

# Answers to Questions on Calvinism's Doctrines of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

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*A perennial difficulty for every branch of theology and philosophy is how to understand the relationship between moral responsibility and the sense that people are part of a larger scheme of things over which they have little—perhaps even no—control. Questions about this problem arise in every generation. In the history of Christian theology, Calvinism has offered one system of answers to these questions, and Calvinists believe that this system is the best—the most Biblical, the most reasonable, and the most liveable—among all offered by various Christian traditions. It should not be surprising, however, that people who embrace other theological traditions pose questions to Calvinists that, they think, point up weaknesses in Calvinism—points at which it is unbiblical, unreasonable, or unliveable. In the spring of 1996 two Lutherans in southern California devised “Thirteen Questions for Calvinists” and presented them to various Calvinist thinkers. Some of their questions related specifically to the political views of one Calvinist teacher and his adherents and are not properly related to Calvinism’s handling of the sovereignty/freedom problem. Ignoring those questions, I address below—in the form of a letter to this couple—those that truly target Calvinism itself:*

First, let me point out that your implying that Calvinism presents a mutually exclusive alternative to “Lutheranism’s personal moral responsibility freedom view” is to misconceive of Calvinism from the start and thus to reject a straw man. Calvinism believes in personal moral responsibility and human freedom. For the Calvinist, everyone sins freely and is responsible for his sin. Furthermore, for the Calvinist, everyone who trusts in Christ does so freely and is responsible for that trust, and everyone who rejects Christ does so freely and is responsible for that choice. The crucial question is the nature of moral freedom. Is it the unrestricted capacity to do anything or any alternative to it, including its moral opposite? This is the general view of moral freedom<sup>1</sup> for Arminians (though not, I think, for Arminius himself), but it is not Calvinism’s view of freedom, and I think it is not Scripture’s view of freedom. If we go to Scripture itself for our understanding of freedom, we find that it is deliverance from slavery to sin into slavery to righteousness (Romans 6). The unregenerate are bound, not by anything external to themselves but by the principle of sin in their own constitution, so that they are not capable of resisting sin consistently. Their incapacity, however, is culpable because it is a matter of their own nature. No one else forces them to sin; they sin because they are sinners, because it is their nature to sin. The regenerate, too, are bound, not by anything external to themselves but by the principle of righteousness in them, so that they are not capable of resisting righteousness consistently. Their incapacity is laudable, however, because it is an expression of their own (new) nature (2 Corinthians 5:17; compare Matthew 7:16-20). Notice that this does *not* imply either that the unregenerate can never do what is right<sup>2</sup> or that the regenerate can never

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<sup>1</sup>And henceforward when I write of *freedom* I shall have *moral* freedom in mind whether I supply the modifier or not. It is to be distinguished from political, religious, artistic, and other freedoms.

<sup>2</sup>This should be qualified, however, by the recognition that the rightness of an act may be looked at as objective or subjective. It is objectively right for someone to give food to the hungry; it is subjectively right for him to do so because he

do what is wrong;<sup>3</sup> the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity does not mean that everyone is as sinful as he could be but that everyone is sinful in every respect, i.e., that sin taints every aspect of his humanity (physical and spiritual; volitional, intellectual, and emotional) and therefore incapable of doing any saving good;<sup>4</sup> neither does the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints (the certainty of progressive sanctification unto glorification) mean that any believer can never sin before his glorification (Calvinists are not perfectionists).

To argue instead that responsible freedom *does* entail the unrestricted capacity to choose anything or its opposite is to run headlong into an insoluble dilemma, for then either we say that God is morally free and therefore has the capacity to sin (which Scripture explicitly denies; e.g., Habakkuk 1:13; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18), or we deny that God has the capacity to sin and therefore that He is morally free, this option entailing that God (a) is bound by something outside Himself and is therefore not ultimate, i.e., is not God, (b) is dependent for His goodness on something outside Himself, and (c) is not praiseworthy for His goodness since He is not good of His own intention.<sup>5</sup>

At any rate, to oppose Lutheranism to Calvinism by saying that the former embraces personal morally responsible freedom while the latter does not is to set up a straw man for Calvinism and to ignore important questions about what is meant by moral freedom.

This having been said, let us go to the specific questions:

1. *It is often said by Calvinists that dead men can't respond. As you say, "you are dead in your trespasses & sins" (Ephesians 2:1). Romans 6:11 instructs us, "in the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." If being dead in sin means one can't respond to God then does being dead to sin mean that the Christian cannot respond to sin?*

No, the former does not imply the latter.

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loves them; it is subjectively wrong for him to do so because he hopes, by so doing, to earn saving merit with God. The best motive for any act is the glory of God; Calvinists would argue that no unregenerate person can do any act with that motive, rightly understood, since the unregenerate are at heart enemies of God (Romans 5:10).

<sup>3</sup>This, likewise, should be qualified. For the Calvinist would argue that just as the best motive is the glory of God, so the worst motive is blasphemy, the intentional dishonor of God. Because of his new nature, the regenerate person cannot intentionally set out to dishonor God. He may indeed do what is objectively wrong, and he may even do it with subjectively sinful motives, but because he has been reconciled to God and given a new nature that is enslaved to righteousness rather than to sin (Romans 6), he cannot do it with the intention of blaspheming God (1 Corinthians 12:3).

<sup>4</sup>Caricatures of Calvinism frequently neglect this. It is important to get the meaning right. Here is how the *Westminster Confession* puts it:

#### CHAPTER IX Of Free-Will

- I. God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor, by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good, or evil.
- II. Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom, and power to will and to do that which was good and well pleasing to God; but yet, mutably, so that he might fall from it.
- III. Man, by his fall into a state of sin, hath wholly lost all ability of will *to any spiritual good accompanying salvation*: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from *that good*, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, *to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto*. [Emphases added.]
- IV. When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He freeth him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.
- V. The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to good alone, in the state of glory only.

<sup>5</sup>I discuss this in *Answers For Atheists, Agnostics, and Other Thoughtful Skeptics: Dialogs About Christian Faith and Life*, rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 47-54.

First, the two verses are not analogous, and the difference between them is significant. Ephesians 2:1 states a matter of fact (“you *were* dead in your trespasses and sins”); Romans 6:11 conveys an instruction (“*consider yourselves to be* dead to sin, but alive to God”). In the former, Paul states a fact from which he argues to a conclusion; in the latter, Paul exhorts believers to think of themselves in a particular way. One *might* say that in Romans 6 Paul is telling believers to think of themselves *as if* they were dead to sin *even though* they are not. This, however, would be to mistake Paul, since earlier he tells us that we “died to sin” (6:2), “that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin” (6:6-7). Paul does not mean, then, to tell us to adopt a useful fiction, to think of ourselves as dead to sin *though in fact we are not*; rather, he means to tell us to think of ourselves as dead to sin *because we are*, and to act accordingly: as “freed from sin” (6:7) therefore not allowing sin to “reign in” us (6:12).

Second, does it follow from this that our being dead means precisely the same thing for us in Romans 6:2, 6-7, 11 relative to sin that it means in Ephesians 2:1 relative to regeneration (the topic there)? No, because the contexts indicate that Paul had different, though closely related, ideas in mind. In Romans 6, Paul is addressing the regenerate (“we who died to sin” [6:2] and who “walk in newness of life” [6:4]), but his purpose is to exhort them not to sin—which assumes that they are in fact capable of sinning and indeed need exhortation to assist them not to. To understand “dead to sin” as implying incapacity to sin would therefore be to vitiate Paul’s entire purpose in the context. You are entirely right in insisting that it cannot mean that. But what is Paul’s purpose in the context of Ephesians 2:1, where he writes of the Ephesians as having been “dead in your trespasses and sins”? It is to offer this fact as one of the grounds for ascribing all the praise and glory for salvation to God alone in His grace. He begins the epistle with a doxology: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3); afterward he gives various reasons for blessing God. He tells them (a) that God predestined<sup>6</sup> them “to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, *to the praise of the glory of His grace*, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved” (1:5-6); (b) that “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, *according to the riches of His grace*” (1:7); (c) that in Christ “we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be *to the praise of His glory*” (1:11-12); (d) that having heard of their faith in the Lord and their love for all the saints, he does not “cease giving thanks [to God] for [them]” (1:15-16).<sup>7</sup> Now at the start of chapter two he adds one crowning reason for the opening doxology: that their regeneration and salvation is entirely God’s doing, not at all their own: “you<sup>8</sup> being dead in your trespasses and sins, . . . the sons of disobedience, . . . by nature children of wrath . . . God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,<sup>9</sup> even when we were dead

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<sup>6</sup>Please note that I am not here arguing a case regarding the Calvinistic notion of predestination, although of course that issue is integrally related to the issue of the inability of the unregenerate to embrace the gospel. Don’t get sidetracked by this word.

<sup>7</sup>As an aside, it would be rather strange, would it not, for him to thank God for their faith and love if their faith and love had originated in themselves and not, rather, as gifts from God?

<sup>8</sup>By the way, the Greek word translated *you* here is not the *subject* of the sentence; it is an *object*, the subject not appearing until verse 4 (*God*) and the main verb, of which *you* is the object, not appearing until verse 5 (*made . . . alive*), where *you* is joined by another object, *us*.

<sup>9</sup>Note, by the way, that it doesn’t say, “Because of the faith He observed in us.” The motive for His making us alive was His own love for us, not our faith in Him—which is consistent with the Biblical *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), which puts regeneration before faith (logically; temporally the latter may follow or perfectly coincide with the former). For evidence of this, follow carefully the sequence of tenses in John 5:24: “. . . he who hears (present tense) My word, and believes (present tense) Him who sent Me, has (present tense) eternal life, and does not come (present tense with future force) into judgment, but *has passed* (*metabēbēken*, perfect participle; its action precedes that of each of the present-tense verbs) out of death into life,” i.e., passing from death into life (regeneration) must precede hearing (in the effectual sense Jesus has in mind here; not mere physical hearing but the hearing of understanding and embracing) and believing, just as

in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, *in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (2:1, 2, 3, 4-7). And then of course he crowns his argument with those marvelous verses, "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, that no one should boast. For *we are His workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (2:8-10). If, then, we carefully consider Paul's intent in the contexts when deciding how to understand *dead* in the two passages, we are led naturally in different directions: In Romans 6, his purpose is to help us to adopt an attitude that will assist us in the struggle against sin, and this purpose presupposes that being dead to sin does not mean being incapable of sin; to take it otherwise is precisely to undermine his purpose, for it would mean there was no struggle against sin in which we would need help. But in Ephesians 1-2, his purpose is to magnify God in His grace, to argue that He *alone* deserves all praise and thanks for everything related to our salvation, and this purpose is well served by understanding "dead in your trespasses and sins" as signifying our incapacity to make ourselves alive, by understanding "sons of disobedience" as signifying our incapacity to free ourselves from "the prince of the power of the air," by understanding "by nature children of wrath" as signifying our incapacity to propitiate God's wrath toward us due to our sin, but this purpose is undermined by understanding "dead in your trespasses and sins" as signifying nothing but that though it is difficult we *can* make ourselves alive, free ourselves from Satan, and satisfy God's justice in its demands both for punishment of our sin and for our positive conformity to His law. To take any of these phrases as signifying less than absolute incapacity is to vitiate the heart of verse 10: "for we are His workmanship"; it is to imply that our being created in Christ Jesus<sup>10</sup> may very well be only *partly* His workmanship and *partly* our own, and to imply that is to undermine Paul's whole argument that the entirety of our salvation is "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6), "to the praise of His glory" (1:12, 14), "that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace" (2:7). In both contexts, then, *dead* signifies incapacity, but whether that incapacity is relative or absolute must be determined by a close study of the contexts, and such a study leads clearly to the conclusion that in Romans 6 it signifies a relative incapacity while in Ephesians 2 it signifies an absolute incapacity.<sup>11</sup>

Third, not only the larger structural context (Ephesians 1:3-2:10) and conceptual context (doxology grounded in God's gracious saving work), but also the more immediate structural context (2:1-5) and conceptual context (our powerlessness and culpability contrasted with God's power and praiseworthiness) supports this understanding of "dead in your trespasses and sins." Paul piles figure upon figure to intensify the point: "And you were *dead in your trespasses and sins*, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the *prince of the power of the air*, of the spirit that is now working in *the sons of<sup>12</sup> disobedience*. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the

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believing precedes justification. But this is to go off on a tangent, so I won't argue the case here.

<sup>10</sup>Compare 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>11</sup>Indeed, I would go farther and argue that in Romans 6 being dead to sin denotes not so much a *relative incapacity to sin* as being freed from the *absolute incapacity not to sin*.

<sup>12</sup>Note that the phrase *son of*, when followed by a moral description, signifies the nature or character of the subject. Thus, for example, *son[s] of Belial* (or *rebellion*) = a rebellious, corrupt, perverted person. (Thus the *New King James Version*, for instance, translates that phrase "perverted men" (Judges 19:22), "corrupt" (1 Samuel 2:12); "a scoundrel" (1 Samuel 25:17); "sons of rebellion" (2 Samuel 23:6), and "scoundrels" (1 Kings 21:10). Compare what Jesus says to the corrupt Jewish religious leaders: "If God were your Father, you would love Me<sup>[a]</sup>. . . . You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own [nature]; for he is a liar, and the father of lies," implying of course that they, too, are liars, since they are sons of a liar, just as they are murderers [intending to murder Him] because they are sons of a murderer.

