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand, that I will break the Assyrian in my land, and on my mountains trample him underfoot; and his yoke shall depart from them, and his burden from their shoulder." This is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth, and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>25</sup>Such language is reminiscent of God's words to Abraham concerning the birth of a son in Sarah's old age, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for the lord?" (Gen 18:14). Likewise, when the angel appears to Mary declaring the forthcoming virgin birth and the pregnancy of Elizabeth, the angel declares in Luke 1:37, "For nothing will be impossible with God." While these verses speak of God's omnipotence in the physical realm, the spiritual realm is no exception. For example, similar language is used when Jesus' disciples ask after Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, "Who then can be saved?" (Matt 19:25). Jesus responds, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26).

It is clear from Isaiah 14 that nothing, not even a nation like Assyria, can annul Yahweh's purposes and plans. How much less so an individual sinner whom God has chosen to save! God cannot be frustrated and there is no one who can turn back his determination. Nebuchadnezzar learned this himself when God humiliated him for his pride (Dan 4:28-33), only later to lift him out of his pathetic, beastly state. Nebuchadnezzar exclaims, "For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Dan 4:34-35). Where is the Arminian understanding of God's antecedent, resistible will in this passage? Indeed, the text says the exact opposite, namely, that God does according to his will and no one can question it or successfully oppose it. As Job proclaims after the Lord questions him, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2; cf. Jer 23:20).<sup>26</sup> Can an Arminian truly affirm what Job says, namely, that *no* purpose of God's can be thwarted? Surely he cannot. Moreover, there are many other texts that also affirm the efficacy of God's purposes. As the Psalmist states, "Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (Ps 115:3). Therefore, there is no one who "can avail against the Lord" (Prov 21:30). Indeed, his Word is certain and efficacious (Isa 31:2; 55:11). Notice what the Lord says in his opposition to false idols and in his promise to bring Cyrus from the east (even before Cyrus was named or born),

I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed and I will do it" (Isa 46:9-11).

The Lord is very lucid; what he intends, purposes, and sets out to accomplish cannot be successfully resisted, whether it be the salvation of a sinner or the uprising of a nation

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<sup>26</sup>Such a truth is also demonstrated by prophecy. See Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

and king.

Moreover, while sometimes in the narrative of Scripture God's plans may appear to suffer defeat, the reader is always informed – even if it be at a later point in redemptive history – that what appeared to oppose God's plan actually was ordained by God to fulfill his plan in the first place. As Frame explains,

Now we should remember that God decrees, not only the end of history, but also the events of every moment of time. For his own reasons, he has chosen to delay the fulfillment of his intentions for the end of history, and to bring about those intentions through a complicated historical sequence of events. In that sequence, his purposes appear sometimes to suffer defeat, sometimes to achieve victory. But each apparent defeat actually makes his eventual victory all the more glorious. The cross of Jesus is, of course, the chief example of this principle. So God intends, not only his ultimate triumph, but also his apparent defeats in history. He intends that history be exactly as it is. Therefore, all his decrees, both those for history and for the consummation of history, always come to pass.<sup>27</sup>

As Frame observes, the cross of Christ is the ultimate example. How could the murder of God's one and only Son be the will of the Father or his ordained and decreed purpose? Yet, Peter states, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). While such a horrific evil at the moment seemed to be the greatest opposition to God's plan of redemption, it was in fact the exact purpose and decree of God to send his Son to be crucified by evil men.

### **The Reformed View of God's Will<sup>28</sup>**

On the basis of a plethora of biblical texts, the Reformed distinguish between

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<sup>27</sup>John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 114.

<sup>28</sup>It should be observed that by "Reformed" I am referring those who hold to a traditional Calvinist position. Keathley misrepresents the "decretal" view when he puts Herman Hoeksema and David Engelsma, two hyper-Calvinists, in the same camp as traditional Calvinists like Francis Turretin. In doing so Keathley states that decretal theology "requires a denial of God's universal love" and a failure to "teach that God loves all humanity and desires the salvation of all" according to 1 Tim 2:4 and 2 Pet 3:9. Two responses are in order. (1) Calvinists do not deny that God has a universal love for all people but only that this does not encapsulate the totality of God's love since God also has a special, particular, and efficacious love only for his elect (see appendix 1). (2) Keathley's error is due to the fact that he includes hyper-Calvinists, who deny the well-meant offer of the gospel, as representatives of Calvinism (a historical caricature). Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 47-51.

God's decretive will and perceptive will.<sup>29</sup> Other Reformed theologians have sought to be even more specific by adding a third category, namely, God's will of disposition.<sup>30</sup> First, the *decretive will* of God is sometimes called God's secret, efficacious, and sovereign will, whereby what he decrees will necessarily be fulfilled. As Frame states, God's decretive will "is synonymous with his foreordination."<sup>31</sup> That which God decrees to take place absolutely will without any question come to pass. Herein sits the doctrines of effectual calling and regeneration for God's decretive will cannot be successfully resisted or thwarted nor can it ever fail.<sup>32</sup> Scripture portrays God's decretive will as

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<sup>29</sup>These two wills in God have been identified by many other labels including: secret or hidden will and revealed will; efficient or efficacious will and permissive will; will of decree and will of command; will of sign (*voluntas signi*) and will of good pleasure (*voluntas beneplaciti*). For an overview of these distinctions in Post-Reformation Reformed Scholasticism, see Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 143-49.

<sup>30</sup>Arminians reject this distinction that the Reformed tradition makes in God's will. As Basinger objects, "Just what is the relationship between God's two wills? They seem to be at cross purposes. For example, his moral will is that all be saved. Yet his sovereign will is that not all be saved. What is the *real* will of God? Obviously it must be the sovereign will, because this is what God ultimately brings about. But what then of the moral will? In what sense is it real; to what extent does it reveal something about God? The Calvinist appears to face an unresolvable dilemma. If God's moral will represents what God really wants to happen, then human sin really thwarts God's will. But then God is not sovereign. On the other hand, if God is sovereign, then the human will cannot be outside of the divine will. But then how can it be true that God really does not want humans to sin? Arminians escape this dilemma by denying that God has an exhaustive sovereign will and thereby they preserve both the reality of sin and the reality of God's moral will. Calvinists must try to have it both ways. Randall G. Basinger, "Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1989), 201-202. However, as we will see, despite Basinger's protest, the distinction is inherently biblical and does not make God schizophrenic but simply highlights different aspects of God's infinitely complex will.

<sup>31</sup>"It is his eternal purpose, by which he foreordains everything that comes to pass." Frame, *No Other God*, 109.

<sup>32</sup>Moreover, since man does not know all of that which God has decreed in eternity past to take place in the future, God's decretive will is secret. For example, God has decreed who will and will not be saved and those whom he has elected will efficaciously be saved, but who those elect are has not been made known to man and therefore remains hidden. To affirm God's decretive will is also to affirm a certain understanding of God's sovereignty. If God decrees *everything* that comes to pass, then God's decree must be exhaustive and meticulous, including not only the ends but the means without which the ends would not be accomplished. Therefore, if God's decree is exhaustive and meticulous so also must his control of events as they occur in time be exhaustive and meticulous, lest he risk those decreed events not coming to fruition. Such a definition of sovereignty is distinctly Reformed and stands in direct contrast to the Arminian understanding of sovereignty which affirms a general sovereignty that denies a meticulous control in order to preserve libertarian freedom. A meticulous decree that results in a meticulous control of all that has been decreed absolutely excludes libertarian freedom and the Arminian refuses to dispense with libertarianism, even at the expense of God's exhaustive sovereignty. Therefore, it should be evident that the difference between the Calvinist's decretive will and the Arminian's consequent will is that the former is not contingent upon libertarian freedom whereas the latter most definitely is. As Frame states, "God's decision as to what will actually happen is not based on his foreknowledge of the libertarian free choices of men." *Ibid.*

unconditional, effectual, immutable, irresistible, and unassailable in numerous texts.

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today (Gen 50:20).

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases (Ps 115:3).

For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose, calling a bird of prey from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it’ (Isa 46:10).

For his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, as he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Dan 4:34-35).

At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will” (Matt 11:25-26).

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know – this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men” (Acts 2:23).

So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills (Rom 9:18).

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11).

These passages are lucid: God’s decretive will is always accomplished according to plan.

However, Scripture also reveals that God has a *perceptive will*. In contrast to God’s decretive or secret will, God’s perceptive will is revealed and made known to man because it consists of those precepts and commandments made evident in Scripture. As Frame states, “God’s perceptive will is his valuations, particularly as revealed to us in his Word (his ‘precepts’).”<sup>33</sup> God’s perceptive will can and is most definitely violated and resisted due to the depravity of man. God has revealed his commandments or precepts

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.,109.

(e.g. Exod 20) but throughout redemptive history man has violated them, bringing upon himself just condemnation (Acts 7:1-51).<sup>34</sup> However, as Frame observes, the “term perceptive is somewhat misleading, for it does not always have to do with literal precepts (God’s laws, commandments).” Sometimes “God’s perceptive will refers to states of affairs that God sees desirable, but which he chooses not to bring about (e.g., Ezek. 18:23; 2 Peter 3:9).”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while many in the Reformed tradition simply list two aspects of God’s will (decretive and perceptive), other Reformed theologians add a third distinction, namely, God’s *will of disposition*. God’s will of disposition includes all of those things which are pleasing and delightful to God.<sup>36</sup> Of course, God’s will of disposition includes God’s precepts, but it also incorporates God’s desire for all to be saved or the fact that God does not delight in the death of the wicked. Consider the following passages:

For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you (Ps 5:4).

I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devises (Isa 65:2).

For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love; for he does not

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<sup>34</sup>Consider the following passages which warrant a perceptive will: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21); “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt 12:50); “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34); “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority” (John 7:17); “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2); “Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17; cf. 6:6); “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess 4:3; cf. 5:18); “Now may the God of peace . . . equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:21); “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:2).

<sup>35</sup>Frame, *No Other God*, 109n5. There are not many theologians who make this third specification (probably for simplicity’s sake), but R. C. Sproul does in *What is Reformed Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 169. Note, those who only use two distinctions in God’s will (decretive will and perceptive will) are not in disagreement with those who utilize three distinctions but simply include the third (will of disposition) within the second (perceptive will). See Frame, *No Other God*, 109n5.

<sup>36</sup>R. C. Sproul, *Willing to Believe: The Controversy over Free Will*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 169.

willingly afflict or grieve the children of men (Lam 3:31-33).

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather than he should turn from his way and live (Ezek 18:23; cf. 33:11; Hosea 11:7-8)?

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not (Matt 23:37-38)!

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Unfortunately, Arminianism views such verses as all-encompassing when it comes to determining how God acts in the world. For example, if it is true that God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23), then it cannot be the case, says the Arminian, that he ordains the death of the wicked. Or, if it is true that God holds out his hands to a rebellious people (Isa 65:2), then it cannot be the case that God would predestine the wicked to hell. However, it is at this point that Arminianism utilizes a faulty hermeneutic, neglecting the analogy of Scripture, which seeks to interpret one passage in light of *all* of Scripture. Yes, God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23) but God does decree the death of the wicked and even creates calamity (Isa 45:7). Yes, God holds out his hands to a rebellious people wanting them to be saved (Isa 65:2), not wishing that any of them perish (2 Pet 3:9; Matt 23:38), but it is also true that God prepares vessels of wrath for destruction in order to make know the riches of his glory (Rom 9:22-23). Yes, Christ himself weeps over Jerusalem, holding out his hands for salvation (Matt 23:38), but it is also true that the Father chose not to send his Son to Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom whom he knew would have repented and instead chose to send his Son to Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum whom he knew would never repent (Matt 11:20-24). Perhaps one of the best examples of such a biblical complexity in God's will is between his decree and his desires in Lamentations 3. Here God says he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of man in 3:33 but four

verses later says, “Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?” (Lam 3:37-38). Here is an example of God’s will of disposition and God’s decretive will in the same chapter. Yes, God does not take joy in the affliction of man (3:33), but it is indeed God himself who wills and decrees that such affliction will come upon man (3:38).

Moreover, like Lamentations 3, there are numerous passages where two or more of these aspects of God’s will are identified within the same passage. As John Piper has shown, these passages can be examined under at least five themes: (1) The Death of Christ, (2) The War against the Lamb, (3) The Hardening Work of God, (4) God’s Right to Restrain Evil and His Will Not to Restrain, and (5) The Punishment of the Wicked.<sup>37</sup> Here we will briefly summarize Piper’s findings.

(1) *The Death of Christ*. God hates and forbids murder (Exod 20:13) and condemns those who murdered his Son (Luke 22:3; Acts 2:23).<sup>38</sup> However, Peter states in Acts 2:23 that the men who put Jesus to death did so “according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.” Likewise, the early church prayed, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place*” (Acts 4:27-28). Such a prayer which speaks of God predestining his own Son’s death is similar to the language used in Isaiah 53:10, “Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him.” God considered it fitting that his Son, the author of salvation, should suffer (Heb 2:10). Therefore, while God forbids murder (perceptive will) and in one sense does not desire death (will of disposition), God ordains and predestines the murder of his Son for the salvation of his people (decretive

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<sup>37</sup>In my opinion, Piper’s essay is still the best chapter treatment of this topic and remains to be reckoned with. Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?” 107-31.

