

Answers to Attacks on Calvinism / Reformed Doctrine

These are genuine questions that have been sent to the author at one time or another. Biblical teachers find that they have to repeat certain theological defences over and over again in various controversies, even explaining matters that should be simple and accepted as basic Biblical truth. Consequently, it seemed fitting to write a compendium of some of these questions and answers; especially as the answers have already been of some use to readers of portions of this material.

At the end of the day, the matter before us is about God's truth; and indeed, the truth of his salvation by sovereign grace. This paper seeks to establish truth and define Biblical doctrine regarding salvation. Only the truth sets free; in establishing what is genuine we, of necessity, must expose error. There is much to contend with.

Questions and false propositions

The attempt to avoid theological systems
Calvinism is a dangerous (or even demonic) cult
Predestination
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The attempt to avoid theological systems

Some people adopt a well-meaning position to avoid all theological systems; but this usually leads to utter confusion. In dealing with the doctrine of salvation, of necessity, one has to adopt one scheme or another. One is either:

- *Monergistic* (focusing on God's sovereignty as in Calvinism);
- *Synergistic* (teaching man's co-operation with God in salvation, as in Arminianism) or
- *Pagan* (teaching works righteousness and universalism).

Some writers appear to weave in and out of all three, with the result of utter confusion and self-contradiction.

All the systematic approaches to the Doctrines of Grace have been explored in 2,000 years and codified. Hybrid systems that try to harmonise any of these systems end up being self-contradictory, illogical, hypothetical and absurd. How can one blend God's free, sovereign grace with the meritorious works of man? One historic attempt was Amyraldism, an attempt to unite Calvinism and Arminianism,¹ but this system was (and still is) a hopelessly confused, contradictory, hypothetical failure. The teachings of Andrew Fuller are a more extreme form of this, which has traces of Calvinism, Arminianism, Amyraldism, Pelagianism and Socinianism.

Today, some new systems are developing, but these are really new interpretations of one doctrine (such as justification by faith, or God's sovereignty) to try to squeeze between two existing systems.²

People who seek to avoid systems all find that they are facing two ways at the same time; they are double-minded and thus unstable. To be consistent, one has to either be monergistic, synergistic or pagan.

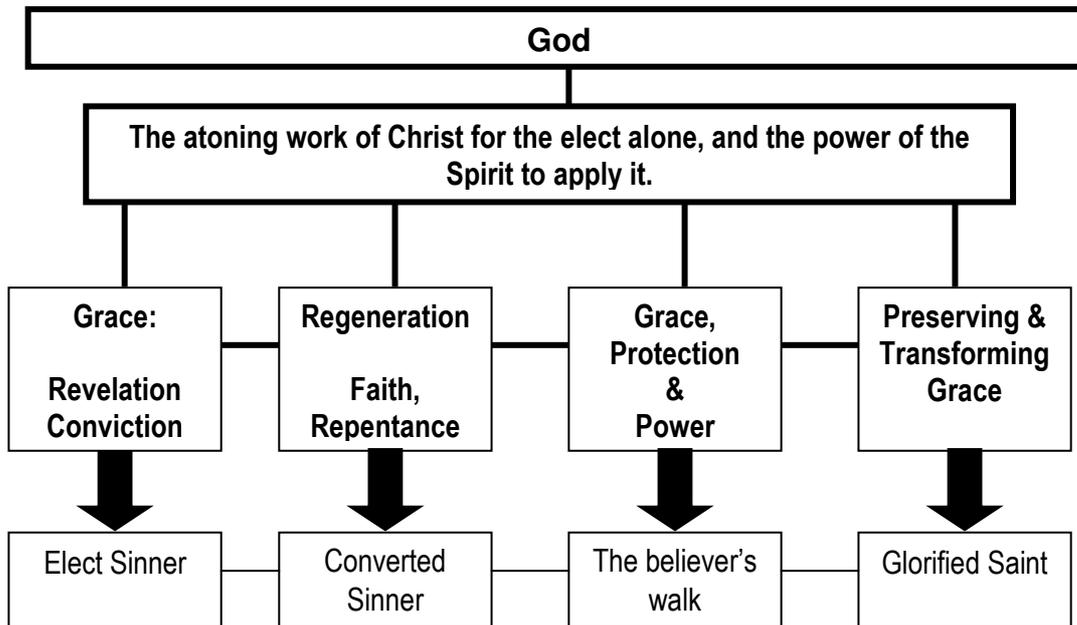
The essential options in salvation

Monergism God's Sovereign Grace alone	Synergism Human Co-operation with God	Paganism Human Works alone
Augustinianism	Semi-Pelagianism (& Romanism)	Pelagianism
Calvinism / Reformed Theology	Arminianism	Socinianism
	Amyraldism Four-Point Calvinism	
	Fullerism	

¹ Originally it sought to fuse Calvinism and 17th century Lutheranism. It follows Moses Amyrald and teaches a hypothetical, conditional, universal atonement (God loves everyone and desires to save everyone if they believe) and joins it to the particularism of Calvinism (God elects only some to eternal life since men won't believe). It is a theological impossibility seeking to unite two opposite and contradictory things.