<sup>[a]</sup>By the way, note here the assumed sequence: you become a child of God and consequently you love Christ.

desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature children of<sup>13</sup> wrath*, even as the rest” (2:1-3). What more must Paul have said to make the point of the absolute incapacity of the unregenerate to quicken themselves, to free themselves from Satan, and to propitiate God’s wrath? I’ll grant that he *could* have done it with much more prosaic language: “you were so dead you couldn’t quicken yourselves at all, so enslaved to Satan you couldn’t free yourselves at all, so perfectly deserving of God’s wrath that you could do nothing to propitiate Him.” But that sort of thing just isn’t Paul’s style, and what is the latter half of each couplet if not a mere making explicit of what is already implicit in the former half?<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, although being dead to sin does not mean being incapable of sin in the present life, it does mean being incapable of sin in the life to come. Here we have but a foretaste of what is to come. There is a larger argument in Romans 5-8 than the one in Romans 6 alone. In Romans 6 Paul argues that because we are dead to sin, we should *resist* sin, because sin doesn’t properly express our new nature. But this argument arises only in answer to another one: that, since by grace we have been made righteous, we may sin with impunity (6:1, 15). And that argument arose in response to Paul’s having said that “as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous,” and consequently “as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (5:18-19, 21). Notice that Paul writes of both forensic and practical righteousness and unrighteousness: “as through one transgression there resulted condemnation [forensic unrighteousness] to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification [forensic righteousness] of life to all men,” and “as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners [practical unrighteousness], even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous [practical righteousness].” But the practical righteousness that Paul says ensues from the obedience of the One is not immediately apparent: believers do sin. Can we really say then that grace reigns through righteousness? Yes, Paul answers, for it does so first definitively [in forensic righteousness, in declaring the sinner righteous in God’s sight because of the merit of Christ’s righteousness and on condition of the sinner’s faith {given him by God} (5:18)], then progressively [in the believer’s sanctification, in which he struggles against sin, growing in obedience (6:1-8:28)], and finally consummatively [in the believer’s glorification (8:30)], so that though the believer does indeed struggle with sin now he can have confidence that nothing can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus his Lord (8:32-39). Are we dead to sin now and therefore freed of its domination? Yes, definitively (Romans 6:2, 7). Are we dying to sin now and therefore being freed of its domination? Yes, progressively (Romans 6:11; compare 8:13; Colossians 3:5). Shall we at last be perfectly dead to sin and therefore perfectly freed from its domination, incapable of ever sinning again? Yes, consummatively (Romans 8:30).

Finally, though it is indeed “often said by Calvinists that dead men can’t respond,” that figure of speech is a loose shorthand for something more precise: “spiritually and morally dead men can’t respond *rightly* to God’s law or gospel.” They can indeed respond, but their character—dead in trespasses and sins, the sons of disobedience, by nature children of wrath, their minds futile, their understandings darkened, themselves excluded from the life of God because of their ignorance, which itself is because of the hardness of their hearts (Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-18)—forces them to respond in a particular way: by transgressing the law (even as their consciences make them approve it; Romans 2:15, 17-18, 21-23) and rejecting the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>See previous note.

<sup>14</sup>One can also point to the reaffirmation of this message in 4:17-19 as support for this interpretation of 2:1-3.

<sup>15</sup>See Appendix for relevant Lutheran confessions related to the bondage of the will and the implications thereof for soteriology. It seems to me that the Lutheran and Calvinist confessions agree on the bondage of the will, though the Lutheran confessions are not so consistent as the Calvinist on the point.

2. *Even though God does perfectly know all human thoughts, can man have thoughts that have never been thought before (i.e. ex-nihilo thoughts)? If these thoughts are not free (i.e. they are determined) then has God caused all thoughts, including evil ones which would make God the author of sin and evil and man not responsible? If, on the other hand, these thoughts are free, then how can God remain sovereign in the Calvinist view?*

This is a particularly difficult question, and I'm not sure I can give an answer that you will find very satisfying, but I'll give it a try. First, I think people not only *can* think thoughts that have never been thought before but can *only* think thoughts that have never been thought before, for thoughts are events, the acts of thinking. The content (meaning) of two thoughts may be the same, but they are not actually the same thought, the same act of thinking. Second, it seems to me that your question has its answer already imbedded in it—or at least an answer that indicates that the solution to the problem is no harder for the Calvinist view than for your view. You start with the assumption that God *knows* all human thoughts, yet certainly you would not say that in *knowing* sinful thoughts God sins. In other words, there is something morally significant about the difference between actually thinking lustfully and knowing *that* someone is thinking lustfully or even knowing what it is to think lustfully. Now, if God can *know* our thoughts (= think truly that we are thinking them) without sinning, why should it involve sin for God to have predetermined that we should (sinfully) think those thoughts? The difference is that between primary and secondary causes. If His knowing *that* we think lustfully does not involve Him in the sin of thinking lustfully, there is no reason why His planning *that* we shall think lustfully does involve Him in the sin of thinking lustfully.<sup>16</sup> Third, there is a sense in which although human beings with our finite knowledge cannot justify our choices teleologically (for us, the end does not justify the means), the omniscient God *can* justify His decisions teleologically. Why? Because we neither know nor can ensure the ends of our choices,<sup>17</sup> but He can both know and ensure the ends of all His choices. Even for God, teleology would not justify His actually violating (supposing it were even possible) His moral Law, which is an expression of His moral character, but it could justify His so planning things that *others* would violate His moral law, i.e., others would do real evil to serve His own entirely right and just and holy ends. And He does indeed have just and holy ends for the evil He has planned for men to do: to display His justice in punishing some

<sup>16</sup>Two comments of St. Augustine are apropos here:

Sometimes with a good will a man wills something which God does not will. . . . For example, a good son wills that his father live, whom God wills to die. Again, it can happen that the same man wills with a bad will what God wills with a good will. For example, a bad son wills that his father die; God also wills this. That is, the former wills what God does not will; but the latter wills what God also wills. And yet the filial piety of the former, even though he wills something other than God wills, is more consonant with God's good will than the impiety of the latter, who wills the same thing as God does. *There is a great difference between what is fitting for man to will and what is fitting for God, and to what end the will of each is directed, so that it be either approved or disapproved. For through the bad wills of evil men God fulfills what he righteously wills.* [*Enchiridion* xxvi. 100 f. (Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae* 40. 279; tr. *Library of Christian Classics* VII. 399 f.)]

Since the Father delivered up the Son, and Christ, his body, and Judas, his Lord, why in this delivering up is God just and man guilty, unless because in the one thing they have done, the cause of their doing it is not one? [*Letters* xciii. 2 (Migne, *Patrologiae Latinae* 33. 324; tr. *Fathers of the Church* 18. 63).

Cited in Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xviii.3, 4.

<sup>17</sup>A wonderful illustration of this occurs in Jean Paul Sartre's short story *The Wall* (based on a true series of events), in which a member of the Spanish revolutionary army is captured by the government's forces, imprisoned, and sentenced to death. The government tries all kinds of torture to get him to reveal the hiding place of the leader of the revolution, and he refuses. Finally, the night before his execution, he decides, "I'm going to have some fun. I'll pretend to tell them where he's hiding, just to have the fun of watching them get excited and act all important and powerful, and then I'll have the last laugh when they come back in disappointed." So he tells them the leader's hiding in the gardener's shack in a particular cemetery (a place where he's never hidden before). The soldiers bustle off in excitement, and an hour later they march back in with the leader and throw him in the same cell. In horrified shock, the fellow asks, "Where'd they find you?" "I was hiding in the gardener's shack in the cemetery," the leader replies.

sinner and His grace in pardoning others.<sup>18</sup>

4. *The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2:4, “God our Savior wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.” It also states that God wants all men to be saved in 2 Peter 3:9; Matthew 23:37; Ezekiel 33:11; 18:32.<sup>19</sup> Obviously not all men are saved. How does Calvinism explain this? Does the God of Calvinism have two wills that are in direct contradiction and hence have a multiple personality disorder?*

First, careful consideration of the several texts will show that they do not affirm that God intends the salvation of all men, each and every one universally.

1 Timothy 2:3-4: “. . . God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” The argument rests on the assumption that *all men* means each and every human being who ever lived or ever will live. But the phrase certainly does not always bear this sense, even in contexts in which there is no *explicit* limitation. Consider, for example, Numbers 16:29, where Moses says, “If these men die the death of *all men*, or if they suffer the fate of *all men*, then the LORD has not sent me.” What sort of death, or fate, had he in mind? A common, ordinary death. But not all men die so; some die very strangely. Indeed, even these men were not the only ones ever to die by being swallowed up in an earthquake. *All men* here, therefore, denotes the generality of men, not every individual. When Amnon said, “Have *all men* go out from me” (2 Samuel 13:9), did he mean that each and every man in the world, through all time, should go out from him? Clearly not; he meant the men who were present there, the men in mind—all of them, yes, but all *of them*, not each and every man who ever lived or would live. When God told Ezekiel to speak to “*every kind of bird* and to *every beast of the field*” and tell them, “You shall eat the flesh of . . . *all the men of war*,” did Ezekiel, to obey this, have to travel around the world giving the message to every different kind of bird, and did he have to speak to every single beast of the field around the world, not only in his time but in all time before and after him, and did his message mean that those very birds and beasts would eat the flesh of all men of war all over the world through all time? When Jesus told the disciples they would be hated by “*all men*” for His sake (Matthew 10:22), did He mean that each of them would be hated, specifically and individually, by every other man who ever lived or would live, including by his fellow disciples? When the disciples told Jesus, “Everyone is looking for You” (Mark 1:37), did they mean to include every man who ever lived or would live? When *all* marveled at Jesus’ healing of the Gadarene demoniac (Mark 5:20), did that include every man who ever lived or would live? When we read that *all men* counted John the Baptist a prophet (Mark 11:32), does that include the wicked religious leaders who opposed and rejected him, indeed all men who ever lived or would live? When we read that *all men* wondered whether John the Baptist were the Christ (Luke 3:15), does that include John the Baptist himself, and Jesus, indeed all who ever did or would live? Did *you* go to Jesus at the Jordan to be baptized by him, since after all you are one of *all men* who did so (John 3:26)? When the wicked Jewish religious leaders said that if they left Jesus alone, *all men* would believe in Him (John 11:48), did they intend to include themselves and Job and every other man who ever lived or would live? Did Balaam know, and does the aborigine who never heard of Christianity know, that the Twelve were Christ’s disciples through their love for one another, as Christ said *all men* would do (John 13:35)? When

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<sup>18</sup>There is an analogy to this in a common practice in law enforcement. When the police seek to trap a rapist by having a woman walk through a park at night where he has been known to attack women, they will that he should attack her, that is, they will that he should do a wrong thing. Yet their will is not itself wrong. Why? Because the end they have in mind—that by his attacking her he should reveal himself to them and thus be apprehended and punished—is right, even though the end the rapist would have in mind would be wrong. This does not mean that the end by itself—that is, independently of any consideration of God’s moral law—justifies the means. It would not justify their willing, themselves, to do something contrary to God’s moral law. But it does recognize that, within the limits of God’s moral law, the end may justify choosing one lawful means over another.

<sup>19</sup>You actually listed not 18:32 but 18:30, but I’m pretty sure you intended 18:32.

the believers in Jerusalem sold and distributed their possessions to *all men* as *every man* had need (Acts 2:45), did they distribute them to the isolated villagers in northeastern Mongolia at the time, and to the homeless people in Chicago today, and to Rahab the harlot in Jericho? Did every man who ever lived or would live glorify God for what was done through Peter and John (Acts 4:21)? Have *all men* who ever lived or would live known of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:31)? Did the whole human population, from Adam through whoever is the last person ever born, gather to witness the book burning in Ephesus (Acts 19:19)? After all, the books were burned before *all men*. Did the Asian Jews gathered in Jerusalem really mean to accuse Paul of teaching every man from Adam to the last ever to be born “against our people, and the Law, and this place” (Acts 21:28)? Did Paul witness to *all men*, from Adam to the last, of what he had seen and heard (Acts 22:15)? Did the obedience of the Roman Christians become known to every man who ever lived or would live (Romans 16:19)? Have all men who have ever lived and all who ever will live read that living epistle, the believers in Corinth (2 Corinthians 3:2)? Were the Corinthians’ gifts distributed to each and every man who ever lived or will live (2 Corinthians 9:13)? Has Paul indeed made *all men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery of Christ—including those who have never heard of Christ (Ephesians 3:9)? If ever a single man lived, from Adam to the last one ever to be born, who didn’t know of the Philippians’ moderation, would that mean that the Philippians failed ignominiously to follow Paul’s instruction to let their moderation be known to *all men* (Philippians 4:5)? Does Paul’s instruction that we should pray for *all men* (1 Timothy 2:1) contradict John’s teaching that there are some—those who have committed sin unto death—for whom we should not pray (1 John 5:16)? Does your non-Christian neighbor who never read the New Testament know of the folly of those who resisted the truth under Paul’s ministry, since after all Paul wrote that their folly would be known to *all men* (2 Timothy 3:9)? Did you—since you are one of *all men*—forsake Paul when he gave his first defense (2 Timothy 4:16)? By the time Paul wrote his letter to Titus, had God’s grace already appeared to *all men* who ever did or would live and taught them all to live soberly, righteously, and godly while looking eagerly for Christ’s return (Titus 2:11-13)? Does God indeed give wisdom liberally to *all men*—including the moron and the reprobate (James 1:5)? By the time John wrote his third epistle, had all men who ever lived or would live already given good report of Demetrius (3 John 12)? Assuming the event described is future, will the birds of the heavens eat *your* flesh and *my* flesh and Adam’s flesh, indeed, the flesh of *all men*—each and every one—who ever did or will live, at the time of “the great supper of God” (Revelation 19:18)? Obviously, the answer to each of these questions is, “No.” Indeed, I daresay that if you take a computerized concordance and ask it to list for you all the passages using the phrase *all men* (or *everyone* or similar words or phrases), you will find that far more are of restricted reference than are of unrestricted reference. If we go by general usage, we should *expect* restricted reference for *all* and *all men* whenever we meet them and affirm unrestricted reference only when the context demands it. It is not the particularist who should be challenged to provide reason for asserting the restricted reference of *all men* in this and similar texts, for his understanding is consistent with the overwhelming majority of uses of such phrases; it is the universalist, whose understanding is inconsistent with the overwhelming majority of uses of such phrases. Now, is there any good reason contextually to think that Paul meant *all men* in 1 Timothy 2:4 to be taken universally? On the contrary! The immediate context provides an example of the use of *all men* to indicate not each and every individual who ever did or would live but men of every sort, class, or condition: “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of *all men* . . . “ (1 Timothy 2:1). Does this mean we should pray for the dead—those who were saved and no longer need our prayers, and those who were not saved and can no longer benefit from them? Of course not. Paul goes on to explain: “. . . for kings and all who are in authority . . . “ (2:2). If we are not to take *all men* as universal in scope in 2:1, what compels us to take it as universal in scope in 2:4?<sup>20</sup>