<sup>38</sup>Other passages that also exemplify the sin involved in the crucifixion of Jesus include: John 13:18 (Ps 41:9); John 15:25 (Ps 69:4; 35:19); John 19:24 (Ps 22:18); John 19:36-37 (Exod 12:46; Ps 34:20; Zech 12:10).

will).

(2) *The War against the Lamb*. Next, Piper brings our attention to Revelation 17:16-17 in order to demonstrate that that while it is a sin for the beast and the ten kings (horns) to wage war against the Lamb of God, nevertheless the text says God “put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind” (Rev 17:17). As Piper explains, this is not a mere prediction of what will happen, but is actually a divine intention on God’s part whereby he makes sure this will happen. “John is exulting not in the marvelous foreknowledge of God to predict a bad event. Rather he is exulting in the marvelous sovereignty of God to make sure that the bad event comes about.”<sup>39</sup> Again, while it is against God’s moral law to oppose the Lamb of God (perceptive will) and while God in one sense does not desire anyone to oppose his Son (will of disposition), in Revelation 17:17 God “put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose” (decretive will).

(3) *The Hardening Work of God*. One of the most striking examples of the complexity between God’s decretive and perceptive will is the hardening of the Word of God in the sinner. For example, in Exodus 8:1 the Lord tells Moses to go to Pharaoh and tell Pharaoh to let God’s people go. However, in Exodus 4:21 God says to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.” Which is it? Is it the Lord’s will that Pharaoh let God’s people go or is it the Lord’s will to harden Pharaoh’s heart before hand so that he will not let God’s people go? The answer is both. According to God’s perceptive will, it is morally wrong for Pharaoh not to obey Moses (and ultimately Yahweh) by letting God’s people go. Even Pharaoh admits that he sinned by not letting the Hebrews go free (Exod 10:17). However, according to his decretive

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<sup>39</sup>“Fulfilled prophecy, in John’s mind, is not only prediction, but also promised performance. This is what God meant in Jeremiah 1:12 when he said, ‘I am watching over my word to perform it.’” And again, “John expresses his theology of God’s sovereignty with the words, ‘These things happened in order that the scripture be fulfilled.’ The events were not a coincidence that God merely foresaw, but a plan that God purposed to bring about.” Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?” 113.

will, it is not God's will that Pharaoh let the Hebrews go and God hardens Pharaoh's heart to make sure this is the case. Therefore, as Piper states, "What we see is that God commands that Pharaoh do a thing that God himself wills not to allow. The good thing that God commands he prevents. And the thing he brings about involves sin."<sup>40</sup>

God's hardening work is not limited to Pharaoh, but is also exemplified when Yahweh hardened the heart of Sihon the king of Heshbon so that Israel would be prohibited from passing through (Deut 2:26-30). Surely Sihon's resistance to the people of God was against the perceptive will of Yahweh and yet, according to his decretive will, "God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as at this day" (Deut 2:30). God's hardening work not only occurs with Sihon but also with the cities of Canaan, "For it was the Lord's doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be devoted to destruction and should receive no mercy but be destroyed, just as the Lord commanded Moses" (Josh 11:19-20). What is even more astonishing is that Yahweh's hardening work also occurred with Israel herself. She was hardened when God gave her a "spirit of stupor" as well as eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear (Rom 11:7-9). Yet, it is also true that God commands his own people to repent and believe (Isa 42:18). Clearly, as Piper notes, "When the time has come for judgment God wills that the guilty do things that are against his revealed will."<sup>41</sup> Piper's point is again demonstrated by

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<sup>40</sup>Piper goes on to explain how some have objected to this interpretation. "Some scholars have tried to avoid this implication by pointing out that during the first five plagues the text does not say explicitly that God hardened Pharaoh's heart but that it 'was hardened' (Exod. 7:22; 8:19; 9:7) or that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Exod. 8:15, 32), and that only in the sixth plague does it say explicitly 'the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart' (9:12; 10:20, 27; 11:10; 14:4). For example, Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston say that only from the sixth plague on God gave Pharaoh 'supernatural strength to continue with his evil path of rebellion.' But this observation does not succeed in avoiding the evidence of two wills in God. Even if Forster and Marston are right that God was not willing for Pharaoh's heart to be hardened during the first five plagues, they concede that for the last five plagues God does will this, at least in the sense of strengthening Pharaoh to continue in the path of rebellion. Thus there is a sense in which God does will that Pharaoh go on refusing to let the people go, and there is a sense in which he does will that Pharaoh release the people. For he commands, 'Let my people go.' This illustrates why theologians talk about the 'will of command' ('Let my people go!) and the 'will of decree' ('God hardened Pharaoh's heart')." Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?" 114.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 115.

Jesus who says that while God has given the secrets of the kingdom to his disciples, he has not given this secret to “those outside.” Instead, Jesus himself has spoken in parables so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven” (Mark 4:11-12). Yes, according to the revealed, perceptive will, God commands that his Word should be obeyed. And yes, according to his will of disposition, God does not wish that any perish (Mark 1:15). But the text tells us more. According to the secret, decretive will, God, for his own good purposes, hides his truth so that sinners remain in darkness. The very thing needed to be saved, is denied to them. Jesus’ hard words are again evidenced when Paul says that a “partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). The purpose of the partial hardening is that “in this way all Israel will be saved” (Rom 11:26). And yet, Paul prays, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Rom 10:1). As Piper explains, “God holds out his hands to a rebellious people (Rom. 10:21), but ordains a hardening that consigns them for a time to disobedience.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, while God commands his people not to harden their hearts (Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7; i.e. perceptive will), he simultaneously wills that their hearts be hardened (i.e. decretive will). While such a hardening is permanent for some – actually making sure sinners will not be saved (Mark 4:11-12) – at other times such a hardening is only partial and is actually utilized to bring salvation in the end (Rom 11:26).

(4) *God’s Right to Restrain Evil and His Will Not to Restrain.* Piper defends the complexity of God’s will by turning to those profound passages where God chooses to either restrain or allow evil in the human heart. As demonstrated in Genesis 20:1 with

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<sup>42</sup>Piper goes on to elaborate, “This is the point of Romans 11:31-32. Paul speaks to his Gentile readers again about the disobedience of Israel in rejecting their Messiah: ‘So they [Israel] has now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you [Gentiles] they also may receive mercy.’ When Paul says Israel was disobedient ‘in order that’ Gentiles might get the benefits of the gospel, whose purpose does he have in mind? It can only be God’s. For Israel did not conceive of their own disobedience as a way of blessing the Gentiles or winning mercy for themselves in such a roundabout fashion. The point of Romans 11:31 therefore is that God’s hardening of Israel is not an end in itself, but is part of a saving purpose that will embrace all the nations. But in the short run we have to say that he wills a condition (hardness of heart) that he commands people to strive against (“Do not harden your heart” [Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7]).” *Ibid.*, 116.

Abimelech, God has divine authority over the heart of a king, for, as Proverbs 21:1 states, “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will” (cf. 1 Chron 5:25-26; 2 Kings 15:19; 2 Chron 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-3). In the case of Abimelech, Sarah is taken by Abimelech under the impression that she is Abraham’s sister. However, when warned in a dream not to touch her, Abimelech confesses that he had not touched her due to the integrity of his own heart which the Lord confirms (20:6). However, it is also true that “I [Yahweh] also kept you from sinning against me; therefore I did not let you touch her” (20:6b). In other words, God restrained Abimelech from committing sin. However, at other times it is the will of the Lord that sin increase, as in the case of Eli’s sons who lead Israel in idolatry (1 Sam 2:22-25). Though Eli’s sons sinned against the Lord by committing sexual immorality in front of Israel, such evil was ordained by God for “it was the will of the Lord to put them to death” (1 Sam 2:25b). Again, according to the perceptive will, adultery is always against the will of God. Likewise, according to his will of disposition, the Lord never delights in adultery. However, according to the decretive will, it was the will of God that Eli’s sons commit these evils because the Lord desired to put them to death and remove the evil from within Israel’s midst.

Furthermore, as Piper observes, the word “desired” in 1 Samuel 2:26 is the same word used in Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 33:11. Here God states that he does not “desire” the death of the wicked. Nevertheless, God did desire to put Eli’s sons to death. “The upshot of putting the two together is that in one sense God may desire the death of the wicked and in another sense he may not.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore, to take “desire” in Ezekiel 18:23 as Arminians do fails to do justice to the full testimony of Scripture which sees a complexity to God’s desires with both the righteous and the wicked.

A final example of evil persisting according to the will of God is in Romans

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 117.

1:24-28 where Paul states that God handed sinners over to the lusts of their hearts, to dishonorable passions, and to a base mind and improper conduct. Clearly, such evils like sexual immorality are against God's perceptive will and will of disposition. And yet, according to his decretive will, God wills that these sinners continue in their wretched sin to the point of no return (i.e. handed them over). Could God have restrained such sin as he did in other cases? Absolutely. However, in this case it was actually the will of God that evil increase and continue to persist unto death and condemnation. What this means is that "God chooses for behavior to come about that he commands not to happen."<sup>44</sup> Therefore, God has the authority and power to either restrain sin or permit it.<sup>45</sup>

(5) *The Punishment of the Wicked.* God actually delights *and* does not delight in the punishment of the wicked. Deuteronomy 28:63 states, "And as the Lord took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the Lord will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you." But does not Ezekiel 18:23 say that the Lord does not take delight in the punishment of the wicked? It does and yet Deuteronomy also says the Lord *does* take delight in bringing ruin and destroying *his own* people. Such a tension does not expose a contradiction, which would certainly be the case if one abides by the Arminian view, but rather such texts as these demonstrate the complexity within God's will. As Piper states, in these texts "we are faced with the inescapable biblical fact that in some sense God does not delight in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18), and in some sense he does (Deut 28:63; 2 Sam 2:25)."<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid. Piper notes that there are many other examples in Scripture where God does not restrain evil precisely because he planned to use it. See 2 Sam 7:14; 1 Kings 12:9-15; Judges 14:4; Deut 29:2-4. There is no way around these texts for the Arminian. God does not simply foreknow evil but he actually ordains it and ensures its fulfillment. For example, in Deuteronomy 29:2-4, Israel's hardness of heart was because "the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear." While sin is the responsibility of the sinner, clearly this text demonstrates that the Lord can keep a sinner engrossed and enraptured in his sin so that he does not repent and believe.

<sup>46</sup>Piper also brings to attention those texts where God laughs over the ruin of a people. See Prov 1:24-26; Isa 30:31; Rev 18:20. Ibid., 118-19.

### Conclusion

Unfortunately, Arminians fail to satisfactorily address these many texts Piper has put forth as justification for a distinction between God's perceptive will and decretive will (e.g. Kenneth Keathley).<sup>47</sup> But as the above texts demonstrate, there is a profound complexity and depth to God's will which the Arminian fails to do justice to. When the Arminian reduces God's will to his desire that all be saved, vast portions of Scripture have gone neglected. Yes, indeed, God does desire that all be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9), but God also has decreed that he "has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills" (Rom 9:18).

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<sup>47</sup>Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 42-62. While Keathley does mention Piper he does not interact with the many texts Piper puts forth.

## APPENDIX 3

### EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION IN THE REFORMED *ORDO SALUTIS*: A REVIEW OF PROPOSALS OLD AND NEW WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS GIVEN TO MICHAEL HORTON'S "COVENANT ONTOLOGY AND EFFECTUAL CALLING"

#### **Introduction**

Historically Calvinism has emphasized the Scriptural teaching of effectual grace. God efficaciously works in the heart of the dead and depraved sinner creating new life. Consequently, the sinner responds to God's gifts of faith and repentance in conversion. Therefore, God's salvific work is monergistic not synergistic. More specifically, those in the Reformed tradition have identified two aspects of this monergistic work of God to call and awaken the sinner to new life: effectual calling and regeneration. However, Calvinists have differed on the relationship between the two. For example, John Murray distinguishes between effectual calling and regeneration, placing the effectual call prior to regeneration in the *ordo salutis*. On the other hand, Louis Berkhof differs, identifying regeneration as that which precedes effectual calling. Other Reformed theologians such as Anthony Hoekema and more recently Michael Horton have argued that such bifurcations are erroneous and there needs to be a return to the Westminster Confession which includes regeneration in effectual calling. Instead of separating regeneration from effectual calling the two must be viewed as identical and synonymous. It is the purpose of this appendix to probe the intricacies of each view and the arguments put forth in order to determine both the strengths and weaknesses of each position. Since Horton's proposal is the most extensive of all the views, a majority of this appendix will be devoted to interacting with his model in order to determine whether or not it should be adopted.

