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Essays on the “Traditional Statement” Part 1



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Editorial Introduction



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The essays in this issue and the next issue of the Journal of Baptist Theology and Ministry (JBTM) comprise a two-part series. These journal issues were prompted by the inimitable response to a soteriological statement drafted by Mississippi pastor Eric Hankins titled “A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation.” Hankins authored the document, also known as the Traditional Statement (TS), in consultation with a group of pastors and professors. After being affirmed by several past presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and other denominational leaders, the TS was circulated among the SBC state executive-directors in May of 2012. Within the first few weeks of its release, the TS elicited online replies from Roger Olson and Albert Mohler, an e-book from Founders Ministries, and two articles in Christianity Today. The website featuring the statement, sbctoday.com, was ranked in June 2012 by Technorati as the #2 religion blog in the world.

Most articles and books which critique Calvinism do so while remaining committed to particular commitments shared by both Calvinists and Arminians. For that reason, most soteriological discussions employ theological definitions and categories informed by the Canons of Dort (1618–19). Most of the contributors in this series reject as unhelpful the theological commitments distinctive to the Calvinist-Arminian debate. Instead, the essayists attempt to construct a doctrine of salvation from the Bible alone while appealing to statements from the *Baptist Faith and Message*, and consciously rejecting the Calvinist-Arminian presuppositions that have framed this debate in Western theology for centuries.

These essays provide a detailed, article-by-article explanation of this statement of “Traditional” Southern Baptist soteriology. As explained in introduction to the TS, the word “Traditional” is not meant to imply that this is the only theological tradition in the SBC and among Baptists. Rather, the word “Traditional” refers to that theological tradition which might also be called the General Baptist or the Sandy Creek or the Mullins-Hobbs-Rogers tradition.

The essays in this issue defend the TS and its unifying presupposition that any person who hears the gospel can be saved. In the opening essay, David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas,

provides general observations on the convention-wide discussion and offers particular suggestions for fostering greater understanding, clarity, and unity. Next, Eric Hankins, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford, Mississippi, outlines his theological and missiological motivations for drafting the TS. The remainder of the essays in this issue provide the content and commentary on the first 6 of 10 articles in the TS. David Hankins, Executive Director of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, defends the claim from Article 1 that any person can be saved. Next, I affirm from Article 2 the full sinfulness of man, deny that Adam's sin renders people guilty before they sin, and affirm that all people who hear the gospel are capable of making a Spirit-enabled response. David Allen explains the significance of the affirmation in Article 3 of universal, or general, atonement. Brad Reynolds, Vice President for Academic Services and Professor of Christian Studies at Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, affirms in his essay on Article 4 that God's grace is necessary for salvation and asserts that God's grace can be resisted. Ronnie Rogers, Senior Pastor of Trinity Baptist Church in Norman, Oklahoma, argues from Article 5 that people are regenerated, or saved, at the moment—and because—they believe; Rogers argues against the view that people are regenerated *before* they believe. In his essay on Article 6, Eric Hankins eschews a decretal view of election for one that is covenantal, Christocentric, categorical, concurrent, and corporate.

All of the contributors serve the Lord in a variety of ways, including the local church, denominational service, and the academy. I am thankful for their investment of time and energy in this effort, especially David Allen and Eric Hankins, who served with me as co-editors on this project.

This series of essays is not meant to be the final word on Southern Baptist soteriology. Rather, these contributions by a group of SBC pastors, evangelists, and academics are offered to the readers of the *JBTM* as a contribution to the peaceable, on-going, convention-wide conversation on the doctrine of salvation.

The Current SBC Calvinism Debate: Observations, Clarifications, and Suggestions



David L. Allen, Ph.D.

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The release of “A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation” in the summer of 2012 engendered a Convention-wide discussion and made nation-wide news. Tongues wagged and fingers pecked computer keyboards ceaselessly in subsequent weeks. The Traditional Statement (TS) has received both acclaim and criticism. In reflecting on the tsunami of words, and as a conversation partner along with my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, I have asked the Lord to help me be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. I hope the following thoughts will be helpful as we continue the conversation in the days ahead. By way of brief personal background, I served in the local church for twenty-six years; twenty-one of those years as a senior pastor of two churches. I have served two theological institutions in the classroom since 1985. In addition, I served on the Board of Trustees at one of our SBC Seminaries for 12 years. In my current role, I preach regularly in Southern Baptist churches.

Two things are crystal clear. The issue of Calvinism in the Southern Baptist Convention is not going away, and finding our way forward is not going to be easy. Calvinism is viewed through many prisms in the SBC. Some see it as absolutely vital to the health and prosperity, both theological and otherwise, of the SBC. Others view it as theologically flawed, a nagging nuisance spawning various levels of problems, including divisiveness, in the churches. Regardless of which camp you are in, or somewhere in the middle, Southern Baptists need to proceed with caution in the days ahead. When it comes to Calvinism in the SBC, a fair amount of misinformation, misinterpretation, misunderstanding, and misrepresentation characterizes the current climate. This makes it difficult for most to cut through the discrepant fog.

The first place to begin, it seems to me, is with our common ground. As Southern Baptists, our agreements outnumber our disagreements. We agree: 1) on the BFM 2000. 2) on the Lordship of Christ. 3) on the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture. 4) on the exclusivity of the gospel and the lostness of humanity. 5) that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, not to mention a host of other issues on which we agree. Virtually all of us recognize that Southern Baptists are not going to agree on Calvinism. However, that does not mean that this discussion should not happen! While the debate about Calvinism is necessary, it is absolutely essential that all involved desire, speak, and work for unity. There is a difference between union and unity.

Two cats with their tails tied together have union. They sure don't have unity! Southern Baptists generally agree that our unifying doctrinal statement is the BFM 2000. It is sufficiently broad in latitude that we can all live, breathe, and work under its umbrella. In fact, Calvinists and Traditionalists, for the most part, have been doing that already for quite a number of decades.

Second, because of this common ground in the BFM 2000, we should avoid at all costs the Scylla of attempting to run all Calvinists out of Dodge and the Charybdis of attempting to return us as a Convention to the Calvinistic theology of some of our founding fathers. Neither of these will bring us together. In fact, both approaches will foster division. I have on rare occasion sought to correct overzealous Traditionalists who have questioned the place of Calvinists in the SBC. It is any and every Baptist's right to be persuaded that a Calvinistic Soteriology reflects the teaching of Scripture. Being a Calvinist should not be a Convention crime. Calvinists have and should always be free to have a place at the SBC table. Any church that feels led of God to call a Calvinist pastor should do so without hesitation. I serve a seminary that has some Calvinists on the faculty, some of whom I myself recommended to the Administration for hiring. I have on occasion recommended other Calvinist faculty members to other SBC colleges and seminaries. I have and continue to work side-by-side with Calvinist brothers and sisters in the churches I pastored, in the seminary I serve, and in the broader Southern Baptist Convention of which I am a part.

On the other hand, Calvinism should not be a Convention cause either. The publication of an article by a Southern Baptist professor in recent years entitled "Why Your Next Pastor Should Be a Calvinist" is an example of one aspect of the current problem in the Convention. Dr. Danny Akin said in 2007: "I have Calvinist friends who say they hope and pray for the day when all of our seminaries have presidents and faculties that are five-point Calvinists."¹ Dr. Akin rightfully eschews such a sentiment, but this validates the concern of many Southern Baptists that some Calvinists in the SBC do indeed believe we would be better off if we reverted to Calvinism unilaterally in the seminaries. If there are Calvinists who feel this way about the seminaries, perhaps many of them feel this way about SBC churches as well. Of course this is a recipe for disaster. As long as Calvinists, individually or as groups, continue to seek to make it a cause with the intention of moving the SBC towards Calvinism, then we will continue to have a problem.

If we are to come together in unity, we must do so as *Baptists*, not as Calvinists and Traditionalists. We must unite around *Baptist distinctives* which includes the only glue that can hold us together: a biblical Baptist theology wedded to a Great Commission resurgence of evangelism and missions. We don't have to cease to be Calvinists or Traditionalists to be Baptists. We've had both from day one. Let us debate the theology of Calvinism and let the chips fall where they may, but deliver us from attempting to Calvinize or de-Calvinize the SBC.

¹Ray Clendenen & Brad Waggoner, ed., *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 253.

Third, we need to love and respect one another even though we are not in complete agreement on every theological point. This is the clear mandate of Scripture. We should speak the truth in love and avoid strident, emotive language. May we not allow the opinions of others about us, whether positive or negative, to cause us to reciprocate in kind (the negative that is!) to our fellow brothers and sisters or cloud our assessment of their doctrinal positions. One of my favorite stories about General Robert E. Lee concerns the time he was asked by Confederate President Davis his opinion of one of his officers in the Confederate army. Lee responded that he thought the gentleman was a good man and a fine officer. Someone nearby reminded Lee that this particular officer had been critical of the great general. Lee's response was classic: "Yes, that's true. But the President asked my opinion of him, not his opinion of me."

Deep-seated convictions usually breed deep-seated emotions. Deep-seated emotions, left unguarded, can breed deep-seated sin. Fair-mindedness coupled with plain-spokenness scores a direct hit. A thick head and thin skin is a bad combination for theological dialogue. Scrappy, sarcastic, sardonic speech and writing chills the air quickly. It is incumbent on all of us to engage the concerns and questions that come our way in a straightforward manner, rather than appearing to evade and dissimulate. We're not here to hornswoggle anyone. On a related note, those on both sides of the issue should refrain from drive-by verbal "shootings." We don't need innocent casualties via collateral damage. Failure to be careful in these areas will not exculpate us at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Remember, the enemy is the devil, not each other.

Fourth, we need to be reminded that the truth of a given position is in no way related to who or how many hold that position. Positions should be evaluated on their merits and ultimately according to their comportment with Scripture, not because high profile leaders and/or churches or groups hold them or don't hold them. The fact that the majority of Southern Baptists do not adhere to Calvinism is no argument against whether it is true or false. The fact that some of the early Southern Baptist leaders were Calvinists is no argument that Calvinism is true or false nor is it an argument that Calvinism should be embraced today. Neither the popularity nor unpopularity of something should play into the discussion of whether that something is true or false. Each of us should take to heart the approach of the Bereans in Acts 17:11, who "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."

Fifth, generally speaking, all Southern Baptists are concerned about theology. With respect to the current discussion, some of my Calvinist friends as well as some of my Traditionalist friends need to become better and more careful theologians and historians. Some Traditionalists need to be aware of and respect the Calvinistic heritage of the SBC. Some Traditionalists need to read more broadly in the area of Calvinism in order to understand its theology and why Scripture is interpreted the way it is in a Reformed Soteriological framework. On the other hand, some of my Calvinist friends need to shore up their theologizing as well. I have observed through the years that some Calvinists, especially young Calvinists, make two mistakes. 1) They simply take their theology from Calvinist writers, especially modern writers, without filtering it through the New Testament. None should be a theological epigone. 2) They read predominately, if not exclusively,

contemporary Calvinist authors and neglect the writings of the earliest generations among the Reformers and the Reformation, Calvinist or otherwise. Calvinism is not monolithic. In fact, it never has been. Disagreement among Calvinists themselves exists over many issues, chiefly Limited Atonement, since the Reformation. The TULIP acrostic is itself a twentieth-century construct. Many Calvinists, especially young Calvinists, simply equate Calvinism with TULIP. This is a serious historical error that leads to serious theological distortion.

In this vein, all of us are prone to a number of errors which we should heartily strive to avoid: 1) subsuming one set of Scripture passages under another set of Scripture passages in order to maintain a particular doctrine or belief system; 2) prejudicing that which is logical over that which is paradoxical in the Scripture; 3) succumbing to logical fallacies in an attempt to maintain our particular theology; 4) doing systematic theology before one does biblical theology and/or allowing systematic theology to trump biblical theology; 5) confusing one's theological system with the gospel and reacting as if a critique of the system is a challenge to the gospel; 6) confusing a critique of someone's doctrine as a critique of that individual personally; 7) engaging in *ad hominem* attacks; and 8) questioning one's motives (which are often wrongly judged and can only be surmised at best unless one directly speaks to his/her motives for what he says and does). I suppose, at one time or another, each of us has fallen into one or more of these or similar traps. Ted Williams ended the 1941 baseball season with an extraordinary .406 average. But even with this remarkable feat, he still grounded out, flied out, or struck out roughly six times out of every ten at bats. No one bats a thousand. We need to cut each other a little slack along the way.

Sixth, it is crucial that we avoid misrepresenting someone's theology. I have found that when this happens, it is usually the result of a lack of understanding the specifics of a position, or of overzealous rhetoric. There have been times in the past when Calvinists and their theology have been misrepresented by those who disagree with them. Anyone deliberately misrepresenting Calvinism is wrong, should repent of such misrepresentation of the views of fellow Christians, and immediately cease and desist in such behavior. Those who in the past have misrepresented Calvinism from a lack of understanding Calvinist doctrine should take steps necessary to rightly understand Calvinism before they speak critically of it. Our Calvinist brothers and sisters have every right to expect those of us who disagree with them to accurately represent their doctrines. Likewise, Traditionalists have every right to expect the same from their counterparts, including the right to critique Calvinism without being accused of denying cardinal doctrines of the faith. We actually do believe in the sovereignty of God, election, total depravity, etc.; we just don't believe in your interpretation of them. We must learn to distinguish between Scripture and our interpretation of Scripture. The former is inerrant; the latter is not. I hope my Calvinist friends will acknowledge that the reason I and other Traditionalists are not Calvinists is not because we do not understand Calvinism, but because we actually *do* understand it, and find aspects of it inconsistent with Scripture. Without a reciprocal acknowledgment of these and similar factors, dialogue and progress in the debate is ultimately an exercise in futility.

Furthermore, and this is crucial, we must distinguish between a belief system and our inferences

or implications that we draw from that system. When we say that something “implies” such and such, we mean that if you affirm doctrine x, then said doctrine implies y. When doctrine x is critiqued by arguing that it implies y, sometimes those who adhere to doctrine x assume doctrine x is being denied or distorted, willfully or not. It is the difference in logic between saying “A is B” and saying “A implies B.” Sometimes we are unclear in our discussions and false conclusions are drawn because we fail to make this crucial distinction. This failure leads to mischaracterization, misrepresentation, misinterpretation, and hence, misunderstanding.

Thus, the current SBC discussion on Calvinism is sometimes hindered by the failure 1) to accurately describe what the other side believes, 2) to accurately describe what the other side is attempting to do (that is, disprove a particular doctrinal point via use of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument), and 3) to accurately distinguish between what one believes from what one thinks might be inferred from that belief (in other words, to use a “straw man” argument). When these kinds of things happen, it becomes virtually impossible to read what others write or listen to what others say without partiality. Emotive language and emotive thinking are often slippery slopes to straw men arguments and generally erect signs that read “Dead End Street.”

This, I believe, describes some of the misunderstanding surrounding the debate concerning the TS. Some in the press, on blogs, and in comment threads have accused the statement of “distorting” Calvinism, setting up “straw men” arguments, and “inaccurately” describing the theology of Calvinism. I do not believe this charge is accurate. For example, I have seen several occasions where the statement has been criticized for “saying” or “implying” that Calvinists believe a person can be saved apart from repentance and faith. The TS neither says nor implies such. Some have apparently wrongly inferred this from the TS. There is a huge difference in “implying” and “inferring.” Implication is in the mind and pen of the writer; inference is in the mind of the reader. Writers/speakers imply; readers/hearers infer. Most Traditionalists are well aware that Calvinists don’t believe anyone is saved apart from repentance and faith (with the exception of infants and mentally disabled people, which are regarded as an exception). The real difference between Calvinists and Traditionalists here is the nature and function of the will in salvation. Traditionalists believe that compatibilism implies a denial of genuine freedom. Calvinists don’t. But both groups affirm the necessity of repentance and faith for salvation. Mischaracterization is one thing. Disagreement with someone’s critique of your position should not *ipso facto* place the disagreeer under condemnation of mischaracterization. One person’s mischaracterization is sometimes merely another person’s critique. May God help us to be less shrill in our rhetoric; less sloppy in our understanding and use of history, theology, and language; and make every argument and counter-argument biblically tethered.

Seventh, is the TS divisive? Division, like most things, occurs in varying degrees and is not always unhealthy or wrong. One degree of division is the simple fact that some believe Calvinistic doctrines and some don’t. Some Calvinists believe in Limited Atonement, while other Calvinists and all Traditionalists don’t. Calvinists believe in Irresistible Grace while Traditionalists don’t. “Almond Joys got nuts; Mounds don’t.” This kind or level of division is not at all unhealthy.

Another kind of division occurs when people of a like theological mind tend to pal together. They spend more time talking, texting and emailing one another than they do those in the other group. Again, this kind of division is not unhealthy. A third kind of division is when people in one theological camp think, speak, and act in ways that promote their theological convictions. They sponsor conferences. They join together to produce books. This naturally divides them from those who hold differing theological convictions. This kind of division is likewise to be expected and is not necessarily unhealthy.

But there are unhealthy divisions as well. When people think, speak, and act in ways that seek to promote their theological convictions with an agenda, stated or unstated, to marginalize those who differ with them theologically, this kind of division is unhealthy. When people fail to be courteous and respectful in their discussions with those who disagree with their theology; when they engage in emotive language, straw-man arguments, and misrepresentation; this kind of division is unhealthy. It is divisive when people insist that their view is the only possible correct reading of Scripture or even to insist that those who disagree with them are heretical. (I am speaking only about the discussion of Calvinism within the SBC.) If leaders unfairly favor one group over another in hiring practices, service opportunities, committee representation, book and literature production, etc., this creates unhealthy division. This is especially egregious if the favored group is in the statistical minority in the organization.

In daily life, healthy division is unavoidable. Theological disagreement need not be divisive, need not entail unhealthy division, and need not result in disunity. To preserve unity will require focused effort on the part of all parties in this discussion. May God help us to keep in step with the Holy Spirit who is our source of unity.

Finally, the entire enterprise calls for a healthy dose of humility and prayer. The worm of pride is ever threatening to eat into the fruit of the Spirit. Adrian Rogers used to talk about preachers who could strut sitting down. God deliver us from ourselves and a tin God complex in this debate. To reflect God's light, we should not seek the limelight. As Southern Baptist missionary Miss Bertha Smith used to say: "Even the donkey that brought Jesus into Jerusalem knew that the applause was not for him." The goal in this dialogue should not be to win at all costs. The goal should be to win the world for Christ at all costs. May God grant it for His glory.

Let the dialogue continue.

Savability: Southern Baptists' Core Soteriological Conviction and Contribution



Eric Hankins, Ph.D.

Eric Hankins is Pastor of First Baptist Church, Oxford, Mississippi. He is the primary author of "A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation."

The Southern Baptist Convention was formed in 1845 and is comprised of forty-five thousand churches, sixteen million members, ten thousand home and international missionaries, and six large seminaries with ten thousand students preparing for ministry.¹ Last year, over six hundred thousand people were baptized in Southern Baptists churches and ministries in the United States and around the world. The SBC has survived and thrived in a kaleidoscopic and increasingly secular American culture. While mainline denominations are collapsing under the weight of modernism's flight from biblical authority,² Southern Baptists' unique identity, polity, and theology have seen us through difficult days in unparalleled fashion.³ All of these reasons and more provide a sufficient warrant for the articulation of a theological perspective that is uniquely our own. Not a Baptist theology, for we do not speak for all Baptists, but a *Southern Baptist* theology. This needs to be done not for the purposes of separating ourselves from others or demonstrating our superiority. Rather, it is right for us to codify and contribute to the wider

¹By comparison, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) has 351,406 members in 1,771 churches, with 10,067 professions of faith (available at <http://www.pcaac.org/statistics.htm>; accessed October 13, 2012), yet it has a very distinctive theological tradition and exerts an influence on American evangelical theology that far exceeds its size. Note the output and impact of R. C. Sproul, James M. Boice, D. James Kennedy, J. Ligon Duncan, Timothy J. Keller, Phillip G. Ryken, Bryan Chapell, Edmund P. Clowney, John M. Frame, and Tullian Tchividjian, to name a few.

²Alister McGrath, *The Future of Christianity, Blackwell Manifestos* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 100. McGrath essentially makes the point that the future of Christianity will not include the mainline denominations.

³*Contra* David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (B&H Academic, 2008), 9, who believes that Southern Baptist laypeople were ill-equipped for modernism's challenge to biblical authority, I think it is clear that they were quite adequately equipped. Through the consistent and biblical simplicity of Hershel Hobbs' Sunday School literature and the leadership of preachers like W.A. Criswell, Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, Charles Stanley, and Jimmy Draper, Southern Baptists believed that biblical inerrancy, soul-winning, and missions were core values. When they discovered that these values were not shared at their agencies, local church autonomy empowered them to bring radical change.

Christian world what we understand to be the basis for the sustained cooperative kingdom reach that is unique to us. Moreover, because the SBC is being challenged by the threats of fragmentation and decline, it is needful to understand clearly what it is about our identity that should be maintained as we seek to make our message meaningful in an ever-changing world.⁴ Finally, because no theological paradigm is perfect or eternal, ours needs to be publicly articulated so that it may be evaluated, improved, and retooled for future generations.

Within the broad sweep of systematic theology, soteriology has been the most contested doctrine over the last fifteen hundred years. While Calvinism and Arminianism have dominated the discussion within Protestantism, neither system has prevailed in Southern Baptist life.⁵ The contention here is that our reluctance to identify with either system is actually a clue to our effectiveness: we believe very simply but very deeply that *anyone can be saved and, once saved, is secure forever*. Anyone is “sovereignly savable.” In a technical theological sense, savability seeks to convey the idea that the salvation of every sinner is the object of God’s sovereign love and Christ’s saving work. Savability means that anyone who hears the gospel is the object of the Spirit’s saving ministrations and can respond with repentance and faith or rebellion and unbelief. This response of faith results in the sealing of the Spirit and eternal security in the accomplished work of Christ. Savability also insists that every sinner is in desperate need of salvation; it takes as axiomatic each sinner’s absolute need for rescue and redemption. Savability speaks not of one’s ability to save himself (the term itself is fundamentally passive) but of God’s ability to save anyone, even the “vilest offender who truly believes.” In a sense, the ten articles of “A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation” are simply an expression of the various implications the belief that anyone can be saved forever.