2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward

<sup>20</sup>Or, for that matter, in 2:6, which says Christ “gave Himself as a ransom for all.”

you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” Everything said about *all* and *all men* and the like in the preceding paragraph applies here, too. In terms of general usage, we should *expect* a restricted, not a nonrestricted, referent for *any* and *all* here. Does the context compel us to the nonrestricted sense? On the contrary! As John Owen put it:

See, then, of whom the apostle is here speaking. “The Lord,” saith he, “is long-suffering to us-ward [*or you*],<sup>21</sup> not willing that any should perish.” Will not common sense teach us that *us* [*or you*] is to be repeated in both the following clauses, to make them up complete and full,—namely, “Not willing that any of *us* [*you*] should perish, but that all of *us* [*you*] should come to repentance?” Now, who are these of whom the apostle speaks, to whom he writes? Such as had received “great and precious promises,” chap. i. 4, whom he calls “beloved,” chap. iii. 1; whom he opposeth to the “scoffers” of the “last days,” verse 3; to whom the Lord hath respect in the disposal of these days; who are said to be “elect,” Matt. xxiv. 22. Now, truly, to argue that because God would have none of those to perish, but all of them to come to repentance, therefore he hath the same will and mind towards all and every one in the world (even to those to whom he never makes known his will, nor ever calls to repentance, if they never once hear of his way of salvation), comes not much short of extreme madness and folly. Neither is it of any weight to the contrary, that they were not all elect to whom Peter wrote: for in the judgment of charity he esteemed them so, desiring them “to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure,” chap. i. 10; even as he expressly calleth those to whom he wrote his former epistle, “elect,” chap. i. 2, and a “chosen generation,” as well as a “purchased people,” chap. ii. 9.<sup>22</sup>

Matthew 23:37: “O 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.” The word *wanted* translates *thelō*, to will, wish, or desire. The word does not always denote a firm decision or choice; it may denote a wish or a pleasure that one may be disposed either to satisfy or not to satisfy, or the satisfaction of which may not depend solely on the one who wishes. A good example of *thelō* denoting a general desire not pursued appears in Matthew 14:3-5: “For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. For John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ And although he *wanted* to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they regarded him as a prophet,” and so he *did not* kill him (i.e., chose not to, despite his wish otherwise) right away. Then, when his daughter Herodias acted on his *promised oath* (strong words denoting unwavering decision) and asked for John’s head on a platter, “although he was grieved, the king commanded it to be given because of his oaths, and because of his dinner guests” (14:9). At first, then, though Herod would have liked to have killed John, he chose not to, though he could have chosen otherwise; later, however, though Herod would have liked not to have killed John, he chose to kill him, though he could have chosen otherwise. *Thelō*, in other words, does not always denote a firm intention or decision; it may denote a much weaker wish against which one chooses.<sup>23</sup> Another example of someone’s *deciding* to do something different from what he *wishes* to do occurs in Romans 7:15-21, where Paul writes, “. . . I am not practicing what I would *like* to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not *wish* to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wishes to do good.” But does this imply that such a distinction between wish and decision applies only to sinful men and could not apply to God? No, for Paul explicitly tells us that God has *decided* not to do something He *would like* to have done: “What if God, although willing [from *thelō*] to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?” (Romans 9:22). It would have pleased God very much to have poured out His wrath on those vessels of wrath prepared for destruction; but He

<sup>21</sup>Owen depended on a Greek text that had *us* here, but the argument fits whether the word is *us* or *you*.

<sup>22</sup>John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648; Edinburgh, Scotland, and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959 reprint), 236-7.

<sup>23</sup>For some other passages in which it carries such a connotation, see Matthew 7:12; 12:38; 20:21; Mark 6:26, 48; 9:35; Luke 6:31; 14:28; 23:8; 23:20; 1 Corinthians 7:32; 10:1; 12:6; Hebrews 10:5, 8.

chose to do otherwise because something else pleased Him even more: to demonstrate His patience. There is no compelling ground to think that *thelō* in Matthew 23:37 indicates anything more than this sort of wish on Jesus' part—something that comes far short of decision or intention. “It would have pleased me to do this, *but*. . . .” But what? Jesus *mentions* “but you would not.” Does this mean there is no *additional* reason behind His not in fact gathering Jerusalem's children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings? No, and to insist otherwise is to argue from silence. And the fact that elsewhere Scripture prophesied that God had determined to take the Kingdom from the Jews and give it to believing Gentiles is evidence that Christ's wish here was limited not *only* by the Jews' preference but *also* by His own decision (with the Father and the Holy Spirit) to do otherwise. Indeed, immediately before this saying Jesus had just declared His own intention to judge Jerusalem: “. . . you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that [i.e., *so that, to the end that*; the word expresses purpose] upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth. . . . Truly I say to you, all these things *shall come* upon this generation” (Matthew 23:31-36). Granted this context, and Jesus' having so frequently and recently prophesied (21:18-22; 21:23-32; 21:33-46; 22:1-14) the taking of the Kingdom from Israel and giving it to the Gentiles, it certainly makes better sense to see “I wanted” in 23:37 as indicating a general wish that was overridden than a firm intention.

The same consideration answers the use of Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11 as evidences that God intends the salvation of each and every man universally. It may also be applied to 1 Timothy 2:4, which—whatever the referent of *all men*—still only tells us that God *desires*, i.e., would be pleased to have, all men to be saved, not that He has decided that it shall be so. (But I prefer on that verse the argument offered above for it.)

Second, how does Calvinism explain the fact that not all men universally are saved? In light of these texts, it has no difficulty: 1 Timothy 2:4 doesn't tell us that He intends all men indiscriminately to be saved but that He intends all sorts of men to be saved; 2 Peter 3:9 doesn't tell us that God intends all men indiscriminately to come to repentance but all those whom “His divine power<sup>24</sup> has granted . . . *everything pertaining to life and godliness*,<sup>25</sup> through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence” (2 Peter 1:3);<sup>26</sup> and Matthew 23:37, Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11 do not tell us that God has in fact chosen that all should repent and be saved but that such would have pleased Him, had not something else pleased Him even more. There is, in short, nothing for Calvinism to explain, since these texts teach

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<sup>24</sup>Note the significance of the use of this word here. Life (regeneration) and godliness (sanctification), the latter through the knowledge of God (faith) are not dependent upon a fallible moral suasion, an effort God makes to persuade sinners to repent and believe, but on “His divine *power*,” which transforms sinners from bad trees to good trees, enabling them who previously were not able to bear the good fruits of faith and obedience. It is common for Arminians to argue that faith is not properly the fruit of *power* (which would be a unilateral, sovereign act of God) but of intellectual and volitional act on the part of the believer (which points immediately toward synergism). But Scripture here directly tells us that life, godliness, and the knowledge of God are the results of God's divine *power* working in us. This does not imply that faith has nothing to do with intellect and volition, but it does imply that the understanding and embracing that constitute faith are the sure fruits of God's unilateral power regenerating the sinner. As J. I. Packer put it in his introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1646; Edinburgh, Scotland, and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), “Christ did not die to win a hypothetical salvation for hypothetical believers, a mere possibility of salvation for any who might possibly believe, but a real salvation for His own chosen people. His precious blood really does ‘save us all’; the intended effects of His self-offering do in fact follow, just because the Cross was what it was. *Its saving power does not depend on faith being added to it; its saving power is such that faith flows from it*” (p. 10).

<sup>25</sup>Think carefully about this: are faith and repentance and recognition of the truth of the gospel necessary to life and godliness, and hence to salvation? Then this verse implies that God's *power* has *granted* these things to the saints. They are not the fruits of some synergistic cooperation between God and men.

<sup>26</sup>Here's an instructive exercise for you: follow through all the second- and third-person pronouns in 2 Peter and observe the distinctions that appear between the saints, to whom Peter writes, and all others.

nothing inconsistent with Calvinism.

Third, “Does the God of Calvinism have two wills that are in direct contradiction and hence have a multiple personality disorder?” No. But there is a difference between what generally pleases or would please God, other things being equal, and what God actually chooses, other things not being equal. What God chooses always pleases Him; what would please Him He does not always choose.<sup>27</sup> The failure of the universalist argument here is in inverting that relationship. Since Scripture explicitly teaches us that God sometimes intentionally forgoes some things that would please Him, there is no reason to deny that. (Any parent who has ever felt how much more pleasant it would be to forgo disciplining his child but chooses to discipline him anyway, knowing that it is the better thing, should be able to understand this distinction.)

5. *Calvinism excludes individual faith from the salvation process, classifying such faith as a work. How can Calvinists classify faith as a work when Paul specifically excludes faith from works in Romans 3:27-28 and 4:5?*

I don’t know what Calvinists you’ve been talking to, but I’ve never encountered any Calvinist theologian, past or present, who would exclude individual faith from the salvation process. Indeed, every Calvinist analysis I have ever seen (and there are a good many) of the *ordo salutis* includes faith. To demonstrate how typical that is, I shall import below, from files already on my hard drive, two analyses of the *ordo* based on the writings of two major Calvinist theologians, Robert Reymond and Benjamin Warfield, each of which includes faith:

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## Ordo Salutis

**Adapted From that Worked Out By  
Robert L. Reymond in his syllabus  
*Our “So Great Salvation”***

1. Transcendent (eternal) acts [Romans 8:28-30]
  - a. Foreknowledge: ultimate source of our salvation, the love of God for us specifically
  - b. Predestination: ultimate goal of our salvation, conformity to the image of Christ
2. Temporal acts
  - a. Effectual calling: God’s initiative [Romans 8:30]
  - b. Regeneration: God’s sovereign act, the instrument by which God makes the call effective, and the enabling precondition of faith [John 1:12-13; John 3:3, 5; 1 John 5:1]
  - c. Faith [Galatians 2:16] (receiving Christ, believing in Him [John 1:12-13]): man’s response, but enabled and given by God
  - d. Repentance: man’s response, but enabled and given by God; simultaneous with, and mutually interdependent on, faith [Acts 11:18; 20:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10]
  - e. Justification: simultaneous with, but conditioned on (not caused by) faith [Romans 8:30; Galatians 2:16]
  - f. Definitive sanctification [Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:11; Ephesians 5:26]: God’s act, concomitant with justification and adoption.
  - g. Adoption: legal relationship established by faith (instrument) and on the ground of justification [John 1:12-13], simultaneous with both
  - h. Progressive sanctification [2 Peter 3:18], a life-long process of dying more and more to sin

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<sup>27</sup>Or more precisely: when A and B would both please God, but they are impossible (e.g., pardoning all sinners and yet displaying His just and holy wrath against sin), God chooses what pleases Him more (pardoning some sinners to display His grace, punishing others to display His justice).

- and living more and more to righteousness, beginning simultaneously with repentance, faith, justification, definitive sanctification, and adoption
- i. Perseverance in holiness [Philippians 3:13-14]
  - j. Glorification [Romans 8:30]

<b>The Ordo Salutis</b>					
		<b>Transcendent Acts Expressing the Eternal Purpose of God</b>			
		Foreknowledge: God’s love for specific persons, the ultimate source of salvation			
		Predestination: God’s election of those same persons to holiness, the ultimate goal of salvation			
<b>Temporal Acts Applying the Eternal Purpose of God to the Elect in Time</b>					
<b>Divine Acts</b>	<b>Human Responses</b> (Instantaneous and Concomitant)	<b>Divine Responses</b> (Instantaneous and Definitive)	<b>Divine/Human Activity</b> (Progressive)	<b>Divine Act</b>	
1. Calling, made effectual through ↓	3. Faith in Jesus Christ	5. Justification	8. Progressive sanctification	10. Glorification	
2. Regeneration	4. Repentance unto life <sup>1</sup>	6. Definitive sanctification	9. Perseverance in holiness		
		7. Adoption			
<sup>1</sup> Reymond puts repentance before faith; I reverse the order because I think repentance depends on belief in the truth and righteousness of God and his law and gospel.					
Adapted from Robert L. Reymond, <i>Our ‘So Great Salvation’</i> (St. Louis, MO: Covenant Theological Seminary, unpublished class syllabus, n.d.), 110.					

**The Plan of Salvation<sup>28</sup>**

The plan of salvation is the dispensation (*oikonomia*; the method, order, and mode of acting) by which God sovereignly and graciously delivers sinful men from the presence, power, and penalty of sin, giving them a new life, a new record, and a new heart, reconciling them to himself through his Son Jesus Christ and by union with him effected by the Holy Spirit, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

The glory of God, particularly of his grace (final cause)<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Constructed on the general outline of infralapsarianism given in Benjamin B. Warfield’s *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 31.