### 1. Effectual Calling Precedes Regeneration in the *Ordo Salutis*

In 1955 John Murray published *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* in which he argued that effectual calling and regeneration are distinct rather than identical, with the former preceding the latter.<sup>1</sup> It is “calling that is given distinct emphasis and prominence as that act of God whereby sinners are translated from darkness to light and ushered into the fellowship of Christ.” Murray continues,

This feature of New Testament teaching creates the distinct impression that salvation in actual possession takes its start from an efficacious summons on the part of God and that this summons, since it is God’s summons, carries in its bosom all of the operative efficacy by which it is made effective. It is calling and not regeneration that possesses that character. Hence there is more to be said for the priority of calling.<sup>2</sup>

Murray proposes four reasons why calling is the first step instead of regeneration. (1) The sinner must be united to Christ for the inward operate grace of God to take effect in regeneration. “It is calling that is represented in Scripture as that act of God by which we are actually united to Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:9). And surely union with Christ is that which unites us to the inwardly operate grace of God. Regeneration is the beginning of inwardly operate saving grace.”<sup>3</sup> (2) The link between the effectual call and the sinner’s response is regeneration.

Calling is a sovereign act of God alone and we must not define it in terms of the response which is elicited in the heart and mind and will of the person called. When this is taken into account, it is more reasonable to construe regeneration as that which is wrought inwardly by God’s grace in order that we may yield to God’s call the appropriate and necessary response. In that case the new birth would come after the call and prior to the response on our part. It provides the link between the call and the response on the part of the person called.<sup>4</sup>

(3) The apostle Paul in Romans 8:29-30 clearly designates that which is first in the order

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<sup>1</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 93-94.

of the application of salvation, namely, calling. It is calling, not regeneration which comes first after election.<sup>5</sup> (4) The eternal purpose of God's grace places the efficacious summons as logically prior to regeneration. The rest of the *ordo salutis* is dependent upon the effectual call.

A more recent proponent of Murray's logical priority of effectual calling is John Frame. Frame argues that regeneration is the first blessing of effectual calling and the second event in the *ordo salutis*. "When God calls us into fellowship with Christ, he gives us a new life, a new heart. Regeneration is the first effect of effectual calling. And regeneration is the first item on the list that occurs inside of us."<sup>6</sup> Rather than regeneration being the first act from which all the other blessing of salvation flow, it is the effectual call that is the ultimate source.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Regeneration Precedes Effectual Calling in the *Ordo Salutis*

While Murray's view has been popularized within Reformed theology, many Calvinists prior to Murray did not hold such a view, but rather followed Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) who placed regeneration before the effectual call. According to Berkhof, regeneration is "that act of God by which the principle of the new life is implanted in man, and the governing disposition of the soul is made holy."<sup>8</sup> Berkhof lists three positive characteristics of what regeneration is:

- a. Regeneration consists in the implanting of the principle of the new spiritual life in

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<sup>5</sup> "It is not by any means likely that Paul in Romans 8:28-30, in setting forth the outlines of the order followed in the application of redemption, would begin that enumeration with an act of God which is other than the first in order. In other words, it is altogether likely that he would begin with the first, just as he ends with the last. This argument is strengthened by the consideration that he traces salvation to its ultimate source in the election of God. Surely he traces the application of redemption to its beginning when he says, 'whom he did predestinate them he also called.' And so calling would be the initial act of application." Ibid., 94.

<sup>6</sup> John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 185.

<sup>7</sup> "So, in effectual calling, God acts on us first, before we offer him any response. He acts sovereignly, calling us into fellowship with his Son. This calling is the ultimate source in time of all the blessings of salvation." Ibid., 84.

<sup>8</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 468-69.

- man, in a radical change of the governing disposition of the soul, which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, gives birth to a life that moves in a Godward direction.
- b. It is an instantaneous change of man's nature, affecting at once the whole man, intellectually, emotionally, and morally.
  - c. It is in its most limited sense a change that occurs in the *sub-conscious* life. It is a secret and inscrutable work of God that is never *directly* perceived by man.<sup>9</sup>

According to Berkhof, regeneration is radical, instantaneous, and sub-conscious.

Regeneration changes both the disposition of man's soul and nature (intellectually, emotionally, and morally). In contrast to regeneration, Berkhof also gives three characteristics of the internal or effectual call:

- a. It works by moral suasion plus the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit.
- b. It operates in the conscious life of man.
- c. It is teleological, calling the elect to fellowship with Christ.

With regeneration and effectual calling defined and distinguished, how does Berkhof understand the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration? First, Berkhof rightly observes that in the seventeenth century effectual calling and regeneration were identified as synonymous.<sup>10</sup> Berkhof concedes that such a view finds support from Romans 8:30 where Paul does not use the term regeneration but "evidently conceives of it as included in calling in Rom. 8:30."<sup>11</sup> Berkhof explains that the post-Reformation Calvinists included regeneration in calling in order to preserve the close unity between "the Word of God and the operation of grace."<sup>12</sup> However, Berkhof rejects this position because he is motivated by other means. "In a systematic presentation of the truth, however, we should carefully discriminate between calling and regeneration."<sup>13</sup> Berkhof detects several differences that exist between the two. First, while regeneration occurs internally on the sub-conscious, effectual calling occurs externally in the conscious life.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 469.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 471.

In other words, while regeneration is internal and inward oriented, effectual calling is external, coming from without. “Regeneration,” writes Berkhof, “in the strictest sense of the word, that is, as *the begetting again*, takes place in the sub-conscious life of man, and is quite independent of any attitude which he may assume with reference to it. Calling, on the other hand, addresses itself to the consciousness, and implies a certain disposition of the conscious life. This follows from the fact that regeneration works from within, while calling comes from without.”<sup>14</sup>

Second, while regeneration first creates new life, effectual calling extracts the new life within.

Furthermore, regeneration is a creative, a hyper-physical operation of the Holy Spirit, by which man is brought from one condition into another, from a condition of spiritual death into a condition of spiritual life. Effectual calling, on the other hand, is teleological, draws out the new life and points it in a God-ward direction. It secures the exercises of the new disposition and brings the new life into action.<sup>15</sup>

With these differences between regeneration and effectual calling established Berkhof argues that regeneration must precede the effectual call on the basis of four stages.

(1) Logically, the external call in the preaching of the Word (except in the case of children) generally precedes or coincides with the operation of the Holy Spirit, by which the new life is produced in the soul of man. (2) Then by a creative word God generates the new life, changing the inner disposition of the soul, illuminating the mind, rousing the feelings, and renewing the will. In this act of God the ear is implanted that enables man to hear the call of God to salvation of his soul. This is regeneration in the most restricted sense of the word. In it man is entirely passive. (3) Having received the spiritual ear, the call of God in the gospel is now heard by the sinner, and is brought home effectively to the heart. The desire to resist has been changed to a desire to obey, and the sinner yields to the persuasive influence of the Word through the operation of the Holy Spirit. This is the effectual calling through the instrumentality of the word of preaching, effectively applied by the Spirit of God. (4) This effectual calling, finally, secures, through the truth as a means, the first holy exercises of the new disposition that is born in the soul. The new life begins to manifest itself; the implanted life issues in the new birth. This is the completion of the work of regeneration in the broader senses of the word, and the point at which it turns into conversion.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Emphasis added. Ibid. Notice, this is the same point Frame (following Murray) made earlier when he said that regeneration is the first *inward* act. The only difference is that Frame will give logical priority to effectual calling while Berkhof will not. Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 184-185.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

Notice, for Berkhof the effectual call (stage 3) comes after regeneration (stage 2).<sup>17</sup> While regeneration is an inward renovation of the soul, effectual calling is an outward working through the Word.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Effectual Calling and Regeneration are Identical

Early Reformed theology saw a strong affinity between regeneration (in the narrow sense) and effectual calling.<sup>19</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) is an example of the simplicity of viewing the two terms as synonymous. No section is to be found under the title of regeneration. Rather, chapter 10 is titled “Of Effectual Calling.”

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds, spiritually and savingly, to understand the things of God; taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that

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<sup>17</sup>I am following Anthony Hoekema, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Michael Horton in my interpretation of Berkhof. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 106; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Effectual Call or Causal Effect? Summons, Sovereignty and Supervenient Grace,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49, no. 2 (1998): 218; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 235-36. However, not all theologians have read Berkhof in this way. For instance, Robert Culver believes Berkhof simply does not distinguish between the two. Such a reading is illegitimate on the basis of the quote above and does not examine the minute distinctions Berkhof makes. Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2005), 682.

<sup>18</sup>Of what benefit is it to Berkhof to give regeneration the logical priority rather than effectual calling? By placing regeneration prior to the effectual call in the *ordo salutis* Berkhof is able to argue in favor of infant regeneration. Due to the possibility of infant regeneration, the priority of regeneration to effectual calling cannot be a logical order in all circumstances, but in the case of elect infants it must be a temporal order which applies. “The new life is often implanted in the hearts of children long before they are able to hear the call of the gospel; yet they are endowed with this life only where the gospel is preached. There is, of course, always a creative call of God by which the new life is produced. In the case of those who live under the administration of the gospel the possibility exists that they receive the seed of regeneration long before they come to years of discretion and therefore also long before the effectual calling penetrates to their consciousness.” Therefore, with elect infants God implants the seed of regeneration and new life and it is only when the infant comes of age that the effectual call, alongside of the preached Word, applies that new life consciously. However, Berkhof goes on to clarify that this is not the normal pattern in adults who experience regeneration, effective calling, and conversion simultaneously. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 468-469.

<sup>19</sup>“In the first half of the seventeenth century, theologians tended to define the term ‘effectual calling’ in such a way as to include regeneration. This is reflected in the ‘Westminster Confession of Faith,’ which has a chapter on effectual calling but no chapter on regeneration. In the later seventeenth century, for example, in John Owen, a clearer distinction was made between effectual calling and regeneration, with much more stress being placed on the latter. The general shape of the *ordo salutis* was thus clarified. It was argued that effectual calling produces regeneration. Faith, as the first fruit of regeneration came next; the *ordo salutis* then divided into two streams.” A. T. B. McGowan, “Justification and the *Ordo Salutis*,” in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 151.

which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace.<sup>20</sup>

The effectual call incorporates the transformation of the sinner's nature and the enlightening of the sinner's mind. The language of Ezekiel 36 whereby a heart of stone is replaced with a heart of flesh is utilized by the confession. Not only is a new heart necessary but so also is a renewed will. All of this language (new nature, enlightened mind, a new heart, a renewed will, etc.) is language later Calvinists would identify with regeneration in distinction from effectual calling.<sup>21</sup> But with the WCF, as W. G. T. Shedd rightly concludes, "Effectual calling is made to include regeneration, because man is said to be altogether passive, until he is enabled to answer the call."<sup>22</sup>

The Particular Baptists in England who wrote The Second London Confession of 1677/1689 also found Westminster's identification of regeneration with effectual calling agreeable. The wording is almost identical to Westminster and the same affinity between effectual calling and regeneration is apparent.<sup>23</sup> While not all Baptists would maintain such simplicity,<sup>24</sup> John Dagg would in his *Manual of Theology* (1857) where he

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<sup>20</sup>The Confession goes on to state, "II. This effectual call is of God's free and special grace alone, not from any thing at all foreseen in man; who is altogether passive therein, until, being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit, he is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the grace offered and conveyed in it." Philip Schaff, "The Canons of the Synod of Dort," in *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 3:624-25.

<sup>21</sup>The Westminster Shorter Catechism also equates effectual calling and regeneration in questions 29 through 31. *Ibid.*, 3:682-83.

<sup>22</sup>Shedd makes a very similar affirmation when commenting on the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechism. "According to this definition the effectual call produces (a) conviction of conscience, (b) illumination of the understanding, (c) renovation of the will, and (d) faith in Christ's atonement." Shedd continues, "But such effects in the soul as conviction, illumination, renovation, and faith imply a great change within it. These are fruits and evidence of that spiritual transformation which in Scripture is denominated 'new birth,' 'new creation,' 'resurrection from the dead,' 'death to sin and life to righteousness,' 'passage from darkness to light.' Consequently, effectual calling includes and implies regeneration. Hence it is said in Westminster Confession 13.1 that 'they who are effectually called and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified.'" William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 761.

<sup>23</sup>William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, VA: Judson, 1969), 264-65.