Now, all Southern Baptist Calvinists want to speak of the gospel, salvation, and God’s love as being for all, but their own theology works against the intelligibility of such a claim. If Christ died only for the sins of some, then no provision has been made for others, making their salvation *impossible*. If some are chosen without respect to their response of faith, then *no hope* of salvation ever existed for others. If saving grace is irresistible for some, then saving grace is *unavailable* for others. If there is no hope for some, if salvation is impossible and saving grace is unavailable for some, then the Calvinists’ claim that the gospel is for all is, ultimately, self-contradictory.⁶

⁴Before Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), which is strongly Calvinistic, became the dominant theology textbook at Southern Baptist seminaries, Millard Erickson’s *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) was the standard. While encyclopedic and conservative, its moderate Calvinism is not particularly distinctive, creative, or compelling. Certainly, it never produced the sort of convictional commitment to a particular theological system that Grudem’s has. It is more of a reference book for general theological parameters rather than a resource book for constructive Southern Baptist theological engagement.

⁵Malcolm Yarnell, “Neither Calvinists nor Arminians but Baptists,” White Paper 36, The Center for Theological Research (September 2010); available at <http://www.baptisttheology.org/baptisttheology/assets/File/NeitherCalvinistsNorArminiansButBaptists.pdf> (accessed October 6, 2012). See also Dockery, 60–62.

⁶Tom Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, rev. ed. (Cape Coral, FL: Founder’s Press, 2006), 281: “All

Because of our unique commitment to biblical authority, to simplicity and praxis, and to passion for missions, Southern Baptists must make clear what we mean when we say that the gospel is for all. For the vast majority of us, we mean that *anyone can be saved*, and we are intentionally not speaking the language of consistent Calvinism when we say it. A theological tradition running from Carroll and Scarborough through Mullins, Conner, Hobbs, Criswell, Rogers, and Patterson is a distinct and sufficient basis on which to construct such a soteriology. The Traditional Statement (TS) is a first attempt at a programmatic description of Southern Baptist soteriology, and it is made in hope that a Southern Baptist systematic theology might someday be forged that is reflective of the totality of Southern Baptist witness both historically and at present.

To be sure, this soteriological tradition has its weaknesses. The simplicity and practicality of the conviction that anyone can be saved makes it easy to truncate and manipulate. Constructive theology should be critical theology, and Southern Baptists must be willing to let our tradition be challenged by the Word and by the wider *communio sanctorum*. This is why the Calvinist critique of Southern Baptist soteriology has often been significant and salient. It has exposed the need for coherence, depth, spiritual formation, true community, and substantive cultural engagement in our theology. Indeed, Southern Baptist theology has always had a deep, intimate connection with Calvinism that has kept it grounded in the superiority of Scripture, the sovereignty of God, the sufficiency of Christ, and the severity of sin. It has provided a critical counterweight to the revivalism that mediates to us our belief in savability but sometimes falls into man-centered excess. While this critical evaluation is beneficial, Calvinism has never been the dominant voice. Despite the claims of a Southern Baptist theological Golden Age of Calvinism to which we must return,⁷ there is simply no denying that most Southern Baptists do not think of themselves as Calvinists and that the prospect of such an identity is disconcerting.⁸ The proponents of the TS believe that, while Calvinism is a major contributor to Southern Baptist self-understanding, its logical implications are ultimately at cross-purposes with our core soteriological conviction that anyone can be saved.

are invited indiscriminately to share in Christ, Christ is open to all and displayed to all. It is clear, however, that only those who believe receive the promised benefits. How does anyone believe? By special operation of God's power on the word of truth, a benefit given only to the elect."

⁷Fred A. Malone, "Misery Loves Company: A Presbyterian Pastor Comes Home," in *Why I Am a Baptist*, ed. Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 138. Cf. John Leland, "A Letter of Valediction on Leaving Virginia" in *The Letters of the Late Elder John Leland* (New York: G.W. Wood, 1845), 172, quoted in Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale, 1992), 322. Leland believed that the best preaching is characterized by "the doctrine of sovereign grace . . . mixed with a little of what is called Arminianism."

⁸Russ Rankin, "SBC Pastors Polled on Calvinism and Its Effect," available at <http://www.lifeway.com/Article/research-sbc-pastors-polled-on-calvinism-affect-on-convention> (accessed on October 6, 2012). Sixty percent of pastors are concerned about Calvinism's influence in the SBC.

The TS was written to make clear the places where Southern Baptist thinking departs from Calvinism while acknowledging that, indeed, “non-Calvinism” is a poor descriptor of what we believe. Therefore, we are arguing for the term “Traditionalist” to define Southern Baptists who reject Calvinist soteriology. “Traditionalist” intends to convey that Southern Baptist soteriology from the very beginning has stood in appreciative but critical relationship with Calvinism. This tradition of modification of certain tenets of Calvinism is seen in all of our founding denominational documents including the Abstract of Principles, which does not include limited atonement or irresistible grace.⁹

The TS is written not only to challenge some of the specific components of Calvinism but also ultimately to challenge it at the deepest level. What holds Calvinism together, what provides its grid and filter for the biblical text, is its commitment to compatibilism, which is the idea that all events are unchangeably foreordained in such a way that people do not have the power to choose otherwise. This “soft-determinism” colors every aspect of the system. Theistic determinism necessarily undoes any regular understanding of humanity’s interaction with the world and with God. On this view, claims that God loves everyone and wants to save everyone are simply untenable.¹⁰ While Calvinists sincerely reject such evaluations, the necessary implication is, unfortunately, unavoidable: God unconditionally causes certain people to spend eternity in hell.¹¹ Therefore, what is fundamental to Calvinism is quite problematic for Southern Baptist soteriology: we believe in savability; we believe that anyone can be saved.

To say that we are rejecting consistent Calvinism is, however, not an innovation, it is a theological tradition. The TS simply makes explicit what has always been the case for Southern

⁹Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (New York: Oxford University, 2009), 92–93: “[In the time of James P. Boyce] Few Southern Baptists were Arminians—perhaps none of the clergy—but many held “lax views” on the doctrine of election, most commonly by teaching that God elected persons because he foresaw that they would repent and believe.” William Broadus, an advocate for Southern Seminary at that time in Virginia, opposed Arminianism, “but he also knew that some Virginia Baptists might find an unqualified statement of the faculty’s Calvinism troubling” (93).

¹⁰William Lane Craig, *Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000); Paul Himes, “When a Christian Sins: 1 Corinthians 10:13 and the Power of Contrary Choice in Relation to the Compatibilist-Libertarian Debate,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (June 2011): 329–44; Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); James W. Lamb, “On a Proof of Incompatibilism,” *Philosophical Review* 86 (January 1977): 20–35; Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 48–53. Peter van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism,” *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975): 185–99; Jerry Walls, “Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be A Compatibilist,” *Philosophia Christi* 13 (2011): 75–104; Mark Thomas Walker, “The Freedom of Judgment,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 11 (2003): 63–92.

¹¹Bruce Little, “Evil and God’s Sovereignty,” in *Whosoever Will*, ed. Steve Lemke and David Allen (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 297: “At the end of the day, if [Calvinists] wish to hold to their view of sovereignty [theistic determinism], they should be willing to accept the logical conclusion of their position and acknowledge that God is morally responsible for evil.”

Baptists. Our evangelism and missions have been driven by the conviction that it is God's sovereign desire for all people to hear and respond to the gospel. Many will never hear the gospel; many will hear and reject it. This is not due to any deficiency in God's plan or the power of the gospel. God, who is certainly powerful enough to create any possible world He wants, wanted a world of uncoerced relationships, and so the free response of people really matters. Yet, because of His great grace, anyone who hears the gospel may come and, believing, may have everlasting life. To abandon this for anything else is to trade in that which has made Southern Baptists so useful to God's kingdom for so long.¹²

¹²As a principle contributor to the report from the Calvinism Advisory Committee presented to the Houston Convention this year called "Truth, Trust, and Testimony in a Time of Tension," available at <http://www.sbclife.org/Articles/2013/06/sla5.asp> (accessed on November 26, 2013), I want to make clear that this essay and all the others here dealing with the TS are intended to work within the spirit of critically constructive interaction that is called for in the document. Unity does not demand unanimity, and we look forward to the ongoing conversation concerning Calvinism that will make us better together.

A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan of Salvation



Eric Hankins, Ph.D.

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Preamble

Every generation of Southern Baptists has the duty to articulate the truths of its faith with particular attention to the issues that are impacting contemporary mission and ministry. The precipitating issue for this statement is the rise of a movement called "New Calvinism" among Southern Baptists. This movement is committed to advancing in the churches an exclusively Calvinistic understanding of salvation, characterized by an aggressive insistence on the "Doctrines of Grace" ("TULIP"), and to the goal of making Calvinism the central Southern Baptist position on God's plan of salvation.

While Calvinists have been present in Southern Baptist life from its earliest days and have made very important contributions to our history and theology, the majority of Southern Baptists do not embrace Calvinism. Even the minority of Southern Baptists who have identified themselves as Calvinists generally modify its teachings in order to mitigate certain unacceptable conclusions (e.g., anti-missionism, hyper-Calvinism, double predestination, limited atonement, etc.). The very fact that there is a plurality of views on Calvinism designed to deal with these weaknesses (variously described as "3-point," "4-point," "moderate," etc.) would seem to call for circumspection and humility with respect to the system and to those who disagree with it. For the most part, Southern Baptists have been glad to relegate disagreements over Calvinism to secondary status along with other important but "non-essential" theological matters. The Southern Baptist majority has fellowshiped happily with its Calvinist brethren while kindly resisting Calvinism itself. And, to their credit, most Southern Baptist Calvinists have not demanded the adoption of their view as the standard. We would be fine if this consensus continued, but some New Calvinists seem to be pushing for a radical alteration of this long-standing arrangement.

We propose that what most Southern Baptists believe about salvation can rightly be called "Traditional" Southern Baptist soteriology, which should be understood in distinction to "Calvinist" soteriology. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is articulated in a general

way in the *Baptist Faith and Message*, “Article IV.” While some earlier Baptist confessions were shaped by Calvinism, the clear trajectory of the BF&M since 1925 is away from Calvinism. For almost a century, Southern Baptists have found that a sound, biblical soteriology can be taught, maintained, and defended without subscribing to Calvinism. Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology is grounded in the conviction that every person can and must be saved by a personal and free decision to respond to the Gospel by trusting in Christ Jesus alone as Savior and Lord. Without ascribing to Calvinism, Southern Baptists have reached around the world with the Gospel message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. Baptists have been well-served by a straightforward soteriology rooted in the fact that Christ is willing and able to save any and every sinner.

New Calvinism presents us with a duty and an opportunity to more carefully express what is generally believed by Southern Baptists about salvation. It is no longer helpful to identify ourselves by how many points of convergence we have with Calvinism. While we are not insisting that every Southern Baptist affirm the soteriological statement below in order to have a place in the Southern Baptist family, we are asserting that the vast majority of Southern Baptists are not Calvinists and that they do not want Calvinism to become the standard view in Southern Baptist life. We believe it is time to move beyond Calvinism as a reference point for Baptist soteriology.

Below is what we believe to be the essence of a “Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God’s Plan of Salvation.” We believe that most Southern Baptists, regardless of how they have described their personal understanding of the doctrine of salvation, will find the following statement consistent with what the Bible teaches and what Southern Baptists have generally believed about the nature of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Article One: The Gospel

We affirm that the Gospel is the good news that God has made a way of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for any person. This is in keeping with God’s desire for every person to be saved.

We deny that only a select few are capable of responding to the Gospel while the rest are predestined to an eternity in hell.

Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2:1–12; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; Luke 19:10; Luke 24:45–49; John 1:1–18; 3:16; Romans 1:1–6; 5:8; 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Galatians 4:4–7; Colossians 1:21–23; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; Hebrews 1:1–3; 4:14–16; 2 Peter 3:9

Article Two: The Sinfulness of Man

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will or rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned. While no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, we deny that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15–24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5; 7:15–16; 53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9; 31:29–30; Ezekiel 18:19–20; Matthew 7:21–23; Romans 1:18–32; 3:9–18; 5:12; 6:23; 7:9; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 6:9–10; 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27–28; Revelation 20:11–15

Article Three: The Atonement of Christ

We affirm that the penal substitution of Christ is the only available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

We deny that this atonement results in salvation without a person's free response of repentance and faith. We deny that God imposes or withholds this atonement without respect to an act of the person's free will. We deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved.

Psalms 22:1–31; Isaiah 53:1–12; John 12:32, 14:6; Acts 10:39–43; Acts 16:30–32; Romans 3:21–26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10–14; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:13–20; 1 Timothy 2:5–6; Hebrews 9:12–15, 24–28; 10:1–18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2

Article Four: The Grace of God

We affirm that grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.

We deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation.

Ezra 9:8; Proverbs 3:34; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 19:16–30, 23:37; Luke 10:1–12; Acts 15:11; 20:24; Romans 3:24, 27–28; 5:6, 8, 15–21; Galatians 1:6; 2:21; 5; Ephesians 2:8–10; Philippians 3:2–9; Colossians 2:13–17; Hebrews 4:16; 9:28; 1 John 4:19

Article Five: The Regeneration of the Sinner

We affirm that any person who responds to the Gospel with repentance and faith is born again through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a new creation in Christ and enters, at the moment he believes, into eternal life.

We deny that any person is regenerated prior to or apart from hearing and responding to the Gospel.

Luke 15:24; John 3:3; 7:37–39; 10:10; 16:7–14; Acts 2:37–39; Romans 6:4–11; 10:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; 6:15; Colossians 2:13

Article Six: Election to Salvation

We affirm that, in reference to salvation, election speaks of God's eternal, gracious, and certain plan in Christ to have a people who are His by repentance and faith.

We deny that election means that, from eternity, God predestined certain people for salvation and others for condemnation.

Genesis 1:26–28; 12:1–3; Exodus 19:6; Jeremiah 31:31–33; Matthew 24:31; 25:34; John 6:70; 15:16; Romans 8:29–30, 33; 9:6–8; 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1–2; Ephesians 1:4–6; 2:11–22; 3:1–11; 4:4–13; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; 1 Peter 1:1–2; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9–10

Article Seven: The Sovereignty of God

We affirm God's eternal knowledge of and sovereignty over every person's salvation or condemnation.

We deny that God's sovereignty and knowledge require Him to cause a person's acceptance or rejection of faith in Christ.

Genesis 1:1; 6:5–8; 18:16–33; 22; 2 Samuel 24:13–14; 1 Chronicles 29:10–20; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Joel 2:32; Psalm 23; 51:4; 139:1–6; Proverbs 15:3; John 6:44; Romans 11:3; Titus 3:3–7; James 1:13–15; Hebrews 11:6; 12:28; 1 Peter 1:17

Article Eight: The Free Will of Man

We affirm that God, as an expression of His sovereignty, endows each person with actual free will (the ability to choose between two options), which must be exercised in accepting or rejecting God's gracious call to salvation by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel.

We deny that the decision of faith is an act of God rather than a response of the person. We deny that there is an “effectual call” for certain people that is different from a “general call” to any person who hears and understands the Gospel.

Genesis 1:26–28; Numbers 21:8–9; Deuteronomy 30:19; Joshua 24:15; 1 Samuel 8:1–22; 2 Samuel 24:13–14; Esther 3:12–14; Matthew 7:13–14; 11:20–24; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 9:23–24; 13:34; 15:17–20; Romans 10:9–10; Titus 2:12; Revelation 22:17

Article Nine: The Security of the Believer

We affirm that when a person responds in faith to the Gospel, God promises to complete the process of salvation in the believer into eternity. This process begins with justification, whereby the sinner is immediately acquitted of all sin and granted peace with God; continues in sanctification, whereby the saved are progressively conformed to the image of Christ by the indwelling Holy Spirit; and concludes in glorification, whereby the saint enjoys life with Christ in heaven forever.

We deny that this Holy Spirit-sealed relationship can ever be broken. We deny even the possibility of apostasy.

John 10:28–29; 14:1–4; 16:12–14; Philippians 1:6; Romans 3:21–26; 8:29,30; 35–39; 12:1–3; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 1:13–14; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 1:21–22; 1 John 2:19; 3:2; 5:13–15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 13:5; James 1:12; Jude 24–25

Article Ten: The Great Commission

We affirm that the Lord Jesus Christ commissioned His church to preach the good news of salvation to all people to the ends of the earth. We affirm that the proclamation of the Gospel is God’s means of bringing any person to salvation.

We deny that salvation is possible outside of a faith response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Psalms 51:13; Proverbs 11:30; Isaiah 52:7; Matthew 28:19–20; John 14:6; Acts 1:8; 4:12; 10:42–43; Romans 1:16, 10:13–15; 1 Corinthians 1:17–21; Ephesians 3:7–9; 6:19–20; Philippians 1:12–14; 1 Thessalonians 1:8; 1 Timothy 2:5; 2 Timothy 4:1–5

Commentary on Article 1: The Gospel



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Is the Gospel ‘Good News’ for Every Sinner?

Every person is savable. This is the central claim of the first article in the Traditional Statement entitled “The Gospel.” I have been a gospel preacher for forty-five years. From my youth, shortly after my commitment to follow Christ, I have pursued the calling to proclaim to all people that God has made a way for them to find forgiveness by sending His only Son, Jesus of Nazareth, to die for their sins. This wonderful, astounding message is the gospel which literally means “good news.” There was never any lack of clarity in those who taught me or any doubt in my mind that the message was intended for everyone. This meant more than that it should be preached to everyone. It also meant that everyone—any morally responsible person who heard it—could respond to and receive the saving provision the gospel announces.

Article One: The Gospel

We affirm that the Gospel is the good news that God has made a way of salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ for any person. This is in keeping with God’s desire for every person to be saved.

We deny that only a select few are capable of responding to the Gospel while the rest are predestined to an eternity in hell.

Genesis 3:15; Psalm 2:1–12; Ezekiel 18:23, 32; Luke 19:10; Luke 24:45–49; John 1:1–18; 3:16; Romans 1:1–6; 5:8; 8:34; 2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Galatians 4:4–7; Colossians 1:21–23; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; Hebrews 1:1–3; 4:14–16; 2 Peter 3:9

I assert that this traditional understanding of Southern Baptists about the salvation of sinners includes this proposition: God meant for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be good news for everyone; God meant for it to be bad news for no one.

The Gospel is Good News

I write these words a few days into the New Year, having just completed an extensive and enjoyable celebration of the Christmas holidays. Although many allow the message of the first advent to get lost in secular celebration, I am always blessed by the seasonal emphasis with its pageants and carols and preaching on the birth of Jesus. The message of Christmas is cause for celebration for the likes of us, sinners one and

all. We ought to be as thrilled as the shepherds who first heard the amazing announcement from the angel: “Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** of great joy that will be for **all** the people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10–11 NIV; emphasis mine). The gospel is the story of God’s plan for his creature, man. It is a story of everlasting love. It is a story of eternal planning. It is a story of waiting and watching, and sacrificial giving. It is a story of redemption. It is good news. It is *the* good news.

The gospel story began in eternity past, when God according to His own counsels decided to have a race of creatures with whom He could express covenant love. He placed them in an environment completely suitable for them where they might create with Him, reign with Him, and fellowship with Him. He knew they would be tempted to sin and would succumb. He knew this rebellion would corrupt them and his creation. He knew it would seem to Satan and sinners that evil had ruined it all. But before the foundation of the world, He had a plan that would overturn the blight of sin, defeat Satan and evil, and make His beloved creatures fit for life in an unsullied, incorruptible kingdom.

The gospel story centers in Jesus Christ, God’s one and only Son. His coming had been prophesied for centuries. By the time the angel announced His birth, the people had been languishing a long time. Now, in the fullness of time, the one whose name means “God saves” had come to save His people from their sins. The price of salvation was His own horrific death. But through that death, God’s justice was satisfied, and Jesus was raised to life. The good news that was announced to the shepherds was now to be announced to the whole earth: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16 (NKJV).

Euangelion is the New Testament word generally translated “gospel.” It literally means good news. It is the message sinners everywhere need to hear. In the words of the “gospel” hymn:

Sinners Jesus will receive: Sound this word of grace to all
Who the heavenly pathway leave, All who linger, all who fall.
Come, and He will give you rest; Trust Him, for His word is plain;
He will take the sinfulest; Christ receiveth sinful men!¹

We must begin our conversation about soteriology, the doctrine of salvation, with the declaration that this subject is good news for Adam’s race. This good news of salvation in Christ is objective, sufficient, exclusive, and available to all.

¹Erdmann Neumeister, “Christ Receiveth Sinful Men,” trans. Emma Bevan, in *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991), hymn 563.

The Gospel is Good News for Everyone

The additional and pivotal claim we are making is that this gospel, this good news, is for *everyone*. It is in the heart of God to desire the salvation of every person He created. I expect no objections from the Christian community to Article 1 for its centering the gospel in the person and work of Jesus. But the further point of this affirmation and denial is that the salvation proclaimed by this gospel, though not finally received by all, is in fact available to *all*. When God made provision in Christ, He had a universal scope in mind. All persons were potential recipients of this magnanimous, magnificent salvation. Are we justified in making such a claim? Can we really know the mind of God on this matter? Is it more than a gesture toward equity or a sentimental view of God?

I submit that this view is the *plain* teaching of Scripture and is foundational to the plan of God for redemption. The gospel is not the gospel if it is not for everyone.

God's Word Declares It

Note three of the texts from the list of supporting passages. Because New Testament scholars have made the case extensively in numerous works that these verses declare that the gospel is for everyone, I will offer only a brief review.

John 3:16

There is a prevailing opinion that John 3:16 is the most significant verse in the Bible. It has been memorized, quoted, placarded, distributed, translated, and preached perhaps more than any other single verse of Scripture. It has been called the gospel in superlatives, the Bible in miniature, the Little Gospel, and the gospel in a nutshell.² It deserves all this attention because it succinctly declares what the gospel is (eternal life made possible through faith alone in God's only Son) and who the gospel is for (the world). If there were no other verse to appeal to regarding the intention of God toward sinners, John 3:16 would be sufficient to make it clear. The verse teaches:

1. God loves the world. He is not disinterested, dispassionate, or spiteful regarding people. He loves them enough to sacrifice his Son for them.
2. He loves the *whole* world. The word for world in the Greek is *kosmos*, that is "the whole human race."³ God's love and resultant offer of eternal life is for all humans.