<sup>29</sup>

Some Types of Causes

**Cause**

Efficient cause  
Final cause

**Description**

that *by* which something is made (or done) (cause)  
that *for* which something is made (purpose)

**Chair**

carpenter  
something to sit on

Creation of man in the image of God with Righteousness and holiness Knowledge and creativity Dominion Life, with potential for immortality Glory and honor	(man is the passive recipient of God's creative act)
Permission of the Fall and consequent Guilt Corruption Total inability Death Blindness Deafness Foolishness Wickedness On the grounds of which, the just condemnation of all men	(man is the active agent in sin)
Gracious (unconditional) election of some (unworthy) sinners to salvation in Christ Foreknowledge (forelove; covenantal) Predestination	(man is the passive recipient of election)
Gracious gift of Christ to redeem his elect and ground the offer of salvation to all Humiliation: incarnation and subjection to the law and to sinful men Vicarious obedience Vicarious death (atonement) Propitiatory sacrifice Satisfaction of the demands of God's vindictory justice by payment of judicial debt; = expiation Reconciliation of God the Father to the elect sinner Vicarious prayer (intercession, entry into the Father's presence, <i>coram Dei</i> ) for the elect	(man is the passive recipient of the gift of Christ)
Gracious gift of the Holy Spirit to save the redeemed External calling By the Word (preaching) General and indiscriminate, to elect and non-elect alike Regeneration By grace (motive cause), not conditioned on any merit (good works, including faith) of the soul (object) Giving spiritual life to the spiritually dead (formal cause) An immediate ("physical," not merely "moral suasive") work of the Holy Spirit (efficient cause) in the elect alone The soul is passive, the object, not the subject, of the work Instantaneous, there being no middle ground between death and life Consists of bestowing the Holy Spirit to indwell the elect, making him again a living soul (cf. Gen. 2:7) <sup>30</sup>	(man is the passive recipient of the Spirit) (man is active in preaching and hearing)    (man is passive)

Formal cause	that <i>according to which</i> something is made (form or nature)	the form of chairness
Material cause	that <i>out of which</i> something is made (substance)	wood
Exemplar cause	that <i>after which</i> something is made (form or type)	blueprints
Instrumental cause	that <i>through which</i> something is made (instrument)	tools

<sup>30</sup>Thus Machen: "Does the Bible really teach that the spirit of man is to be distinguished from his soul, or does it teach that the soul of man and the spirit of man are exactly the same thing, called by two different names? . . . In [1 Corinthians 2-3] Paul repeatedly distinguishes the soul from the spirit, and speak of the man characterized by 'soul' as distinguished from the man characterized by 'spirit'. 'But a soul-man,' he says, 'receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But the "Spirit-man" judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.' . . . this passage distinctly discourages the threefold division of man's nature into body, soul and spirit, and encourages the twofold division into body and soul. The plain fact is that the word

Begins the restoration of the image of God in the regenerate by enabling him (not by a power his own but strictly by the power of the indwelling/enlivening Holy Spirit) to live, to understand the things of God (knowledge/faith), to love God and his ways (holiness/righteousness), to serve God in its proper vocation in life (dominion), culminating in his glorification

Internal (effectual) calling (man is passive)

Its origin and nature

Immediate (direct) influence of the Holy Spirit (efficient cause) on the soul

Particular and discriminating to elect alone

Its effects

Conviction of sin (curing wickedness)

Enlightenment to the truth (curing blindness, deafness, and foolishness), with consequent:

Conversion,<sup>31</sup> consisting of faith and repentance (man is active by the power of and in response to the Holy Spirit)

Faith (“... through it the Holy Spirit is witness of his adoption.”)<sup>32</sup>

Its origin and nature

Given immediately by the Holy Spirit (Spirit = efficient cause of faith)

Inclusive of knowledge (knowledge = material cause of faith)

Exercised by man (man = instrumental cause of faith)

Neither an active cause nor a meritorious condition but a passive means, *medium ληπτικόν* (accepting or receiving medium or means), i.e., faith is the instrumental cause of justification, salvation, etc.

Its effects (final causes)

Union with Christ

Effected by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (man is passive)

Causing reconciliation of the justified sinner to God the Father because of (man is passive)

Justification,<sup>33</sup> consisting of (man is passive)

Remission of (pardon for) the believer’s sin (*iustificatio negativa*) on the grounds of its being imputed to Christ

Declaring the believer righteous on the grounds of Christ’s righteousness’s being imputed to him (*iustificatio positiva*)

Signified, sealed, and applied by the sacraments: (man is active by the power of and in response to the Spirit)

How sacraments are means of grace:

Properly used, they truly convey (signify, seal, and apply) the benefits of redemption to Christ’s people.

The efficient power active in them is not of the elements (water, bread, wine), of the act (not *ex opere operato*), of the minister, or of the recipient, but solely due to the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit.

They are effectual as means of grace only to those who receive them in faith (not *ex opere operato*).

They are *ordinary* but not *necessary* means of grace; God can and does work independently of them in conveying all of the graces ordinarily conveyed by them.

Baptism: signifying, sealing, and applying identification with Christ and attendant cleansing from

‘spirit’ in the adjective ‘spiritual’ used in the phrase ‘the spiritual man’ does not refer to the spirit of man at all, but refers to the Spirit of God. I do not see how it would be possible to make that much clearer than this passage makes it. ‘For what man knoweth the things of a man,’ says the passage in the eleventh verse, ‘save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.’ Then the passage goes on to speak about the man who knows the things of God because the Spirit of God is in him. . . . The ‘soul-man’ is a man who has only a human soul, and the ‘spiritual man’ is the man who, in addition to his human soul, has the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God. . . . the ‘spiritual’ man is the man who has been transformed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, . . . and the ‘soul-man’ is the man who has merely his human soul not so transformed. . . . In the Biblical sense, the spiritual man is the man who has been begotten again, and has had not a part of his nature but all of his nature transformed by the supernatural act of the Spirit of God.” J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View of Man* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, [1937] 1965), 140-142.

<sup>31</sup>But note, “With the theologians of the seventeenth century conversion and regeneration were synonymous terms.” Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint), 3:3.

<sup>32</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), III.ii.8, 1:552.

<sup>33</sup>On the grounds of which also the believer has a title to eternal life.

sin (remission), death to sin and (the penalty of) the law, burial with Christ, and resurrection with Christ

Lord's Supper: signifying, sealing, and applying fellowship with Christ and the Church as spiritual food and drink

Repentance (man is active by the power of and in response to the Spirit)

Given immediately (directly) by the Holy Spirit (efficient cause)

Motivated by conviction of sin (motive cause)

Exercised by man (instrumental cause), with consequent:

Obedience, with consequent sanctification

(man is active by the power of and in faithful response to the Spirit)

Adoption<sup>34</sup>

Sanctification of all the redeemed and regenerated (a gracious work of the Spirit indwelling man)

Rooting out sin from our hearts and actions

Growth in obedience, wrought in man by the Holy Spirit as a fruit of faith

Increasing the soul's conformity to the image of Christ in knowledge, righteousness, dominion, and finally glory; therefore, not merely a change in behavior but a change in character (making the bad tree good so that it bears good fruit instead of bad)

Resurrection of the just and the unjust (man is passive)

Judgment (man is passive)

Of the non-elect to damnation

Justice to the sinner under the covenant of works

Casting from the presence of God into eternal punishment

Of the elect to salvation

Justice to Christ under the covenant of grace

Grace to the sanctified (elect and transformed) sinner

Consummation of all things

The elect to eternity in Heaven (including renewed/transformed earth)

The non-elect to eternity in the Lake of Fire

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At any rate, it is simply not true to say that Calvinism excludes faith from the salvation process. You have argued against a straw man.<sup>35</sup>

Does Calvinism call faith a work? Yes, but only because the Bible calls it a work: "They said therefore to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent'" (John 6:28-29).<sup>36</sup> However, it is not a work *of the law*, and it is against such that Paul contrasts faith: "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works *of the Law*" (Romans 3:28). Furthermore, that faith, a work (but not a work of the law) is the condition (instrumental, not meritorious, cause) of justification does not imply that it is something that can be done by the unregenerate. The Biblical *ordo salutis* puts regeneration before faith

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<sup>34</sup>According to Hodge, the older writers sometimes equate adoption with a title to eternal life, which Hodge lists as the [third] consequence (the first being remission of sins and the second acceptance of the believer as righteous) of the imputation of Christ's righteousness, i.e., of justification. If it is this, then adoption should be listed as a subpoint of justification, above.

<sup>35</sup>In one of your e-mail messages, you mentioned that you used to be Calvinists. Have you considered the possibility that though you *thought* of yourselves as Calvinists, your understanding of Calvinism was inaccurate, and that when others pointed out the errors in what you *thought* was Calvinism you abandoned not only what you mistakenly thought was Calvinism but Calvinism itself? (I know that for quite a few years I considered myself a Calvinist but had not yet come to recognize all the major elements of Calvinism as either [a] Biblically justified or [b] integral to Calvinism.)

<sup>36</sup>It is tempting to take the easy way with this text and to say that this verse calls faith God's work in us, not our work—an explanation that would be consistent with Calvinism, which is monergistic in its soteriology, but not with synergistic Lutheranism. But the context, it seems to me, rules this out.

and recognizes faith as a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7). In other words, God's work of regeneration in us quickens us to exercise His gift of faith; we would have neither life nor faith were it not for God's sovereign, gracious work in us. Consequently He is the whole efficient cause of our salvation.

6. *Jonah 2:8 says that "those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs." If, as Calvinism teaches, God determined before time began who would be reprobates, and therefore does not extend the grace to them by which they could be saved, how logically can we understand this verse's statement that these reprobates, "forfeited the grace that could be theirs?"*

The *New International Version*, which you cite, substitutes interpretation for translation.<sup>37</sup> The *New American Standard Bible* has here simply "Those who regard vain idols forsake their faithfulness," which properly reflects the Hebrew and falls a long, long way short of the seeming implications of the *NIV*. According to the more accurate translation, the verse simply denotes that idolaters "forsake their faithfulness" (*NAS*) or "forsake their Mercy" (*New King James Version*). One of two ideas might be in mind: that they forsake their own faithfulness, that is, the way of faithfulness that is their duty even simply as creatures of God, let alone as members of the covenanted people of God; or that they forsake their God, here named as their Faithfulness or Mercy (the Hebrew *chésed*, here translated *faithfulness* or *mercy* or *grace* sometimes being used, in the Old Testament, to denote God Himself).<sup>38</sup> The *NIV*'s phrase "that could be theirs" doesn't represent anything in the Hebrew; it is purely the translator's interpretation masquerading as translation.

However, assuming for the sake of argument (and for that reason alone, not because I think it's actually an acceptable translation) the *NIV*'s wording, this would not contradict Calvinism's understanding of the sovereignty of God. The optative mood conveyed by "that could have been theirs" simply expresses the result should some (unnamed) condition be met. It is true, regardless whether it is realizable, i.e., on either a Calvinist or an Arminian assumption, that *if* these idolaters were to forsake their idols and follow the one true God, they would enjoy the grace of God, and *since* they do not, they do not enjoy the grace of God. Calvinism affirms wholeheartedly, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved," and it will say that with complete conviction to any and every man who ever lived or will live. Affirming the truth of a whole conditional does not entail affirming the realization or even the realizability of its protasis (i.e., the fulfillment of the condition).<sup>39</sup>

Part of the difficulty here might arise from the argument's assuming as its target a supralapsarian version of Calvinism, which would indeed have a difficult time with this question. But from an infralapsarian view, the answer is much easier. All the non-elect do in fact choose to forfeit the grace that could be theirs. God's grace (i.e., his saving, gracious, pardoning mercy) is available to any who want it and choose to repent. The problem is, no one in the natural state (post lapsus) wants anything to do with God or His saving mercies. This hostility is not some kind of additional barrier that God sends on the non-elect; this is simply due to their corrupted, fallen nature. In their case (i.e., of the non-elect), God simply chooses not to counteract their active resistance to Him, which is quite a different matter from suggesting that He is actively preventing people who would otherwise desire a relationship with Him.

7. *The Bible says in John 6:44, "no one can come to me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." The same word "draw" is used in John 12:32 which says, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto myself." Matthew 23:37 says that men can resist God's will. How do you answer this problem in Calvinism?*

First, see #4 on 1 Timothy 2:4 on the usage of *all men* and #4 on Matthew 23:37 on the use of *thelō*;

<sup>37</sup>A problem it has not just here but frequently in both testaments.

<sup>38</sup>In my estimation, the context favors the latter interpretation: they forsake God.

<sup>39</sup>Logicians recognize that the truth of a conditional statement as a whole implies nothing about the truth or realizability of its protasis (the conditional part of it). "If X is a Pegasus, X has wings" is true by the definition of a Pegasus, but it implies nothing about the reality of Pegasi—that is, whether there really is any X that is a Pegasus. Similarly, "If X forsakes his idols, X will be saved" may also be true, but whether true or not it implies nothing about whether X can or does forsake his idols.

the former applies properly to John 12:32 and the latter to your argument here from Matthew 23:37. Indeed, it is demonstrable that, having been lifted up on the cross, Christ has not drawn to Himself each and every man who ever lived and will not draw to Himself each and every man who ever will live—whether one understands this passage from a Calvinist or from an Arminian perspective, and whether one sees drawing to Himself as salvific or something less. Millions have lived and died without ever hearing of Jesus, let alone becoming seriously interested in Him, let alone being converted to Him as Savior and Lord. No matter what meaning one puts on *draw all men unto myself*, therefore, the *all men* cannot denote each and every man who ever has lived or ever will.