<sup>24</sup>The New Hampshire Confession of 1833 speaks of the grace in regeneration but has no section specifically for the effectual call. *Ibid.*, 393-94.

states that regeneration “is the same as effectual calling.”<sup>25</sup>

In the twentieth century Anthony Hoekema, following seventeenth century Reformed theology, also argued that effectual calling and regeneration are identical.<sup>26</sup>

I prefer to think of regeneration (in the narrower sense) and effectual calling as *identical*. There is precedent for this view. Seventeenth-century theology generally identified the two. More recently the same position was taken by Augustus Hopkins Strong and Herman Bavinck. Since effectual calling is the sovereign work of God whereby he enables the hearer of the gospel call to respond in repentance and faith, it is not different from regeneration. These two expressions describe the change from spiritual death to spiritual life by means of different figures: the bestowal of new life (regeneration) or the bestowal of the ability to respond to the gospel call in faith (effectual calling).<sup>27</sup>

Both effectual calling and regeneration are accomplishing the same *telos* and in Scripture they are two concepts that refer to the same reality. Therefore, when speaking about effectual calling Hoekema says that this too is the work of the Spirit whereby he (1) opens the heart, enabling the sinner to respond (Acts 16:14), (2) enlightens the mind so the sinner can comprehend the gospel (1 Cor 2:12-13; 2 Cor 4:6), and (3) bestows spiritual life so the sinner can turn in faith to God (Eph 2:5).<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Murray, Frame, and Berkhof who explained regeneration as inward and effectual calling as

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<sup>25</sup>“The internal grace, which renders the outward call effectual, is the grace of regeneration. Hence regeneration, considered as the work of the Holy Spirit, is the same as effectual calling; considered as the change of the sinner’s heart, it is the effect of this calling. The calling is effectual, because it produces regeneration in the subject on whom it operates.” John Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1990), 220.

<sup>26</sup>Ferguson observes how it was in the seventeenth century that many Reformed theologians began to use regeneration in the narrow sense of the word. Many seventeenth century Calvinists such as Herman Witsius, Peter van Mastricht, as well as the delegates at the Synod of Dort, assumed regeneration under the topic of effectual calling. However, later Reformed theologians separated regeneration from effectual calling. Ferguson laments this change. “While this served to focus attention on the power of God in giving new life, when detached from its proper theological context it was capable of being subjectivized and psychologized to such an extent that the term ‘born again’ became dislocated from its biblical roots.” Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit, Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 117. See Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London: Edwards Dilly, 1763); Peter van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2002); “The Canons of the Synod of Dort,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3:587-92.

<sup>27</sup>“We may note that these two are parallel in that both are new beginnings which lead to continuing spiritual growth. Regeneration issues in conversion and leads to a life of obedience and consecration. Effectual calling, as we saw above, summons us to a distinctive kind of life: a life of fellowship with Christ, holiness, freedom, and peace.” Emphasis added. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 106.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

outward, Hoekema says that the effectual call is inward, changing and regenerating the sinner's heart since effectual calling and regeneration are synonymous.<sup>29</sup>

Though he never mentions Hoekema, Reformed theologian Michael Horton has also argued that effectual calling and regeneration are synonymous. "I contend here that we should recover the earlier identification of the new birth with effectual calling."<sup>30</sup> In short, effectual calling *is* regeneration. Horton is reacting against the tendency of later Reformed theologians, particularly Louis Berkhof, who bifurcate regeneration and effectual calling, placing the former before the latter. Horton challenges what he titles "the ontology of infused habits" that "funds a later Reformed distinction between regeneration (direct and unmediated) and effectual calling (mediated by the Word)." Horton proposes otherwise,

Eliminating the distinction between regeneration and effectual calling entails the elimination of any appeal to the category of infused habits. Effectual calling *is* regeneration (new birth), and although the Spirit brings about this response when and where he will, it is brought about through the ministry of the gospel, as Romans 10:17; James 1:18; and 1 Peter 1:23 explicitly state.<sup>31</sup>

Out of all of the Reformed theologians discussed, Horton's treatment of the issue is the longest and most involved. Therefore, it is necessary to elaborate on Horton's proposal.

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<sup>29</sup>However, if Hoekema asserts that regeneration is an instantaneous, supernatural, and radical change that implants new spiritual life, affects the whole person, and occurs below consciousness, what role does the preached Word have? Hoekema answers, "We conclude, therefore, that though God by his Holy Spirit works regeneration in the narrower sense in us immediately, directly, and invincibly, the first manifestations of that new spiritual life comes into existence through the word-whether it be preached, taught, or read. New spiritual life, in other words, is bestowed immediately by God; but the new birth is produced mediately, through the word." Notice, however, that Hoekema does make an exception for infants. "There are, however, exceptions to this rule. Infants of believers who die in infancy, and are therefore unable to respond to the word, can be regenerated apart from the word. Note Westminster Confession, X, 3: 'Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh within, and where, and how he pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.' Cf. also Canons of Dort, 1,17." Herman Bavinck also affirms this exception. *Ibid.*, 109-10.

<sup>30</sup>Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 216-217, 230, 231.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 216-217.

## Michael Horton's Proposal

**Speech-act Theory.** First, Horton capitalizes on Kevin Vanhoozer's use of speech-act theory<sup>32</sup> to demonstrate that effectual calling is communicative rather than purely causal. "First, drawing on Kevin Vanhoozer's suggestive appropriation of speech-act theory for understanding the effectual call, I propose that *a communicative paradigm offers richer possibilities for affirming the monergistic and Trinitarian conclusions of traditional Reformed theology than are possible in a purely causal scheme.*"<sup>33</sup> Horton begins here by providing the historical context. Against Rome, Socinianism, and Arminianism, the Reformed of the seventeenth century defended a *sola gratia* that was "emphatically monergistic: that is, salvation in its entirety can be ascribed to God and his grace alone."<sup>34</sup> There was, says Horton, an inherited ontology shared by all groups which was "essentially causal (patterned on physics: the movement of objects in space)" and therefore "Reformed theologians went to great pains to insist that regeneration or effectual calling was not an impersonal operation of one object upon another, nor coercive." Horton is right. As seen in chapter 2, Augustine, Calvin, Dort, and Westminster all emphasize monergism but quickly qualify that it is not coercive nor impersonal, but both effectual and sweet.

In doing so, Reformed scholastics like John Heinrich Heidegger placed great emphasis on the unity between Word and Spirit. "The word is the same which man preaches and which the Spirit writes on the heart. There is strictly one calling, but its cause and medium is twofold: instrumental, man preaching the word outwardly;

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<sup>32</sup>"A speech act has two aspects: propositional content and illocutionary force, the 'matter' and 'energy' of communicative action. The key notion is that of illocution, which has to do not simply with locating or uttering words but with what we do *in* uttering words." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 118.

<sup>33</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 217. See Vanhoozer's chapter entitled "Effectual Call or Causal Effect? Summons, Sovereignty & Supervenient Grace," in *First Theology*, 96-126. On speech-act theory see John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

<sup>34</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 217.

principal, the Holy Spirit writing it inwardly in the heart.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, as Horton observes, there is an inseparability between “the preached Word and the Spirit” as well as an inherent Trinitarianism in that the “Father preaches, the Son is preached, and the Spirit is the ‘inner preacher,’ who illumines the understanding and inclines the will to receive him.”<sup>36</sup> The unity between Word and Spirit came into keen focus in reaction to synergism’s objection that man is turned into a block or stone (see chapter 2). In response the Reformed argued that grace does not destroy nature but liberates it, a point Horton readily acknowledges.<sup>37</sup> Such a reality is expressed well by the term “effectual calling,” which Horton believes “already indicates a more communicative model of divine action than causal grammars allow.”<sup>38</sup>

It is at this point that Horton appeals to the correlation between speech-act theory and effectual calling. As Vanhoozer explains, “The illocution – what the speaker has done – is the objective aspect of the speech act; the perlocution – the intended effect of the act – is the subjective aspect of the speech act.”<sup>39</sup> And again,

A perlocution is what one brings about *by* one’s speech act. Speech frequently presents an argument, but arguments are intended to produce assent. Perlocutions have to do with the effect on the hearer of a speech act. Now, the primary role of the Holy Spirit, I believe, is to minister the Word. The application of salvation is first and foremost a matter of applying both the propositional content and the illocutionary force of the gospel in such a way as to bring about perlocutionary effects: effects that in this case include regeneration, understanding and union with Christ. Not for nothing, then, does Paul describe the Word of God as the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17). It is not simply the impartation of information nor the transfer of mechanical energy but the impact of a total speech act (the message together with its communicative power) that is required for a summons to be efficacious.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>As quoted in Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. E. Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1950; reprint, London: Wakeman Trust, 2002), 518. See Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 218.

<sup>36</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 218.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 220.

<sup>39</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 21n113.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 121-22.

Speech-act theory, Horton argues, fits well with the world described in Scripture, namely, one that is “from beginning to end a creation of the Word.”<sup>41</sup> It is dangerous to believe that concepts are “merely linguistic vessels that do not affect the content and, on the other hand, to suppose that whenever certain terms are employed, they bear the same meaning that they have in their original philosophical context.”<sup>42</sup> And yet, philosophical concepts and words are used differently. Medieval (post-Thomist) theology depended directly on the categories of Aristotle. Vanhoozer and Horton recognize that Aquinas saw grace as acting on the soul not as an efficient cause but as a formal cause, which would be challenged by the Reformers. Yet, the Reformers did not abandon Aristotle’s causal categories but distinguished between the efficient cause of grace (God), the material/meritorious cause (Christ’s person/work), the means of grace (Word and sacrament), the instrumental cause (faith), and the final cause (God’s glory in salvation).<sup>43</sup>

However, Horton is not satisfied with these causal categories, but, along with Vanhoozer, wants to improve upon them with the language of “supervenience.” As Vanhoozer states, the effectual call does not merely “intervene” but “supervenes on the external call” and “is a speech act with a unique communicative force.”<sup>44</sup> Vanhoozer believes this avoids making God a mere physical cause or, in the case of Arminianism, an ineffectual influence.<sup>45</sup> Vanhoozer proposes, with Horton following shortly behind, that we are to think of the “God-world relation in terms of communicative rather than causal agency.” The desired result is that the “call exerts not brute but communicative force.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 220.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>43</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 221; Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 101.

<sup>44</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 106, 109; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 222.

<sup>45</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 109; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 222.

<sup>46</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 117; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 223.

Building off of John Searle and Nicholas Wolterstorff, Vanhoozer explains how a “speech act has two aspects: propositional content and illocutionary force, the ‘matter’ and ‘energy’ of communicative action.”<sup>47</sup> Vanhoozer’s “claim is that God’s effectual call is not a causal but a communicative act” like Jesus’ verbal command, “Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43), “a speech act that literally wakes the dead.”<sup>48</sup> Likewise, the same can be said concerning God’s redemptive proclamation, “I declare you righteous.” Vanhoozer raises the question then, “Is the grace that changes one’s heart a matter of energy or information? I believe it is both, and speech-act theory lets us see how. God’s call is effectual precisely in bringing about a certain kind of understanding in and through the Word. The Word that summons has both propositional content (matter) and illocutionary force (energy).”<sup>49</sup> The implication for the effectual call is a shift in thinking from a causal picture to that of a communicative picture.

Horton imbibes Vanhoozer’s proposal, applying a communicative theory to passages like John 6:44-45, which show that the “Father’s drawing, in other words, is not causal but communicative.” Indeed, the “Word itself has a kind of force.”<sup>50</sup> In other words, says Horton, in “effectual calling, the Spirit draws us into the world that the Word not only *describes* but also *brings into existence*. . . . When the Spirit brings about in the audience the perlocutionary effect of the divine drama’s performative utterance, effectual calling does not mean mere influence or coaxing, but a thoroughly effective speech-act.”<sup>51</sup> Horton seeks to preserve the best of both worlds. Effectual calling remains monergistic and at the same time communicative. Horton rejects mere “persuasion”

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<sup>47</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 118; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 223. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>48</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 1118; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 223.

<sup>49</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 118; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 223.

<sup>50</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 120; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 224.

<sup>51</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 225.

because it is too weak. “God did not *persuade* creation into being or lure Christ from the dead, but summoned, and it was so, despite all the odds. At the same time, one can hardly think of these acts of creation and resurrection as *coerced*.”<sup>52</sup> Horton dismantles the Arminian objection that an effectual call is coercive, treating men like blocks or stones. To the contrary, the effectual call is personal in that it is communicative, but it is also effectual because the Word communicated does not merely present data, but actually does what it says, namely, creates life where there was only death.

However, Horton anticipates an objection, namely, that his great emphasis on a communicative scheme (via speech-act theory) in contrast to a purely causal scheme, overstates his case and results in the infamous swinging of the pendulum to the other extreme. Does Horton dispense with causality all together? Absolutely not!

As useful as communicative theory is for enriching our concept of effectual calling – and, more generally, delineating a covenantal account of the God-world relationship – what we need is a richer account of causality, not to simply dispense with the analogy itself. After all, every speech-act involves *causes*, and to the Spirit we have even attributed the perlocutionary *effect* of all divine works. Vanhoozer has himself spoken of speech-acts as bearing both “matter” and “energy,” *bringing about* not only understanding but also the appropriate response. Therefore, to say that “God’s effectual call is not a causal but a communicative act” seems to overstate the case. Even to suggest that humans are “‘ontologically constituted’ by language” implies some notion of cause. Like the analogies of creation and resurrection, then, speech-act theory does not do away with causality, but redefines it in more interpersonal and so covenantal terms.<sup>53</sup>

The importance of Horton’s qualification cannot be overemphasized. Horton does not want to dispense with the language of causality. What he does want to dispense with are those models which purely or only describe effectual calling in causal categories, completely ignoring the communicative and personal nature of God’s speech. In fact, as Horton says, it is impossible to do away with causality for even in speech-act theory communicative language is dependent upon causal categories. Rather, Horton is trying to improve upon causal language by accompanying it with interpersonal, covenantal

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 225.

categories made available in speech-act theory.