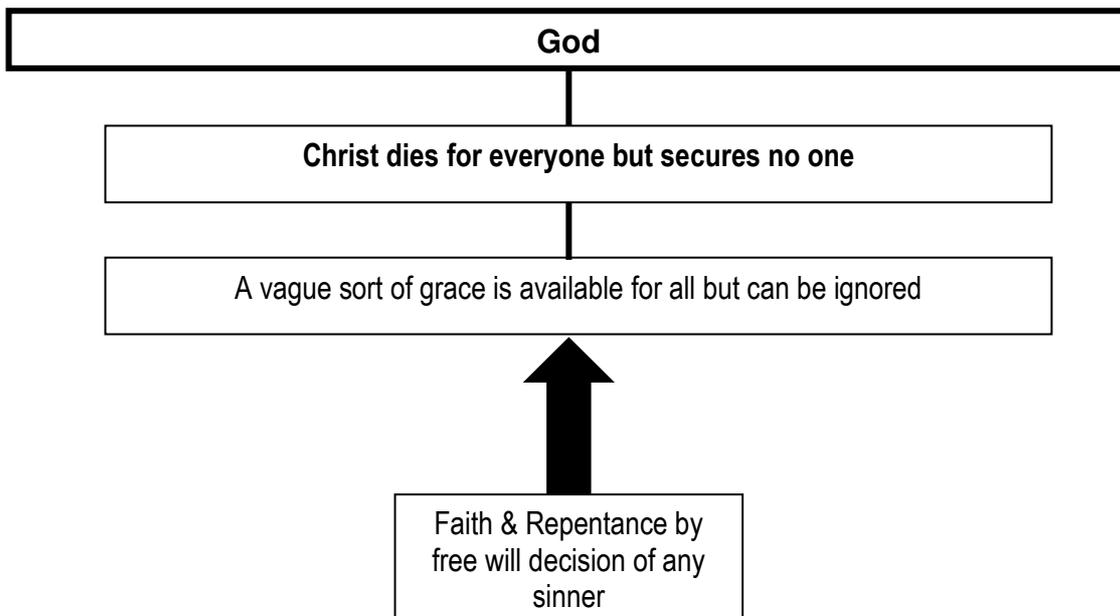
² Such would include *Federal Vision* in modern US Presbyterian churches, NT Wright's *New Perspective on Paul & the Open Theism* of Clark Pinnock.

Monergism



God does everything in saving, converting, sanctifying, protecting and glorifying the elect.
 [Christ] became the author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9)
 Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith. (Heb 12:2)

Synergism



Man initiates conversion and continues in his own strength, allowing the possibility of falling away completely.

Calvinism is a dangerous (or even demonic) cult

This is a slanderous accusation. A cult is '*a system of religious veneration and devotion directed towards a particular figure or object. A relatively small group of people having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister.*' [Oxford Dict.]

Calvinists do not worship John Calvin; neither are they a group practising strange beliefs or aberrations. As CH Spurgeon said Calvinism is merely the nickname, or shorthand, for a theological system that upholds the Biblical teaching regarding the Doctrines of Grace. Before Calvin it was called Augustinianism, before Augustine it was apostolic theology. After Calvin it was more often termed Reformed Theology,³ others prefer the phrase 'sovereign grace'.

It was held by many Christians throughout history and is not an oblique sectarian movement. In fact, Calvinism is largely responsible for the political development and liberty of spirit of the modern western world up to the 20th century. Indeed, Calvinistic theology is the foundational basis of all the major Protestant Confessions: Anglican (*39 Articles*), Congregational (*Savoy Declaration*), Presbyterian (*Westminster Confession*), Baptist (*1689 Confession*), Continental (*Heidelberg Catechism*) and even early Brethren writings. Martin Luther's original position was also very close to this; but later Lutheranism strayed towards universalism and works. Calvin effectively systematised all the key truths of the Reformation. To despise Calvinism is to despise the Reformation and all Protestant religion.

The focus of the Reformation was the glory of God. Its fundamentals can be summarised in a series of catch phrases based on the Latin word for 'alone':

<i>Sola Gratia</i>	Grace alone
<i>Sola Fide</i>	Faith alone
<i>Solos Christos</i>	Christ alone
<i>Sola scriptura</i>	Scripture alone
<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i>	Glory to God alone

SALVATION IS THUS: BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, IN CHRIST ALONE; BASED SOLELY UPON THE WORD OF GOD AND IS TO THE GLORY OF GOD ALONE.

The key evangelical alternative to Calvinism is Arminianism. This originally did start as a sect, being the heretical beliefs of a Calvinist Dutch preacher, James Arminius. After his followers⁴ developed and illegally promoted his teachings in the Dutch reformed church, the movement was disciplined at the international Synod of Dort. This was when the five points, known by the mnemonic TULIP⁵ were formulated.

³ 'Reformed Theology' is sometimes applied in a more limited sense identifying it with the Covenant or Federal Theology of Presbyterians. This is why 'Calvinism' is more universal. Baptists, Independents and Presbyterians can all claim to be Calvinists, but some Baptists would not call themselves 'Reformed'.

⁴ This was a genuine cult called 'The Remonstrants' or protesters. Modern Arminianism is based upon their refining (worsening) of Arminius' original theology. Eventually the Remonstrants became liberal.

⁵ To combat the five remonstrant points, the synod established the Biblical truth of salvation by free grace as:

- Total Depravity of man: man is dead in sin and cannot contribute anything to his salvation.
- Unconditional Election: God chose those who will be saved in eternity according to his own will.
- Limited Atonement: Jesus died for the people God gave him, the elect. The cross was fully effective.
- Irresistible Grace: The Spirit applies God's power to the elect alone in the effectual call, within the proclamation of the Gospel. This gives power to believe and repent after regeneration.
- Preservation of the saints: true believers will be kept by God's grace to the end. None will perish.

Apart from a form of Evangelical Arminianism taught by John Wesley,⁶ Arminian theology was always considered heterodox and was a minority view. Indeed it was originally promulgated in England by Roman Catholic Jesuits to disrupt the progress of the Reformation. Sadly, these teachings were later adopted by modern preachers in the 20th century and have now become mainstream; but they are still heresy.