²Jerry Vines, "Sermon on John 3:16," *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 13–14.

³A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. V: The Fourth Gospel and the Epistle to the Hebrews (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1932, 50), in Vines, 17.

3. The verse further asserts the universality of the gospel's intent by the word "whoever," translating the word *pas* which is used in the New Testament 1,228 times and is regularly translated whoever, all, and every. In John 3:16, "The best translation is: 'Anyone who believes.' The idea is non-restrictive. The idea is anyone...anywhere...anytime."⁴

1 Timothy 2:3–4 and 2 Peter 3:9

Added to the remarkable salvation invitation for all people in the verse above is the clear declaration of God's intent as expressed in 1 Timothy 2:3–4 and 2 Peter 3:9:

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." - 1 Timothy 2:3–4 (NKJV)

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." - 2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

Only by the most tortured eisegesis can one avoid the profound truth that God desires all sinners to be saved. Some interpreters, in order to maintain that God does not intend the gospel for everyone, suggest that the "all" in these verses means "all of the elect" or "all kinds of people" or something less than every individual human being. "This is a strained exegesis that is hard to justify in every case. Unless the context requires a different interpretation, it is better to say that 'all means all.'"⁵

God's Covenant Displays It

It is not only individual Scriptures like those above that teach the gospel is good news for everyone, but also the whole trajectory of Scripture points to the universal design of God for all people to benefit from His love. God is not a localized deity who cares for only one tribe. He is the Creator of all men and calls all to Himself.

This is noted early in God's call to Abraham. It begins with "I will make you a great nation" but ends with "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen 12:2–3 NIV). Although the nation of Israel often believed that the blessings were just for them, God always intended that they would be His servants so that all the world could be reached for His glory. As the prophet Isaiah declares: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isa 49:6 NIV).

⁴David Allen, correspondence, in Vines, 24.

⁵Timothy George, *Amazing Grace: God's Initiative—Our Response* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2000), 94.

Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees because they thought the Messiah was just to benefit them. And the Apostle Paul had to counter the Judaizers who didn't understand that the "wall of partition" had been broken in Christ and that the mystery had been unveiled: "Salvation is for the Gentiles, too." (For examples, see Col 1:26–27 and Eph 2:14.) In too many instances, the Jews, the Pharisees, and the Judaizers said to certain people, "God's plan is not for you" but Jesus along with the rest of the writers of the NT roundly condemn such thinking. How can the church conclude from the providential sweep of God's plan for the ages that the gospel is not for everyone?

God's Gospel Demonstrates It

When we say the gospel is good news for everyone, we do not mean that everyone will be saved. We are simply declaring that because of God's offer in Jesus Christ, everyone could be saved. Romans 1:16 is instructive on this issue:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16 (NASB)

The enabling act in the sovereign design of God, which makes it possible for anyone and everyone to come to salvation, is the gospel (its particulars and its proclamation). When the gospel is heard, its inherent power makes all sinful hearers able to respond. The failure of some sinful hearers to be saved is solely because of their refusal to believe. John 3:18 tells us that those who believe are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already. There is no deficiency in the power of the gospel or in the willingness of God to save.

The New Hampshire Confession of Faith (1833) reads: "We believe that the blessings of salvation are made free to all by the gospel; that it is the immediate duty of all to accept them by a cordial, penitent, and obedient faith; and that nothing prevents the salvation of the greatest sinner on earth but his own inherent depravity and voluntary rejection of the gospel; which rejection involves him in an aggravated condemnation."⁶

In the gospel, God has done all that is necessary to bring otherwise helpless sinners to the point of salvation. With that being done, sinners must receive or reject the gospel offer. God, in His sovereign plan, has chosen neither to coerce nor prohibit the sinner's choice in salvation. Only God (and the sinner himself) knows why sinners, having been enabled by the gospel to believe, choose as they do. As we try to understand why some are saved and others are lost, we must be careful that we do not misinterpret scripture, malign the character of God, or minimize the love of God by suggesting that His desire for some sinners is to simply ignore them or to damn them instead of to redeem them.

⁶See http://baptistcenter.net/confessions_page.html (accessed July 3, 2013).

When the Good News is Bad News

Is there any scenario in which the gospel (which is good news) would be bad news to anyone? If they were excluded by God from being afforded the gospel's provision and, from the day of their birth, were only passing time until a sure and certain consignment to an eternity in Hell, then indeed, that is bad news.

The implication of Calvinism is just that. God's salvific intent was always only for a select number. He picked them out before time began (unconditional election), caused events so that they would with certainty be redeemed, and left all other human beings to just as certainly perish in their sins. This interpretation of soteriology is good news for some and bad news for the rest.

Do Calvinists really teach that the gospel was always only intended by God for some sinners and that decision was made by God prior to creation? Consider the following comments by Reformed Theologian Loraine Boettner: "The Reformed Faith has held to the existence of an eternal, divine decree which, antecedently to any difference or desert in men themselves, separates the human race into two portions and ordains one to everlasting life and the other to everlasting death (hell)." Boettner goes on to say that Calvinists "believe that from all eternity God has intended to leave some of Adam's posterity in their sins and that the decisive factor in the life of each is to be found only in God's will."⁷

According to T. H. L. Parker in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Augustine is the father of these views. Parker explains:

The conclusion, to which Augustine was not afraid to go, is that mankind is from all eternity divided into two classes of elect and non-elect. The elect, of whom there are from all eternity a fixed number (known only to God) will in time believe and at last be saved. ... The non-elect are so because God has rejected them on account of their sin, and they are justly, as sinners, condemned to eternal punishment... God was in no sense a passive spectator before the event, but as the sovereign Lord determined the eternal lot of each man and therefore foresaw how he would deal with each man and what should become of him.⁸

Augustine was unmoved by the apparent arbitrariness of God's actions. He thought that it was impertinence to question the goodness of God on these matters. He pled ignorance on one hand because God's purposes are unsearchable; then, on the other hand, proceeded to give an answer to the dilemma, declaring it is a good thing for God to give sinners what they deserve even as He shows other sinners His mercy.

⁷Loraine Boettner in Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 43–44. Olson, 103, concludes that this view "is crucial to all true Calvinists; it is the heart of their system of soteriology."

⁸T. H. L. Parker, "Predestination," in *A Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Alan Richardson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 264.

Subsequent theologians adopted Augustine's views, but none was more prominent than John Calvin. Parker writes, "We turn to Calvin, with whose name predestination is popularly linked. Yet Calvin himself thought that he was merely reproducing Augustine's doctrine."⁹ Parker, appealing to quotations from a translation of Calvin's 1559 edition of *Institutes*, continues,

Calvin's definition, it will be remembered, stated that "eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others" (iii.21.5). There is no question here of a mere taking out of the elect from the mass of mankind and of overlooking the rest. Calvin will certainly speak of "passing over" and "setting apart," but he sees the passing over as a deliberate excluding by God, determined in eternity: "those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children" (iii.23.1). This he determined, therefore, before the sin for which the reprobate would in time be condemned had been committed. More, God willed the fall of man: "man falls, the providence of God so ordaining" (iii.23.8).¹⁰

James P. Boyce, the oft-cited founder of Southern Seminary, says this regarding the Decree of Reprobation in his *Abstract of Theology*:

The Scriptural statements as to Reprobation are that God, in eternity, when he elected some, did likewise not elect others; that as resulting from this non-election, but not as efficiently caused by it, he passes by these in the bestowment of the special favors shown to the Elect, and, as in like manner yet further resulting, condemns men because of sin to everlasting destruction, and while they are in the state of sin and condemnation, he effects or permits the hardening of their hearts, so that his truth is not appreciated, but actually rejected.¹¹

The preceding survey illustrates that Calvinism, at least in its historic and standard form, does not teach that everyone is savable. Those holding this view do not concur with Article 1 of the Traditional Statement. They affirm the position that God pre-temporally elected certain individuals for eternal life, which makes their faith response inevitable, while not electing all others, which makes their faith response impossible.

It is well known, however, that Calvinism (like many other theological systems) has within in its ranks numerous variations of belief. Chief among these variations is the attempt to salvage the idea that "God desires to save every sinner" from the ravages of the "horrible decree" of double predestination.

One such view is commonly referred to as "single predestination." This was the position of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. A self-described Calvinist and hero to most Southern Baptists, including me, Spurgeon goes to great lengths to separate the decree to elect and the decree to pass by. In a sermon on Romans 9:13, Spurgeon begins with this strong disclaimer about his

⁹Ibid., 268.

¹⁰Ibid., 269.

¹¹James P. Boyce, *Abstract of Theology* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 356.

understanding of this subject: “Do not imagine for an instant that I pretend to be able thoroughly to elucidate the great mysteries of predestination.” Instead, he is willing to “give you what I think to be a scriptural statement of the fact, that some men are chosen, other men are left.”¹²

Spurgeon basically argues that God’s decision to elect is alone causative for salvation but His decision not to elect is not in any way causative for condemnation. He writes, “All the glory to God in salvation; all the blame to men in damnation.” He insists it is not possible or necessary to reconcile the two arguments and deflects objections to his view with an appeal to mystery and to some sort of “fideism.” He adds, “It is not a matter of understanding; it is a matter of faith.”¹³

The “single predestination” view is widely held among people who self-identify as Calvinists.¹⁴ They believe it permits the concept that God really desires the salvation of all, even though He does not elect all which is a prerequisite for being able to respond to the gospel. This stripe of Calvinist appeals to mystery, as Spurgeon did, but isn’t this really a case of clear contradiction? The logical result of electing only some is the certain condemnation of the rest.¹⁵ In other words, the result to the non-elect is the same whether you style God’s activity as “double predestination” or “single predestination.” It is God’s choice alone that rescues sinners from hell or leaves them in their sin to face eternal judgment. According to these views, God has chosen for only some to be rescued.¹⁶

Another variation of Calvinism that attempts to affirm God’s love for all sinners and his desire to save everyone posits that God has two wills, His hidden (or secret) will and His revealed will. They assert that while it is God’s revealed will to desire the salvation of all, His hidden will is that only some (the elect) be saved.¹⁷

The hidden/revealed wills theory is flawed in numerous ways, including a destruction of confidence in the revealed will. How can one be assured of God’s revelation in Christ, the truth of gospel claims, or salvation for anyone in particular if these may be secretly countermanded by God’s hidden will? Additionally, this theory doesn’t solve the problem its proponents have with the question of God’s desire to save everyone. The revealed will (God desires to see all saved) is trumped by God’s hidden will (only some are intended for salvation). This makes the claim that “God desires to save all” a mere charade.

¹²Charles Spurgeon, “Jacob and Esau,” Sermon 239, delivered on January 16, 1859. Available: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/spurgeon/sermons05.xvi.html> (accessed August 26, 2013).

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴George, 88–89.

¹⁵Olson, 105–9.

¹⁶See Bruce Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” in *Perspectives on Election*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 39, who affirms “single predestination.” Ware writes: “As this relates to unconditional election, yes it is absolutely true that the elect most surely and certainly will be saved, and that the nonelect are just as certainly left in their sinful condition to experience the consequences of their sin.”

¹⁷Ken Keathley, “Does God Desire the Salvation of All,” in *Sovereignty and Salvation* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 42–62, summarizes how theologians have tried to manage the question of who God desires to save.

Because we deny the notion that the Bible teaches that only some humans are the objects of God's desire to save, we reject the theological interpretations described above as Calvinism. We applaud the attempt of some Calvinists to try to hold to their understanding of election and, at the same time, to affirm that God desires to save all. However, those attempts that just appeal to mystery or paradox are puzzling because they want to affirm simultaneously two contradictory claims. Those proposals for "a hidden will/secret will" are more troubling because they claim to affirm God's desire to save all but do not believe He really does. If these views do not make the affirmation "God desires the salvation of everyone" a central tenet, they have diminished the good news of the gospel.

Conclusion

By God's design, everyone is savable. We affirm that the gospel is for everyone. We reject the concept that only a select few are capable of responding to the Gospel while the rest are predestined to an eternity in hell.

The article on the gospel is first in the Traditional Statement because it sets the boundaries for the further discussion of the doctrine of salvation. Subsequent chapters will address the implications of the belief that "God desires to save everyone" on subjects such as grace, election, and sovereignty. Whatever conclusions one makes of the various aspects of God's plan of salvation, if it cannot be maintained that everyone is savable, then the good news for all has become bad news for most.

Commentary on Article 2: The Sinfulness of Man



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Article Two: The Sinfulness of Man

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will or rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned. While no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, we deny that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15–24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5; 7:15–16; 53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9; 31:29–30; Ezekiel 18:19–20; Matthew 7:21–23; Romans 1:18–32; 3:9–18; 5:12; 6:23; 7:9; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; 6:9–10; 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27–28; Revelation 20:11–15

Southern Baptists affirm that Adam's single act of disobedience in the Garden was an egregious rebellion against a holy God. His judgment against sin is visible throughout the Old Testament atonement motif, culminates at the Cross of Christ, and will be fully realized at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Questions concerning Article 2 of the Traditional Statement (TS) are justified because one's doctrine of sin informs one's doctrine of salvation. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Jesus came to die in order to offer Himself as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Any rejection of our lost and sinful condition is a rejection of His stated mission. The TS affirms both man's lost condition and God's gracious provision of salvation by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8–9) as the only way by which people may be saved from their hopeless and helpless condition.

Of the ten articles, the strongest objections to the TS have centered on Article 2, entitled "The Sinfulness of Man." Specifically, the article denies both incapacitated will and inherited guilt. Rather than address the points on which there is agreement, this chapter will focus on those points of disagreement. Because Article 8 in the TS addresses free will, this chapter will deal briefly with incapacitated will and at length with inherited guilt.

Does Article 2 Affirm That People Can Resist God's Saving Grace?

Yes. After providing two qualifications, Article 2 affirms that people can resist God's saving grace. First, Article 2 affirms that "no sinner is remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort." Second, it denies "that any sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel." With those qualifications stated explicitly, Article 2 declares, "We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of any person's free will." Chapter 8 deals with free will in greater detail. In summary, Article 2 denies the Calvinistic view that sinners are unable to repent and confess faith in Christ until they are first regenerated by God. Instead, the TS affirms that people who are saved by grace alone are called and enabled to exert their will by placing their faith or trust in Christ alone.

The Bible describes the sinful and lost condition of humanity (John 3:36; Rom 3:9–20). The Bible also declares that God loves the world (John 3:16), Christ died for the sins of the world (John 1:29; 1 John 2:2), and all people in every place are called to repent (Mark 6:12; Acts 2:38; 17:30). Will God hold people accountable for failing to do what they are unable to do? If God calls all people to repent and there are open invitations for people to respond in faith to Christ, then it follows that people are able to repent and place faith in Christ.¹

The denial of an incapacitated will in Article 2 is a denial of Calvinism's doctrine of irresistible grace, also known as monergism. Roger Olson rejects irresistible grace but explains the view is biblically and logically necessary if one accepts total depravity, unconditional election, and limited atonement. Olson writes,

As for logic, the argument is that because people are totally depraved and dead in trespasses and sins, unless God elects him or her, the person will never respond to the internal calling of the Holy Spirit. So, the Holy Spirit has to change the person inwardly in an effectual manner, which is regeneration. Then the born again person desires to come to Christ, in which case he or she is given repentance and faith (conversion) and justification (forgiveness and imputation of Christ's righteousness). This process is called "monergistic grace" or just "monergism."²

Steve Lemke denies the doctrine of irresistible grace, or monergism. While rejecting any idea that any person "can achieve salvation apart from God," he identifies the theological debate as "whether humans have any role at all in accepting or receiving their own salvation." Calvinists explain that God does not violate a lost person's will but changes their will through regeneration so they are drawn to Christ. Compatibilism is the Calvinist view that a lost person's will is irresistibly changed through regeneration so they now desire Christ. Lemke explains that compatibilism is not a solution because there is no opportunity for a person to choose otherwise.

¹Calvinists distinguish between natural and moral inability. For more on this internal discussion, see works of Jonathan Edwards, Andrew Fuller, A. A. Hodge, and William Shedd.

²Roger E. Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 156.

Lemke presents a robust argument from Scripture that God's saving grace is *resistible*. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem; He wanted to gather them to Himself but they "were not willing" (Matt 23:37 HCSB). The rich young ruler appears unwilling to follow Jesus' instructions about inheriting eternal life (Luke 18:18–23). Other examples of resistible grace in the parables of Jesus include the two sons (Matt 21:28–32), the vineyard (Matt 21:33–44), and the soils (Matt 13:1–23).

Lemke also notes the "all-inclusive invitations" in Scripture. He writes, "The key issue, then, is whether salvation is genuinely open to all persons or merely just to a few who receive irresistible grace." He notes God's desire for the salvation of all people (Matt 18:14; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2) and traces all-inclusive invitations throughout the Bible (Joel 2:32; Matt 7:24; 10:32–33; 11:6; 11:28; 12:50; Luke 9:23–24; John 1:7; 3:15–16; 4:13–14; 6:40; 6:51; 7:17; 7:37; 8:51; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 2:21; 10:43; Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 John 2:23; 4:15; 5:1; Rev 3:20; 22:17).³

Richard Swinburne, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford, writes, "My assessment of the Christian theological tradition is that all Christian theologians of the first four centuries believed in human free will in the libertarian sense, as did all subsequent Eastern Orthodox theologians, and most Western Catholic traditions from Duns Scotus (in the fourteenth century) onwards."⁴ Likewise, the TS resists monergism and affirms libertarian free will.

Does Article 2 Deny That People Inherit Adam's Guilt?

Yes. Article 2 makes two particular claims regarding our inheritance from the first Adam. First, Article 2 affirms that all people inherit "a nature and environment inclined toward sin." Second, it denies that Adam's sin renders "any person guilty before he has personally sinned." This view of inherited sinful nature (or inclination) appears to be more consistent with a plain reading of the Bible than the view that people inherit guilt. Also, the verbiage for Article 2 was taken from Article 3 of the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM) 1963 and 2000. By approving the BFM in 1963 and 2000, the SBC excluded from the convention's confession any notion of inheriting of the guilt of Adam's sin.

The BFM 2000 affirms that people inherit a nature inclined toward sin. (See the single-underlined words in the illustration on page 32.) Article 2 of the TS attempts to clarify Article 3 of the BFM 2000, which provides this explanation concerning Adam's posterity: "as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation." The TS

³Steve W. Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 109–62.

⁴Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (New York: Clarendon, 1998), 35. This claim is explored in Christopher J. Eppling, "A Study of the Patristic Doctrine of Free Will," Unpublished Th.M. Thesis, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009.

restates the view as follows: “every person who is capable of moral action will sin.” The TS then denies explicitly that people are born with the guilt of the first Adam’s sin. We regard this to be an implication of the BFM: “We deny that Adam’s sin ... rendered any person guilty before he has personally sinned.” (See the double-underlined words in the illustration on page 32.)

This denial of inherited guilt is not intended to be a judgment that such a view is outside of Christian orthodoxy or Baptist theology. Rather, Christian history is replete with examples of faithful biblical exegetes and noteworthy theologians who affirm inherited guilt. The doctrine of inherited guilt is one attempt to explain our relationship to the first Adam. Many Baptists have affirmed inherited guilt in their doctrinal statements, as have other respected streams within the larger Christian tradition, such as Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. Of course, groups can share one theological conviction (such as inherited guilt) without sharing all theological convictions. Some Calvinistic Baptists, for example, have mounted impressive arguments against infant baptism.⁵ Why? Baptists are neither Lutherans nor Presbyterians nor Roman Catholics. It should cause our Calvinistic brothers to wonder: Is it consistent to affirm Augustine and Calvin’s problem of inherited guilt but reject their answer of infant baptism? If so, then why?

Inherited guilt is the shared theological premise among many traditions which baptize their infants. How long will Calvinistic Southern Baptists agree with them in accepting the problem of inherited guilt but rejecting their solution involving infant baptism? The reply from Calvinistic Southern Baptists will be, “We affirm believer’s baptism.” We say, “Rightly so.” But consider the possibility that a similar reading of Scripture which causes them to reject infant baptism causes us to reject infant guilt.

Calvinistic Southern Baptists typically affirm some variation of the inherited guilt view, which teaches that the guilt of Adam is passed (or imputed) to all people—with the exception of Jesus. Imputed guilt is their explanation for why infants sometimes die. John Murray was not a Southern Baptist but a well-respected professor of theology at Princeton Seminary and Westminster Seminary. In his work *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, Murray raises this question and answers with imputed guilt. He quotes Rom 6:23 to argue that the wages of sin is death; infants sometimes die because Adam’s guilt is imputed to all people.

Article 2 denies inherited guilt. What is the reply to John Murray’s argument that infants sometimes die because of Adam’s guilt? According to Rom 6:23, death is a result of sin. True. But Rom 6:23 does not state that every physical death is the result of that person’s individual guilt. Is there any other biblical support for our view that physical death isn’t always the result of the guilt of our own sin? Yes.

⁵See as examples Thomas Schreiner and Shawn Wright, *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007); and Fred Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism versus Paedobaptism* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2003).

**Illustration: Is Article 2 of the Traditional Statement
Consistent with Article 3 of the the BFM 2000?*****Baptist Faith and Message (2000) Article 3: Man***

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

Genesis 1:26-30; 2:5,7,18-22; 3; 9:6; Psalms 1; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:14-18,29; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.

***A Statement of the Traditional Southern Baptist Understanding of God's Plan
of Salvation (2012) Article 2: The Sinfulness of Man***

We affirm that, because of the fall of Adam, every person inherits a nature and environment inclined toward sin and that every person who is capable of moral action will sin. Each person's own sin alone brings the wrath of a holy God, broken fellowship with Him, ever-worsening selfishness and destructiveness, death, and condemnation to an eternity in hell.

We deny that Adam's sin resulted in the incapacitation of free will in all people or rendered all people guilty before they have personally sinned. While no one is even remotely capable of achieving salvation through his own effort, no sinner is saved apart from a free response to the Holy Spirit's drawing through the Gospel.