Vanhoozer does the same, “What God says makes a difference, but it would be perverse to describe this difference in terms of impersonal causation. If God’s call must be described in terms of causality, it would have to be of a communicative kind, and hence personal. God comes to the world in, and as, Word. To be precise, God relates to the world with both “hands”; Word and Spirit.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it is not as if Horton is against the use of causality but rather the wrong use of causality. Or as he states, “So the question is not *whether* God causes things, but *how*.”<sup>55</sup>

In my view what is transcended is a certain construal of causality that is too closely associated with physics: the movement of bodies from one place to another through force rather than the movement of persons from enmity to reconciliation through speech. While this sort of an account will not bring to an abrupt end debates over divine and human freedom, it may at least situate this long discussion within a more productive paradigm. Bringing about a new relationship through communication is different from simply causing movements between objects.<sup>56</sup>

Horton’s point is well taken. If Calvinists only use causal categories to describe the effectual call, we are in danger of the Arminian objection, namely, that grace is coercive, treating men like blocks of wood. In this paradigm, sinners become mere objects moved upon. But if, as Horton suggests, we combine causality with communicative categories, we have then preserved both the omnipotence of grace *and* the interpersonal, relational nature of grace. Grace is not the movement of one body upon another through force, but “the movement of persons from enmity to reconciliation through speech.”<sup>57</sup> As Vanhoozer states, by keeping Word and Spirit together, in effectual calling we have not “simply the impartation of information nor the transfer of mechanical energy but the impact of a total speech act (the message together with its communicative power) that is

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<sup>54</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 123.

<sup>55</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 229.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>57</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 121; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 226.

required for the summons to be effective.”<sup>58</sup> The Spirit *advenes* on the preached Word “when and where God wills” making it efficacious.<sup>59</sup>

This communicative understanding of the effectual call steers in between two extremes: (1) a grace that is a brute cause and (2) a grace that is mere information or exhortation.<sup>60</sup> A causal but communicative understanding of grace, Horton argues, finds biblical support in Isaiah 55:10-11, where we read that God’s Word goes out from his mouth and shall not return to him empty, but shall accomplish that which he purposed and succeed in the thing for which he sent it. “God’s speech not only reaches its addressee, but because the Spirit is always already present in creation to bring that speech to fruition, its illocutionary stances, which are always deployed in a covenantal context (commands, promises, curses, blessings, etc.), also actually bring about the reality they announce.”<sup>61</sup> For the Arminian, God’s communicative power fails to actually bring about the reality God announces if the sinner determines himself otherwise. Not so with Horton’s Calvinism, which is not only causal but communicative in that God’s Word brings about its intended effect by the Spirit in those it is meant to save. “Effectual calling is a divine *poēsis*, a drama that not only is *about* something but also *itself* bears the reality. Words are no longer seen as signs of a longed-for signified, nor as identical to the signified, but as mediating an advent.”<sup>62</sup> Horton concludes by showing the attractiveness of his view for those in the Reformed tradition.

Instead of thinking merely of a sole agent (God) acting upon another agent (humans), greater conceptual space is given to the noncoercive yet always effectual working of the divine persons upon, for, and within people. Since Scripture itself treats God’s effectual working as communicative (primarily, speaking), and

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<sup>58</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 121; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 226.

<sup>59</sup>Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 121; Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 226.

<sup>60</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 227.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 228.

Reformation theology has emphasized this point, the categories of speech-act theory appear promising. It is always through his Word and Spirit that God brings about intended results in the created order—an important premise in challenging the notion of a subconscious and unmediated work of the Spirit prior to a communicatively mediated effectual calling. . . .<sup>63</sup>

And again, Horton demonstrates how a causal-communicative paradigm preserves both the omnipotence of God’s grace (contra Arminianism) and at the same time avoids coercion due to the interpersonal nature of the Spirit advening upon the Word.

More like being overwhelmed by beauty than by force, the call is effectual because of its *content*, not because of an exercise of absolute power independent of it. And yet the appropriate “amen” cannot be attributed to the recipient, since it is the Father’s communication of the Son and the Spirit’s effective agency within the natural processes of even truth-suppressing consciousness that brings it about. The doctrine of effectual calling helps to unseat the sovereign self from its pretended throne by emphasizing that this new creation, including the new birth, is a divine *poēsis*, not a self-making. And yet, it does not unseat through violence anymore than through mere moral persuasion. We receive our new selves as we are baptized into the new creation of which Christ is the firstfruits, becoming joint heirs with Christ as a power and right that is not inherent in us but as those “who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). “WorDED” by this Word, or as I have described it elsewhere “rescripted” into God’s drama of redemption, we simply find ourselves new creatures in a new world that we freely choose, though not *because* we freely chose it.<sup>64</sup>

**Challenging the Distinction.** Second, with speech-act theory situated, Horton moves to challenge the distinction between regeneration and effectual calling. “The argument thus far would suggest that regeneration is not a direct and immediate act of God on the soul, but the perlocutionary effect of the illocutionary act pronounced by the Father in the Son through the Spirit.”<sup>65</sup> Horton laments how in the

postconfessional era it became common to speak of regeneration as a work of the Spirit in the heart prior to effectual calling; a direct and immediate work of the Spirit infusing a new disposition or habit, planting the principle of new life, so that one would respond favorably to that external ministry. So while effectual calling was indeed mediated by the preached gospel, regeneration was a subconscious operation of sovereign grace. . . . here I want to offer a more direct challenge to the distinction between regeneration and effectual calling.

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 230.

Here Horton, as he admits, is going against most Reformed theologians in the post-confessional era who have identified regeneration as a *direct* and *immediate* act of God, as demonstrated in chapter 4 via Herman Bavinck.

Horton believes that post-confessional Reformed theologians have not escaped the remnants of a medieval ontology of infused habits, as is especially evident in their understanding of infant regeneration. Using Turretin as an example, Horton demonstrates how the Reformed denied the Lutheran view that infants actually have faith and yet, like Jeremiah and John the Baptist, the infant can receive the Spirit before he or she actually believes.<sup>66</sup> Turretin states, “Although infants do not have actual faith, the seed or root of faith cannot be denied to them, which is ingenerated in them from early age and in its own time goes forth in act (human instruction being applied from without and a greater efficacy of the Holy Spirit within).”<sup>67</sup> Horton argues that even by Turretin’s time “Reformed theologians were not entirely at one as to whether regeneration preceded (or could be distinguished from) effectual calling.” However, as the “tradition moved steadily away from any notion of baptismal regeneration . . . this space was sometimes filled by the concept of a direct and immediate regeneration – the implanting of the *seeds* of faith and repentance – that would in due time be exercised by the elect through their hearing the gospel.”<sup>68</sup>

Next, Horton turns to Charles Hodge. With continuing threats from Arminian synergism, Hodge argued that a physical rather than a mere moral change takes place in regeneration. This simply means that regeneration “was not something that was offered or presented to the will and understanding, but an effectual operation upon both that immediately imparted a new disposition or *habitus* – although *habitus* does not mean

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<sup>66</sup>Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. G. M. Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 2:583.

<sup>67</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 233.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

exactly the same thing here as it does in Roman Catholic theology.”<sup>69</sup> Hodge’s point, says Horton, “was to say that in regeneration the Spirit actually changes one’s disposition, so that the preaching of the gospel will be received rather than resisted.”<sup>70</sup> Hodge, argues Horton, was reacting to synergists in New Haven such as Nathaniel Taylor and Charles Finney. For Taylor and Finney regeneration was “basically equivalent to repentance” as evident in Finney famous (or infamous!) sermon “Sinners Bound to Convert Their Own Hearts.” Hodge, however, responded by affirming a regeneration that occurs subconsciously, as opposed to a conscious regeneration that is effected through cooperation.

Subsequently, Horton draws a line from Hodge to Louis Berkhof, placing particular emphasis on the “subconscious” nature of regeneration. For Berkhof, like Hodge, regeneration is subconscious and therefore both direct and immediate. While regeneration is the inward renovation of the soul, effectual calling is outward working through the Word. Berkhof anticipates an objection to his bifurcation, namely, if regeneration is inward and immediate while effectual calling is outward and mediate what place is there for the Word as a means in regeneration?<sup>71</sup> Berkhof defers to Shedd who argued that the Spirit acts in a direct and immediate manner upon the soul of the sinner in regeneration.<sup>72</sup> Shedd extracts the Word from regeneration and, as Horton argues, fails to recognize “that in every external work the persons of the Trinity cooperate

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 234. Horton has in mind Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1872), 2:6.

<sup>70</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 234.

<sup>71</sup>Berkhof further clarifies the question as follows, “The question is not, whether God works regeneration by means of the creative word. It is generally admitted that He does. Neither is it, whether He employs the word of truth, the word of preaching in the new birth, as distinguished from the divine begetting of the new man, that is, in securing the first holy exercises of the new life. The real question is, whether God, in implanting or generating the new life, employs the word of Scripture or the word of preaching as an instrument or means. The discussion of this matter often suffered in the past from the lack of proper discrimination.” Berkhof is unclear and confusing in this statement. While he says God “works regeneration by means of the creative word” he ends by arguing that God does not employ the word in implanting or generating new life. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 474.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

in their unique ways, with the Word always included as the ‘matter’ of the Spirit’s work.”<sup>73</sup> Berkhof recognizes the conflict his view seems to have with texts like James 1:18, I Peter 1:23, and Matthew 13 (cf. Mark 4:1-12; Luke 8:4-10) where the Word plays a significant role in regeneration. Nevertheless, Berkhof follows Shedd, insisting that regeneration is an “operation upon ‘the essence of the soul itself,’” which for Horton is a return to a medieval ontology.<sup>74</sup>

Horton is convinced that though many of the Reformed at first rejected the language of infused habits, yet, in their apologetics with Arminian synergists they were once again driven back to the “traditional categories of infused habits in order to affirm the logical priority of grace.”<sup>75</sup> Horton points to Peter van Mastricht who speaks of the “Word’s mediation of regeneration” but still affirms a regeneration that “infuses a new habit, not actually creating faith and repentance, but disposing one to the effectual call.”<sup>76</sup> Horton goes on to argue that Mastricht is no different from Aquinas because regeneration is an “infused *habitus* distinct from any actual act of faith, hope, love, or repentance.”<sup>77</sup> Consequently, regeneration and justification are “given different ontological fields of discourse that allowed them to drift apart like tectonic plates.”<sup>78</sup> In other words, by identifying regeneration with infused habits, not only is regeneration separated from effectual calling, but justification is left all alone, “on a forensic island surrounded by a sea of inner operations that take place apart from the declaratory Word,” a move which, according to Horton, lacks exegetical and theological grounding.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 236.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid. Horton quotes van Mastricht, *A Treatise on Regeneration*, 26.

<sup>77</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 236.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 236-37.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

According to Horton, the problem only escalated in a dilemma aroused by the monergism-synergism debate.

Again, part of the problem is that these writers [Shedd] link the Word to “moral persuasion,” to which Arminians (not to mention Socinians and Pelagians) had reduced regeneration. In other words, *the ministry of the Word was understood simply in its illocutionary function of presenting the content of the gospel*. At that point, one could either challenge this moral-influence theory of the Word, reasserting the Reformation’s strong conception of the Word’s efficacy, or one could insert an immediate, subconscious regeneration prior to hearing and believing.<sup>80</sup>

Shedd and company clearly chose to go the route of inserting an immediate, subconscious regeneration prior to hearing and believing. Horton, however, believes the proper move is to instead emphasize the efficacy of the Word, as evident in Horton’s utilization of speech-act theory. Such a move, says Horton, allows one to affirm both the monergism that Calvinists sought to preserve and the efficacy of the Word.

If we treat the instrumentality of the Word in terms of both illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, then the monergism that these writers rightly insist on affirming can be firmly defended without appeal to a regeneration that is logically prior to and separate from effectual calling through the gospel. To borrow Vanhoozer’s expression above, we could say that effectual calling *advenes* on the external preaching of the gospel. With the older Reformed writers, we still affirm the necessity of the Spirit’s sovereign work of inwardly regenerating hearers while affirming that this operation *beyond* the mere hearing of the external Word nevertheless occurs *with* it and *through* it.<sup>81</sup>

Clearly, Horton is not afraid to say that not only does effectual calling work with the Word but so also does regeneration work with and through the Word.