So, is Calvinism dangerous? Absolutely not; it is Biblical and historic Christianity. However, as with anything, there have been some extremists who have claimed to be Calvinists but have taken radical and aberrant views. This doesn't affect genuine Calvinism. Is it a cult? Of course not. In fact it is the reverse of a cult having spawned all of the mainstream Protestant denominations.

Predestination 1

The word 'predestined' is only mentioned twice in the Bible and the word 'predestinate' is only mentioned twice. It is thus an obscure concept and does not imply reprobation of some to condemnation.

[Note: Most people think of a fatalistic predestination when they consider Calvinism; however, it should be noted that in Calvin's *Institutes* this is not his prime concern. Calvin, and Reformed Theology generally, is fundamentally concerned with the glory, honour and sovereignty of God above all else. This is what marks this system out from others - everything is focused upon God's glory. However, predestination (and its related doctrine 'election') is a significant Biblical teaching.]

We have to evaluate the original Greek words in a word search. The Greek word for 'predestination' is:

- *proori,zw proorizo* (Strong's No. 4309) meaning: to predetermine, decide beforehand, to foreordain, appoint beforehand and God's decree from eternity. This appears six times in the NT (Acts 4:28; Rm 8:29, 30; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 1:5, 11).

Connected with this word are the words:

- *proginw,skw proginosko* (Strong's No. 4267), meaning: to have knowledge before hand, to foreknow, to predestinate, to intimately foreknow (i.e. love) those whom God elected to salvation. [E.g. 1 Rm 8:29, 11:1; Pt 1:20.] In some contexts this word is used with the strength of 'predestinate' (see 'Foreknowledge' later).
- *pro,gnwsij prognosis* (Strong's No. 4268) meaning: foreknowledge, forethought, pre-arrangement. [E.g. Acts 2:23; 1 Pt 1:2.]

If we are to question such a supremely important issue as the predestination of some to salvation, it is crucial that we get the technical facts correct.

Definition

Predestination is God's eternal, sovereign, immutable, and unconditional decree to control all events to comply with his divine purpose.

- It exalts God's glory, majesty and sovereignty.

⁶ Which tried to be less heretical than the Remonstrants on the questions of man's depravity and the imputation of Adam's sin to all men.

- It establishes God's sovereign, free grace to undeserving sinners.
- It demonstrates that salvation is totally founded on divine grace and mercy. There is no room for the elect to boast or the reprobate to complain.
- It leads to a deep sense of humility and worship in believers.
- It gives assurance of hope to the elect since God controls all things for their good.

Predestination 2

God does not control or predestine all things or man would have no responsibility. Furthermore, it is the devil that controls the bad things that happen in this world; God is love and cannot initiate bad things.

If God is not in complete control of all things, how can there be any guarantee of salvation, deliverance, assurance, comfort or protection? If the devil is in charge of my circumstances, how can I give thanks for them? How can I trust God at all? Where is the comfort in the notion that my enemy is in control? If Satan controls bad events, how can God be in charge of the world or history? How can I be sure that I will remain steadfast to the end if God is not in control? Hundreds of comforting texts thus become meaningless such as,

1 I will say of the LORD, '*He is* my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust.'
 3 Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler *and* from the perilous pestilence.
 4 He shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth *shall be your* shield and buckler.
 5 You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, *nor* of the arrow *that* flies by day,
 6 *Nor* of the pestilence *that* walks in darkness, *nor* of the destruction *that* lays waste at noonday.
 7 A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; *but* it shall not come near you. (Ps 91)

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. (Rm 8:28)

In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thess 5:18)

In order for the Lord to be our refuge and deliverer, God has to control *all* circumstances. In order to control history, God has to arrange all aspects of men's life. For the end to fit according to God's plan, God must have purposed all things before time began. How can prophecy be established if God cannot control future events. Before Cyrus was prophesied (by name in Isaiah) as being the future king to set the Jews free from Babylon, God had predestined Cyrus to unexpectedly rise to be the ruler of the Persians.

The Bible shows that God is in complete control of everything. Indeed, he has planned everything from eternity to fit into his divine purpose. Nothing takes God by surprise and nothing can thwart his plan. Predestination is the prior sovereign choice of God over all that happens in this world. This means that all natural events, all circumstantial problems, all sickness and suffering, the politics and warfare of nations and all men are under God's complete control and exist for a reason.

We cannot supply texts to cover everything here but we can identify some key factors which demonstrate that God is the manager of all things and yet without being the author of sin (Jm 1:13):

Natural Conditions

- He gave them hail for rain and flaming fire in their land. (Ps 105:32)
- He struck their vines also, and their fig trees, and splintered the trees of their territory. He spoke, and locusts came, Young locusts without number. (Ps 105:33-34)
- Moreover He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread. (Ps 105:16)
- When He utters *His* voice -- *There is* a multitude of waters in the heavens: 'He causes the vapours [clouds] to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures.' (Jer 51:16)

Evil things⁷

- For You, O God, have tested us; You have refined us as silver is refined. You brought us into the net; you laid affliction on our backs. You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water. (Ps 66:10-12)
- They consoled him and comforted him for all the adversity [Heb. 'evil'] that the LORD had brought upon him. (Job 42:11)
- I *am* the LORD, and *there is* no other; I form the light and create darkness [Heb. 'evil'], I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these *things*. (Isa 45:6-7)
- Who *is* he *who* speaks and it comes to pass, *when* the Lord has not commanded *it? Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High that woe ['evil'] and well-being ['good'] proceed? (Lam 3:37-38)
- If there is calamity [Heb. 'evil'] in a city, will not the LORD have done *it?* [NKJV] Does evil befall a city unless the Lord has done *it?* [RSV](Amos 3:6)
- Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I am fashioning a disaster ['evil'] and devising a plan against you.' (Jer 18:11b)