Genesis 3:15-24; 6:5; Deuteronomy 1:39; Isaiah 6:5, 7:15-16;53:6; Jeremiah 17:5,9, 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:19-20; Romans 1:18-32; 3:9-18, 5:12, 6:23; 7:9; Matthew 7:21-23; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; 6:9-10;15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-15

Consider the tragic story of the first son of David and Bathsheba. Their infant son did not die because of his own guilt. The text of 2 Samuel 12 is clear that the infant died as a result of David's sinful actions, which were ultimately a result of Adam's sin. Our view is not that infants are sinless; instead, they have inherited "a nature and environment inclined toward sin."⁶ Infants are *not guilty* before God because they have not yet knowingly acted in sinful ways. Why do they sometimes die? As was the case with David's first son, infants are sometimes impacted the sweeping consequences of God's judgment against the sinful behavior of other people, such as the sinful actions of King David which resulted in the death of his infant son. But physical death as a result of another person's sin should not be equated with bearing the guilt of another person's sin. Because infants live in a body and world inclined toward sin, this sometimes results in the death of not-guilty infants. Consider also the murder of infant boys carried out by Pharaoh and by King Herod (Exod 1:22 and Matt 1:16). Does the Scripture indicate they died because of the guilt of Adam or because of the royal decree? The view of inherited sinful nature affirmed in the TS is consistent with both the BFM and the Bible.

It is not necessary for all Southern Baptists to deny inherited guilt. However, a denial of inherited guilt seems more consistent with the language of the BFM 2000, and it is necessary that Southern Baptists who affirm the convention's statement of faith affirm that people inherit from Adam a nature inclined to sin. Why? That is the view found in Article 3 of the BFM 2000.

In the following sections, evidence will be provided from the Bible, church history, and systematic theology in favor of inherited sinful nature over inherited guilt, as expressed in Article 2 of the TS.

A Defense for Article 2 from the Bible

Southern Baptists who affirm the TS explicitly reject inherited guilt. The Bible teaches that Adam's sin had devastating consequences for humanity and no one escapes sinfulness. But we are held accountable by God for our own sin and guilt, not the sin and guilt of Adam.

Deuteronomy 1 & Numbers 14

Recall the story of the twelve spies. Two saw grapes; ten saw giants. Why did Israel wander in the desert for forty years? Because they voted with the ten spies, who failed to trust God. Deuteronomy 1 and Numbers 14 record God's judgment against them. Because the Israelites failed to trust God, the "evil generation" was prohibited from entering the Promised Land. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the older generation (defined in Num 14:29 as twenty years and older) would

⁶Others prefer to speak of inherited death in order to argue that sin is attached to but not fundamental to the human nature; also, inherited death may account for the dying of creation mentioned in Romans 8. Regardless, the language of both the TS and the BFM 2000 claim that we now have both "a nature and environment inclined toward sin."

not enter the Promised Land. Instead, they would wander around and die in the desert. After the last of that generation died, the younger generation of Israelites would enter the land. What was the *single reason* the younger generation was spared God's judgment? Their age.

This is not to suggest that twenty years is an age (or stage) of accountability for every person. But according to Deut 1:39, that younger generation had "no knowledge of good or evil." They lacked moral knowledge and were spared from God's judgment. In his commentary, Weinfeld writes that the phrase in Deut 1:39 refers to males "not yet of responsible age." In support of this view, he compares the phrase to Isa 7:15, cites the parallel passage in Num 14:31, and notes the age of twenty years as a time of accountability (Exod 30:14 and Num 1:3). Weinfeld adds, "According to rabbinic tradition, man is not accountable before the age of twenty."⁷

Although not held guilty for the sins of their fathers, the younger generation nevertheless experienced some of the negative consequences or wages of sin. They wandered in the desert, unable to inherit the Promised Land until the last person of the older generation died. In a similar way, infants today are not held responsible for the actions of previous generations, up to and including Adam. Like the younger generation in the Deuteronomy/Numbers account, infants experience the consequences of sin for which they are not counted guilty.

John MacArthur holds a similar interpretation of Deut 1:39 and links that with the spiritual condition of infants today. In his book *Safe in the Arms of God*, he writes, "The Israelite children of sinful parents were allowed to enter fully into the blessing God had for His people. They were in no way held accountable, responsible, or punishable for the sins of their parents. Why? Because they had no knowledge of good and evil, right or wrong." Then, he quotes Ezek 18:20 (ESV), which reads, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself."⁸

Psalm 51:5

After David's sin with Bathsheba and confrontation by Nathan, the king offers this confession in Psalm 51:5, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (NASB). In what way should his statement be understood? David wrote that he was brought forth in "iniquity" (*'āwōn*) and conceived in "sin" (*ḥēṭ*). *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (CHALOT)* defines *'āwōn* as "activity that is crooked or wrong." Similarly it defines *ḥēṭ* as "fault (against men)" and "sin (against God)." In both instances, this standard

⁷Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 151.

⁸John MacArthur, *Safe in the Arms of God* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 45.

lexicon defines the words in reference to wrongful *actions*. Did David regard the circumstances surrounding his conception to be sinful?

The following comments are made concerning Psalm 51:5 in the United Bible Society's *A Translator's Handbook on The Book of Psalms*:

In vivid language the psalmist confesses that he has been a sinner all his life. The literal language, "In iniquity I was given birth, and in sin my mother conceived me" (see 58.3), is hardly the basis for biological, anthropological, or theological pronouncements about the nature of the human being as sinner. Were the words to be taken literally, they would mean that the psalmist's mother sinned when she became pregnant (which implies either that sexual intercourse as such is sinful or that she was guilty of fornication or adultery), and that at the moment of his birth he was already a sinner. What the psalmist is saying is that he (and so, by implication, everyone) is a sinner; sin is ingrained in human nature and permeates all of human activity. In some languages it may be better to follow the example of TEV or of GECL: "Wrong and guilt have characterized my life ever since my mother gave birth to me."⁹

Other scholars who comment on the meaning of Psalm 51:5 render a similar judgment. Franz Delitzsch explains that David's "parents were sinful human beings, and this sinful state (*habitus*) has operated upon his birth and even his conception, and from this point has passed over to him." Edward Dalglish observes that "the psalmist is relating his sinfulness to the very inception of life; he traces his development beyond birth (*chuwl*) to the genesis of his being in his mother's womb—even to the very hour of conception (*yacham*)." Bruce Waltke writes that it "supports the notion that at the time of conception man is in a state of sin (. . .)." Mitchell Dahood concurs, "All men have a congenital tendency toward evil."¹⁰

Michael Goulder notes that "critics are almost unanimous in taking v. 5 to refer to the universality of human sin, transmitted from generation to generation." In his commentary, Hans-Joachim Kraus writes, "'*Āwōn* and *hēt* have from the hour of birth been the determining forces under whose signature life began. The petitioner wants to say that the primordial cause, the root cause of my existence, is interwoven with corruption."¹¹ None of these Old Testament

⁹Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reburn, *A Translator's Handbook on The Book of Psalms* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991) in Translator's Workplace Version 5.0, Summer Institute of Linguistics and United Bible Society.

¹⁰Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, translated by Francis Bolton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 137; Edward Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-One: In the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 121; Bruce Waltke, "Reflections from the Old Testament on Abortion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19 (1976): 12, 12; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100*, in vol. 17a of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 4.

¹¹Michael Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalm 51–72): Studies in the Psalter, II*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 102, edited by David J. A. Clines and Philip R. Davies (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1990), 53; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Continental Commentary*, translated

scholars derive from Psalm 51:5 that people are guilty of sin from birth. Instead, they affirm that sinfulness is present at the first moment of life.

Romans 5:12

Joseph Fitzmyer cautions readers of Romans 5 to distinguish between Paul's writings and the later teachings of the church. The Catholic scholar explains that the doctrine of original sin (the view that all people inherit both a sinful nature and guilt) is a later teaching of the church rather than an explicit teaching of Paul. The doctrine of original sin was developed from later Augustinian writings and solidified through the Sixteenth Council of Carthage, the Second Council of Orange, and the Tridentine Council.¹²

Romans 5:12 begins with the word "Therefore." What was Paul's previous argument? In Rom 5:1–2, Paul explains that we have been justified by faith and have peace with God through Christ. Also, through Christ we have access by faith to this grace. In vv. 3–5, those who have been given the Holy Spirit can hope in their suffering because of what God produces in them. Christ died for "the weak," "ungodly," people who were "still sinners" (vv. 6–8). Verse 9 begins in a way that is similar to v. 1 ("Since, therefore, we have been justified..."). Verse 1 mentions being justified by faith; verse 9 mentions being justified by His blood. Verses 9–11 provide assurance that we will be saved from God's wrath by the life provided by Jesus.

In verse 12, Paul states that "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (v. 12). Sin entered the world through one man, Adam. Death entered the world through sin. Death spread to all men. Why? The answer is found in verse 12, "because all sinned." The text states neither "in whom all sinned" nor "because all sinned in Adam." Death spread because people sinned. Even worse, "death reigned from Adam to Moses" (v. 14). But Christ is anticipated, and Adam is described as "a type of the one to come" (v. 14).

The remark that "one trespass led to condemnation" (v. 18) is clarified in v. 19, "For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" (ESV). Do these verses teach that all people inherit the guilt and condemnation of Adam? If this is pressed as the meaning intended by Paul, then the parallel to all people inheriting guilt and condemnation is all people inheriting justification and life (v. 19). In order to affirm universal sinfulness but deny universal salvation, Millard Erickson posits a "conditional imputation" of Adam's guilt. People must ratify the work of Adam by personally and knowingly sinning just as they must ratify the work of Christ by

by Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 503.

¹²Joseph Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with introduction and Commentary*, in vol. 33 of *The Anchor Bible*, edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), 408–09.

personally and knowingly repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Savior and Lord.¹³

What does the text of Rom 5:12–21 not say? The text makes no mention of a covenant between God and Adam and it makes no mention of imputation of Adam's guilt. Can those ideas be found among the systematic theologies. Yes. Can they be found in this passage? No. In his monumental work *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, James D. G. Dunn, articulates his rejection of inherited guilt as follows: "Nevertheless, guilt only enters into the reckoning with the individual's own transgression. Human beings are not held responsible for the state into which they are born. That is the starting point of their personal responsibility, a starting point for which they are not liable."¹⁴

Perhaps other biblical texts support the doctrine of inherited guilt. Perhaps not. Either way, they are not discernible in Rom 5:12–21. Instead, we see that death spread to all of humanity because of the sin of one man, Adam. Thankfully, God answered the spread of death and condemnation through Adam with the hope of justification and life through Christ.

A Defense for Article 2 from Church History

Certain people question the denial of inherited guilt by citing historical statements affirming the view. We too have given careful study to the biblical text. And we are persuaded by the words of the Bible to reject inherited guilt in favor of inherited sinful nature. If it can be demonstrated from the words of the Bible that we have been wrong as a convention (failing to affirm inherited guilt since 1963), then we will revise Article 2. But we will not be persuaded by citations of systematic theology textbooks, even if they happen to have been written by Southern Baptists. Certain Southern Baptist theologians have been writing academic papers for several years attempting to argue that twisting a plain reading of the Bible to fit on a theological framework is precisely what has contributed to the present difficulties.¹⁵ We prefer to deal in a conversation about the words of the Bible alone. The Reformation cry was *Sola Scriptura* (Scripture alone). We agree. Let the assertions and claims about this matter be drawn from an appeal to Scripture alone as we discuss this matter. To establish that this view is not a recent innovation within church history, examples will be provided from the following periods of church history: Patristic, Reformation, and Southern Baptist history.¹⁶

¹³Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 656.

¹⁴James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 97.

¹⁵See David Allen, Ken Keathley, et. al, "Neither Calvinists nor Arminians but Baptists." White Paper 36 (September 2010) at http://www.baptistcenter.net/papers/Neither_Calvinists_Nor_Arminians_But_Baptists.pdf (accessed September 3, 2012); and Eric Hankins, "Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism: Toward a Baptist Soteriology" *Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 8 no. 1 (Spring 2011): 87–100.

¹⁶More detail on these and other examples can be found in my book, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants: A Biblical-Historical Survey and Systematic Proposal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 81–152. Emphasis in the quotations is mine.

Known as “Golden Mouth” for his skills in oratory, John Chrysostom (AD 374–407) is regarded as one of the most significant preachers in the first thousand years of Christian history. He wrote: “We do baptize infants, although *they are not guilty of any sins*.”¹⁷

Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 330–390) preached, “For this is how the matter stands; at that time they begin to be responsible for their lives, when reason is matured, and they learn the mystery of life for of *sins of ignorance owing to their tender years they have no account to give*, and it is far more profitable on all accounts to be fortified by the Font, because of the sudden assaults of danger that befall us, stronger than our helpers.”¹⁸ Gregory taught the following ideas in the passage above: First, people are not born with the responsibility of Adam’s sin. Rather, they become morally responsible at the point in life at which their reason matures and “they learn the mystery of life.” Second, they are not responsible for sins committed prior to this time of responsibility. Infancy is obviously included in the earliest period of life; Gregory called this period the “tender years,” which is a time *prior* to people becoming “responsible for their lives.” All sins committed during these “tender years” are regarded by God as “sins of ignorance,” for which the person will not have to give an account.

In *On Infants’ Early Deaths*, Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–394) addressed the spiritual condition of infants. They were neither good nor bad; infants who died would be with God because their souls had never been corrupted by their own sinful actions.

Eastern theologians were not the only ones who rejected (or failed to advocate for) inherited guilt. Among the pre-Augustinian Western fathers, Tertullian (ca. 145–ca. 220) is often cited in support of the view that infants inherit sin and guilt. Although he mentioned that their souls are unclean in Adam, he also questioned why there was a rush to baptize infants, referred to their souls as innocent, and differentiated between infants and children based upon their capability to commit sin.¹⁹

Inherited guilt was rejected by one of the most important of the Magisterial Reformers, Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531). Like Martin Luther, Zwingli rejected the Augustinian notion that baptism removed the guilt of original sin. However, he admitted to holding that view at one time. In 1525, he admitted that the controversy with Anabaptists “has shown us that it is not the pouring of water which washes away sin. And that was what we once believed, although without any authority in the word of God. We also believed that the water of baptism cleansed children from a sin that they never had, and that without it they would be damned. All these beliefs were erroneous, as we shall see later.”²⁰ Zwingli still affirmed both Adam’s seminal unity

¹⁷John Chrysostom *On Infants*, edited and translated by Henry Bettenson, in *The Later Christian Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 169.

¹⁸Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.28, in NPNF2 7:370.

¹⁹See my treatment of Tertullian’s *A Treatise on the Soul*, *Against Marcion*, and *On Baptism* in my book, *The Spiritual Condition of Infants*, 96–101.

²⁰Ulrich Zwingli, *Of Baptism*, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Vol.

with humanity and sin's devastating effects upon humanity. But he stated the effects on infants in new ways.

Martin Luther attacked Zwingli's position as Pelagian because of his use of free will, so Zwingli offered a reply to Urbanus Rhegius in Augsburg. In defending his view of original sin, Zwingli asked this question: "For what could be said more briefly and plainly than that original sin is not sin but disease, and that the children of Christians are not condemned to eternal punishment on account of that disease?"²¹ Zwingli defended his view by distinguishing between the words *disease* and *sin*. *Disease* refers to the "original contamination of man," "defect of humanity," or "the defect of a corrupted nature." Romans 5:14 reveals that Adam's fault brought this to every person. *Sin*, however, "implies guilt, and guilt comes from a transgression or a trespass on the part of one who designedly perpetrates a deed."

In his *Systematic Theology*, James Leo Garrett, Jr. categorizes Zwingli's view as one of five "Theories Not Teaching the Imputation of Guilt" and labels it "Theory of Uncondemnable Depravity." Garrett identifies Zwingli with this view and explains, "This theory holds that human depravity always leads to sin but is not sin per se, and hence human beings are not condemned for their depravity but for the sins to which depravity has led."²²

E. Y. Mullins (1860–1928) served as president of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Baptist World Alliance, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (1899–1928). Mullins was the architect of the *Baptist Faith and Message* 1925. He rejected the doctrine of inherited guilt, as does the Traditional Statement. Mullins argued that man is not guilty because of his nature. Also, according to Mullins, man is not guilty because he was represented by Adam in the Garden or because we were seminally present in Adam. Rather, man "is guilty when he does wrong." For Mullins, Adam's guilt is not imputed to humanity. Mullins explained, "Men are not condemned therefore for hereditary or original sin. They are condemned only for their own sins."²³

A Defense for Article 2 from Systematic Theology

The appeal to set aside the systematic theology textbooks, even those excellent volumes produced by Baptists, is not based upon the notion that our view cannot be supported. To the

XXIV: Zwingli and Bullinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 153.

²¹Ulrich Zwingli, *On Original Sin*, translated by Samuel Jackson, in *On Providence and Other Essays* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 3.

²²Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:489–91. Garrett also includes under "Theory of Uncondemnable Depravity" Charles G. Finney and New England Congregationalists Samuel Hopkins, Nathanael Emmons, Timothy Dwight, and Nathaniel W. Taylor.

²³E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1917; reprinted 1974), 294, 302. For examples of other Southern Baptists who have denied inherited guilt, see my booklet *Born Guilty? A Southern Baptist View of Original Sin* (Carrollton, GA: Free Church Press, 2013), 20–22.

contrary, we find support for our view in a systematic treatment by a respected Baptist theologian who blazes a trail leading through the confusion and back to the Scriptures. Millard Erickson is a professor of theology whose book, *Christian Theology*, is commonly used in the classrooms of Southern Baptist colleges and seminaries. He is profiled among the statesmen and thinkers in a chapter of George and Dockery's book, *Baptist Theologians*. Erickson's many teaching posts have included both Southwestern and Southern seminaries.

In *Christian Theology*, Erickson argues for a view known as conditional imputation. In this view, Adam's guilt is imputed to a person only *after* he knowingly sins. For this reason, infants are free from Adam's guilt and God's judgment. At the point that a person first knowingly sins, he becomes accountable to God. This is the justification for an age or stage of moral accountability. Pointing to Romans 5, Erickson explains that just as the work of Christ is not universally imputed but must be individually ratified (or received), so the work of Adam is not universally imputed but must be individually ratified (or received).²⁴

Following the biblical intuition of Millard Erickson, the TS rejects imputed guilt. We understand the Bible to teach in Romans 5 and other biblical texts that Adam's sin had devastating consequences for humanity but we are held accountable by God only for our own sin and guilt.

Conclusion

While affirming the universal and inescapable sinfulness of all people, Article 2 makes two important denials, both of which conflict with particular doctrines of Calvinism. First, Article 2 denies that sinners are unable to respond to freely respond to God's gracious invitation to repent of sin and place their faith in Christ. Calvinists appeal to the doctrine of total depravity to claim that sinners are unable to repent and trust Christ apart from the monergistic work of regeneration. The TS differs. The universal appeals for people to repent and believe in Christ imply that any sinner can actually repent and believe in Christ. Second, Article 2 denies that people inherit the guilt of Adam's sin. Instead, the TS remains consistent with the BFM 1963 and 2000, which fail to mention inherited guilt and explicitly describe what people inherit from Adam. People inherit a nature and environment inclined toward sin. Eventually, people will become transgressors and be subject to condemnation. Neither the Bible nor the BFM requires an affirmation of inherited guilt. The TS, like many theologians throughout church history, simply goes one step further and denies inherited guilt.

²⁴Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 652–56.

Commentary on Article 3: The Atonement of Christ



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Recovering the Gospel — Why Belief in an Unlimited Atonement Matters

Article 3 addresses the Atonement of Christ. It consists of one proposition in affirmation and three in denial. I expect there will be no disagreement on the affirmation regarding the penal substitution of Christ. The penal substitutionary atonement, though often attacked and vilified in modern theology, is the bedrock doctrine for explaining the work of Christ on the cross for the sins of the world. Sin can only be atoned by the shed blood of Christ on the cross as our substitute. The word “penal” connotes legal imagery. Jesus’ death on the cross satisfied the justice and wrath of God against our sin. Apart from Christ, there is no salvation. Apart from his atonement, there is no salvation. Only the cross of Christ provides an available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

The first proposition in the denial states: “We deny that this atonement results in salvation without a person’s free response of repentance and faith.” The operative word here is “free.” The Scripture teaches that the atonement is only applied to those who meet the condition of repentance and faith. When it comes to the question of free will, all Calvinists affirm some form of divine determinism along with free will.¹

¹Westminster Confession, III, 1.

Article Three: The Atonement of Christ

We affirm that the penal substitution of Christ is the only available and effective sacrifice for the sins of every person.

We deny that this atonement results in salvation without a person’s free response of repentance and faith. We deny that God imposes or withholds this atonement without respect to an act of the person’s free will. We deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved.

Psalm 22:1–31; Isaiah 53:1–12; John 12:32, 14:6; Acts 10:39–43; Acts 16:30–32; Romans 3:21–26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10–14; Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:13–20; 1 Timothy 2:5–6; Hebrews 9:12–15, 24–28; 10:1–18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2

One key aspect of divine determinism is the doctrine of God's eternal decree which affirms that God predetermined from eternity who will be saved (the elect) and who will be damned.² Most affirm compatibilism, by which is meant all human actions are determined by God and yet humans are free and responsible for their actions. With respect to salvation, in a compatibilist framework, God changes the will of the individual by means of irresistible grace, such that having been regenerated, one genuinely and freely desires to trust Christ. According to compatibilism, the individual does not have the ability to choose any differently. Compatibilism is heavily dependent on Jonathan Edwards's concept that we always act according to our greatest desire.³

We do not believe that compatibilism comports with genuine freedom. The reason should be obvious. In this construct, God imposes regeneration, and the individual is "free" to exercise faith but he is not free to choose any differently. By any normal understanding of freedom, this is not freedom. In order to have freedom, there must be the opportunity for a genuine choice between at least two options, and there must be no coercion made with respect to the choice. Acts committed under compulsion are not truly free acts. Compatibilists maintain that their version of free choice is not "imposition" or "compulsion." We maintain that in essence, given the description of how one chooses to have faith in a compatibilist framework, such choices are not, in fact, genuinely free. Furthermore, Scripture (Romans 7) and human experience illustrate that we do not always act according to our desires. In fact, sometimes we act against our desires. This question of free will is a difficult issue in theology. The first proposition in the denial should be understood to mean that we deny compatibilism and affirm genuine (libertarian) freedom.⁴ This is with the understanding that there is no such thing as absolute freedom, and that the freedom we do possess in no way conflicts with or ever overrides the sovereignty of God.