Of course, since effectual calling *is* regeneration, the Word’s involvement with one entails the other as they are synonymous. The presence of the Word in effectual calling/regeneration means, for Horton at least, that we do not need to affirm “either subconscious operations or infused habits.” Rather, “Scripture repeatedly identifies God’s ‘creating power’ with the Word that is spoken. Like the original creation, the new birth is

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

the result of a mediated speech-act.”<sup>82</sup> Does this mean, as at first glance it would seem, that Horton denies any use of the language of “infused habits”? Not at all. “In my view we can even speak of ‘new qualities infused,’ as long as it is simply a figure of speech for the unilateral gift of faith and new birth through the gospel.”<sup>83</sup> Horton acknowledges that the Canons of Dort, Herman Witsius, Peter van Mastricht, and the Westminster Confession all use the language of “infused habits.” However, Horton does not believe Dort, for example, was using this language in the way that later Reformed theologians like Berkhof would. When Dort says effectual calling/regeneration includes the infusion of new qualities it is “not a medieval notion of infused habits, but simply a manner of expressing the impartation of new life from a source external to the person who is ‘dead in sins.’ . . . [regeneration] is not represented here as accomplished apart from or prior to the external preaching of the gospel.”<sup>84</sup> Here Horton appeals to John Owen who writes that in regeneration the Spirit “doth make use of the word, both the law and the gospel.”<sup>85</sup>

Horton appeals to Luke 1:13, 57; 23:29; John 1:14; 16:21; Galatians 4:24; James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 and reproves Berkhof for neglecting the New Testament language. Since, as these texts demonstrate, regeneration does not occur apart from the Spirit’s work with the Word, why “not just say that the Spirit regenerates through the proclaimed gospel, albeit when and where the Spirit chooses, just as the Reformed confessions and catechisms affirm?” He continues,

Do we really need to appeal to the medieval category of infused habits, however revised in content, in order to refute synergism? Does such a formulation save us from synergism only to open the door again to dualism between God’s person and Word? Crucially, *what* is implanted, according to the passages we have cited: a principle of new life or the living and active and life-imparting Word? Does the

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 238.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 203n83.

<sup>85</sup>John Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 3:316.

Spirit ever implant a seed other than his Word? And is that Word ever a mere principle or silent operation rather than a vocal, lively, and active speech? Is it not the case that in attributing all efficacy to the Spirit's power, Scripture typically represents this as occurring through the word of God that is "at work" in its recipients (1 Thess. 2:13; cf. Rom. 8:14-16; 1 Cor. 2:4-5; 4:12-13; 2 Cor. 4:13; Gal. 3:2; Eph. 1:17; 1 Thess. 1:5; Titus 3:5)-specifically, that message of the gospel, which is "the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Thess. 1:5)?<sup>86</sup>

How then does Horton's proposal impact the Calvinistic affirmation of *effectual* grace?

Horton gives at least two answers. (1) By rejecting the formula of regeneration as the infusion of habits apart from the Word and effectual calling as distinct, subsequent, and through the Word, Horton believes he has avoided a schizophrenic soteriology. "In my view, the separation of regeneration and effectual calling set up the possibility for a schizophrenic soteriology according to which part of the *ordo* is radically forensic in its source and the other remains trapped in the medieval ontology that the former was struggling to overcome."<sup>87</sup> (2) Speech-act theory preserves the proper meaning of regeneration in monergistic categories. "I am suggesting that speech-act theory is better suited to amplifying both the monergistic principle of *sola gratia* and the forensic principle of even an inward regeneration mediated by the external Word than a causal framework that requires infused habits apart from that mediation."<sup>88</sup> For Horton, the external call includes the "*locutionary act of the Father's speaking and the Son as the illocutionary content.*" The internal or effectual call, which is synonymous with regeneration, "*is the Spirit's perlocutionary effect.*"<sup>89</sup>

Regeneration or effectual calling is something that happens to those who do not have the moral capacity to convert themselves, yet it not only happens *to* them; it also happens *within* them, winning their consent. The source of this inward renewal is not an infused principle, but the Spirit working through the Word. The notion of regeneration as mediated by the preached gospel leads inevitably to mere "moral persuasion" (i.e., offering an external enticement that the will may either accept or reject) only if the Word is mere information or exhortation rather than the "living

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<sup>86</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 239.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

and active” energy of God.<sup>90</sup>

Horton’s point here is foundational to his proposal. Rather than a purely causal scheme which relies on the infusion of habits to defend God’s monergistic work against the synergism of Arminianism, Horton proposes a communicative paradigm (via speech-act theory) in which regeneration by the Spirit through the Word is not mere information but actually the living and active energy of God. In other words, it is “not *immediacy* that guards regeneration from synergism, but its divine *source*.”<sup>91</sup> Therefore, as seen with speech-act theory, no “wedge can be legitimately driven between speech and action.” Rather, “God’s speaking is active; the Word itself has the power, in the Spirit, to bring about its intended effect within creaturely reality without violating creaturely integrity.”<sup>92</sup>

### **An Evaluation of Proposals Old and New**

In evaluation of these three distinct views within the Reformed tradition, I find Berkhof’s position to be the most problematic, Murray’s/Frame’s position to be less problematic but not completely satisfying, and Hoekema’s/Horton’s position to be the most fulfilling, though itself not without certain challenges.

#### **John Murray**

Murray’s proposal is very attractive for several reasons. (1) Murray seems to avoid the very problem Horton has with Berkhof, namely, a regeneration where there is an infusion of habits apart from the Word that is prior to effectual calling through the Word. For Murray, regeneration is the first result of effectual calling. Therefore, it is not possible to drive a wedge between effectual calling and regeneration, as Horton believes Berkhof does. (2) In placing effectual calling prior to regeneration, Murray seems to keep the Word central in both. The gospel call goes forth, the Father effectually calls his elect

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 241.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 242.

and then the Spirit irresistibly applies the Word to the elect in the new birth. (3) It makes logical sense at least that God would first irreversibly call his elect to himself and then, when they come, grant them new life. The sinner is summoned and it is the regenerating work of the Spirit which makes the summons effectual. As Murray explains, it is regeneration that is the link between the call and the response of the sinner.<sup>93</sup>

However, Murray (and Frame) do not escape difficulties. First, Murray argues that it “is calling that is represented in Scripture as that act of God by which we are actually united to Christ (cf. I Cor. 1:9). And surely union with Christ is that which unites us to the inwardly operate grace of God. Regeneration is the beginning of inwardly operate saving grace.”<sup>94</sup> However, on what biblical basis can Murray say that it is effectual calling that is first, due to its ability to unite us to Christ, when in Scripture we see that regeneration is also spoken of as uniting us with Christ. For example, Paul says in Ephesians 2:5, “That by the power of the Spirit sinners dead in their trespasses are made alive together *with Christ*” (Eph 2:5, 10). And while God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), it is in regeneration that God re-creates us in Christ (Eph 2:5, 10). As Hoekema explains, “It is therefore at the moment of regeneration that union between Christ and his people is actually established. This union is not only the beginning of our salvation; it sustains, fills, and perfects the entire process of salvation.”<sup>95</sup> Or as Piper states, “In the new birth, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ in a living union. . . . What happens in the new birth is the creation of life in union with Christ.”<sup>96</sup>

Moreover, if, as Murray says, effectual calling is external and it is

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<sup>93</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 93-94.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>95</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 60. Hoekema views regeneration in particular as the initial point where union with Christ begins. “By regeneration, also called the new birth, is meant that act of the Holy Spirit whereby he initially brings a person into living union with Christ, so that he or she who was spiritually dead now becomes spiritually alive.” *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>96</sup>John Piper, *Finally Alive* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009), 32-33, 37.

regeneration that is the first inward movement of grace resulting from the call, then how can effectual calling be that which unites the sinner to Christ. To the contrary it would seem that according to Murray's logic it would have to be regeneration that receives the credit in uniting the sinner to Christ. Consider Frame's statement, for example, "When God calls us into fellowship with Christ, he gives us a new life, a new heart. Regeneration is the first effect of effectual calling. And regeneration is the first item on the list that occurs inside of us."<sup>97</sup> If regeneration is the first item on the list, even over and against effectual calling, that is inside of us, then how can the sinner be united to Christ in effectual calling? Indeed, as Frame states, the effectual *vocatio* "calls us into fellowship with Christ" but that fellowship is not truly fulfilled until regeneration results.<sup>98</sup>

Second, Murray says regeneration "is the beginning of inwardly operate saving grace."<sup>99</sup> Frame follows suit when he considers regeneration to be "the first item on the list that occurs inside of us."<sup>100</sup> However, if regeneration is the "first" item that occurs "inside of us" what does this mean for effectual calling? While regeneration is internal, the effectual call is strictly external. But Scripture never speaks of the effectual call as a mere external call. As Hoekema explains, the effectual call is *inward*, changing and regenerating the sinner's heart.<sup>101</sup> The Word utilized by the effectual call penetrates the very heart and soul of the sinner (1 Cor 1:18-31; 2 Thess 2:14). Hence, many

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<sup>97</sup>Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 185.

<sup>98</sup>Reymond also has recognized this problem but takes the issue of union with Christ one step farther back to election. He asks, "But is it so that it is effectual calling *per se*, apart from regeneration, that actually unites one to Christ?" Reymond answers, "The elect sinner is not brought by God's effectual summons into the ἐν Χριστῷ, *en Christō*, relationship for the first time. Rather, it is *because* the elect sinner was 'chosen *in Christ* before the creation of the world' and because he was *in Christ* when Christ died for him that God effectually calls him." Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 716.

<sup>99</sup>Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 93.

<sup>100</sup>Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 187, 185.

<sup>101</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 109-10.

Reformed theologians have termed the gospel call as an external call and the effectual call as an internal call. While the Word is preached to all, the Spirit speaks and calls the elect internally with the Word. Moreover, while Frame does view the Word as instrumental in regeneration he does not explain why regeneration should be separated from effectual calling if both work with and by the Word.

Third, Murray argues from Romans 8:29-30 that Paul clearly designates that which is first in the order of the application of salvation, namely, calling. It is calling, not regeneration which first comes after election. However, as seen above, Berkhof and Hoekema recognize that the natural reading of the text is that regeneration is assumed or included in Paul's language of calling. Moreover, historically the sharp distinction between effectual calling and regeneration did not come until the latter half of the seventeenth century. Are we to think that Paul had in mind this sharp distinction of post-Reformed scholasticism in Romans 8:28-30 to such an extent that he consciously left out regeneration while including effectual calling? It seems unlikely. It is more natural that Paul would assume the reality of the new birth when he identifies the effectual call as that which results from election and comes prior to justification.

### **Louis Berkhof**

With Berkhof the weaknesses overshadow the strengths. For Berkhof, one conceivable strength in placing regeneration prior to effectual calling is that he seeks to explain how infants are saved if they should die in infancy, namely, through the seed of regeneration being implanted within apart from the Word. A second conceivable strength is that by placing regeneration prior to effectual calling, even to the extent that regeneration could occur in infancy while effectual calling does not occur until later in life through the Word, a strong emphasis is laid upon the sovereignty of the Spirit. Clearly, with an infant, no cooperation is conceivable. Third, it is understandable, logically speaking, why Berkhof would think it is necessary to place regeneration before

effectual calling. God must first restructure man's inner capacities (perhaps by an infusion of new habits) to make him capable of receiving an effectual call that is accompanied by the Word.

Nevertheless, as Horton demonstrated already, Berkhof's paradigm is fraught with problems. Since Horton, as represented above, has already explained many of these problems I will not regurgitate them here. However, it is necessary to briefly mention one of them. Berkhof, following Shedd, goes so far as to say that, while effectual calling is mediated through the Word, regeneration is not. However, there is no reason to divorce the two, making effectual calling through the Word and regeneration independent of the Word. In Scripture both effectual calling and regeneration occur *in* and *through* the Word (see chapter 3). Several biblical texts affirm this position. First, in Matthew 13 (cf. Mark 4; Luke 8) Jesus draws a close connection between the Word and the sprouting of new life in his parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-9; 18-23). When the seed (the Word of the kingdom) is planted in good soil, life begins and much fruit is yielded (13:23).

The gospel of John also draws a very close connection between Word and Spirit. For example, Jesus says in John 6:63, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*" It is the very words of Christ that are life for the sinner. New spiritual life is created in the sinner through the words of Christ. Also, in John 15:3 Jesus says, "Already you are clean *because of the word* that I have spoken to you." There is a straightforward connection between new life in Christ and the Word spoken by Christ. It is his Word that is spirit and life, cleansing the sinner. This connection between regenerative new life by the Spirit and the Word are also spoken of in 1 Peter 1:22-23. "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, *through the living and abiding word of God.*" Likewise, James 1:18 says, "Of his own will he [God] *brought us forth by the word of truth*, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." Once

again, God brings forth or births the sinner “by the word of truth.”

Besides Horton, Sinclair Ferguson also observes this biblical identification of the Word as instrumental in regeneration. While Ferguson affirms that the Spirit is the *efficient* cause of regeneration he argues that the Word is the *instrumental* cause of regeneration.<sup>102</sup> And yet, God’s sovereignty in working directly (immediately) upon the heart is preserved.