Illness, disease and death

- God delivered *him* into his hand. (i.e. dies in a fight, Ex 21:13)
- So the LORD said to him, 'Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? *Have* not I, the LORD?' (Ex 4:11)
- If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law ... then the LORD will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues ... and serious and prolonged sicknesses. ... until you are destroyed. (Deut 28:58-61)
- You *are* God. You turn man to destruction, And say, 'Return, O children of men.' (Ps 90:2-3)
- And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.' (Jn 9:2-3)

Judgment

- For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, *and* that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses. (Jos 11:20)
- God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting. (Rm 1:28)
- God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thess 2:11-12)
- Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (Rm 9:18)

⁷ 'Evil' = the Hebrew word *Rah* (7451), adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, evil, harm, displeasure, trouble etc. It is from the root word *Ra'a'* (7489): to spoil by breaking to pieces, to make something evil, shatter, destroy.

Political history

- For this *purpose* I have raised you up [**Pharaoh**], that I may show My power *in* you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth. (**Ex 9:16**)
- The LORD delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as *it is* this day. (**Deut 10:15**)
- When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. (**Deut 32:8**)
- He gave them the lands of the Gentiles, and they inherited the labour of the nations. (**Ps 105:44**)
- ... To do whatever your hand and your purpose determined before to be done. (**Acts 4:28**)
- And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings. (**Acts 17:26**)

God does what pleases him

- But our God *is* in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. (**Ps 115: 2-3**)
- In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. (**Eph 1:11**)
- The eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (**Eph 3:11**)
- God, who has saved us and called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. (**2 Tim 1:9**)

Man's life

- Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations. (**Jer 1:5**)
- Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned⁸ for me, when *as yet there were* none of them. (**Ps 139:16**)
- And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed! (**Lk 22:22**)
- Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (**Matt 10:29-30**)
- But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. (**Acts 3:18**)
- (For *the children* [**Jacob and Esau**] not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.) It was said to her, 'The older shall serve the younger.' (**Rm 9:11-12**)
- Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. (**Rm 9:18**)

There is no doubt that the Bible teaches that God is in sovereign control of all things, both good and evil. Even calamity brought about by enemy opposition is under the permission of the Most High God (**Job 1:12, 2:6**). In order to control history according to his plan, all human events have been divinely predestined from eternity.

Does this extend to fine details. Absolutely, the big events of history are built on small details. World wars have started with one bullet; terrible pestilences that killed millions of Europeans from one flea bite. Scripture confirms this divine control. Not only in teaching passages, such as that the hairs on our head are numbered, but even in narrative passages. Here is an example -

⁸ Fashioned = squeeze into shape, mould into form like a potter, fashion, determine.

They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be,' that the Scripture might be fulfilled which says: 'They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.' Therefore the soldiers did these things. (John 19:24)

Note the word 'therefore'.⁹ This is a relatively trivial matter when the Lord of Glory is hanging on a cross above these soldiers' heads. But God is interested in the fine detail and every aspect of the crucifixion of Jesus is prophesied and fulfilled; from the plurality of criminals executed with him to the singularity of being buried in a rich man's tomb. But here we are told that the dividing of the clothes and the casting of lots for the tunic¹⁰ was because God's servant David (in Ps 22:18) had prophesied it would happen a thousand years earlier. God predestined that these specific soldiers would divide Jesus' garments but unusually gamble for the tunic to exactly comply with the prophecy. John takes time to explain this in detail to glorify God's word.

God is in sovereign control over every single event in the worlds of men and angels.

Election 1

Calvinism teaches that God has predestined the elect to be saved, while those who are not elect will be rejected by God, and will face eternal torment. This teaching makes God out to be a respecter of persons! Yet the scriptures clearly state that God is no respecter of persons.

Predestination is wider than election and is the sovereign control of all things (nature, men and history) by the Lord God. Election is within predestination and is the sovereign choosing of some to be the people of God and the leaving aside of others (the reprobate).

Ironically, it is Arminianism which teaches that God is a respecter of persons in that it teaches God saves those he sees in the future will believe. The Bible teaches that God is not a respecter of persons and that he elects those who are sinners merely from his sovereign good pleasure:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, **according to His good pleasure** which He purposed in Himself. (Eph 1:7-9)

Election 2

Calvinism teaches an unbiblical, extreme form of predestination by claiming that one person is elected and predestined to eternal life, while another is predestined to damnation.

This is election. It is not extreme, it is Biblical. God chooses those who are saved, not man.

- Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near to dwell in thy courts! (Ps 65:4)

⁹ **ou oun** (Strong's No. 3767) meaning: then, therefore, accordingly, consequently, these things being so.

¹⁰ This is in itself was an unusual event, usually the clothes of criminals were cheap but Jesus must have been given an expensively woven tunic.

- You HAVE NOT chosen me but I HAVE chosen you ... I have chosen you out of the world. (Jn 15:16,19)
 - God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this he called you through our gospel. (2 Thess 2:13-14)
 - For the sake of the elect, whom he chose. (Mk 13:20)
 - For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you. (1 Thess 1:4)
 - Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. (Col 3:12)
 - I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. (Ex 33:19, Rm 9:15)
- God chooses those who are brought near, to be saved, not man.

Salvation is repeatedly stated to be of the Lord, not of man's choice, e.g. Ps 3:8, 37:9, 38:22, 68:20, 85:7; Isa 12:2; Jer 3:23; Lam 3:36; Jonah 2:9-10.

Conversion occurs when God gives faith and repentance to a person (Acts 5:31, 11:18, 14:27, 18:27; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 1:29; Jn 6:29; Rm 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25-26; Heb 12:17). These cannot be worked up by man who is dead in sins (Eph 2:1-8) and unable to do any good work (Rm 3:10-12). Faith is a good work that man cannot perform. Only the elect are given faith and power to repent.