The second proposition in the denial states: "We deny that God imposes or withholds this atonement without respect to an act of the person's free will." This denial must be understood in light of the meaning of the first statement of denial and its explanation. While compatibilists argue that no one is saved apart from an exercise of their free will, we are simply saying that irresistible grace vitiates free will for reasons stated above. In the Calvinist system, the elect are regenerated by an act of God which it is impossible for them to resist or decline. It seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that God is indeed "imposing" salvation. However divine sovereignty and human responsibility interact, we must affirm both, for Scripture affirms both, and we must not go against Scripture nor should we go beyond Scripture.

The third proposition in the denial states: "We deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved." This is our denial of limited atonement. This third proposition addresses the question of the extent of the atonement. This is a far more intricate subject than most realize. I

²Westminster Confession, III, 3.

³For a description of compatibilism from a Southern Baptist theologian, see Bruce Ware, *God's Greater Glory: The Exalted God of Scripture and the Christian Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

⁴On the problems with theological compatibilism, see Jerry Walls, "Why No Classical Theist, Let Alone Orthodox Christian, Should Ever Be a Compatibilist," *Philosophia Christi*, vol. 13.1 (2011): 75–104.

shall only be able to address the issue in summary fashion.⁵

When it comes to the atonement, it is crucial to keep three major concepts in mind: 1) intent, 2) extent, and 3) application. The “intent” of the atonement answers the question: “What was God’s *purpose* in providing the atonement. The “extent” of the atonement answers the question: “For whose sins did Christ die?” The “application” of the atonement answers the question: “When and to whom is the atonement applied?” Though these questions are interrelated, my comments below will be focused primarily on the question of “extent.”

With respect to the question of the extent of the atonement, there are only two answers: 1) Limited Atonement – Christ died for the sins of the elect alone; 2) Universal Atonement – Christ died for the sins of all people. Calvinists who reject limited atonement (four-point Calvinists) believe Christ died equally for all with respect to extent, but has an unequal intent or will to save all through the death of Christ (their view of election makes this so along with their notion of God’s two wills: revealed and decretal). But it is important to note that they do believe that Christ actually satisfied for the sins of all people. Most Baptists who are not Calvinists believe that Christ died equally for the sins of all people with equal intent to save all who believe. Thus, we agree with four-point Calvinists on the question of “extent,” but not on the question of “intent.” Five-point Calvinists believe that the “intent” and “extent” of the atonement are identical: Christ died only for the sins of those he intends (wills) to save. These are important distinctions.

Historically, the first person to advocate limited atonement was Gottschalk of Orbais in the 9th century, and he was condemned by three French Councils.⁶ Within the broad spectrum of the Reformation, none of the first generation reformers on the continent or in England affirmed limited atonement, including Calvin. In the generations to follow, many well-known Calvinists rejected limited atonement and argued against it explicitly or implicitly in their writings: Davenant (signer of Dort), Amyraut, Baxter, Bunyan, Preston, Howe, and Charnock, to name only a few. Also added to this list would be Jonathan Edwards, David Brainard, Charles Hodge, Dabney, Shedd, and J. C. Ryle. Many others could be named, including Andrew Fuller who revised his famous work *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, where he totally rewrote his section on the extent of the atonement after coming to the conclusion that limited atonement was biblically incorrect.⁷

⁵For a more detailed presentation of the issues discussed in this response, consult David L. Allen, “The Atonement: Limited or Universal?” in *Whosoever Will: a Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 61–107, along with chapters authored by Steve Lemke on “Irresistible Grace” and Jeremy Evans on “Determinism and Human Freedom” in the same work.

⁶G. M. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536–1635)* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 5.

⁷See my discussion in David L. Allen, “Preaching for a Great Commission Resurgence,” in *Toward a Great Commission Resurgence: Fulfilling God’s Mandate in Our Time*, eds. Lawless & Greenway (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 281–98. See also Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation, or the Duty of*

The key issue in the debate over the extent of the atonement has to do with the “sufficiency” of Christ’s death. All Calvinists will affirm this sufficiency as “infinite” to save any and all. But, and this is crucial, what those who hold to limited atonement mean by this is that Christ’s death *could have* paid for the sins of the whole world had God intended for it to do so, but He did not intend such and hence the death of Christ is limited to the sins of the elect. We believe, along with all Calvinists who reject limited atonement, that Christ’s death is actually sufficient for the sins of all because it actually paid for the sins of all. This is called “infinite” or “universal” sufficiency.

Oftentimes one hears the famous statement, originally coined by Peter Lombard in the Middle Ages, the death of Christ was: “sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect.” This statement originally meant that Christ died for the sins of all, but the benefits of His atonement are only applied to those who believe (the elect). This is the biblical position. When you hear a Calvinist use this statement, you must ask “what does ‘sufficient’ mean?” That is the key question! The third proposition in the denial is meant to affirm an infinite, genuine, universal sufficiency in the death of Christ in that He died for the sins of all people.

But enough history. What does the Bible say? There are two kinds of texts in the New Testament that play a key role in the question of the extent of the atonement. There are those texts which use words like “all” and “world” with reference to the death of Christ. Then there are those texts which speak of Christ dying for his “sheep” or for the “church.” Those who affirm limited atonement rightly understand these latter texts to be limited with reference to extent. This would not be surprising when the biblical speaker or author was specifically addressing those in the church. However, Calvinists then interpret the universal texts in a limited fashion, suggesting that in places like John 1:29, John 3:16 and 1 Tim 2:4–6, to mention three, “all” and “world” should be interpreted to mean “all without distinction” and not “all without exception.” Thus, the argument goes, “all” or “world” in these texts refers to either 1) all kinds of people, or 2) Jews and Gentiles as a group, or 3) the elect only.

This is a linguistic/exegetical issue. Sometimes the Bible uses the words “all” and “world” in a sense that does not mean, “all without exception.” This point is not in dispute. The problem lies in the invalid hermeneutical/exegetical legerdemain that transmutes the words “all” or “world” into something less than all humanity in the New Testament passages where it is used in direct and indirect reference to the extent of the atonement. Passages like John 1:29, John 3:16, and 1 Tim 2:4–6 simply cannot be shackled with the limiting lexical chains which restrict the meaning of “world” and “all” to something less than all humanity. This is a huge linguistic mistake. D. A. Carson rightly pointed out, as have many Calvinists, that “world” in Scripture never means “the

Sinners to Believe in Jesus Christ, with Corrections and Editions; to which is Added an Appendix, on the Necessity of a Holy Disposition in Order to Believing in Christ, in *Fuller’s Works*, vol. 2, 328–416. Fuller’s *Gospel Worthy* was first published in 1785, but a second edition with his revisions was published in 1801. The second edition appears in *Fuller’s Works*. Consult also Peter Morden, *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life*, in *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 8 (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK/Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003), 69–76. Morden carefully demonstrates Fuller’s shift on the subject of limited atonement.

elect.” Context usually makes it clear whether “all” or “world” means “all without exception” and “all without distinction.” These three texts are clear, not to mention a dozen other New Testament texts. It is simply not exegetically possible to interpret “all” and “world” in the three texts listed above, and several others, in a limited fashion. I fear some of those who do are operating out of a pre-conceived theology which they bring to the text.

Calvinists often appeal to Paul’s preaching in Acts to support the contention that the Apostles never used such language as “Christ died for your sins.” They conclude from this lacuna that Paul never employed such a phrase in evangelistic preaching or witnessing. But is such a conclusion valid? First, this is an argument from silence. It does not conclusively prove Paul, Peter, or anyone else did not say it nor is it a valid argument that they did not believe it. Second, all of the sermons in Acts are condensations of the actual sermons given. Third, with respect to Peter’s sermon in Acts 3, how else could he tell his hearers to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 3:19) if he did not somehow connect the death of Christ on the cross as accomplishing the means for their forgiveness and salvation? Are we to think that Peter’s hearers did not understand that what Peter was saying in essence was that since Christ died for their sins, the door is opened for them to repent and believe? Furthermore, if Peter believed in limited atonement, how could he say “it was for you first that God raised up his Servant, and sent him to bless you by turning every one of you [*hekastos* in Greek meaning “each one, every one” BDAG, 298] from your wicked ways” (Acts 3:26)? For any of the non-elect present in his audience, there was no atonement for them, so it would be impossible for them to be saved, even if they wanted to. It would also be disingenuous on Peter’s part to give anyone such false hope.

There is direct, overt, evidence that Paul in his preaching did indeed tell unsaved people that Christ died for their sins and furthermore it was his consistent practice to do so. Such evidence comes from 1 Cor 15:3: “For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. . . .” Here Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the message he preached to them when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:1–18). He clearly affirms the content of the gospel he preached in Corinth included the fact that “Christ died for our sins.” Notice carefully Paul is saying this is what he preached pre-conversion, not post conversion. Thus, the “our” in his statement cannot be taken to refer to all the elect or merely the believing elect, which is what the high-Calvinist is forced to argue. The entire pericope of 1 Cor 15:3–11 should be kept in mind. Notice how Paul comes back around to what he had said in verse 3 when he gets to verse 11: “Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.” The customary present tense in Greek used by Paul when he says “so we preach” along with the aorist tense in Greek for “believed” makes it clear Paul refers to a past point in time when they believed what it was his custom to preach. What did Paul preach to them in his evangelistic efforts to win all of the unsaved to Christ? He preached the gospel, which included “Christ died for our sins.” And so they believed.

The assertion that Paul did not preach a universal atonement is false based on 1 Cor 15:3–11. What do we mean when we preach to the unsaved, “Christ died for your sins”? Does it not

intend to convey that God desires to save all and that God is prepared to save any and all since Christ's death is actually sufficient to save them? One wonders if a reluctance to say "Christ died for you" implicitly expresses a reluctance to tell unsaved people that God is willing to save them all and is prepared to do so as well if they will repent and believe.

Turning to theological issues, the key argument used by Calvinists for limited atonement is the double payment argument.⁸ In essence, it argues that justice does not allow the same sin to be punished twice. There are at least four strong arguments against this: 1) It is never found in Scripture; 2) it confuses a commercial understanding of sin as debt with a penal satisfaction for sin (the latter is the biblical view); 3) Even the elect are still under the wrath of God until they believe (Eph 2:1–3); and 4) it negates the principle of grace in the application of the atonement since nobody is owed the application.

The other theological argument used to support limited atonement is the "Triple Choice Argument." It is built on the double payment argument. Either Christ died for all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some of the sins of all men. If Christ died for the sins of all, then why are not all saved? The argument sounds good logically, but it is flawed. Scripture never says a person goes to hell because no atonement was provided for him. People are said in Scripture to perish because they do not believe. Even though Christ died for all, he does not apply salvation to all. Faith in Christ is the condition for salvation. Finally, the argument quantifies the imputation of sin to Christ, as if there is a ratio between all the sins of those Christ represents and the sufferings of Christ, an unnecessary move given the extrinsic sufficiency of Christ's death for the sins of the world.

Let's talk logic for a moment. Some read verses that say Christ died for his "sheep," "church," or "friends" and draw the conclusion that since these groups are limited, so the atonement must be limited. Not so fast! This line of argument is logically flawed because it invokes the "negative inference fallacy," which says the proof of a proposition does not disprove its converse. When Paul says "Christ died for me" in Gal 2:20, we cannot infer that he died only for Paul. This is the logical mistake made by all High Calvinists on this point. There is no statement in Scripture that says Jesus died only for the sins of the elect.

Some argue that if Jesus died for the sins of all people, then all people will be saved. This is a false conclusion for several reasons. First, the Scripture is clear that all will not be saved. Second, it confuses the extent of the atonement with the application of the atonement. No one is saved by the death of Christ on the cross *until they believe in Christ*. This point was made by Shedd, a Calvinist with impeccable credentials.⁹ As stated above, Eph 2:1–3 makes clear that even the elect are under the wrath of God and "have no hope" until they believe. Third, as 2 Cor 5:18–21

⁸See John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed., W. H. Goold (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1852), 10:296.

⁹W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 2:477.

makes clear, reconciliation has an objective and subjective aspect to it. The death of Christ objectively reconciles the world to God in the sense that His justice is satisfied, but the subjective side of reconciliation does not occur until the atonement is applied when the individual repents of sin and puts faith in Christ. Along these lines, don't miss Col 1:19–20 which speaks of Christ's universal reconciliation of all things. This of course does not mean "universalism," but it does mean that Christ's death on the cross is a crucial aspect of his Lordship over all people and things (Phil 2:9–11). Every knee shall bow.

Finally, we believe there are some negative practical implications for ministry entailed by limited atonement with respect to preaching and evangelism.

1) Diminishing of God's Universal Saving will. First Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9 affirm God desires the salvation of "all people" not just the elect. It is difficult to sustain this clear teaching of Scripture from the platform of limited atonement.

2) The "Well-Meant Gospel Offer." Second Corinthians 5:19–20 states: "that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God." Here we have God himself offering salvation to all. But how can He do this according to limited atonement since there is no provision for the salvation of the non-elect in the death of Christ? Furthermore, how can God make this offer with integrity? It seems difficult to suppose He can. Without belief in the universal saving will of God and a universal extent in Christ's sin-bearing, there can be no well-meant offer of salvation from God to the non-elect who hear the gospel call. It would be like being invited to the Master's banquet table where no chair, table setting and food has actually been provided. This implicates and impugns the character of God in the making of the offer of salvation to the non-elect because in fact there is no salvation to offer: Christ did not die for their sins.

3) The "Bold Proclamation." The bold proclamation of the Gospel is an old term used to refer to telling people individually or corporately that "Christ died for *your* sins." Notice how some Calvinists use code language here. Those who believe in limited atonement will say "Christ died for sinners," which is code for "elect sinners." This is confusing at best and disingenuous at worst. Calvinists point out that they preach to all because they don't know who the elect are. Certainly true, but this misses the point. Belief in limited atonement puts the preacher in the difficult position of preaching to all people *as if* Christ's death is applicable to them even though they believe all are not capable of salvation. This creates a situation where preachers operate on the basis of something they know to be untrue. In addition, how will such a preacher respond to the following question from an unbeliever: "When you say Christ died for sinners, does that mean Christ died for me?" There is no way to answer that question with a firm "yes" from the platform of limited atonement. On the other hand, preachers who affirm universal atonement can boldly proclaim Christ died for their sins.

4) Limited atonement is contrary to the Southern Baptist Convention's statement of faith. Article 3 of the BFM 2000 declares, "The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love." The use of the word "man" in context clearly indicates "mankind" as a whole. The BFM does not limit the death of Christ to the elect but to the same group which is made in his image, man.

Let me be clear. We all agree that doctrine matters. Doctrine informs praxis. This is not an issue of whether someone is committed to preaching and evangelism. This is not a question of whether one is passionate about preaching and evangelism. I take it for granted that Calvinists as well as Traditionalists desire to obey the Great Commission. That being said, and for the reasons stated above, I am arguing the case that a belief in limited atonement necessarily entails a hindrance to preaching and evangelism. Paul said the content of the gospel he preached included the fact that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3). Limited atonement denies and distorts a crucial aspect of the gospel: that Christ died for the sins of the world.

Thus, for biblical, theological, logical and practical reasons, we deny that Christ died only for the sins of those who will be saved. We believe that Christ died for the sins of all to provide a genuine offer of salvation to all, and that his death not only makes salvation possible for all, but actually secures the salvation of all who believe.

Commentary on Article 4: The Grace of God



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The Affirmations

The following assumptions are held regarding the affirmations: First, most Southern Baptists would agree with the affirmations in Article 4. Second, some who agree with the affirmations think they do not go far enough. Instead, they would add to them. Third, many who would deny them would do so on the basis of the phrase “any person.” Thus, the affirmations concerning the grace of God are a minimal statement. Some of the supporting biblical passages will be considered below.

Article Four: The Grace of God

We affirm that grace is God’s generous decision to provide salvation for any person by taking all of the initiative in providing atonement, in freely offering the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in uniting the believer to Christ through the Holy Spirit by faith.

We deny that grace negates the necessity of a free response of faith or that it cannot be resisted. We deny that the response of faith is in any way a meritorious work that earns salvation.

Ezra 9:8; Proverbs 3:34; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 19:16–30, 23:37; Luke 10:1–12; Acts 15:11; 20:24; Romans 3:24, 27–28; 5:6, 8, 15–21; Galatians 1:6; 2:21; 5; Ephesians 2:8–10; Philippians 3:2–9; Colossians 2:13–17; Hebrews 4:16; 9:28; 1 John 4:19

“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are” (Acts 15:11 NASB).¹

John Polhill states regarding this passage, “God’s acceptance of the Gentiles has drawn a basic lesson for the Jews as well. There is only one way of salvation – ‘through the grace of our Lord Jesus.’”² One could never earn one’s way into heaven. Our greatest works are filthy rags to a Holy God. Amazing grace is the sole vehicle God uses to offer life to man.

“...being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24).

¹All biblical quotations in this chapter are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

²John Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001), 327.

This verse connects to the “all” in verse 23. James D. G. Dunn comments,

The gospel is that God sets to rights man's relationship with Himself by an act of sheer generosity which depends on no payment man can make, which is without reference to whether an individual in particular is inside the law/covenant or outside, and which applies to all human beings without exception. It is this humbling recognition – that he has no grounds for appeal either in covenant states or in particular ‘works of the law,’ that he has to depend *entirely* from start to finish on God's gracious power, that he can receive acquittal only as a gift – which lies at the heart of faith for Paul. ... For at this stage *everything*, the whole argument, the gospel itself, depends on the most fundamental insight of all: that man's dependency on God for *all* good is total, and that the indispensable starting point for any good that man does is his acceptance of God's embrace and his continual reliance in God's enabling to accomplish that good.³

Dunn correctly remarks that man being made right with God is an act of grace which man cannot earn but only receive as a gift.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

The amazing grace of God is inextricably linked to the amazing love of God. While we were yet sinners Christ took our place. He took the judgment of God on Himself. He took our sins upon Himself. As our substitute, He paid our debt. As Robert Mounce explains, “God did not wait until we had performed well enough to merit his love (which, of course, no one ever could) before he acted in love on our behalf. Christ died for us while we were still alienated from him and cared nothing for his attention or affection.”⁴ God did not demonstrate his love by prohibiting evil from impacting our lives. He demonstrates his love by paying for the sin in our lives. The proof of God's amazing love is His Son. It is significant that God refers to Himself as love (1 John 4:8). He does not refer to Himself as hate. To claim God hates certain individuals without, in the same breath, claiming God loves His enemies and “God so loved the world” is to disregard a clear biblical teaching.⁵ We should neither sacrifice the benevolence of God on the altar of human systems nor avoid certain texts which assist in clarifying other biblical texts.

The affirmation above states that “grace is God's generous decision to provide salvation ... ”

³James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1988), 179. Emphasis in the original.

⁴Robert Mounce, *Romans*, The New American Commentary, vol. 27 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 136–137.

⁵Romans 9:13, quoting Malachi 1:2–3, quotes the Lord, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” It is not necessary to insist that God made a decision prior to Esau's actions that He hated Esau any more than it is necessary to insist that a disciple of Jesus must hate one's family (Luke 14:26). In both instances, there are better ways to understand the teaching in context.

Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection are an expression of God's *grace*. The offer of the gospel is *grace*. The work of the Holy Spirit is *grace*. The salvation of any person is *grace*. All of these are examples of God's *grace*. The conviction of the Holy Spirit is a gracious act of God. The power of the gospel unto salvation (Rom 1:16) is a gracious act of God. Grace! Grace! Grace! God is the author and finisher of salvation. He provides *grace*.

How does God convict the sinner? By His Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Where is the power of God for salvation? The power of God for salvation is found in the gospel, or the message of the Cross (1 Cor 1:18). When we simply share the good news of Jesus Christ, *that* is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). Anabaptist leader Balthasar Hubmaier put it this way, "God by means of His sent Word gives power to all people to become His children."⁶

The Denials

Since the points of disagreement center mostly around the denials in Article 4, more attention will be devoted to the denials. The first sentence denies the concept of irresistible grace. The second sentence denies the concept that faith is equivalent to works. Advocates of the TS reject the idea that when an individual, by his own free will, believes in Christ he has earned his way into heaven. The two sentences in the denials are connected and will be treated as such. This section will attempt to support the denials by addressing many of the biblical texts to which Article 4 appeals.

"Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" (Romans 3:27–28).

The New Testament term for "faith" means "to rely on," "to trust," or "to believe."⁷ To trust or not to trust seems to be one's personal decision. In this passage Paul juxtaposed faith and works. In other words, faith is never to be equated with works. To claim faith is a meritorious work is to make a claim contrary to the Scriptures. What may be disputed is the origin of the faith in question. Is the faith owned by God and given to man as a gift (in the sense that God's grace is given to man as a gift) or is it an individual's faith? The next passage more clearly demonstrates the disagreement.

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in

⁶Balthasar Hubmaier, *Freedom of the Will*, II in *Balthasar Hubmaier*, translated and edited by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H Yoder (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 450.

⁷Rudolph Bultmann, "*pisteuō*" in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, translated by G. W. Bromiley (Stuttgart: Verlag, 1968; reprint Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 6:203.

Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8–10).

It has been argued that the antecedent of *touto* (“that”) in “that not of yourselves” is grace and faith. The problem is the text itself seems to deny such an interpretation. The Greek term for “that” is in the singular. This truth indicates that its antecedent is something (singular) and not some things (plural). Had God intended it to refer to both grace and faith, the plural feminine “*tauta*” (“these”) was available for Paul’s use. Paul could have easily stated “these are the gifts of God.” But He did not use the plural. For these reasons, the forced application of the singular neuter pronoun “that” to refer to two feminine nouns would be inappropriate.