For the New Testament writers, however, there is no hint of a threat to divine sovereignty in the fact that the word is the instrumental cause of regeneration, while the Spirit is the efficient cause. This is signaled in the New Testament by the use of the preposition *ek* to indicate the divine originating cause (e.g. Jn. 3:5; 1 Jn. 3:9; 5:1) and *dia* to express the instrumental cause (e.g. Jn. 15:3; 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Pet. 1:23).<sup>103</sup> . . . Since the Spirit’s work in regeneration involves the transformation of the whole man, including his cognitive and affective powers, the accompanying of the internal illumination of the Spirit by the external revelation of the word (and vice versa) is altogether appropriate. Since faith involves knowledge, it ordinarily emerges in relationship to the teaching of the gospel found in Scripture. Regeneration and the faith to which it gives birth are seen as taking place not by revelationless divine sovereignty, but within the matrix of the preaching of the word and the witness of the people of God (cf. Rom. 10:1-15). Their instrumentality in regeneration does not impinge upon the sovereign activity of the Spirit. Word and Spirit belong together.<sup>104</sup>

Therefore, Word and Spirit are inseparable. The instrumental use of God’s Word in no way compromises the Spirit’s sovereignty in monergistic regeneration.<sup>105</sup> If we follow Scripture in identifying the Word with regeneration there seems to be no reason to interpret regeneration as coming apart from the Word prior to effectual calling which comes with the Word.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 125.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>106</sup>My identification of the Word as a means in regeneration does side with the Calvinist tradition rather than the Lutheran tradition. While the Reformed maintain the use of the Word they also affirm that regeneration is immediate (without human *cooperatio*). Lutherans cannot affirm this. As Muller explains, in Lutheranism there is no “immediate operation of the divine *omnipotentia* (q.v.), but rather a mediate operation of God in and through designated *media gratiae*, or means of grace” which is resisted. Though distinct from Arminianism, a type of synergism remains in Lutheranism whereby they will not affirm *gratia irresistibilis* (irresistible grace). Richard A. Muller, “*Gratia Resistibilis*” in *Dictionary of*

Does the intermediacy of the Word negate regeneration as an immediate and subconscious act? Not at all, as long as one defines “immediate regeneration” correctly the term can be maintained. If by immediate we mean, as Reformed theologians such as Herman Bavinck have traditionally maintained, that God acts directly *without the cooperation of the sinner* then regeneration is immediate in every way (see chapter 3).<sup>107</sup> However, such immediacy in regeneration does not exclude the Word. Word and Spirit cannot be separated but work together.

### **Michael Horton**

There are both strengths and weaknesses to Horton’s proposal, though, in my evaluation, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses. First, the strengths: (1) Horton exposes serious weaknesses in Berkhof’s *ordo salutis*. Again, the reader only needs to return to the lengthy representation of Horton’s evaluation of Berkhof above to identify these. It is not an exaggeration to say that Horton exposes large holes in Berkhof’s model.

(2) Horton rightly emphasizes the importance of *the Word* in regeneration. In Scripture there are numerous examples of God’s Word acting in a regenerative or creative manner, thereby justifying the identification of regeneration with an effectual call. At the creation of the universe God says, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Gen 1:3). If this is the power of God’s Word when he creates physical life, how much more so when he creates spiritual life? Therefore, Paul can say, “For God, who said, ‘Let

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*Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 132 (cf. 294).

<sup>107</sup>The best treatment on a correct understanding of “immediate regeneration” is by Herman Bavinck. Speaking of the Reformed at Dort who affirmed immediate regeneration Bavinck states, “By expressing themselves this way, they had a twofold purpose. First, with this description of regeneration they wanted to cut off the Pelagian and Remonstrant error, which claimed that regeneration was dependent upon an intermediating decision of the human will. Second, they were seeking to avoid the position of Cameron and others, which taught that the renewal of the human will occurs merely in a mediate way, namely, through the instrumentality of the intellect.” Bavinck, however, qualifies immediate regeneration, “The expression immediate regeneration, however, was never employed by the Reformed in earlier days to exclude the means of grace of the Word from the operation of regeneration by the Holy Spirit.” Herman Bavinck, *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit’s Work in Calling and Regeneration*, ed. J. Mark Beach, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2008), 54.

light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). John can open his gospel by saying that the Word (Jesus Christ) was with God and the Word was God. It was through the Word that all things were made (John 1:3; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:3). It is no surprise that when Jesus "calls" saying, "Lazarus, come out" (John 11:43) new life begins and Lazarus walks out of his tomb. Such a creative and regenerative call parallels the spiritual reality prophesied of in Ezekiel 37 (see chapter 3). When God speaks and calls dead sinners to live, the power of God's call is regenerative, creating new life (Eph 2:5; John 3:5-8). Therefore, Jesus can say, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63). On this basis, God's Word in the effectual call is a regenerating Word.

(3) Horton's model preserves the Trinitarian unity that characterizes effectual calling/regeneration in Scripture. As Horton observes, there is an inseparability between "the preached Word and the Spirit" as well as an inherent Trinitarianism in that the "Father preaches, the Son is preached, and the Spirit is the "inner preacher," who illumines the understanding and inclines the will to receive him."<sup>108</sup> And again, "Effective calling is thus God the Father *speaking powerfully to us*, and regeneration is God the Father and God the Holy Spirit *working powerfully in us*, to make us alive."<sup>109</sup>

(4) Horton's use of speech-act theory answers the Arminian objection (that effectual calling treats man like a block or stone) with success. As seen above, Horton argues above that if effectual calling/regeneration is purely causative, as some theologians have had the tendency of making it, then the Arminian objection stands. Grace is reduced to one object acting upon another object. However, if, as Horton suggests, we combine (as the Reformers did) causality with communicative categories then both omnipotence and interpersonal concepts are preserved. No longer is one object

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<sup>108</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 218.

<sup>109</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 700.

acting upon another in a coercive manner, but the Creator of the universe is redeeming sinners by a grace that is both omnipotent and sweet.

Here, Horton is at his best precisely because his use of speech-act theory not only counters the objections of seventeenth century Arminianism but also of Arminians today. Though Horton never mentions him, Arminian Stephen Ashby reiterates the classic objection, namely, that monergism is causal and therefore impersonal and mechanical. In contrast, synergism is personal and relational since God respects our personal freedom and choice to resist his efforts to save. “Since God has chosen to deal with his human creation in terms of their personhood, by influence and response rather than through cause and effect, he allows us to resist his grace – though he has enabled us to receive it.”<sup>110</sup> In response, it must be understood that the irresistibility of grace does not preclude the relational aspect of grace. As John Owen explains,

We do not affirm grace to be *irresistible*, as though it came upon the will with such an overflowing violence as to beat it down before it, and subdue it by compulsion to what it is no way inclinable [unto.] But if that term must be used, it denoteth, in our sense, only such an unconquerable efficacy of grace as always and infallibly produceth its effect; for who is it that can “withstand God?” Acts xi. 17. As also, it may be used on the part of the will itself, which will not resist it: “All that the Father giveth unto Christ shall come to him,” John vi. 37. The operation of grace is resisted by no hard heart; because it mollifies the heart itself. It doth not so much take away a power of resisting as give a will of obeying, whereby the *powerful impotency* of resistance is removed.<sup>111</sup>

The point Owen makes is again reiterated by Anthony Hoekema when he says, “God’s actions in regenerating us, therefore, is no more a violation of our wills than is the

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<sup>110</sup>Stephen M. Ashby, “A Reformed Arminian View,” in *Four Views on Eternal Security*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 155. Wesleyan-Arminian Barry L. Callen, arguing for a “mutuality model of conversion,” agrees, “A mutuality model differs significantly from a more mechanical and manipulative model that features the premises of absolute divine sovereignty, election, predestination, and irresistible divine grace. A mutuality model focuses, instead on the divine intent of producing redeemed people who reflect the trinitarian love in all of their relationships. The general trajectory of a divinely predetermined and fully controlled conversion model derives from the “I-it” style of assumptions typical of a scholasticized Calvinism, in considerable contrast with the kind of “I-thou” assumptions of what is sometimes called “free-will theism.” Barry L. Callen, “A Mutuality Model of Conversion,” in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 147.

<sup>111</sup>Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:134.

artificial respiration applied to a person whose breathing has stopped.”<sup>112</sup> Hoekema’s illustration brings out an important point, namely, that God’s effectual operation on the dead sinner is simultaneously *powerful* (it raises the dead sinner to new life, an act only an omnipotent God can do) and *loving*, for God is saving a dead *sinner*, who in no way deserves to be saved. John Owen recognized this when, rejecting the argument of Arminius that it always remains in man’s power of free-will to reject grace, he said,

Not that I would assert, in opposition to this, such an operation of grace as should, as it were, violently overcome the will of man, and force him to obedience, which must needs be prejudicial unto our liberty; but only consisting in such a sweet effectual working as doth infallibly promote our conversion, make us willing who before were unwilling, and obedient who were not obedient, that createth clean hearts and reneweth right spirits within us.<sup>113</sup>

Owen’s point is that God’s efficacious and omnipotent work of grace is not coercion or violence but rather it is “sweet” and yet infallible. It is sweet because God makes the unwilling willing, the disobedient obedient. Herman Bavinck also capitalized on such a point when he rightly states that God’s efficacious call “is so powerful that it cannot be conquered, and yet so loving that it excludes all force.”<sup>114</sup> One must remember that God’s “conquering” of the sinner is the most loving thing God could possibly do. If God does not conquer such a hater and blasphemer then he will never repent and respond in faith but will spend an eternity in hell. God must use a strong, powerful, prevailing, dominant, and yes, irresistible act of grace to turn this sinner from his sin and to Christ. Yet, due to man’s state, this grace which is potent is an act of sheer love for it is that which is best for the sinner. Horton makes the same point, but does so through the modern theory of speech-act.

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<sup>112</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 105.

<sup>113</sup>John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, in *Works*, 10:133.

<sup>114</sup>Herman Bavinck, *Reeping en Wedergeboorte* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1903), 224. As translated by Hoekema in *Saved by Grace*, 105. Hoekema also points to the words of C. S. Lewis. “The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.” C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Fontana, 1960), 183.

(5) Not only does speech-act theory preserve the interpersonal nature of effectual calling, but it avoids two extremes. One extreme was identified above: treating grace in purely causal language may reduce grace to coercion. However, it also avoids the other extreme found in Arminianism, namely, of reducing the divine call to a purely informative and persuasive plea. For the Calvinist, “God’s *working* is God’s *wording*.”<sup>115</sup> God’s speech not only announces information but for those whom God has chosen, it actually accomplishes what it intended. No “wedge can be legitimately driven between speech and action.” Rather, “God’s speaking is active; the Word itself has the power, in the Spirit, to bring about its intended effect within creaturely reality without violating creaturely integrity.”<sup>116</sup>

(6) Finally, Horton makes a very strong case for viewing regeneration *as* effectual calling. Scripture does not seem to differentiate between the two, as if one occurs with the Word while the other does not. While distinguishing between effectual calling and regeneration may be pedagogically helpful in teaching systematic theology, nevertheless, trying to explain how they are distinct from one another on the basis of any particular scriptural passage is a very difficult task. While Scripture may use different language (called vs. new birth), ultimately the same reality is being referred to. Moreover, if one presses the language it is difficult to see how the effectual call is that different from the gospel call *if* the effectual call is not merely different language for what is taking place in regeneration. The very reason the effectual call is effectual is because it regenerates the sinner from death to new life. Unfortunately, Horton does not spell out the specifics of how systematic theologians should teach effectual calling and regeneration if they are seen as synonymous. I would argue that even if we agree to view these two as synonymous, nevertheless, we are justified in distinguishing between them

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<sup>115</sup>Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 231.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 242.

for pedagogical purposes since Scripture itself uses different terminology even if in the end it is the same reality being referred to. Scripture does this all the time. For example, notice the different ways Scripture explains regeneration: the circumcision of the heart (Deut 30:6; Jer 31:31-34); the writing of the law on the heart (Jer 31:31-34); removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; cf. Jer 24:7); breathing new life into dead dry bones (Ezek 37); a new birth (John 3:5-8); shining light out of darkness (2 Cor 4:6 and 5:17); creating man anew (2 Cor 5:17); the resurrection of a spiritually dead corpse (Rom 6:4; Eph 2:1; 1 Pet 1:3); washing and renewing (Titus 3:4-7). Here we can distinguish between all of these and yet say they all refer to regeneration. Can the same not be done with effectual calling? To use an analogy, effectual calling and regeneration may be two sides of the same coin, but when the expert explains the variables of the coin it may be necessary to describe one side of the coin before the next. Therefore, as seen with Hoekema, one can view effectual calling and regeneration as identical but also write two separate chapters on each (as I have done in chapters 3 and 4).