Are some reprobated (left in their sins and not chosen)?

The Bible says categorically, yes. The elect are loved, chosen and saved; the reprobate are hated, not chosen and condemned.

- Esau I hated. (Rm 9:13)
- Vessels of wrath made for destruction. (Rm 9:22)
- ... some who were long ago designated for this condemnation. (Jude 4)
- They disobey the word, as they were destined to do. (1 Pt 2:8)
- You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. (Jn 10:26)
- You shall die in your sins. (Jn 8:22,24)
- See also: Prov 16:4; Rm 9:18,21; Rev 13:8; Mt 11:25.

When did this selection take place?

In eternity before the people involved were even born (Rm 9:11-13; Eph 1:4).

Is this just?

God has no obligation to save mankind since man rebelled and turned away from him at the Fall. If God destroyed all mankind it would be just. In this way it was just for God to destroy the wicked world by a flood, except for eight people. In fact, God is rich in mercy since he has been patient for thousands of years with sinful rebellious creatures, and has sovereignly decided to save a huge portion of mankind to demonstrate his grace, love and mercy. The elect did not deserve this, but the reprobate do deserve to be punished for their sin.

Two things should be remembered:

1. God is totally just, he will always do right (Gen 18:25).
2. The reprobate do not want to be saved, do not want to be holy, and have no desire to honour Christ.

Unregenerate men have no claim upon the blessing of God, therefore, there can be no injustice.

Election 3

Rm 8:29-30 does not teach that God has ordained some to eternal life and others to eternal damnation. It does not even mention eternal damnation.

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (Rm 8:29-30)

These verses specifically teach election and reprobation. To choose some is to ignore others. If God only predestines those he foreknew (loved) to be conformed to the image of his Son, then there are others he did not select for this salvation. If he only called these loved ones, he did not call others who are hated. If he only calls those he loves (see 'foreknowledge'), then he does not love those he does not call. Thus these un-chosen could never be saved since only God can draw people to Christ (Jn 6:44, 65). There is no salvation without God's drawing / calling.

The error being taught here is that God elects only those he foreknew (as meaning merely 'had knowledge beforehand') would believe by their own power (see 'Foreknowledge' later). This is the key error of Arminianism and a number of other Semi-Pelagian heresies. It not only misrepresents this verse, but ignores hundreds of clear scriptures that teach sovereign predestination and election.

Universalism

Jesus sacrificial death paid the full ransom for the sins of the whole world, once for all!

Think about this: if Jesus paid the full ransom for every man, the result is universalism - there can thus be no hell, no sinners and no condemnation. There is no need for the Gospel; the ransom is paid.

What about the people in history before the cross whom God judged in condemnation, like the Canaanites, Sodom, Gomorrah? These are said to be condemned, how is the ransom paid for these?

Texts that appear to be universalistic must be interpreted in context to evaluate their true meaning. The apostles did not believe in Universalism and so they cannot mean to teach it.

Often the people who push for a universalistic meaning in these texts prove more than they want. They believe in hell and judgment but still insist the texts teach a universal atonement. This is a self-contradictory position. If the words 'all' and 'world' in these disputed texts mean everyone, then there is no Gospel, no hell, no sinners and no Christianity.¹¹

¹¹ See next item.

Peter tells us that God wants everybody to repent and be saved.

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

This is one of the many apparent universal texts.¹² Again, if it means everyone then there is no hell. We cannot look at all the texts which often focus on the words ‘all’ or ‘world’. There are many arguments to prove that the ‘all’ refers to the elect alone. In fact the Greek word all (*pas*) frequently does not mean every single person, but certain people in a group.¹³

Firstly, the ‘all’ here are clearly the elect because Peter is talking about ‘us’ (v9), the ‘beloved’ of v 8. He writes ‘to you’ (3:1) i.e. his flock. Who are these? They are, those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:1). These are the godly as opposed to the unjust (2:9). In fact he speaks only a chapter earlier about the reprobate who are: reserved the under punishment for the day of judgment (2:9); who are made, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, (2:12); they are, slaves of corruption (2:19); who will utterly perish in their own corruption, *and* will receive the wages of unrighteousness, (2:12-13); for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever (2:17). This is as clear a statement about reprobation as there is.

The arguments of Arminians and other universalists (such as Pelagians or Amyraldians) are always of this nature. Seemingly universal statements are taken completely out of context and then doctrines built up around them. All the writings of the apostles must be evaluated as a whole and texts interpreted in context and not in isolation. Since they did not preach universalism, these verses cannot teach universalism - and they don't when interpreted properly.

Free Will

Calvinism teaches that the individual's free will has no place in our salvation or eternal destiny. This teaching makes God out to be a dictator. He has given free will or free choice to every one of His created beings. Individuals either respond to God's mercy and grace or reject it. God did not make us robots.

Man is dead in sin. A dead man cannot choose anything. This deadness is spiritual; therefore man cannot choose to perform any spiritual good work, so he cannot repent or believe since they are good works. In a sense he has free will to sin but not anything else, because he lives in a world of deadness, sin and corruption. He can choose eggs or Cornflakes for breakfast, but he has no power of self-determination to good.

Apart from this metaphysical fact, God specifically states that salvation of not of him who wills:

So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (Rm 9:16)

¹² Others include Deut 5:29; Isa 48:18; Ps 81:13, 103:8, 145:9; Ezek 18:23, 33:11; Matt 5:43-46, 23:37; Lk 6:35-36, 13:34; Jn 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 1 Pt 3:20; 2Pt 3:9; 1 Jn 4:14; Rev 3:20, 22:17. See my papers, *An Analysis Of The Key Disputed Universalistic Texts & All in the New Testament*.