Second, regardless whether Calvinism might have a tough time with John 12:32 (and I deny that it does), Arminianism (or any system—call it what you may—that gives the sinner the capacity either to come to Christ of his own accord or to refuse of his own accord to come to Christ despite God’s drawing him) has a much tougher time with both passages. Take first the verb translated *draw*, *helkiō*. It occurs in eight verses in the New Testament. Aside from these two, they are: John 18:10 (Peter *drew* his sword); 21:6 (the fishermen were not able to *draw* their net); 21:11 (Peter *drew* a net full of fish to land); Acts 16:19 (the oracle’s masters, after catching them, *drew* Paul and Silas into the marketplace to the rulers); 21:30 (the mob took Paul and *drew* him out of the temple); James 2:6 (rich men oppress poor believers and *draw* them before the judgment seats). Each of these uses of the term depicts a *coercive* action, one that the object cannot successfully resist. Indeed, the Arminian notion that *helkiō* might, in John 6:44 and 12:32, denote a tender, tentative, supplicating invitation that may or may not yield the intended result rather than a coercive seizing and delivering that *does* yield the intended result is undermined by the use in John 21:6: the fishermen “were not able to draw [the net] for the multitude of fishes” (*AV*; the *NAS* has “were not able to *haul* it in”—nice descriptive language). If *helkiō* only denoted making an *attempt*, then no matter how many fish were in the net the fishermen could have “drawn” the net—i.e., could have *tried* to land it; but because *draw* denotes a successfully completed action, and the size of the load of fish prevented the fishermen’s successfully landing the net, we are told that they “were not able to draw” the net. Whatever the referent of *all [men]*<sup>40</sup> in John 12:32, Jesus is certainly telling us that He will draw—succeed coercively in bringing—them to Himself; He will not try and fail, they will not successfully resist. So John 12:32, then, is one among various passages on which Calvinists can lean for their doctrines of irresistible grace and effectual calling, but it testifies directly against Arminians’ doctrine of resistible grace and ineffectual calling. And if we look again at John 6:44, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day,” we find another testimony against Arminianism, for this says that (1) apart from the Father’s coercive, unilateral drawing (effectually; the end is achieved), no one can come to Christ, i.e., without irresistible grace and effectual calling none will convert, and (2) whoever *does* so come to Him, Christ “will raise . . . up on the last day,” i.e., every converted person *will* ultimately be glorified. So here we have evidence for Calvinism’s doctrines of irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints, and against Arminianism’s doctrines of resistible grace and the possibility of being truly converted and yet not finally being saved. The surrounding context reinforces the case: “All that the Father gives me<sup>41</sup> shall come to Me” (John 6:37; irresistible grace); “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of *all* that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day” (6:39; perseverance of the saints); “For this is the will of My Father, that *everyone* who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day” (6:40; perseverance of the saints); “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (6:44; the inability of the unregenerate to come to Christ apart from the Father’s *drawing* [remembering the full sense of that term]; and the perseverance of all who do come, so that they are finally saved); “*Everyone* who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me” (6:45; irresistible grace); and so on.<sup>42</sup>

Far from fueling an argument against Calvinism, these verses assert Calvinism and deny Arminianism

<sup>40</sup>*Men* is implied, not explicit, in the Greek.

<sup>41</sup>Note that here we have *explicitly stated* the reference for *all*.

<sup>42</sup>Let D = people drawn to Christ, whether by the Father or by Christ Himself; C = people who come to Christ; and R = people who are raised at the last day, i.e., whom Christ does not lose, who are finally glorified. From the combination of these verses, we may argue: (1) D ⊃ C [irresistible grace]; C ⊃ R [perseverance of the saints]; ∴ D ⊃ R [the inevitability of final salvation for all who are drawn]. (2) ~D ⊃ ~C [impossibility of self-conversion]; ~C ⊃ ~R [the damnation of the unconverted]; ∴ ~D ⊃ ~R [the impossibility of final salvation apart from being drawn to Christ by God].

(and any similar soteriology).

8. *You say that even the “good” acts of sinners are “bad” because they come from a completely depraved nature. Is it a “bad” act to rationally apprehend the truthfulness of apologetics? If so, why has God commanded us to practice apologetics to sinners, which causes them to do a bad act? Doesn’t that mean that God causes sinners’ bad acts? If you say “yes,” doesn’t that make God a bad guy?*

First, no, Calvinism says that objectively good acts done by unregenerate men (and even by imperfect regenerated men) are always tainted by the impure motives of the sinful heart and thus are subjectively impure. Apprehending the truthfulness of an apologetic argument is an objectively good act; it is subjectively tainted to the extent that intellectual pride or gnostic self-justification motivates the person (whether Christian or non-Christian).

Second, neither Arminians nor Calvinists can say that doing apologetics *causes* people to apprehend the truthfulness of an apologetic argument; either can only say that doing apologetics gives people an *opportunity* to apprehend the truth. Whether that opportunity will be realized is, in the Arminian system, contingent on their utterly unrestricted choice,<sup>43</sup> and, in the Calvinist system, contingent on the sovereign, enlightening work of God. In the Arminian system, the subject’s *arbitrio* is the efficient cause, and the argument the instrumental cause, of the subject’s apprehending the truth; in the Calvinist system, the enlightening work of God is the efficient cause, and the argument the instrumental cause, of the subject’s apprehending the truth. In neither system is the argument the efficient cause. Furthermore, in the Calvinist system, applying the insights gained from the sequence of tenses in John 5:24, someone’s embracing the truth of the gospel—the ultimate end desired in any apologetic—is dependent on his first being given new life by God; i.e., the unregenerate is not *capable* of embracing the ultimate truth argued for by any Christian apologetic.

So the answer is, No, God does not cause the sinner’s “bad” act of apprehending the truth, for (a) apprehending the truth is itself not a bad act, though the concomitant motives might be bad, and (b) whatever badness is involved in the act is solely the sinner’s contribution, not God’s. Furthermore, if we stretch apprehending the truth of an apologetic so broadly as to encompass actually embracing in faith the truth of the gospel, i.e., conversion to Christ, the Calvinist says that such faith is a gift from God, not originating in the sinner, and that it follows (logically, even if it is temporally simultaneous) upon God’s regenerating the sinner.

So, no, your argument doesn’t establish that Calvinism necessarily implies that God is a bad guy.

9. *When Calvinism is shown to have logical contradictions, Calvinists usually reply that God’s thoughts are unsearchable, and therefore the logical problems that Calvinism has, for example divine election and human responsibility, exhaustive sovereignty and human free will, and God’s having two contradictory wills are solved by invoking the phrase, “well that’s a mystery.” If you can solve your logic problems by copping out with the term mystery, why can’t the Arminian types, atheists and others pull the same move?*

First, I would deny that Calvinism is shown to have logical *contradictions* (as distinct from paradoxes: sets of propositions the consistency of which is very difficult to explain, perhaps beyond a given person’s capacity, but that are not actually contradictory). Nothing in the questions you have asked here convinces me that Calvinism embraces contradictory propositions.<sup>44</sup>

Second, I am perfectly willing to grant to anyone in any discussion the appeal to the insufficiency of human reason to figure all things out as one legitimate part of an argument for an overall system. The

<sup>43</sup>A choice, therefore, not even restricted by pure reason. For the Arminian, it is impossible to compel someone, through reason, to acknowledge any given truth.

<sup>44</sup>In one of your e-mail messages, you expressed dismay that some Calvinists whom you had questioned about what seemed to you to be logical inconsistencies in Calvinism gave you no satisfactory answers. I trust that you have considered carefully the possibility that the problem, at least in some such instances, was not with them but with you: that you might have mistaken a paradox for a contradiction.

rational superiority of one system over another, for finite human minds, consists not in its perfectly explaining *everything* but in its involving fewer or less crucial unexplained or unexplainable (for finite minds) elements. Scripture itself tells us that some things are beyond our ken, and it is entirely Biblical to admit such: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29). It is legitimate to question whether this or that particular problem is among those the answer to which God has revealed, but it is not legitimate (for one who confesses the authority of Scripture) to question the legitimacy of appeals to mystery *in principle*. (Also, by the way, determining that a given paradox properly fell into the category of mystery would not be *solving* that paradox, it would be setting it aside, concluding that it ought not to be determinative in one’s evaluation of the overall system.)

Third, I think you are dead right in saying that *many* (not all) Calvinists abuse the mystery defense and need to improve their arguments for Calvinism so as to minimize the appeals to mystery. I think there are two reasons this happens: (1) They have learned their Calvinism principally as a logical system, and within an uncritical community, so that they have not confronted the need to think it through more carefully. (2) They have *not* learned their Calvinism as the result of Biblical exegesis. Indeed, for years in the late 1970s and early 1980s I, as an Arminian, delighted in twisting all my Calvinist pastor friends around my little finger with exegetical arguments. They were always using systematic, logical arguments for Calvinism, while I kept taking them to verses like those you cite, and they could never explain those verses in a way that I found persuasive—indeed, they usually couldn’t answer them at all. (This might be a commentary on the poor quality of their seminary educations, or on their own mental capacities, or both.) But one day I boarded a plane in Fayetteville, Arkansas, with a copy of the slim excerpts from John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, with J. I. Packer’s introduction, in my hand, a convinced Arminian, and I got off another plane in Washington, D.C., a convinced Calvinist. Why? As a Calvinist now I must explain this as due to God’s gracious enlightening as the efficient cause and to Owen’s superb exegetical arguments as the instrumental cause. Owen simply made mincemeat of my Biblical arguments. And that was only a small part of Owen’s whole massive work on *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, which in turn was only a small part of his massive writing in response to Arminianism. (And ever since then, the distinctive doctrines of Calvinism have become clearer and clearer to me as I’ve read and re-read and re-read the Scriptures. And the more detailed has been my exegesis, the more clear have I thought the teaching to be of what goes by the name of Calvinism but is in fact, I believe, simply Biblical soteriology.) What I’m saying to you is that you shouldn’t mistake the lame arguments that lots of Calvinists give for the various elements of Calvinism for the best arguments that can be given. If you really want to take on Calvinism intellectually, find the *best* arguments for it and interact with those. (And for goodness’ sake don’t confuse [name deleted’s] arguments with the best arguments for Calvinism. He who makes the most noise is not always the best thinker.)

Fourth, I find it ironic that you, writing as Lutherans, would criticize Calvinists for invoking mystery as one element in their attempt to deal with the relationship between divine sovereignty and human freedom and accountability, because (a) historically, Lutheran theologians have tended to accuse Calvinism of being too rationalistic, too wedded to systematizing through logic, insufficiently humble to recognize that there are some things beyond human ken; and (b) the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*, Article XI, *Affirmativa*, X, itself refers to God’s predestination as a mystery (and the placement of this affirmation is revealing, since it comes right after a series of affirmations that appear to me, at least, to be inherently inconsistent—paradoxical at the least, if not contradictory). Lutherans and Calvinists alike might do well to attend to one of Calvin’s cautions: “A saying of Chrysostom’s has always pleased me very much, that the foundation of our philosophy is humility.<sup>45</sup> But that of Augustine pleases me even more: ‘When a certain rhetorician was asked what was the chief rule in eloquence, he replied, “Delivery”; what was the second rule, “Delivery”; what was the third rule, “Delivery”; so if you ask me concerning the precepts of the Christian religion, first, second, third, and always I would answer, “Humility.”’”<sup>46</sup>

11. *The Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 that reprobates “perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.” From your Calvinistic worldview, how can it logically be said that a*

<sup>45</sup>Chrysostom, *De profectu evangelii* 2 (MPG 51. 312).

<sup>46</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.ii.11; citing Augustine, *Letters* cxiii. 3. 22 (MPL 33. 442).

*reprobate refuses to love the truth and so be saved, when your God determines that the reprobate can't love the truth, can't be saved, and therefore doesn't refuse God at all?*

First, ask any unbeliever whether his unbelief is because *he refuses to believe* or because *God makes him refuse to believe*; I guarantee you he'll confidently affirm that *he refuses to believe*. I, as a Calvinist, won't argue with him.

Second, from the Calvinist perspective, the conditional propositions are true for everyone, elect and non-elect alike: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved," and "Whoever believes not will be damned." Let anyone believe in Christ, and he will indeed be saved; let anyone reject Christ, and he will indeed be damned. In the former case, his faith will be the condition (instrumental cause) of his justification; in the latter case, his unbelief will be the condition (instrumental cause) of his condemnation. In the former case, Christ's righteousness alone will be the *meritorious* cause of his justification; in the latter case, the sinner's sin alone will be the *meritorious* cause of his condemnation. From the Calvinist perspective, in the former case the sovereign will of God in regenerating the sinner and giving him the gifts of repentance and faith will be the *efficient* cause of his justification, and in the latter case the sovereign will of God in *not* regenerating the sinner and *not* granting him the gifts of repentance and faith will be the *efficient* cause of his condemnation. From the Arminian perspective, in the former case the sinner's unrestricted will will be the *efficient* cause of his justification, and in the latter case the sinner's unrestricted choice will be the *efficient* cause of his condemnation. In other words, in the Calvinist system, God saves and God condemns; in the Arminian system, man saves himself and man condemns himself. Granted that Scripture calls *God* our Savior, I have no difficulty figuring which of these views is Biblical.

Third, what is it that prevents the reprobate's loving the truth and therefore being saved? He would do so if he were not a sinner. But he is a sinner. Subjectively, it is his sin that prevents his loving the truth; he doesn't love the truth because he loves sin instead. Objectively, he is not freed from his sin because God does not choose to free him. But who's to blame for his sin? He is, not God.

Fourth, see #2.