Furthermore, the advantages of equating regeneration with effectual calling are seen when we recognize some of the problems that creep into models that separate effectual calling from regeneration. Take two examples, which Horton never interacts with but nonetheless, in my evaluation, could be countered by Horton's proposal. First, as chapter 7 discussed, there is the modified attempt by Millard Erickson, Bruce Demarest, and Gordon Lewis to split effectual calling and regeneration apart from one another in order to insert conversion in between. In doing so, Erickson, Demarest, and Lewis are able to borrow from Calvinism by affirming a call that is effectual and prior to conversion and yet simultaneously borrow from Arminian synergism by placing conversion before regeneration. As already seen in chapter 7, such a model is unbiblical and there is no need to return to the arguments here. However, it should be observed that if, as Horton does, one unites regeneration and effectual calling, it is impossible to make

room, even if it be slight, for Arminianism as Erickson, Lewis, and Demarest do. Second, we must return to John Murray who argues that effectual calling and regeneration are distinct and in that order. According to Murray, it follows that because the exact language of effectual calling is not attributed to the Spirit in Scripture there is no basis to identify the Spirit with the effectual call as the Westminster Confession and Catechism does but rather the Spirit is only to be attributed to regeneration.<sup>117</sup> In other words, for Murray only the Father effectual calls and only the Spirit regenerates and neither person is to be confused with the other's work. In opposition to Murray, Robert Reymond argues that the Father's effectual summons "is effectual through the regenerating work of the Spirit of God, which the Spirit executes by and with God's summons in the hearts of the elect, to effect faith which does unite the sinner to Christ. The Westminster standards clearly draw regeneration within the compass of effectual calling."<sup>118</sup> Reymond goes on,

Murray is being overly critical when he faults the Shorter Catechism definition because it 'construes calling as specifically the action of the Holy Spirit, when the scripture refers it specifically to God the Father.' [Murray, "The Call," *Collected Writings*, 2:165] It is God the Father who summons-that is true enough. But, as Murray's own Confession of Faith declares, the Father 'is pleased . . . effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit' (X/i). And the Shorter Catechism-being just that, a shorter catechism for children-simply summarizes the longer confessional statement by referring effectual calling to 'God's [that is, God the Father's] Spirit.' But I do not want to leave the impression that the Spirit by whom the Father effectually calls the elect is his Spirit alone, and that there is no concurring activity on the Son's part in the regenerating activity of the Spirit. To the contrary, the Scriptures teach that the effectual call of the elect is an activity in which all three persons of the Godhead are engaged, and that the Spirit who regenerates is not only the Father's Spirit, he is Christ's Spirit as well (see Rom. 8:9-10; see also Westminster Confession of Faith, XIV/i). The Scriptures testify that it is from Christ that the baptismal (regenerating) work of the Spirit 'descends upon' the elect (Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16; John 1:33) and that it was Christ who poured out his Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (John 15:26; Acts 2:33). Nothing is more erroneous than the perception that exists in the popular Christian mind that, save for his present intercessory work at the Father's right hand in behalf of the saints, the risen Christ is relatively inactive today, the Holy Spirit being now the person of the

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<sup>117</sup>John Murray, "Irresistible Grace" in *Soli Deo Gloria: Essays in Reformed Theology*, ed. R. C. Sproul (Philipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1976), 60.

<sup>118</sup>Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 717.

Godhead who is primarily entrusted with the task of applying the benefits of Christ's accomplished cross work to men.<sup>119</sup>

Reymond concludes,

To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; *effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their heart by His Word and Spirit*; overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.<sup>120</sup>

Reymond is right in arguing that all three persons play a role in each act of redemption, including the effectual call, and this does not undermine the fact that one of the three persons can take the central role in that particular act. Ironically, Murray comes to the exact opposite conclusion on the relations between the three persons in the divine economy of salvation. Just as Murray refuses to associate the Spirit with the effectual call (since the effectual call is only the work of the Father), Murray also refuses to associate the Father with regeneration (since regeneration is only the work of the Spirit). He believes that restricting the Father to the effectual call and from regeneration and likewise restricting the Spirit's work to regeneration and from the effectual call actually preserves the economy of salvation. Murray states,

It would be easy to say that the actions of the Father referred to above are simply different ways of expressing regeneration. This is far too simplistic and fails to reckon with the manifoldness of the operations of grace. In the design of salvation there is an economy. In the once-for-all accomplishment of redemption there is an economy. That is, there are the specific and distinguishing functions of the distinct persons of the Godhead. There is also economy in the application of redemption and we must take full account of the diversity involved. To equate the actions of the Father with regeneration is to ignore the diversity; our theology is thereby truncated and our faith deprived of the richness which the economy requires.<sup>121</sup>

However, as Reymond noted above, Murray's argument ignores the fact that all three persons are involved in *each* economic activity, including regeneration. It is unbiblical to

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<sup>119</sup>Emphasis added. Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Emphasis added. Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Murray, "Irresistible Grace," 60.

restrict the Father from the work of regeneration, especially when texts like Ephesians 2:4-6 speak of God *the Father* making the sinner alive (spiritual resurrection or regeneration). Moreover, by viewing each person of the Trinity as involved in effectual calling and regeneration, the diversity of the Trinitarian economy is actually preserved, contra Murray. Not only is there an ordering in the broad strokes of redemption (the Father elects, the Son dies, the Spirit applies), but there is a unity between the three persons in each particular work of redemption, though one may take on the focal role (see chapter 1). Otherwise, the unity of the three is compromised and only one of the three is at work. Such a bifurcation between the Father and the Spirit contradicts the orthodox and Reformed affirmation that *opera trinitatis indivisa sunt* (the works of the Trinity are indivisible). Certainly the three are indivisible in the works of effectual calling and regeneration as well. To conclude, Murray's separation of the Father from the Son is exactly the type of dichotomy Horton's model warns against and seeks to solve. By uniting effectual calling and regeneration, there is an economic Trinitarianism that is safeguarded, that Murray's model struggles to find.

Despite these significant strengths, there are weaknesses in Horton's proposal. (1) Horton's emphasis on the communicative in contrast to the causative is so strong and reactionary (to those who have emphasized purely the causative) that at times it could give the impression that one must choose between an effectual call that is causative and one that is communicative. To be fair, however, Horton does qualify himself as recognized already, stating that he is seeking to correct those paradigms that are purely causative. Horton does not want to abandon causative concepts but merely support them with the communicative. (2) It is possible that the "immediate" (direct) nature of regeneration Horton is reacting to has much more to do with Berkhof's and Shedd's interpretation or utilization of it than that of other historic Reformed theologians. In other words, Horton rejects the idea that regeneration is an "immediate" and "subconscious" work and he seems to do so because Berkhof and Shedd use these terms to also say that

regeneration occurs apart from the Word. However, many (dare I argue most) Reformed theologians have used this language (immediate and subconscious) not to divorce regeneration from the Word but to merely say that regeneration occurs apart from our cooperation (see chapter 3). In other words, by immediate the Reformed have meant that God works *directly*, without our assent. This is a point, as seen already, that Herman Bavinck stresses again and again. Bavinck argues that the Reformed since at least Dort sought to affirm an immediate regeneration in order to “cut off the Pelagian and Remonstrant error, which claimed that regeneration was dependent upon an intermediating decision of the human will.”<sup>122</sup> The Reformed also sought to “avoid the position of Cameron and others, which taught that the renewal of the human will occurs merely in a mediate way, namely, through the instrumentality of the intellect.” But, says Bavinck, “The expression immediate regeneration, however, was never employed by the Reformed in earlier days to exclude the means of grace of the Word from the operation of regeneration by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>123</sup> Unfortunately, Horton does not interact with Bavinck’s extensive work on immediate regeneration, nor does he interact with Anthony Hoekema, who, while also arguing that effectual calling and regeneration are synonymous nevertheless still says, “Though God by his Holy Spirit works regeneration in the narrower sense in us immediately, directly, and invincibly, the first manifestations of that new spiritual life comes into existence through the word-whether it be preached, taught, or read.”<sup>124</sup>

(3) Horton’s proposal is defined almost entirely by his reaction to Louis Berkhof and the impression given is that in defining the relationship between regeneration and effectual calling one must choose between these two proposals, the

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<sup>122</sup>Bavinck, *Saved by Grace*, 54.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 110.

former advocating a regeneration that is prior to effectual calling and the latter advocating a regeneration that *is* effectual calling. However, Horton never discusses the fact that other Reformed theologians such as John Murray and John Frame have proposed yet another alternative, namely, that effectual calling precedes regeneration. Because Horton never interacts with the proposal of Murray and Frame, it could still be argued that the very same problems Horton's model seeks to solve (especially in relation to Berkhof), can also be solved by Murray and Frame. Murray and Frame do not, like Berkhof, place regeneration before effectual calling. Therefore, it seems that the model advocated by Murray and Frame could just as easily solve the same problems with Berkhof's model (infused habits, regeneration apart from the Word, etc.) that Horton believes his model alone can answer. Moreover, could Murray and Frame also appropriate speech-act theory as a complementary asset in arguing that while regeneration is distinct from effectual calling, the latter must always precede the former? Could effectual calling be the illocution and regeneration the perlocution? Is the view of Murray and Frame that much different from Horton's if it is maintained that both effectual calling and regeneration are accompanied by the Word? These are areas Horton leaves unexplored and are therefore open to further investigation.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, this appendix demonstrated that the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration is very complex. Wayne Grudem points out the impression of many when he says it is "difficult to specify the exact relationship in time between regeneration and the human proclamation of the gospel through which God works in effective calling."<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, though the mystery of the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration remains intact, this appendix has sought to

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<sup>125</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 700.

show that Horton's proposal, though itself challenged by certain problems, has significant advantages, both biblically, philosophically, and historically, over other models old and new.

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## ABSTRACT

### RECLAIMING MONERGISM: THE CASE FOR SOVEREIGN GRACE IN EFFECTUAL CALLING AND REGENERATION

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This dissertation examines the doctrines of effectual calling and regeneration and argues that the biblical view is that God's saving grace is monergistic - meaning that God acts alone to *effectually* call and *monergistically* regenerate the depraved sinner from death to new life - and therefore effectual calling and regeneration causally precede conversion in the *ordo salutis*, thereby ensuring that all of the glory in salvation belongs to God not man. Stated negatively, God's grace is not synergistic - meaning that God cooperates with man, giving man the final determinative power to either accept or resist God's grace - which would result in an *ordo salutis* where regeneration is causally conditioned upon man's free will in conversion and, in the Calvinist's opinion, would rob God of all of the glory in salvation.

Chapter 1 introduces the monergism-synergism debate by placing it within the contemporary evangelical context. Chapter 1 not only introduces the debate between Calvinists and Arminians but also introduces the recent attempt of modified views to present a *via media* between the two. Chapter 1 also presents the thesis and explains the parameters and presuppositions of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 examines the doctrine of monergism within the Reformed tradition. Rather than an exhaustive survey, chapter 2 selects some of the most important

representatives from the Reformed tradition including: Augustine, John Calvin, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession. In discussing these figures and confessions, chapter 2 provides the historical and theological context in which the Reformed argued against the synergists of their own day.

Chapter 3 turns to a biblical and theological defense of total depravity and effectual calling. Chapter 3 first begins with a biblical defense of total depravity and spiritual inability, as well as a brief discussion and utilization of Jonathan Edwards' understanding of free will (the freedom of inclination). Chapter 3 then seeks to argue for the thesis presented in chapter 1 by showing from Scripture that the Calvinist view of effectual calling is biblical.

Chapter 4 continues the argument from chapter 3 by focusing in on the doctrine of regeneration. Chapter 4 argues that regeneration is monergistic rather than synergistic, meaning that God's grace in regeneration is not contingent on the will of man to believe but God's grace works alone. Therefore, faith and repentance are the result not the condition of regeneration in the *ordo salutis*.

Chapter 5 seeks to give an accurate and fair presentation of the Arminian view(s), giving attention to the theological nuances among Arminians. Chapter 5 shows that there is diversity within Arminianism, so that there are those who hold to a "classical Arminian" view and there are those who hold to a Semi-Pelagian view. However, chapter 5 demonstrates that both views end up in the same place, namely, affirming the doctrine of synergism which makes God's grace contingent upon man's will.

Chapter 6 is a biblical and theological critique of the Arminian view. Chapter 6 shows that the Arminian doctrine of synergism is not found in Scripture, contradicts Scripture, and robs God of all his glory in salvation.

Chapter 7 turns from the Arminian view to examine recent modified

attempts to pave a middle way between Calvinism and Arminianism. Chapter 7 shows specifically that attempts at a middle way borrow from Arminianism and consequently fall prey to an erroneous interpretation of Scripture. Chapter 7 shows that a middle way is biblically impossible and it also robs God of all his glory in salvation.

Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation by restating the thesis, summarizing the biblical data, and arguing that only the Calvinist view can preserve the glory of God to save sinners.

Three appendixes conclude the dissertation. Appendix 1 examines the Arminian and Calvinist views of the love of God and argues that divine love in Scripture is far more complex than the Arminian makes it out to be. God not only has a universal love for all people but a special, particular, and efficacious love only for the elect. Appendix 2 examines the Arminian and Calvinist views of the will of God and argues once again that the will of God in Scripture is far more complex than the Arminian makes it out to be. Scripture shows, it is argued, that God not only has a moral or preceptive will as well as a will of disposition but also a will of decree by which he effectually ordains all that comes to pass. Appendix 3 looks at the relationship between effectual calling and regeneration in the Reformed tradition and the diversity that exists among the Reformed as to how exactly describe this relationship. Appendix 3 presents and critiques each view, but pays particular attention to Michael Horton's recent proposal for "covenant ontology and effectual calling."

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