Thus, “that” functions as the antecedent to grace or to faith or to salvation. If one had to choose among the three, context points to salvation. If so, then this verse fails to provide biblical support for the idea that faith is a gift from God.

But an objection might be raised. “That” was not referring to grace or salvation but to faith. Although the neuter singular form of “that” *could* allow this interpretation, the feminine form would be clearer since faith is a feminine noun. Had God intended for “that” to refer to faith, the feminine singular form of “that” was available for use. But the literary context seems to prevent such an interpretation. Paul addresses salvation in verses 5–7 and verses 9–10. The rest of Paul’s writings make it clear he is not worried about a misunderstanding that faith is by works but that salvation is by works. The Bible teaches that grace is God’s grace given to man (it is never man’s grace). And salvation is most certainly God’s gift. But Scripture also seems to teach that faith or trust in God must be exercised by man, not passively received.

Paul affirms the Ephesians’ faith (man’s faith) a few verses earlier (1:13 and 1:15). There are thirty-nine occurrences in the New Testament where faith is attributed to individuals rather than God (Matt 9:2, 22, 29; 15:28; Mark 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Luke 5:20; 7:50; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42; 22:32; Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 2:5; 15:14, 17; 2 Cor 1:24; 10:15; Eph 1:15; Phil 2:17; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 1:8; 3:2, 5, 6, 7, 10; 2 Thess 1:3; Philemon 6; Heb 10:23; 12:2; James 1:3; 2:18; 1 Peter 1:7, 9, 21; 2 Peter 1:5; 1 John 5:4). It is unwise to take a concept and force an interpretation upon a text because of a theological grid when such a concept is not found in the rest of Scripture. Calvin’s comments on Ephesians 2 support the view of Article 4 that faith is not the gift Paul is referencing in this particular passage:

(H)e arrives at this general conclusion, that they had obtained salvation by faith alone. First, he asserts, that the salvation of the Ephesians was entirely the work, the gracious work of God. But then they had obtained this grace by faith. On one side, we must look at God; and on the other, at man. God declares, that he owes us nothing; so that salvation is not a reward or recompense, but unmixed grace. The next question is, in what ways do men receive that salvation which is offered to them by the hand of God? The answer is, *by faith*; and hence he concludes that nothing connected with it is our own. If, on the part of God, it is grace alone, and if we bring nothing but faith, which strips us of all condemnation, it follows that salvation does not come

from us. ... Many persons restrict the word *gift* to faith alone. But Paul is only repeating in other words the former sentiment. His 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.⁸

Many Calvinistic Southern Baptists have already realized the implications for irresistible grace if faith is not considered a gift from God. Whether this was the impetus for many errant forced readings into this text is not known. What is known is that even John Calvin did not allow a theological conviction to alter the plain reading of the biblical text. Having closed the door on the concept of faith being a gift from God in this often-cited passage, the door will be reopened to consider three passages which seem to teach that faith may be a gift of God.

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent’” (John 6:29).

“For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29).

“...who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:21).

Is faith a gift from God or not? The English words “faith” and “believe” are translated in the New Testament from the same the same Greek word, *pistis*. When translated as a noun, it is “faith.” When translated as a verb, it is “to believe.” It is noteworthy that no Scripture attributes “faith” to God.⁹ But three verses speak of one’s believing as being from God. John 6 says it is God’s work that we believe. Philippians 1 says God granted us to believe. First Peter 1 states it is through Him we act in belief in God.

Still, there are far more passages where one’s “believing” is not attributed to God but seems to be attributed to a person (Matt 21:32; 27:42; Mark 9:24, 42; John 3:12; Acts 15:11; 27:25; Rom 3:3, 22; 10:9, 14; 1 Cor 10:27; 1 Thess 4:14; 1 Tim 1:16; 4:10; esp. John 1:12; 1 Cor 1:21; 2 Tim 2:13). Of special note is the following verse: First Corinthians 1:21, “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” In addition to these passages, people ask God in two texts to increase their faith (Luke 17:5; 9:24).

How should faith and/or believing be understood? It is noteworthy that when God’s Word speaks of one’s faith (noun), it is never attributed to God. But in three verses where God speaks of man believing (verb) in God we are told: 1) God grants them to believe, 2) it is through God

⁸John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. XXI, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 227–229. Italics in original.

⁹Jesus refers in Rev 2:13 to “my faith” but this is not in reference to saving trust. If it were, then it would imply that man could deny the saving faith of Jesus.

they believe, and 3) it is His work. Does “faith” originate with man but “believing” originate with God? No. The rest of the “believing” passages indicate that believing is also of man. We would be wise to tread lightly at this point. It seems that God created people with the ability to trust. That ability was not lost in the Fall. But that ability was so twisted by the Fall that we are now unable to trust in God without the grace of God. He gives this grace to all men but this grace can be resisted. Through Him and His work we are granted to believe as we are drawn by the Holy Spirit and as we choose to believe in Him. In these passages we see an interplay between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility, neither of which can be denied. It would be imprudent to affirm any theological system which speculates beyond the clear teaching of Scripture.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling” (Matthew 23:37).

Christ wept over Jerusalem and desired to gather them to Himself, but they were unwilling. This text provides good reason to resist the concept of irresistible grace. God desired to bring man to Himself, but man resisted. Note the words of Craig Blomberg, “Here Jesus wishes he could gather all the recalcitrant ‘children’ of Israel, to love, protect, and nurture them like a mother hen does her baby chickens. Similar imagery recurs frequently in Jewish literature (e.g., Deut 32:4; Ps 36:7; Ruth 2:12; Isa 31:5). But God never imposes His love by overriding human will.”¹⁰

“You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did” (Acts 7:51).

This is perhaps the clearest text in all of Scripture that God’s grace is resistible. Nowhere does the Bible state that the Holy Spirit is irresistible. It was previously established that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is an expression of His grace. This text refers to people resisting the Holy Spirit. People can resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit drawing them to salvation. This text is hard to ignore but seems to be ignored.

Were someone to ask me, “Don’t you know your faith is a grace gift from God?” I hope I would respond, “Let’s not limit God’s grace only to His power given that people might believe. God’s grace includes the giving of His only Son, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the giving of the gospel to all the world that anyone may be saved—‘Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!’” May we never limit the power or the scope of the grace of God.

¹⁰Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 350.

Confessional Voices from the Southern Baptist Tradition

Denying irresistible grace and affirming man's free will is not contrary to the Traditional Southern Baptist understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Consider these quotations from the men who knew the theological contours of the *Baptist Faith and Message* perhaps as well as anyone, since each one served as the chairperson for his respective BFM committee in 1925, 1963, and 2000. Here, we appeal to E. Y. Mullins, Herschel Hobbs, and Adrian Rogers.

"In his free act of accepting Christ and his salvation, man is self-determined." – E. Y. Mullins¹¹

"However, the Bible also teaches the free will of man as a person made in God's image. To violate man's free will would make him less than a person, only a puppet dangled on the string of fate. The Bible never teaches that. Man is free to choose, but is responsible to God for his choices. Otherwise God Himself is responsible for man's sin, which is unthinkable! The free will of man is seen in Ephesians 1:13: 'After that ye believed' or 'believing.' Exercising faith is an act of the human will. To say that only those chosen by God can believe is to ignore the plain teachings of the New Testament. If this be true, then Jesus' commissions to evangelize the world and the many pleas for lost people to believe in Him for salvation are meaningless." – Herschel Hobbs¹²

"There are some who talk about 'irresistible grace,' the idea that you cannot say no to God. But the Bible tells of many people who resisted God's love. People have the dubious privilege of saying no to God without damaging His eternal attributes one bit." – Adrian Rogers¹³

Conclusion

As we leave this consideration of irresistible grace, man's free will, and faith, it is important to note the implication involved in Calvinism if God invites individuals to salvation knowing He has decreed they are incapable of such. This would imply God, at best, is insincere. But, one may ask, "Where has God invited universally?" Among other texts, consider Isaiah 55 and Matt 11:28–30.

I conclude this chapter with sincere reverence. I fear the reality that I could be errant here. Nevertheless, I state boldly that I believe God gave His Word to reveal truths, and thus it is my opinion that when the corpus of Scripture is considered there is strong evidence to confirm both the affirmations and denials of Article 4.

The sovereignty of God and the free will of man is an arena one should not enter with self-confidence. But I bristle at the suggestion that I have minimized or negated the sovereignty of God by affirming what God's Word appears to teach, namely, that man has free will. It is not

¹¹E.Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1917), 334.

¹²Herschel Hobbs, "God's Sovereignty and Man's Free Will," *Oklahoma Baptist Messenger*, June 1, 1995.

¹³Adrian Rogers, *The Passion of Christ and the Purpose of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 76.

a denial of God's sovereignty to say man has free will if God in His sovereignty gave it to man. Further, I would argue I have exalted God by affirming His ways are not easily understood. I find myself reflecting on what God said after He issued a universal invitation: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9).

I do not grasp all the intricacies involved in God's sovereignty and man's free will. No one does. Even now I wonder if I chose to write this chapter or if God ordained it (Prov 20:24). Even so, I affirm both rather than deny either one in order to grasp their relationship or affirm a theological system. I cringe when theological systems speculate beyond Scripture. Perhaps this is why so many people are saying, "I am not an Arminian, and I am not a Calvinist; if you have to call me something, call me a Baptist." This does not mean that Arminians and Calvinists cannot claim to be Baptists. With no desire to be offensive, Baptists have always held tightly to the Bible and when we feel that any theological system speculates beyond Holy Writ we say: "Keep your system; just give me the Bible, because I'm a Baptist."

Commentary on Article 5: The Regeneration of the Sinner



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Article Five:

The Regeneration of the Sinner

We affirm that any person who responds to the Gospel with repentance and faith is born again through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is a new creation in Christ and enters, at the moment he believes, into eternal life.

We deny that any person is regenerated prior to or apart from hearing and responding to the Gospel.

Luke 15:24; John 3:3; 7:37–39; 10:10; 16:7–14; Acts 2:37–39; Romans 6:4–11; 10:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20; 6:15; Colossians 2:13

This chapter summarizes the Traditional Southern Baptist view of the relationship of faith and regeneration—being born again. Most Calvinists teach that regeneration precedes faith, which will result in a free but determined act of faith.¹ Non-Calvinists believe that faith precedes regeneration or that regeneration occurs, as stated in the TS, “at the moment he believes.”² I will also point out how some of the harsh realities of Calvinism are contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture. I call these “disquieting realities.” Although they are unsettling, one must accept them if he is going to be a consistent Calvinist.

The Scripture affirms that faith precedes and is the prerequisite for regeneration—being born again (John 1:12–13; 3:3, 15–16, 36; 5:24; 6:40; 7:37–39; 12:36; 16:7–14; 20:31; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 5:1, 4). These and other Scriptures show

Editor’s Note: This chapter draws from “Faith and Regeneration,” published previously in my book *Reflections of a Disenchanted Calvinist* (Bloomington, IN: CrossBooks, 2012), 53–60.

¹According to Calvinism, regeneration is something that God does monergistically against the sinful will of man. Then, after God has changed the nature of the elect person through this inviolable selective regeneration, man, whose nature has been so changed, will choose to exercise faith in Christ unto salvation. Calvinists regard the act of faith to be free, but the free act is determined by the new nature given by God. Thus, in Calvinism’s soteriology, the idea of contrary choice is non-existent.

²I would label myself as an *Extensivist*, which is one who believes that man was created in the image of God with libertarian free will (*otherwise choice*) and that God’s salvation plan is comprehensive, involving an all-inclusive unconditional offer of salvation and eternal security of the believer; reception of which is conditioned upon *grace-enabled* faith rather than a narrow plan involving a limited *actually meaningful* offer of salvation restricted to the unconditionally elected, or any plan that, in any way, conditions salvation upon *merely* a humanly generated faith from fallen man.

that spiritual life follows the sinner placing his faith in Jesus Christ. The Apostle John gave as his reason for writing his gospel “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31). It seems clear that “you” includes anyone who reads or hears John’s gospel. If salvation is monergistic and man is totally passive, then why would God inspire John to write his gospel in order for people to read, believe and be saved? According to Calvinism, God knows the non-elect cannot read and believe and the elect cannot believe prior to regeneration.

Calvinists posit that no one can read John’s writings (or any Scripture) and believe unto salvation because salvation is monergistic—accomplished by God alone. According to Calvinism, a person must be regenerated first and then, and only then, can he read and believe; furthermore, not only *can* he then believe, he *must* believe. Consequently, this is to turn what John clearly says about reading and believing into an esoteric code for the Calvinist doctrine of regeneration prior to faith for only a select few rather than the clear teaching that God had John write this gospel so that all people, by the grace of God, could see who Jesus really is and what He did for them, believe, and be saved.³ Calvinism’s belief that grace is only for a select few is a disquieting reality.

Jesus repeatedly called on people to believe so they would not die in their sins. For example, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). The inference is that Jesus truly desires that they believe and that they can believe and not die in their sins. This is contrary to the Calvinist secret.⁴ The Calvinist secret is that while it is true that if one does not believe he will die in his sins, the other truth is that Jesus is telling them to do what He knows they cannot do unless they are one of the elect.⁵ Therefore, Calvinism transmogrifies Christ’s general, merciful plea into an esoteric,

³Jeremy A. Evans, seeking to soften the Calvinist order of things, writes, “This relationship is intended to be understood logically, not temporally. Temporally, the cause and effect relationship occurs simultaneously; logically, regeneration occurs before faith.” See his “Reflections on Determinism and Human Freedom,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 259. One wonders if it is helpful (even possible) to divide logic and time in this way.

⁴Lewis Sperry Chafer is a Calvinist who emphasizes that unconditional election and selective regeneration (i.e. the non-elect really can’t be saved even though they hear “whosoever will may come”) are not things to talk about with the unsaved. He writes in *Systematic Theology, vol. 3: Soteriology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 172, “The entire theme concerns those only who are regenerated and should never be presented to, or even discussed in the presence of, the unsaved.”

⁵Jesus clearly warned them to repent, with every indication that they should and could. Jesus issued warnings repeatedly (Matt 4:17; 11:20–21; Luke 5:32; 15:7; 24:47) as did the apostles (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 20:21; 26:20). If Jesus knew some of them could not repent because they were not the elect, then His warnings seem disingenuous and misleading. Some Calvinists will say that Jesus was making a “good faith offer” (if there is such an idea) because as a man, He did not know who the elect were.

As an example of Jesus not knowing certain things in His humanity, they reference Jesus saying, “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Matt 24:36). However, these are disanalogous. For the reference in Matthew to be relevant, it would have to

academic recitation. This is a disquieting reality indeed.

Calvinists frequently seek to analogize unconditional election with the reality that even in non-Calvinism not everyone gets the *same* opportunity to believe the gospel. However, these two realities are absolutely disanalogous. First, the non-Calvinist position is not that everyone receives the *same* opportunities because that is an impossibility, but simply that the Scripture portrays God's love providing everyone *an* opportunity to believe. Therefore, according to Calvinism, God's love withholds what He could have granted, whereas according to non-Calvinism, God's love provides everyone *an* opportunity, which is possible rather than the impossibility that everyone receives the *same* opportunity. Hence, it is urgent to recognize that "today is the day of salvation" (Luke 12:14–21; Acts 13:38–41; 17:30–31; Heb 13:7–19; Rev 22:20).⁶

The Scripture is replete, lucid, and compelling in teaching that faith precedes regeneration. Also, faith is *not* a gift given to some people in unconditional election or selective regeneration. Scripture is clear that God is working in order to give all men and women a *real* chance to trust Him unto salvation (John 16:8–11). Salvation is offered as a free gift (Romans 3:24; 6:23) to all who are in need of forgiveness (Rom 3:23; 5:15, 18), and people are summoned to act upon the offer by accepting the gift by (grace-enabled) faith (John 1:12; Rom 3:22). As Norman Geisler has stated it, "Never does the Bible say, 'Be saved in order to believe'; instead, repeatedly, it commands, 'Believe in order to be saved.'"⁷

Scripture affirms repeatedly that God supplies every man with the necessary grace in order for him to be able to exercise faith in Christ unto salvation and eternal life or to resist the genuine offer of salvation unto eternal damnation. The means of this grace enablement include but are not limited to: conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11), working of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:1–6), and the power of the gospel (Rom 1:16). Additionally, it affirms that man, because of these gracious provisions and workings of God, can choose to seek God, as did the Bereans, of whom it says because they studied the Scripture, "therefore many of them believed" (Acts 17:12). Moreover, it is clear from Scripture that no one can come to God without God drawing (John 6:44) and that God is drawing all men (John 12:32). The same Greek word for draw, *helkuō*, is

include Jesus not knowing the date and then announcing a date for His return. There is a crucial difference between Jesus *not knowing* certain things due to His role as a servant and His *speaking forthrightly* things that are either misleading or not true—do not correspond fully to reality.

Jesus commanded them to repent because He was not willing that any would perish and that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), something that God has grace-enabled everyone who hears the truth to do.

⁶It is impossible to offer the same opportunity for every person. Requiring that God do such is neither possible nor necessary to demonstrate God's love any more than to be offered a free gift requires everyone be offered the same number of times in exactly the same time frame and same way in order to have actually received the offer of a free gift. Also, when the Scriptures offered a chance and call for people to repent and believe, Calvinists believe some are not actual opportunities to believe.

⁷Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3: *Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004), 129.

used in both verses.⁸ According to Lewis Sperry Chafer, “About 115 passages condition salvation on believing alone, and about 35 simply on faith.”⁹ Other grace enablements may include providential workings in and through other people, situations, and timing or circumstances that are a part of grace to provide the optimal opportunity for an individual to choose to follow Christ.¹⁰

Since the Fall, man has been in such spiritual bondage that he cannot, nor will he have any desire to, come to God unless God offers “enabling grace.” Enabling grace may be referred to at times as “calling,” “conviction,” “drawing,” or “opening the heart” among other things, but all refer to God graciously granting sufficient grace for a person to hear and understand the good news, be able to choose to receive God’s word of redemption, and by God-given grace exercise faith unto salvation or choose to remain in sin. A person can choose to do other than whatever he did in fact choose. There is nothing that a sinner can do to merit this *unconditional* enabling because it originates conceptually and manifests itself actually because of God’s perfect love, mercy, compassion, and grace. Therefore, enabling grace exists and is granted because of what is in God rather than what is in man. Furthermore, this enabling through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11) is coextensive with the preaching of the gospel and the work of the gospel in the heart of man (Rom 10:14; Acts 16:14; Heb 4:12).¹¹

The Scripture teaches and demonstrates that the exercise of faith is a choice, meaning that one could do otherwise, and this is an inextricable part of man being made in the image of God. The Fall so corrupted man that while man can still make many choices about many things or choose to act otherwise, he is now unlike Adam in that he is unable to exercise saving faith—choose God—on his own. However, God’s enabling grace overcomes this inability. Consequently, the charge that rejecting Calvinism results in minimizing the damage of the Fall, or that we are saying that man’s free will is sufficient to choose to trust God on his own, are simply straw men.

⁸This does not mean that all men will be saved. These verses only affirm that God draws all men to Christ and that all who come to Christ will have been drawn by God. Other biblical texts can be examined to establish the view that many of those people who are drawn by God to Christ will not repent and believe in Him.

⁹Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. VII: *Doctrinal Summarization* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 273–74.

¹⁰These are grace enablements in at least three ways; first, they are provided by God’s grace rather than deserved by mankind; second, the necessary components for *each and every* individual to have a *real* opportunity to believe unto salvation are provided and/or restored by God; third, they are provided by God without respect to whether the individual will believe or reject, which response God knew in eternity past. The offer of the gospel is *unconditional*, but God sovereignly determined that the reception of the offer was conditioned upon grace enabled faith; thus, faith is the *means* to being regenerated, or saved, not the *reason* for being saved; finally, this truth of Scripture does not imply that God was held captive to the choice of man, but rather that God coextensively determined to create man and provide this genuine offer in eternity past; also, in order to fulfill this plan, God is not obligated to disseminate the gospel to people that he knows have rejected the light He has given them and will in fact reject the gospel that He enables the lost to believe or reject; although, He may still send the gospel to them.

¹¹See “Depravity of Man” in my book *Reflections*, 21–24.

The question is not whether or not man is totally depraved, whether he needs God's grace to be able to come to God, or whether salvation is totally a work of God. Rather, it is this: Does the Scripture teach that God sovereignly chose to create man with the ability to exercise faith or not exercise faith, and does God restore that ability by means of grace enablements for everyone apart from unconditional election and selective regeneration in His salvation plan?

Calvinists refer to their beliefs as "the doctrines of grace," which is fine, but it actually does not tell us much. That is to say, the doctrines of any Biblicist are all "doctrines of grace." There simply are no other kinds in orthodoxy. It is similar to the Calvinist's continual reference to the sovereignty of God. It tells us nothing since all believers with any biblical fidelity and understanding of God believe in His sovereignty. Further, disavowal of the Calvinist's definition of the doctrines of grace and sovereignty is not a denial or undermining of the doctrines of grace and the sovereignty of God, but is simply a denial of Calvinism's definitions.

Non-Calvinists affirm that salvation is entirely a work of God because He has provided everything necessary by which sinners receive the salvation of the Lord. The offer of salvation is unconditional, whereas the experience of salvation by an individual is conditioned upon grace-enabled—not forced—repentance and faith (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38). Many verses attest to the accuracy of this understanding of salvation. The call for people to repent and believe is seen in the book of Acts repeatedly, e.g. Acts 2:37–41; 3:19–26; 7:51; 8:6–14, 22–23, 36–37; 9:35, 42; 10:34–35, 43; 11:21; 13:8–13, 38–41, 46–47; 14:1; 15:19; 16:30–34; 17:2–4, 11–12, 17, 30–31; 18:4–8, 19, 27–28; 19:8–9, 18; 20:21; 22:18; 26:17–20; 28:23–24. The epistles teach the same (Rom 5:1; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:8–9; Heb 11:6). In addition, God gave repentance as a grace gift (Acts 5:31; 11:18).

Accordingly, God works *substantively* through people. Regarding Paul's Damascus road experience, he said before King Agrippa that the Lord said to him, "But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that *they* may *turn* from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in *order that* they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified *by faith in Me*" (Acts 26:16–18, emphasis added).