¹³ **pa/j pas** (Strong's No. 3956) meaning: (individually) each, every, any, all, the whole, everyone, all things, (collectively) some of all types. Phrases like ‘all the people’ often mean a relatively few people in a certain situation (Jn 3:26, 8:2, 10:8, 18:40). ‘All’ can mean just a few key things (Jn 4:39, 4:45).

This is why faith and repentance have to be gifts given by God. Man, being dead, has no power.

God's Love

Grace is the outworking of God's unconditional love towards fallen humanity. The Bible says that God loved the world; i.e. every one of His unique, created human beings.

Grace is the manifestation of God's love to man only in the sense that it is applied to the elect. Grace is never given to the reprobate and God's love does not reach out to all. If God loves everyone, then where is that love on those who go to hell? God can only do things perfectly, completely and forever (Eccles 3:14). If he loves people, he loves them fully and forever, but this love cannot be in hell. If God loves everyone, why does his inspired word repeatedly state that he hated certain people?

- You hate all workers of iniquity. (Ps 5:5)
- The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. (Ps 5:6) [Abhor = 'to loathe', 'to regard as an abomination', it is worse than 'hate'.]
- The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. (Ps 11:5).
- The mouth of an immoral woman is a deep pit; He who is abhorred by the LORD will fall there. (Prov 22:14).
- But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev 2:6 also Rev 2:15)
- And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation [Canaanites] which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. (Lev 20:23)
- God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day. (Ps 7:11)

God hates religious people who sin:

- I dismissed the three shepherds in one month. My soul loathed them, and their soul also abhorred me. (Zech 11:8)
- ... if you do not obey Me, ... My soul shall abhor you. (Lev 26:27-30)

He hates some people before they were born:

- Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (Rm 9:13)
- And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste. (Mal 1:3)

God has hated entire nations and empires:

- And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them. (Lev 20:23)

God hates some from people from eternity, who are chosen for eternal wrath; therefore, he separates out those who are reprobate, those whom mercy passes by, who are left as a testimony of God's justice against sin.

- The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. (Prov 16:4).
- The Lord has set apart for himself him who is godly. (Ps 4:3)
- Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels

of wrath fitted to destruction: And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory (**Rm 9:18, 22-23**).

- But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption. (**2 Pt 2:12**)
- For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (**Jude 4**)
- **Note Jesus' words**, Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. ... And you Capernaum ... if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day (**Matt 11:21, 23**). **If God loved the people in Sodom, why did he not do these works if he knew they would repent? It is because repentance is not based upon a foreseeable future human faith, but upon a gift of God's sovereign good pleasure (Eph 2:8-10). God decreed that the population of Sodom would be condemned for sin because they were not loved.**

The reprobate wicked can do no good works, even their farming is seen by God as sinful.

- And the ploughing of the wicked are sin. (**Prov 21:4**)

God curses the wicked and those people who curse the elect

- ... cursed is he who curses you. (**Num 24:9**)
- And I will curse him who curses you. (**Gen 12:3**)
- The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the just. (**Prov 3:33**)

God cannot love the man he curses.

False prophets are rejected and hated (God hates workers of iniquity)

Beware of false prophets ... Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!' [*You that work iniquity - KJV*] (**Matt 7:15-23**)

God clearly hates various classes of people from eternity and unto final judgment. His decision was made in eternity according to his good pleasure. If God loves everyone, how can he hate such a large number of people? Before creation, mankind was predestined unto eternal life or eternal death. For God to be a sovereign, just judge, there must be an eternal testimony to his love and mercy on those who are saved; and wrath, justice and condemnation upon the wicked.

[Note: Jn 3:16 cannot be applied to all men for many reasons. Just one is that if 'world' means everyone in verse 16, then it means 'everyone' in v17, which results in universalism and no hell, since every man is saved - including those already condemned by God in the Old Testament.]

God's Grace

Gods amazing grace appears to all people during the course of their lifetime.

Where is there any scripture that states this? There is no such text! In fact, the Bible shows that some people who desperately wanted to repent couldn't find repentance when they tried, because God refused to give it to them as they were hated and reprobate:

... lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb 12:16-17)

There was no grace offered to the millions of inhabitants of the Earth who died when it was flooded by God in judgment. There was no grace for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah condemned for their great sins. There was no grace, only judgment, for the Canaanite tribes dispossessed by Israel. The idea that everyone is granted one chance to receive grace is unbiblical. How can God give grace to those he has reserved unto judgment? In any case, men choose evil not good, they don't want to be saved; only those whom God draws to himself desire grace and favour with God.

As far as salvation is concerned,¹⁴ grace is the unmerited kindness of God that reaches down in mercy to unworthy sinners and empowers them to believe and repent. This grace comes from the atonement of Christ, from the cross, and is only applied to those whom God gave to the Lord Jesus to be His bride - the elect. This grace is never applied to the wicked who are outside of the elect company.

God does not offer grace to those he has not elected to salvation.

Christ's Blood

God wills that all come to repentance, because He does not want the sufferings and sacrificial death of His only begotten Son, to be in vain.

It is universalistic systems that teach there is a waste in the blood of Christ; that he died in vain for millions of people who chose to reject the Gospel. Furthermore, they teach that man has the power to reject God.

Biblical theology does not teach this. God wills all the elect to come to repentance but not all men. Jesus only died for the elect and no more. If Jesus died for everyone, then God

¹⁴ Grace has a number of applications. The Greek word is **ca,rij** *charis* (Strong's No. 5485) and means:

- That which affords joy, pleasure, delight, loveliness.
- Good will, loving-kindness, favour.
- The merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.
- What is due to grace.
- The spiritual condition of one governed by divine grace; the proof of grace.
- A gift of grace (spiritual gifts).
- Thanks, (for benefits, services, favours), recompense, reward.