12. *You have said that nothing thwarts the will of God, and you also have said that a man's will cannot be free or else God would not be absolutely sovereign. Doesn't this mean that God determines (or is the cause of)<sup>47</sup> evil and the evil acts of men for his sovereign pleasure?*

First, let us address the notion of a free will. I deny that there is any such thing as a free will, and in so doing I stand with Luther (see his *The Bondage of the Will*)<sup>48</sup> as well as with Calvin and Augustine and Paul (Romans 6; the will is either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness; it is not free). But I don't deny that there is any such thing as a free *agent*. And the distinction is crucial, as Charles Hodge points out:

The usage . . . which makes these expressions synonymous is liable to the following objections: (1.) Predicating liberty of the will is apt to lead to our conceiving of the will as separated from the agent; as a distinct self-acting power in the soul. Or, if this extreme be avoided, which is not always the case, the will is regarded as too much detached from the other faculties of the soul, and as out of sympathy with it in its varying states. The will is only the soul willing. The soul is of course a unit. A self-determination is a determination of the will, and whatever leads to a self-decision leads to a decision of the will. (2.) A second objection to confounding these expressions is, that they are not really equivalent. The man may be free, when his will is in bondage. It is a correct and established usage of language, expressive of a real fact of consciousness, to speak of an enslaved will in a free agent. This is not a mere metaphor, but a philosophical truth. He that commits sin is the servant of sin. [Romans 6:16] Long-continued mental or bodily habits may bring the will into bondage, while the man continues a free agent. A man who has been for years a miser, has his will in a state of slavery, yet the man is perfectly free. He is self-controlled, self-determined. His avarice is himself. It is his own darling, cherished feeling. (3.) There is no use to have two expressions for the same thing; the one appropriate, the other ambiguous. What we really mean is, that the agent is free. That

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<sup>47</sup>*Determining and being the cause are not properly synonymous. There are, as I suggested above, a wide variety of types of causes, some of which do not determine. Some of your difficulty might stem from your not avoiding equivocations like this one.*

<sup>48</sup>Luther argued the case on the distinction between the necessity of immutability (the immutability of God's knowledge) and the necessity of coercion. The former, he said, was true; because God's knowledge is immutable, no one can ever choose to do something that God has not always known would be chosen, and everything He has known would be chosen has been chosen only because He has forewilled it to be so chosen, since after all had He intended that it not be chosen He could always have so arranged his creation that it would not have been. Nothing outside God frustrates God's decretive will.

is the only point to which any interest is attached. The man is the responsible subject. If he be free so as to be justly accountable for his character and conduct, it matters not what are the laws which determine the operations of his reason, conscience, or will; or whether liberty can be predicated of either of those faculties separately considered. We maintain that the man is free; but we deny that the will is free in the sense of being independent of reason, conscience, and feeling. In other words, a man cannot be independent of himself, or any one of his faculties independent of all the rest.<sup>49</sup>

The will is not unrestricted precisely because it is dependent on the knowledge, emotional preferences, and moral character of the agent of whom the will is one constituent element. The agent—the choosing, acting person—may be free (uncoerced by anyone or anything outside himself), though his will (as a constituent element of him) is bound by its interdependence with the rest of his constituent elements. What really matters to us in this debate is not whether the *will* is free but whether the *person* is free.

Second, let us address another important distinction: that between liberty and *ability*. As Hodge puts it:

The usage which attaches the same meaning to these terms is very ancient. Augustine denied free will to man since the fall. Pelagius affirmed freedom of will to be essential to our nature. The former intended simply to deny to fallen man the power to turn himself unto God. The latter defined liberty to be the ability at any moment to determine himself either for good or evil. The controversy between Luther and Erasmus was really about ability, nominally it was about free-will. Luther's book is entitled "De Servo Arbitrio" [Of the Bondage of the Will], that of Erasmus, "De Libero Arbitrio" [Of the Freedom of the Will]. This usage pervades all the symbols of the Reformation, and was followed by the theologians of the sixteenth century. They all ascribe free agency to man in the true sense of the words, but deny to him freedom of will. To a great extent this confusion is still kept up. Many of the prevalent definitions of liberty are definitions of ability; and much that is commonly advanced to prove the liberty of the will, is really intended, and is of force only as in support of the doctrine of ability. . . . Augustine, and after him most Augustinians distinguished, (1.) The liberty of man before the fall, which was an ability either to sin or not to sin. (2.) The state of man since the fall, when he has liberty to sin, but not to good. (3.) The state of man in heaven when he has liberty to good, but not to evil. This last is the highest form of liberty, a *felix necessitas boni*. This is the liberty which belongs to God. In the popular mind perhaps the common idea of liberty is, the power to decide for good or evil, sin or holiness. This idea pervades more or less all the disquisitions in favour of the liberty of indifference, or of power to the contrary.<sup>50</sup>

Hodge goes on to explain how critical is the distinction between free will and ability:

It is admitted by this class of writers [namely, those who insist that free agency equals freedom of the will], and, indeed, by the whole Christian world, that men since the fall have not power to make themselves holy; much less to effect this transformation by a volition. It is admitted that saints in glory are infallibly determined by their character to holiness, yet fallen men and saints are admitted to be free. Ability may be lost, yet liberty remain. The former is lost since the fall. Restored by grace, as they say, it is to be again lost in that liberty to good which is identical with necessity. If liberty and ability are thus distinct, why should they be confounded. We are conscious of liberty. We know ourselves to be free in all our volitions. They reveal themselves to our inmost consciousness as acts of self-determination. We cannot disown them, or escape responsibility on account of them, even if we try; and yet no man is conscious of ability to change his own heart. Free agency belongs to God, to angels, to saints in glory, to fallen men, and to Satan; and it is the same in all. Yet in the strictest sense of the words, God cannot do evil; neither can Satan recover, by a volition, his lost inheritance of holiness. It is a great evil thus to confound things essentially distinct. It produces endless confusion. Augustine says, man is not free since the fall, because he cannot but sin; saints are free because they cannot sin. Inability in the one case destroys freedom; inability in the other is the perfection of freedom! Necessity is the very opposite of liberty, and yet they are said to be identical. One man in asserting the freedom of the will, means to assert free agency, while he denies ability; another means by it full ability. It is certainly important that the same words should not be used to express antagonistic ideas.

Confusion of thought and language, however, is not the principal evil which arises from making liberty and ability identical. It necessarily brings us into conflict with the truth, and with the moral judgments of men. There are three truths of which every man is convinced from the very constitution of his nature. (1.) That he is a free agent. (2.) That none but free agents can be accountable for their character or conduct. (3.) That he does not possess ability to change his moral state by an act of the will. Now, if in order to express the fact of his inability, we say, that he is not a free agent, we contradict his consciousness; or, if he believe what we say, we destroy his sense of responsibility. Or if we tell him that because he is a free agent, he has power to change his heart at will, we again bring ourselves into conflict with his convictions. He knows he is a free agent, and yet he knows that he has not the power to make himself holy. *Free agency is the power to decide according to our character; ability is the power to change our character by a volition.* The former, the Bible and consciousness affirm belongs to man in every condition of his being; the latter, the Bible and consciousness teach with equal explicitness does not belong to fallen man. The two things, therefore, ought not to be confounded.<sup>51</sup>

Hodge goes on to explain another confusion, that between self-determination of the agent and self-determination of the will. By the latter is intended by those who use the phrase the denial

. . . that the will is determined by the antecedent state of the mind, and to affirm that it has a self-determining power, independent of anything preëxisting or coëxisting," i.e., the affirmation "that as the will has a self-determining power it may decide against all motives internal or external, against all influences divine or human, so that its decisions cannot be rendered inevitable without destroying their liberty. The very essence of liberty, they say, is power to the contrary. In other

<sup>49</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973 reprint), 2:290-291.

<sup>50</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:291-292.

<sup>51</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:292-294.

words, a free act is one performed with the consciousness that under precisely the same circumstances, that is, in the same internal as well as external state of the mind, it might have been the opposite. According to the [Augustinian] doctrine, the *will* is determined; according to the other, it determines itself. In the one case, our acts are or may be inevitably certain and yet be free. In the other, in order to be free, they must be uncertain.<sup>52</sup>

But beyond all the confusion of terms, there remains “a real difference [of understanding] as to the nature of free agency; and that difference concerns this very point: may the acts of free agents be rendered inevitably certain without destroying their liberty?”<sup>53</sup> Hodge then states points about which the two sides in the debate are agreed: (1) “that man is a free agent, in such a sense as to be responsible for his character and acts”; (2) that “the nature of free agency . . . supposes both reason and active power”—i.e., that brutes and maniacs are not free agents; (3) “that in all important cases, men act under the influence of motives”; (4) “that the will is not determined with certainty by *external* motives”; (5) “that the word *will* is to be taken in its proper, restricted sense. The question is not, whether men have power over their affections, their likes and dislikes. No one carries the power of the will so far as to maintain that we can, by a volition, change our feelings. The question concerns our volitions alone. It is the ground or reason of acts of self-determination that is in dispute. And, therefore, it is the will considered as the faculty of self-determination, and not as the seat of the affections, that comes into view.”<sup>54</sup>

The whole question therefore is, whether, when a man decides to do a certain thing, his will is determined by the previous state of his mind. Or, whether, with precisely the same views and feelings, his decisions may be one way at one time, and another at another. That is, whether the will, or rather the agent, in order to be free, must be undetermined.<sup>55</sup>

Hodge then launches his argument that free agency is consistent with certainty—and therefore with moral inability on the part of unregenerate man, with moral immutability on the part of God, and with God’s foreknowledge and even predetermination on the part of man’s choices:

It is certainly a strong argument in favour of that view of free agency, which makes it consistent with certainty, or which supposes that an agent may be determined with inevitable certainty as to his acts, and yet those acts remain free, that it suits all classes or conditions of free agents. To deny free agency to God, would be to deny Him personality and to reduce Him to a mere power or principle. And yet, in all the universe, is there anything so certain as that God will do right? But if it be said that the conditions of existence in an infinite being are so different from what they are in creatures, that it is not fair to argue from the one to the other, we may refer to the case of our blessed Lord. He had a true body and a reasonable soul. He had a human will; a mind regulated by the same laws as those which determine the intellectual and voluntary acts of ordinary men. In his case, however, although there may have been the metaphysical possibility of evil (though even that is a painful hypothesis), still it was more certain that He would be without sin than that the sun or moon should endure. . . . But if it be objected even to this case, that the union of the divine and human natures in the person of our Lord places Him in a different category from ourselves, and renders it unfair to assume that what was true in his case must be true in ours; without admitting the force of the objection, we may refer to the condition of the saints in heaven. They, beyond doubt, continue to be free agents; and yet their acts are, and to everlasting will be, determined with absolute and inevitable certainty to be good. Certainty, therefore, must be consistent with free agency. What can any Christian say to this? Does he deny that the saints in glory are free, or does he deny the absolute certainty of their perseverance in holiness? Would his conception of the blessedness of heaven be thereby exalted? Or would it raise his ideas of the dignity of the redeemed to believe it to be uncertain whether they will be sinful or holy? We may, however, come down to our present state of existence. Without assuming anything as to the corruption of our nature, or taking for granted anything which Pelagius would deny, it is a certain fact that all men sin. There has never existed a mere man on the face of the earth who did not sin. When we look on a new-born infant we know that whatever may be uncertain in its future, it is absolutely, inevitably certain that, should it live, it will sin. In every aspect, therefore, in which we can contemplate free agency, whether in God, in the human nature of Christ, in the redeemed in heaven, or in man here on earth, we find that it is compatible with absolute certainty.<sup>56</sup>

If free agency—moral responsibility for our choices—is consistent with the bondage of the will rightly understood—a bondage to the moral character of the agent whose will does the choosing—then it is consistent with certainty. And if it is consistent with certainty, then it is consistent with foreknowledge and determination. No appeal to the free agency of man, therefore, is an adequate ground for denying the absolute foreknowledge of God or God’s sovereign predetermination of all things that come to pass.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:294, 296.

<sup>53</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:296.

<sup>54</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:297.

<sup>55</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:297-298.

<sup>56</sup>Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:298-299.

<sup>57</sup>Clark Pinnock offers another argument for the incompatibility of free agency with foreknowledge, a strange and ill-defined notion that what is foreknown somehow cannot be significant: “I found I could not shake off the intuition that such a total omniscience would necessarily mean that everything we will ever choose in the future will have been already spelled out in the divine knowledge register, and consequently the belief that we have truly significant choices to make would seem to be mistaken.” (Clark H. Pinnock, “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989], 25.) Scripture

Recognizing these three distinctions—between liberty of the will and liberty of the agent; between liberty and ability; and between self-determination of the will and self-determination of the agent—permits us to understand how a free agent can have a will that is in bondage, i.e., a will that is unable to choose certain things. The phrase *liberty of the agent* means that the agent—the acting person—is not forced by anyone or anything outside himself to choose and to do as he does. He is at liberty respecting external causes; he is responsible for his choices, and he alone. But the phrase *liberty of the will* means that the will is not forced by anything outside *itself*—whether internal or external to the agent—to choose as it does. But if the will is bound by no force outside itself, whether internal or external to the agent whose the will is, then the will is utterly arbitrary and capricious. No will of a moral agent, therefore, is free, for the will of every moral agent is directed by that agent’s moral and intellectual character. The will may be free in respect of forces external to the agent, but in respect of forces internal to the agent, the will is bound; it cannot make decisions other than as the agent’s understanding and moral commitment lead it.

This is true of God and man alike. God is “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness”—that is, cannot look on it with pleasure (Habakkuk 1:13); His will is bound from delighting in wickedness. Because truth is of the very essence of God, God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2); it is “impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18); His will is bound from lying. “God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5); His will is bound from all evil. God neither knows nor can be known by—not in the mere sense of intellectual acknowledgment or acquaintance, but in that deeper sense of covenantal relationship and union—anyone who does not love, “for God is love” (1 John 4:8); His will is bound from joining in covenantal union with the wicked. It is precisely because God is righteous—i.e., just—that He *could not* simply leave sin unpunished and declare innocent those who were guilty of sin, precisely because of this that He, if He were going to acquit anyone, had to provide “the gift of righteousness” by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness “resulting in justification of life” so that “by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:17-19), so that Paul could write, “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:21-26); His will is bound from leaving sin unpunished.

In all of these things, God the agent is absolutely free; nothing external to Him binds Him in any way. But God’s *will* is bound, bound by God’s character. And it is the immutable righteousness, justice, and faithfulness of God that is the ground of the believer’s confidence in prayer when he conforms his prayers to the character of God, as Abraham did when he prayed for Sodom, “Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25). God is not able to will anything contrary to His own moral nature or character; His will is not free, although He Himself is free.

So also man. All men, prior to regeneration, “both Jews and Greeks . . . are all under sin” (Romans 3:9), i.e., are enslaved to it in their own natures, and that is why “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one” (Romans 3:10-12). On the contrary, all are “dead in trespasses and sins . . . the sons of disobedience . . . by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-3), their choices ruled by “the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness,” dominated entirely by “the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:17-19, 22). This is why Paul says that, so long as they remain outside of Christ, they are “slaves of sin” (Romans 6:6, 17, 20), under its dominion (Romans 6:14), slaves of disobedience (Romans 6:16), “free in regard to righteousness” (Romans 6:20)—i.e., not ruled by righteousness but ruled by sin.