By saying that God works through people and uses other things in bringing people to salvation, non-Calvinists do not mean the same thing as Calvinists who say that witnessing, praying, and tragedy are part of the process of bringing people to salvation. We mean that they are actually *substantive* and *integral* parts, while in Calvinism's soteriology nothing *actually substantively* matters except unconditional election. According to Calvinism, God unconditionally elected some to salvation, whom He monergistically brings to salvation through irresistible grace in

selective regeneration—because man is totally passive until regenerated.¹²

One cannot argue logically or scripturally that man is *totally* passive and regeneration is *monergistic*—God working independent of the human will—on one hand while maintaining that what man does has a *substantive* role in the process. Man cannot both be active and passive at the same time in the same sense. A Calvinist may argue that man's actions are a part of the process, but he cannot argue that it is *substantively* or *inextricably* so, which in fact is the clear teaching and portrayal of Scripture. If one argues that man's actions do have a *substantive* and *integral* role, then it seems that Calvinism is positing that God either “foreknew” this or He predetermined it, which seems to mean that man is not totally passive and therefore regeneration is not monergistic.

The clear declaration of Scripture is that God genuinely desires for all to come to repentance (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 3:9), gets no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and pleads with man to turn to Him and be saved (Ezekiel 33:11). Moreover, the Scripture makes faith the unmistakable, undeniable responsibility of man, as enabled by grace, in order to receive salvation. The Scripture is lucid, as well as deliberately commanding and compelling, in presenting Christ as praying for the lost and pleading with man to repent and believe and scolding nonbelievers for their unbelief (Matt 11:20–24; 23:37; Luke 23:34; John 5:40–47; 11:42). Such pleading is disingenuous if God knows that man cannot do what He has pleaded with him to do (John 7:17), and such scolding for unbelief is heartless if man has no capacity for believing. It is important to note that in John 5:40–47, the Jews' disbelief is not because they have not been regenerated; rather, Christ attributes it to the fact that they do not love God, they receive glory from one another, and do not believe Moses, which clearly implies He thought they should and could believe.

Other examples of faith being man's responsibility and preceding regeneration can be seen in these words of John: “while you have the light, *believe* in the light, *in order* that *you may become sons of light*” (John 12:36, italics mine). Again John says, “But as many as *received Him*, to them He gave the right *to become children* of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, 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, italics mine). According to Paul, faith is both prior to regeneration and the condition that believers must meet in order to receive salvation. He writes, “For you are all sons of God *through* faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26, italics mine). Non-Calvinists deny the asseveration of Calvinism that obscures the clear and simple meaning of these verses with the interpretation that

¹²Man's passiveness is stated explicitly in the *Westminster Confession*. “This effectual call [to salvation] is of God's free and special grace alone, not from anything 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 by it” (italics added). I add to this the clarification that he is not only enabled, but according to Calvinism, he is enabled against his will, and not only enabled to believe but *made* to only be able to believe rather than choose between believing and not believing. I maintain that God indeed has foreknowledge, even of the future, contingent, free will choices of men and women, which is an indispensable part of His decrees and predestination. That is to say, contrary to Calvinism, He gave free will, paid everything necessary for the salvation of all, sent the call out to receive by faith, provided grace enablements and predestined to salvation those who would receive and respond to His grace by His grace.

while this general call is for all, it can only be realized by the unconditionally elected because the secret will of God includes the inward efficacious call which is only for the unconditionally elected.

The unambiguous and ubiquitous claim of Calvinism is that faith is the evidence of the new birth. For example, John Piper avers, "Faith is the evidence of new birth, not the cause of it."¹³ In like manner, R. C. Sproul declares, "We do not believe in order to be born again; we are born again in order to believe."¹⁴ Further, Piper states, "Except for the continual exertion of saving grace, we will always *use our freedom* to resist God."¹⁵

Consequently, according to Piper, Sproul, and other Calvinists, given a choice, people will always choose to reject God and stay in their sin, and God causes *some* people to be born again, and only then will they believe. Hence, man is forced into a position of necessarily believing against his will. This is not to say that faith is forced against the person's will, but rather that regeneration was forced upon the person against his will. Again, Piper asserts, "The native hardness of our hearts makes us unwilling and unable to turn from sin and trust the Savior. Therefore conversion involves a miracle of new birth. This new birth precedes and enables faith and repentance. Nevertheless, faith and repentance are *our* acts. We are accountable to do them....God grants us the inclination we need."¹⁶

This is a clear example of what I call Calvinism's double-talk. By double-talk, I *specifically and only* mean thinking, praying, writing or speaking in such a way that obscures the disquieting realities of Calvinism. If a person accepts these realities, then he can be a knowledgeable and consistent Calvinist, but if one is unwilling to face them and accept them, he cannot be a consistent Calvinist. Additionally, I am not calling anyone a double-talker nor is my use of this term intended in any sense to be pejorative.¹⁷

Second, in the Calvinist view, being born again is not a mere "inclination," it is an inviolable determination made by God alone—monergistically. Piper clearly, as do other Calvinists, places regeneration prior to faith, which had to happen against the sinner's will, notwithstanding their statements which, at times, contradict or blur this reality. His statement that "faith and repentance are *our* acts" is a little misleading. While it is true, according to Calvinism, that the human does them after regeneration, faith and repentance are also the *unalterable* and *inevitable* acts of the once regenerated person. They are as determined as they are free.

Therefore, there *may be* some remote sense in which people are accountable, but one cannot

¹³John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 63–64.

¹⁴R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1986), 259.

¹⁵John Piper, "Irresistible Grace" in *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism* <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism/print> (accessed October 4, 2012).

¹⁶Piper, *Desiring God*, 62.

¹⁷For more on this term, see my entry on "Double-talk" in "Glossary of Authorial Terms," in *Reflections*, 152–53.

glean any amount of uncertainty from a Calvinist understanding of accountability or responsibility; they redefine how Scripture commonly portrays these things and how they are understood in everyday life. While they are free to redefine an everyday usage—not Scripture’s usage—they should be forthright about it so as not to obscure the truth of Calvinism. Furthermore, most, if not all, usages of accountability and responsibility in Scripture and everyday usage, at least, imply libertarian choice. That is what *most* people believe the Calvinist means, but it is emphatically not what they mean. This is a disquieting reality.

According to Calvinism, faith and repentance are responsibilities of the regenerated person that he is *not* free to resist. In other words, the bitter reality of Calvinism is that the predetermined elect are regenerated by God without regard to anything else, and that the one God chooses will be regenerated in absolute contradiction to the desires of his fallen nature. Then, the one who is regenerated will have no more option not to repent and have faith than he had not to be regenerated. Consequently, any implication or inference that the sinner, prior to regeneration, has a choice in being regenerated, exercising faith, or not being regenerated, and after regeneration has a choice of not exercising faith, is an illusion. This is a disquieting reality.

The lack of *real* choice to exercise faith or not is the chilling truth of Calvinism, and it is this truth that takes words like “responsibility,” “accountability,” and the normal teaching of Scripture’s repeated pleas, injunctions, and warnings to new levels of obfuscation. I disagree with those who hold to such understandings, but I am even more profoundly troubled by unwillingness on the part of *many* Calvinists to speak regularly and forthrightly about these realities in such a way that people understand exactly what is involved in being a Calvinist. Some Calvinists fully understand this and do their best to communicate it. I applaud their forthrightness. But I am convinced that most people who embrace Calvinism do not fully understand or accept this truth of Calvinism, and/or they think it is not essential to Calvinism, when in fact it is. This is a disquieting reality.

Calvinism’s endeavor to exalt God by emphasizing compatibilism, unconditional election and monergism actually diminishes God.¹⁸ One simply cannot diminish the *work* of the creator without diminishing its creator, which Calvinism does by teaching that man was created to inevitably sin and be totally passive in regeneration. For example, what if one looked beneath the majestic mystique of the Mona Lisa only to find that Da Vinci actually painted by the numbers, or we learned that Beethoven’s 5th Symphony was actually composed by an alien being who could do nothing but produce such a masterpiece. Either discovery would tell us more about the creators of such works than the works themselves, and would in fact reduce our opinion of their creators. Calvinism’s reduction of man’s freedom to that of compatibilism tells us more about their, albeit possibly unwitting, diminished view of God—who apparently cannot be in sovereign control of truly free beings with choice to do otherwise—than it does about their view of man.

Calvinism teaches that the gospel is only, in any meaningful sense, offered to the unconditionally

¹⁸For more on compatibilism and free will, see the chapter on Article 8 of the TS.

elected because God has chosen to grant only the elect His selective regeneration and withhold that same salvifically essential and determinative work from the non-elect, thereby inviolably prohibiting them from being enabled to receive the gospel unto forgiveness of sins and eternal life; hence, while a Calvinist *may* argue that he makes a good faith offer (if there is such a thing), it is incontrovertible that Jesus makes no such offer.

Calvinism's view that God withholds the essential element of regeneration, which leads to salvation, means that God does not in any sense desire the non-elect to be saved. Such a conclusion contradicts numerous biblical texts and the picture presented in Scripture of God's salvific love for the all of the lost (Luke 24:47; John 8:24; Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 3:9; Rev 22:17).

Further, God's genuine offer of salvation to each and every lost person is based upon the attributes of God (perfect love, matchless mercy, indefatigable compassion and boundless grace) rather than the attributes of man. Thus, the non-Calvinist position is pedestalled upon a scripturally balanced exaltation of *all* of the attributes of God. Therefore, the non-Calvinist view of God and His *genuine* offer of salvation to all of the lost is not derived from an exaltation of man or by humanizing God, but rather by simply recognizing the exalted place Scripture affords God and His love.

"God so loved the world" (John 3:16) and genuinely *desires* for everyone to repent, believe, and be saved (2 Peter 3:9). God has provided everything that every fallen, undeserving and rebellious sinner needs in order to receive forgiveness in Christ (John 1:9–14; Acts 17:30–31; Rev 22:17). Consequently, any person can respond to the gospel with grace-enabled repentance and faith, and when he does, he is at that instant born again through the power of the Holy Spirit; he becomes a new creation in Christ with eternal life (John 10:10; Rom 6:4–11; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20; 6:15; Col 2:13).

Commentary on Article 6: The Election to Salvation



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Introduction

Article 6 rests on the reality that election is clearly taught in the Scriptures and is an essential component of the doctrine of salvation. Election emphasizes the fact that salvation is accomplished through the Father's initiative, guaranteed by the person and work of Christ alone, and actualized in the lives of sinners through the power of the Holy Spirit. Election, therefore, communicates that salvation is completely gracious. It signifies the lavish generosity of God, who will save not just a few but an innumerable multitude. Election's announcement of God's sovereignty in salvation includes the role of the sinner's repentance and faith. God has chosen to bring into existence a people who belong to Him by faith in a world where their decisions

Article Six: Election to Salvation

We affirm that, in reference to salvation, election speaks of God's eternal, gracious, and certain plan in Christ to have a people who are His by repentance and faith.

We deny that election means that, from eternity, God predestined certain people for salvation and others for condemnation.

Genesis 1:26–28; 12:1–3; Exodus 19:6; Jeremiah 31:31–33; Matthew 24:31; 25:34; John 6:70; 15:16; Romans 8:29–30, 33; 9:6–8; 11:7; 1 Corinthians 1:1–2; Ephesians 1:4–6; 2:11–22; 3:1–11; 4:4–13; 1 Timothy 2:3–4; 1 Peter 1:1–2; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 7:9–10

for or against Christ really matter. Rather than determining these choices Himself, God has gloriously and sovereignly decided to accord to each sinner the responsibility of surrendering to the Holy Spirit's leading in the preaching of the gospel. Since gospel proclamation is the means by which God brings His elective purposes to bear, election cannot be understood apart from the plan of God to bring salvation to the world *through* His chosen people and their sharing of the gospel with the lost.

God desires the salvation of everyone (John 3:16; 1 Tim 2:3–4; 2 Peter 3:9). No one is excluded from His saving intentions. Article Six, therefore, denies that election language in the Bible refers to God's eternal and fixed choice of some individuals for salvation and not others without respect to their response to the gospel. If God desires the salvation of *all people*, it cannot be the case that He has actually determined

to save only *some individuals*, while planning from eternity to consign the rest to everlasting punishment. When believers say, “God chose me,” they cannot also mean, “and, from eternity, He did not choose others.” To make such a statement is to dismiss the clear teaching of Scripture that God wants everyone to be saved. Therefore, when one says, “God chose me,” he means, “God has done everything necessary to bring me to salvation in a world where people’s decisions are a critical part of God’s ultimate purposes.” It is our belief, therefore, that the majority of Southern Baptists reject the idea that God predestines some people to hell.¹

If God has decided in eternity past which individuals He will not save, then those individuals cannot be thought of either as being truly loved by God or as being the objects of His saving intentions. Calvinists protest that it is simply a mystery as to how God loves people He wills to condemn before they are ever born. Some assert that God has two wills, one “hidden” and one “revealed,”² or two kinds of love,³ but most Southern Baptists view these answers as having neither a biblical nor logical basis. Moreover, Calvinists’ affirmation of “single predestination” over against “double predestination” as a method for absolving God of the charge of actively causing the lost to spend eternity in hell is unconvincing. To say that God merely passes over the lost rather than actively causing their perdition is both a distinction without a difference⁴ and a flat refusal to own the implications of the Calvinist system.⁵

Article Six and the *Baptist Faith and Message* (BFM)

Article 6 is completely in keeping with the treatment of the doctrine of election in the BFM, which has expressed Southern Baptist consensus on the matter for nearly a century and is based on a consensus that had emerged among Baptists in America nearly a century before that. Article 5 of the BFM states:

¹Calvinists likely will object to the phrase “predestined to hell” as a mischaracterization of their position, insisting that God does not “predestine” some sinners to hell; rather, He “foreordains” it, or “permits” it by withholding the grace necessary for them to be saved. Such double-speak should be rejected as mere semantics in the service of hiding a truth of Calvinism most Southern Baptists find unbiblical and objectionable: there is no one in hell who ever had the opportunity to be anywhere else.

²John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved,” in *The Grace of God and the Bondage of the Will*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 107–24.

³John MacArthur, “Does God Love the Elect and Hate the Non-Elect,” *Grace to You*; available at <http://www.gty.org/resources/questions/QA184> (accessed October 3, 2012).

⁴If I have the ability and opportunity to rescue someone who is drowning, then I have an obligation to render aid. If I simply stand aside and let them die, then I am morally culpable. Calvinist objections that the sinner is already dead will not suffice. If I have the ability and opportunity to resurrect a person but do not, my culpability is the same.

⁵Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 148–49.

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

This definition of election stands in clear contrast to more Calvinistic Baptist confessions.⁶ First, there is no mention of individuals who are not elect. The BFM does not affirm God's eternal and absolute rejection of certain individuals. Election is not God's plan to damn sinners; it is His plan to save sinners. Second, election is not configured in association with a deterministic view of divine action. The BFM makes no statement regarding God's decrees or His meticulous foreordination of all things including the supposedly "free" decisions of men. Instead, Article 2 emphasizes God's absolute foreknowledge of the free decisions of His creatures.

Older Calvinistic Baptist confessions deal with election before treating the doctrines of Christ, Man, and Salvation, making God's choice of some individuals but not others the lens through which these other doctrines should be understood. The BFM places election after these doctrines. In doing so, election *serves* God's glorious desire to save all rather than *constraining* it. The framers and revisers of the BFM had these much more Calvinistic Baptist confessions available to them, confessions which are much more consistent with the Westminster Confession's vision of election. Southern Baptists, however, have always been more comfortable with an understanding of election that was simpler, less speculative, and fully compatible with God's desire for the salvation of all people.

Election and Southern Baptist "Non-Calvinism"

Most Southern Baptists categorically deny that certain individuals are selected for hell before creation. They know what election *does not* mean. What is needed in Southern Baptist life is a clear statement of what election *does* mean. Southern Baptists affirm that election is taught in the Bible, that God is sovereign in salvation, and that He has a very specific plan for each life but a plan that includes their free choices. A strategy that many Southern Baptists adopt to deal with election is to employ what they think is "compatibilism," their idea that God's sovereign choice of some individuals is compatible with man's free response to the gospel. Strictly speaking, however, "compatibilism" is a technical philosophical term asserting that *determinism* and free will are compatible.⁷ Compatibilism is actually the Calvinistic view of divine action which sees every event as foreordained by God such that no human has the freedom of choice. Instead, "freedom" is the ability to do what one desires most. However, since people are not able to choose what they desire, those desires must be determined by God. This view of the relationship between divine

⁶See, i.e., *The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith* (1689), *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (1742), *The Baptist Catechism* (Charleston Association, 1813), and the *Abstract of Principles* (1858).

⁷*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "compatibilism," available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/compatibilism/> (accessed October 3, 2012).

action and human willing is simply unacceptable to most Southern Baptists who believe that the clear sense of Scripture is that people have real choices for which they are morally responsible.⁸

A Positive Construction of Election

A truly Southern Baptist understanding of election, one that is faithful to God's desire to save all and to the necessity of a real response to the gospel must incorporate the totality of the biblical witness concerning this doctrine. Election language in Scripture emphasizes the nature of God's ultimate plan to bring about the salvation of myriads of people without negating the real response of individual sinners to His offer of covenant relationship. It must be constantly kept in mind that the Bible does not unfold as systematic theology, but salvation-history. The Scriptures reveal what God is doing in history, especially the history of Israel, and make clear what God's actions demonstrate about His character and purposes. The question of God's ultimate plan for history through Israel is a controlling exegetical and theological question of both the Old and New Testaments. God's choice of Israel, therefore, is fundamental to the meaning of election in the Bible. Several crucial features emerge from the Scriptures' treatment of Israel's election. First, the distinction between Israel and everyone else is comprehensively and maximally *salvific*. God does not choose Israel and damn the nations.⁹ He chooses Israel to be a light of salvation to the nations. Second, this world-wide scope of election is based upon God's covenantal promises to bring His creation to completion in relationship with humankind. Third, election promises are typically mediated to and through one man, from whom these promises go out to all the earth (i.e. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the Messiah). Fourth, these covenant promises, which are made to the whole covenant community and, through them, to the whole world, consequently must be ratified by faith in order to be realized by individuals. Fifth, these election promises are antecedent to any individual response, and they will be fulfilled because God alone has categorically committed Himself to bringing about their fulfillment.¹⁰

These five main trajectories of the election of Israel in the Old Testament govern the meaning of election language as it flows out into various applications in the New Testament. These trajectories cover the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of election.

Covenantal

First, election is *covenantal*. This addresses the *why*, the purpose, of election. God has promised to redeem, and election speaks of God's intention and plan to keep that promise.

⁸John S. Hammett, "Human Nature" in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 381–92.

⁹Charlie Trimm, "Did YHWH Condemn the Nations When He Elected Israel? YHWH's Disposition Toward the Non-Israelites in the Torah," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55/3 (2012): 536.

¹⁰See Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 58–62, for a helpful discussion of the concepts of "antecedent" and "consequent" with respect to sovereignty and freedom is God's desire to save.

Election functions within God's sovereign commitment to bring about His ultimate purposes for all things, and it is hardwired to His desire for everyone to come to repentance and faith. This desire for maximum salvation is expressed fully in God's covenant purposes for creation from the very beginning (Gen 1:26–28): God has always desired to be in real relationship with the crown of His creation, through whom the whole cosmos would be brought to completion.¹¹ Election, therefore, is not an end to itself. Rather, it is a crucial part of God's covenant plan for the redemption of the created order. Yet, within God's sovereign desire for maximum salvation, covenant also demands a real response.¹²

The core reference point for covenant and election is God's choice of Abraham. The ultimate purpose of that choice was that through Abraham all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1–3; cf. Gal 3:8), and Abraham's response to that covenant offer really mattered. God did not choose Abraham in distinction to the nations but on behalf of the nations. Israel was chosen to be a kingdom of priests, the ones through whom all the peoples of the earth would come to worship the one true God. The salvation-historical script from which the writers of the New Testament are always working is that God's elective covenantal purposes through Israel have come to fruition in the person and work of Christ breaking forth in a church that is world-wide, composed of believing Jews *and* Gentiles, the sign that the covenant with Abraham to redeem the world is being fulfilled.¹³ Election is covenantal.

Christocentric

Second, election is *Christocentric*. This speaks to the where (and how), the location (and means), of election. Where does election take place? *In Christ*. How? *Through Christ*. God's ultimate purposes for creation are grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of the Son. All that was promised to, in, and through Israel has been fulfilled in Christ. In Christ, the universal need for the salvation of humankind by God was met in the particular appearing and ministry of the God-Man. Paul speaks of believers being chosen and predestined “in Him” (Eph 1:4, 11) and predestined to be adopted “through Jesus Christ” (v. 5). Paul tells the Romans that they

¹¹Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 17; William J. Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1984), 27.

¹²See, i.e., Deut 29:14–21. Israel is reaffirming the covenant promised to the patriarchs and to future generations. However, if there is an individual man or woman who boasts, “I have peace with God though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart,” the Lord will “single him out” from the people for destruction (vv. 18–21). Although the covenant is for the whole community, the individual must respond in faith in order to benefit from those corporate covenant promises.

¹³William J. Dumbrell, “Abraham and the Abrahamic Covenant in Galatians 3:1–14,” in *The Gospel to the Nations: Perspectives on Paul's Mission*, ed. Peter Bolt and Mark Thompson (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 19, 29. Paul asserts this connection between Abraham, election, the gospel, and the nations in Gal 3:8: “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations of the earth will be blessed in you.’” Cf. Rom 4:13–25.

are “predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren” (8:29). Christ is the Elect One (Luke 9:35; 23:35 and 1 Peter 1:20; 2:4, 6). Through this One Man, through the universal and unlimited nature of His atonement, all people are now under the aegis of God’s electing love. God’s desire to have a people for Himself is secured by what has been accomplished in Christ. Those individuals who are united with Christ by faith are the elect, not by virtue of what they have done, but by virtue of what Christ has done. Through Christ, God’s covenant offer to Israel is now an offer He makes to the whole world, but, as it was with individual Israelites, so it must be with individual sinners—they must respond in faith (Deut 29:19–21). Moreover, as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, the elect are now the gracious means through which the gospel of Christ, the power of salvation, goes out to the whole world. The church, in becoming ever more like Christ, puts the glory of God on display before the nations so that all might come to repentance and faith.