Adapted from *Thayer's Expanded Lexicon*.

failed to achieve something he wanted - the salvation of all men. God failed, Jesus blood is wasted, his decree of salvation is a failure. This is not only wrong it is close to blasphemy.

Systems that teach a universal atonement must imply some dichotomy within the Trinity.

- *Contradiction between God's will and God's power:* God loves everyone and wants everyone to repent but is not powerful enough to effect that will. Man rejects God's will. [As in Arminianism or Four-Point Calvinism.]
- *Contradiction between God's decree of election and the atonement of Christ:* Jesus died for everyone but only the elect are actually saved. [As in Amyraldism and Fullerism.]

Of necessity there has to be some limitation in the atonement since all evangelicals accept that hell exists for some. This means that

1. *Either the atonement is limited by quantity* - Jesus only died for the elect; power is extended to all for whom Jesus died. [As in Calvinism.]
2. *Or it is limited in power* - Jesus died for everyone, but they can reject this atonement; it doesn't ensure the salvation of anyone. [As in Arminianism.]

The truth is that Jesus only died for those whom God chose. He died for the elect, the people God gave him from eternity (Jn 17:2, 6, 9, 12, 24). Further it is for these people Jesus prays for - not the world (Jn 17:9). If God only gave the Lord Jesus some, and if Jesus only prays for some, how could he die for all?

God's Will

It is not God's will that any perish in hell.

Scripture declares that no one can thwart God's will. If it is God's will to save everyone, then everyone will be saved. Since all men are not saved, a reason has to be found. There are two false solutions:

1. *Arminians and Semi-Pelagians* teach that the reason God's will is thwarted is that man rejects the Gospel by his free will. This proposes that man is greater than God and can foil the divine decree.
2. *Amyraldians, Four-Point Calvinists and Fullerites* propose that God has two contradictory wills.
 - The first is a *secret will* that only the elect will be saved.
 - The second is a *revealed will* that tells everyone they genuinely could be saved.
 - Apart from anything else this makes God a liar. But worse, this proposes a contradiction in the heart of God. How can God will two contradictory things at once?¹⁵

Since the NT categorically states that salvation is not of man's will (Rm 9:16), then it is a false proposal to teach that God does not intend anyone to perish. The Biblical position is that it is not God's will to save everyone, and multiple texts prove this.

¹⁵ Evangelical theologians often teach two wills in God from various standpoints, but never that these are contradictory. Often it is framed on the basis of God's will of decree (what God decrees will certainly happen, e.g. the salvation of the elect); and God's will of command or precept (what God commands men to do, e.g. repent). These harmonise.

Foreknowledge

Those whom God foreknew (knew before the event) would respond to His grace and repent were predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. The chosen ones 'choose to be chosen' by responding to God's mercy and grace.

No. God chose the elect by his sovereign pleasure on no human basis:

He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will. (Eph 1:4-5)

The words 'know' and 'known' can often mean more than just knowledge, they are sometimes used to refer to the knowing of divine love; this can be demonstrated in many texts.¹⁶ There are many cases in the Bible where the word 'know' is used to refer to a loving relationship, e.g. You only have I known of all the families of the earth (Amos 3:2). Obviously God knows all families, all people, his knowledge is perfect; but Israel was known to God as a lover, a bride (that is why resorting to idols is called spiritual adultery in the prophetic books). See also Jer 1:5; Mt 7:22-23; 1 Cor 8:3; 2 Tim 2:19.

'Foreknowledge' in Rm 8:29 & 1 Pt 1:2 effectively means 'fore-loved'. It means a pre-determined choice made by God to love certain people; in other words – election. This is knowledge in love, not simply prescience. God knows everyone who ever lived – that is mere knowledge; what is referred to here is a love relationship, a knowing in love.

In addition, the Granville Sharp rule of Greek grammar equates 'predestined' and 'foreknowledge' in Rm 8:29; thus the terms are synonymous. This is further confirmed in 1 Peter 1:20 where *proginosko* is translated as 'foreordained'.

The word used has nothing to do with an awareness of future events, or observing the future good works of those chosen. It refers to a predetermined, planned, intimate relationship. Those elected to salvation are those seen by God as loved. Christians are foreknown to be loved and saved in the same sense that Christ was 'foreordained' [*proginosko*, 1 Pt 1:20] to be God's atoning sacrifice [also Acts 2:23].

So 'Foreknow' in Rm 8 has the meaning of 'loved'. The word foreknow is used in the Biblical sense of 'known in a loving relationship', just like Adam 'knew' Eve (Gen 4:1, i.e. intimately). It is those whom God knew, loved, that were predestined. The verse does not say it was those who God knew something about (i.e. would have faith). To make the verse mean this you have to add a phrase like: 'those whom he foreknew would believe.' The example of Israel is pertinent here; she was not chosen for what she would do, but in spite of it (i.e. act faithlessly). Israel was chosen because God chose to love her.

Eminent commentators translate it as 'whom he set regard upon' (John Murray) or 'whom he selected' or 'whom he particularly loved' (Charles Hodge). God obviously knows all people, but these predestined people are known in a special way differently to others, they are fore-loved by God.

¹⁶ For example: Gen 18:19; Amos 3:1-2; Hosea 13:4-5; 1 Cor 8:3; Gal 4:9.