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nowhere hints that “truly significant choices” are only those that surprise God. The significance of choices, according to Scripture, arises from whether they are right or wrong, whether they conform to or violate the law of God, whether they glorify Him or rebel against Him, whether they help or hurt our neighbors.

Are they free in regard to things external to themselves? Yes. They and they alone make their choices. But are they free in regard to something internal to themselves—to their own moral character? No. They are slaves of sin, sons of disobedience, dead in trespasses and sin, futile in thought, dark in understanding, alienated from the life of God, ignorant, blind in heart, and insensate (Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19). Thus for every unregenerate man, while he himself is free—nothing outside him forces him to choose as he does—his will is bound by his moral nature or character; it is unable to choose contrary to that nature; it lacks precisely what Arminians believe is the essence of freedom, the *power* (ability) of contrary (capricious) choice. His will is not free, although he himself is free.

This is why repentance, faith, and conversion are not, and cannot be, the work of unregenerate man. Regeneration must come first, for a bad tree cannot bear good fruit (Matthew 7:18); the tree must be made new, transformed from a bad tree to a good tree, before it can bear good fruit. The man dead in trespasses and sins must be made alive; the son of disobedience must be made a son of obedience; the child of wrath must be made a child of peace; the futile mind must be made effectual; the dark understanding must be enlightened; ignorance must be replaced by knowledge; the blind heart must be made to see; the insensate, seared conscience must be made sensate and tender. None of these transformations can be made by the unregenerate man, but all must be made in order for repentance, faith, and conversion to occur. All are what is meant by regeneration, the new birth, adoption as sons to God, being united with Christ. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the moment that we die to the old man, we live to the new, and “if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin” (Romans 6:5-7). All these things are done to him, not by him, as indicated in the passive verbs Paul uses: “. . . if we *have been united* together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection”; “our old man *was crucified* with Him, that the body of sin *might be done away with*, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died *has been freed* from sin. . . . And having *been set free* from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:5-7, 18).

The blessed goal toward which every regenerate man is moving, by the grace and faithfulness of God, is glorification, when the last bit of the “old man” will have been erased from his constitution, and he will be undividedly good, perfectly conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29-30). From that time on, his free agency will be usable only for good. Having put off corruption and put on incorruption; having put off mortality and put on immortality, he will be forever free from the sting of sin, the victory over sin at last won (1 Corinthians 15:50-57). Although he may not know now what he will be, he does know that when Christ is revealed, he will be like Him (1 John 3:2).<sup>58</sup>

Third, does the Calvinist notion of God’s sovereignty, which includes the proposition that God has foreordained everything that comes to pass, imply that God is the author of sin? No, for He has ordained that some things shall come about by His direct action and some through secondary causes. As the *Westminster Confession*, Chapter III, puts it:

- I. God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.
- II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions, yet hath He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.
- III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.
- IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.
- V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure

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<sup>58</sup>I discuss these points—about freedom will and free agency—more fully in chapter two of *Evangelical Heathenism? Examining Contemporary Revivalism* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996).

of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all the praise of His glorious grace.

- VI. As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.
- VII. The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.
- VIII. The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men, attending the will of God revealed in His Word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may, from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election. So shall this doctrine afford matter of praise, reverence, and admiration of God; and of humility, diligence, and abundant consolation to all that sincerely obey the Gospel.

And in Chapter V:

- I. God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible fore-knowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy.
- II. Although, in relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.
- III. God, in His ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at His pleasure.
- IV. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering, and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.
- V. The most wise, righteous, and gracious God doth oftentimes leave, for a season, His own children to manifold temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to chastise them for their former sins, or to discover unto them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, that they may be humbled; and, to raise them to a more close and constant dependence for their support upon Himself, and to make them more watchful against all future occasions of sin, and for sundry other just and holy ends.
- VI. As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden, from them He not only withholdeth His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan, whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.
- VII. As the providence of God doth, in general, reach to all creatures; so, after a most special manner, it taketh care of His Church, and disposeth all things to the good thereof.

Now, does this involve mystery? Yes. And I daresay there is mystery involved in *any* attempt to explain the whole of creation, let alone the Creator as well. Anyone who tells you he can explain everything related to questions of freedom and determination without leaving anything unexplained automatically disqualifies himself from the discussion. The whole history of philosophy—whether theistic

or agnostic or atheistic—testifies to the extreme difficulty of this issue.

Here are some truths that are revealed in Scripture:

1. That God foreordains, and therefore foreknows, all that comes to pass.
2. That every man sins not because anything outside himself compels him to sin but because he chooses to sin; i.e., that every man is self-determined in sin.
3. That no man can change himself from sinner to saint.
4. That whoever is changed from sinner to saint is changed by the sovereign act of God and becomes the recipient of every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, this being a magnificent display of His grace.
5. That whoever is not changed from sinner to saint is left to himself and becomes the recipient of God's condemnation and punishment, this being a magnificent display of God's justice.

Precisely how all these truths relate to each other, how their finest implications are consistent with each other, is something that I can't pretend to explain fully.<sup>59</sup> Yes, this means I fall back on mystery—which is only to say that I fall back on the truth that I am finite, not infinite; creature, not Creator; man, not God. As Stephen Charnock puts it, I had far rather confess an imperfection in myself than assert an imperfection in God as the implication of an ability in myself:

But what if the foreknowledge of God, and the liberty of the will,<sup>60</sup> cannot be fully reconciled by man? shall [sic] we therefore deny a perfection in God to support a liberty in ourselves? Shall we rather fasten ignorance upon God, and accuse him of blindness, to maintain our liberty? That God doth foreknow everything, and yet that there is liberty in the rational creature, are both certain; but how fully to reconcile them, may surmount the understanding of man. Some truths the disciples were not capable of bearing in the days of Christ; and several truths our understandings cannot reach as long as the world doth last; yet in the mean time, we must, on the one hand, take heed of conceiving God ignorant, and on the other hand, of imagining the creature necessitated; the one will render God imperfect, and the other will seem to render him unjust, in punishing man for that sin which he could not avoid, but was brought into by a fatal necessity. God is sufficient to render a reason of his own proceedings, and clear up all at the day of judgment; it is a part of man's curiosity, since the fall, to be prying into God's secrets, things too high for him; whereby he sings his own wings, and confounds his own understanding. It is a cursed affectation that runs in the blood of Adam's posterity, to know as God, though our first father smarted and ruined his posterity in that attempt; the ways and knowledge of God are as much above our thoughts and conceptions as the heavens are above the earth (Isa. lv. 9), and so sublime, that we cannot comprehend them in their true and just greatness; his designs are so mysterious and the ways of his conduct so profound, that it is not possible to dive into them. The force of our understandings is below his infinite wisdom, and therefore we should adore him with an humble astonishment, and cry out with the apostle (Rom. xi. 33): "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" Whenever we meet with depths that we cannot fathom, let us remember that he is God, and we his creatures; and not be guilty of so great extravagance, as to think that a subject can pierce into all the secrets of a prince, or a work understand all the operations of the artificer. Let us only resolve not to fasten anything on God that is unworthy of the perfection of his nature, and dishonorable to the glory of his majesty; nor imagine that we can ever step out of the rank of creatures to the glory of the Deity, to understand fully everything in his nature.<sup>61</sup>

Whatever our views—Arminian or Calvinist—we would all be wise to carry a big dose of humility into all our discussions of the divine/human relationship.

13. *In Romans 9 where God says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" why do you automatically assume that God does not want to have mercy on all but only have mercy on the select few when God clearly tells us in Romans 11:32 that, "God has bound all men over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all?" If you say that all means all classes of men, but not all men in every class, then why does it not mean all classes of men but not all men in every class in Romans 3:23 where it says, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God?" Does this mean some have not sinned? Perhaps, for instance, the Virgin Mary?*

First, we do not *assume* that God has mercy only on *some* (not necessarily a few; there are good

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<sup>59</sup>This is not the same as to say that there are actual contradictions among these propositions. It is to confess my inability to explain completely *how* they all are consistent with each other. If I were convinced that there were an actual *contradiction* between any two of them, or if I were convinced that any one of them contradicted an actual teaching of Scripture (not a faulty interpretation of Scripture), I would abandon one or more of them.

<sup>60</sup>Keep in mind that Charnock is not here using the same distinction in terminology that Hodge does between liberty of the will and liberty of the agent. Hodge's analysis is a genuine advance on Charnock at this point.

<sup>61</sup>Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, two volumes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, [1853; Robert Carter & Brothers] 1979 rpt.), 1:450-51.

reasons, from a Calvinist perspective, to believe that the *majority*, perhaps the *vast majority*, of all men from creation to consummation will be saved)<sup>62</sup> but not on absolutely everyone who ever lived or will live; instead, we infer it

1. From the immediate context: “. . . there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God’s purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written, ‘Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.’ What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.’ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?’ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God?<sup>63</sup> The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?” (Romans 9:10-21). Paul’s very point is to argue that the reason some believe and others don’t is to be found in the purposes of God, who has mercy on some and not on others, who makes some vessels to honor and others vessels to dishonor. Our view is not an assumption but driven by the immediate context.
2. From the broader teaching of Scripture, as we saw above: that no one can come to the Son unless the Father draws him, and all that the Father gives to the Son will come to Him, and to all such the Son will give eternal life, and all such He will raise up in the last day. All of these things are acts of God’s mercy; they certainly are not acts of God’s justice to the sinners, for they are of grace, not of debt (Romans 4:4).

Second, both uses of *all* in Romans 11:32 are governed by the immediate context: “For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, ‘The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob.’ ‘And this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.’ From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as *you* once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of *their* disobedience, so *these* also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to *you* they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up *all* [i.e., both you, Gentiles who now are believers, and them, Jews, who will yet become believers] in disobedience<sup>64</sup> that He might show mercy to *all* [i.e., the same restricted sense of *all*].” In neither case does *all* denote each and every man who ever lived or ever will; instead, in both cases it denotes specifically those who, because God either *has* shown mercy on them or *will* show mercy on them, are saved.

Third, *all* can mean *all classes* (Gentile and Jew *who already were or would be saved*) here and yet mean each and every man who ever lived or will live in Romans 3:23 if the *contexts* require us to understand it so. We have seen already that the context of Romans 11:32 requires us to understand *all* as denoting all classes (Gentile and Jew *who already were or would be saved*). What of the context of 3:23? From Romans 1:16-3:28 (and beyond), Paul builds an argument that salvation must be by grace because no mere human can merit justification (being declared righteous) before God because every human being is a sinner. Paul divides humanity into two classes: “all who have sinned without the Law” (who “will also perish without the Law”) and “all who have sinned under the Law” (who “will be judged by the Law,” i.e., will perish under the Law) (2:12), i.e., Jews and Gentiles. He argues that all Gentiles are sinners (2:13-16);

<sup>62</sup>See Benjamin B. Warfield’s essay *Are They Few That Be Saved?* in one of the volumes of his *Works*, published by Baker; I don’t have access to it here so can’t cite it fully for you.

<sup>63</sup>Don’t you find it rather uncomfortable to be in the position of using precisely the sort of argument that Paul here uses as a *foil* for his own theology?

<sup>64</sup>By the way, how does Arminianism handle *this* phrase—“God has shut up all in disobedience!”—granted its insistence on the unregenerate man’s ability to obey the gospel?

then that all Jews are sinners (2:17-3:8); then concludes that all human beings<sup>65</sup> are sinners (3:9-18). In light of this, things are utterly hopeless if our standing with God depends on our own moral ability: “Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under<sup>66</sup> the Law, that *every mouth* may be closed, and *all the world* may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law *no flesh* will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin”—i.e., but not deliverance from sin (3:19-20). How, then, can *anyone* ever stand righteous in God’s sight? Paul answers: “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for *all those who believe*; for there is no distinction; for *all have sinned* and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus . . .” (3:21-24). Paul here treats *all those who believe* as a subset of *all humans*; he has already argued that *all humans* have sinned (1:18-3:18); now it only remains to point out that since all who are “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” are a subset of all humans, then all who are justified must have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In other words, Romans 3:23 itself does *not* tell us that each and every human (except Christ) who ever lived or will live sinned or will sin; it only tells us that each and every human who ever was or would be “justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” had sinned or would sin. It is the *prior* section, especially 3:9 (along with plenty of others passages in Scripture [e.g., Romans 5:12-21]) that tells us that every human being (except Christ) is a sinner. In short, *all* does not mean each and every human who ever lived or will live in *either* Romans 11:32 or 3:23. It is *true* that each and every human being has sinned, or will sin, but that truth is taught elsewhere *before* 3:23, not *in* it.

Fourth, no, the restriction of *all* in Romans 3:23 does not imply that some have not sinned; to argue so is to argue from silence.<sup>67</sup> The verse is simply irrelevant to the question whether some have not sinned. *Ex nihilo nihil inferrant*. (I have a sneaking suspicion you knew perfectly well that even if Romans 3:23 did *not* teach universal sin, that wouldn’t imply the falsehood of universal sin. But I don’t mind a little good-natured toying around every once in a while.☺)

Well, that covers all the questions that actually apply to Calvinism generally and not just to [name deleted] and [organization name deleted]. No doubt you are by now utterly convinced and will be joining your local Calvinist church next Sunday!

No? Well, I should be disappointed if you did. The matter requires considerably more study and discussion than this, and I hope you will give it such. If you want to follow this up, you might begin by reading the whole of volume 10 of *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh, Scotland, and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), which contains Owen’s arguments against Arminianism.

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<sup>65</sup>With the exception of Christ, of course.

<sup>66</sup>The better translation here is probably *in*.

<sup>67</sup>Let B = believers, S = people who have sinned, and P = people. The syllogism (1) All B are S, (2) All S are P, (Conclusion) Therefore all B are P is valid, but the syllogism (a) All B are S, (b) All S are P, (Conclusion) Therefore some P are not S is invalid.