Categorical

Third, election is *categorical*. This addresses the *who*, the subject, of election: God alone. In sovereign freedom alone, the Father has chosen the Son, and, in sovereign freedom alone, the Son has submitted Himself to the Father (John 5:18–30). In and through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Father elected to have a people for Himself in whom and through whom He will fulfill His covenant to redeem the world. Like His decision to create, His decision to elect is non-contingent and unconditional. God initiates and superintends election, and His decision to have a people for Himself cannot be stopped. He will accomplish what He has determined to accomplish because He is God. Election is of grace. God’s choice of Israel was not based on her present or future worthiness, but on God’s free decision alone. Indeed, God fulfills that commitment perfectly and completely in Christ. God’s choice to have an eschatological people in Christ mirrors His election of Israel. God does not elect this people because He foresees that they will behave righteously. He elects them through categorical freedom, grace, and love. Because God’s electing purposes are based on His gracious decision alone, He can provide this salvation for anyone.

Concurrent

Fourth, election is concurrent, which relates to the *when* of election, addressing the issues of time and eternity and the movements of sovereignty and free will. While Calvinists speak of election as unconditional and happening from eternity and Arminians see it as conditional and happening in time, the Scriptures affirm elements of both views. God’s total sovereignty and people’s real responsibility in salvation are “simultaneously true.”¹⁴ To diminish God’s

¹⁴Kenneth Keathley, “The Work of God: Salvation,” in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 707. “Some advocates of the concurrent election position appeal to

sovereignty in salvation (or anything else) leaves the outcome of human destiny subject to doubt and beyond God's control. To diminish human responsibility is to concede causal determinism, reducing human decision-making to a farce. Yet, Ken Keathley notes, "The Bible so congruently interweaves divine and human actions that it is a mystery where one ends and the other begins (cf. John 6)."¹⁵ Concurrence in election means that God's sovereignty in election extends ultimately to the individual believer in such a way that, without God's electing, initiating, and superintending, no individual has the hope of salvation. It, however, also means that the free response of humans to God's electing activity is real and essential to salvation.¹⁶

Corporate

Finally, election is *corporate*, speaking to the *what*, the object of election.¹⁷ Election is the outworking of God's desire to save all. It is expressed in His desire to have a *people* for Himself. When the choice of individuals is raised in the Scriptures, it always refers to God's activity through that individual to bring about His purposes for maximum salvation. The concept of election is not focused on the question, "How does God save individuals?" The Bible answers that question clearly, but with a different concept: faith. Individuals are saved by grace through faith in Christ. This is not to say that the election of a people and the salvation of individuals are unrelated. Because Christ is the Elect One, the people of God are elect in and through Him. Because Christ is the Savior of each individual by faith, then a proper theological implication is that union with Christ makes an individual a member of the elect. Since the Son is freely chosen to bring about the existence of the elect, the Son Himself is the first member, the image for those who are predestined to conform to it, making Christ "the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom 8:29). Therefore, the corporate entity is no "empty set."¹⁸ Because maximum salvation was always the purpose of election, the fact that multitudes have come to faith and multitudes are yet to come is simply the intended outcome of God's sovereign activity in election.

Election in Romans 9–11

This five-fold matrix of election in Scripture structures the following soteriological claim: election is God's sovereign, unstoppable, promised plan to save a multitudinous people for

God's timelessness, others base their arguments on his ability to know even hypothetical situations (this ability is called *middle knowledge*), while still others argue that, since the Bible clearly teaches concurrence but does not provide an explanation about how concurrence works, then the matter should be left as a mystery."

¹⁵Ibid., 719.

¹⁶This is essentially Millard Erickson's view in *Christian Theology*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 382–87.

¹⁷William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 21.

¹⁸William Klein, "Is Corporate Election Virtual Election?," available at <http://ebookbrowse.com/klein-is-corporate-election-merely-virtual-election-pdf-d46693980> (accessed October 3, 2012).

himself through faith in Christ alone. While this plan is sufficient to save every sinner, those who are excluded from it are excluded only by their own decisions within the collective rebellion and brokenness of humankind, an outcome that functions fully within God's sovereign purposes to bring maximum salvation by faith.

This matrix reveals that the texts most often cited as *proof* that election means God's fixed choice of some and not others are actually making the *opposite* point. Romans 9–11 is arguably the "pillar passage" for the Calvinist view of election, but it actually fits beautifully into this matrix and reveals that God's saving intentions are for all, not just a select few. There is no question that the election of Israel forms the basis for these chapters. Whatever election means here it must be collated with what God was doing in His choice of Israel. Paul's point in the letter from beginning to end is that, as the Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, he is proclaiming that God's commitment to bring salvation to the world through Israel has been fulfilled in Israel's Messiah and through the Messiah's People. In Romans 9–11, *covenant* is the driving force. The question of 9:6 (Has God's covenant with Israel failed?) is answered in 11:25–26 (Israel's present resistance to the gospel is temporary, purposed by God for maximum salvation among the Gentiles, which will result in *all* Israel being saved.). The conclusion of this plan is exclaimed in verse 32: "that He might have mercy on them all." Who benefits from these covenant promises? *Anyone* who *believes* (Rom 10:9–13). *Concurrence* is in view in the ease with which Paul speaks of God's absolute sovereignty in the plan of salvation (Rom 9:6–29) and then turns in the next verse to find Israel's own unbelief as the precipitating cause of God's current rejection of them, the remedy for which is faith in Christ alone for anyone who will confess and believe (9:30–10:16).

Christocentrism is on display in the core of this passage in Rom 10:5–17. Christ is the fulfillment of the new covenant promised to Israel in Deut 30:12–14 (Rom 10:6–8). Belief in the Lordship of the Living Christ alone results in salvation for *all people*. The *categorical* nature of this sovereign plan to save all is on display especially in chapter 9. God, indeed, can save whomever He wants however He wants, but the question is, "Who does God want to save?" Does He want to save certain ones and not others? That hardly seems to be the point of a passage that ends with the proclamation that there will be mercy for all. The point of Romans 9 is that nothing can stop God's plan for maximum salvation, not even Israel's unfaithfulness. In fact, her unfaithfulness is actually a part of the plan to bring salvation to the whole world (9:17–18; 11:11–15). God is hardening Israel for a little while, not according to some hidden will to save some and not others, but according to His revealed will to save anyone and everyone who believes.

Finally, election in Romans 9–11 is *corporate*. Paul is talking about God's dealings with two groups, Jews and Gentiles, who are being made into one group (Rom 11:16–24). God's choice of Israel (and His sovereign administration of Israel's unbelief) has resulted in His choice of all who believe. Again, not everyone will hear the good news ("How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?") and not everyone will believe ("All day long I have lifted My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people"). But Paul's point about election in Romans 9–11 is clear: God never just gives up on people. No one is outside of His reach or His mercy. Anyone can be

saved. His electing purposes for maximum salvation are unstoppable, yet they fully include the real responses of people to the gospel.

Conclusion

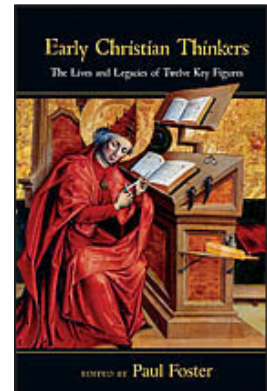
It is inaccurate to say that God elects some individuals and not others to salvation on the basis of his inscrutable decrees. Calvinism's reading evacuates the biblical concept of faith, which requires real freedom as necessary for salvation. God saves individuals by providing salvation through Christ in the announcement of the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. The individual who responds to the offer of the gospel with repentance and faith is saved. By virtue of an individual's being saved by faith in the Elect One, he is now a member of the elect. "God chose me," then can only mean that God has always planned to bring salvation to sinners in a way that takes seriously both their radical sinfulness and their responsibility to respond in faith. It cannot mean that God chooses some and not others without respect to their response of faith to the gospel.

Biblical election, therefore, is part of the answer to the question, "How does God fulfill His sovereign, loving desire to save sinners?" The answer is that despite the universal and ubiquitous rebellion of all men, God decided, in Christ, to choose a people to whom salvation would come and through whom salvation would go out to all people, no matter what. Therefore, the burden of election language in the Bible is not the demonstration of how it is that God wants to save anyone. That is an Augustinian concern. Election in Scripture stands with the announcement that God wants to save *everyone*. God is not looking out over the mass of the damned, pinching his nose and picking out a few. He is looking at the world He loved so much that He made a way for whoever believes in Him to have life, and He has guaranteed that He will have such a people in Christ through whom the gospel will go out to the whole world.

What does this view of election mean for Southern Baptists? It means that we can say that God moved heaven and earth to bring the gospel to sinners like us. He did so through Christ and through the long chain of the faithfulness and obedience of His people. We are the beneficiaries of His electing purposes when we respond in faith to that gospel preached to us, and, when we take that good news to others, we put the electing purposes of God on display. Election means that we did not save ourselves. Until the gospel was preached to us, until the Spirit of God moved in that preaching, we were hopeless and helpless, undeserving of and uninterested in a relationship with God. Yet, God refused to stop. He has chosen to pursue His rebellious creatures to the uttermost. The end will reveal His elective purposes were not designed for a great exclusion but a maximum salvation.

Early Christian Thinkers: The Lives and Legacies of Twelve Key Figures. Edited by Paul Foster. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010, xx + 203 pages. Paperback, \$23.00.

Paul Foster serves as Senior Lecturer of New Testament Language, Literature & Theology at the University of Edinburgh. The list of his publications on early Christian literature is lengthy and impressive. In this handy volume, Foster brings together twelve leading patristic scholars to briefly introduce and analyze the most prominent pre-Nicene writers (ca. AD 150-330).



Paul Parvis introduces Justin Martyr as an astute philosopher whose *Dialogue with Trypho* is a lengthy, early example of Christian interpretation of the Old Testament. Parvis shows how Justin creatively used legal procedures to post his extensive defense of Christianity (the *Apologies*) for elite audiences of Rome.

Paul Foster describes Tatian as Justin's student from the east. Foster explores the nature of his apology and the language of his Gospel harmony (the *Diatessaron*). Foster shows how Tatian was later condemned as unorthodox for his alignment with the Encratites.

Denis Minns presents Irenaeus as a theologian with pastoral concern, who spent his life leading the church of Lyons. Against the rise of the Gnostics and other sects, Irenaeus wrote his magnum opus (*Adversus Haereses*), which Minns explores for Irenaeus' concept of Scripture, tradition, truth, salvation, history, and Christology.

Rick Rogers introduces Theophilus of Antioch as an author overshadowed by bigger names of the second and third centuries. Rogers restores Theophilus to a place of significance with a careful reading of Jerome, Eusebius, and his *Apology To Autolycus*.

Judith L. Kovacs presents Clement of Alexandria as a dynamic thinker, biblical philosopher, and all-around polymath. Despite the dearth of biographical details about Clement, his writings evince a voracious reader familiar with a wide array of secular and Christian literature. Kovacs shows how ancients and moderns have spoken of Clement's intellect and legacy in the highest terms.

Everett Ferguson describes Tertullian of Carthage as the first great Latin theologian. As an adult convert, Tertullian used his classical education to produce dozens of apologetic, doctrinal, and moral writings. Ferguson shows how Tertullian's thought was influential for generations, even though he had sectarian tendencies and eventually joined the Montanists.

Sara Parvis introduces Perpetua as a young convert and courageous martyr whose innermost thoughts are recorded in her diary. Though influenced by dreams and prophecies, her compassion

and composure in the face of death is found to be exemplary. Parvis shows how Perpetua's theology was expressed influentially in the words and actions of her last moments.

Rebecca Lyman presents Origen as the controversial scholar of Alexandria and Caesarea. Origen is famous for his asceticism, allegorizing, voluminous writings, edition of the Old Testament (the *Hexapla*), defense against Celsus, and leadership of two catechetical schools. Lyman shows how Origen's unorthodox and independent spirit caused him to be embraced by some but rejected by others.

J. Patout Burns introduces Cyprian as the martyr-bishop of Carthage who guided the church as it transitioned from persecution to prominence. Cyprian rose quickly to leadership as the church disagreed and divided on how to restore "the lapsed." Burns shows how Cyprian advanced the unity, purity, and rituals of the church during turbulent times.

Ulrich Volp presents Hippolytus of Rome as one who provoked doctrinal debate and leadership opposition. Volp reconstructs Hippolytus from the many writings attributed to him and shows how for centuries few matched the depth of his thought and volume of his writings.

Michael Slusser introduces Gregory Thaumaturgus as the elusive, third-century miracle worker of Neocaesarea. Slusser takes a "maximalist" approach in the debate over the details and writings known of Gregory. Slusser finds him to be a productive bishop often eclipsed by the more famous Gregorys of later generations.

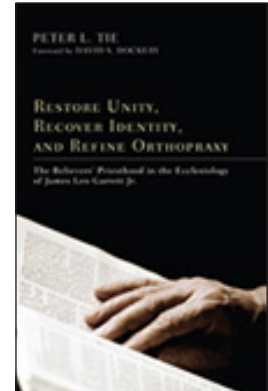
Timothy David Barnes presents Eusebius of Caesarea as a metropolitan bishop, church historian, and productive writer. Barnes clarifies the current scrutiny of *Life of Constantine* and *Ecclesiastical History*. Even though he penned innumerable exegetical, dogmatic, apologetic, and historical documents, Barnes finds Eusebius to be inelegant, idiosyncratic, and underwhelming.

Early Christian Thinkers is a wonderful introduction to the formative period of Christian thought and practice. The contributors include copious notes and helpful bibliography so the eager reader can pursue further study. At about 15 pages each, the chapters are brief enough that readers new to patristics can quickly grasp the scope and significance of these twelve luminaries. The authors do more than simple summary as they introduce the main issues debated about the writers and their writings. In a few places, the presentations succumb to tedious academic discussions, but generally the essays flow nicely from one to the next with fascinating details and insights on early Christian thinkers and their thought. This is the kind of volume which will pique the interest of readers and cause them to crave more.

—Jeff Cate, *California Baptist University, Riverside, CA*

Restore Unity, Recover Identity, and Refine Orthopraxy: The Believers' Priesthood in the Ecclesiology of James Leo Garrett, Jr. By Peter L. Tie. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012. 156 pages. Paperback, \$18.00.

James Leo Garrett, Jr. has been a gift to Southern Baptist scholarship over the last six decades. Now Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Garrett has served on the faculties of Baylor University, Southern Seminary, and Hong Kong Theological Seminary in addition to teaching at Southwestern Seminary for forty years. Universally respected for his scholarly erudition, Garrett earned the Bachelor of Arts degree from Baylor, the Bachelor of Divinity degree from Southwestern Seminary, the Master of Theology degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, the Doctor of Theology degree from Southwestern Seminary, and the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Harvard University. Garrett's engagement in dialogue with other Christian traditions has made him the face of Southern Baptists in many discussions in the broader theological world. His *magnum opus* is the two volume work *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, which interweaves biblical, historical, and systematic theology in a rich tapestry of thought.



While his scholarly erudition is beyond question, Garrett is clearly a theologian of the church. Unlike some contemporary theologies, his theology is engaged with and informed by the church's interpretation of Scripture. An earlier volume in his honor, *People of God: Essays on the Believer's Church*, edited by Paul Basden and David Dockery, addressed this ecclesiological interest in Garrett's thought. This new volume by Peter Tie, arising from his dissertation research as a doctoral student at Southwestern Seminary, also focuses on Garrett's ecclesiology. *Restore Unity, Recover Identity, and Refine Orthopraxy* affords a helpful overview of Garrett's thought through the lens of his ecclesiology.

Tie traces Garrett's discussion of the mission of the church through three major aspects — evangelization, ecumenism, and ethics. The task of *evangelism* is fulfilling the Great Commission by sharing the gospel of Christ with everyone in the world. Christian *ecumenism* has been a particular interest of Garrett in his participation in interdenominational and interfaith dialogue. He does not favor engagement in organizations that would require doctrinal compromise, however, and realizes that the goal of the church universal experiencing unity and oneness will not be realized until the end of time. The role of *ethics* concerns the need for the church to engage in diakonal service and social action to address the physical needs of the world.

Regarding the criteria for membership into the church, Garrett insists that persons who have reached the age of accountability must come by profession of faith in Christ. Churches should consist only of believers baptized by immersion. Garrett also calls for the robust practice of church discipline to maintain a regenerate church membership.

Tie next discusses Garrett's perspective on the ministry of the church. Garrett gives considerable attention to the priesthood of all believers, considered more as a corporate whole than as individuals. All the church's members should be actively functioning as priests. Garrett also addressed those specially called to ordained ministry, who should reflect the *munus triplex* of prophet, priest, and king. Although Garrett discussed the arguments for and against ordaining women as pastors or deacons, he does not provide a final opinion on these difficult and controversial topics.

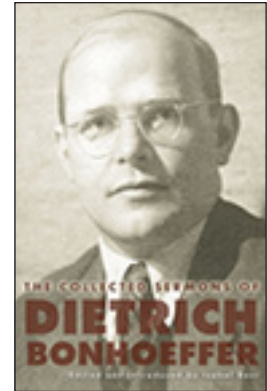
In a section on the "management" of the church, Tie overviews Garrett's perspectives regarding church and state relations, congregational polity, and church discipline. Garrett affirms the traditional Baptist beliefs of religious freedom, free church congregational church polity, and meaningful church discipline.

Although this volume occasionally evidences the formal academic language and repetition of a dissertation, Tie provides an excellent overview of Garrett's ecclesiology. *Restore Unity, Recover Identity, and Refine Orthodoxy* is a fitting tribute to this great Baptist theologian.

— Steve Lemke, *New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

The Collected Sermons of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edited by Isabel Best. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012, xxvi +214 pages. Hardback, \$29.95.

Even though Dietrich Bonhoeffer is best known as a theologian, ethicist, writer, and martyr, he displayed a high propensity for preaching. He once said, "A real evangelical sermon must be like holding a pretty red apple in front of a child or a glass of cool water in front of a thirsty person and then asking: do you want it?" (34). This work signifies the compilation of thirty-one sermons from the preaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Isabel Best has contributed to several translations of Fortress Press's *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, English Edition* (DBWE). Best's work in this volume gathers Bonhoeffer's numerous sermons from throughout his collected works in the DBWE and offers them in a chronological order with proper contextual introduction.



Following the editor's introduction of biographical information on Bonhoeffer, Best provides her sermon selection with poignant introductions to set the cultural and theological background of Bonhoeffer's time. As Best moves through the sermons, she comprehends the context of the personal life of Bonhoeffer and the growing concern of Germany in World War II. The specifics of the German Lutheran faith in the sermon introductions express the pastoral vision and preaching that Bonhoeffer brought to the pulpit.

The chronological journey through Bonhoeffer's sermons begins with one of his earliest sermons, delivered at the age of twenty-two while he served as a pastor's assistant and was preparing for his ordination. This particular sermon revealed the great imagination that filled Bonhoeffer's preaching even from an early age. "God is with Us," preached after Easter in April of 1928, communicated Bonhoeffer's strong desire for people to know that there was still the possibility of an intimate "walk with God" as described in the Old Testament and with the Christ of the New Testament (1). Sermons like this one express the reason why evangelicals flock to Bonhoeffer's writings; he describes in his works the personal experience of God.

As Best progresses through Bonhoeffer's sermons, she reflects on the specifics of Bonhoeffer's homiletical style. Bonhoeffer, in his sermon "Ambassadors for Christ" from October 1933, describes his view of preaching, "When a preacher opens the Bible and interprets the word of God, a mystery takes place, a miracle: the grace of God, who comes down from heaven into our midst and speaks to us, knocks on our doors, ask questions, warns us, puts pressure on us, alarms us, threatens us, and makes us joyful again and free and sure" (90). This expression of preaching reveals Bonhoeffer's desire to implement grace and communion through the sermonic event. Best reflects much of Bonhoeffer's theological understanding of preaching throughout her chronology of his sermons.

The final sermon, "Death is Swallowed Up in Victory" from November 26, 1939, provides the background for the final years of Bonhoeffer's life before his incarceration and death. This sermon describes the resilient faith of Bonhoeffer that would sustain him through his imprisonment, suffering, persecution, and death. He writes, "When dark hours and when the darkest hour comes over us, then we want to hear the voice of Jesus Christ calling in our ear: *victory is won*. Death is swallowed up in victory. Take comfort. And may God grant that then we will be able to say: I believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting" (210). His sermons reflected the application of faith in the lives of others as well as his own life.

One strength of this book lies in the discussion and introduction of each sermon. Best supplies detailed information for understanding the context of Bonhoeffer's world and how he addressed his context through faith and proclamation. Another strength of the book flows from the short yet comprehensive introduction on Bonhoeffer's life and his impact on Christianity. One possible weakness of the book can be found in the sermon selection. All but one of the sermons come from the New Testament. Assuming Bonhoeffer preached a higher percentage of sermons from the Old Testament, a more balanced selection of sermonic discourses from the Old Testaments would provide a better understanding of Bonhoeffer's preaching and his faith.

Best's book was both refreshing and edifying as she described Bonhoeffer's sermons as "real time events" in front of "real people" (xxvi). For this reason, her background provides pertinent information for understanding the purpose and effort behind Bonhoeffer's sermons. The book would be a valued starting point for those who are new to understanding Bonhoeffer. The biographical information in the editor's introduction would introduce new readers to Bonhoeffer's

doctrinal views. Though the biographical information is necessary, it does not overwhelm the purpose of the book in providing Bonhoeffer's sermons a voice to speak for themselves. Students of preaching and of Bonhoeffer's life and writings will benefit from Bonhoeffer's Christological expression of the church. All can profit from Best's sermonic evaluation, which shows how "passionately [Bonhoeffer's] heart went out to ordinary people and their life struggles and search for meaningful Christian faith" (xiii).

– *Charles B. Rogers Jr., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*

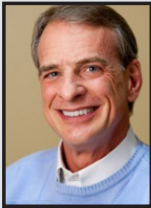
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