In summary: to suggest that scripture teaches that God predestines those whom he knew would believe is wrong because:

- ‘Foreknowledge’ cannot be made to mean just prescience from the Greek words used in the relevant texts.
- It is a thought alien to the context.
- It is a doctrine alien to Paul's express teaching elsewhere.
- It opposes the clear Biblical teaching everywhere.
- Faith is the fruit of predestination (Acts 13:48), God's gift, therefore, it cannot be the cause of foreknowledge or an act of man.

Since faith is given by God, the suggestion that God looked into the future to choose those who had faith is absolute nonsense.

God's Decree

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit determined to do all in their power to rescue their lost creation and legally buy man back out of the devil's snare of sin, death, and eternal damnation. They devised a plan whereby Jesus' blood could pay the ransom for the sins of the world.

This posits that God is desperate to devise a way to rescue a fallen creation after Adam's sin. The Biblical position is that God chose his people in eternity before that sin; the plan of salvation was initiated before the Fall. Indeed Jesus is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:8). The decree to save the elect came before the Fall, or even before the decree to permit the Fall.

Perseverance

The moment we get our attention and trust away from what Christ has freely provided for us – we fall from grace.

This is unbiblical. Those chosen by God are kept by his power unto the end and cannot fall away. Only false, professing Christians fall away, since they were never elect. If believers are united to Christ, placed in Him, how can they be torn away? Who has the power to take something out of union with Christ? How can saints be pulled out of Christ's hands? How can they be removed from his palms once engraved (Isa 49:16)?

A few verses to support this:

Ps 30:5 His favour *is for* life.

Isa 43:1-2 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; you *are* mine. When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.'

Isa 54:10 'For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, who has mercy on you.

- Jer 32:40** And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me.
- Mt 18:12-14** What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that *sheep* than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.
- Jn 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
- Jn 3:36** He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
- Jn 5:24** Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.
- Jn 6:35-37** And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.'
- Jn 10:27-29** My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.
- Rm 5:8-10** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.
- Rm 8:1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
- Rm 8:29-31** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *can be* against us?

This also shows us the necessity of fruit in a believer's life. Genuine Christians will always bear fruit for God, manifest the fruit of the Spirit, grow in grace, grow in love for God, grow in a desire to serve God, grow in sacrificial love for the brethren. If a person fails to grow in grace, there are grounds for concern that they are not converted.

Gospel Preaching

If Salvation does not come about by any decision of man, why do Calvinists tell us that we must repent and believe the Gospel?

This question refers to the paradox of man being unable to respond to God by nature, but is still commanded to repent. This is the demand of the Gospel (Acts 17:30).

God gives grace to the elect to repent and to believe because man has no power to do any spiritual good as he is dead in sins. This command to repent is to be preached indiscriminately to all sinners. This is due to the power of God being exerted in the Gospel message. With God, all things are possible, and the Gospel has power when the Holy Spirit applies it to the conscience of the elect. To them the Gospel comes with power; God gives

power to believe and repent to his people. The reprobate do not receive this power but are hardened in their sins.

This is why Calvinists teach that there are two calls in the Gospel: a general call to all proclaiming God's word; and an effectual call (irresistible grace) where that word comes to the elect in great power.

This is similar to the power Jesus expressed when he commanded impossible things of men. He told dead men to rise up from the tomb; he told blind eyes to see and crippled men to get up and walk. The word of Christ brings power to those it is meant to affect. Not every cripple in Israel was cured by Christ, nor every blind man; few dead people were raised up; but those he commanded to do the impossible did it.

The command to repent and believe is exactly the same. Those who respond are the elect that God empowers to come to him. The majority reject the word and are hardened in their sin and rebellion, and receive a greater condemnation. This command is man's responsibility as a created being, he must believe and repent; failure for which will be judged.

The command to repent and believe in Christ does not imply any power in man; he has no spiritual power, cannot do good, cannot believe and cannot repent - yet true Gospel preaching commands that sinful men must repent and believe (Mk 1:15; Acts 2:38, 3:19). All men have a moral responsibility and accountability to obey God because he is their creator. The command of the Gospel reveals those who obey (because they are elect) and those who are rebels (because they are reprobate).

Old Covenant Salvation

The Old Covenant was based on works; the New Covenant is based on unconditional love, grace and faith in the promises of God's word.

This is not true. Abraham saw Jesus and knew the Gospel promise (Jn 8:56). The Abrahamic Covenant is the basis of the New Covenant; the Gospel and Law of Christ is the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham; Christ is the promised Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16). Indeed, the Bible specifically states that Abraham was justified by his faith, not by works (Rm 4:9).

Salvation is only ever by faith in any dispensation since man cannot contribute anything to his salvation, being dead in sins.

Conclusion

What is crucial in the matter of salvation is the honour of God. We are not concerned with defending some system of man for the sake of it; the key issue is upholding the truth of God's revealed word and glorifying his name. *Calvinism* and *Reformed Theology* happen to be useful nicknames for the Biblical teaching of the Doctrines of Grace, the scriptural system of salvation.

Humanistic arguments all centre on confronting the sovereignty of God in salvation, elevating man's contribution in some form of works righteousness, and attacking free,

sovereign grace. Evangelical salvation is monergistic. It is founded upon the will and power of God alone. Man has no power to initiate, contribute to, or continue in salvation. God is the source of the power of conversion and supplies the means by his Spirit to preserve a convert to the end. The glory of salvation belongs to the Lord.

For this reason we make every effort to defend this faith and contend with humanistic arguments against it. This is necessary to safeguard the truth, establish believers in true faith and expose lies and false teaching. All the attacks on Biblical faith are well-worn and have been defeated many times over. Every generation new attacks arise, but they are really just a rehash of long defeated notions. The contention against error will never cease. For this reason each generation needs to restate the truth and confront heresy in colloquial terms. I trust this small paper has gone some way to do this.

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