### Appendix: Lutheran Confessions Relevant to Free Will and Unconditional Election

*Augsburg Confession*, Art. XVIII, “Of Free Will”:

. . . man’s will hath some liberty to work a civil righteousness, and to choose such things as reason can reach unto; but . . . it hath no power to work the righteousness of God, or a spiritual righteousness, without the Spirit of God; because that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 14). But this is wrought in the heart when men do receive the Spirit of God through the Word.

These things are in as many words affirmed by St. Augustine, *Hypognosticon*, lib. iii.: ‘We confess that there is in all men a free will, which hath indeed the judgment of reason; not that it is thereby fitted, without God, either to begin or to perform any thing in matters pertaining to God, but only in works belonging to this present life, whether they be good or evil. By good works, I mean those which are of the goodness of nature; as to will to labor in the field, to desire meat or drink, to desire to have a friend, to desire apparel, to desire to build a house, to marry a wife, to nourish cattle, to learn the art of divers things, to desire any good thing pertaining to this present life; all which are not without God’s government, yea, they are, and had their beginning from God and by God. Among evil things, I account such as these: to will to worship an image; to will manslaughter, and such like.’

They condemn the Pelagians and others, who teach that by the powers of nature alone, without the Spirit of God, we are able to love God above all things; also to perform the commandments of God, as touching the substance of our actions. For although nature be able in some sort to do the external works (for it is able to withhold the hands from theft and murder), yet it can not work the inward motions, such as the fear of God, trust in God, chastity, patience, and such like.

*Formula of Concord*, Article I, “Of Original Sin,” *Negativa*, VI:

[We also reject and condemn the dogma that] man’s nature and essence are not utterly corrupt, but that there is something of good still remaining in man, even in spiritual things, to wit, goodness, *capacity* [emphasis added], aptitude, *ability* [emphasis added], industry, or the powers by which in spiritual things he has strength to undertake, effect, or *co-effect* [emphasis added—not the firm rejection of all synergism] somewhat of good.

*Ibid*, Article II, “Of Free Will,” *Affirmativa*:

I. . . the understanding and reason of man in spiritual things are wholly blind, and can understand nothing by their proper powers. As it is written (1 Cor. ii. 14): ‘The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because he is examined concerning spiritual things.’

II. . . the yet unregenerate will of man is not only averse from God, but has become even hostile to God, so that it only wishes and desires those things, and is delighted with them, which are evil and opposite to the divine will. For it is written (Gen. viii. 21): ‘For the imagination and thought of man’s heart are prone to evil from his youth.’ Also (Rom. viii. 7): ‘The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law, neither indeed can be.’

Therefore we believe that *by how much it is impossible that a dead body should vivify itself and restore corporal life to itself, even so impossible is it that man, who by reason of sin is spiritually dead, should have any faculty of recalling himself into spiritual life*; as it is written (Eph. ii. 5): ‘Even when we were dead in sins, he hath quickened us together with Christ.’ (2 Cor. iii. 5): ‘Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing good as of ourselves; but that we are sufficient is itself of God.’

*Loc. cit.*, *Negativa*:

II. We repudiate, also, that gross error of the Pelagians, who have not hesitated to assert that man by his own powers, without the grace of the Holy Spirit, has ability to convert himself to God, to believe the gospel, to obey the divine law from his heart, and in this way to merit of himself the remission of sins and eternal life.

III. Besides these errors, we reject also the false dogma of the Semi-Pelagians, who teach that man by his own powers can commence his conversion, but can not fully accomplish it without the grace of the Holy Spirit.

IV. Also the teaching that, although unregenerate man, in respect of free-will, is indeed, antecedently to his regeneration, too infirm to make a beginning of his own conversion, and by his own powers to convert himself to God, and obey the law of God with all his heart; yet if the Holy Spirit, by the preaching of the word, shall have made a beginning, and offered his grace in the word to man, that then man, by his own proper and natural powers, can, as it were, give some assistance and co-operation [note again the rejection of synergism], though it be but slight, infirm, and languid, towards his conversion, and can apply and prepare himself unto grace, apprehend it, embrace it, and believe the gospel. . . .

VIII. Also, when such statements as these are used without explanation, that the will of man, before conversion, in conversion itself, and after conversion, is set against the Holy Ghost, and that the Holy Ghost is given to those who of set purpose and obstinately resist him. For God in conversion of *unwilling men makes willing men, and dwells in the willing* [italics original], as Augustine is wont to speak.

But as concerns certain dicta, both of the Fathers and of certain modern doctors, such as the following: *God draws, but draws a willing man*, and *man's will in conversion is not idle, but effects somewhat*—we judge that these are not agreeable to the form of sound words. For these dicta are advanced for the confirming of the false opinion of the powers of the human will in the conversion of man, contrary to the doctrine which attributes that work to divine grace alone. . . .

But, on the other hand, it is rightly taught that the Lord in conversion, through the drawing (that is, the movement and operation) of the Holy Spirit, of resisting and unwilling makes willing men, and that after conversion, in the daily exercises of penitence the will of man is not idle, but co-operates also with all the works of the Holy Spirit which he effects through us.

IX. Also, whereas Dr. Luther has written that the will of man in conversion is *purely passive*, that is to be received rightly and fitly, to wit: in respect of divine grace in kindling new motions, that is, it ought to be understood of the moment when the Spirit of God, through the hearing of the Word or through the use of the sacraments, lays hold of the will of man, and works conversion and regeneration in man. For after the Holy Spirit has already wrought and effected this very thing, and has changed and renewed the will of man by his own divine virtue and working alone, then, indeed, this new will of man is the instrument and organ of God the Holy Ghost, so that it not only lays hold of grace, but also co-operates, in the works which follow, with the Holy Spirit.

There are, therefore, left before the conversion of man two efficient causes only (efficacious to conversion), that is to say, the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, which is the instrument of the Holy Spirit whereby he effects the conversion of man. [Schaff, in *Creeds of Christendom*, from which I am citing, adds this note: “Against Melancthon, who in his later years taught that there are three causes of conversion closely combined, namely, the Holy Spirit (the creative cause), the Word of God (the instrumental cause), and *the consenting will* [emphasis original] of man.”] This Word man is, without question, bound to hear; but, nevertheless, *he is in nowise by his own powers able to obtain the benefit of embracing it in true faith, but only by the grace and working of God the Holy Ghost* [emphasis added; note once again the firm rejection of any sort of synergism and of any ability of the unregenerate man to embrace the gospel].

*Formula of Concord*, Article XI, “Of the Eternal Predestination and Election of God,” *Affirmativa*:

IV. But the predestination or eternal election of God extends only to the good and beloved children of God, and this is the *cause* [emphasis added; Note that predestination causes salvation and is not conditioned on it, i.e., that the *Formula* here teaches unconditional election.] of their salvation. For it procures their salvation, and *appoints those things which pertain to it*<sup>68</sup> [emphasis added]. . . .

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<sup>68</sup>This clause is pregnant for the whole discussion, for if indeed the predestination of God “procures [the children of God’s] salvation, and *appoints those things which pertain to it*,” then predestination appoints not only those things pertaining to salvation that are unilateral acts of God but also those things that are acts of man, e.g., faith and repentance. I find it impossible to reconcile this with the *Formula*’s later affirmation that unregenerate sinners may “foreclose to the Spirit of God his ordinary way, so that he can not accomplish his work in them. . . .” Let S = salvation, T = things that pertain to salvation, P = things that are predestined, and F = faith. If this clause is true, then: (1) S  $\supset$  F [If one is to be saved, he must believe.]; (2) F  $\supset$  T [Believing is something pertaining to salvation.]; (3) T  $\supset$  P [All things pertaining to salvation are predestined.];  $\therefore$  (4) F  $\supset$  P [Faith is predestined.] and (5) S  $\supset$  P [All who are saved are predestined, i.e., none who are not predestined to salvation are saved.] And so also for any element in the entire *ordo salutis*: regeneration, calling, conversion (faith and repentance), sanctification, perseverance, and glorification.

VII. But Christ calls all sinners to him, and promises to give them rest. And he earnestly wishes that all men may come to him, and suffer themselves to be cared for and succored. To these he offers himself in the Word as a Redeemer, and wishes that the Word may be heard, and that their ears may not be hardened, nor the Word be neglected and contemned. And he promises that he will bestow the virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit and divine aid, to the end that we may abide steadfast in the faith and attain eternal life.

VIII. Therefore we are to judge neither by the judgment of our own reason nor by the law of God, concerning our election to eternal life, lest we either give ourselves over to a dissolute and Epicurean life or fall into desperation. For they who follow the judgment of their own reason in this matter, in their hearts arise these mischievous thoughts, which it is hard indeed for them to resist: If (say they) God has elected me to eternal salvation, I can not be damned, let me do what evil I will. But, on the other hand, if I am not elected to eternal life, all the good that I may do will advantage me nothing at all, for all my endeavors will be vain.

IX. The true opinion, therefore, concerning predestination is to be learned from the Gospel of Christ. For in it is clearly taught that ‘God hath concluded all under unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all;’ and that ‘he is not willing that any should perish, but rather that all should be converted and believe in Christ’ (Rom. xi. 32; Ezek. xviii. 23; xxxii. 1; 2 Pet. iii. 9; 1 John ii. 2).

X. Whoever, therefore, inquire into the revealed will of God, and proceed in that order which St. Paul has followed in the Epistle to the Romans (who first leads man to repentance, to the acknowledgment of his sins, to obedience to the commandments of God, before he speaks of the mystery<sup>69</sup> of eternal predestination), to them the doctrine of the predestination of God is salutary, and affords very great consolation.

XI. But as to the declaration (Matt. xxii. 14), ‘Many are called, but few are chosen,’ it is not to be so understood as if God were unwilling that all should be saved, but the cause of the damnation of the ungodly is that they either do not hear the Word of God at all, but contumaciously contemn it, stop their ears, and harden their hearts, and in this way foreclose to the Spirit of God his ordinary way, so that he can not accomplish his work in them, or at least when they have heard the Word, make it of no account, and cast it away. Neither God nor his election, but their own wickedness, is to blame if they perish (2 Pet. ii. 1 sqq. Luke ii. 49, 52; Heb. xii. 25 sqq.).<sup>70</sup>

XII. So far, therefore, may a godly man proceed with safety in meditation upon the article of the eternal election of God, even as far, that is, as it is revealed in the Word of God. For the Word of God proposes to us Christ, the Book of Life which through the preaching of the Gospel is opened and spread out before us, as it is written (Rom. viii. 30): ‘Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.’ In Christ, therefore, is the eternal election of God the Father to be sought. He in his eternal counsel has decreed that besides those who acknowledge his Son Jesus Christ, and truly believe on him, he will save no one. Other surmisings should be wholly dismissed from the minds of the godly, because they are not of God, but of the inspiration of Satan, whereby the enemy of mankind is endeavoring either to weaken or wholly to take away that most sweet consolation which we may draw from this most wholesome doctrine: inasmuch as by it we are rendered certain that by mere grace, without any merit of our own, we are chosen in Christ to eternal life, and that no one can pluck us out of his hands. And this most merciful election the Lord hath attested and confirmed, not by mere words, but by the mediation of an oath, and hath sealed to us by the holy sacraments, which we ought to call to mind in our deepest temptations, and seek consolation from them, that we may quench all the fiery darts of the Devil.

XIII. Yet none the less ought we to take the utmost pains to fashion our life agreeably to the norm of the divine will, and to *make our calling and election sure*, as St. Peter says (2 Pet. i. 10), nor to recede a hair-

<sup>69</sup>Note the appeal to mystery here. Calvinists aren’t the only ones who do it!

<sup>70</sup>The Calvinist would agree with the last sentence, recognizing the *wickedness* of the non-elect as the *meritorious cause* of their damnation, even as he would add that the *efficient cause* why they are not regenerated and converted, and hence of their damnation, is the sovereign election of God. He would disagree with the *Formula’s* understanding of the verses cited in IX and XI (on which see the discussion of your fourth question above). He would also argue that Article II, “Of Free Will,” *Affirmativa*, I, II, and *Negativa*, III, IV, and Article XI, “Of the Eternal Predestination and Election of God,” *Affirmativa* IV, which teach the inability of the sinner to embrace Christ unless he is first regenerated, and indeed that this regeneration transforms the unwilling man into the willing, are inconsistent with Article XI, *Affirmativa*, XI, which affirms the ability of the sinner to frustrate the Spirit’s work of regeneration.

breadth from the revealed Word of God; for that will never fail us.

XIV. This brief explication of the eternal election of God, attributes fully and completely to God his own proper honor, showing that he saves us according to the purpose of his own will, of mere compassion, without any merit of our own. While by this doctrine no handle is given to vehement disturbances of mind and faint-heartedness, nor to Epicureanism.

And *Negativa*: [We reject the doctrines]

I. That God is unwilling that all men should repent and believe the Gospel.

II. That when God calls us to him, he does not earnestly wish that all men should come to him.

III. That God is not willing that all men should be saved, but that some men are destined to destruction, not on account of their sins, but by the mere counsel, purpose, and will of God, so that they can not in any wise attain to salvation.

IV. That the mercy of God and the most holy merit of Christ is not the sole cause of the divine election, but that there is also some cause in us, on account of which cause God has chosen us to eternal life.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>The Calvinist would agree with this but would argue that its implications are inconsistent with the insistence that God wills indiscriminately the salvation of all the descendants of Adam, for if election is the cause of salvation and of those things that pertain to salvation, then it is the cause of the subject's response to all that God does to bring about his salvation, for his response is among those things that pertain to his salvation, and this in turn implies either that all will be saved (for God does the same things toward all, in the view of those who affirm universal redemption and calling) or that all that God can do and has done is not sufficient to save anyone and therefore that either (a) none will be saved or (b) any who are saved are saved not on account of what God has done for them (i.e., not saved by God) but on account of what they do (i.e., they save themselves).